



ASSYRIAN PROPHECIES

by
SIMO PARPOLA

Illustrations
edited by
JULIAN READE
and
SIMO PARPOLA

HELSINKI UNIVERSITY PRESS

1997

FOREWORD

The manuscript for this volume was prepared entirely by Simo Parpola. He has also done almost all of the editing and typesetting work on the volume.

The format of this volume differs somewhat from that of other SAA volume in that there is an extensive Introduction to the corpus of texts edited here. Although the size of the corpus is small, the nature and importance of the texts has warranted a much more thorough discussion of their place in Assyrian life than the other corpora that have been edited in this series. For the same reasons, the critical apparatus is also much expanded over that to be found in other volumes of the series, approaching a full commentary.

This is the first volume of the State Archives of Assyria series that has been produced since the Project has become a Centre of Excellence of the University of Helsinki. We thank the University of Helsinki for this honour and for the financial support that comes with it, and we feel that this volume is a particularly appropriate inauguration for this new status.

Helsinki, December 1997

Robert M. Whiting

PREFACE

The text part of this volume (transliterations, translations, critical apparatus, glossary and indices) took its final shape in 1993 and essentially dates from that year, although work on it had of course begun much earlier, already in the late sixties. The introduction and the notes were finished in 1994-97. It may be asked whether the time spent on them justifies the four-year delay in the publication of the edition proper, which was in proofs already at the end of 1993. In my opinion it does. There would certainly have been many quicker and much easier ways to finish the introduction. However, in that case the complex background studies included in it, without which the texts make little sense, would still remain to be written. They are needed to make this important corpus of prophecies fully accessible not just to a limited circle of Assyriologists but to specialists in religious studies as well.

I wish to thank the Trustees of the British Museum for permission to publish the previously unpublished prophecy texts as well as the illustrative material and photographs included in this volume. I am indebted to the whole staff of the Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities, in particular to Drs. C. B. F. Walker and I. L. Finkel for their help with the photographs, and to Dr. Julian Reade for his help with the illustrations. Professor Othmar Keel of the Institut Biblique, Université de Fribourg, and Dr. Annie Caubet of the Département des Antiquités Orientales, Musée du Louvre, kindly granted publication permission for the objects in their custody used as illustrations in the volume. I am also grateful to Professor Rykle Borger (Göttingen) for communicating to me his join to K 1292 immediately after its discovery, and to Professor Herbert Huffmon (Drew University) for discussing the texts with me on many occasions in the eighties. Professors Ithamar Gruenwald (Tel Aviv), Abraham Malamat (Jerusalem) and Moshe Weinfeld (Jerusalem), and Dr. Martti Nissinen (Helsinki) read the final manuscript and provided important comments and additional references. Drs. Steven Cole and Robert Whiting of the SAA Project read the manuscript from the viewpoint of English and helped with the proofs. Ph. lic. Laura Kataja assisted in the typesetting of the text part. I am very grateful to all of them. Last but not least, I wish to record my indebtedness to Professor Karlheinz Deller (Heidelberg), with whom I worked on the corpus in the early seventies. Our planned joint edition never materialized, but I hope he will find the present volume an acceptable substitute.

I dedicate this book to the memory of my grandfather, the Rev. K. E. Salonen, who understood the significance of Assyriology to biblical studies and whose gentle figure I remember fondly, and to the memory of my mother, Taimi Mirjam Parpola (born Salonen), to whom I had originally hoped to

present it as a gift. A devout Christian, she was not disturbed by my work on the origins of Christian beliefs but took an active interest in it until her death. I thought of her often in writing this volume.

Helsinki, December 1997

Simo Parpola

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	VII
PREFACE	IX
INTRODUCTION	XIII
The Conceptual and Doctrinal Background	XVIII
The Assyrian Concept of God	XXI
Ištar: the Holy Spirit	XXVI
The Descent of Ištar and the Ascent of the Soul	XXXI
The King as God's Son and Chosen One	XXXVI
Assyrian Prophecy	XLV
Designations of Prophets	XLV
Prophecy and the Cult of Ištar	XLVII
The Prophets of the Corpus	XLVIII
The Prophecy Corpus	LIII
Tablet Types	LIII
Manuscripts	LV
Authorship Indications and Other Scholia to the Oracles	LXII
Structural Elements of the Oracles	LXIV
Language and Style	LXVII
The Historical Contexts and Dates of the Oracles	LXVIII
Appendix: Inscriptions of Esarhaddon Pertaining to the Corpus	LXXII
On the Present Edition	LXXVI
Notes	LXXX
Bibliography of Previous Studies	CIX
Abbreviations and Symbols	CXIII

TRANSLITERATIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

Oracle Collections	1
1. Oracles of Encouragement to Esarhaddon	4
1.1 Issar-la-tašiyaṭ of Arbela	4
1.2 Sinqiša-amur of Arbela	5
1.3 Remutti-Allati of Dara-ahuya	6
1.4 Bayâ of Arbela	6
1.5 Ilussa-amur of the Inner City	7
1.6 Unknown Prophet	7
1.7 Issar-beli-da'-ini, Royal Votaress	9
1.8 Ahat-abiša of Arbela	9
1.9 Unknown Prophet	9
1.10 La-dagil-ili of Arbela	10
2. Oracles Concerning Babylon and the Stabilization of the King's Rule	14
2.1 [Nabû]-hussanni of the Inner City	14
2.2 [Bayâ] of Arbela	14
2.3 La-dagil-ili of Arbela	15
2.4 Urkittu-šarrat of Calah	16
2.5 [Sinqiša-amur of Arbela]	17

2.6 Unknown Prophet	18
3. The Covenant of Aššur	22
3.1 Introduction	22
3.2 First Oracle of Salvation	23
3.3 Second Oracle of Salvation	23
3.4 The Meal of Covenant	25
3.5 Word of Ištar of Arbela to Esarhaddon	25
4. Fragment of a Collection of Encouragement Oracles	30
Oracle Reports	31
Reports to Esarhaddon (5-6)	33
5 An Oracle to the Queen Mother	34
6 An Oracle from Tašmetu-ereš of Arbela	35
Reports to Assurbanipal (7-13)	37
7 Prophecies for Crown Prince Assurbanipal	38
8 Words Concerning the Elamites	40
9 Words of Encouragement to Assurbanipal	40
10 Fragment of a Prophecy	42
11 Report on a Vision and an Oracle to Assurbanipal	42
GLOSSARY AND INDICES	45
Logograms and Their Readings	45
Glossary	47
Index of Names	53
Personal Names	53
Place Names	53
God and Temple Names	54
Subject Index	55
Index of Texts	59
By Publication Number	59
By Museum Number	59
List of Joins	59
List of Illustrations	60
Index to the Introduction, Notes and Critical Apparatus	61
Biblical Passages Cited or Discussed	79
COLLATIONS	83
PLATES	85

Shame on the tyrant city [Nineveh], filthy and foul! No warning voice did she heed, she took no rebuke to heart... Her prophets (*nby'yh*) were reckless, no true prophets. Her priests profaned the sanctuary and did violence to the law.

Zephaniah 3:1-4

INTRODUCTION

In 1875 the British Assyriologist George Smith published in copy an unusual cuneiform tablet from Nineveh which he labeled "addresses of encouragement to [the Assyrian king] Esarhaddon" (680-669 BC). Although a tentative English translation of the text (no. 1 in the present edition) was provided by T. G. Pinches already in 1878, it did not attract much attention initially. The first to recognize its significance was Alphonse Delattre, who in an article entitled "The Oracles Given in Favour of Esarhaddon," published in 1888, defined it as "a series of oracles [from] the prophets of Assur [which] recall to mind the images of the Biblical prophets." He regarded it as "one of the most interesting fragments which Assyrian literature presents," adding: "It is astonishing that it should have attracted so little attention up to the present day."

Little did he know that this statement would still be by and large valid more than a hundred years later! True, Delattre's article momentarily generated considerable interest in the oracles. The tablet containing the "addresses" was recopied and retranslated by Pinches in 1891 (this time labeled "The Oracle of Istar of Arbela"), and in the course of the following fifteen years six new tablets of the same kind (nos. 2, 3, 5 and 7-9 in the present edition) were identified in the collections of the British Museum. By 1915, most of the corpus as known today had been made available in English, French and/or German translations and preliminarily analyzed from the religious, historical and literary points of view (see the bibliography on p. CIX).

However, after World War I interest in the oracles abated drastically. For decades, no further additions were made to the corpus, and except for a few retranslations of no. 1 made for anthologies of ANE texts, no new translations, editions or studies of the published texts appeared between 1916 and 1972. As a result, the corpus as a whole slowly sank into oblivion and became virtually inaccessible to non-Assyriologists. By the seventies, the text editions and studies published before WW I had become so hopelessly dated that they could be used only by a handful of specialists in Neo-Assyrian.

Thus, more than a hundred years after its discovery, the Assyrian prophecy corpus still remains virtually unknown to the great majority of biblical scholars and historians of religion — even though it provides a much closer parallel, at least in time, to OT prophecy than the early second-millennium

prophetic texts of Mari, now well known to every serious biblical and ANE scholar.

The marginal attention the corpus has received is not only due to the lack of good editions but also to inaccurate and misleading terminology. While the prophecies of the corpus have been traditionally designated as "oracles" — a term accurate in itself but not specific enough to suggest an affinity to OT prophecy — Assyriologists have applied the labels "oracle" and "prophecy" also to texts totally unrelated to inspired prophecy, such as extispicy queries¹ and predictive texts drawing on standard collections of omens.² No wonder that biblical scholars, seeing how little such "prophecies" have to do with OT prophecy, have not found the little-known "oracles to Esarhaddon" worth much attention.

In the course of the past fifteen years, the situation has slowly started to change. Thanks to a series of articles in the seventies by Manfred Weippert, Herbert Huffmon and Tomoo Ishida, who for the first time since Delattre approached the texts as prophetic oracles, interest in the corpus has grown and a number of important studies on it have appeared during the eighties and nineties. Studies by Weippert and Maria deJong Ellis have removed the terminological confusion just referred to and firmly established the nature of the texts as prophetic oracles fully comparable to biblical prophecies. The similarities between the Assyrian and biblical prophecy corpora have been systematically charted and discussed by Weippert and Martti Nissinen, and the relevance of the Assyrian prophecies to OT studies in general has been ably demonstrated by Nissinen.

However, the primary significance of the Assyrian prophecy corpus does not lie in the parallel it provides to OT prophecy but in the light it throws on Assyrian religion. It has hitherto been commonly believed that inspired prophecy was basically alien to Mesopotamia,³ and that Assyrian prophecy in particular, which seems to appear "out of the blue" in the reign of Esarhaddon, was only a marginal and ephemeral phenomenon possibly related to the large-scale deportations from Israel and Phoenicia under Tiglath-Pileser III and Sargon II, and thus a sort of "import from the West."⁴ As we shall see, this view is untenable and has to be emphatically rejected. The prophecies have tight links to the cult of Ištar and Assyrian royal ideology, mythology and iconography, and thus represent a genuinely Mesopotamian phenomenon. The scarcity of prophetic oracles from Assyria and Mesopotamia in general is simply due to the basically oral nature of the phenomenon and cannot be used as an argument for its alleged foreign origin.

How then to explain the affinities of the texts with OT prophecy? And what about the occasional passages in them which have parallels in later Jewish mystical tradition (no. 1.6), Hellenistic mystery cults (no. 7 r.8) and Neoplatonic and Christian doctrines (nos. 1.4, 2.5, and 3.4)? Whence did these prophets draw the self-confidence which enabled them to speak not for but *as* gods, or their fanatic emperor-centric zeal? Why did they constantly proclaim the word of Ištar, the goddess of love, and not the word of Aššur, the national god?

My work on these and other questions raised by the corpus has resulted in a interpretative model which adds a new dimension to and sharply deviates

from the traditional understanding of Assyrian religion. The main points of this model can be briefly recapitulated as follows:

1. The prophecies have to be studied as integral parts and products of a larger religious structure, the ecstatic cult of Ištar, which in its essence can be defined as an esoteric mystery cult promising its devotees transcendental salvation and eternal life.

2. Like Shakta Tantrism, the ecstatic cult of the Hindu mother goddess, the cult had a sophisticated cosmogony, theosophy, soteriology and theory of the soul, which were hidden from the uninitiated through a veil of symbols, metaphors and riddles and explained only to the initiates, who were bound to secrecy by oath.

3. The cornerstone of the cult's doctrine of salvation was the myth of Ištar's descent to the netherworld, in which the Goddess plays the role of the Neoplatonic Cosmic Soul. The first half of the myth outlines the soul's divine origin and fall, the latter half its way of salvation through repentance, baptism and gradual ascent toward its original perfection.

4. A central component of this doctrine was the concept of the heavenly perfect man sent for the redemption of mankind, materialized in the institution of kingship. In the Descent of Ištar, the king's redemptive role is expressed by the image of the shepherd king, Tammuz, given as Ištar's substitute to the "netherworld," that is, the material world. This image corresponds to the king's role as the earthly representative of God, and finds another expression in the portrayal of the king as the "sun of the people" (radiating heavenly brightness to the darkness of the world) and as an incarnation of the saviour god, Ninurta/Nabû, the vanquisher of sin, darkness and death.

5. The idea of perfection embodied in the king implied total purity from sin, implicit in the soul's divine origin and personified in the figure of the goddess Mullissu, the queen of heaven, the Assyrian equivalent of the Holy Spirit. Doctrinally, the king's perfection was not self-acquired but heaven-sent. Figuratively speaking, he was the son of Mullissu; and like the Byzantine emperor, he ruled through the Holy Spirit's inspiration. The mother-child relationship between the Goddess and the king, expressed through the image of a calf-suckling cow, is a constantly recurrent theme in the prophecies.

6. The king's perfection, *homoousia* with God, made him god in human form and guaranteed his resurrection after bodily death. For the devotees of Ištar, who strove for eternal life emulating the Goddess, he was a Christ-like figure loaded with messianic expectations both as a saviour in this world and in the next.

7. The central symbol of the cult was the cosmic tree connecting heaven and earth, which contained the secret key to the psychic structure of the perfect man and thus to eternal life. Other important symbols were the seven-staged ziggurat; the rainbow; the full, waning and waxing moon; the eight-pointed star; the calf-suckling cow and the child-suckling mother; the horned wild cow; the stag; the lion; the prostitute; the pomegranate; and so on. All these different symbols served to give visual form to basic doctrines of the cult while at the same time hiding them from outsiders, and thus amounted to a secret code, a "language within language" encouraging meditation and dominating the imagery and thinking of the devotees.

8. Beside transcendental meditation, the worship of the Goddess involved extreme asceticism and mortification of flesh, which when combined with weeping and other ecstatic techniques could result in altered states, visions and inspired prophecy.

9. The cult of Ištar, whose roots are in the Sumerian cult of Inanna, has close parallels in the Canaanite cult of Asherah, the Phrygian cult of Cybele and the Egyptian cult of Isis, all of which were likewise prominently ecstatic in character and largely shared the same imagery and symbolism, including the sacred tree. The similarities between Assyrian and biblical prophecy — which cannot be dissociated from its Canaanite context — can thus be explained as due to the conceptual and doctrinal similarities of the underlying religions, without having to resort to the implausible hypothesis of direct loans or influences one way or another.

10. The affinities with later Hellenistic and Greco-Roman religions and philosophies must be explained correspondingly. These systems of thought were not the creations of an “Axial Age intellectual revolution” but directly derived from earlier ANE traditions, as is evident from the overall agreement of their metaphysical propositions and models with those of the Assyrian religion. While each of these religious and philosophical systems must be considered in its own right and against its own prehistory, it is likely that all of them had been significantly influenced by Assyrian imperial doctrines and ideology, which (taken over by the Achaemenid, Seleucid and Roman empires) continued to dominate the eastern Mediterranean world down to the end of classical antiquity.

The conceptual and doctrinal background of the prophecies will be analyzed and discussed in more detail in the first three chapters of this introduction. The aim throughout has been to concentrate on issues essential to the understanding of Assyrian prophecy as a religious phenomenon and to correlate the Assyrian data with related phenomena, especially OT prophecy, Gnosticism and Jewish mysticism. I am fully aware that the issues tackled are extremely complex and would require several volumes, not a brief introduction, to be satisfactorily treated. Nevertheless, I have considered it essentially important not to limit the discussion to the Assyrian evidence alone but to take into consideration also the comparative evidence as fully as possible. The different sets of data are mutually complementary and it is not possible to understand one without the others. The intricate connection between mystery religion, esotericism and emperor cult, crucial to the understanding of ANE prophecy and the origins of ancient philosophy, emerges with full clarity only from the Assyrian evidence. On the other hand, the Assyrian sources, especially their symbolic imagery, cannot be fully understood without the supporting evidence of related traditions.

* * *

Reconstructing the religious and doctrinal background of the corpus has been a slow and complicated process extending over more than 25 years, and the relevant methodology cannot be adequately discussed here since it would require a monograph of its own. Briefly, the process as a whole can be

compared to the piecing together of a giant jigsaw puzzle. The "pieces" of the puzzle were the data found in the corpus, supplemented by those found in other Mesopotamian sources, both written and iconographic, earlier, contemporary and later. The "cover picture" used as an aid in analyzing, interpreting and piecing together these disconnected and fragmentary bits of evidence was the comparative evidence provided by related religious and philosophical systems, some of which survive to the present day through uninterrupted oral and written tradition and can thus be better understood as coherent systems.

Initially, the corpus was analyzed in light of contemporary Assyrian evidence only, in order to establish a reliable point of departure and to identify areas of interpretation requiring further study in light of other kinds of evidence. Next, the texts and the preliminary interpretive model were systematically correlated and compared with OT and Mari prophetic oracles and ANE prophecy in general. This study firmly established not only the independence and antiquity of Assyrian prophecy as a phenomenon, but above all the close ties of ANE prophecy in general to the cult of the "mother goddess" and its esoteric doctrines of salvation. The realization that this cult provides the key to the understanding of Mesopotamian/ANE prophecy as a cross-cultural phenomenon finally necessitated a systematic study of the cult of Ištar in light of the comparative evidence provided by the "mystery cults" of classical antiquity and related religious and philosophical systems (including Gnosticism, Jewish mysticism and Neoplatonism).

I would like to emphasize that while the comparative evidence has certainly played an important role in the reconstruction process and is frequently cited both in the introduction and notes in order to illustrate the nature of Assyrian prophecy as part of a wider cross-cultural phenomenon, it plays only a marginal role in the reconstruction itself, which in its essence is firmly based on Assyrian evidence.

The Conceptual and Doctrinal Background

For all their similarities, Assyrian and biblical prophecies have one conspicuous difference, and it appears to be fundamental. While the biblical prophets proclaim the word of Yahweh, the god of Israel presented as the only true God, the Assyrian prophets do not proclaim the word of their national god, Aššur. In most cases the oracular deity is *Ištar*, the goddess of love, but other deities, both male and female, also appear in this capacity in the texts. Aššur speaks only once in the corpus.

As far as I can see, nobody seems to have ever been bothered by this state of affairs. On the contrary, it seems to have been taken as the most natural thing in the world, a simple reflection of the contrast between the *monotheistic* religion of Israel on the one hand, and the “pagan” *polytheistic* religion of Assyria on the other. From this point of view, the prominence of *Ištar* and other female deities as oracular gods in Assyria of course constitutes no problem: it simply indicates a close connection of Assyrian prophecy to “fertility” and “vegetation cults,” again implying a fundamental contrast to biblical prophecy, which supposedly had a different background.

However, a closer acquaintance with the texts reveals a number of difficulties with this view. Leaving aside the fact that the content of the prophecies has absolutely nothing to do with “fertility” or “vegetation cults,” the multiplicity of oracular deities appearing in them is largely illusory. Thus the incipit of no. 2.4, “The word of *Ištar* of Arbela, the word of the Queen Mullissu” is followed by an oracle in the first person singular; here Mullissu, elsewhere known as the wife of Aššur/Enlil, is clearly only a synonym or another designation of *Ištar* of Arbela.⁵ The same situation recurs in nos. 5, 7 and 9, where the deity, always speaking in the first person singular, is alternatingly identified as *Ištar* of Arbela or Mullissu, or both. The other two female oracular deities occurring in the texts, Banitu (“Creatrix”) and Urkittu (“the Urukite”), are likewise well known from contemporary texts as appellatives of *Ištar* denoting specific aspects of this universal goddess.⁶

In oracle 1.4, the deity first speaks as Bel, then as *Ištar* of Arbela, and finally as Nabû, the son of Bel and the keeper of celestial records.⁷ It is as if in this short oracle the deity were repeatedly putting on new masks to suit the changing themes of the discourse,⁸ and one cannot help being reminded of the Holy Trinity of Christianity, where the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are explained as different hypostases of one indivisible Divine Being.⁹ Similar shifts in the identity of the oracular deity are also observable in other oracles of the corpus as well as in other contemporary texts.¹⁰

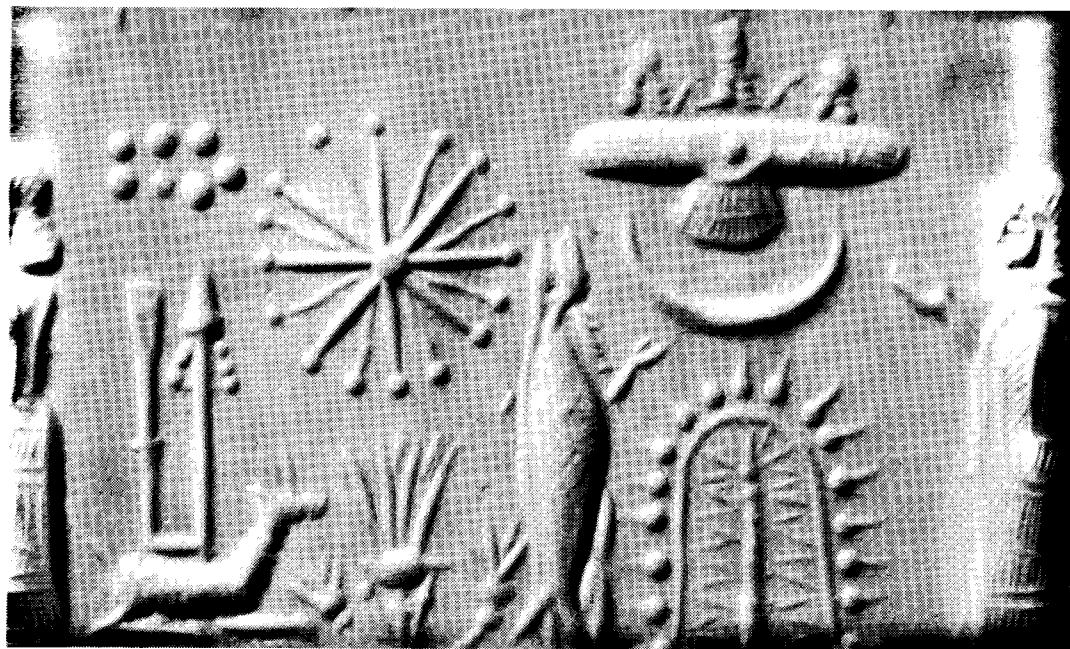


FIG. 1. *A triad of gods on the winged disk. See p. XVIII and n. 8ff.*
WA 89502.

Most important, in no. 3, a collection of oracles referred to in the text as "the covenant tablet of Aššur," the identities of Aššur and Ištar blend in an unexpected and absolutely baffling way.

The text consists of five interrelated oracles, all by the same prophet, four of which are identified or identifiable as "words of Ištar of Arbela."¹¹ The middlemost oracle (3.3), however, deviates from the pattern. It begins with reference to the king's cry for divine help ("Hear me, O Aššur!"), states that the plea was heard, describes the subsequent destruction of the king's enemies through a rain of hail and fire, and ends with a self-identification of the deity: "Let them see (this) and praise me, (knowing) that I am Aššur, lord of the gods."¹²

This oracle, which powerfully recalls Psalm 18, is the only oracle in the whole corpus ascribed to Aššur. In its subscript, it is defined as an oracle of well-being placed before "the Image," doubtless that of Aššur himself, and it is certainly no accident that the reference to the "covenant tablet of Aššur" occurs immediately after it. Note that in Isaiah 45, a similar self-presentation of Yahweh is linked with a similar demonstration of God's power in support of Cyrus, "his anointed," and compare Yahweh's covenant with David (Psalm 89), which in 2 Samuel 7 is conveyed to the king through the prophet Nathan.

Clearly then, oracle 3.3, in accordance with its central position in the text, constituted the essence of the "covenant tablet of Aššur." However, in the very next oracle (3.4), it is not Aššur but Ištar of Arbela who actually concludes the covenant. In a scene reminiscent of the Last Supper, the Goddess invites "the gods, her fathers and brothers" to a covenant meal, in the course of which she addresses them as follows: "You will go to your cities and districts, eat bread and forget this covenant. (But when) you drink from

this water, you will remember me and keep this covenant which I have made on behalf of Esarhaddon."

The formulation of the passage makes it clear that Ištar is not acting as a mere mediator here. The covenant in question is between her and the other gods — it is *her* covenant with "the gods, her fathers and brothers." Accordingly, the phrasing of oracle 3.4, considered with 3.3, unquestionably implies that, in a way or another, Aššur and Ištar were considered *identical* by the author of the text.¹³ On the other hand, in no. 3.2 and other oracles of the corpus, the Goddess refers to Aššur in the third person and thus evidently as a distinct divine entity. This creates a theological problem that seems serious indeed: How can two gods at the same time appear as identical yet distinct entities in one and the same text?¹⁴

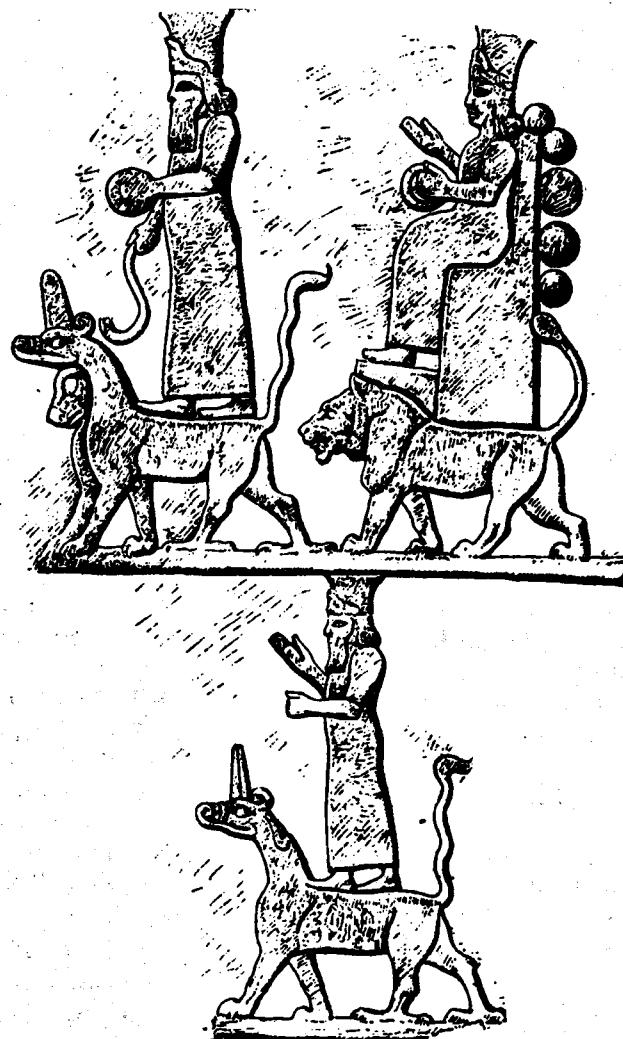


FIG. 2. Aššur/Enlil, Ištar/Mullissu and Ninurta/Nabû on Esarhaddon's Senjirli stela (see n. 59). MESSERSCHMIDT, VS 1 Beiheft Tf. 7 (VA 2708).

The Assyrian Concept of God

The solution to the problem lies in the Assyrian concept of God, which defined Aššur — “the only, universal God”¹⁵ — as “the totality of gods.”¹⁶ Aššur himself was beyond human comprehension.¹⁷ Man could know him only through his powers pervading and ruling the universe, which, though emanating from a single source,¹⁸ appeared to man as separate and were accordingly hypostatized as different gods.¹⁹ On the surface, then, Assyrian religion, with its multitude of gods worshiped under different names,²⁰ appears to us as polytheistic;²¹ on a deeper level, however, it was monotheistic,²² all the diverse deities being conceived of as powers, aspects, qualities, or attributes of Aššur,²³ who is often simply referred to as “(the) God.”²⁴ On the human level, the underlying doctrine of God’s “unity in multiplicity” mirrored the structure of the Assyrian empire — a heterogenous multi-national power directed by a superhuman, autocratic king, who was conceived of as the representative of God on earth.²⁵

Just as the exercise of the king’s rule was effected through a state council presided over by the king personally, so was God’s rule over the universe visualized in terms of a divine council presided over by Anu, the first emanation and “mirror image” of Aššur.²⁶ This council is referred to in oracle 9 and other contemporary texts as “the assembly of all the gods” or “the assembly of the great gods,” and it is described as functioning like its human counterpart, with issues raised by individual council members and decisions made after sometimes long debate.²⁷ The human analogy must not, however, obscure the fact that the image of the council essentially was a metaphor meant to underline the unity of the divine powers and their organic interaction.²⁸ Aššur himself never appears as a “council member” for the simple reason that the council in fact *was* Aššur — “the totality of gods.”²⁹

The idea of God as “the sum total of gods” is attested in various parts of the ancient Near East already in the sixth century BC, and later in several Hellenistic and Oriental philosophies and religions (e.g., Platonism, Orphism, Neoplatonism, Hinduism, Tantrism).³⁰ It certainly also was part and parcel of first-millennium BC Jewish monotheism, as shown by the biblical designation of “God,” *elōhîm*, which literally means “gods.”³¹ What is more, the idea of a divine council is well attested in the Bible and unquestionably formed an essential component of the imagery of Jewish prophets from the earliest times through the end of biblical prophecy.³² Consider, for example, the following passage, quoting words of the mid-ninth-century prophet Micaiah:³³

Now listen to the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD seated on his throne, with all the host of heaven in attendance on his right and on his left.³⁴ The LORD said, “Who will entice Ahab to attack and fall on Ramoth-gilead?” One said one thing and one said another; then a high spirit came forward and stood before the LORD and said, “I will entice him.” “How?” said the LORD. “I will go out,” he said, “and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.” “You shall entice him,” said the LORD, “and you shall succeed; go and do it.” You see, then, how the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets of yours, because he has decreed disaster for you.

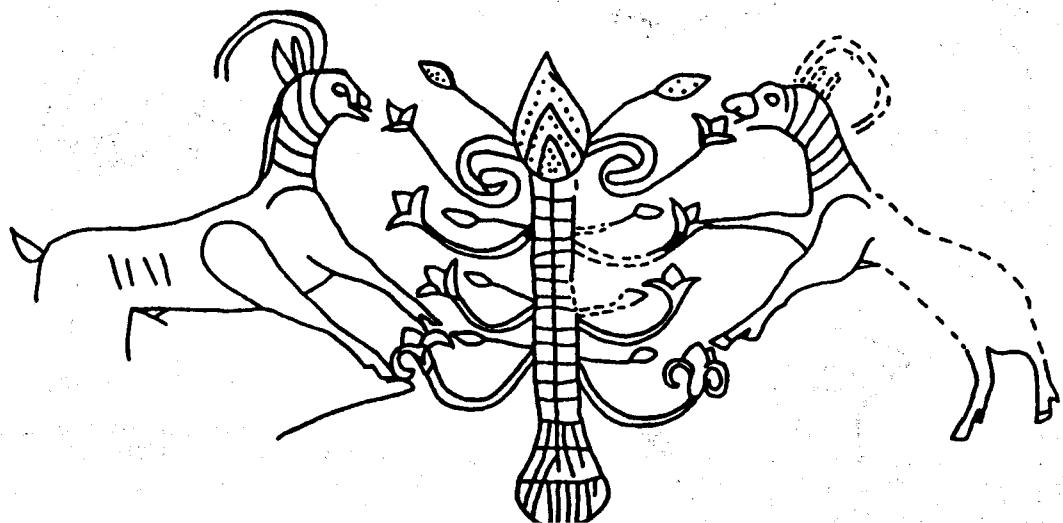


FIG. 3. *Israelite sacred tree from Kuntillet 'Ajrud (c. 800-775 BC). See p. XLII and nn. 199-202.*
P. BECK, *Tel-Aviv* 9 (1982), fig. 4.

The key elements of this vision — God, seated on his throne, presiding over and conversing with a heavenly council or court — not only recur in most major biblical prophets and Job,³⁵ but in later Jewish and Christian traditions as well, from post-exilic times down to medieval Kabbalah.³⁶ Several further elements of biblical celestial imagery (e.g., a furnace or lamp burning at the throne of God, a succession of heavens and heavenly palaces, ladders leading to them, heavenly gates and gatekeepers, and a heavenly city and kingdom)³⁷ likewise continue as integral elements of later Jewish and Christian traditions,³⁸ and what is particularly important in this context, they also figure prominently in the Assyrian prophecy corpus and Mesopotamian cosmic geography at large.³⁹ We shall return below (p. XXVI and n. 136) to other important features in the passage just cited relevant to the understanding of Assyrian prophecy; for the present, it will be enough simply to note that both Judaism and Christianity share many apparently polytheistic concepts and features with Assyrian religion. Interestingly, the relevant imagery is generally not felt to be at variance with the basically monotheistic nature of either religion, while it is commonly taken as diagnostic of the basically polytheistic nature of Assyrian religion.

The various celestial beings or spiritual entities populating the heavens in Christianity and Judaism are explained partly as creations, partly as hypostases of God.⁴⁰ In Christian dogma, angels and saints belong to the former category; God the Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit to the latter. In early Jewish mysticism, by contrast, angels are conceived as *powers of God*, and they are actually invoked as (quasi) independent gods in Jewish magical texts of the early first millennium AD.⁴¹ The fundamental unity of all divine powers is, however, basic to Judaism, and is encoded in its central symbol, the menorah, now well established as derived from the Ancient Near Eastern sacred tree or “Tree of Life.”⁴² Though the Tree itself is well known from the Bible and has a prehistory reaching long back into pre-exilic times, its precise



FIG. 5. Anthropomorphic tree from Assur (see n. 47).

O. KEEL, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World* (Winona Lake 1997), fig. 153 (VA Ass 1358).

symbolism was long kept secret from the masses and therefore surfaces only in medieval Jewish mysticism, Kabbalah.⁴³

The Tree of Life of Kabbalah is a multi-layered symbol in which the metaphysical structure of the universe (macrocosm) and the model of the perfect man (microcosm) converge as the “image” of God. It is composed of ten divine powers called sefirot (“[primordial] numbers,” lit., “countings”), defined as aspects or attributes of God and systematically associated with parts of his “body,” so as to constitute an anthropomorphic whole.⁴⁴ It thus effectively depicts God as the “sum total” of his divine powers, “gods.” From the viewpoint of Assyrian prophecy, it is of crucial importance that the tree with its entire associated doctrinal apparatus can be shown to be based on a Mesopotamian model perfected in Assyria in the second millennium BC.⁴⁵ That this model could be made an integral part of Jewish religious thought underlines the basic similarity of the Assyrian and biblical concepts of God.⁴⁶

The Assyrian sacred tree (figs. 4-8 and 13f), which occasionally takes an anthropomorphic form, can be analyzed as consisting of the “great gods” of the Assyrian pantheon and taken as a schematic representation of the “divine assembly,” with Ištar occupying the “heart” of this divine “body.”⁴⁷ Like the sefirot, the “great gods” making up the tree were prominently associated with numbers. This fact gives the tree an important mystical dimension, to which we shall return later on (see p. XXXIV).

Equipped with this information, we can now return to the problem of the identity of Aššur and Ištar left pending above. On the surface level, we have

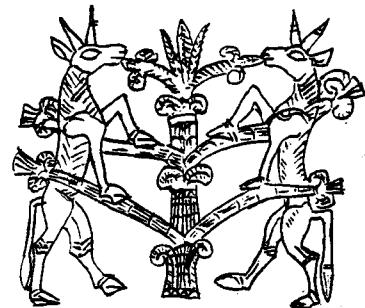
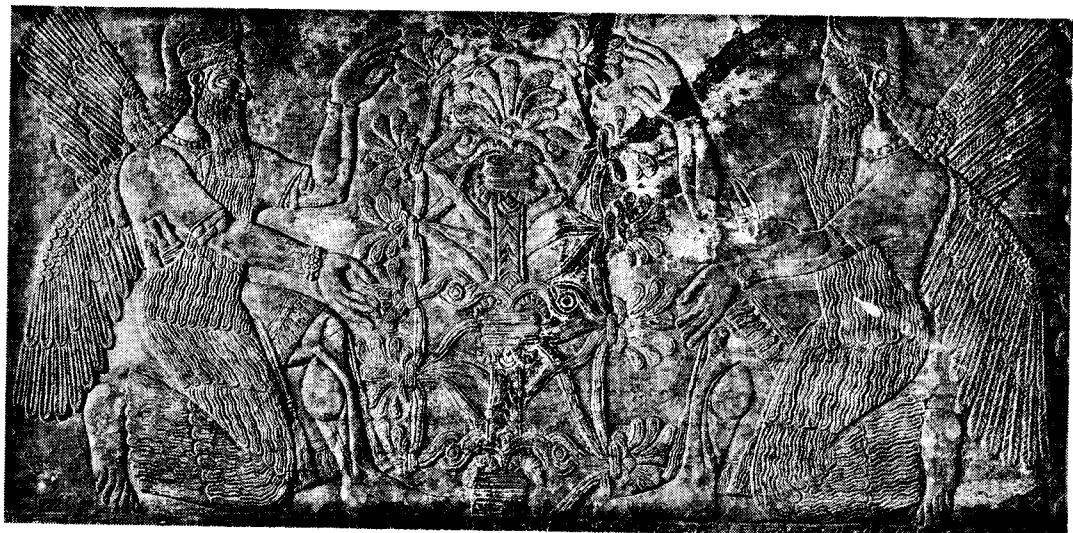


FIG. 4. Assyrian sacred tree, probably from Iran.

After A. MAHAZARI, *Der Iran und seine Kunstschatze* (Genève 1970), p. 21.



COURTESY TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

FIG. 6. Assyrian sacred tree from the palace of Assurnasirpal II, early ninth century BC (cf. fig. 13f). WA 124580.

a scene in oracle 3.4 in which the prophet, personifying Ištar, administers a ritual meal to gods summoned from various cities and districts of Assyria to participate (along with the respective governors and vassal kings) in a divine covenant in favour of Esarhaddon. On the allegorical level, this corresponds to a meeting of the divine council, convened to terminate a period of divine wrath with Assyria and to initiate a new era under the rule of a saviour king, Esarhaddon. On a deeper, mystical level, the passage describes a process taking place within Aššur himself, with Ištar, the “heart” of his cosmic body, playing a key role in the process.⁴⁸ The same pattern of thought is reflected in Tablet XI of the Gilgamesh Epic, which tells that the *heart* of the convened great gods induced them to cause the Flood, and later specifies that it was Ištar who commanded it.⁴⁹ Thus, while Ištar in the oracle appears as the *primus motor* of the covenant, it was the council in its entirety, that is, Aššur himself, who concluded it.⁵⁰

It can be argued that a similar mode of thinking is reflected in the Last Supper, and the striking affinities of the latter with oracle 3.4 can be explained accordingly.⁵¹

In sum, the perspective of oracle 3.4 is that of the divine council in which the prophet participated as a manifestation of Ištar, and this explains its particular formulation. In the preceding oracle (3.3), the situation is different. Here God speaks to man directly through his magnificent deeds. On this level, no metaphors are called for and Aššur is the only God.⁵²

All things considered, the conceptual framework of Assyrian prophecy emerges as largely identical with that of ancient Israelite prophecy. Both shared the same basic concept of God as “the sum total of gods” and the same religious concepts and imagery. The worship of a multitude of deities (“the host of heaven”) in state religion is well attested for pre-exilic Israel and Judah.⁵³ No biblical prophet denied the existence of these “hosts of heaven,”⁵⁴ though their basic position was that God transcended these powers,⁵⁵ which on their own were neither omnipotent nor omniscient, but limited in func-

tion.⁵⁶ This was also the position of the Assyrian prophets and Mesopotamian religion in general.⁵⁷

Of course, in a religion of this type, the borderline between the surface level (polytheism) and the deeper level (monotheism) is subtle, and the distinction between the two was certainly often lost in practice.⁵⁸ Examples are not lacking in Assyrian texts and iconography where Aššur appears as if he were just one god among many — granted, the most exalted one, but still on the same level with other gods.⁵⁹ In the prophecies, state cult, and royal inscriptions, however, he is always strictly set apart from his emanations. In accordance with his special status, he is represented as a winged disk hovering over the “Tree of Life.”⁶⁰ His fundamental unity with his powers is, however, made clear by his seal, where he is said to “hold a cosmic bond binding together the great heavens and the Igigi and Anunnaki gods.”⁶¹

The risk of losing the distinction between God and his powers is likewise inherent in the kabbalistic concept of God, as illustrated by the following passage stressing the importance of the daily recitation of Shema' Israel (Deut. 6:4) for the unification of the divine powers:

Since you know that the Sefirot are designated as attributes, and they are not [limited] in attribute by their nature, but from our perspective, you ought to unify all of them twice during the day... let him direct [the thought] as if he will cause all of them to enter the [Sefirah of] Keter, from whence they were emanated.⁶²



COURTESY TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

FIG. 7. Winged disk hovering over the sacred tree in a Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal.
BM 105111.

An early kabbalistic text asserts:

All the Sefirot will be unified in [Israel's] pure thought and will be linked to each other until they are drawn [up] to the source of the endlessly sublime flame... And this is the secret of the unification [done] by a man in the morning and evening prayer, causing the elevation of all the Sefirot into one bundle and their union.⁶³

The bitter attacks of biblical prophets against idolatry and the worship of heavenly bodies and foreign gods⁶⁴ have in my opinion to be seen in this light — as attacks against the nation's excessive worship of divine powers at the cost of God himself, which was seen as the root cause of her demise,⁶⁵ not as attacks against the contemporary concept of God as such, which did not differ essentially from its Assyrian counterpart.⁶⁶

Ištar: the Holy Spirit

If this is so, why then are the Assyrian oracles called “words of Ištar” and not “words of Aššur,” as one would be inclined to expect on the basis of the biblical analogy, “word of YHWH”?

The answer should be evident by now. Ištar, who in the oracles addresses the king as her child, is *Aššur revealed in his mother aspect*. In speaking through the prophet, she, however, is at the same time also an entity *distinct* from Aššur: a divine power working in man and thus bridging the gulf between man and god. Though distinct from the prophet as well, she unites with him or her, thus making him or her momentarily an agent or limb of God in the sense of p. XXI above and, for a fleeting moment, one with God.⁶⁷

It is important to realize that the Goddess has to be understood concretely in terms of her human manifestation: she is the emotion (*libbu*) moving the prophet, the breath (*šāru*) issuing from his or her “heart,” and the voice (*rīgmu*) and words (*dibbi*) emerging from his or her mouth. There is a definite correlation between her human manifestation and her place in the divine “body” (the anthropomorphic tree and the divine assembly, see p. XXIIIIf above). In both cases she occupies *the heart*, the center of the body universally regarded as the seat of emotions, love and affection, and synonymous with spirit, courage and the essence of anything.⁶⁸

Accordingly, Ištar can be viewed as the “spirit” or “breath” of Aššur (= God) — a concept well-attested in Neo-Assyrian texts.⁶⁹ Going a step further, one can say that Ištar of the prophecies is the spirit of God, who, residing in the heart of the prophet, *spirits* him and speaks through his or her lips.⁷⁰ In other words, she is the functional equivalent of the biblical Spirit of God (also called the spirit of YHWH, the Holy Spirit, or simply the Spirit), who plays a similar role in biblical and early Christian ecstatic prophecy.⁷¹

I am well aware that this interpretation, which has not been suggested before, will strike many as bold, ill-considered, and totally out of the question. After all, Ištar is commonly regarded as an aggressive “goddess of war, fecundity, and sexual love”⁷² — all notions apparently incompatible with those commonly attached to the Holy Spirit, who especially in Western

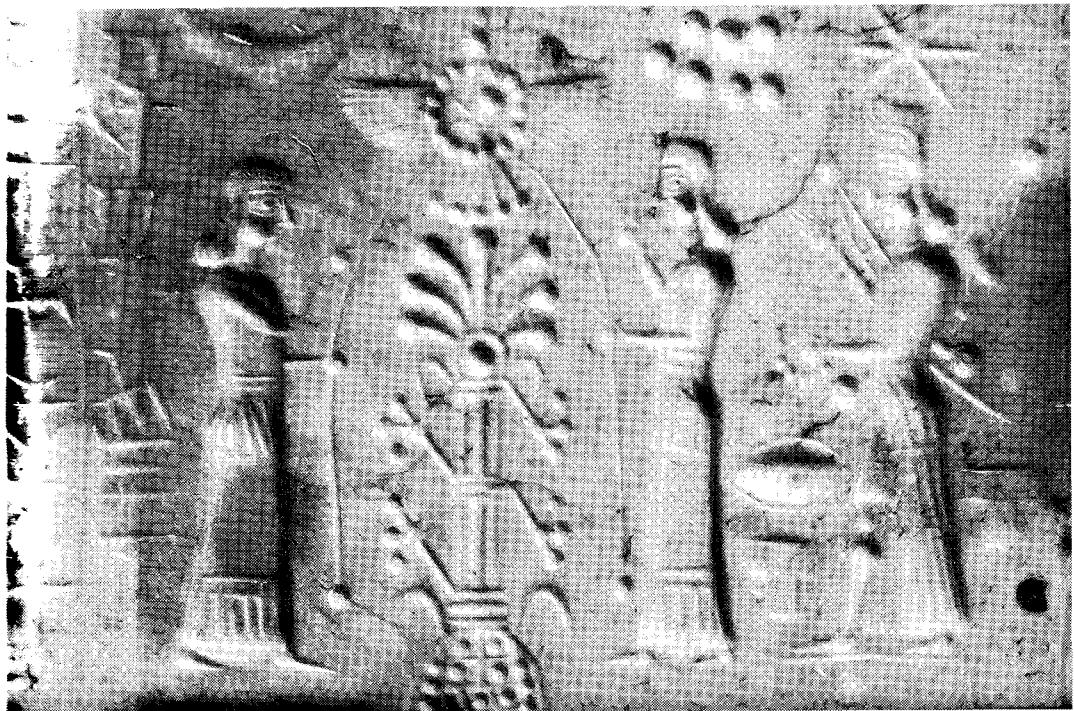


FIG. 9. *Ishtar with her eight-pointed star behind a eunuch devotee. Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal.*
FRIBOURG 103.

COURTESY INSTITUT BIBLIQUE, UNIVERSITÉ DE FRIBOURG

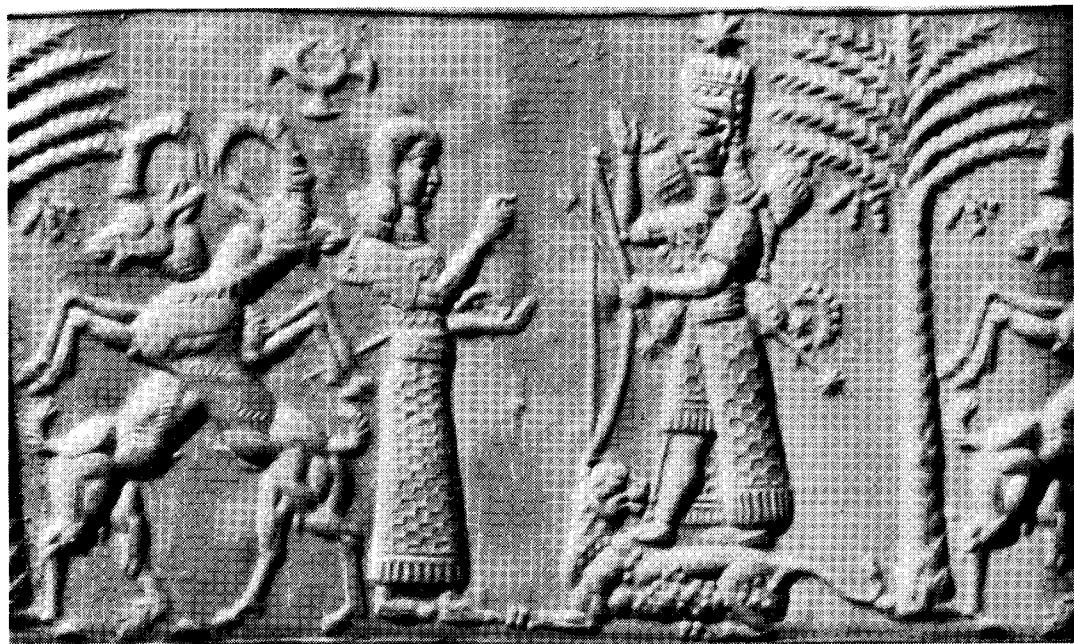


FIG. 8. *Ishtar, armed with quivers and swords and holding a bow and arrows, facing a eunuch official (see p. XLVI).*
BM 89769.

COURTESY TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

Christianity is an elusive, predominantly male entity void of any feminine characteristics.⁷³ However, a closer look at the facts will soon reveal that the equation rests on good grounds.

It should be noted, first of all, that the male notion of the Spirit in Christianity is a late, secondary development. In the Hebrew Bible, the "Holy Spirit" (*rwh qds*) and its equivalents (*rwh 'lhym*, *rwh yhwh*, *hrwh*) are consistently construed as feminine nouns, which indicates that it was conceived as a feminine entity.⁷⁴ In the Nicene Creed (AD 381), the Holy Spirit is defined as the "life-creating power" — i.e., the equivalent of the Mesopotamian "mother goddess" — and the role of the Spirit in the immaculate conception of Jesus Christ, as defined in the Apostles' Creed, corresponds to that of Ištar/Mullissu in the conception of the Assyrian king (see below, p. XL). In the apocryphal Gospel According to the Hebrews (2nd cent.), Jesus calls the Holy Spirit his *mother*,⁷⁵ while in the gnostic treatise *On the Origin of the World*, the Spirit is presented as a *virgin* sitting on the left of the throne of Sabaoth, with Jesus Christ enthroned on its right.⁷⁶ Correspondingly, in second-century Gnosticism, the later Christian trinity (like the Assyrian trinity in oracle 1.4) appears as a triad made up of the Father, the *Mother*, and the Son.⁷⁷

The gnostic Holy Spirit is a much more complex figure than the faceless and demythologized Spirit of Christianity and shares numerous important features with Ištar/Mullissu. She is the female aspect and "consort" of the Father, the "Mother of the Universe, whom some call Love";⁷⁸ she is the first "Thought that dwells in the Light, a Voice, who gradually put forth the All";⁷⁹ she is the "androgynous Mother-Father, the Womb that gives shape to the All, the ineffable Word, a hidden Light pouring forth a Living Water, a male Virgin by virtue of a hidden Intellect."⁸⁰ She manifests herself in many forms and is, like Ištar, called with many names. She is usually called *Sophia*, "Wisdom," which corresponds to Ištar's designation as "Daughter of the moon" (see below), but she is also known as the "fallen *Sophia*" and, like Ištar, referred to as "whore."⁸¹ These characteristics link the gnostic Holy Spirit with the Logos of John 1 and the personified Wisdom of Proverbs 8 on the one hand,⁸² and with the ancient Near Eastern "mother goddesses" in general on the other.

The dove, the Christian symbol of the Holy Spirit, was consistently associated with goddesses of love and procreation in the ancient world. In the Greco-Roman world, it was sacred to Venus and Aphrodite;⁸³ in the apocryphal Acts of Thomas, it is invoked as "the hidden mother."⁸⁴ In the Song of Songs, the "dove" refers to the bride,⁸⁵ that is, the hidden Wisdom and Beauty of God presented as his consort in Proverbs 8.⁸⁶ A talmudic passage compares the Spirit of God hovering over the waters in Gen. 1:2 to a dove hovering over its young ones.⁸⁷ In Mesopotamia, the dove's generative potency and incessant groaning and moaning associated it with the mother goddess mourning the fate of her creatures perishing in the deluge.⁸⁸ This association is also implicit in Romans 8:26, "The Spirit comes to the aid in our weakness... Through our inarticulate groans the Spirit himself is pleading for us." Incidentally, the Hebrew word for "dove" in the Song of Songs, *yonah*, literally means "the groaning one."⁸⁹

With regard to the traditional notion of Ištar as a “goddess of war and sexual love,” it should be noted that while it is technically accurate in a sense, it totally misses the essence of the Goddess. As recently observed by Rivkah Harris, “[Inanna-Ishtar] embodied within herself polarities and contraries, and thereby transcended them... [She] was far more than simply the goddess of fertility, of love and war, and the Venus star.”⁹⁰ Her complex figure, which combines features of the madonna with those of a whore and a warlord, has been aptly characterized by Harris as a “paradox and a coincidence of opposites.” A paradox indeed, for her seemingly contradictory features find a coherent explanation once — and only when — she is recognized as an equivalent of the Holy Spirit and considered in this light from the perspective of later esoteric traditions.

Irrespective of her mythological role, the most common notions attached to Ištar (and other goddesses equated with her) in Mesopotamian texts are purity, chastity, prudence, wisdom and beauty. From the earliest times on, her standing epithets are “pure/holy”⁹¹ and “virgin.”⁹² She is the “daughter” of Anu (god of heaven), Ea (god of wisdom) and Sin/Moon (god of purity and prudence).⁹³ She is a veiled bride, “beautiful to a superlative degree.”⁹⁴ In Assyrian iconography, her most common symbolic representation is the eight-pointed star,⁹⁵ and she is often depicted as a female figure surrounded by intense radiance (Fig. 10f).

As recently observed by Irene Winter, “Things that are holy, or ritually pure/clean, are described in terms of light [in Mesopotamian texts and arts], and if the sacred is manifest as luminous, then that which is sacred will shine.”⁹⁶ Thus the prominence given to the luminosity of the Goddess in visual arts corresponds to the notion of her holiness stressed in contemporary texts. The same is true of the epithet “virgin,” which, as is well known, is a universal symbol of purity and chastity. The bearded, androgynous figure of the Goddess in Assyrian texts and iconography has correspondingly nothing to do with virility or martiality but rather symbolizes sublime purity and perfection, as in Gnosticism and Syriac Christianity.⁹⁷

The brilliance and beauty of Ištar corresponds in Jewish mysticism to the brightness and glory of God (*kavod*), revealed to the mystic as a divine light,



FIG. 10. Ištar, standing on a lion and surrounded by divine radiance (*melammu*), appearing to the governor Nabû-ušalla.

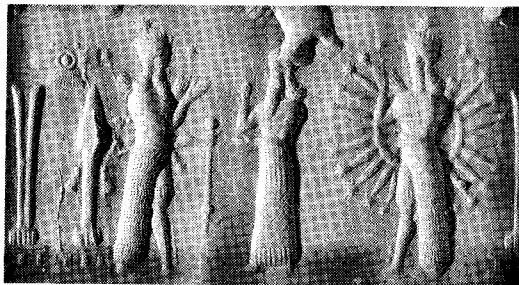
K. WATANABE, *BaM* 23 (1992) 357.



COURTESY MUSÉE DU LOUVRE

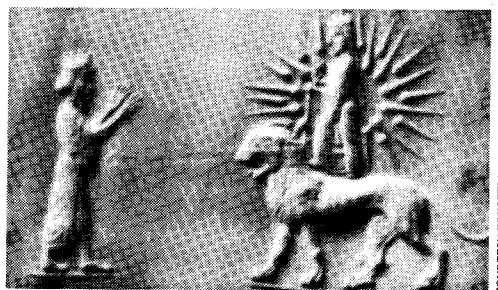
FIG. 11a. *Ishtar and Aššur-Enlil blessing a eunuch official.*
AO 1510.

b



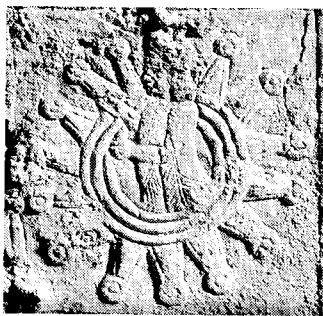
COURTESY TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

c



COURTESY TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

d



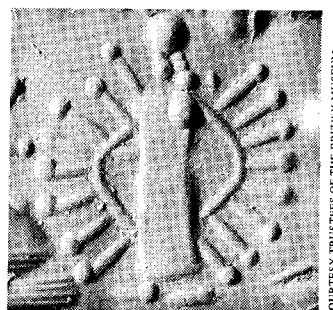
COURTESY TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

e



COURTESY VORDERASIATISCHES MUSEUM, BERLIN

f



COURTESY TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

FIG. 11b-f. *Epiphanies of Ishtar.* b = Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal, WA 89810. c = Achaemenid seal from Gorgippa, N shore of the Black Sea. D. COLLON, *First Impressions*, London 1987, no. 432. d = Detail of a Neo-Assyrian relief, WA 124867. e = Silver medallion from Sam'al, Das Vorderasiatische Museum, ed. L. Jakob-Rost, Berlin 1987, Abb. 38. f = Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal, WA 89632.

often taking the form of a beautiful feminine apparition, *Shekhinah*, "the virgin of light."⁹⁸ Unable to approach God directly, the mystic could unite himself with his Shekhinah (lit., "indwelling"), believed to exist also without form, as a voice. Mystical union with God, referred to allegorically as the "bridal chamber," constituted the highest sacrament in Gnosticism (see n. 120 below); as noted above, the same imagery is also found in the Song of Songs, an allegory par excellence for mystical union. The Song of Songs has close parallels in Assyria, with Ištar and other goddesses playing the part of the "bride"; the outspokenly erotic language of these compositions, which served to describe the bliss of the encounter with the godhead, of course has little if anything to do with carnal sexuality.⁹⁹ We shall return to the question of sexuality in the cult of Ištar in detail below. Here it may be briefly noted that while sexuality did play a conspicuous part in the cult of the Goddess, it did not, contrary to a widespread modern myth, advocate promiscuity or sexual license, but rather the opposite.¹⁰⁰

The martial role of the Goddess is a corollary of her role as the divine mother and protector of the king (see p. XXXVI), and has an exact parallel in the role of Yahweh, "the Holy One of Israel," as the warlord of Israel, and of the Madonna, the "Holy Virgin," as the Palladium of Christian armies.¹⁰¹ The wars she fought were *holy* wars against forces of evil, darkness, and chaos,¹⁰² and they were won not only because the Goddess was on the king's side but because she *spirited* the soldiers of the victorious army, fighting for the just cause.¹⁰³

The role of the Goddess as a prostitute, finally, is explained by the well-known but little understood myth of Ištar's Descent to the Netherworld.¹⁰⁴ This myth contains the key to the religious background of Assyrian prophecy, and must hence be analyzed here in detail.

The Descent of Ištar and the Ascent of the Soul

To understand the *Descent* correctly it is essential to realize that it has nothing to do with "fertility" or "seasonal growth and decay" but, like the gnostic myth of the Fall of Sophia, addresses the question of man's salvation from the bondage of matter. Its protagonist is the "Neoplatonic" Cosmic Soul, personified as the goddess Hekate in the Chaldean Oracles.¹⁰⁵ The first half of the myth presents the soul's heavenly origin and defilement in the "netherworld," i.e. the material world, the latter half outlines her way of salvation.¹⁰⁶ Like Sophia and Hekate Soteira, the goddess of the myth thus is a "two-faced" entity. Descending, she is the holy spirit entering the prison of the body; ascending, she is the penitent soul returning to her celestial home.¹⁰⁷ This double role explains her contradictory figure, which combines the image of the Holy Spirit with that of the prostitute.

The affinity of the gnostic Sophia myth and the Descent of Ištar is borne out by several considerations, most importantly by a Nag Hammadi treatise entitled *The Exegesis on the Soul*.¹⁰⁸ This text has been taken as a rephrasing of the Valentinian myth of Sophia; in actual fact, however, its narrative much more closely follows that of the Descent of Ištar, to the extent that it could

be considered a running commentary or a paraphrasis of the latter.¹⁰⁹ In contrast with most gnostic texts, it is written in easily comprehensible, plain language, clearly meant to explain rather than to conceal. It thus offers a most valuable interpretive parallel to the Descent of Ištar, whose heavily metaphorical and allegorical language served just the opposite purpose.¹¹⁰

The descent of Ištar is presented in terms of a stripping metaphor. She leaves her home as the queen of heaven, the wise, chaste and pure "daughter of the moon," dressed in her regal attire.¹¹¹ At each gate of the netherworld, she has to take off one piece of her clothing, until she in the end arrives in the netherworld completely naked, stripped of all her virtues and powers.¹¹² Her later ascent is expressed by reversing the metaphor: at each of the seven gates, she gets back a piece of clothing in an order mirroring that of their removal.

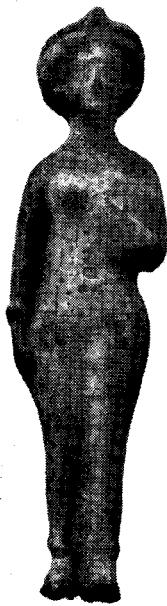
In *Exeg. Soul* we read: "As long as the soul was alone with the father, she was virgin and in form androgynous. But when she fell down into a body and came to this life, she fell into the hands of many robbers. Some made use of her [by force], while others did so by seducing her. In short, they defiled her, and she [lost her] virginity. And in her body she prostituted herself."¹¹³ Even though no reference to the removal of garments is actually made in the text, both the context and the use of the word "robbers" imply that the stripping metaphor underlies this passage too.

The same metaphor is also found in Jewish mysticism, where the Torah reveals herself by a process of undressing, while man ascends to higher worlds through a process of dressing.¹¹⁴ A student of the Torah aspires to become a bridegroom of the Shekhinah, and one who diligently studies the Torah clothes the Shekhinah, for she is naked in her exile in this world. Conversely, every sinner is thought of as one who disrobes the Shekhinah, and in so doing prolongs her exile.¹¹⁵

The gates through which Ištar has to pass on her way back from the netherworld correspond in Kabbalah to the gates of the sefirot, through which the soul must pass in order to reach the Divine King.¹¹⁶ In Gnosticism and in the mysteries of Mithras, they correspond to the seven planetary heavens or spheres.¹¹⁷ In each case, they are implicitly linked to a clear-cut doctrine of salvation, which we shall now consider.

In *Exeg. Soul*, the way to salvation is opened up by repentance, mourning, prayer, and mercy. Recognizing her miserable condition, the soul begins to call with all her heart upon the name of her father: "Save me, my father, for behold I will render an account for [thee, for I abandoned] my house and fled from my maiden's quarters. Restore me to thyself again." The text adds: "When the father, who is above, sees her in such a state, then he will count her worthy of his mercy upon her."¹¹⁸

In the Descent of Ištar, the same idea is expressed through the penitent figure of Papsukkal, who weeps before Ištar's father, and through the creation of the effeminate *assinnu*, who releases Ištar from Ereškigal's thrall. The *assinnu* corresponds to the gnostic "helper" sent by the Father to the suffering soul to comfort it, awaken it, and to provide it with the "food and water of life," the word (*logos*) of salvation (Rudolph *Gnosis*, p. 119ff). The sprinkling of Ištar with the water of life corresponds to the baptism which in *Exeg. Soul* effects the rebirth and cleansing of the soul.¹¹⁹

FIG. 12. *Ištar, naked, with her jewelry.*

K. KARVONEN-KANNAS, *The Seleucid and Parthian Terracotta Figurines from Babylon* (Firenze and Helsinki 1995), pl. 5:12 and p. 49a.

In *Exeg. Soul*, the ascent of the soul — the restitution of her original unity with God — is presented in terms of a wedding allegory.¹²⁰ The soul is a bride adorning herself for the arrival of the bridegroom, “her man and her brother,” to whom she was joined when she was “with the father.”¹²¹ The text then explicitly states: “This is the ransom from captivity. This is the upward journey of ascent to heaven. This is the way of ascent to the father ... Then when she will become young again she will ascend, praising the father and her brother, by whom she was rescued.”¹²²

The ascent of Ištar, too, requires a ransom: Tammuz, her brother and “the husband of her youth,” must be given to the netherworld as her substitute.¹²³ The sacrifice of Tammuz — an etiology for the death of the king as Son of God¹²⁴ — constitutes the culmination of the whole myth and must be regarded as a functional equivalent of the redemptory death of Christ.¹²⁵ As in Christianity, it paradoxically becomes a promise of eternal life for man. At the end of the myth we are told: “When Tammuz rises, the lapis lazuli pipe and the carnelian ring will rise with him, the male and female mourners will rise with him!¹²⁶ May the dead rise and smell the incense!”¹²⁷

In sum, it seems certain that the Descent of Ištar contained the basic tenets of an ecstatic mystery cult promising its followers absolution from sins, spiritual rebirth and resurrection from the dead.¹²⁸ These rewards were in store for those who were ready to follow the path of the Goddess from prostitution and suffering to the wedding in heaven.¹²⁹ In the words of the gnostic document *Thunder*:¹³⁰

I am the first and the last.
 I am the honoured and the despised.
 I am the prostitute and the holy.
 I am the wife and the virgin.
 I am the mother and the daughter...
 I am the voice whose sound is manifold,

and the *logos* which has many images...
 I am shame and boldness...
 I am war and peace...
 I am the union and the dissolution.
 I am what is beneath, and to me will they come up.
 I, I am sinless and (yet) the root of sin derives from me...
 Give heed then, O listeners—
 For many are the sweet forms which exist in numerous
 sins and incontinences, and disgraceful passions,
 And fleeting pleasures; which people embrace,
 Until they become sober and go up to their place of rest.
 And they will find me there,
 and live, and not die again.¹³¹

We are poorly informed about the practical details of this cult. As in other ancient mystery cults, those who embarked on it were pledged by oath to lifelong secrecy.¹³² The main lines of it can, however, be reconstructed from the available evidence.

The overall goal of the cult was the purification of the soul so that it would regain its original unity with God. This goal was encoded in the Assyrian sacred tree, meditation on which certainly played an important part in the cult. The trunk of the tree, represented as a stylized date palm standing on a rock, symbolized Ištar as the power bridging the gap between heaven (the crown of the tree) and the material world (the base of the tree).¹³³ The union of the mystic numbers of the crown (1) and of the base (14) equals the mystic number of Ištar (15).¹³⁴

For a spiritually pure person, union with God was believed to be possible not only in death but in life as well.¹³⁵ This belief provides the doctrinal basis of Assyrian prophecy: when filled with divine spirit, the prophet not only becomes a seat for the Goddess but actually one with her, and thus can foresee future things.¹³⁶

To achieve the union, one had to emulate the Goddess, particularly her sufferings and agony, which provided the starting point for her salvation.¹³⁷

One way of doing this was self-inflicted bodily pain, whipping oneself to the point of fainting, stinging oneself with pointed spindles, cutting oneself with swords and flint knives, and even turning oneself into a eunuch in a frenzied act of self-mutilation.¹³⁸ This ghastly act was widely practiced not only in Mesopotamia but all over the ancient Near East, and illustrates the tremendous power that the cult of Ištar exerted upon its initiates.¹³⁹ The purpose of the act — which certainly was the culmination of a long process of spiritual preparation — was to turn the devotee into a living image of Ištar: an androgynous person totally beyond the passions of flesh.¹⁴⁰

Another important way of emulating the Goddess was incessant weeping, sighing and lamenting.¹⁴¹ This method was directly prescribed in the Descent of Ištar, and its significance was powerfully augmented by a passage in the Mesopotamian Flood story, where the Goddess bewails the fate of her perishing creations.¹⁴²

Any one of these practices, particularly when continued to the point of exhaustion, is liable to lead to paranormal states and experiences.¹⁴³ From the viewpoint of Assyrian prophecy, the prominence of methods involving agitation of the eye (weeping) and the mouth (lamenting) is of particular interest,

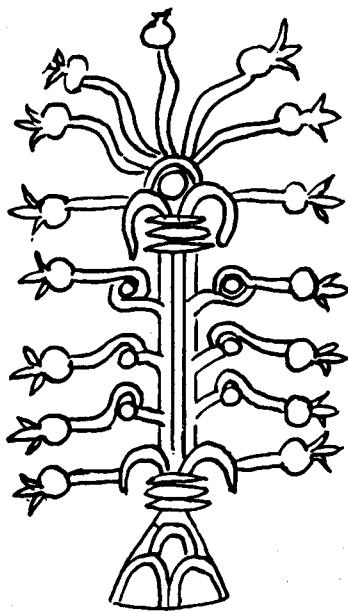


FIG. 13. Assyrian sacred tree with a palmette crown and a mountain base.
WA 89135.

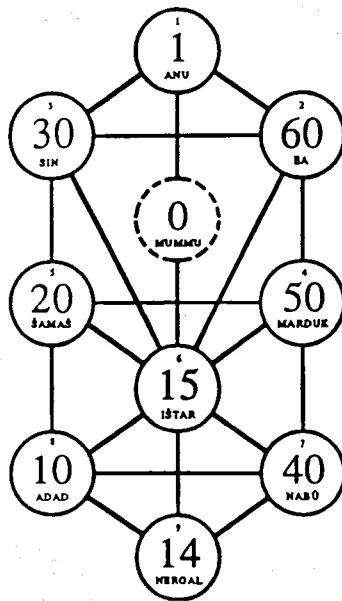


FIG. 14. The reconstructed numerical structure of the Assyrian sacred tree (cf. n. 48).
PARPOLA, JNES 52 (1993) 183, fig. 9.

for these also play a prominent role in Jewish mysticism and ecstatic Kabbalah.

In his book *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, Moshe Idel has analyzed in detail the mystical techniques used by kabbalists to induce the mystical union. He reviews several cases of self-induced suffering, weeping, and prayer leading to experiences of the Shekhinah,¹⁴⁴ and then makes an important observation (p. 84f):

In the cases of Abraham Berukhim, Hayyim Vital, Levi Isaac, and Safrin, weeping preceded the appearance of the Shekhinah... The activation of the eye [here] ends in a visual experience. In the case of Karo and Alkabéz, [by contrast], the organ activated was the lips; indeed, [this time] the Shekhinah spoke from the throat of Karo... The correlation between the technique and the nature of the revelation is striking.¹⁴⁵

The apparition of the Shekhinah as either a vision or a voice, depending on the organ stimulated by the mystic, is indeed striking, and all the more so inasmuch as the same situation is encountered in Assyrian sources, which distinguish between visions and dreams received by seers (*šabru*) and oracles spoken by prophets (*raggimu*). While male gods, too, could be seen in visions and dreams, only Ištar and other goddesses speak from the mouth of the prophet.

The evidence collected by Idel establishes a similar strong link between prophecy and the Shekhinah. According to R. Moses Azriel ben Eleazar ha-Darshan, "Whoever knows [the divine name] and prays using it, the Shekhinah dwells upon him and he prophesies like the ancient prophets."¹⁴⁶

An anonymous source quoted by Moses de Cordovero expresses the same in another way:

Some of the ancients commented that by the combination and permutation of the name ... after a great concentration, the righteous will receive a revelation of an aspect of a *Bat Kol* ... until a great influx will descend upon him, on the condition that whoever deals with this will be a well-prepared vessel to receive the spiritual force.¹⁴⁷

Commenting on this passage, Idel notes that “in texts written in the ecstatic vein of Kabbalah and Hasidism ... man is regularly viewed as a Temple or a vessel receiving the Shekhinah.”¹⁴⁸

This is no place for a serious discussion of the complex figure of the Shekhinah, but she certainly shares many features with Ištar and gnostic Sophia. Like the latter, she is a “virgin of light,”¹⁴⁹ perceived in visions as a beautiful feminine apparition;¹⁵⁰ she is the supernal holy soul with whom the mystic seeks to unite;¹⁵¹ she is the presence of God in man;¹⁵² she is the word of God;¹⁵³ she is the love of God;¹⁵⁴ and she is also known as the Supernal mother and the Infernal mother,¹⁵⁵ the upper Shekhinah and the lower Shekhinah, paralleling the role of the soul in Ištar’s Descent and Sophia’s Fall.¹⁵⁶

In Jewish esoterism, the Shekhinah is closely associated with *Malkhut*, “kingdom,” the receiver and transmitter of the “divine efflux” into the lower worlds.¹⁵⁷ This association corresponds to the special relationship between Ištar and the king in Assyrian religion, which we shall now consider in detail.¹⁵⁸

The King as God’s Son and Chosen One

Throughout the prophecies the king is presented as a semi-divine being, partly man, partly god. On the one hand, he has a human mother who gave birth to him;¹⁵⁹ on the other hand, he is “the son of Mullissu” (the divine queen) and “a creation of Mullissu and the Lady of Arbela.”¹⁶⁰ In oracle 2.5, the Goddess declares: “I am your father and mother; I raised you between my wings.”¹⁶¹ The mother-child relationship between the Goddess and the king, implicit in every oracle of the corpus, is elaborated through a set of images and metaphors stressing the king’s total dependence on his divine mother and the latter’s ardent love for her child or creature. Most commonly, the king is portrayed as a baby suckled, comforted, tended, carried, reared and protected by the Goddess, who now appears as his mother, now as his midwife, wet nurse, or nurse, and tenderly calls him “my calf” or “my king,”¹⁶² while she fiercely attacks his enemies.¹⁶³

Recent studies by Othmar Keel and Martti Nissinen have established that this imagery was by no means limited to the Assyrian prophecy corpus alone but is well attested all over the ancient Near East, including biblical prophecy.¹⁶⁴ In Isaiah 66 and Hosea 11, God’s love for Israel is described in terms of a mother-child imagery identical with that of the Assyrian prophecies, and the formulation of Hosea 11:4, “I bent down to feed them [= Israel],” recalls

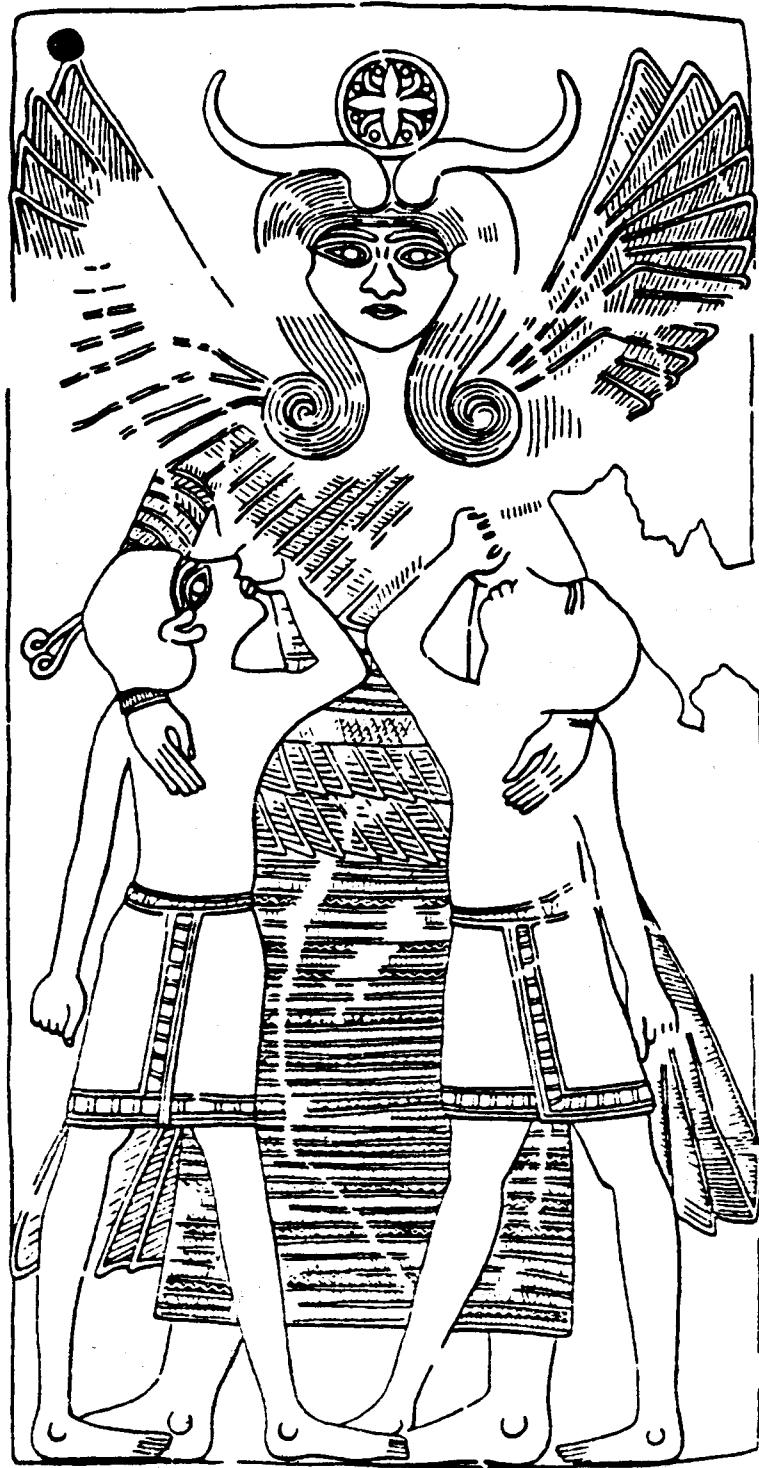


FIG. 15. Aširtu/Anat nursing the crown prince. Ivory panel from Ugarit, early 13th century BC.

U. WINTER, *Frau und Göttin* (OBO 53), Abb. 409.

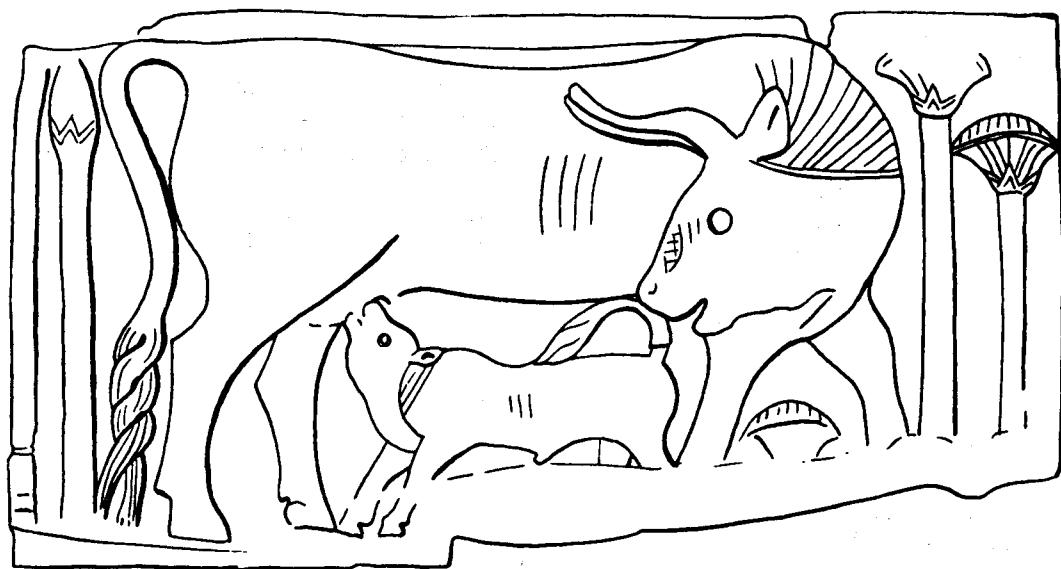


FIG. 16. *Mullissu/Ištar suckling her calf*. Neo-Assyrian ivory panel from Nimrud (cf. figs. 19 and 21). O. KEEL, *Das Böcklein in der Milch seiner Mutter* (OBO 33), Abb. 118.

the image of a cow bending over its suckling calf, a ubiquitous motif of contemporary visual arts.¹⁶⁵ While in biblical prophecy the role of God's son and chosen one is usually applied to Israel collectively, passages such as 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 89 leave no doubt that this role was originally reserved for the king alone and ideologically remained the prerogative of the Davidic dynasty for "as long as the heavens endure."¹⁶⁶

In discussing the meaning of the Assyrian mother-child imagery, Nissinen argues that it was functionally rather than ontologically oriented, and that its primary purpose was to *legitimize* the king's rule.¹⁶⁷ From this point of view, calling the king the son of God would be merely a figure of speech for god-chosen (and thus legitimate) king;¹⁶⁸ and the need to legitimize the

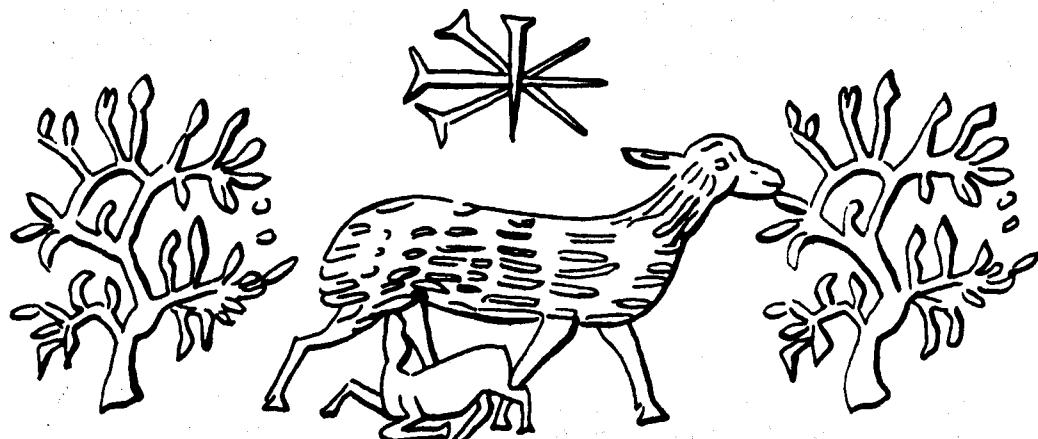


FIG. 17. *Ištar suckling her lamb*; notice the cuneiform sign "god" above the ewe. Middle-Assyrian cylinder seal from Assur. KEEL, OBO 33, Abb. 87.

kingship of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal would provide a plausible explanation not only for the existence of the present corpus but for the activity of the prophets in general. In Nissinen's words, "The prophets are always positively disposed towards the king... It was a prophetic *task* [emphasis mine] to convey to the king the divine mother's or midwife's blessing for the legitimization of his kingship."¹⁶⁹

This interpretation certainly makes good sense, keeping in mind the historical context of the prophecies (see below) and the important role that allegory and metaphor play in Mesopotamian religious language and thought. However, on closer examination it becomes evident that it alone does not provide a sufficient explanation for the existence of the prophecy corpus, nor does it explain Assyrian prophecy as a phenomenon.

First of all, if the prophecies had been delivered and collected simply to back up Esarhaddon's and Assurbanipal's political position, one would expect them to be referred to in royal inscriptions composed at the time when these kings were politically weak. This, however, is not the case. While Esarhaddon does mention that he received encouraging oracles after his victory over his brothers (see p. LXVIII), this statement is found only in inscriptions composed in his eighth regnal year (673), when his power had already long been consolidated. The only reference to prophecies in his early inscriptions is to be found in a context relating to the rebuilding of Babylon (see p. LXIX). And while Assurbanipal takes pains to relate in detail the oracles and visions he received before his war against Teumman, king of Elam (see pp. XLVI and LXX), he does not bother to mention that he had received supporting prophecies as a crown prince or during the Šamaš-šumu-ukin war.¹⁷⁰

This implies that although both Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal undoubtedly welcomed the support of the prophets,¹⁷¹ they did not need it to *sanction* their rule. They were no usurpers; on the contrary, they had been promoted to the status of crown prince by divine approval, and their hereditary rights had been fully confirmed by oaths of loyalty imposed on the whole empire.¹⁷² Hence the emphasis of the prophecies on the legitimacy of the king does *not* indicate a need for divine approval but, on the contrary, reflects the exceptional care by which both kings were raised to the status of crown prince.

In the second place, it should be noted that although the doctrine of god-chosen god-raised king certainly was part and parcel of Mesopotamian royal ideology, there is no evidence that it was automatically applied to every Assyrian king (just as not every king of Israel or Judah was automatically hailed as the Messiah).¹⁷³ Only relatively few kings refer to themselves as creations of gods, and the inscriptions of Assurbanipal, where this claim is repeatedly made, constitute an exception rather than a rule. Nor is there any evidence that kings who really needed prophetic support actually received it. Excepting Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, no Assyrian kings mention prophetic oracles in their inscriptions.

Most important, there is every reason to believe that the mother-child imagery of the prophecies was not just metaphorical. We know that Assyrian princes were entrusted as infants to temples of Ištar, almost certainly to be suckled and nursed by hierodules who impersonated the motherly aspects of the Goddess.¹⁷⁴ The ideological background of this practice is provided by the creation myth, *Enūma eliš*, according to which Marduk, the future king

of the gods, in his infancy suckled the breasts of goddesses and was tended by a divine nurse.¹⁷⁵ An Assyrian esoteric text related to the cult of Ištar elaborates on the goddesses in question: we learn that Marduk's wet nurse was Ištar of Nineveh, while his dry nurse was Ištar of Arbela.¹⁷⁶ Exactly the same goddesses figure in the prophecies and other contemporary texts as the wet and dry nurses of the king.¹⁷⁷ Moreover, the goddess Mullissu, who in the prophecies appears as the divine mother of both Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, appears in the same capacity also in contemporary royal inscriptions and hymns.¹⁷⁸ It is thus clear that the distribution of the roles of the goddesses was not fortuitous but had a well-established doctrinal basis shared by contemporary prophecy, mysticism and royal ideology. The application of a celestial pattern of education to royal children, or vice versa, reflects an important dogma already encountered above (p. XXI): the complementarity of the celestial and mundane realms, the latter being conceived of as the mirror image of the former.¹⁷⁹

Thus when Assurbanipal, in line with oracle 2.5, claims that he "knew no father or mother, and grew up in the lap of [his] goddesses,"¹⁸⁰ and when he calls himself a "product of Emašmaš and Egašankalamma" (the renowned temples of Ištar of Nineveh/Mullissu and Ištar of Arbela),¹⁸¹ he means what he says. The implication is that he was separated from his physical mother and father in his infancy and brought up in temples of Ištar in Nineveh and Arbela.¹⁸² Nursed by hierodules and educated by initiates in the sacred mysteries he indeed "grew up in the lap of the goddesses" and was "raised between their wings."

By the same token, when the king repeatedly refers to himself as the creation of gods or to Mullissu as "the mother who gave birth to me,"¹⁸³ these assertions have to be taken seriously. They imply that he was more than a normal man: a semi-divine being selected and called by gods and miraculously perfected for his office in the womb of his mother¹⁸⁴ — a creature "two-thirds god and one-third man," like the legendary Gilgamesh, the prototype of the perfect king.¹⁸⁵

Two points in particular are worth close attention in this doctrine, which is attested in Assyrian royal inscriptions since the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243-1207 BC)¹⁸⁶ and which certainly represented an article of faith comparable to the Christian doctrine of the immaculate conception of Christ.

First, the divine mother of the king, Mullissu, bears the epithet "wild cow" (*rīmtu*) in Assyrian royal inscriptions.¹⁸⁷ This epithet not only connects her with the mother of Gilgamesh, Ninsun the "Wild Cow,"¹⁸⁸ and the calf-licking cow of contemporary visual arts, but also associates her (through the horns of the cow) with the moon, and thus identifies her with the supernal aspect of Ištar, the "Daughter of the moon" or "Ištar of Wisdom,"¹⁸⁹ the equivalent of the Holy Spirit (see pp. XXIX and XXXII above). Created by this goddess, whose very name connoted purity and holiness,¹⁹⁰ the king was a man "conceived of the Holy Spirit"¹⁹¹ — not just an "adoptive" son of God, but "the offspring of God himself,"¹⁹² the Perfect Man impersonating the Tree of Life and thus fit to rule the world as the "Good Shepherd," God's representative on earth.¹⁹³

Second, whenever the theme of divine creation and choice occurs in Assyrian royal inscriptions, it is always combined with a *historical mission* the king was committed to fulfill.¹⁹⁴ This circumstance gives the choice of a



COURTESY MUSÉE DU LOUVRE

FIG. 18. *Mullissu seated as the Queen of Heaven on her star-lined throne.*
AO 23004.

crown prince a “messianic” dimension also implicit in *Enūma eliš*, where the birth of Marduk in effect signalled the coming of a saviour god, the “avenger of his father.”¹⁹⁵ Just as this celestial king-to-be was to vanquish the forces of chaos represented by the raging sea (Tiamat) and to create a new world order, so was the mundane crown prince expected to vanquish whatever forces threatened the empire and to establish a reign of lasting peace and justice. In Mesopotamian mythology, the celestial saviour is consistently identified as Ninurta/Nabû, the heavenly crown prince,¹⁹⁶ who after his victory over the forces of darkness merges with his father and must accordingly be considered as the heavenly paragon of the king in his role as the defender of cosmic order.¹⁹⁷

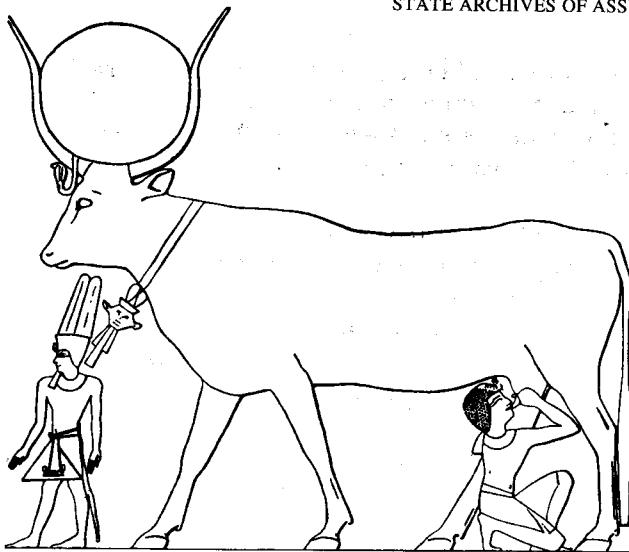


FIG. 19. *Hathor nursing the young pharaoh*. 18th dynasty relief from Deir el-Bahri, early 15th century BC. KEEL, OBO 33, Abb. 40.

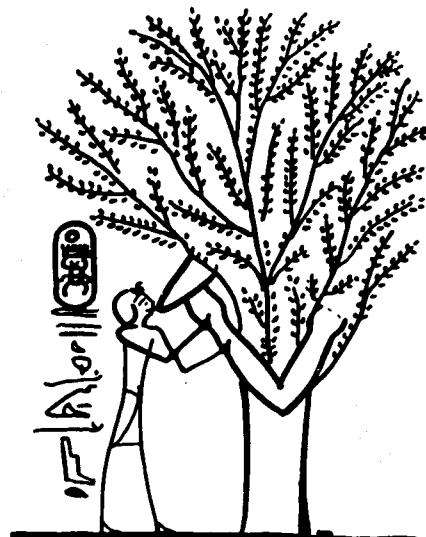


FIG. 20. *Isis as sycamore tree nursing the pharaoh*. Wall painting from the tomb of Tuthmosis III, mid-15th century BC.

Ideologically, then, the god-born god-chosen Assyrian king corresponds to the Egyptian pharaoh (considered the incarnation of Horus) and to the Jewish Messiah. The divine mother of the king, Mullissu, is the perfect equivalent of Egyptian Hathor, defined as the mother and wet nurse of the pharaoh, the wild cow, the queen of heaven, the goddess of love, the mother of gods and the creatrix of all living things, the lady of life, the living soul of the trees, and the ultimate reality.¹⁹⁸ Remarkably enough, the Canaanite equivalent of Mullissu, the goddess Aširtu/Asherah,¹⁹⁹ firmly connected with ecstatic prophecy,²⁰⁰ is represented as a stylized tree in late second and early first millennium iconography.²⁰¹ In 8th-century Israel, Asherah is attested as the consort of Yahweh.²⁰² Logically, then, she must have functioned as the divine mother of the king in pre-exilic Israel, too, which accords with the mother role of the oracular deity in the Hosea prophecy discussed above (p. XXXVII).²⁰³

The king's ideological association with Ninurta/Nabû of course does not imply that every king came to be viewed as, or had to play the role of, a god-chosen "Messiah." On the contrary, the expectations projected upon them as individuals certainly varied greatly depending on the circumstances.

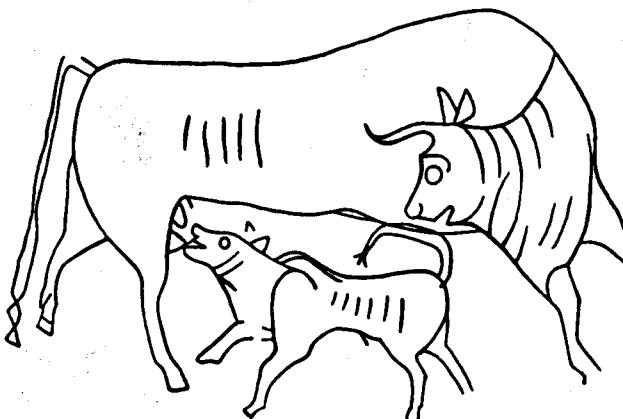


FIG. 21. *The cow-and-calf motif on Pithos A from Kuntiller 'Ajrud*. KEEL, OBO 33, Abb. 120.

The accession of Esarhaddon was preceded by a period of serious internal crisis for Assyria. The emperor had been murdered by his own sons, the legitimate heir had been driven into exile, and a power struggle in the heart of the land shook the foundations of the whole empire. This state of affairs was interpreted as a manifestation of divine wrath resulting from the upheaval of cosmic harmony.²⁰⁴ Not only the land of Assyria but the “kingdom of heaven” as well was in a state of war, as the angry gods punished the nation for its wicked deeds.²⁰⁵

In this situation the role of Esarhaddon assumed a new, “messianic” significance. There can be little doubt that he had from the beginning been regarded as the legitimate heir by the prophets. In contrast to his brothers, he had been raised by the Goddess; in addition, he had a mother whose name, Naqia/Zakutu (“the pure, innocent one”) reminded one of the Holy Goddess herself.²⁰⁶ In the eyes of the prophets, he was the person chosen to defeat the forces of evil, restore order, and save the country.

A portent received during Esarhaddon’s exile, months before the murder of Sennacherib, powerfully added to the nimbus of the prince. This portent not only predicted that the king would be murdered by a son of his but also that the exiled prince would return victorious, ascend the throne, and rebuild “the temples of the great gods.”²⁰⁷ We know that the portent had been communicated to Naqia, and after her pilgrimage to Arbela on behalf of her son (see oracle 1.8) it was doubtless soon propagated all over the empire.²⁰⁸ With the murder of Sennacherib, the first part of the portent had become a reality; and the swift defeat of the brothers, also preceded by a portent, must have convinced even the last sceptic that Esarhaddon indeed was a tool in the



FIG. 22. *Ninurta/Nabû combatting mythical monsters. Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal with legend reading “Let the one who trusts in you not come to shame, O Nabû!”*
BM 89145.

COURTESY TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

hand of God — a true incarnation of Ninurta, the “avenger of his father, “shining like sun” after his victory.²⁰⁹

Against this background, the oracles to Esarhaddon can be seen as words of divine encouragement and support to a saviour king who had embarked on a historical mission but had not yet completed it, comparable to the messianic oracles delivered to David, Cyrus and Zerubbabel.²¹⁰ By defeating the murderers of his father, Esarhaddon had restored the cosmic harmony, but had not yet even gotten started with his grand mission, the restoration of the temples of the great gods, a task that was to occupy him for his entire reign. The message of the prophets was that just as he owed everything to the help of God, he was to proceed fearlessly towards the fulfillment of his mission, knowing that God would be with him in the future too and would not let him come to shame.

We know that Neo-Assyrian prophecy had a long prehistory extending back to the early second millennium BC (see below, p. XLVIII) and that other Assyrian kings also received prophetic encouragement on critical occasions. But just as Esarhaddon’s triumphant rise to power against all odds remains without parallel in Assyrian history, the massive prophetic movement in his support is also likely to have been unique. It was the product of a unique historical situation loaded with the expectation of a saviour king, comparable to the one preceding the appearance of Jesus 700 years later.²¹¹

Assyrian Prophecy

Designations of Prophets

The Neo-Assyrian term for “prophet” was *raggimu* (fem. *raggintu*, “prophetess”), which literally means “shouter/proclaimer.”²¹² Such a term immediately reminds one of John the Baptist, “the shouting one,” and of his 9th-century BC predecessor, Elijah, who epitomize the idealized picture of biblical prophets as ascetics living in the “wilderness.” Indeed, there is evidence that asceticism and seclusion from the world played a significant role in the life of Assyrian prophets. In oracle 9 the prophetess presents her concern for the life of the king as the exertions of Gilgamesh; the allusion is to the 9th and 10th tablets of the Gilgamesh Epic, where the hero roams the desert as an ascetic clad in animal skins, again recalling the biblical figures of Elijah and John the Baptist.²¹³

The role of the prophets as speakers to the masses is well attested both in the prophecy corpus itself and in contemporary texts. In oracle 2.4 the prophetess declares: “I will speak to the multitudes,” and continues: “Listen, sunrise and sunset!,” recalling Isaiah 1:2 and other biblical passages. Oracle 3.2 begins, “Listen, Assyrians!,” recalling Amos 3 and other biblical oracles addressed to the Israelites collectively. In SAA 10 352 (ABL 437 = LAS 280), a prophetess speaks in “the assembly of the country,” while ABL 149 = LAS 317 and CT 53 969 refer to appearances of prophetesses in temples and during religious ceremonies.²¹⁴ Oracle 3.5 indicates that the activity of the prophets played a decisive role in winning the population of Assyria over to Esarhaddon’s side before his clash with the rebel brothers.²¹⁵ The same idea is implicit in lines 108ff of Esarhaddon’s succession treaty (SAA 2 no. 6), which show that prophets were considered capable of turning the masses of people against Assurbanipal, Esarhaddon’s crown prince designate.²¹⁶ Finally, the very fact that prophesying was expressed in Neo-Assyrian through the verb *ragāmu*, “to shout, to proclaim,”²¹⁷ implies that prophetic oracles were generally delivered in a loud voice — “shouted” — and hence usually addressed to masses of people rather than to single individuals.

While the deliverers of prophetic oracles are consistently called *raggimu* (*raggintu*) in the prophecy corpus and other Neo-Assyrian texts (letters, treaties, and administrative documents),²¹⁸ in Esarhaddon’s inscriptions the oracles of Collections 1-3 are referred to as *šipir mahhē*, “messages of ecstatic prophets” (see below, p. LXXIII). The term *mahhû*, “ecstatic prophet,”²¹⁹ is well known as a designation of the Mari prophets²²⁰ and also

occurs in Ur III, Old Babylonian and Neo-Babylonian texts,²²¹ as well as in Standard Babylonian literary and lexical texts;²²² it is also attested in Middle Assyrian.²²³ By contrast, it is conspicuously absent from purely Neo-Assyrian texts, where it is attested only twice: once in the Succession Treaty of Esarhaddon as a synonym of *raggimu*,²²⁴ and once in a religious commentary, the so-called Marduk Ordeal text.²²⁵ Conversely, the word *raggimu* does not occur outside Neo-Assyrian texts.²²⁶ It is thus clear that *raggimu* was a specifically Neo-Assyrian designation of prophets replacing older *mahhû*, which was retained as a synonym restricted to literary use.²²⁷ Accordingly, the logogram MÍ.GUB.BA, which is given the reading *mahhūtu* in lexical texts,²²⁸ is probably to be read *raggintu* in no. 10, where it seems to refer to the prophetess Dunnaša-amur, the speaker in oracle 9.

Whether the replacement of *mahhû* “ecstatic” by *raggimu* “shouter” reflects a change in the social role of the prophets between the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods remains unclear.²²⁹ In any case, it is certain that Neo-Assyrian prophecy continued to be ecstatic in character. As already pointed out above (p. XXXIVf), the “possession” of the prophet by the Goddess involved a change in consciousness, purposely triggered by ascetic techniques such as weeping and wailing.²³⁰ In addition to oral prophecy, these techniques also produced visions and dreams. It is certainly no coincidence that *raggimu* “prophet” is equated with *šabru* “seer, visionary” in a Neo-Assyrian lexical text,²³¹ and that *mahhû* “ecstatic” is associated with words like “wailer” (*lallaru*), “frenzied” (*zabbu*), “carrier of spindle” (*nāš pilaqqi*), and other ecstatic devotees of Ištar in Babylonian lexical and omen texts.²³² The close connection between visions and prophetic oracles is clearly evidenced by no. 11, which contains an oracular utterance followed by a vision (*diglu*), as well as by several other contemporary texts.²³³ At times the borderline between oracular prophecy and visions seems to vanish altogether, as in the following episode in an inscription of Assurbanipal:

In Ab, the month of the appearance of the Bow star and the festival of the Venerable Lady, the daughter of Enlil, as I was sojourning in her beloved city Arbela to worship her great divinity, they reported me an attack of the Elamites... Because of this insolence ... I turned to Ištar, the Most High; I stood before her, I knelt down under her, and I prayed to her godhead while my tears were flowing: “... He (Teumman) is whetting his weapons in order to invade Assyria. You are the most heroic one of the gods; scatter him like a pack in the thick of the battle and raise a violent, destructive storm against him.”

Ištar heard my desperate sighs. She said to me, “Fear not,” and encouraged me (with the words): “I feel compassion for the prayer you prayed and [the tears] that filled your eyes.”

The very same night as I was praying to her, a seer (*šabru*) lay down and had a dream. Having awakened, he related to me the nocturnal vision (*tabrit mūši*) which Ištar had made him see (*ušabru*):

“The Goddess who dwells in Arbela entered (var. entered me). Quivers hang from her right and left, she held a bow in her hand, and she had drawn a pointed sword to make battle. You stood before her, while she spoke to you like a mother to a child. Ištar, the highest of the gods, called to you and gave you the

following order: 'You plan to make war — I am on my way to where you intend to go.'

You said to her, 'Wherever you go, I will go with you,' but the Lady of Ladies answered you: 'You shall stay here, where your residence is! Eat, drink wine, make merry, and praise my godhead until I go and accomplish that task and make you attain your heart's desire. You shall not make a long face, your feet shall not tremble, and you shall not wipe away sweat in the thick of the battle.'

She sheltered you in her sweet embrace, protecting your entire body. Fire flared up in her face, and she left angrily and impetuously to defeat her enemy, proceeding against Teumman, king of Elam, who had made her very angry.'

(Streck Asb pp. 114ff // 190ff // Piepkorn Asb p. 64ff)²³⁴

In both its imagery and its content the theophany reported here closely resembles the prophetic oracles of the present corpus. However, it differs from them in being a visual and acoustic experience, not direct speech of god, and is accordingly attributed not to a *raggimu* but to a *šabru*, "seer." The distinction made in the text between *raggimu* and *šabru* is fundamentally important. While any individual (and especially any devotee of Ištar) could have a vision or a dream and report it,²³⁵ only a few special individuals could qualify as prophets, to speak with the mouth of God. This basic distinction between a "seer" and a "prophet" of course does not preclude the possibility that a prophet could have visions — on the contrary.²³⁶

Prophecy and the Cult of Ištar

The close connection of Assyrian prophecy to the cult of Ištar has been noted in several earlier studies,²³⁷ and indeed cannot be stressed enough. This close connection is evident not only from the fact that the Assyrian oracles are called words of Ištar/Mullissu; as shown in detail below (p. ILff), the prophets also bear names associated with the Goddess or her cult, and come from three major cult centres of Ištar, viz. Arbela, Calah and Assur (the "Inner City").²³⁸ One of the prophets is a votaress donated to the Goddess by the king.²³⁹ The oracles contain references to the cult of the Goddess or present demands on her behalf.²⁴⁰ The fact that prophets are closely associated with devotees of Ištar (*assinnu*, *nāš pilaqqi*, etc.) in lexical lists and elsewhere²⁴¹ and that they participated in cultic ceremonies²⁴² strongly suggests that they were permanent members of the temple community. A letter to the king shows that a prophet could be consulted by private individuals during visits to the temple of Ištar in Calah.²⁴³ A Middle Assyrian administrative text from Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta lists prophets and prophetesses as recipients of food rations among other cultic personnel of the Ištar temple of the city.²⁴⁴

All this implies that the individuals who became prophets belonged to the community of devotees of Ištar and therefore shared the same religious convictions, doctrines and educational background.²⁴⁵ Incidental passages in the prophecies show that philosophical and mythological compositions dealing with the ascent and salvation of the soul, such as the myths of Adapa, Atrahasis and Gilgamesh, were well-known to the prophets, to the extent that

they affected the imagery and content of the oracles.²⁴⁶ Other literary allusions in the oracles indicate familiarity with cultic love lyrics and panegyric hymns, royal rituals, and royal penitential psalms and hymns, in other words, texts central to the official cult of Ištar.²⁴⁷ Most importantly, a number of passages in the oracles have parallels only in esoteric mystical texts relating to the cult of Ištar²⁴⁸ and Jewish mystical tradition.²⁴⁹ Such passages imply that the prophets had access to esoteric mystical lore, and the only thinkable context in which such an exposure could have been possible is the cult of Ištar with its secret mysteries and initiation rites.²⁵⁰

While all the oracles of the corpus are addressed to or concern the king or his son and display a positive attitude towards the king,²⁵¹ it is also certain that other types of prophecies existed. Contemporary letters and other sources reveal that the prophets could also sharply attack the king and his behaviour.²⁵² Keeping in mind the cultic background of the prophets, it is not unreasonable to suppose that they also propagated the key doctrines of the cult of Ištar, particularly its way of salvation,²⁵³ and consequently also a critique of contemporary morality.²⁵⁴ While this moral dimension surfaces only occasionally in the extant prophecy corpus,²⁵⁵ the critical attitude of the prophets towards the “world” cannot be questioned.²⁵⁶ Such a prophetic activity would help explain the unremitting influx of new devotees to the Goddess. Who else but the prophets would have carried out the “missionary work” generating this influx?²⁵⁷

Although no Assyrian prophetic oracles are extant from the time before the 7th century, the existence of prophets and prophetesses (*mahhû* and *mahhûtu*) associated with the cult of Ištar is firmly documented already for the 13th century BC, see p. XLVII above; an oracle of Ištar of Nineveh is actually quoted in the Amarna correspondence (see Tušratta’s letter to Amenophis III, EA 23, mid-fourteenth century BC). The Middle Assyrian prophecy, in turn, has a prehistory reaching back, through Mari prophecy, to the early second millennium BC and even beyond. The earliest reference to a prophetic oracle of Ištar seems to occur in an Old Akkadian text dating to reign of Naram-Suen (23rd century BC), see Wilcke, ZA 87 (1997) 16f.

The Prophets of the Corpus

The 28 oracles of the corpus can be assigned, on the basis of the extant authorship indications, to 13 different prophets, four of whom are male and nine female (including two apparently bi- or asexual prophets, see below under Bayâ and Ilussa-amur). The comparatively high number of women is paralleled by the prominence of prophetesses and female ecstasies in Mari and OT prophecy, as well as in Gnosticism and early Christianity.²⁵⁸ Eight of the prophets come from Arbela, two from Assur, one from Calah, possibly one from Nineveh, and one from a town “in the mountains” (probably near Arbela).

The individual prophets are surveyed below in alphabetic order along with a brief discussion of their names, domiciles and oracles. Outside the corpus, only two more Assyrian prophets (one male and one female) are known by

name from contemporary texts.²⁵⁹ The unnamed prophets and prophetesses (*raggimānu raggimātu*) honoured by the king in ABL 1216 = SAA 10 109:9 almost certainly largely consisted of prophets included in the following list.²⁶⁰

1. **Ahāt-abiša** (wr. MÍ.NIN—AD-šá), “Sister of her father,” a prophetess from Arbela (oracle 1.8). The name, also borne by a daughter of Sargon II (SAA 1 31 r.27, cf. Fuchs Sar. 124:198), can be compared with such NA names as *Rišat-abiša* “Joy of her father” (ADD 1142:2 and *Hadi-abiša* “Delight of her father” (GPA 248:3), and is unlikely to be an assumed “prophet name” with religious connotations. In a marriage document from Calah (CTN 3 47:4) it is borne by the young girl to be married. The reading of the first element is assured by the NB syllabic spelling MÍ.a-hat—AD-šá (Tallqvist NBN, p. 3).

Ahat-abiša’s short oracle refers to a prayer of Naqia to Ištar on behalf of her exiled son (see p. XLIII above) and closes with words recalling the conclusion of the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:13.

2. **Bayâ**, a prophet(ess) from Arbela (oracles 1.4 and [2.2]). The female determinative preceding the name of the prophet in 1.4 is clear on the tablet and is confirmed by MÍ.ba-ia-a listed as a “[servant of] Ištar of Huzirina” in STT 406 r. 10. On the other hand, the prophet is clearly defined as a “son” of Arbela (i.e., male) on the tablet, and there is no way of emending the crucial sign DUMU “son” to DUMU.MÍ, “daughter.” If oracle 2.2 also originates from Bayâ (see below), the masculine gentilic following the name there would confirm the male sex of the prophet. The female determinative would then imply that the prophet was a “man turned into woman” through an act of self-castration, see above, p. XXXIV. See also below, under Ilussa-amur.

The name of Bayâ is restored in oracle 2.2, but the suggested restoration perfectly fits the extant traces, the available space, and the content of the oracle. Note that 2.2 begins with the same words as 1.4 and shares with it the phrase “the future will be like the past” and the theme of “sixty gods,” neither of which occurs in the other oracles of the corpus. Note also that Bayâ is not the only prophet represented by two oracles in the corpus. Collections 1 and 2 also contain two oracles by La-dagil-ili (1.10 and 2.3), and these oracles likewise share common features not occurring in other oracles of the corpus (the beginning words, almost identically worded promises of safety and dynastic succession, and cultic demands). See also below on Sinqiša-amur, the author of oracles 1.2 and 2.5 (and possibly of 9 and 10).

Bayâ’s oracles are important for their theological and doctrinal content. The Assyrian concept of God as the “sum total of gods” is clearly articulated in his oracles, which also contain the “Platonic” ship-of-state metaphor and an important Trinitarian allusion (see above p. XVIII). On the exhortation “Do not trust in man; lift your eyes, look to me” (1.4) see below under La-dagil-ili.

3. **Dunnaša-āmur** (wr. MÍ.KALAG-šá—a-mur), “I have seen her power(?)”, a prophetess from Arbela (nos. 9 and 10). The reading of the logographic element of the name is uncertain (cf. KALAG.GA = *dunnu*, SAA 3 39:34ff), and no syllabic spellings confirming it are available. It is not excluded that one actually has to read Sinqiša-amur (“I have seen her distress”), making this prophet identical with no. 11 below. Note that *singu* (= Bab. *sunqu*) in NA meant “hard times, distress” and could hence have been written logo-

graphically with the sign KALAG; cf. MÍ.KALAG.GA = *dannatu* “hard times,” and *sunqu* = *dannatu*, LTBA 2 2:340ff.

Reading the name as Sinqiša-amur is supported by the fact that apart from 1.2 (from Sinqiša-amur), no. 9 is the only oracle in the corpus to use the verb *tabāhu* “to slaughter” to indicate the annihilation of the king’s enemies. On the other hand, Dunnaša-amur would make sense as a “prophet name”: the power of the Goddess is stressed several times in NA sources, e.g. oracle 9:3 and ABL 876:9.²⁶¹

In no. 9 the prophetess identifies herself with Gilgamesh roaming the desert in search of eternal life, implying that ascetic denial of the body (lines 12-15) played an important part in her own life, see above, pp. XXXIV and XLV. On this important oracle see further pp. XXI and LXXI, and nn. 18 and 21.

4. **Ilūssa-āmur**, “I have seen her godhead,” a prophetess from the Inner City, i.e. Assur (oracle 1.5). The name implies a visionary experience of Ištar and hence probably is a “prophet name.” It is otherwise attested only in KAV 121, a small fragment of unknown date from Assur. The rarity of the name makes it likely that this text too refers to the prophetess, and the fact that she appears in the text as a recipient of provisions along with other women suggests that she was permanently attached to a temple (cf. above p. XLVII).

Note that although the name is spelled with the feminine determinative in both 1.5 and KAV 121 (MÍ.DINGIR-sa—*a-mur*), the gentilic adjective in 1.5 is in the masculine gender. See the discussion under Bayâ.

The oracle of Ilussa-amur ends in the words “I am Mu[llissu],” but is otherwise almost completely destroyed.

5. **Issār-bēli-da”ini**, “Ištar, strengthen my lord!,” a prophetess of unknown domicile (probably Arbela) defined as “a votary of the king” (1.7). The name (where “my lord” certainly refers to the donor, in this case the king) may have been given or assumed at the moment of or after the donation. Non-royal votaries to the Goddess apparently did not have comparable names.²⁶²

Issar-beli-da”ini’s fragmentary oracle is addressed to Esarhaddon’s mother and is related in content to oracle 1.8, by Ahat-abiša of Arbela, with which it is grouped in Collection 1.

6. **Issār-lā-tašiyat**, “Do not neglect Ištar!,” a prophet from Arbela (oracle 1.1). The name is a *hapax legomenon*, but is clearly an equivalent of the contemporary *Lā-teggi-ana-Issār* “Do not neglect Ištar!”²⁶³ If the meaning of the name is to be taken seriously, it suggests that the parents of this prophet had likewise been devotees of Ištar, cf. below under La-dagil-ili.

7. **La-dagil-ili** “One who does not see God,” a prophet from Arbela (oracles 1.10, 2.3, [3.1-5]). As already observed by Banks, AJS 14 (1897/8) 269, “While expecting those who form the mouth-pieces of the gods to bear names implying great piety, we are surprised that Ištar of Arbela spoke through one whose name testifies that he does not trust in God!” Indeed, La-dagil-ili is a surprising name for a prophet. It reminds one of the names given by the prophet Hosea to his children, *Lo-ruhamah* (“Not loved”) and *Lo-ammi* (“Not my people”), explained as follows in Hos. 1:

The LORD ... said [to Hosea], Go, take a wanton for your wife and get children of her wantonness, for like a wanton this land is unfaithful to the LORD... She conceived and bore a daughter, and the LORD said to him, Call her Lo-ruhamah, for I will never again show love to Israel, never again forgive them. After

weaning Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son; and the LORD said, Call him Lo-ammi, for you are not my people, and I will not be your God.

Analogously, the name La-dagil-ili would refer to the Assyrian nation or mankind at large who did not seek (or “see”) God like the devotees, visionaries and prophets of Ištar.²⁶⁴ Note the exhortation “do not trust in men, look to me (*dugulanni*)!” in oracle 1.4. A critical attitude to mankind is indeed evident in La-dagil-ili’s oracle 2.3: “Mankind is deceitful; I (Ištar) am one who says and does.” The name of the prophet could thus be a “prophet name” assumed by La-dagil-ili at some point in his career, or given to him already at birth by prophet parents, as in the Hosea passage just quoted. Cf. the discussion under Issar-la-tašiyat above.²⁶⁵

In line with the implications of his name, La-dagil-ili appears to have been a very important prophet, comparable to the great biblical prophets. Like Nathan, he administers the divine covenant with Esarhaddon, and unlike the other prophets of the corpus, he repeatedly demands humility from the king and presents demands on behalf of the cult of Ištar. He has also left more oracles than any other Assyrian prophet. In addition to 1.10 and 2.3, where his name is fully preserved, Collection 3 in its entirety must also be attributed to him.²⁶⁶

Like the oracles of Bayâ and Sinqiša-amur, those of La-dagil-ili also contain characteristic elements not found in other oracles of the corpus. Both 1.10 and 2.3 open with the same formula, unique to La-dagil-ili, and the concluding section of 1.10 (also unique to La-dagil-ili) recurs almost verbatim in oracle 2.3, lines 11-14.

8. **Mullissu-kabtat**, “Mullissu is honoured,” a prophetess of unknown domicile, possibly Nineveh (oracle 7).

The name of the prophetess as well as the fact that she delivers an oracle of Mullissu suggests that she belonged to the temple of Mullissu in Nineveh, Emašmaš, and thus may have been one of the “goddesses” who nurtured Assurbanipal in his childhood (see above, p. XXXIXf). This would account for the content of her oracle, one of the longest in the corpus, which strikes one as an exceptionally affectionate and tender expression of support for the prince.

9. **Nabû-hussanni**, “Nabû, remember me!,” a prophet from Assur (oracle 2.1). Names ending in *hussanni*, “remember me,” are rare; besides Nabû, only Aššur is attested as the theophoric element in Neo-Assyrian sources.²⁶⁷ As restored, the name of the prophet recalls the words of the criminal in Luke 23:42, “Jesus, remember me when you come to your throne (var., come in royal power).” Indeed, its connotation is exactly the same: Nabû is here invoked as the saviour exalted beside his father’s throne, to pass judgment on the living and the dead.²⁶⁸ Restoring the theophoric element as Aššur does not change the basic connotation of the name. It has to be kept in mind that, after all, Nabû was just an aspect of Aššur, see p. XXI and nn. 7ff above.

In his fragmentary oracle, Nabû-hussanni appears to take a position in favour of the restoration of Esaggil.

10. **Rēmutti-Allati**, “Granted by Allatu,” a prophetess from a mountain town, Dara-ahuya (oracle 1.3). Allatu was a name of the Mesopotamian netherworld goddess, Ereškigal.²⁶⁹ Accordingly, the name, which is a hapax legomenon, looks like an assumed “prophet name” referring to its bearer as

a person released from the power of the netherworld, that is, the “world.” In her short two-line oracle, the prophetess speaks for the whole community of devotees in Arbela.

11. **Sinqiša-āmur**, “I have seen her distress,” a prophetess from Arbela (oracles 1.2 and [2.5]). The name of the prophetess is a hapax legomenon and is clearly an assumed “prophet name”; like the name Ilussa-amur, it refers a visionary revelation of Ištar, specifically as the Creatrix agonizing over the fate of mankind perishing in the deluge.²⁷⁰ That the suffix *-ša* in the name indeed refers to Ištar is proved by the name *Sinqi/Siniq-Issār* “Distress of Ištar,” frequent in contemporary texts.²⁷¹ Note that apart from Aššur, Ištar is the only deity combined with the word *singu* “distress” in names.²⁷²

The corpus contains at least two oracles by Sinqiša-amur. The authorship note of the other has been lost, but its attribution to Sinqiša-amur is certain. Both oracles share the same unique address formula and the promise to “bring enemies in neckstocks and vassals with tribute before the king’s feet,” which does not occur in other oracles of the corpus. In addition, both oracles are largely identical in thematic structure.²⁷³

The oracles of Sinqiša-amur are important for their doctrinal content: no. 2.5 clearly articulates the concept of the interconnection of the “kingdom of heaven” and the Assyrian empire (see nn. 25 and 204), and the doctrine of Ištar as the power linking the world of gods with the world of men (see nn. 48, 89 and 133). For the possibility that Sinqiša-amur is identical with the author of oracles 9 and 10 see above, under Dunnaša-amur. If so, she would be the only Assyrian prophet known to have remained active for a period of over 31 years.

12. **Tašmetu-ereš**, “Tašmetu desired,” a prophet from Arbela (oracle 6). The name of the prophet is not attested elsewhere and thus may be an assumed “prophet name.”²⁷⁴

The oracle of Tašmetu-ereš is largely destroyed and contains an intriguing reference to prophetic activity.

13. **Urkittu-šarrat**, “Urkittu is queen,” a prophetess from Calah (oracle 2.4). In Sargonid Assyria, Urkittu (“the Urukite [Ištar]”) was simply an appellative of Mullissu/Ištar (cf. SAA 3 13:3-22 and r.2f, and 5:8-20), so the name actually extols Mullissu as the supreme goddess, “queen of heaven.” Though the name thus suits the prophetess well, it is not necessarily a “prophet name,” for names extolling Urkittu were not uncommon in contemporary Assyria.²⁷⁵

Note that although the prophetess comes from [the Ištar temple of] Calah, she proclaims the word of “Ištar of Arbela and Queen Mullissu.” Her long oracle is political throughout and portrays Ištar as a power directing the course of world history.

The Prophecy Corpus

The Neo-Assyrian prophecy corpus is extant on two kinds of clay tablets, which differ from each other both in size and in shape. Texts 1-4 are relatively large, vertical tablets containing several oracles in two or three columns. Nos. 5-8 are smaller, horizontal in shape and contain only one oracle each (see diagram on p. LIV). By its format, no. 9 belongs with nos. 1-4, although it contains one oracle only; for nos. 10-11 see below, p. LXIf. All the tablets display a fixed length ratio between their horizontal and vertical axes, which remains constant even though the individual tablets vary considerably in size. In the horizontal tablets this ratio is 2:1 (that is, the width of a tablet is twice its height), whereas in the vertical ones it is 1:2 or 2:3, depending on the number of columns into which the tablet was divided.

Tablet Types

Both tablet types are well known from the Ninevite archives. The horizontal format (*u'iltu*) was used for notes, reports, receipts, and memoranda — in short, for information primarily meant for immediate use, not for permanent storage.²⁷⁶ The vertical, multi-column format (*tuppu*) was used for treaties, census lists, balanced accounts and inventories of treasury, as well as for collections of all sorts, including royal decrees and ordinances, recipes, etc. — in short, for documents specifically drawn up for archival storage and reference purposes.²⁷⁷ The two tablet types rarely overlap in content, but there is evidence that information recorded on horizontal tablets was archivized by copying them onto multi-column tablets, whereafter the originals were routinely destroyed.²⁷⁸ The archival documents normally have a short heading, short scribal notes interspersed within the text, and a date or colophon at the end. The *u'iltus* also usually have short notes added to the text, mostly specifying the source of the information.

The tablets of the prophecy corpus share these characteristics. We can thus conclude that nos. 5-8 report freshly received oracles, whereas nos. 1-4 are copies made from reports like nos. 5-8. No. 9 also has to be considered an archival copy because of its vertical format and the formulation of its authorship indication (see below). The careful finish of the tablet, the elaborate wording of the oracle, and the eponym date found at the end likewise clearly distinguish it from the reports. The only respect in which no. 9 formally differs from nos. 1-4 is its single-column format. However, the multi-column format would have been purposeless in a tablet accommodating one oracle

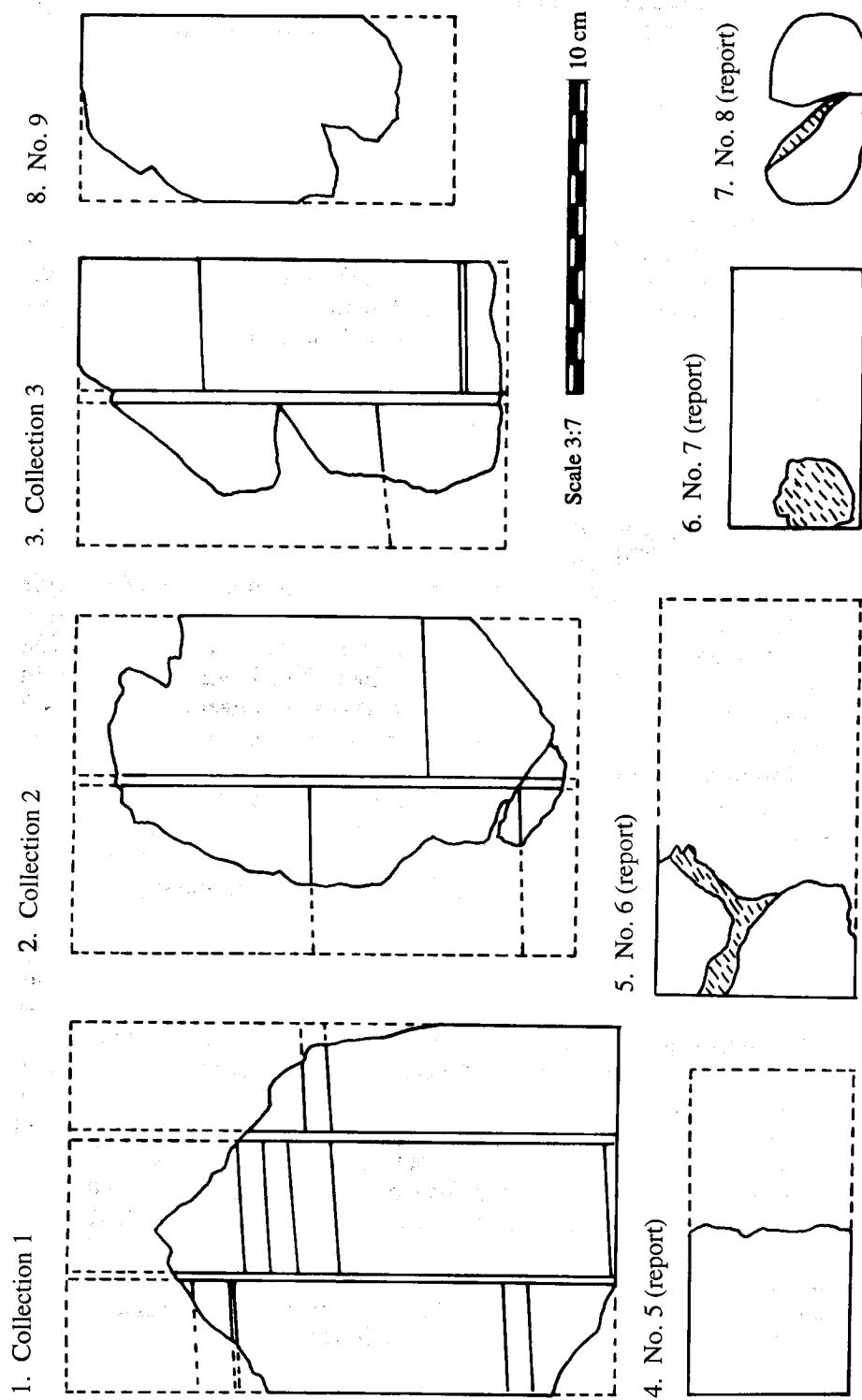


DIAGRAM I. Outlines of nos. 1-3 and 5-9.
Note: Broken lines indicate reconstructions, solid lines actual outlines and rulings drawn by scribes.

only. The 1:2 side-length ratio of the tablet is in perfect agreement with the one-column archival standard of Nineveh.

The quotation particle *mā* introducing the oracles in nos. 6-8 and 10-11 confirms that they were not written down by the prophets themselves but by professional scribes.²⁷⁹ This is also made clear by the colophon of no. 6.

Manuscripts

All the reports certainly originate from different scribes, since the scribal hands are different in all of them. The four oracle collections, however, were all compiled by the same scribe. This can be established with certainty from an analysis of the sign forms and other scribal idiosyncracies occurring in these tablets, as contrasted with the other tablets of the corpus (see Table 1).²⁸⁰

Text 1 (Plates I-III)

No. 1 (K 4310) is a three-column tablet measuring 28 mm (maximum thickness) × 118 mm (full width) × 155 mm (extant height). The upper part of the tablet is broken off so the beginnings of all the columns on the obverse and the ends of all the columns on the reverse have been lost. In addition, a small piece has broken away from the lower left corner of the tablet. The columns on the obverse (from left to right) measure 32, 42 and 35 mm in width, those on reverse 33, 42 and 35 mm. The space between columns is 2 and 2.5 mm on the obverse, 2-3 and 2 mm on the reverse.

The portion of even thickness in the middle of the tablet measures 45 mm, the portion of decreasing thickness from there to the bottom of the tablet 65 mm. Assuming an identical curvature for the upper part of the tablet, this implies an original tablet height of 175 mm (= 2 × 65 mm + 45 mm) and a ratio of 2:3 between the horizontal and vertical axis of the tablet, as in nos. 2 and 3.

Vertical script density is 10 signs to 35 mm in cols. I and V, 10 signs to 38 mm in cols. II, III and VI, and 10 signs to 32 mm in col. IV. Allowing for an uninscribed space of 5 mm at the top of the obverse, as on the reverse, the amount of text lost on the obverse can hence be estimated as six lines at the beginning of cols. I and II, and as 14 lines at the beginning of col. III; in addition, another four lines have been lost due to surface damage at the beginning of col. I. Correspondingly, about 14 + 8 + 8 lines have been lost at the ends of cols. IV, V and VI. The lower portion of the last column is uninscribed, but the break at the end may have contained a short colophon and a date (see p. LIII above). The total number of lines lost in the breaks, excluding the colophon, is hence 42. Adding this to the total of extant lines (224), the original line total of the tablet can be established as 266, of which 84.2% are extant. Col. I originally contained 49 lines; col. II and III, 46 lines;

col. IV, 49 lines; col. V, 44 lines; and col. VI, 32 lines of text (+ possibly a colophon and a date).

The individual oracles on the tablet and the authorship indications following them are separated from each other by horizontal rulings. The ruling before oracle 1.1 is a double one, implying that the text before it differed in nature from the rest of the tablet and hence probably did not contain a prophetic oracle. A similar double ruling occurs in no. 3, col. II, where it separates oracle 3.4 from a six-line section of ritual instructions attached to oracle 3.3.

The available data are not sufficient to determine the nature of the introductory passage preceding the double ruling in col. I with any certainty. All that can be said is that it evidently fell into two parts, a ten-line introductory section entirely lost at the beginning of col. I, and a three-line postscript separated from it by a horizontal ruling and closed by the double ruling just discussed. The text remaining from the postscript shows that it cannot have contained an authorship indication, and it is unlikely to have contained ritual instructions. It is possible that the introductory section was preceded by a short 1-2 line heading, see below, p. LXIII with n. 285.

Note that the partially preserved ruling before col. I 1', which at first glance looks like a double one, almost certainly was a single ruling with an accidentally bifurcated tail. A similar single ruling with a 0.5 mm wide double tail occurs in col. III (between lines 6' and 7'). In the double rulings preceding oracles 1.1 and 3.4 the space between the rulings is much wider (1.5 mm in the former and 2 mm in the latter).

There are two horizontal impressions of the stylus ten lines apart in the space between cols. VI and V of the reverse, at the beginning of lines v 12 and v 21. The former is accompanied by a superscript *winkelhaken* ("ten" mark), which may indicate that these impressions were meant to plan the distribution of the text on the tablet. Similar marks are not found elsewhere in corpus.

Apart from the breaks, the tablet is in an excellent state of preservation. The script is clear and for the most part easily legible despite the three-column format, which occasionally caused the scribe problems of space and forced him to exceed the right-hand column margin, especially in col. I (see lines i 6', 7', 9', 10', 14', 28' and 32', and ii 13', 20' and 23'-26'). The handwriting is elegant and experienced, though it betrays traces of haste; erasures and scribal errors occur in i 17', 20', 28', and ii 6', 8', 34' and 39'. It is possible that some of the scribal mistakes derive from textual damage in the originals used. This is suggested by the unusually spelling *na-karar-ka* "your enemy" in ii 8', which looks like a misreading for *na-kar-u-ti-ka* "your enemies"; note that *ar* cannot be interpreted as a phonetic complement here, since *kar* was not a polyphonic sign and thus did not need any reading specification. It is interesting that though the scribe evidently has applied his own conventions in the copying process, isolated traces of the orthography and ductus of the originals shine through here and there.²⁸¹

For evidence indicating that the scribe who inscribed the tablet also wrote Collections 2 and 3, see p. LV above with n. 280. On the probable date of the text (late 673), see p. LXIX.

	No. 1	No. 2	No. 3	No. 7	No. 9
ba					
zu					
su					
ka					
PAB					
ti					
nu					
NUMUN					
na					
ru					
qa					
ag					
ta					
TA*					
az					
rab					
LUGAL					
DÜ					
ni					
ú					
ra					
sar					
ša					
di					
ki					
MEŠ					
šar/Ug					
ku					
lu					
sal					

TABLE I. *Sign forms occurring in nos. 1, 2, 3, 7 and 9.*

Text 2 (Plates IV-V)

No. 2 (K 12033 + 82-5-22,527) is a two-column tablet measuring 88 mm \times 146 mm. One face of the tablet is flat, the other slightly convex; the flat face is the obverse, as in K 2401 (no. 3). The entire left side of the tablet and the beginnings and ends of all the columns are missing. The right-hand column of the obverse measures 51 mm in width; the original width of the left-hand column can be determined to have been 54 mm on the basis of the restorations in lines 11'-22', which are certain. As the space between the columns is 3 mm, the original width of the tablet can be reconstructed as 108 mm. On the reverse, the right-hand column (col. III) measures 54 mm, and as the space between the columns here is also 3 mm, the original width of the left-hand column must have been 51 mm.

Assuming that the ratio between the horizontal and vertical axes of the tablet was 2:3, as usual in three-column tablets, the original height of the tablet can be estimated to have been 162 mm.

Vertical script density is 10 signs to 38 mm in cols. I-III (in col. II partly 10 signs to 36 mm) and 10 signs to 40 mm in col. IV. Judging from the curvatures, very little text (about two lines only) has been lost at the bottom of the tablet. The amount of text lost at the top can be estimated as 4 to 6 lines depending on the column. Taking into consideration the lines lost in the breaks, cols. I and II originally contained 45 lines, col. II, 43 lines, and col. IV about 40 lines of text. The original line total of the tablet thus was about 173, of which 145 (= 83.8%) are extant.

As in nos. 1 and 3, the individual oracles are separated from each other by horizontal rulings, but in contradistinction to no. 1, the authorship indications are not correspondingly separated from the oracles. Instead, a blank space is left between the oracle and the authorship indication in 2.1. This space does not occur in other oracles of the tablet.

The scribe is the same as in nos. 1 and 3 (see p. LV). The script is clear but in several places (especially near the breaks) badly damaged and effaced, and therefore at times harder to read than in no. 1. In col. III, recent brushing and scratching has resulted in making the sixth sign in line 8' illegible beyond remedy. Scribal mistakes occur in lines ii 9' and 34', and text is occasionally continued over the column margin as in no. 1, see col. iv 1', 4', 13', 21' and 27'. On the probable date of the tablet (679 BC) see p. LXIX.

Text 3 (Plates VI-VII)

No. 3 (K 2401) is a two-column tablet measuring 26 mm \times 75 mm \times 139 mm. As in no. 2, the obverse is flat, the reverse slightly convex. The left side and the lower edge of the tablet are missing; in addition, two small pieces have broken off from the middle of cols. I and III. The right-hand column of the obverse measures 42 mm in width; the space between the columns is 3.5 mm; the original width of the left-hand column can be determined to have been 46 mm on the basis of the restorations in lines 9-13 and 27-34. The

original width of the tablet thus was 92 mm. On the reverse, the space between the columns is narrower (2 mm), and the right-hand column a little wider (44 mm) than on the obverse. The left-hand column probably had the same width as that on the obverse (46 mm).

Applied to the reconstructed tablet width (92 mm), the 2:3 axis ratio of two-column tablets yields 138 mm as the original height of the tablet. In actual fact, the tablet measures 139 mm in height, implying that the extant height is very close to the original one. This is confirmed by the curvatures which indicate that very little, possibly only the surface of the edge, is missing at the bottom of the tablet.

Vertical script density is 10 signs to 37 mm in cols. I-III and 10 signs to 35 mm in col. IV. The tablet originally contained a total of 145 lines, of which 139 (= 95.2%) are extant, many of them unfortunately only in part. Each column was originally inscribed with about 37 lines of text (cols. I and III = 37 lines; col. II = 36 lines; col. IV = 35 lines + blank space of two lines).

The individual oracles are separated from each other by horizontal rulings as in nos. 1 and 2; a double ruling separates the first three (coronation) oracles, accompanied by ritual instructions, from the rest of the tablet. In contradistinction to no. 1, but in keeping with no. 2, rulings are not used to separate the ritual instructions from the oracles, and a blank space is inserted before the authorship indication at the end of the tablet. This, as well as the two-column format of no. 2 and 3, indicates that no. 3 is temporally close to no. 2, while no. 1 was written at a different time, as is also implied by the analysis on p. LXVIIIf, which suggests that the tablets date from 680, 679 and 673 respectively.

The scribe is the same as in nos. 1 and 3 (see p. LV). The script is very clear and easily legible throughout.

Text 4 (Plate VIII)

No. 4 (83-1-18,839) is a fragment from the surface of a clay tablet measuring 33 mm (width) by 39 mm (height). The surface of the fragment is entirely flat, which indicates that a multi-column tablet is in question, and the estimated column width (50 mm or slightly less) points to a two-column tablet. Compare the column widths in nos. 2 (51 to 54 mm) and 3 (42 to 46 mm), both two-column tablets, against those in no. 1 (32 to 42 mm), a three-column tablet. The vertical script density is the same as in nos. 2 and 3 (10 signs to 37-38 mm).

The available data are not sufficient to determine the original size of the tablet, but it is likely to have been close to that of no. 2 or 3 and hence probably contained between 170 and 150 lines of text. If the format of the tablet was the same as in nos. 2 and 3, the fragment belongs to the obverse, most probably to the beginning of column II. Since only one line seems to be missing from the beginning, it is unlikely to have contained the very first oracle of the tablet.

The script is clear and easily legible, and the scribal hand agrees with that of nos. 1-3. By its content, the fragment parallels nos. 1-2 and hence a date of composition ca. 680 BC is probable.

Text 5 (Plate VIII)

No. 5 (K 6259) is the left half of a horizontal tablet measuring 25 mm (thickness) \times 60 mm (extant width) \times 52 mm (full height). The original tablet width can be established as 104 mm on the basis of the 2:1 ratio between the horizontal and vertical axes, which is constant in this type of tablet. Accordingly, more than 40% of text has been lost in each line.

The writing is big; signs measure 5 mm in height on the average, and vertical script density is 10 signs to 60 mm on the obverse and 10 signs to 73 mm on the reverse. Nevertheless, the tablet is in places very difficult to read; many signs, especially on the reverse, are badly obliterated or scratched beyond recognition. The scribal hand does not is not found on other tablets of the corpus.

Text 6 (Plate VIII)

No. 6 (Bu 91-5-9,106 + 109) is a fragment from the left side of a horizontal tablet measuring 26 mm (thickness) \times 43 mm (extant width) \times 64 mm (height). The original width (twice the height) was 128 mm. Accordingly, more than two thirds of each line has been lost.

The script is clear and easy to read despite occasional surface damage. Vertical script density is 10 signs to 65 mm. The scribal hand is not the same as in no. 5 or other tablets of the corpus.

Text 7 (Plates IX and XIII)

No. 7 (K 883) is an almost complete horizontal tablet measuring 22 mm (thickness) \times 82 mm (width) \times 41 mm (height). A small chip of 25 mm diameter has broken off the lower left-hand corner of the obverse, and there is minor surface damage in obv. 12 and rev. 1-2 and 11.

Vertical script density is 10 lines to 35 mm. The script is clear and beautiful, and in contrast to nos. 5-6, the text is elegantly distributed over the lines. It is almost certainly an archival copy of a more hastily prepared original, which it seems to have reproduced faithfully, judging from the distinctive features it shares with nos. 5-6 and 8, like the quotation particle *ma-a* (cf. above, p. LV). The scribal hand is not found on the other tablets of the corpus.

Text 8 (Plates X and XIII)

No. 8 (K 1545) is a horizontal tablet pieced together from two fragments; it measures $15 \times 62 \times 31$ mm. A 1-2 cm wide triangular piece is missing from the middle, but otherwise the tablet is complete.

Vertical script density is 10 lines to 40 mm; script is clear and easily legible. Even though the available data are admittedly very limited, it is possible that the tablet was written by Assurbanipal's chief scribe, Ištar-šumu-ereš (cf. the ductus and sign forms, especially those of *iq*, *ša*, *ti*, in LAS 13 and CT 53 84, 177, 594 and 943).

Text 9 (Plates XI-XII)

No. 9 (K 1292 + DT 130) is a vertical single-column tablet measuring 20 mm \times 57 mm (full width) \times 104 mm (height). The upper left-hand corner and lower part of the tablet are missing. Vertical script density is 10 signs to 35 mm. Assuming that the ratio between the horizontal and vertical axes was 1:2, as is normal in this type of tablet, the original height of the tablet was 114 mm. This means that about 4 lines have been lost at the end of the obverse and a corresponding number of lines at the beginning of the reverse. In addition, the tablet has a coating of very fine clay which has cracked off from the lower left-hand corner of the obverse and from the beginning of the reverse, causing additional loss of text. Altogether, at least 10 lines (= 24%) of the original prophecy have been totally lost.

The tablet is beautifully inscribed and by all criteria represents a library copy rather than a report. The scribal hand closely resembles but is not identical with that of nos. 1-3. The script is very clear and easily legible on the obverse, but badly effaced and at times very hard to read on the reverse.

Text 10 (Plate XIII)

No. 10 (83-1-18,726) is a fragment from the left side of a clay tablet measuring 15 mm (thickness) \times 12 mm (width) \times 42 mm (height). The curvatures point to a vertical tablet originally measuring ca. 30 \times 60 mm. Vertical script density is 10 lines to 41 mm. This implies (including the edges) that the tablet was originally inscribed with about 33 lines of text.

Text 11 (Plate XIII)

No. 11 (K 1974) is fragment of a vertical clay tablet from the upper left part of the reverse measuring 27 mm (width) by 49 mm (height). Curvatures

suggest that the original width was ca. 40 mm, and hence the original height ca. 80 mm. Judging from the vertical script density (10 lines to 34 mm), the tablet was probably originally inscribed with about 50 lines of text.

The lines of the tablet are crowded with text, with signs packed tightly against each other, which combined with textual damage makes the reading and interpretation of some lines quite difficult. The scribal hand is not found on other tablets of the corpus.

Authorship Indications and Other Scholia to the Oracles

In addition to oracles proper, all the tablets of the corpus contain other kinds of information as well: brief notes specifying the origin of the oracle and possibly its context and date. The individual tablets exhibit considerable variation in the formulation and placement of such notes, depending on the text type. The reports normally open with a brief note introducing the oracle, while in the collections the notes follow the oracle and are rigorously standardized in formulation. Some of the introductory notes to the reports have close parallels in the biblical corpus.²⁸²

The Reports

The following introductory notes are attested:

- 1. No. 5:1, "The word of Ištar of Arbela [*to the queen mother*]"
- 2. No. 6:1, "Ištar of Arbela (has said)"
- 3. No. 7:1, "The prophetess Mullissu-kabtāt (has said)"
- 4. No. 8:1f, "Words concerning [the Elami]tes: [God] says as follows"

In addition, no. 6 has a postscript added in smaller script after the oracle: "Tašmetu-ereš, a prophet [...], prophesied (this) in Arbela" (r. 11f). This note has a parallel in collection 3 (iv 31-35) and hence may have been routinely added to many more oracle reports. For the time being it seems, however, that such postscripts were the exception rather than the rule, since two of the reports (nos. 7 and 8) certainly close with the oracle (followed by a horizontal ruling).²⁸³ None of the tablets is dated.

The Collections

Judging from other comparable Ninevite archival texts, it is likely that all the oracle collections opened with a short heading specifying the content of the tablet and ended with a colophon and/or an eponym date.²⁸⁴ The beginnings of nos. 1-4 are almost completely destroyed, but the breaks offer sufficient room for short (1 to 2 line) headings. The "one-oracle collection" no. 9 begins as follows:

"[The prote]ction of Mullissu, [...] of the Lady of Arbela."

This could be interpreted as a heading, taking the restored word *kidinnu* as a technical term for "(oracle of) protection," to be compared with the term *šulmu* "(oracle of) well-being" in nos. 3.2 and 3.3 (see p. LXIV below and the commentary on p. 23). However, since the passage is not separated from the rest of the text by a ruling, as is usual in the case of headings,²⁸⁵ it is more likely to be part of the oracle itself and thus to be interpreted as an address formula in the vocative (see below, p. LXV, and cf. line 22 of the text).

Collections 1 and 2 insert after each individual oracle a stereotypical authorship note which is also found in the "one-oracle collection" no. 9. The note is structurally identical in all three texts ("from/by the mouth of PN + origin") but its exact formulation varies slightly from tablet to tablet. The following variants occur:

1. *ša pi-i PN DUMU GN* "by the mouth of PN, 'son' of GN" (1.1, 1.4, 1.10)
2. *ša pi-i PNf DUMU.MÍ GN* "by the mouth of PNf, 'daughter' of GN" (1.2, 1.8)
3. *ša KA PNf [DUMU.MÍ] GN* "by the mouth of PNf, 'daughter' of GN" (9)
4. *ša pi-i PNf ša GN* "by the mouth of PNf of GN" (1.3)
5. *ša pi-i PNf GN-a-a* "by the mouth of PNf of GN" (1.5)
6. *ša pi-i PNf še-lu-tu* "by the mouth of PNf, votaress" (1.7)
7. *TA* pi-i šá PN GN-a-a* "from the mouth of PN of GN" (2.3)
8. *TA* pi-i PNf GN-a-a* "from the mouth of PNf of GN" (2.4)
9. *[TA* pi-i] PN GN-a-a* "from the mouth of PN of GN" (2.1, 2.2)

Variants 7-9 (especially 7) show that the expression *ša pî* "of/by the mouth" has to be understood literally (cf. above, p. XXVI) and not just as an idiomatic expression for "according to."²⁸⁶ The fact that the term *raggimu/raggintu* "prophet/prophetess" does not occur in the formula (in contrast to the authorship notes of nos. 3, 6, 7 and 10) indicates that it was superfluous in the context and underlines the basically oral nature of Neo-Assyrian prophecy. Considering that variants 2 and 3 are for all practical purposes identical, it is possible that the scribe of no. 9 was using (the 30-years older) no. 1 as a model when preparing the tablet.

Following the authorship note, no. 9 has an eponym date. If the scribe indeed used no. 1 as a model, it would stand to reason that the latter likewise ended in a date. There is room for 8 lines of text at the end of the tablet, but since the space before the break is uninscribed, it is possible that the uninscribed space extended further down leaving room only for the date in the break.²⁸⁷ Collection 2, which parallels no. 1 in structure and was written by the same scribe, has a break of about 6 lines at the end of the tablet, which would leave just enough room for the final lines of the last oracle, an authorship note, a ruling, and a date.

Collection 3, which contains several oracles delivered by a single prophet on a very special occasion (see below), does not insert an authorship note after each oracle. Instead, it specifies the author in a postscript resembling that of no. 6:

[La-dagil-i]li, a prophet of [Arbela, prophesied (this) when] Ištar [.....].

The last two oracles of the tablet (3.4 and 3.5) are separated from the beginning of the text by a double ruling. It could be argued, consequently,

that the authorship note pertains only to the last two oracles. However, who would then have delivered the first three? Considering the pains taken elsewhere in the corpus to specify the authors of the oracles, it appears extremely unlikely that the prophet who delivered such important oracles as 3.2 and 3.3 would have been left unnamed. It is therefore perhaps best to accept La-dagil-ili as the author of all the oracles and not to assign undue significance to the double ruling. After all, we do not know what it stood for.

Oracles 3.2 and 3.3 are followed by postscripts defining them as *šulmu*, "(oracles of) well-being," and indicating that copies of them were on display in Ešarra, the temple of Aššur in Assur; the term *šulmu* has to be understood here as referring to the universal harmony restored through Esarhaddon's accession (cf. 3.1 and see above, pp. XXIV and XLIIIf). In addition, the postscript to 3.3 contains ritual instructions showing that the collection, defined as "the covenant tablet of Aššur," was to be read in the presence of the king. Oracle 3.1 seems to describe a procession led by the king to Ešarra; 3.2 addresses a body of Assyrians probably convened in the courtyard of the temple, where a copy of this oracle was placed; and 3.4 refers to a covenant meal administered on the terrace of the temple immediately outside the cella of Aššur. Combining these indications it can be concluded that the oracles were embedded in the coronation ceremonies of Esarhaddon and probably were all publicly delivered by the prophet La-dagil-ili. Considering the date of Esarhaddon's accession (28th Adar, 681, i.e., only a few days before the great New Year's festival of Nisan, where the whole ruling class of Assyria was present), it is possible that the tablet was also read at subsequent New Year's receptions, to impress on the audience the divine support for Esarhaddon's kingship (cf. oracle 3.4 and the biblical passages cited in the commentary to 3 ii 32).

Structural Elements of the Oracles

The oracles consist of a limited inventory of structural and thematic elements (see Chart 1), which could be combined freely. The order of the elements is likewise free, even though certain elements are usually placed at the beginning, others at the end of the oracle. All the elements are optional, though many of them are found in almost all the oracles. Their choice correlates with the contents of the oracles; the "fear not" formula, for example, occurs only in encouragement and support oracles (nos. 1, 2, 4, and 7).

The formulation of the elements can vary considerably, even within oracles by the same prophet. Certain formulations and phrases are attested only in the oracles of certain prophets (see above, pp. IL and LII), while others recur in the oracles of several prophets, note e.g. the "fear not" and praise formulae, and passages such as 1.1:6 = 1.4:34f, and 1.1:15ff = 1.10:7ff. This points to a long prophetic tradition and "professional" education within the context of the Ištar cult.

The following discussion of the elements follows the order of Chart 1.²⁸⁸ It should be stressed that this order does not fully reflect the reality; although

CHART 1. *Structural and Thematic Elements*

Element	Collection 1										Collection 2						Collect. 3					4	Reports				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	5	6	7	8	9	
“word of Ištar”	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	+	—	—	—	b	b	b	b	b	—	—	—	—	—
address	b	b	—	+	e	+	+	+	+	+	b	b	+	+	b	—	b	—	+	+	+	+	+	—	b	—	b
self-identification	+	+	—	+	b	b	b	b	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	e	—	+	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
“fear not” formula	+	—	b	+	+	—	e	b	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	—	—	—	—	—	+	—	+	—	—	—	
past support	+	+	—	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	+	—	+	—	—	—	—	—	
present support	e	e	e	—	+	e	e	+	+	+	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	e	—	—	—	+	+	—	—	
future support	+	+	—	+	+	—	e	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	—	—	—	—	+	—	+	+	+	—	—	
demand for praise	—	—	e	—	—	+	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	+	—	—	—	—	
demand for faith	—	—	—	+	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
cultic commands	—	—	—	—	—	+	?	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
other	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	

+ indicates attested element

— " absence of element

? " possible but uncertain element

b " attestation at the beginning of the oracle

e " " at the end " "

lack of +/-/b/e indicates textual damage

some oracles do contain most of elements in the order indicated, the order is quite variable and the full sequence of elements is not actually attested in any of the oracles.

1. The phrase “**word of Ištar**” (*abat Issār*; variant: “word of Queen Mullissu,” no. 7:2; cf. also 2.4) occurs in five oracles of the corpus, mostly at the beginning and in combination with an address element,²⁸⁹ recalling the introductory formula of the royal letters (*abat šarri ana NN*, “the word of the king to NN”). This element corresponds in every respect to the biblical *dbr yhwh*, “the word of YHWH.”²⁹⁰ With one exception (3.5), it is in complementary distribution with the self-identification of the oracular deity.

2. The **addressee** of the oracle is mostly indicated by a name or title in the vocative (e.g., “Esarhaddon!” 1.6), often combined with the “fear not” formula (e.g., “King of Assyria, fear not!” 1.2) or another imperative (“Listen, Assyrians!” 3.2). A dative address (“to NN”) occurs in five oracles, usually in combination with the “word of Ištar” formula but once without it (“To the king’s mother,” 1.8). In three cases the addressee is specified indirectly only (“you,” 3.3) or not at all (1.3, and 8). All these forms of address have parallels in biblical prophecies.

3. The “word of Ištar” formula is in most oracles replaced by a **self-identification** of the oracular deity, “I am DN” (*anāku DN* or *DN anāku*), mostly at the very beginning of the oracle (1.6, 1.8, 1.10, 2.3), but also at the end (1.5) and in the middle (1.1, 1.4, 1.6 and often); it may occur repeatedly within a single oracle (1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 1.6, etc.). This element corresponds to the biblical phrase ‘ny yhwh “I am YHWH,” see the discussion above, p. XIX.

4. The exhortation “**fear not!**” (*lā tapallah*) is a ubiquitous element of practically all encouragement oracles, where it is missing only in 1.3 and 1.10. It is often placed at the very beginning the oracle, in combination with the name of the addressee (1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 2.2, 2.5), but it can also occur alone (1.1:24, 2.4:17), at the end (2.1, 2.4, 7) or in the middle of an oracle (1.6, 1.8, 2.5, 4), sometimes several times (2.6, 7). It regularly combines with assurances of divine help, support and protection, and clearly corresponds to biblical ‘*l tȳr’w*, cf. e.g. 2 Chr. 20:15, ‘Thus said YHWH: Have no fear, do not be dismayed by the great horde, for the battle is in God’s hands.’²⁹¹

5. **Past support.** References to divine help and support in the past are found in several oracles. They are regularly paired with promises of future support,²⁹² and were clearly intended to enhance the credibility of the prophecy, for many of them emphasize that the previous oracles had come true (“What words have I spoken to you that you could not rely upon,” 1.1:15ff; “What enemy has attacked you while I remained silent? The future shall be like the past,” 1.4:34ff; “Could you not rely on the previous utterance which I spoke to you? Now you can rely on this later one too,” 1.10:7-12; “The future shall be like the past; I will go around you and protect you,” 2.2:17ff; see also 1.2 ii 2f, 1.8:14-23, 3.3:22-25, 3.5:15-21, and 4:6). For biblical parallels, cf. simply the Isaiah passage cited in the commentary on 1.10:7-12 (p. 10 below).

6. **Present/future support.** The promise of present and future divine support to the king is a theme pervading the entire corpus. Even in 3.3 and 3.4 — the only oracles with no explicit promises for the future — the continuing divine support is implicit in the wording of the text. The individual promises are on the whole very generally formulated (safety, protection, defeat of unspecified enemies, stability of throne); even when names are mentioned (2.4, 3.2, 3.5, 7, 8), one looks in vain for accurate and concrete “predictions.” This indicates that the course of history as such was of little or no interest to the prophets. What mattered was whether or not God was with the king; everything else (attainment or loss of power, glory, military victories, etc.) resulted from and depended on this one basic thing. It should be noted that even the references to past events (as in oracles 1.2 and 3.3) are phrased very vaguely throughout.

The predicates of the passages containing promises are regularly in the indicative present.²⁹³ The first person precative forms in 3.3 (lines 17 and 24) and 3.5 (passim) indicate divine will, not promises.

7. **Demand for praise.** Five oracles contain a demand to praise the oracular deity (*na’’idanni* “praise me!” 1.4 bis, 1.10 bis, 2.3, 2.6; “let them see and praise me,” 3.3; note also “glorify Mullissu!,” 5 r.6”). In most cases, this demand accompanies a self-presentation of the deity (1.4, 2.6, 3.3), and is then always combined with a reference to divine support received in the past. In two cases, it is linked with promises of future support (1.4, 2.3).

This thematic element has no direct parallel in biblical prophecy, obviously because only a few of the extant prophecies are addressed to the king. However, several royal psalms praise the greatness of God, and the phrase “Praise YHWH” (*hllw-yh*) occurs frequently in psalms. It may be noted that the hymn of Assurbanipal to Ištar of Arbela and Mullissu (SAA 3 3) could well be a response to a demand for praise presented in an oracle — perhaps

no. 9, where this demand is not extant but could well have been included in the portion lost at the bottom of the tablet.

8. **Cultic demands** occur in three oracles of the corpus, all by La-dagil-ili. They include greater veneration of the Goddess (1.10), recognition of the gods of Esaggil (2.3), and provision for the cult of Ištar of Arbela (3.5). It is possible that demands for the restoration of Esaggil were also made in 2.1 and 2.6, but this is uncertain owing to the fragmentary state of these oracles. In any case, cultic demands must have been a fairly regular feature of Neo-Assyrian prophecy, to judge from CT 53 969, a contemporary letter to the king.²⁹⁴

Language and Style

Both grammatically and lexically, the language of the oracles is pure Neo-Assyrian, and numerous phonological and morphological details indicate that the prophets spoke it as their mother tongue. The occasional Aramaic loanwords occurring in the oracles (*agappu* 1.1, *hangaru akku* 1.6, *sapāku* 2.1, *tullummâ* 2.4, *sippu* 2.5, *izirû* 2.5 and 2.6, *anina* 3.3, *halputu* 7) are characteristic of Neo-Assyrian in general and cannot be used as evidence for the alleged "Western origin" of the prophecies.²⁹⁵

Stylistically, the oracles are half prose, half poetry, characterized by rhythmically structured passages and the use of rich religious imagery, mythological allusions, metaphors and similes.²⁹⁶ In addition, extensive use is made of "classic" poetic devices such as alliteration, anaphora, antithesis, chiasm, climax, parallelismus membrorum, parataxis and paronomasy.²⁹⁷ Isolated instances of stylistic *diglossia* are also attested,²⁹⁸ indicating acquaintance with Babylonian literature. These features, taken together, elevate the diction of the oracles to a surprisingly high stylistic level, keeping in mind that they were written down from oral performance and apparently not subjected to any substantial editing.²⁹⁹

It is true that the oracles are on the whole relatively short and that their thematic repertory is somewhat limited and formulaic. However, under no circumstances can they be considered products of untrained ecstasies "prophesying" under the influence of drugs or intoxication. Their literary quality can have been achieved only through conscious striving for literary excellence, and their power of expression reflects the prophets' spiritual assimilation to the Goddess who spoke through their lips.

The Historical Contexts and Dates of the Oracles

The general date of the corpus is easy to establish: Nos. 1-6 are addressed to Esarhaddon (or his mother, as the mother of the king), nos. 7-11 to Assurbanipal.³⁰⁰ Determining the exact historical contexts and dates of the individual oracles is more difficult, as only one of the texts (no. 9) bears a date, and the circumstances to which the individual oracles relate are as a rule not specified. Almost all the oracles of collections 1-4, for example, refer to the king's distress and/or battle against his enemies, but such references are in general very elusive. The prophecies concerning Elam, Mannea, Urartu and Mugallu of Melid in oracle 2.4 could, in principle, belong to almost any phase of Esarhaddon's twelve-year reign. The promise of victory over [Mel]id and the Cimmerians included in oracle 3.2 is no more specific.

Oracle 1.8, however, offers a concrete, historical fixed point. The first part of it, addressed to the queen mother, contains an unmistakable reference to the time of the murder of Sennacherib (Tebet, 681 BC), when Esarhaddon, the official crown prince, was in exile and his two half-brothers (earlier crown princes) held power in Assyria.³⁰¹ The end of the oracle, on the other hand, unequivocally refers to Esarhaddon's triumphal rise to power. It can thus be dated immediately after the end of the civil war, in Adar, 681.

This is a crucially important clue. Clear references to the civil war and the rebel brothers are also found in oracles 3.3 and 3.5. On the other hand, the letters and inscriptions of Esarhaddon inform us that immediately after the war (and possibly already in the course of it, before the decisive battle) the king received encouraging oracles from ecstatic prophets.³⁰² Since encouragement of the king is indeed the central theme of the oracles included in nos. 1, 2 and 4 (and to some extent no. 3 as well), it seems obvious that they are the oracles referred to in the inscriptions. Considering the scarcity of references to prophecies in Esarhaddon's inscriptions (and Assyrian inscriptions in general), this conclusion can in fact be regarded as virtually certain.

The Dates of the Collections

A careful comparison of the collections with Esarhaddon's inscriptions (see Appendix, p. LXIIff) confirms this hypothesis. It appears that the oracles collected in these tablets were arranged chronologically and, it seems, thematically as well.

Collection 1 begins with an oracle which seems to have been delivered just before the decisive battle fought in 681-XI. The following five oracles

(1.2-1.6) seem to date after the battle but before Esarhaddon's arrival in Nineveh (681-XII-8). Oracle 1.6 refers to an impending crossing of the river (i.e., the Tigris), which represented the last obstacle on the king's journey to the capital; the references to battles yet to be fought indicate that (in contrast to oracle 1.8) the final victory had not yet been achieved. Section 1.9 alludes to the triumphal celebrations arranged after the final victory, and in the last oracle of the collection (1.10) the king already rules in his palace, albeit still in a precarious position.

Collection 2 contains no references to battles, but it is dominated by repeated references to the internal disorder of Assyria (2.1, 2.3-5), the stabilization of Esarhaddon's kingship (2.2, 2.6), the elimination of disloyal subjects and a general feeling of uncertainty prevailing in Assyria (2.4). This fits the political situation of Assyria after Esarhaddon's accession (in the early part of year 680), which is described in Esarhaddon's inscription Assur A composed in early 679.

The central theme of this inscription is the stabilization of the king's rule, the relenting of the gods and the restoration of the cosmic harmony — the very themes which are also central to Collection 2 (especially 2.5). After citing a number of favourable omens, the inscription notes that the king also regularly received oracles from ecstatic prophets "concerning the establishment of the foundation of my sacerdotal throne until far-off days." The oracles are mentioned after a Mars omen that occurred between the 5th and 7th months of the year, but this order does not necessarily have chronological relevance, since the signs received from the gods are grouped in the text in three main categories (portents, oracles, dreams), not in a strict chronological sequence. Most likely the oracles date from the same period as the portents, the first of which (an omen derived from Venus) is datable between the 11th month (Shebat) of 681 and the third month (Sivan) of 680.

At least three oracles of the collection (2.1, 2.3 and 2.5) contain a reference to Babylon and/or its exiled gods and its destroyed temple, Esaggil. The restoration of Babylon and Esaggil was also a central theme of the early inscriptions of Esarhaddon (see Borger Esarh. pp. 12-18, below p. LXXV), and the Jupiter omen cited in support of the project occurred in Sivan, 680.

It seems, accordingly, that Collection 1 contains (in chronological order) oracles relating to the accession of Esarhaddon and dating from the end of year 681, whereas Collection 2 contains oracles from the early part of the next year and relating to the stabilization of Esarhaddon's rule. The existence of two thematic collections of oracles correlating with two separate sets of inscriptions strongly points to a mutual dependency between the two classes of texts; in other words, it seems that the oracle collections were compiled at about the same time as the respective inscriptions. This would date Collection 2 to year 679 (the date of Ass. A) and Collection 1 to late 673 (the date of Nin. A).³⁰³ The temporal difference (six years) between the compilation of the two would explain the slight differences in their formulation, which would be surprising if the texts had been drawn up simultaneously.

The incentive for the compilation of the Nin. A inscriptions, and hence of Collection 1 as well, was certainly Esarhaddon's controversial decision to promote his younger son Assurbanipal as his successor, put into effect in early 672.³⁰⁴ The detailed account of his own miraculous rise to power served

to remind any potential critics of the decision — in the first place, Assurbanipal's elder brother, Šamaš-šumu-ukin, and his supporters — of the fate of those who would try to usurp power against the will of the gods.

Collection 3, which contains the oracles sealing Aššur's covenant with Esarhaddon, is likely to have been recited at the coronation of Esarhaddon and hence is probably the earliest of the three collections, dating from the very last days of 681 or early 680. It is written by the same scribe as nos. 1 and 2 and displays considerable affinity with no. 2 both in its external appearance (tablet format, size, ductus) and orthography.

Collection 4 shares the two-column format and subject matter of nos. 2 and 3 and may thus date from the same time, that is, 680 BC.

The Dates of the Reports

No. 5, addressed to the queen mother, parallels in content 1.8, 1.9, 2.1 and 2.6, and thus is likely to be contemporaneous with the oracles of Collections 1 and 2.

No. 6 opens with a promise to restore order [in Assyria] and hence may be contemporary with the oracles included in Collection 2. Note, however, that the promise "I will restore order" also occurs in no. 11, addressed to Assurbanipal.

No. 7 is addressed to Assurbanipal as crown prince (obv. 3) but before the official promotion ceremony, the girding of the royal diadem (obv. 7), so it must be dated before the prince's introduction to the Palace of Succession, which took place in Iyyar, 672. This agrees with the prophecies of lines 14 and 1.5, which date the text between 674 (peace treaty with Elam) and Tammuz/July, 671 (the conquest of Egypt). The Cimmerians (obv. 14) are attested as threat to Assyria's eastern provinces at the time of Assurbanipal's crownprincehood, see LAS II p. 193f; G. B. Lanfranchi, *I Cimmeri* (Padua 1990), pp. 84-108, and A. Ivantchik, *Les Cimmériens au Proche-Orient* (OBO 127, Fribourg 1993), p. 82ff.

Note that the prophecy of line 6 may be echoed in SAA 3 3, Assurbanipal's hymn to Mullissu and Ištar of Arbela, which reads (line 8): "I am Assurbanipal ... whose kingship they made great even in the House of Succession. In their pure mouths is voiced the endurance of my throne."

No. 8 foresees an open military conflict with Elam leading to the complete subjugation of the country, and thus can only date from the reign of Assurbanipal. There are two possibilities: either the war with Teumman in 653 BC, which reduced Elam to a vassal of Assyria (see M. Waters, *A Survey of Neo-Elamite History* [PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania 1997] 84-98), or the aftermath of the Šamaš-šumu-ukin war (647-646 BC), which reduced the country to an Assyrian province (see E. Carter and M. Stolper, *Elam: Surveys of Political History and Archeology* [Berkeley 1984] 51ff). The former alternative is perhaps the likelier one, considering the irate tone of the oracle: note that the war was triggered by an Elamite raid undertaken while Assurbanipal was worshiping Ištar of Arbela — an insult provoking not only the anger of the king but of the Goddess as well (see above, p. XLVI).

No. 9 has an eponym date placing it squarely in the middle of the Šamaš-šumu-ukin rebellion: Nisan 18, eponymy of Bel-šadû'a = April 16, 650 BC.³⁰⁵ The tone of the prophecy reflects the military situation. Six months before, in Elul II, 651, the Babylonian army had succeeded in capturing Cutha.³⁰⁶ For the Assyrian king, this was an intolerable setback: a successful rebellion at the heart of the empire represented a serious danger to imperial unity and a direct threat to the emperor himself. Consequently, an Assyrian counteroffensive was launched immediately and Babylon was put under siege on Tammuz 11, 650, less than three months after the date of the text.

The oracle has many affinities with SAA 3 13 (the so-called Dialogue of Assurbanipal with Nabû), and it is likely that both texts emerged from the same historical situation; certainly the same scribe wrote and edited both tablets. SAA 3 13 shows Assurbanipal praying and having a dream in Emašmaš, the temple of Mullissu in Nineveh; the date of no. 9 implies that this took place in the course of or immediately after the New Year's festival of Nisan. The situation in general thus resembles that preceding the war against Teumman, which provoked the oracle and vision cited above, p. XLVI. Note that Mullissu (= Lady of Nineveh) figures as the principal oracular deity in no. 9. It seems very likely that SAA 3 3, Assurbanipal's hymn to Mullissu and Ištar of Arbela, was written in response to no. 9, and it can not be excluded that SAA 3 12, the so-called Righteous Sufferer's Prayer to Nabû, records the prayer that Assurbanipal actually spoke in Emašmaš.

No. 10 cites on its left edge the prophetess who authored no. 9, and may thus date from the same time. Note, however, that Assurbanipal is not mentioned in this fragment; if the name of the prophetess is to be read Sinqiša-amur (see p. ILf), then a date in the reign of Esarhaddon also becomes possible.

No. 11 dates from the reign of Assurbanipal (r. 1), and the promise to "restore order in (all) the lands" may point to the time of the Šamaš-šumu-ukin rebellion (i.e., c. 652-650 BC). However, lines r.4f intriguingly remind one of the theophany reported to Assurbanipal before the war against Teumman (see p. XLVIIf). Could this be the original letter reporting it? Note the reference to a (previous) vision in r.6.

Appendix: Inscriptions of Esarhaddon Pertaining to the Corpus

Square brackets enclose explanatory additions to the text (years and months in which the events described took place and → references to the oracles of the corpus).

1. *The Civil War of 681 and Esarhaddon's Rise to Power*

[Year 683] ^{i 8ff} Even though I was younger than my big brothers, at the behest of Aššur, Sin, Šamaš, Bel, Nabû, Nergal, Ištar of Nineveh and Ištar of Arbela, my father duly elevated me among my brothers and declared, "This is my successor." He consulted Šamaš and Adad by extispicy, and they answered him with a firm yes: "He will be your replacement." Respecting their weighty command, he assembled the people of Assyria young and old, my brothers, and the progeny of my dynastic line, and made them swear by the gods of heaven and earth a solemn oath to protect my succession. In a favourable month [Nisan, 683], on an auspicious day, in accordance with their august command, I joyously entered the Palace of Succession [→ 1.2], the awesome place where the fate of kingship resides.

[Year 682] ^{i 23ff} Proper guidance was lavished upon my brothers, but they forsook the gods, trusting in their own haughty deeds, and hammered out evil plans. Godlessly they fabricated malicious rumors and untrue slander against me [→ 1.7, 3.3]; spreading unwholesome lies and hostility behind my back, they angered my father's gentle heart with me against the will of the gods [→ 1.8, 3.3], though deep in his heart he felt compassion for me and remained intent on my exercising the kingship.

[Nisan, 681] ^{i 32ff} I spoke with my heart and took counsel in my mind, asking myself: "Their deeds are vainglorious and they trust in their own reason; what will they do in their godlessness?" Entreatingly and humbly I beseeched Aššur, king of the gods [3.3], and merciful Marduk, to whom treachery is an abomination, and they accepted my plea. In keeping with the will of the great gods, my lords, they transferred me away from the evil deeds to a secret place and extended their sweet protection over me [→ 1.1, 1.4, 3.3], safeguarding me for the kingship.

[Tebet, 681] ^{i 41ff} Afterwards my brothers went crazy (*immahû*) and did everything that is improper before god and man. They planned evil, and godlessly made an armed rebellion in Nineveh, butting each other like young goats in their strife for kingship. Aššur, Sin, Šamaš, Bel, Nabû, Nergal, Ištar of Nineveh and Ištar of Arbela looked with displeasure on the deeds of the

usurpers which had been done against the will of the gods and did not stand at their side, but turned their strength into weakness and made them bow to my feet. The people of Assyria, who with water and oil and by the great gods had sworn an oath of allegiance to protect my kingship, did not go to their help [→ 3.5].

[Shebat, 681] ^{i 53ff} I, Esarhaddon, who cannot be defeated in battle thanks to the support of the great gods, his lords, soon heard of their evil deeds. I cried, "Woe!" [→ 1.1], I rent my princely garment and shrieked a lamentation, I became enraged like a lion, my mind became furious, and I wrenched my wrists to exercise the kingship of my father's house. With raised hands I prayed to Aššur [→ 3.3], Sin, Šamaš, Bel, Nabû, Nergal, Ištar of Nineveh and Ištar of Arbela, and they accepted my prayer, repeatedly sending me, along with their firm 'yes,' this encouraging liver omen: "Go without delay! We will go by your side and slay your enemies!"

^{i 63ff} I did no waste a day or two, I did not wait for my troops, I did not look back, I did not review my yoked horses and my fighting equipment, I did not heap up my war provisions, nor did I fear the snow and cold of Shebat and the severity of the winter, but like a flying eagle I spread out my wings to defeat my enemies, and marched labouriously but swiftly towards Nineveh.

^{i 70ff} In front of me, in the land of Hanigalbat, the mass of their crack warriors was blocking the advance of my army and brandishing their weapons. Fear of the great gods, my lords, befell them, and when they saw the strength of my onslaught, they went out of their minds (*mahhûtiš*). Ištar, the lady of war and battle, who loves my priesthood, stood by my side, and broke their bows and disrupted their battle array [→ 1.2, 3.3, 3.5]. They said in their ranks, "This is our king!" and by her august command they crossed over to my side, rushing after me and tumbling like lambs to beg for my sovereignty.

[Adar, 681] ^{i 80ff} The people of Assyria who had sworn loyalty to me by the great gods, came before me and kissed my feet. But those usurpers, instigators of revolt and rebellion — when they heard of the progress of my campaign, they abandoned their supporting troops and fled to an unknown land [→ 3.2].

^{i 84ff} I reached the bank of the Tigris and by the command of Sin and Šamaš, the gods of the harbour, made all my troops jump across the broad Tigris as if it were a ditch [→ 1.6]. On the 8th day of the favourable month of Adar, on the *eššešu* day of Nabû, I joyfully entered my royal city, Nineveh, and smoothly ascended the throne of my father [→ 1.3, 1.7].

[Year 680] ^{ii 3ff} The south wind, the breeze of Ea, the wind whose blowing is good for exercising the kingship, blew. Good portents appeared in heaven and on earth [→ 3.1]. Messages of ecstatic prophets, the messengers of the gods and the Goddess (*šipir mahhê našparti ilāni u Ištār*), constantly and regularly came in and encouraged me [→ 1.10]. I searched out all the criminals [→ 2.1, 2.3, 2.4] who had induced my brothers to plot evil for taking over the kingship of Assyria, every one of them, imposed a heavy punishment upon them, and destroyed their seed [→ 3.5].

(Borger Esarh. pp. 40-45, Nin. A i 8—ii 11, dated 673-I)

2. *Esarhaddon's First Regnal Year*

[Year 680] ⁱ 31ff The twin gods Sin and Šamaš, in order to bestow a righteous and just judgment upon the land and the people, maintained monthly a path of righteousness and justice, appearing regularly on the 1st and 14th days.

ⁱ 39ff The brightest of the stars, Venus, appeared in the west in the path of Ea [681-X-29], reached its hypsoma [in Leo] predicting the stabilization of the land and the reconciliation of her gods [680-III-15], and disappeared [680-VII-11]. Mars, who passes the decision for the Westland, shone brightly in the path of Ea [680-V/VII], announcing by his sign his decree concerning the strengthening of the king and his land.

ⁱⁱ 12ff Messages from ecstatic prophets (*mahhû*) concerning the establishment of the foundation of my sacerdotal throne until far-off days were constantly and regularly conveyed to me [→ 1.6, 1.10, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3]. Good omens kept occurring to me in dreams and oracles concerning the establishment of my seat and the extension of my reign. Seeing these signs of good portent, my heart turned confident and my mood became good.

(Borger Esarh. p. 2, Ass. A i 31—ii 26, dated 679-III)

3. *The Gods of Esaggil*

[Year 692] ⁱ 18ff Previously, in the reign of an earlier king, evil portents appeared in the land of Sumer and Akkad. Its inhabitants kept answering each other 'yes' for 'no' and spoke lies. They abandoned the rites of their gods and goddesses and embarked on a different course. They laid hand on the property of Esaggil, the (unapproachable) palace of the gods, and traded silver, gold and precious stones for Elamite support.

[Year 689] ⁱ 34ff Seeing this, the Enlil of the gods, Marduk, got angry. His mind became furious, and he made an evil plan to disperse the land and its people. His angry heart was bent on levelling the land and destroying its people, and a grievous curse formed in his mouth. Evil portents indicating the *disruption of cosmic harmony* started appearing abundantly in heaven and on earth. The stars in the paths of Enlil, Anu and Ea worsened their positions and repeatedly disclosed abnormal omens. The river of abundance, Arahtu, became a raging current, a fierce surge of water, a violent flood like the Deluge, and swept away the city, its houses and sanctuaries, turning them into ruins. The gods and goddesses who dwelt within it (var. adds: got afraid), abandoned their shrines (var. flew off like birds) and ascended to heaven [→ 2.1, 2.3]. The people who lived there fled elsewhere and took refuge in an unknown land.

[Year 681] ⁱⁱ 2ff Though he had written 70 years [= 1 + 10] as the length of its abandonment, the merciful Marduk quickly relented, reversed the order of the numerical symbols, and ordered its resettlement for the 11th year [= 679]. In order to restore those deeds to their original state, you duly chose me, Esarhaddon, from amongst my older brothers, placed your sweet protection over me, leveled all my enemies like the deluge, killed all my foes, made me

attain my desire, and gave me the shepherdship of Assyria to calm the heart of your great godhead and to placate your mind.

[Year 680] ii 24ff At the beginning of my kingship, in my first regnal year, when I magnificently ascended the royal throne, good portents concerning the resettling of the city and the restoration of its sanctuaries occurred to me in heaven and on earth. The angry gods [*relented* and] kept showing me most propitious signs concerning the rebuilding of Babylon and the restoration of Esaggil [→ 2.1, 2.6]. The bright Jupiter, who gives the decision for the land of Akkad, approached in Sivan [680-III] and stood in the place where the sun shines forth. He was bright, his features were red, and his rising was as perfect as the rising of the sun; the angry gods became reconciled [→ 2.4] with the land of Akkad, and there were copious rains and regular floods in the land of Akkad. For the second time, he reached the hypsoma in Pet-Babi and became stable in his seat.

ii 41ff He commanded me to work to complete the cult centres, restore the sanctuaries and set aright the cult of Esaggil. Every month, Sin and Šamaš in their appearances jointly responded with a firm 'yes' regarding the mercy to be shown to the land of Akkad.

(Borger Esarh. pp. 12-18, Bab. A i 10—ii 49, dated 680-II)

On the Present Edition

This volume is essentially a critical edition of the Neo-Assyrian prophecy corpus in the customary SAA style. Because of the exceptional importance of the texts, the introduction and critical apparatus have, however, been considerably expanded over what has been the norm in the previous volumes of the series. It must be stressed that while the introduction deals with questions of fundamental importance to the understanding of ANE prophecy and Assyrian religion, this volume is not a comprehensive study of Assyrian religion, nor is it presented as a "final word" on the matters treated.

Introduction

The introduction deals partly with questions that are concretely related to the prophecy corpus, such as the identity of the prophets, the structure of the texts, or the date and historical context of the individual oracles, and partly with questions relating to the nature of Assyrian prophecy, which are approached holistically in the light of both contemporary Assyrian and diachronic comparative evidence. As noted above (p. XVI), the issues tackled are extremely complex and would actually require several volumes, not a brief introduction, to be properly treated. This made it necessary to refrain from lengthy discussion of specific issues in the introduction itself and to relegate all such discussion to the note apparatus instead.

The introduction and notes thus complement and support each other, and should ideally be read together. The general reader can, however, gladly ignore the notes, even though he will then miss the more detailed and nuanced argumentation and the documentary evidence presented in them. It should be noted that many of the notes contain extensive detailed discussions not only tied to the text but to other notes as well, thus making up a complex network of background information essential to the understanding of the overall discussion. Such interrelated notes are systematically cross-referenced throughout the note apparatus, and both the introduction and the notes are fully indexed.

Texts Included and Excluded

The present volume contains all currently known Neo-Assyrian prophetic oracles included in the extant oracle collections and reports, as detailed above (p. LIIIff). Prophecies quoted in part, paraphrased or referred to in contemporary letters and royal inscriptions have not been included. Such quotations and references are collected and analyzed by Martti Nissinen in a separate study published in the SAAS series as a companion to the present volume.

In addition to texts certainly identifiable as collections or reports, two fragments of uncertain classification (nos. 10 and 11) have also been included for the sake of completeness. No. 10 would by its content qualify for an oracle report but does not have the horizontal format of reports and hence probably is a letter quoting an oracle. No. 11 is almost certainly a letter reporting, besides an oracle, also a vision (*diglu*).

On the other hand, four texts included in an earlier version of this edition (ABL 1249, ABL 1369, CT 53 413 and ABRT I 5f) have been excluded as deemed impertinent for a variety of reasons.

ABL 1249 is a letter from the priest Aššur-hamatia reporting a theophany; although it shares some features with the oracles of the corpus, it cannot be regarded as oral prophecy (see above, pp. XXXV and XLVIf) and accordingly does not belong in the present volume. ABL 1369 is a divine message to the king in the first person singular; although it would qualify as an oracle report due to its horizontal format, it is called a "dispatch" (*šipirtu*) in the text itself and therefore belongs to the category of divine letters edited in SAA 3. CT 53 413 is a fragmentary communication from a votary of Ištar of Arbela to the king; despite its affinities with no. 1.7, it is also explicitly defined as a "dispatch" in the text and accordingly is not a prophetic oracle.

These three texts will be edited along with other letters of Assyrian and Babylonian priests in a forthcoming SAA volume by Steven Cole and Peter Machinist. ABRT I 5f, Assurbanipal's dialogue with Nabû, which shares many features with the oracles of the corpus but cannot be regarded as a specimen of oral prophecy, was edited by Alasdair Livingstone in SAA 3.

The Order of the Texts

The texts are divided by their form and function into two major groups, oracle collections and reports. The collections, most of which predate the reports, are presented first. Within these two major groups, the individual texts are, as far as possible, arranged in chronological sequence. The order of the collections has been determined on the basis of the dates of the individual oracles and the mutual affinities of the texts, ignoring their actual dates of compilation, which cannot be determined with certainty. Thus Collection 1, which is the longest text in the corpus and contains the earliest oracles, is presented first; it is followed by Collection 2, which shares a number of features with it but is shorter and contains later oracles, and this again by Collection 3, which is of a different type and likewise contains

oracles later than those in Collection 1. This order probably does not reflect the actual chronological order of the tablets themselves, according to which Collection 3 should have been presented first, followed by Collections 2 and 1 (see p. LXIXf).

Transliterations

The transliterations, addressed to the specialist, render the text of the originals in roman characters according to standard Assyriological conventions and the principles outlined in the Editorial Manual. Every effort has been taken to make them as accurate as possible. All the texts edited have been collated by the editor, most of them several times.

Results of collation are indicated with exclamation marks. Single exclamation marks indicate corrections to published copies, double exclamation marks, scribal errors. Question marks indicate uncertain or questionable readings. Broken portions of the text and all restorations are enclosed within square brackets. Parentheses enclose items omitted by the ancient scribes.

Translations

The translations seek to render the meaning and tenor of the texts as accurately as possible in readable, contemporary English. In the interest of clarity, the line structure of the originals has not been retained in the translation, but the text has been rearranged into logically coherent paragraphs where possible.

Uncertain or conjectural translations are indicated by italics. Interpretative additions to the translation are enclosed within parentheses. All restorations are enclosed within square brackets. Untranslatable passages are represented by dots.

Month names are rendered by their Hebrew equivalents, followed by a Roman numeral (in parentheses) indicating the place of the month within the lunar year. Personal, divine and geographical names are rendered by English or biblical equivalents if a well-established equivalent exists (e.g., Esarhadon, Nineveh); otherwise, they are given in transcription with length marks deleted. The rendering of professions is a compromise between the use of accurate but impractical Assyrian terms and inaccurate but practical modern or classical equivalents.

Critical Apparatus

The primary purpose of the critical apparatus is to support the readings and translations contained in the edition, and as in the previous volumes, it largely

consists of references to collations, scribal mistakes corrected in the transliteration, alternative interpretations of ambiguous passages, and parallels available for restoring broken passages. Conjectural restorations are explained only if their conjectural nature is not apparent from italics in the translation. References to published photographs and copies are given at the beginning of each text, and different interpretations found in earlier editions and translations are commented upon whenever necessary. Collations given in copy at the end of the volume are referred to briefly as "see coll."

In addition, the critical apparatus also contains information more directly relevant to the study and interpretation of the texts, such as discussions of difficult passages, grammatical or lexical problems, or references to discussions in the introduction and notes. Biblical parallels and parallels to individual oracles found in the corpus itself are systematically noted.

Glossary and Indices

The glossary and indices, electronically generated, follow the pattern of the previous volumes. The glossary contains all lexically identifiable words occurring in the texts with the exception of suffixless numbers 1-99. Note that in contrast to the two basic dictionaries, verbal adjectives are for technical reasons listed under the corresponding verbs, with appropriate cross-references.