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**THE FALL OF ASSYRIA
AND
MEDIAN-BABYLONIAN RELATIONS
IN LIGHT OF
THE NABOPOLASSAR CHRONICLE**

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CHAPTER II

THE QUESTION OF CHRONOLOGY: ASSYRIA DURING HER LAST QUARTER CENTURY (7th Cent. B.C.)

Due to the limited number of documents that have survived Assyria's last quarter century, the task of a historical reconstruction has proven to be formidable. Especially striking is an almost complete absence of sources from the central part of Assyria. The Annals of Ashurbanipal discontinued in 639, [1] and the last business document dated during his reign comes from 631. [2] The Annals of his successors, Aššur-etel-ilāni and Sin-šar-iškun, are also missing, and the limmu list, an important document in the reconstruction of chronology and political history breaks off at 648. [3] As a result, we have at our disposal only a few letters [4] and documents of donations performed by Aššur-etel-ilāni for the benefit of Sin-šum-Ilišir. [5] Also worth mentioning are two pieces of evidence: a document testifying that Aššur-etel-ilāni ceded to the Dakkureans the ashes of their leader Šamaš-ibni, executed by the Assyrians in 678, so that they could be deposited in a mausoleum, [6] and a fragment of an agreement between Sin-šum-[Ilišir] and another claimant, who also was Ashurbanipal's son.

- [1] For dating of the editions of the Annals of Ashurbanipal - see A. K. Grayson, o.c., p. 245.
- [2] CCK, p. 92 (20.III.38 from Nippur). All months represented by Roman numerals refer to the Babylonian calendar.
- [3] See RLA II, s.v. Eponymen and M. Falkner, o.c., p. 100-120.
- [4] ABL 469 and ABL 1444 - cf S. Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal*, Part II: *Commentary and Appendices*, AOAT Bd 5/2, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1983, pp. 90 ff. J. Oates, *Assyrian Chronology 631-612 B.C.*, Iraq, Vol.27/1965, p. 155 does not rule out that two other letters, ABL 815 and 1387, can date back to the period after Ashurbanipal's death. For dating of these letters, see also M. Dietrich, o.c., pp. 89-94 and J. A. Brinkman, *Notes on Aramaeans...*, p. 311 and p. 321, No 44.
- [5] ADD 649, 650 = ARU 20, 21; J. N. Postgate, *Neo-Assyrian Grants...*, No 13-14.
- [6] A. T. Clay, *Miscellaneous Inscriptions in the Yale Babylonian Collection*. YOS 1, New Haven 1915, No 43.

[7] Of great importance to us is the Synchronistic King List from Aššur, [8] written during the reign of Aššur-etel-ilāni or soon after his death, where his name immediately follows that of Ashurbanipal. Date formulae of business documents [9] can also be very useful in establishing the chronology.

None of the above mentioned sources provides us with conclusive information concerning the duration of Ashurbanipal's rule nor those of his successors. All scholars who dealt with this problem before the publication of new texts by Wiseman and Gadd, [10] drew special attention to the data from ancient sources. And so in Eusebius they found a fragment of work by Alexander Polyhistor, who records after Berossus that after a reign of 21 years by Sammuges, alias Šamaš-šum-ukin, Sardanapallus, alias Ashurbanipal, ruled over the Chaldeans for another 21 years. [11] According to the Ptolemaic Canon, Saosdouchinos' reign of 20 years in Babylonia was succeeded by Kineladanos' reign of 22 years. [12] Correspondingly, the Babylonian King List A corroborates a Šamaš-šum-ukin - Kandalanu succession. [13] This discrepancy between Eusebius on one hand and the Ptolemaic Canon on the other has given rise to a hypothesis according to which Ashurbanipal, after the example of Tiglath-Pileser III and Shalmaneser V, who appear on the aforementioned Babylonian King List A as Pulu and Ululai respectively, [14] started to use the name of Kandalanu in Babylonia (Nippur excluded) after he had defeated Šamaš-šum-ukin. Another argument in favour of the identification of Kandalanu as Ashurbanipal is that they both died in the same year.

- [7] A. T. Clay, *Epics, Hymns, Omens and other Texts*, BRM IV, New Haven 1923, No 50. See HKL I, p. 57 and HKL II, p. 34 and the discussion below.
- [8] KAV 182 IV:5-7. Cf A. K. Grayson, RLA VI, p. 125.
- [9] Collected now by J. A. Brinkman, D. A. Kennedy, *Documentary Evidence for the Economic Base of Early Neo-Babylonian Society: A Survey of Dated Babylonian Economic Texts, 721-626 B.C.*, JCS Vol.35/1983, pp. 1-90. One more document dating back to the times of Aššur-etel-ilāni can be added to this survey - E. Leichty, *An Inscription of Aššur-etel-ilāni*, JAOS Vol.103/1983, pp. 217-220 (dated for 11.VI.3).
- [10] C. J. Gadd, *The Harran Inscriptions of Nabonidus*, An. St. 8/1958, pp. 35-92.
- [11] Eusebius, *Chronicles, Book I*, 29, 14-19. Cf FGr H 680 F 7; P. Schnabel, *Berossos und die babylonisch-hellenistische Literatur*, Leipzig-Berlin 1923, pp. 269-270, Nos 43, 47. The work by S. M. Burstein, *The Babyloniaca of Berossus*, Malibu 1978 is not accessible to us.
- [12] E. Bickerman, *Chronology of the Ancient World*, Ithaca, New York 1980², p. 110.
- [13] A. K. Grayson, *Königslisten und Chroniken*, RLA VI/1980, p. 93, col. IV:22.
- [14] See PKB, pp. 61-62; idem *Prelude to Empire*, p. 106.

The absence of any documents dated from the last years of Ashurbanipal's reign (assuming that it lasted 42 years) and the fact that, in light of the Ptolemaic Canon and Eusebius, his reign could be with equal facility counted at 43 years [15] have made many reputable scholars reject both the identification and the count of Ashurbanipal's years as king. [16] And thus, P. Schnabel [17] believes that Ashurbanipal ruled until 638/7 (for 31 years), W. H. Dubberstein [18] - until 633, F. H. Weissbach [19] - until 631 at the latest, and A. Poebel [20] and S. Smith [21] - no longer than up until 628. By the same token, these scholars have dismissed the view of Ashurbanipal as being identical with Kandalanu, Šamaš-šum-ukin's Babylonian successor. According to their calculations, Kandalanu, who died in 627, had outlived Ashurbanipal by several years.

More light was shed on the issue by the Harran Inscription H 1 B published in 1958. From it we learn that Adda-guppi', the mother of Nabonidus, was born in the twentieth year of Ashurbanipal and lived

till the 42th year of this king
 till the 3rd year of Aššur-etel-ilāni
 till the 21st year of Nabopolassar
 till the 43rd year of Nebuchadnezzar
 till the 2nd year of Amēl-Marduk
 till the 4th year of Neriglissar,

that is in total for 95 years (till her son Nabonidus came to the throne). [22]

- [15] Since Ashurbanipal began his reign a year before Šamaš-šum-ukin, the 21st year of Šamaš-šum-ukin corresponds to the 22nd year of Ashurbanipal. Totalling 22 years of Ashurbanipal and 21 years of Sardanapallus after Šamaš-šum-ukin's death results in the count of 43 years. Similarly, since the 20th year of Saosdouchinos coincided with the 21st year of Ashurbanipal, to add 22 years of Kineladenos (assuming that Ashurbanipal and Kandalanu were the same person) results in 43 years of Ashurbanipal's reign. An explanation of the errors committed - see below pp. 57.
- [16]. The summing up of the first round of discussion of this issue is contained in the work by A. T. Clay, *Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania*, Ser.A: *Cuneiform Texts* Vol.VIII, Part I, Philadelphia 1908, pp. 6-11; M. Streck, *Assurbanipal und die letzten assyrischen Könige bis zum Untergange Niniveh's*, VAB 7, I. Teil, Leipzig 1919, pp. CLVIII-CLX. See also works from notes 17-21, and for the recent discussion of the issue see the latter part of the chapter.
- [17] P. Schnabel in a review of the work by Gadd, *The Fall of Nineveh*, in ZA Bd 36/1924, p. 82 and idem Kandalanu nicht Assurbanipal, OLZ Bd 28/1925, pp. 345-349.
- [18] W. H. Dubberstein, *Assyrian-Babylonian Chronology (669-612 B.C.)*, JNES Vol.3/1944, pp. 38-42.

Further on, Adda-guppi' is said to have lived till the ninth year of her son, which comes to 104 years. [23] As Gadd promptly observed, there is a 93, not 95, year difference between the twentieth year of Ashurbanipal and the 4th year of Neriglissar; similarly the difference between the twentieth year of Ashurbanipal and the ninth year of Nabonidus is 102, not 104 years. [24]

If on the Harran evidence one accepts Ashurbanipal's reign as covering 42 years, then, considering that his first year started in 668, one has to date the 42nd year, his last, in 627. But the Inscription places before the first year of Nabopolassar (625), a three year reign of Aššur-etel-ilāni. What is more, according to the documents found in Nippur, the reign of this king was to last not 3 but 4 years. [25]

Our knowledge of the final stages of Assyrian history has been complicated even more by the Uruk King List, which states that Nabopolassar's reign was preceded by a year-long rule of Sin-šum-Išir and Sin-šar-iškun. [26] Lastly, the Chronicle of the early years of Nabopolassar states at the beginning that right up to his accession "there was no king in the land for one year". [27] The Inscription from Harran does not mention Sin-šar-iškun, who appears at the very beginning of the Chronicle of Nabopolassar's early years. [28] Attested dates for Sin-šar-iškun can also be found on documents from a few other Babylonian cities, which allows us to claim that he must have been in power in at least part of Babylonia until his 7th year. [29] Still, apart from the Uruk King List, other texts from Babylonia also confirm Sin-šum-Išir's short reign. [30]

The sources which are now available on the issue of late Assyrian chronology are complimentary and conflicting at the same time. While bringing to light some new chronicles, D. J. Wiseman tried to explain some of those inconsistencies, [31] but the first full-fledged attempt to reconcile the conflicting

[19] F. H. Weissbach, *Aššurbanapli*, RLA I/1932, p. 204.

[20] A. Poebel, *The Assyrian King List from Khorsabad*, JNES Vol.2/1943, pp. 88-90.

[21] S. Smith, *Dating by Ashurbanipal and Kandalanu*, JRAS 1928, pp. 622-626.

[22] C. J. Gadd, *The Harran Inscriptions...*, p. 46, col.I:29-33.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 48; col.II:26-28.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 71.

[25] J. A. Brinkman, D. A. Kennedy, o.c., p. 52-53.

[26] Published by J. van Dijk, UVB Bd 18/1962, p. 53 and Pl. 28a. Cf A. K. Grayson, RLA VI, pp. 97-98.

[27] CCK, p. 50:14; ABC, p. 88:14.

[28] CCK, p. 50:3; ABC, p. 88:3.

[29] J. A. Brinkman, D. A. Kennedy, o.c., pp. 54-59.

[30] *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

[31] CCK, pp. 89-94.

sources was undertaken by W. von Soden. [32] He believes that the last years of Ashurbanipal witnessed a struggle between him and two sons, Aššur-etel-ilāni and Sin-šar-iškun, who ruled together fighting each other at the same time. Von Soden adopts Wiseman's proposition that the fragment of the Chronicle BM 25127:1-17 in its entirety records events of 626. From the Chronicle he also derives the information of a siege of Nippur and links it to several documents written in Nippur during the siege and dated to the 3rd year of Sin-šar-iškun, [33] thus concluding that the year 626 was the third year of this king. His assumption to the throne would then have fallen in 629 and his seventh year from which a few texts from Babylonia are dated - in 622. Since the Synchronistic King List from Aššur names Aššur-etel-ilāni as the first successor after Ashurbanipal, von Soden deduces that his reign must have started before that of Sin-šar-iškun. Extrapolating from the fact that the last document dated by Ashurbanipal's name comes from 5.VI.631 (the 38th year of his reign), von Soden dated Aššur-etel-ilāni's accession in the same year, 631. Since, in accordance with the documents from Nippur, Aššur-etel-ilāni ruled for four years, then there must have been a two year overlap with either Ashurbanipal or Sin-šar-iškun. Von Soden accepts the latter possibility, as Sin-šar-iškun's earliest attested date in the Nippur evidence comes from 14.XII.2nd year of his reign. [34] As a result the following chronology arises:

Ashurbanipal 669-631 (till at least July)

Aššur-etel-ilāni 631 (from July at the earliest till at least October 627)

Sin-šar-iškun 629 (from September at the latest till August 612)

(Sin-šum-Ilšir, presumably ruled for a very short time, the year unknown).

After C. J. Gadd published the text from Harran, von Soden revised [35] and later modified and expanded [36] his hypothesis in the course of a debate with R. Borger. This new data required von Soden to retain only the years of Sin-šar-iškun from the original version of his hypothesis. He accepts now that TMH 2/3, No 35 [37] comes from Nippur, but drawing on a collation by J. Oelsner, he claims that the name of a king from line 7, whose third year of reign coincided with the accession year (*reš šarruti*) of Sin-šar-iškun does not read

[32] In a review of CCK, published in WZKM Bd 53/1957, pp. 316-322.

[33] J. A. Brinkman, D. A. Kennedy, o.c., pp. 56-57.

[34] In fact the earliest known date for Sin-šar-iškun comes from 17.V.2 or maybe even from his *reš šarruti* - cf J. A. Brinkman, D. A. Kennedy, o.c., pp. 54-55 under O.13 and O.7.

[35] W. von Soden, *Der Nahe Osten im Altertum, Propyläen Weltgeschichte*, Bd 2, Berlin 1962, pp. 122-124.

[36] W. von Soden, *Aššuretililāni, Sinšariškun, Sinšum(u)lšer und die Ereignisse im Assyrienreich nach 635 v. Chr.*, ZA Bd 58/1967, pp. 241-255.

Aššur-etel-ilāni, but Sin-šum-lišir. The year 629 was then the third year of Sin-šum-lišir and the accession year of Sin-šar-iškun. But according to ARU 20/21, Aššur-etel-ilāni had become king before Sin-šum-lišir and, since the latter's accession is believed to have occurred in 632, Aššur-etel-ilāni would have had to come to the throne earlier the same year or the preceding year. Von Soden eventually accepted 633 as a beginning of Aššur-etel-ilāni's reign, that is, the 36th year of Ashurbanipal and the 15th year of Kandalanu. Consequently, he proposes the following chronology of kings, starting from 633: [38]

633	Asb 36	= Kand.15	=	Aei 0			
632	Asb 37	= Kand.16	=	Aei 1	= Sšl 0		
631	Asb 38	= Kand.17	=	Aei 2	= Sšl 1		
630	Asb 39	= Kand.18	=	Aei 3	= Sšl 2		
629	Asb 40	= Kand.19	=	Aei 4	= Sšl 3	= Sši 0	
628	Asb 41	= Kand.20			= Sšl 4	= Sši 1	
627	Asb 42	= Kand.21="21"			= Sšl 5	= Sši 2	
626		= Kand."22"			= Sšl 6	= Sši 3	= Nbp 0
625						= Sši 4	= Nbp 1

[37] O. Krückmann, *Neubabylonische Rechts- und Verwaltungstexte. Texte und Materialien der Frau Prof. Hilprecht Sammlung in Eigentum der Friedrich-Schiller, Universität Jena*, Bd 2/3, Leipzig 1933 (= TMH 2/3). Cf the transliteration and translation by M. San Nicolò, *Babylonische Rechtsurkunden des ausgehenden 8. und 7. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.*, ABAW N.F. Heft 34, München 1951, Nr. 63.

[38] Abbreviations used: Asb = Ashurbanipal; Kand. = Kandalanu; Aei = Aššur-etel-ilāni; Sšl = Sin-šum-lišir; Sši = Sin-šar-iškun; Nbp = Nabopolassar.