

Prophecy in Service of the King

Ideology in the Neo-Assyrian Oracle Collections

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Abstract

The Neo-Assyrian oracle collections are a small ensemble of four documents that date to the reign of Esarhaddon (681-669 BC). They are clay tablets that assemble several prophecies in which a divine speaker addresses the king. In the vast majority of these prophecies, the speaking deity is the goddess Ištar. Through the words of prophets, the goddess proclaims her support for Esarhaddon, addressing past hurdles and predicting future success.

The text of these documents alludes to specific challenges from this king's short reign, most importantly to his succession war and to the policy towards Babylonia. Keeping in mind that the collections were assembled in a second moment, reworking prophecies previously emitted, we see that they portray the king as having enjoyed divine support throughout even the most difficult circumstances. Ištar stands out in particular, encouraging Esarhaddon with promises of protection and declarations of motherly love.

The aim of the present dissertation is to study the underlying ideology in these sources and examine how they support the image and actions of Esarhaddon, focusing particularly on the role of Ištar. We seek to show how the text of the collections articulates the more challenging aspects of this king's reign, and to understand what they tell us about the perceived relationship between the goddess and the king of Assyria. Furthermore, since we are dealing with written oracles, we take into consideration the phenomenon of Mesopotamian prophecy as context for the elaboration of these documents.

Key-words: oracle collections; Esarhaddon; Ištar; royal ideology; prophecy.

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List of Abbreviations

AD	Abraham J. Sachs and Hermann Hunger, <i>Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia</i> . Vols 1–3 (Vienna 1988–96)
ARM	Archives Royales de Mari
BM	Tablets in the British Museum
Chron.	A. K. Grayson, <i>Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles</i> (NY 1975)
EA	El-Amarna tablets
FLP	Tablets in the collections of the Free Library of Pennsylvania
<i>JANER</i>	<i>Journal of the Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religions</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JCS</i>	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
LKU	Adam Falkenstein, <i>Literarische Keilschrifttexte aus Uruk</i> (Berlin 1931)
LTBA	<i>Die lexikalischen Tafelserien der Babylonier und Assyrier</i> , Bd. I: L. Matous; Bd. II: W. von Soden (Berlin 1933)
M.	Tablet signature of texts from Mari
MSL	<i>Materialien zum sumerischen Lexikon</i> /Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon
<i>NiN</i>	<i>Journal of Gender Studies in Antiquity</i>
OECT	Oxford Editions of Cuneiform Inscriptions
OIP	Oriental Institute Publications
RIMA	Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Period
RINAP	Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SAAS	State Archives of Assyria Studies
SpTU	<i>Spätbabylonische Texte aus Uruk</i>
TCL	<i>Textes cunéiformes</i> . Musée du Louvre
TCS	Texts from Cuneiform Sources
VS	<i>Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler der Königlichen/Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin</i>
YOS	Yale Oriental Series, Texts
YBC	Yale Babylonian Collection
ZA	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie</i>
ZTT	Tablets from Ziyaret Tepe

Introduction

I am the Great Lady; I am Ištar of Arbela, who cast your enemies before your feet. What words have I spoken to you that you could not rely upon? (1.1, i11-17)

In the Neo-Assyrian period, the goddess Ištar addresses the king through oracles, and speaks her support against his enemies. In this passage she implies that her divine messages for the king have been constant and reliable. We find that written prophecy such as this shows the gods' favour for the Assyrian ruler. The aim of the present study is to better understand the underlying ideology in the extant prophetic texts from this period. We will examine how these sources support the action and image of the king of Assyria, while focusing particularly on the role of Ištar in this process.

In the course of our Master's program, we came to focus our studies, from the much broader frame of Ancient Mesopotamia, on the Neo-Assyrian empire and particularly on the Sargonid dynasty. Wishing to continue on this track, we chose this time frame for the present dissertation. Similarly, we had also started exploring issues relating to the representation of the Assyrian king, on the one hand, and the multiple roles of the goddess Ištar, on the other. Presently, we wished to continue exploring these questions, and how they intertwine, within the context of the Sargonid dynasty. Given the vastness of this subject, we chose to focus on the analysis of a restricted group of sources that naturally encompassed all these themes.

The texts analysed in the present study are the oracle collections of the Neo-Assyrian prophetic corpus, which date to the reign of Esarhaddon (681-669 BC). These collections comprise three tablets, each one inscribed with several prophetic oracles, which were unearthed in Nineveh, the last capital of the empire. In 1997, Simo Parpola released a volume entitled *Assyrian Prophecies* for the "State Archives of Assyria" series, seeking to establish the corpus of known Assyrian prophecy. Amid the other sources, he edited and translated these three collections, which now correspond to SAA 9 1, 2, and 3. He further added a previously unpublished fragment of a fourth collection, SAA 9 4. To facilitate reading, throughout this study, each oracle within the collections will be referred to only by its number. Thus, for example, the first two oracles of the first collection are

1.1 and 1.2 respectively. Parpola's transliteration (with minor alterations in style) and translation are fully reproduced in the appendix.

In the first part of this study, we consider the broader background of Mesopotamian prophecy as well as the physical characteristics of our sources in order to have a better understanding of their context. Then, in part 2, we focus on the way the oracle collections reframe specific challenges and tribulations of the reign of Esarhaddon. Finally, in part 3, we focus on the relationship between the king of Assyria and the goddess Ištar, as revealed through the lens of these written prophecies.

1 – The Oracle Collections and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy

All Assyrian prophetic texts known to us today date to the reigns of the last two great Sargonids, Esarhaddon (681-669 BC) and Assurbanipal (668-630 BC). The four extant collections, which we wish to study, all date to Esarhaddon (Parpola 1997, lxvii-lxx). Collection 1 is inscribed in three columns and collections 2 and 3 in two columns each. The fragment of collection 4 equally shows the tablet to have been a multi-column document.¹ Pierre Villard (2001, 75) notes how the oracle collections have certain characteristics in common with literary and poetic compositions, but contemporary texts of this type tend to be written in Standard Babylonian, whereas all the texts in SAA 9 are written in Neo-Assyrian dialect.

In his study about prophecy in the Ancient Near East, Jonathan Stökl (2012, 220) states that the oracle collections tell us more about Assyrian royal propaganda than about the prophetic phenomenon *per se*, which adequately fits the aims of this dissertation. On the other hand, an understanding of the workings of prophecy is essential to comprehend the oracle collections. Hence, in this first chapter, we will briefly consider the phenomenon of Ancient Near Eastern prophecy. We will also ponder what the physical characteristics of the tablets tell us about them and reflect on how they fit into Neo-Assyrian archival practices, considering finally the issue of archaeological chance and how it affects our understanding of this prophetic corpus.

¹ The tablets are currently in the British Museum archive, their museum numbers being: SAA 9 1=K4310; SAA 9 2=K12033; SAA 9 3=K2401; SAA 9 4=1883,0118.839. For a complete description of the tablets in the corpus, including measurements, see Parpola (1997, lv-lxii). Certain characteristics of SAA 9 3 set it apart from SAA 9 1 and 2 and have led scholars to theorize about its distinct nature from a simple oracle collection. We will briefly address this question in part 1.3.1.

1.1 – A definition of prophecy

In an article first published in 2004, Martti Nissinen calls to our attention that the word “prophecy” nowadays, in the English language, is strongly associated with prognostication and the supernatural ability to say what will happen in the future. It is likewise linked to an idea, strongly influenced by the Judeo-Christian cultural background, of communication with God and transmission of divine messages to the people (55). The word-family for “prophet” and “prophecy” comes from the Ancient Greek word-family of *prophētēs*, whose perceived meaning was of an individual able to interpret the will of the gods and transmit it to others. Clearly the translators of the Septuagint thought that this word was a fitting equivalent to the Hebrew *nābî*, whom they understood to be someone in communication with the divine and able to transmit divine words. As Nissinen points out, it is mainly along these lines that the word “prophecy” is understood in modern scholarship. Since it is agreed upon that it denotes first and foremost the ability to interpret and transmit divine messages, it can now safely be used in academia as a general concept, which must be separated from its Biblical and religious connotations (55-56). It is this sense that must be kept in mind when studying Ancient Near Eastern sources. In fact, prognostication and predictive activity were not defining aspects of prophecy at all, but rather the occasional result of the mediation of divine messages (Nissinen 2017, 4; Parpola 1997, lxvi). Francisco Caramelo (2002, 248) further notes that, when discourse about the future is to be found, it is restricted to the immediate future.

Starting with this general understanding of prophecy, a further definition is required to determine which texts can truly be considered prophetic. It is generally considered that four aspects are required to identify prophecy: 1) the divine sender of the message; 2) the oracle, being the message in itself; 3) the prophet, who is the vehicle of divine communication; 4) and a third party who is the true recipient of the message.² In establishing the corpus of Neo-Assyrian prophecy, Parpola aimed at including all currently known divine oracles, excluding partial quotations of divine words and other

² These four elements are lifted by Nissinen (1998, 5-6) from the definition laid down initially by Manfred Weippert (1988, 289-90). This definition is now widely upheld: cf. Nissinen (2004) 2019, 57; 2017, 20-21; Lion 2012, 147; Stökl 2012, 10; de Jong 2007, 31.

allusions to prophetic activity.³ The texts included in his SAA 9 share certain characteristics that set them apart from other contemporary texts: they present themselves as direct divine speech, including, in every instance, these four aspects considered to define prophecy. It should be added that they all allude, more or less unambiguously, to specific historical circumstances (Nissinen 2017, 96). In this corpus, following a general tendency for Ancient Near Eastern prophecy, the divine sender of the message tends to be the goddess Ištar (see below section 1.2.1), and the ultimate recipient of the message is invariably the king (1.2.2). The prophet, then, is the transmitter and not the addressee of the divine words. The fact that the oracles consist of direct divine speech is what sets them fundamentally apart from other popular forms of searching knowledge of the will of the gods, such as astrology and extispicy.

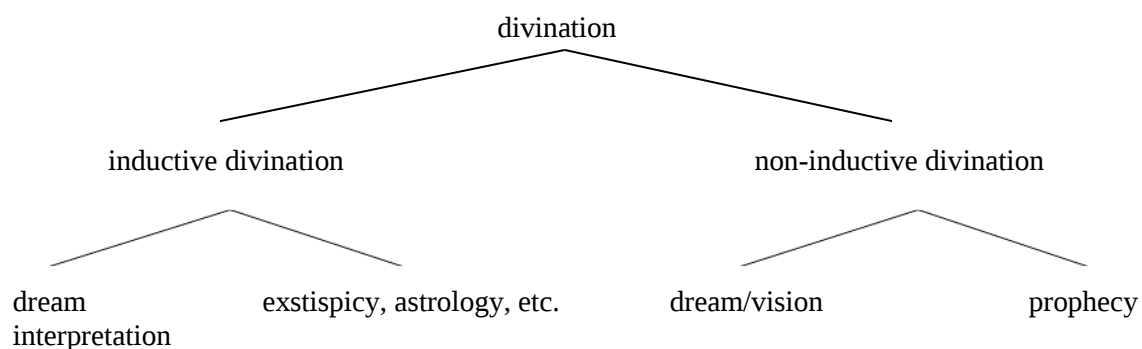
1.1.2 – Prophecy and divination

Nowadays a sharp distinction between prophecy and divination – the technical reading and interpretation of omens – is no longer upheld, and they are seen as two variants of the same phenomenon (Stökl 2012, 7-10; Nissinen [2004] 2019, 59). In fact, though the activities of prophets and other diviners may have been entirely distinct, their social function seems to have been largely similar (Nissinen [2004] 2019, 58; Stökl 2012, 8). Prophecy is considered an integral part of divination, belonging to a sub-type that is characterized by “intuitive, or inspired, or non-inductive methods, such as dreams, visions, and prophecy” and is opposed to “technical, or inductive methods that involve systematization of signs and omens by observing physical objects (extispicy, astrology, lot casting, bird divination, fish divination, oil divination, etc.” (Nissinen 2017, 14-15; cf. Nissinen [2004] 2019, 59)⁴. Thus, divination can be considered an umbrella term for all forms of divine-human communication with two main sub-groups, as represented in the following diagram:⁵

³ For a small discussion on the inclusion and exclusion of certain texts, see p. lxxvii.

⁴ This distinction between inspired divination and deductive divination, as being two sides of a same coin, was first formulated by Jean Bottéro (1987, 198-201).

⁵ After the similar diagram presented by Stökl (2012, 10).



Prophecy then, similarly to divinely inspired dreams and visions, happened when the gods chose to send a revelation through a prophet, whereas technical divination implied that the diviner actively searched the world around him for signs of the gods' communication. This does not mean necessarily that there were no learned techniques employed by the prophets, but they would have been completely different from the knowledge required of practitioners of inductive divination (Nissinen [2004] 2019, 59).⁶ Technical diviners, such as experts in extispicy and astrology, were scholars well versed in the vast tradition of omen interpretation, being individuals of higher social esteem and larger political presence than the prophets, who were not considered scholars at all (Nissinen [2000] 2019, 120-1; [2004] 2019, 60; Villard 2001, 83).

The fact that prophecy was not a scholarly discipline is to be directly associated with the fact that we find female prophetesses in the extant documentation (Lion 2012, 164; Nissinen [2003a] 2019, 109; [2000] 2019, 120-1). In the Neo-Assyrian corpus alone we find record of 13 prophets, only 4 of whom are male while 7 are female, the remaining 2 being of uncertain gender (Parpola 1997, xlvi).⁷ On the other hand we find no women technical diviners or scholars of any discipline.

⁶ These learned techniques would have possibly been connected with entering a state of trance. On this subject: Villard 2001, 67; Caramelo 2002, 269-70; Durand 1988, 395; Stökl 2012, 37, 145.

⁷ On the prophets of uncertain gender see Parpola (1997, il-l). Cf. Nissinen (2000) 2019, 107.

1.2 – Characteristics of prophecy

In his study about the prophetic phenomenon in the Ancient Near East, Jonathan Stökl states:

The overview over the available data for prophecy in the ancient Near East suggests a focus on Mari, the Neo-Assyrian Empire and the Hebrew Bible as the sources elsewhere are either too sparse to allow firm conclusions or as the material that is, at times, understood as prophetic, should be understood as being evidence of forms of technical divination. (2012, 25)

Initially, the study of prophecy was mainly a Biblical domain. Although the Assyrian documents were known already, it was the discovery of the prophetic material from Mari, starting in the 40's, that first suggested a greater focus on Mesopotamian prophecy (Nissinen 1998, 2-3). These texts were first considered as comparative material to the Hebrew Bible, providing sought after context for the Scriptures, but later came to be studied in their own right (Nissinen 2017, 45).

The Hebrew term for prophet, *nābî*', understood as "one who has been called", appears over 300 times in the Biblical text, applied to over 50 individuals (Nissinen 2017, 27).⁸ It is no wonder that the Bible was "once regarded as the source of prophecy par excellence", but, as Nissinen (2017, 144-5) points out, we are dealing here with literary, secondary sources, which reflect the scribes' idea of prophecy, rather than an accurate depiction of the phenomenon in the kingdoms of Judah and Israel. The Hebrew Bible is the result of a long process of selection and edition of text, transmitted and elaborated over generations starting in the time of the Second Temple, that is, throughout the Persian and Hellenistic periods. Hence, the author states:

in the Biblical context in particular, prophecy is literature—not *written* prophecy, that is, prophetic oracles recorded in written form, but distinctly *literary* prophecy, that is, a corpus of literary works that, in their present context, are not immediately connected with any flesh-and-blood prophets whose oral performances may or may not loom in the background (Nissinen 2017, 146)

Nissinen (2017, 146) states that it is necessary to keep in mind a distinction between Hebrew prophecy, the historical phenomenon, and Biblical prophecy, a literary tradition that is rooted in Hebrew prophecy.

The Mesopotamian sources, on the other hand, can be considered written prophecy, not having gone through such a long process of literary transformation.

⁸ Two other designations, used much less frequently, are *ḥōzē* and *rō'ē*. Both can be translated as "seer" and their activities seem mostly to correspond to those of the *nābî*' (Nissinen 2017, 30).

Following the currently accepted definition of prophecy, there are only two corpora of prophetic material known to date. The small Neo-Assyrian corpus established by Parpola is joined by a larger ensemble originating from 18th century Mari. The Mari corpus was edited in 1988 by Jean-Marie Durand, with a very exhaustive introductory analysis, as volume 26/1 of the *Archives Royales de Mari* (ARM). As Caramelo (2002) affirms, due to the relative lack of sources and in spite of the one-thousand-year gap between both corpora, any overview of the phenomenon of prophecy in the Ancient Near East benefits from considering both these ensembles, their similitudes and differences.

In the Neo-Assyrian corpus, the most frequent word associated with prophetic figures is *raggimu/raggintu*, from the verb *ragāmu*, meaning “to shout” or “proclaim”. Otherwise, we find the term *mahhû*, which derives from *mahû* “to go into a frenzy, to become crazy”. This second term clearly suggests a connection between ecstatic behaviour and prophecy. The word *raggimu*, if interpreted literally as “shouter” may likewise imply an altered state (Nissinen 2017, 39). It has been suggested that the exclusively Assyrian *raggimu* was a colloquial synonym of the older term *mahhû* (Parpola 1997, xlvi; Nissinen [2000] 2019, 104). This interpretation is made unlikely by the fact that, in the only document where both terms are juxtaposed (SAA 2 6), there aren’t any other pairs of synonyms. On the other hand, the terms can be understood as referring to different categories of prophetic diviners (Stökl 2012, 144-5; de Jong 2007, 288). Since the extant documentation portrays essentially similar behaviours for both characters, Nissinen (2017, 39) considers these two explanations unsatisfactory.

In Mari we find the term *muhhûm/muhhûtum* commonly attested, which is the Old-Babylonian equivalent to *mahhû*, making this root the most common prophetic denomination in Mesopotamia (Nissinen 2017, 32). We find a second prophetic character called *āpilum/āpiltum*, which can be translated as “answerer” or “spokesperson”.⁹ Since the two designations are never applied to the same individual, they might have corresponded to different categories of prophet (Nissinen 2017, 35; Durand 1988, 386-8).¹⁰

Nissinen remarks that some prophets of the Biblical literary tradition, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, or Hosea “stand out as the main characters in the stories written

⁹ Stökl (2012, 42-3) rejects “answerer” and prefers “spokesperson” as a translation.

¹⁰ Stökl (2012) argues that the *muhhûm* or *mahhû* was a temple ecstatic who occasionally prophesied, rather than a prophetic specialist that displayed ecstatic behaviour.

about them” (2017, 292). In this, Biblical prophecy is fundamentally different from what we find in the Mari and Assyrian corpora. The Assyrian collections under study, for instance, gather prophecies uttered by different individuals in a single tablet, since the speakers seem to have been considered only relevant as mouthpieces for the gods. On the other hand, a figure like Isaiah can be seen, himself, as the criterion for preservation of the literary tradition in which he figures (de Jong 2007, 354-6). The social position of some of these Biblical prophets seems to have been more akin to the prestige of Mesopotamian scholars, among which the technical diviners are to be counted. This may be due in part to the condemnation of inductive forms of divination, associated by Biblical writers to idolatry (Nissinen 2017, 261).

Although the references to prophetic practices and the instances of written prophecy in Mesopotamia are few and far between, the crossing of information from the two corpora, coupled with mentions in other sources, allows for a better understanding of the prophetic phenomenon, namely its relation to the religious institution and its process of transmission. As we will see, a brief overview of the available sources leads to the conclusion that non-inductive divination, or inspired prophecy, is a truly Mesopotamian phenomenon, besides being also a Biblical one.

1.2.1 – Prophecy and the cult

Prophecy, both in Assyria and Mari, seems to be strongly associated with the sphere of the temple. Parpola (1997, xlvi) suggests that in Assyria prophets might have been permanent members of temple communities: in lexical lists they appear in close proximity with devotees of Ištar; some prophets bear names that allude to the cult of Ištar, which would have been “professional names”; and most of them come from one of the three major cult centres of the goddess, i.e. Arbela, Kalhu or Aššur. The colophon of oracle 1.7 states that the prophetess was a votaress (*šēlūtu*) given by the king to the cult, which can be seen as confirmation that prophets could be permanently attached to the temple (Nissinen [2000] 2019, 109).¹¹ Similarly, a Middle-Assyrian text from Kar-

¹¹ The colophon (v10-11) reads: *ša pi-i MÍ.15-EN-da-i-ni še-lu-tu ša LUGAL*.

Tukulti-Ninurta (VS 19 1) lists food rations to be attributed, in the temple of Ištar, to prophets and prophetesses. These appear side by side with mentions of other cultic personnel specially associated with this goddess, like the *assinu*,¹² which further attests to the permanent connection of the prophetic diviners to the temple (Nissinen 2017, 218; Parpola 1997, xlvii). In Mari the prophets are strongly associated with the temple as well (Durand 1988, 384; Nissinen 2017, 35-36). Although the Assyrian documentation does not directly attest prophetic performance in the temple, as the Mari documentation does, it remains equally the most likely scenario. Hence, colophons placing the prophets in a city like Arbela should be taken as indication that the respective oracle was uttered in that specific temple (Nissinen 2017, 214; de Jong 2007, 298).

Of the 13 prophets of the Neo-Assyrian corpus, at least 7 can definitely be placed in Arbela.¹³ It seems then that the temple of Ištar of Arbela, the Egašankalamma, was the epicentre of Neo-Assyrian prophecy. In fact, already from the data presented above, it is possible to establish that, aside from being connected to the temple institution, prophecy was also connected to the great goddess. The divine speaker in the overwhelming majority of oracles is Ištar of Arbela, followed by Mulissu, who in the Neo-Assyrian period can be equated with Ištar of Nineveh (Nissinen 2017, 97; Villard 2001, 61; Allen 2015, 177-8). The divine names Banitu and Urkittu are also to be seen as appellations of Ištar (Villard 2001, 61; Parpola 1997, xviii). The only oracles in the corpus that deviate from this rule are 3.3, where we have a possible prophecy by the great god Aššur, and 1.4, where we find Bel and Nabû as speaking deities, though they are accompanied by Ištar of Arbela.

The overbearing importance of Ištar of Arbela as prophetic deity is such in the Assyrian corpus that we even find prophets that were not from that city speaking in her name in oracles 1.3 and 2.4 (Nissinen [2003a] 2019, 110). To Parpola (1997), the link between Assyrian prophecy and Ištar is a fundamental one, and this is one of the main ideas advanced and elaborated upon in his introduction to SAA 9, where he proposes a complex reconstruction of Assyrian religion.¹⁴ However, as Stökl (2012, 147) points out, this idea is justified only if one chooses to consider solely the SAA 9 corpus. The

¹² The *assinu* seems to have been a cult specialist connected to Ištar, who seems to have been an individual of ambiguous gender role or representation. On the possible connection between the *assinu* and prophecy see Huffmon (2004).

¹³ For complete information about the names, gender and origin of the prophets see Parpola (1997, xlviii-liv).

¹⁴ The place ascribed to Ištar in this reconstruction is examined in section 3.1.3.

inclusion of other contemporary texts mentioning prophetic activity within the Assyrian empire offers a more nuanced picture. For example, in the royal correspondence we find references to prophecies uttered in the name of Bel/Marduk (SAA 10 111), Nusku, and Nikkal (SAA 16 59). Stökl further suggests that the fact that the SAA 9 were likely part of the royal archives probably has some bearing on the predominance of Ištar: it implies a connection with the central official cult, while oracles originating from more marginal people and locations could be associated more frequently with divinities less connected to the state (148).

The significant focus of Neo-Assyrian prophecy in Ištar is mirrored, to a degree, by the marked significance of female goddesses, often Ištar-type deities, in the Mari corpus: Annunitum, Ištar of Bišra, Diritum, Belet-ekallim, Belet-biri, Hišamitum, and Ninhursag. The role of male gods – Dagan, Šamaš, Adad, Itur-Mer, Nergal, Ea, Abba – is however a lot more prevalent in Mari than in Assyria. In the case of 18th century Mari, the relatively lesser role of the goddess could be attributed to a greater influence of the West Semitic prophetic tradition, where male gods – often heads of pantheon like Adad of Aleppo – are the main prophetic deities (Nissinen [2000] 2019, 113-4; Villard 2001, 62-3).¹⁵ Therefore, the connection between prophecy and Ištar is not an exclusive one. However, it is well attested in both corpora, especially in the later one. In Mari the goddess is an important figure of prophecy among others, whereas in the Assyrian documentation she stands out as the main divine speaker.

1.2.2 – The transmission of prophecy

The first thing to bear in mind when approaching a written prophecy, such as the ones recorded in the oracle collections, is that we are never dealing with the original text, because of the oral nature of the prophetic performance (Caramelo 2002, 294). Hence, it can be suggested that the written sources available to us today derive from the necessity of transmitting the originally oral prophecy. As we have stated, the messages sent by the

¹⁵ The Mari document ARM 26 216 is an interesting case because it refers to “LÚ *na-bé-é*-MEŠ *ša ha-na-MEŠ*” who seem to be individuals connected to prophetic activity. They are identified as hanaeans, meaning they were from the west. This document seems to be the first attestation of the West-Semitic term for prophet that will result in the biblical *nābī*’ (Durand 1988, 378).

gods were destined to someone other than the prophet, the true recipient of the prophecy, to whom it had to be transmitted. In the case of both the Neo-Assyrian and the Mari corpus this is almost invariably the king. It is necessary to keep in mind that, when possible, the king could have heard prophecies directly from the prophets, in which case they would not have left any written trace and are irrevocably lost to us (Nissinen 2017, 266; Durand 1988, 381).

This royal focus of prophecy must be equated with the nature of the two corpora. The fact that the Neo-Assyrian and Mari documentation stems from royal archives means that, in all likelihood, prophecy concerning the king is over-represented in the extant sources. As de Jong states:

Almost all oracles are characterized by a royal interest, since it was because of this interest that prophetic oracles were preserved in the royal archives. This need not imply that Assyrian prophecy always was ‘royal prophecy’, but rather that royal interest functioned as a criterion for preservation. (2007, 295)

In fact, in a letter addressed to king Assurbanipal (SAA 10 294), an individual named Urad-Gûla seems to have consulted a prophet. Although this is a unique example in the whole of the available sources, it can be regarded as evidence that a private individual could seek prophecy of his own accord (Nissinen 1998, 86).¹⁶

On the other hand, even considering the bias of the available sources, there are other clues that suggest a royal focus of prophecy in Ancient Mesopotamia. We will now take into consideration a text usually called “Protocol of the Diviners” (M. 13091). This text dates to the reign of Zimri-Lim and concerns professional obligations of the scholars specialized in technical divination (Durand 1998, 13-15). It essentially establishes that any omen, good or bad, perceived through any means of inductive divination, must be mandatorily communicated to Zimri-Lim. This applies also to any sign examined during private consultations with persons other than the king. This text also determines that diviners are obliged to keep secret the contents of consultations performed for the monarch. Durand (1988, 18) notes how this text implies that the obligatory secrecy imposed on the diviners applies only to the king while the contents of private consultations could and should be divulged to the king if considered relevant. In a way, this places the king as the ultimate recipient of all omens and signs of divine communication, for the signs read to him concerned him only, but all others could be considered to concern him as well. Thus Durand: “on a vu que tout acte d’extispicine pris

¹⁶ De Jong (2007, 292-3) provides an alternative translation that would invalidate this interpretation.

par un particulier pouvait avoir un retentissement pour le roi lequel est donc le *sujet immanent* de toute enquête sur le futur” (411). Although the Protocol of the Diviners addresses the technical or inductive diviners only, this author thinks it is possible to ascertain that the attitude towards inspired prophecy seems to have been the same, in that all relevant oracles were to be transmitted to the king (382).

There is no known Assyrian equivalent to the “Protocol of the Diviners”. However, a passage of Esarhaddon’s “Succession Treaty” (SAA 2 6), can also be read as showing that the king wanted to be informed of all negative prophecies and believed it was his right to know them. This treaty was a loyalty oath imposed upon the nomination of Assurbanipal as crown prince, meaning heir to the throne of Assyria, in 672. The relevant passage reads:

If you hear any evil, improper, ugly word which is not seemly nor good to Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate, son of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, your lord, either from the mouth of his enemy or from the mouth of his ally, or from the mouth of his brothers or from the mouth of his uncles, his cousins, his family, members of his father’s line, or from the mouth of your brothers, your sons, your daughters, or **from the mouth of a prophet, an ecstatic, an inquirer of oracles,** or from the mouth of any human being at all, **you shall not conceal it but come and report it to Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate, son of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria.** (o108-122)¹⁷

This determination is not exclusive to diviners but applies to an extensive list of people. However, it seems safe to assume that the unseemly “ugly word” coming from prophets refers to negative (i.e. anti-king) prophecies. Therefore, a parallel could be established with the Mari “Protocol” in that this treaty similarly demands that negative omens and prophecy be brought forth to the king.¹⁸ In this text, the emphasis is on negative prophecy specifically. Although the SAA 9 corpus shows a picture of prophecy that is overwhelmingly supportive of the king, the “Succession Treaty” proves that there were dissident prophetic voices and that we should be wary of an idea of an entirely “official prophetism” (Villard 2001, 83; Nissinen 2017, 276; Caramelo 2002, 265; Lion 2012, 154).

It has been thought in the past that open critique of the king and political institution was a prerogative of Biblical prophecy generally absent from the Mesopotamian sources (de Jong 2007, 213; Nissinen 2017, 261-2). Here we must keep in mind that the long process of composition of the Hebrew Bible started only after the collapse of the

¹⁷ The prophets mentioned in this passage are designated as: *lú-ra-gi-me*, *lú-mah-he-e*, and DUMU *šá-i-li a-mat* DINGIR.

¹⁸ Nissinen (2017, 276) points out that technical diviners are mentioned earlier on in this document under the term *ummānu*.

kingdoms of Judah and Israel, which are the setting of its most prominent prophets' activities. Hence the literary tradition that led to the composition of Biblical prophecy did not depend on the institution of the throne, which is entirely different from the Neo-Assyrian corpus, that was likely part of the royal archives. Like the Assyrian sources, the Mari corpus offers a display of overwhelming divine support for the king, while the gods' animosity is reserved for his enemies (Durand 1988, 403).¹⁹

Nowadays, other sources allow for a more nuanced reconstruction of negative prophecy in Assyria. One important example of such negative prophecies is documented in three letters addressed by a man called Nabû-rehtu-uşur to Esarhaddon (SAA 16 59, 60, 61). The author of these letters reports that a woman proclaimed an oracle, near the city of Harran, in which the god Nusku said that he would give the kingship to an individual named Sasî, and that Esarhaddon would come to ruin. Nissinen (1998, 121) points out that this not only shows that not all prophecy was supportive of the king, but also that it could be used against him, in this case by proclaiming divine support for somebody else.²⁰ By denouncing the situation and reporting this negative prophecy to the king, Nabû-rehtu-uşur was following the instructions of the "Succession Treaty" (Nissinen 2017, 276).

Nabû-rehtu-uşur clearly thought this prophecy posed a serious threat. Besides writing three times on the subject, he also seems to quote words of the goddess Nikkal against Sasî and proclaiming her support of the king, thus answering a negative prophecy with a positive one (Nissinen 1998, 119-21).²¹ It can also be suggested that he chooses not to call the woman from Harran a prophetess, referring, instead, to her as a servant (*amtu*) in a derogatory way to affect her credibility. There is however a precedent in the Mari documentation in which another servant is said to prophesy where a similar motivation could not apply (Nissinen 1998, 124; Lion 2012, 156). Finally, Nabû-rehtu-uşur proposes that a *dullu*, here to be understood as a ritual, be made on account of the servant woman: although it is not clear what the aim of the ritual was, it could well be the

¹⁹ Nissinen (2017, 62) interprets a passage from the omen series *šumma izbu* in which apparently an omen indicating that there were prophets in the enemy's court was an evil portent: this would seem to suggest that there was a general perception that, usually, the messages delivered by prophets to a king tended to convey divine support. Hence prophets in an enemy court equals oracles of support to the enemy.

²⁰ These documents probably relate to an insurrectional movement c. 671-670, to which we will return ahead in section 2.2.2, page 38.

²¹ Nissinen (1998, 119) also suggests this would have been probably a free paraphrase of prophetic words since it is unlikely that Nabû-rehtu-uşur would have come into contact with an oracle of warning against such a specific individual.

sole Assyrian attestation of the practice of verifying prophecy through another divinatory method (Nissinen 1998, 125).

In the Mari corpus, we see that upon transmitting an oracle, a mesh of hair (*šartum*) and a hem of the garment (*sissiktum*) of the prophet could be added.²² These symbols could be seen as a guarantee to the credibility of the process of transmission of the message (Caramelo 2002, 274).

Dominique Charpin (2002, 25) asserts that this was a recurring practice that allowed for the verification of the oracle through hepatoscopy. The verification of a prophetic oracle through divination does not mean that prophets were thought to be lying. As Durand states: “Nulle part, on ne met explicitement en doute la sincérité du prophète, même si l’enjeu est politiquement très important” (1988, 409). It was really believed that prophets were people through whom the gods were liable to speak. Still, this practice of verification can imply that the king was aware of the possible vulnerability of the chain of transmission of the important messages (Nissinen 2017, 81; Caramelo 2002, 246). The goal of the verification through inductive methods was not to learn whether or not the prophecy was true – since the gods certainly don’t make mistakes – but rather to accurately determine if it was indeed a prophecy, to be seriously taken into consideration (Stökl 2012, 86). The case of the Nabû-rehtu-ušur letters is, at best, a vague attestation of this practice, but in an Assurbanipal inscription a divine message of Kidmurri sent to the king via a dream is verified through interrogations to the god Šamaš (Prism T ii9-19). This passage attests the Assyrian practice of using inductive techniques to verify non-inductive divination (Villard 2001, 81).

As we have seen, the Mesopotamian king seems to have conceived himself as the immanent subject of all inquiries into the plans of the gods. The bias of the sources notwithstanding, it can be said that, as far as our understanding goes, the Ancient Mesopotamian prophetic phenomenon, as we know it, is dependent on the existence of the institution of kingship (Stökl 2012, 93).²³ On a study about the commentary texts from Assurbanipal’s library at Nineveh, Eckhart Frahm touches on several important points to the present discussion:

First of all, the king and the royal court at Nineveh must have had a deep and unshakable belief that the gods communicated their decisions to the human world by inscribing them in the sky, in the entrails of the sacrificial animal, and sometimes in other media, and that their signs could be

²² For a commentary on this practice and a list of relevant sources see Stökl (2012, 81-86).

²³ Durand (1988, 411) states this same idea concerning the Mari documentation specifically.

deciphered using the knowledge collected in the large omen series. But the Assyrian king, and this is the second factor, had to take into account as well the political and military realities of his realm. Activities of the enemy in border regions, requests from his subjects, and conflicts between Assyrian officials were reported to him on a daily basis, and they required decisions nearly all the time. If Assyrian politics had been dominated by a literal belief in the tens of thousands of entries of the omen texts, if, for example, every black dog running through the street and every cloud crossing the sky had brought the administrative and military machinery of the Assyrian state to a halt, Assyria would never have become what it was in the end: the dominant political entity of its time. There had to be a balance between the world of divine communications on the one hand, and the world of politics on the other. This balance was provided by hermeneutics. (2004, 49)

The very large percentage of Nineveh commentaries that deal with omen texts reveals a royal interest on technical divination and shows that the king and his entourage believed and were actively concerned with divine-human communication. However, it would have been impossible to take into consideration all possible omens in daily decision-making: a balance was necessary, and it was achieved through a process of interpretation. This idea could equally apply to prophetic divination, since the kings reveal also an interest in prophecy. In the case of prophetic oracles, interpretation started already during the process of transmission to the king. As Nissinen states:

The writers do not necessarily quote the message verbatim but summarize the essential point of the message, the quotation being already an interpretation of the spoken oracle. Usually the divine word is used to reassert the opinion of the letter-writers. (2017, 78-79)

In fact, the written prophecies of the SAA 9, as well as mentions of prophetic activity, are not first-hand information given by the prophet, but rather they were subject to the filter of scribal transmission: the “original” word for word discourse of the prophet cannot be retrieved (Nissinen 2017, 146; [2004] 2019, 70). Considering that the king might have heard the oracular performance directly when possible, we must contemplate that, in the case of the extant prophetic corpora, since it results from a process of transmission, he too was receiving filtered information. Virtually all oracles assembled in collections 1 and 2 end with a colophon indicating the prophet responsible for the utterance. The expression “*ša pī*”, “from the mouth”, is used, which could indicate that it was important to ascertain that the texts compiled went back to a real prophetic performance from an actual prophet (Nissinen 2017, 98; Caramelo 2002, 275).²⁴ On the other hand, if we consider the Mari documentation, where this expression is less attested, we can wonder if the occasional insistence on proximity to the oral phenomenon, which this expression implies, means that other texts were more loosely adapted (Charpin 2001, 15). The Assyrian oracles have characteristics in common with poetic and literary

²⁴ Parpola (1997, lxiii) provides a list of all the written variations of this expression lxiii.

compositions (Villard 2001, 75; Parpola 1997, lxvii). The high stylistic quality that is particularly evident in the oracle collections is to be attributed to the scribal input in the process of transmission (Villard 2001, 78; Caramelo 2002, 15). However, as Stökl states: “authenticity and invention of divine messages are not necessarily mutually exclusive” (2012, 73). For the Assyrian court, the fact that the written oracles were not an exact record of the oral performance of prophets did not make them any less true (Caramelo 2002, 294).

On this subject, three Mari letters (ARM 26 197, 199, 202) provide an interesting example: in these missives, three different people report a prophecy to king Zimri-Lim. They all repeat the words “*šapal tibnim mû illakû*” – “beneath straw runs water” –, but otherwise the divine message is different: this suggests both that the prophetic utterance really happened, and that the message could be freely formulated for transmission (Nissinen 2017, 84-85). It is also significant that all three senders advise against an alliance with Ešnunna, but Zimri-Lim proceeded with it anyway (Nissinen 2017, 280). A Neo-Assyrian letter to the king reports divine demands made through prophecy (SAA 13 37). In it, the temple official quotes the divine words but waits for the king’s instructions: in the process of decision-making, the king’s rulings outweigh the prophetic oracle, which is open to interpretation by the monarch (Nissinen 2017, 81). Prophecy, then, was not an unavoidable command by the gods, but rather important intelligence that informed the king’s decision-making.

Returning now to the letters by Nabû-rehtu-ušur, it is noteworthy that he wrote three times on the same subject, which could suggest that, similarly to Zimri-Lim on the matter of the alliance with Ešnunna, Esarhaddon dismissed the information about the prophecy in favour of Sasî. The author of these letters also quoted favourable prophecies in a rather vague way, without indicating their particular prophetic origin: it seems that he integrated free paraphrases of positive prophecy known to him into his argumentation in order to reinforce his position (de Jong 2007, 400). This goes to show that it was not the closeness to the original formulation of the divine words that made them more or less valid. Nabû-rehtu-ušur seems to believe that the gods’ support for Esarhaddon is true, as shown in the prophecies of Nikkal that he was familiar with, and that he includes as part of his argumentation in trying to get the king’s attention. It follows that the prophecy in favour of Sasî must be a false prophecy. That the utterance of such an oracle was cause of distress attests to the potential of prophecy as a political tool, which is reflected in the

provisions of the “Succession Treaty” against defamatory words from prophets. Nabû-rehtu-uşur’s position towards this negative prophecy is summarized thus by Nissinen:

The ultimate difference between a true and a false prophecy can only be that a true prophecy really originates from a deity and a false one does not – but this is a matter of belief that cannot be verified by any controllable means. . . . What makes him sure of the true origin of the word of Nikkal could only be its contents. It reassured the rule of Esarhaddon like the prophecies usually did, while the oracle of the “slave girl” was directed against the ruling king and, for that reason only, could only be a pseudo-prophecy. (1998, 152)

It wasn’t, thus the fallibility of the chain of transmission or the closeness to *ipsissima verba* that made a prophecy more or less true or more or less worthy of consideration, but its contents. Prophecy that confirmed the established world vision, asserting divine support for the ruler, was believed because it played into previously established expectations, namely the preservation of the world order.

1.2.3 – A Mesopotamian phenomenon?

The Neo-Assyrian prophetic corpus is separated from the Mari documentation by more than a thousand years. When it began to be studied, there were no known antecedents of inspired divination in Assyria. Prophecy seemed then to appear out of the blue in the reigns of the last Sargonids. This led to the idea, initially advanced by Hayim Tadmor (1987, 458), that the prophetic phenomenon attested in late Neo-Assyria resulted from an import from the West-Semitic world, related to the growing aramaization of the empire in this period. Since 18th century Mari was also subject to significant western influence, and because both corpora were so distant from one another, it was thought that all inspired prophecy in Mesopotamia was an import from the west. Nowadays, in Parpola’s words: “this view is untenable and has to be emphatically rejected” (1997, xiv). The two main factors that enable the identification of an independent phenomenon of Mesopotamian prophecy are the sparse yet consistent attestations of the existence of prophets, as well as the continual connection between prophecy and the goddess Inanna/Ištar.

First and foremost, the various designations for prophets appear in lexical lists from the Old-Babylonian all the way through to the Neo-Babylonian and even Late-Babylonian periods, including one Middle-Assyrian and four Neo-Assyrian examples:

their position in the lists coherently associates them with temple personnel and especially with devotees of Ištar.²⁵ There is possibly an even earlier mention of a prophecy of Inanna, dating to the reign of Naram-Sîn (Parpola 1997, 48; ZA 87). Also, in a letter from the Ur III period, a prophet of Inanna of Girsu is listed as receiving a ration – the translation of the term designating the person is, however, not without question (Nissinen 2017, 65n34; TCS 1 369). The first certain attestations start from the Old-Babylonian period: in texts from the city of Larsa we find prophets and prophetesses – designated by the Sumerian LÚ GUB.BA and MUNUS LÚ GUB.BA – and in one of them a prophetess of Inanna of Zabalam is listed as a recipient of silver (Lion 2012, 148-9; TCL 10 34, 10 39, 10 69). Besides the Mari corpus, other 18th century kings were also the receivers of prophetic oracles. King Ibalpiel II of Ešnunna, a contemporary of Zimri-Lim, received oracles from the goddess Kititum of Nerebtum, an Ištar-type goddess (Nissinen 2017, 94; FLP 1674, 2064). A text from the Mari archives documents a prophetic proclamation in the name of Marduk, professed against Išme-Dagan when he was housed by Hammurabi in Babylon, thus attesting the presence of prophets in the famous king's capital (Charpin 2002, 33; Nissinen 2017, 310; ARM 26 371). Charpin (2003, 119) goes so far as to suggest that if we had the passive correspondence of Hammurabi, like we have Zimri-Lim's, we would find a similar number of prophetic texts.

In Assyria, besides the previously mentioned Middle-Assyrian text (VS 19 1) ascribing rations to prophetic personnel of the temple of Ištar, there is a decree dating from the reign of Adad-Nerari III (811-783) listing expenses for a ceremony in the temple of Aššur that mentions prophetesses (Villard 2001, 56; SAA 12 69). Again in the Mari corpus we find a divine message of support to Zimri-Lim from Eštar of Ninêṭ (ARM 26 192), to be understood as Ištar of Nineveh.²⁶ Also, a letter discovered in Amarna addressed by Tušratta, king of Mitanni, to Amenhotep III (1390-1352) contains a prophecy by Šauška of Nineveh, this being the Hurrian name of Ištar (Nissinen 2017, 86; EA 23). Hence, inspired prophecy is attested in Assyria proper long before the redaction of the texts of the SAA 9 corpus, and Ištar of Nineveh is recognized even by foreign powers as a divinity of prophecy since the 18th century. In the broader context of

²⁵ Nissinen (2017, 60) provides an inventory of all these lexical lists: MSL 12 5.22 - Old-Babylonian; Erimhuš III - Middle-Assyrian; MSL 12 4.212, AD 3 132 C, MSL 12 6.2, LTBA 2 1 - Neo-Assyrian; OIP 114 122 - Neo-Babylonian; SpTU 3 116 - Late-Babylonian.

²⁶ This oracle of support might seem surprising since Nineveh was under the domain of Ekallâtum, but Išme-Dagan and Zimri-Lim had both completed alliances with Babylon against the threat of Elam, which made them temporary allies (Charpin 2002, 23).

Mesopotamia, the evidence for prophecy may be sparse but it is enough to establish a long-standing tradition of non-inductive divination independent from any accidental or occasional import from the west (Nissinen 2017 68; [2000] 2019, 123; [2004] 2019, 68).

The documentation on Mesopotamian prophecy does not end with the Neo-Assyrian corpus. A tablet from Tušan, dating from 611, in the last days of the Assyrian empire when Nineveh had already fallen, mentions a prophet and a technical diviner (Nissinen 2017, 65; ZTT 25). Later, a Neo-Babylonian document listing offerings to the Eanna temple in Uruk mentions a prophet (Nissinen 2017, 67; OECT 1). Another document from Uruk shows a prophet involved in a ritual related to the Lady of Uruk, who is Ištar (Nissinen 2017, 70; LKU 51). In some documents we find the designation *mar mahhê*, meaning “son/descendent of prophet”, which implies that Neo-Babylonian families linked their ancestry to an anonymous prophet (Nissinen 2017, 68-69; YOS 7 135; 6 18). Finally, the latest ritual text involving prophecy is known as “Late Babylonian *akītu*-Ritual” dating to Hellenistic Uruk: it presents a prophetic-style discourse to be pronounced by a priest and thus “testifies to ritual reuse of prophecy in Hellenistic Uruk, indicating that the tradition of prophetic language is still alive, most probably in a written form, to be performed and recontextualized in a ritual context” (Nissinen 2017, 71).

Apart from illustrating how evidence of prophecy, even though scarce, is present through a very large time span, this brief overview allows us to verify the fundamental connection between prophecy and Ištar in her various guises all through Mesopotamia and through the ages. And since the cult of the goddess is unquestionably Mesopotamian, so must be prophecy (Nissinen 2017, 123).

1.3 – The oracle collections as tablets

1.3.1 – Neo-Assyrian archival practices and the collections

The oracle collections, along with the other texts in the SAA 9 were all found in Nineveh, the last capital of Assyria, and were unearthed in Kouyunjik, the mound where Sennacherib's Southwest palace once stood.²⁷ In 1850, while the site was being explored under the direction of Austen Henry Layard, a local foreman named Toma Shishman discovered two adjoining rooms, numbered 40 and 41, filled with a fantastical amount of inscribed tablets (Robson 2019, 13). The documents found in these rooms, as well as elsewhere in the palace, were progressively brought to the British Museum for cataloguing and are what we now know as "Assurbanipal's Library". Not all fragments were separately numbered, but the sum total of inscribed pieces is thought to be around 31 000: assuming that each tablet, on average, would comprise four to five fragments, the total number of tablets in the library would have been between 6 200 and 7 750 (Fincke 2017, 209).

This idea of 'Assurbanipal's Library' is our creation and not a concept we can suppose to have existed among the Ninevite royal entourage. Besides that, due to poor cataloguing, it is now difficult to ascertain which of the many inscribed fragments were actually from the palace or which came from elsewhere in Kouyunjik (Robson 2019, 17-21). Unfortunately, at the time of this discovery and in the decades that followed, it was deemed relevant that these tablets came from Nineveh, but their particular disposition in relation to each other and the extant buildings was not taken into consideration (43). Still, Assurbanipal's interest in the scribal arts and in the collecting of texts is a well-documented fact.

Only a small fraction of the Ninevite texts is what we could call *belles-lettres* and the overwhelming majority consisted of professional lore. Even though we cannot assume we have the complete royal archives, texts that are "library records" reinforce this reconstruction. Through the study of these catalogues, so to speak, Parpola (1983a, 6)

²⁷ The letter "K" in the museum numbers of tablets SAA 9 1-3 indicates that Kouyunjik was their findspot. SAA 9 4 was numbered differently because it was only catalogued in 1883.

established that the most represented text categories in the Nineveh documentation are: Exorcists' Lore (*āšipūtu*); Astrological Omens (*Enūma Anu Enlil*); Teratological Omens (*izbu*); Terrestrial Omens (*Alu ina mēlē šakin*); Dream Omens (*iškar Zaqqīqu*); Medical Recipes (*bultē*); and Haruspical Omens (*bārūtu*). This focus on omen literature mirrors the focus on commentaries of omen texts established by Frahm (2004) and speaks to the king's interest in divination. Frame and George's (2005) edition and study of two tablets (BM 45642, 28825) revealed that both texts deal with a similar situation: in Borsippa and in Babylon, Assurbanipal has demanded from the local scribes the copy and shipment of all available literature, and, in one case, exorcist lore and omen compendia are explicitly mentioned. These texts reveal that Assurbanipal was very intent in copying and collecting documents and was even willing to award those who cooperated in this enterprise, which shows that the king was willing to invest in the completion of his library (282). These authors further note that several other documents attest to the initiative of copying and collecting texts, some of which may date to the reign of Esarhaddon, in which case Assurbanipal would have been continuing his father's policy on a grander scale (278-9). This picture of late Neo-Assyrian text collecting highlights the high degree of interest in divination. It seems that the compilation of prophetic oracles would fit logically in this archival endeavour of the late Sargonids.

Parpola's (1997) reconstruction of the process of composition of the documents in the SAA 9 sheds light on their relationship with Neo-Assyrian archival practices. The author's reconstruction starts by taking into consideration the different shapes of the tablets of the corpus. SAA 9 1-4, which are the oracle collections, and SAA 9 9 are vertical tablets, whereas SAA 9 5-8 are smaller and horizontal in shape. These two types of tablets are attested in the Nineveh documentation. The horizontal format, or *u'iltu*, was used for "notes, reports, receipts, and memoranda" and the vertical, multi-column format or *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"(liii).²⁸ Parpola highlights the lack of overlap in content between the two formats and further adds that various types of records on *u'iltu* tablets were archived by copying into *tuppu* format, after which the originals could be discarded. Thus, he

²⁸ For measurements and a complete description of each of the tablets in the corpus see Parpola (1997, lv-lxii).

concludes that the oracle collections 1-4 resulted from the copying of several short oracle reports similar to texts 5-8 (liii). On this subject, Martti Nissinen (2017, 99) further adds that the fact that the collections were in *tuppu* format seems to suggest that library copies were composed to assemble and preserve prophecy reports considered particularly important, and perceived importance may also be the reason behind the archiving of certain *u'iltu* type tablets, which would normally have been discarded.

Stökl (2012, 130-1) raises a few questions regarding Parpola's reconstruction of the archival process (to which Nissinen subscribes as we have just seen). Firstly, he points out that the very fragmentary SAA 9 10-11 seem to have been vertical tablets, although their shape is difficult to ascertain, hence they do not fit neatly into Parpola's classification. Parpola (1997, lxi) actually agrees that these tablets were probably vertical in shape but fails to integrate them into his reconstruction. Secondly, and most importantly, SAA 9 9 is a *tuppu* tablet and seemingly it would have been a library copy. However, it contains a single oracle and not a collection assembled in multiple columns. To Stökl, this implies that the neat distinction between short oracle reports and copies for archival purposes, drawn by Parpola, cannot be maintained. This concerns our sources directly, for knowing whether or not they were assembled with the intent of archival preservation is a fundamental point for interpretation when trying to ascertain the intent behind their composition. Parpola (1997, liii) acknowledges that SAA 9 9 deviates from his reconstruction. Nonetheless, he states that the vertical format, careful finish, and eponym dating in the tablet set it apart from the oracle reports such as SAA 9 5-8, making it more like an archival copy: the multi-column display would have been pointless if the goal was to record a single oracle. We can add that, in such a restricted corpus as this, it seems difficult to determine the importance of the deviating aspects of tablet 9. After all, other vertical library copies of single oracles may have existed but could simply have been lost.

De Jong (2007, 172) recognizes a degree of plausibility to Parpola's reconstruction but points out that the distinction between the two tablet types in the corpus is not as neat as the author would suggest. Again, he goes over the issue with the shape of tablets 10 and 11 and suggests that they could have been letters quoting prophecy, instead of simple reports. He also believes that texts 7 and 8 may contain several different oracles, which would make their classing as single oracle reports impossible. Finally, de

Jong states that collection 3 and text 9 are not true written prophecy, but rather literary elaborations of a different type.

Collection 3 is perhaps the document that raises the most questions. Remarking that SAA 9 3 is interspersed with cultic commentaries, Nissinen (2017, 219) follows Parpola (1997, lxx) in suggesting that we are faced with a collection of five oracles that were to be read in the enthronement ceremony of Esarhaddon in the Ešarra temple, in Aššur. Thus, this tablet was indeed an oracle collection, and its aim was to provide the ritual setting for each prophecy in a specific ceremony. De Jong (2007, 173-4) rejects the classification of SAA 9 3 as an oracle collection altogether, stating that the only text that is actually a written prophecy is 3.5, and Villard (2001, 80) aligns with this idea pointing out that, although we find words of Aššur in 3.2 and 3.3, it is not certain that these corresponded to actual prophetic oracles. Finally, a universal critique is that there is a double ruling in the tablet, between 3.3 and 3.4, that Parpola dismisses, and which should be taken as indication that what precedes it and what follows are entirely different texts (Villard 2001, 80; de Jong 2007, 174; Stökl 2012, 139). The particularly complex nature of SAA 9 3 does not exclude it from the present study, for our aim is not to investigate the nature of the prophetic phenomenon. 3.5 is definitely a prophetic oracle and it remains possible that 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4 are equally written prophecies. Thus, we will consider collection 3 alongside collections 1 and 2 as a vehicle of royal ideology using divine speech.

According to Parpola's reconstruction, the oracle collections under study were library copies intended for preservation. Through an analysis of scribal idiosyncrasies and particular sign forms, Parpola established that the four collections were written by the same hand, whereas the remaining texts all originate from different scribes (Parpola 1997, lv).²⁹ This seems like further indication that texts 1-4 were compiled for archival purposes: reports (or letters) would come from different origins, but the collections were assembled centrally, possibly by a single scribe connected to the palace archives. Even though this author's account of archival practices in what regards prophecy has been subject to valid questions and criticisms, we subscribe to the point it makes about collections 1-4 being archival documents, which is the most important factor for the

²⁹ See also table 1, lvii. Here Stökl misquotes Parpola, stating that "no two tablets published in SAA 9 were written by the same hand" (2012, 129). Since he does not return to this idea, it is uncertain whether or not this mistake influences his appreciation of Parpola's reconstruction.

present study. The fact that they were high quality compilations written in vertical format certainly suggests that they were intended for preservation. This then, connected to the clear royal focus of the texts, makes it nearly certain that they were part of the royal Ninevite archives, although, like all texts considered part of “Assurbanipal’s Library”, their original finding spot is lost to us.

The complex process of transmission of prophecy does not end necessarily when the divine words reach their recipient: this was possibly the case with oral performances of prophecy brought before the king. However, when it comes to written prophecy, particularly with documents like the oracle collections, the creation of copies for archival purposes integrates them into the scribal tradition (Nissinen 2017, 22; [2004] 2019, 64). The editorial activity that necessarily underlies the composition of the collections implies that once-spoken oracles could possibly be reused or reinterpreted, transcending their original setting (Nissinen 2017, 100). Whether the aim was to use these oracles as source material for other compositions, or if the oracle collections were themselves already viewed as literary compositions, remains impossible to determine (Stökl 2012, 133). At any rate, it is possible that they were read in court or publicly, kept for the readers of posterity, or consulted by the palace scholars responsible for the elaboration of royal inscriptions.

1.3.2 – The question of archaeological accident

It is unlikely that we currently have all the tablets that were in the palace in Assurbanipal’s time. When Nineveh was under attack, royal scribes may have rescued some documents, while others may have been completely destroyed (Fincke 2017, 209). It is then possible that there were other contemporary oracle reports and collections that were lost or still await discovery. If the broad lines of Parpola’s reconstruction of the formation of the SAA 9 corpus are correct, then the oracle reports were not meant for archival preservation at all: this means there would have been a much higher percentage of this type of document that did not reach our time (Nissinen [2003a] 2019, 108). Besides that, any reflection on the composition of a Mesopotamian archival corpus has to take into consideration the existence of wooden writing-boards, that have completely perished.

Through the study of library records, Parpola (1983a, 8) was able to deduce that archives had large quantities of writing-boards which, being polyptychs, would comprise a large quantity of text: there is also reason to believe that they were considered more precious and important than the more common clay tablets.

The fact that all extant Neo-Assyrian oracles date to the reigns of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal would seem to suggest that these kings had an unprecedented interest in prophecy (Villard 2001, 60). Both Parpola (1997, 40) and Nissinen (2017, 97) attribute an increase of the importance of prophecy to the personal devotion of these two kings to Ištar of Arbela. However, their argumentation is somewhat weakened by the fact that the prophetic texts themselves represent one of their main pieces of evidence for this exceptional devotion.

Considering the parallel presented by the Mari corpus, it becomes evident that there is an over-representation of periods of crisis in the written sources of prophecy: this would be the case not only because prophecy could be mobilized for, or even against, the interests of the king, but also because in times of political unrest the king would be away from the capital more often and the writing of oracles would be necessary to their transmission (Charpin 2002, 18; Stökl 2012, 91. Cf. Villard 2001, 72; Durand 1988, 399). Regarding both corpora, Villard (2001, 56) points out that, since the vast majority of prophecies address the king, it is only natural that they should be found in palace archives, and the largest ensembles of written documentation unearthed in Mesopotamia are precisely from the palaces of Nineveh and Mari. Hence, it may well be that oracle collections and reports existed in the archives of other cities but were since lost or remain undiscovered.

In a study on Neo-Babylonian archives, Michael Jursa (2005, 58) highlights how, when analysing any archive, the issue of its completeness is, in itself, an important source of information. Here the author defines “‘live’ archives (or rather, archives having suffered a ‘sudden death’)” as archives that were utilized and fully functioning up until a catastrophic event halted their evolution. Such archives are characterized by the inclusion of documents of relevant, continuing value. This categorization can be applied to the Mari and the Neo-Assyrian documentation, meaning that in both collections we find documents that were immediately relevant to the archive holders by the time both cities were destroyed. Some of these documents would possibly have come to be discarded later as the archive evolved. Adding to this idea, Nissinen points out that, in both these very large

archives, all prophetic documentation dates to the last decades before their destruction, which definitely suggests that written oracle reports and even their archival copies might not have been meant for long term preservation. In the author's words:

the small quantity of prophecy in the existing sources is not an accurate indicator of the significance of prophecy, any more than the total lack of letters from the time of Sennacherib implies that he had no correspondence. (Nissinen [2000] 2019, 118-9).

Hence, the fact that the Assyrian prophetic corpus is small and dates to the reigns of the last two Sargonids may be attributed to both issues of preservation and archaeological accident. That we have no previous written prophecy from Assyria could be entirely accidental.

However, Nissinen ([2003a] 2019, 108) also points out that Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal are the first Assyrian kings to mention prophecy in their inscriptions, which makes it more likely that they had a higher esteem for prophecy than their predecessors. It also seems important that, while we have documentation from the reigns of Sargon II and Sennacherib mentioning technical divination, we have none that mentions prophecy (Villard 2001, 60). This suggests that, while prophetic activity was not restricted to the time of the last Sargonids, it may have enjoyed a higher esteem from the king and the royal circle, resulting in the unprecedented elaboration of archival collections of prophetic oracles. Even so, deducing that the first Sargonids were less interested in prophecy because there is no evidence of them showing an interest in prophecy remains an argument *ex silentio* (Nissinen [2000] 2019, 118).

All things considered, Nissinen believes that the fact that all known oracle collections derive from the time of Esarhaddon cannot be dismissed as simple coincidence: "Until proved otherwise, it may be assumed that Esarhaddon, whose predilection for prophecy is best documented, was the first king to let individual prophecies be compiled in archival collections" (2017, 103). Though the issue of preservational/archaeological accident can never be fully resolved, it shouldn't dissuade us from reflecting upon the implications of the oracle collections being a product specific of the time of Esarhaddon, especially since their content is highly relevant to fundamental moments of his reign and very rich in ideological discourse that would have been particularly important in his time.

1.4 – Final thoughts

The kings of Assyria, and the Mesopotamian kings in general, seem to have believed that the gods spoke by inscribing messages in different patterns in nature, that were subject to interpretation, and by using the voices of prophets. It is important to keep in mind that the two great corpora of Mesopotamian prophecy were found in palace archives, which suggests a bias of the available sources towards a greater involvement of the king. However, as we have seen, there is reason to believe that the kings, both in Assyria and Mari, believed themselves to be directly concerned with any and all divine messages, which places kingship at the centre of the prophetic phenomenon as we know it today.

In Assyria, the whole extant corpus of written prophecy comes from the reigns of the last two great Sargonids. In this period, inspired divination belongs to the sphere of the temple and its greatest centre is the Egašankalamma sanctuary of Ištar of Arbela. The goddess is the dominating voice of Neo-Assyrian prophecy. This is aligned with the Mesopotamian tradition that continually associates Ištar with the prophetic phenomenon both before and after this period. That being said, her absolute prominence as speaking deity in the oracles is an Assyrian specificity. So is the elaboration of collections of oracles in tablets that seem to have been destined for preservation in the palace archives.

A degree of scribal intervention was always necessary in what concerns written prophecy because the oracles were originally oral in nature and their redaction is due to the need for transmission. When it comes to the oracle collections of Esarhaddon, the selection and grouping of the oracles included, and the nature of the language, suggests a high degree of literary elaboration. This fact, coupled with the themes and subjects present in the collections, implies they were written with purpose for the reign of Esarhaddon.

2 – The Oracle Collections and the Reign of Esarhaddon

As stated in Part 1 (1.3.2), even taking into account all the uncertainty surrounding the composition and preservation of the Assyrian prophetic corpus, it is worth considering the oracle collections as a product of the reign of Esarhaddon. As literary compositions, they articulate and interpret major events of his time as ruler of Assyria. In Part 2 we examine how the prophecies in these collections play into three major difficulties faced by Esarhaddon, namely the issue of succession, the reversal of policy towards Babylonia and his own deteriorating health. Although it is consensual that the four oracle collections date from the reign of Esarhaddon, neither of them is dated by year and there are differing opinions as to when exactly they were assembled. We will start by addressing this question as it may inform our understanding of the intent behind their composition.

2.1 – On dating the oracle collections

When Simo Parpola (1997, lxviii-lxx) edited the oracle collections, he made the first effort at dating them within the short reign of Esarhaddon. Following his theory that collection 3 was designed to be read at Esarhaddon's coronation ceremony, he dates it to the last days of 681 or the beginning of 680, which would make it the earliest of the collections. In what concerns the other collections, the author states that references to specific enemies, such as the Cimmerians, Manneans, Elamites, the king Mugallu of Melid, or the realm of Urartu, could, in principle, belong to any date in Esarhaddon's reign. In actuality, the only individual oracle that can firmly be dated is 1.8, dating to the period immediately after Esarhaddon's exile from Nineveh in 681. To Parpola, then, the whole first collection should accordingly be read as concerning this period of instability and civil war that preceded this king's ascension. That being said, the author notes there

is an evident thematic parallel between collection 1 and the Nineveh (Nin) A inscription, a text in which Esarhaddon narrates his tumultuous rise to power. This leads him to suggest that this oracle collection dates from the same year as the inscription: 673. Both would have been crafted with the aim of preparing Assurbanipal's nomination as crown prince, a topic we will discuss in section 2.2.2. If this is correct, collection 1 would actually be the latest of the collections. Following a similar line of thinking, Parpola connects collection 2 with the Aššur A inscription and dates it to 679. Finally, because of the two-column format similar to collections 2 and 3, the author suggests that the fragment of collection 4 is likely to date to c.680 rather than closer to 673 when the three-column collection 1 would have been written.

Nissinen ([2003a] 2019) generally follows Parpola's dating of the oracle collections and agrees that there is a link between the composition of collection 1 and Nin A. Villard (2001, 78) agrees that this dating is possible, but cautions that the inscriptions to which Parpola links collections 1 and 2 never quote the prophecies directly, so the association hangs essentially on allusions and thematic similarity.

Given the strong thematic parallel between the Nin A inscription and collection 1 and considering that the inscription mentions prophecy, this part of Parpola's reconstruction seems to be the most popular. De Jong (2007, 250) agrees with the dating of collection 1 but states that collections 2 and 3 cannot be dated to c.680-679 because both contain oracles he associates with later events. Crossing the references to political entities in collections 2 and 3 with mentions in other sources, Beate Pongratz-Leisten (2015, 352-3) advances that oracle 2.4 could date from around 675 and oracle 3.2 from as late as 670. This leads her to state that, if we were to consider the historical references in the oracles seriously, then collections 2 and 3 must date from 675 and 670, respectively. The author concedes, though, that Parpola's reconstruction remains equally possible (356-8).

Taking collection 2 as an example, we find that Nissinen ([2003b] 2019, 223), dating it to the beginning of Esarhaddon's reign, considers the mentions of political enemies of Assyria to be references to the possibility of future conflict. On the other hand, both de Jong (2007, 265) and Pongratz-Leisten (2015, 356) take these same references to mean that collection 2 is later than 675. Of course, once an oracle was emitted, it could be included and even reworked into an oracle collection at any time in the future. In this instance, it seems likely that an oracle predicting a victory against a foreign enemy would

have been included in a collection after that victory had been attained, confirming said oracle. However, since it is impossible to know if that was always the case or if, as Nissinen seems to suggest, predictions of victories were confidently included in the collections before the conflicts were resolved, these allusions to military victories cannot be taken as a safe indication of the date of the collections.

Another possible way of dating the collections would be to try and deduce the purpose of their composition. Thus Pongratz-Leisten (2015, 357) believes all collections were intended to aid in justifying and strengthening Assurbanipal's nomination as crown prince and later ascension to the throne, which in turn makes it more likely that the collections all belong to the later part of Esarhaddon's reign. Without further data, this proposition remains very hypothetical. In following her reasoning, one must be cautious against attributing too much weight to a single assumed purpose or a hypothetical dating at the risk of skewing the reading of the rest of the oracles.

In the present chapter, we follow the widely accepted dating of collection 1 to 673, while maintaining the notion that collections 2 and 3 could date to any year during Esarhaddon's reign. Our aim being to examine how the oracle collections inform and address issues present throughout the whole reign of this king, the exact dating of collections 2 and 3 remains secondary.

2.2 – The issue of succession

The issue of succession to the Assyrian throne came to the forefront twice during Esarhaddon's time. Esarhaddon rose to the throne amid a civil war, one that was motivated by dissatisfaction regarding his nomination as heir. Later, this same king would set in place an unprecedented plan of succession which might have prompted similar opposition. Although there is an eight-year long gap between Esarhaddon's enthronement and his nomination of Assurbanipal as crown prince, the king's own experience certainly influenced his later policy and made him acutely aware of the danger of another succession war.

2.2.1 – The troubled ascension of Esarhaddon

It is well known that Esarhaddon ascended the throne of Assyria after having to fight his brothers in a civil war, and that he was not the original heir to the throne. In all likelihood, Aššur-nādin-šumi, an elder son, whom Sennacherib placed ruling over Babylonia, was the intended heir. Besides being distinguished with this important assignment, he was designated as *māru rēštu*, meaning first son. This could either mean first in pre-eminence, which would seem to indicate he was the heir, or first in age, which could imply the same thing, since the principle of primogeniture was generally followed in Assyria (Porter 1993, 14-15). Yet, Aššur-nādin-šumi came to an untimely death, having been killed during the revolt that broke out in Babylonia in 694.

From 683 onwards, Esarhaddon is the designated crown prince. In this nomination, several older brothers were overlooked. Esarhaddon himself states near the beginning of his Nin A inscription that he was the youngest son: “I am my older brothers’ youngest brother” (i8).³⁰ The text SAA 12 88 attests to an attempt at changing Esarhaddon’s official name, an alteration the king seems to have ended up discarding. In this text, Sennacherib affirms that his son should thereafter be called Aššur-etellu-mukin-apli, meaning “Aššur, the prince, has given an heir”. While showing that Esarhaddon was now the heir to the throne, this document simultaneously implies that he was not the original heir, since there had to be a name change befitting his new status: Esarhaddon stands for Aššur-aha-iddina, “Aššur has given a brother”, which is clearly a younger brother’s name (Porter 1993, 17). Karen Radner (2010) suggests that, in principle, any male descendant of the present or past kings of Assyria could have a claim to the throne. In this specific succession, the conflict could have been generated by there being another crown prince designate demoted in favour of Esarhaddon. However, even if other male descendants could be contenders for the throne, as the author states, this does not necessarily invalidate that the principle of primogeniture was usually followed, or that tensions could arise when it was not (Caramelo 2002, 222). There would be no point to Esarhaddon’s mentioning that he was the youngest brother, in the context of narrating his difficult ascension to the throne, if this was not a significant detail. Either because of the demotion of another crown prince or simply because the nomination of a younger brother

³⁰ *ša ŠEŠ.MEŠ-ia GAL.MEŠ ŠEŠ-šú-nu še-eh-ru a-na-ku*

went against the others' expectations, Esarhaddon faced opposition from the overlooked sons of Sennacherib.

According to Esarhaddon's Nin A inscription, after his father had selected him as heir and installed him in the Palace of Succession, his displeased brothers initiated a slanderous campaign against him:

Persecution (and) jealousy fell over my brothers and they forsook (the will) of the gods. They trusted in their arrogant deeds, and they were plotting evil. They started evil rumors, calumnies, (and) slander about me against the will of the gods, and they were constantly telling insincere lies, hostile things, behind my back. They alienated the well meaning heart of my father from me, against the will of the gods, (but) deep down he was compassionate and his eyes were permanently fixed on my exercising kingship. (i23-32)

Eventually the pressure seems to have mounted because Esarhaddon had to leave Nineveh into a sort of exile in 681. In this same inscription, the king states that he conversed with both Aššur and Marduk and these great gods ordered him to flee to safety so that he could later exercise his due kingship:

By the command of the great gods, my lords, they (the gods) settled me in a secret place away from the evil deeds, stretched out their pleasant protection over me, and kept me safe for exercising kingship. Afterwards, my brothers went out of their minds and did everything that is displeasing to the gods and mankind, and they plotted evil, girt (their) weapons, and in Nineveh, without the gods, they butted each other like kids for (the right to) exercise kingship. (i38-44)

After the murder of Sennacherib, Esarhaddon acted fast and marched towards Nineveh to fight his brothers. In the following section, there is a direct opposition based upon divine favour. The brothers, called usurpers (^{lú}*ha-am-ma-e-e*), are abandoned by "Aššur, Šîn, Šamaš, Bēl, Nabû, Ištar of Nineveh, Ištar of Arbela" (i45-47) because of their actions against the divine will. A few lines below, the same list of gods, with the addition of Nergal after Nabû, listens to Esarhaddon's prayers and sends him signs of their firm support through positive omens (i59-62).

The king proceeds to narrate his military manoeuvres. Emphasis is placed on swiftness and decisiveness of action. The king's enemies are said to have deserted and either joined his ranks or run away:

The goddess Ištar, the lady of war and battle, who loves my priestly duties, stood at my side, broke their bows, (and) she split open their tight battle ranks. In their assembly, they said thus: 'This is our king!' Through her sublime command they began coming over to my side (and) marching behind me. (i74-78)

The goddess Ištar is here portrayed as standing by the side of the king and fighting for him on the battlefield, bringing the enemy troops to the side of the legitimate ruler. It is

hard to determine the degree of accuracy of the description of this campaign, but Esarhaddon was victorious and was crowned by the end of 681:

In Assaru (XII), a favorable month, on the eighth day, the *eššēšu*-festival of the god Nabû, I joyfully entered Nineveh, my capital city, and I sat happily on the throne of my father. (i87-ii2)

Although Esarhaddon accuses his brothers of defamation and treachery, he does not explicitly accuse them of killing his father. In fact, the death of Sennacherib is not mentioned at all. It is rather in sources outside of Assyria that we find the king's other sons accused of his murder. Parpola (1980) worked towards solving the case of Sennacherib's death with a satisfactory degree of success. The author re-edited and translated the document SAA 18 100, which can be dated to after this incident and which accuses several individuals of being involved in a conspiracy to murder the king, led by the king's own son Arad-Ninlil. Parpola then demonstrates that this name should be preferably read Arda-Mulissi, which can very easily be connected with the "Adrammeleck" accused of Sennacherib's murder in the Biblical tradition, and with the "Adramelos" found in Berossus, the third-century writer of a history of Babylonia known to us through later quotations.

Parpola's reconstruction thus leaves Esarhaddon out of any conspiracy against his father. Andrew Knapp (2020), however, points out that there are still reasons to question his innocence. If Esarhaddon was forced into exile, that could have been his motivation. And the quickness and success of his reaction against the brothers could suggest that he knew the previous king was going to die at the hands of his own collaborators in court. This author also suggests that it may be due to his own culpability that Esarhaddon never explicitly accuses his brothers in the Nin A inscription. This, however, could just result from the notion that it was undesirable to remind people of the fragility and vulnerability of a supposedly divinely appointed king (Porter 1993, 109). Though Knapp (2020, 179) states this explanation is unsatisfactory, we believe it is a reasonable hypothesis. Besides, the idea that the brothers did "everything that is displeasing to the gods and mankind" (i41-42) could well be an indirect reference to this parricide, especially since it is stated immediately after that they proceeded to vie against each other for the kingship, suggesting that Sennacherib was, by then, out of the picture. And finally, Arda-mulissi seems to be remembered as the principal culprit in the Biblical and Babylonian traditions, which can only be explained if this were at least partly true. We have seen that, should

this be a fake accusation, it was not started by Esarhaddon, who stood to gain the most, and it is difficult to imagine who else could be responsible for it.

There is, however, weight to the idea that Esarhaddon's departure from Nineveh into exile was not something he chose, as he would have us believe. It is possible that the crown prince was sent away for his own protection by his father, especially since there is no evidence that Sennacherib promoted a different heir (Caramelo 2002, 224; Radner 2003, 167; Pongratz-Leisten 2015, 344). However, the passage quoted above reflects a different reality: "They alienated the well meaning heart of my father from me, against the will of the gods, (but) deep down he was compassionate and his eyes were permanently fixed on my exercising kingship." The statement that his father supported him "deep down",³¹ in spite of the calumnies, can be taken as a confirmation that outwardly Sennacherib became unsupportive of his designated heir (Knapp 2020, 169; Porter 1993, 22). Esarhaddon had no reason to acknowledge that he had fallen from his father's grace unless it was already publicly known and the claim that he still supported him secretly was an attempt to "neutralize his public misfortune" (de Jong 2007, 251).

Hence, it can be assumed that Esarhaddon was in a particularly delicate position around the time of his father's murder. Oracle 1.8 dates to this period of uncertainty. It reads:

I am the Lady of Arbela. To the king's mother: Because you implored me, saying: "You have placed the ones at the (king's) right and left side in your lap, but made my own offspring roam the steppe." Now fear not, my king! The kingdom is yours, yours is the power! (v12-23)

This oracle was pronounced by a prophethess residing in Arbela and is spoken in the voice of Ištar of Arbela as well. It addresses Naqia, the mother of Esarhaddon, who seems to have been an unusually powerful and influential woman.³² The "ones at the right and left side" are to be interpreted as the rebelling brothers of Esarhaddon (Parpola 1997, 9; Nissinen [2003a] 2019, 119). The fact that Naqia claims they are in the lap of the goddess while her son "roams the steppe" is an indication that his exile was indeed a difficult time of disfavour (Knapp 2020, 173). The last part of the oracle reassures the crown prince and predicts his future success, addressing him already as king (Parpola 1997, xliii).

Oracle 1.7, with its mentions of conspiracy, can be easily associated with this situation as well. It is similarly addressed to Naqia, which can be deduced from the use

³¹ *šap-la-a-nu lib-ba-šu* could be translated more literally as "secretly/inwardly in his heart".

³² In her study about this figure, Sarah Melville (1999) tends to downplay the role of Naqia. Cf. note 34.

of the feminine form of “you” in the last passage: “You are you. The king is my king!” (v8-9). This literal translation is interpreted by de Jong as meaning “*You*, Naqia, take care of yourself; *I* (the deity speaking) will take care of Esarhaddon.” (2007, 255). The whole of collection 1 could be related to the period of Esarhaddon’s troubled ascension, the allusions being more evident in 1.2, 1.4 and 1.6, besides 1.7 and 1.8. In 1.2 Ištar of Arbela claims to have beaten the king’s enemies and mentions the Palace of Succession, relating to his time as crown prince. 1.4 could be placed soon after Esarhaddon’s coronation: the passage “I am Ištar of Arbela; I reconciled Aššur with you” (ii30-31) could refer to the overcoming of civil war in the heart of Assyria (de Jong 2007, 260). While 1.6 is longer and more complex, the passage “I will take you safely across the river” (iv3-4) could refer to the crossing of the Tigris during Esarhaddon’s struggle for the throne (Nissinen [2003a] 2019; Parpola 1997, 8; Caramelo 2002, 226). It could, however, be just as easily connected to any campaign on the West (de Jong 2007, 267). Since 2.1 and perhaps the fragmentary 2.6 are also addressed to the mother of the king, they can be linked to 1.7 and 1.8, relating to this period of struggle where Esarhaddon was in exile and Naqia was visiting different locations seeking aid for her son (de Jong 2007, 256). Under her leadership, her son’s supporters could have used these prophecies to gain further endorsement (Villard 2001, 72). Either because of her actions or for other reasons, these oracles testify to the support of the temples of Ištar to Esarhaddon’s claim. Then again, we should keep in mind that if any oracle favouring one of his brothers was emitted, it would not have been preserved after Esarhaddon’s victory.

Oracle 3.3 also seems to allude to Esarhaddon’s struggle for the throne. Here it is the god Aššur who speaks, recollecting that “these traitors provoked you, had you banished, and surrounded you” (ii10-11).³³ After listening to his prayers, the god hurls down fire on the king’s enemies. He tells the king: “I slaughtered your enemies and filled the river with their blood” (ii22-23). De Jong points out how this prophecy and the Nin A inscription present different narratives but are working towards a similar goal:

a bitter fight had taken place between Esarhaddon and his brothers, and Esarhaddon was far from innocent. One way to wipe out this blot was by presenting the events as if no blood had been shed, as does the Nineveh A inscription. Before a civil war broke out, Ištar made the Assyrians of the enemy camp join Esarhaddon’s side, which left the rebel brothers in isolation. They are described as corrupt criminals, Esarhaddon as being totally innocent. The other way to wipe out Esarhaddon’s violent actions was to make the god Aššur responsible for the bloodshed, as does the prophetic text 3.3. (2007, 410)

³³ The translation of ^{lù}sar-sa-ra-ni as “traitors” is not without question. See Parpola 1997, 23.

Through the lens of divine action and divine validation, the oracles quoted, as well as the Nin A inscription, help make the ugly reality of a fratricide war for the throne more palatable. Finally, 3.5 may also allude to the period immediately after Esarhaddon's victory, seeming to mention the punishment of the elite and the palace workers who sided against him (Caramelo 2002, 227). Here, it is again Ištar who takes action for the king:

(As for) [those cou]rtiers and palace [personnel who] rebelled [against] you, [I have sur]rounded them and impaled them by their teeth. (iv25-30)

After attaining the throne, Esarhaddon substituted the whole palace personnel: since it is hardly believable that they would have been allowed to retire, we should presume they were executed (Radner 2003, 167). This passage of 3.5 can thus be read as another instance of a god taking charge of the king's violent actions in the struggle for the throne.

Most of these oracles, by the time they were compiled into collections, were no longer discourse about the future, but about the past (Caramelo 2002, 221). This is especially relevant in the case of collection 1, where we find most oracles relating to the struggle for the Assyrian throne and which we know to have been probably assembled in 673. By this year, Esarhaddon's kingship was well established, and the matter that came to the forefront was now his own plan for succession.

2.2.2 – Securing an unconventional succession

In 672, Esarhaddon made Assurbanipal his crown prince, heir to the throne of Assyria. Additionally, he took the unprecedented measure of setting another son, Šamaš-šum-ukin to inherit the throne of Babylonia. A letter written by the exorcist Adad-šuma-ušur reveals that, besides the novelty of this measure, there was the added question of Assurbanipal being the youngest of the two:

What has not been done in heaven, the king, my lord, has done upon earth and shown us: you have girded a son of yours with headband and entrusted to him the kingship of Assyria; your eldest son you have set to the kingship in Babylon. You have placed the first on your right, the second on your left side! (SAA 10 185, o5-13)³⁴

³⁴ The designation used here to refer to Šamaš-šum-ukin is DUMU.UŠ-ka GAL-ú, which actually does not necessarily mean he is the oldest son, but only that he is older than Assurbanipal (Frame 1992, 94).

The admiration of the writer is evident. Grant Frame (1992, 95) demonstrates that, although it is not clearly stated that Šamaš-šum-ukin was to be a subordinate of his brother, the documentation, starting with the “Succession Treaty” (SAA 2 6), clearly suggests that Assurbanipal was the main heir, and, after Esarhaddon’s death, the new king of Assyria had the final say in matters concerning his brother’s domain of Babylonia.³⁵ Esarhaddon, having fought his own succession war, was certainly concerned with the possibility of a similar event, especially considering that he was creating a new system with a double kingship, and, once again, deviating from the principle of primogeniture.

Esarhaddon knew from his own experience that oaths of loyalty to the crown prince were not enough to prevent a succession war (Melville 1999, 35). Still, he emitted his “Succession Treaty” in favour of Assurbanipal, which survives in 9 copies: these show the same oaths being imposed to bind both state officials and client rulers (Radner 2016, 48). Adding to this measure, Naqia emitted another treaty, known as the “Treaty of Zakutu” (SAA 2 8), this being the Akkadian version of her name, reasserting the loyalty oaths owed her grandson.³⁶ This emission of a second treaty, by a member of the royal family, supporting an earlier one is, to the best of my knowledge, a unique event, that may reveal Esarhaddon anticipated some resistance to his succession plan.

It is possible that we find one such moment of resistance around a figure named Sasî, whom we met as the protagonist of the prophecy from Harran that predicted the downfall of Esarhaddon.³⁷ The context and timing of this movement could suggest that it started in contestation of the nomination of the two heirs (Porter 1993, 135). There seems to have been a conspiracy surrounding this individual, though the nature of his involvement is not entirely clear. The letter SAA 10 179 is probably connected with this scheme, attesting the involvement of several high officials, among which the chief eunuch himself (Nissinen 1998, 134; Radner 2003, 173). The sequence of events that followed is unclear but the outcome seems to have been a series of executions in 670: “The eleventh year: In Assyria the king put his numerous officers to the sword” (Chron. 1, iv29).³⁸ It is

³⁵ Porter (1993, 136) reaches a similar conclusion.

³⁶ Melville (1999) believes the emission of this treaty was the ultimate goal of a strategy, conceived by Esarhaddon, to strengthen his succession plans through the promotion of the figure of the queen mother. The author downplays the authority and initiative of Naqia. The “Treaty of Zakutu” is the only official document proclaimed by a woman in the Assyrian documentation, and we must wonder: what would be the point of having Naqia enact a treaty of loyalty in her own name if she did not have the means, or at least the authority, to uphold it by herself?

³⁷ See above, page 14.

³⁸ Besides connecting the revolt around Sasî to the executions of 670, Radner (2003, 174-5) points out that traces of destruction in archaeological sites near Harran may relate to the suppression of this movement.

worth remembering that this is the second execution of state officials ordered by Esarhaddon in one decade. Though the conspiracy around Sasî could have been sparked by contestation of the recent nomination of the crown prince, it could equally be connected, in a broader sense, to the fact that Esarhaddon faced resistance from the start and throughout his reign.

Keeping in mind the idea that Esarhaddon was possibly concerned by the chance of opposition to his succession plan, the fact that the Nin A inscription and also, probably, collection 1 date to 673 is highly telling. Parpola suggests both documents were intended to support Esarhaddon's controversial decision of naming a younger son as his main heir:

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. (1997, lxix-lxx)³⁹

Both texts show that, against significant odds, Esarhaddon was destined to win because the gods had selected him for kingship and stood by his side. Collection 1 demonstrates that, even when the crown prince had fallen from grace and was “roaming the steppe”, divine favour, and particularly the favour of the goddess Ištar, were always on his side. This contrasts with the idea presented in Nin A that the gods abandoned his brothers and did not support their actions, which were against the divine will. Because of this crucial difference, Esarhaddon was always bound to attain the throne. Pongratz-Leisten (2015, 344) points out the unusual composition of Nin A, which, instead of beginning with the royal genealogies typical of the titulary, opens with a strong emphasis on divine election:

I am my older brothers' youngest brother (and) by the command of the gods Aššur, Šin, Šamaš, Bēl, and Nabû, Ištar of Nineveh, (and) Ištar of Arbela, (my) father, who engendered me, elevated me firmly in the assembly of my brothers, saying: ‘This is the son who will succeed me.’ (i8-12)

Later, Assurbanipal would make similar claims in his Prism F, where he states that it was the gods' instructions that led his father to choose him for the kingship (Porter 1993, 42-43). In Esarhaddon's Nin A inscription, both his unusual election as crown prince and his tumultuous rise to power are interpreted as the fulfilment of the gods' will. Collection 1 furthers this message by showing the continuing divine support for the appointed heir. Their aim was to show that Assurbanipal, having been divinely appointed for kingship, was destined to attain it, and exercise his rule with divine support, in spite of any possible resistance, just like his father had.

Nissinen (1998, 127-150) brings other documents to the discussion that may be connected with this event, but his theory about the role of Sasî is somewhat convoluted.

³⁹ See also Nissinen 1998, 15; Pongratz-Leisten 2015, 344.

Pongratz-Leisten (2015, 357) goes so far as to state that the aim of all the oracle collections was not to legitimize Esarhaddon's reign but to create a new model of succession anchored in divine election, a model that could be purposefully applied to justify the nomination of Assurbanipal as crown prince. Throughout her analysis of the collections (345-360), the author tends to treat them as a cohesive, complete, narrative. However, we must keep in mind that the conception of these texts as a corpus is a modern construct (Caramelo 2002, 16). Their only sure association with each other is that they all date from the reign of Esarhaddon. Also, there could have been other collections similar to the ones we know today that were since lost. Although, as we have seen, all three collections contain oracles that allude to the period of this king's rise to power, it seems reducing to say that their sole aim was to reinvent his ascension as a new paradigm. While they do serve this purpose, they are similarly concerned with other trying aspects of Esarhaddon's reign, such as the relations with Babylonia, which we will address in the following section.⁴⁰

De Jong (2007, 268) believes oracles 1.1 and 1.6 refer to the unsuccessful campaign against Egypt in 674 rather than the succession war. This does not change his analysis that collection 1 is meant to support Assurbanipal's nomination as crown prince. Rather the author believes that these were included to show that the gods were continuously supportive of Esarhaddon's kingship and political action and constituted a promise of future victory over Egypt for both king and crown prince. According to this interpretation, even collection 1 was meant to support not only the succession plans but other hurdles in Esarhaddon's reign.

Just as the gods placed Esarhaddon on the throne and then continuously aided his actions, now the same support would apply to Assurbanipal. The passage in the Nin A inscription that directly mentions prophecy reads:

They (the gods) **continually and regularly** encouraged me with oracles through ecstasies, the message(s) of the gods and goddess(es). (ii6-7)⁴¹

⁴⁰ We might add that, even though Pongratz-Leisten (2015, 347) focuses her analysis on the matter of succession, she also associates the collections with other types of literary texts that became popular under the late Sargonids and that can all be read as justifications of any and all exceptional royal actions.

⁴¹ Emphasis mine: *ši-pir mah-he-e na-áš-par-ti DINGIR.MEŠ u ^diš-tar ka-a-an ú-sad-di-ru-u-ni ú-šar-hi-šu-u-ni*

The main focus may be on succession, but the phrasing in this passage implies that Esarhaddon, in his every endeavour, was constantly receiving positive oracles that showed him continuous divine support.

2.3 – The Babylonian question

The relationship between Babylonia and Assyria was a complex and difficult one from the time Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243-1207) first conquered Babylon. Porter (1993, 31) states that there were three major factors at play in the Babylonian tradition of resistance: the cooperation with Elam; the Aramean (and later Chaldean) tribes of southern Mesopotamia, that frequently provided the leadership for these movements; and the “native” Babylonians whom the Assyrians conceived of as being the traditional inhabitants of the ancient cities. In dealing with this resistance, Assyria reserves a deferential treatment to Babylonia that contrasts with their approach to other dominated entities. Radner (2016, 49-51) provides an example of this, from the time of Sargon II. When the Syrian rebel Ilu-bi'di was beat in 720, his capital city of Hamath was destroyed and all his collaborators executed. Ilu-bi'di himself was flayed alive, as is illustrated in a wall relief from the palace at Dur-Šarrukin. On the other hand, when after ten years of insurrection Sargon finally managed to oust Merodach-Baladan (Marduk-apla-iddina) from Babylon in 710, the city was left unscathed and there were no public displays of violence, a strategy probably designed to win him support as king of Babylon. Besides the idea of cultural indebtedness to the old cities of southern Mesopotamia, Radner (2010, 30) adds an extra point: the scholars are very important in the exercise of power, and, through them, so is the omen tradition. This tradition presupposes the existence of a throne of Akkad. Though it equally includes the lands called Elamtu, Amurru and Subartu, these terms are more generic, the last one coming to be identified with Assyria. The concept of Akkad, however, is associated with the region of Babylonia from the beginning of the second millennium, which could suggest that the existence of a throne in this region was seen as a structural element.

In the reign of Esarhaddon, the Babylonian question is at the forefront. After the revolt that started in 694 and that soon led to the execution of his son, Aššur-nādin-šumi,

Sennacherib laid a siege to the city of Babylon that lasted for over a year.⁴² Finally, in 689, the victorious Assyrian king stormed the city, destroying its walls and temples and carrying off the statues of the gods, among which Marduk. Sennacherib claims to have flooded the city, causing even further devastation:

I destroyed, devastated, (and) burned with fire the city, and (its) buildings, from its foundations to its crenelations. I removed the brick(s) and earth, as much as there was, from the (inner) wall and outer wall, the temples, (and) the ziggurat, (and) I threw (it) into the Arahtu river. I dug canals into the center of that city and (thus) levelled their site with water. I destroyed the outline of its foundations and (thereby) made its destruction surpass that of the Deluge. So that in the future, the site of that city and (its) temples will be unrecognizable, I dissolved it (Babylon) in water and annihilated (it), (making it) like a meadow. (RINAP 3, 223 50-54)

Even allowing for some exaggeration on Sennacherib's report of this campaign, such a harsh treatment of Babylon was unprecedented. On the years following the destruction of the city, the Babylonian documentation is sparse and with atypical and inconsistent dating, which could imply that there was not a centralized power (Frame 1992, 61-62). Sennacherib never used the title of king of Babylon, and the Babylonian documentation refers to this period as kingless years (Brinkman 1983, 35n4).⁴³ When Esarhaddon is crowned, he immediately starts to reverse his father's policy towards Babylonia.

2.3.1 – Babylonia during the reign of Esarhaddon

The ambitious building projects of the Neo-Babylonian rulers make it difficult to identify traces of the devastation caused by Sennacherib. However, in residential areas, archaeology has revealed signs of abandonment, if not systematic destruction: it is possible that the destruction was focused on the walls of the city and its temples and administrative core while the rest was left subject to plundering and eventual desertion (Frame 1992, 56). Esarhaddon's inscriptions describing the building and restoration projects he would come to make confirm that there was some degree of destruction in his father's reign, while a letter (SAA 18 14) from an official named Ubaru praises the king for the resettlement of Babylon and claims that the people of the city bless the king for returning captives and booty (Porter 1993, 47).

⁴² Brinkman (1973, 93) states that text YBC 11377 describes the harsh conditions in Babylon during the siege and dates the document to 690, fifteen months before the capitulation of the city in 689.

⁴³ For example, Chron. 1 iii28: "eighth year of there not being a king in Babylon".

It is possible that Esarhaddon started the building projects in Babylon as soon as 680 (Frame 1992, 67). The king claims to have undertaken restoration work on the temples, namely the temple of Marduk, Esaggil, and the ziggurat, Etemenanki, as well as on the city walls. His son, Assurbanipal, would equally claim to have carried out work in these locations. Porter (1993, 50-59) demonstrates that both kings had extensive building projects in Babylon: Esarhaddon focused more on the temples, which his son may have completed, while the work on the city walls seems to have fallen more to the reign of Assurbanipal. A Babylonian document dating from the end of 679 points to the conclusion that, by this date, the city was at least partly resettled (Frame 1992, 68). There were also building works in Dēr, Borsippa, and Uruk, and gods were returned to their temples in Dēr, Sippar-Aruru, Larsa and Uruk (Frame 1992, 75-76; Porter 1993, 60-64). Finally, Esarhaddon rebuilt and promoted the ancient Akkad, perhaps on the occasion of the return of Ištar of Akkad by Elam in 674: there had been no reference to this city in the documentation from the 500 years prior to his reign (Frame 1992, 74).

Nabû-zēr-kitti-līšir, was a son of Merodach-Baladan and governor of the Sealand, the southernmost region of Mesopotamia, which, at this time, seems to have been largely under the control of the Chaldean tribe Bīt-Yākin. Profiting of the succession war in Assyria, he revolted and laid siege to the city of Ur. After having successfully attained the throne in Nineveh, Esarhaddon quickly responded and the leader of the revolt fled to Elam where he was executed, presumably in order to keep good relations with Assyria at the time. Esarhaddon proceeded to install a less problematic son of Merodach-Baladan as governor of the Sealand and head of the Bīt-Yākin: Na'id-Marduk. Later, a third son of the old Babylonian king, with the backing of Elam, vied for control of this region but was unsuccessful. The dating of this event is uncertain, but it must have happened before 675, because on that date Urtak ascended the throne of Elam and made peace with Assyria, an arrangement that would hold for the remainder of Esarhaddon's reign. In 678, both the governor of Nippur and the leader of another Chaldean tribe, the Bīt-Dakkuri, were taken to Assyria and executed. Again in 675 the current holders of these two positions are equally transported to Assyria, presumably to meet a similar fate. In the letter SAA 18 70, apparently another governor of Nippur complains that the water supply of the city was cut by rebel forces led by a Šillaya. Several other documents report anti-Assyrian activities by an individual of this name, but the degree of his success is difficult to ascertain. Since he disappears from the sources around 675 it seems safe to assume that

this threat was neutralized by then.⁴⁴ Towards the end of the reign of Esarhaddon, the correspondence of one of his important officials, Mar-Issar, reveals several instances of poor management and corruption.⁴⁵

All the above information leads Frame (1992, 101) to the conclusion that the Assyrian king continuously worked towards the pacification of Babylonia, but the region remained difficult to control. Nevertheless, we agree with Porter's reading of the events. The fact that we find Babylonians denouncing rebellious actions and appealing to Assyria, as is the case of the governor of Nippur, shows that the anti-Assyrian feeling was far from unanimous. The more relevant point is that, unlike what happened under both Sargon and Sennacherib, none of the moments of insurrection gained weight and developed into a full revolt. This should be seen as a success of Esarhaddon's policy (Porter 1993, 4-5).

Esarhaddon's relations with Babylonia may have started even before his ascension to the throne. De Jong (2007, 258-9) has remarked that the fact that there was not a widespread revolt starting in the Babylonian cities when Sennacherib was murdered may suggest that some of them, among which Babylon itself, were already supporting Esarhaddon's claim and taking his side on the conflict for the throne. In fact, we find an instance of support clearly stated in a letter by the Babylonian astrologer Bel-ušeziḫ where, similarly to what we find in oracle 1.8, Esarhaddon is addressed first as crown prince and later as king. In this letter he states that it was he

who told the omen of the kingship of my lord the crown prince Esarhaddon to the exorcist Dadā and the queen mother, saying: 'Esarhaddon will rebuild Babylon and restore Esagil, and [honor] me'. (SAA 10 109, o13-15)⁴⁶

The fact that this scholar reported an omen of Esarhaddon's kingship to Naqia and another individual, suggests that already when the crown prince was struggling against his brothers, he had supporters in Babylonia (Nissinen 1998, 92-93). It is not impossible that, even before, there was some lobbying between Naqia and pro-Babylonian actors working towards endorsing Esarhaddon's nomination as heir, especially if Sennacherib could have begun to soften his policy towards the southern capital (Caramelo 2002, 228-9), though

⁴⁴ It is possible that the mentions of internal unrest in oracle 2.4, since they are juxtaposed with references to foreign powers confronted around 675, could refer to this revolt led by Šillaya (de Jong 2007, 265).

⁴⁵ The reconstitution of events presented in this paragraph follows the detailed account, with abundant references to source material, provided by Frame (1992). Porter (1993) presents a similar narrative.

⁴⁶ Here, "me" could possibly refer to Marduk, in which case this god would be the sender of the omens. This is far from certain since the word "honor" is reconstructed.

this remains uncertain.⁴⁷ What is equally interesting about this passage is that Bel-ušeziḫ connects Esarhaddon's kingship directly to the rebuilding of Babylon and the temple of Marduk. Since the omens translate signs from the gods, the underlying idea is that the future king was divinely appointed with this specific mission of reconstruction in sight.

2.3.2 – The ideological framing of Babylonia's reconstruction

In her study on Esarhaddon's Babylonian policy, Porter (1993) demonstrates how this king, while still affirming himself as a fundamentally Assyrian king, went to great lengths to portray himself in Babylonia as a truly Babylonian king and not a foreign overlord. His extensive building projects in Babylon play into his image as a builder king, a fundamental trope of kingship in southern Mesopotamia since the Sumerian period. Esarhaddon would also share booty from his campaigns with the Babylonian cities, and would even reprise the use of the traditional titles his grandfather had likewise worn: king of Sumer and Akkad (*šar māt Šumeri u Akkadi*) and governor of Babylon (*šakkanak Bābili*).

A central example to the argument presented by Porter is a comparison between the Babylon (Bab) A inscription, which dates from 680 and was discovered in Babylon, and the Aššur A inscription, from 679, found in Aššur. Both inscriptions address construction works carried out in the respective cities they are named after. On the opening of the Bab A inscription, Esarhaddon uses the titles of "great king", "mighty king", "king of the world" and "king of Assyria", followed immediately by "governor of Babylon" and "king of Sumer and Akkad". The king proceeds to evoke the favour of Marduk, called lord of lords, and the love of his consort, Zarpanitu. There is no mention of the god Aššur. On the other hand, on the Aššur A inscription, intended for an Assyrian audience, Esarhaddon displays his full, heavy titulature, adding to the above the titles of "governor of Enlil" and "priest (*šangû*) of Aššur". This is followed by the typical genealogy with, likewise, the full titulature of his father Sennacherib, who was entirely

⁴⁷ Porter (1993, 132) cautions against the idea that there were organized opposing parties in the Assyrian court, one defending a pro-Babylonian policy and the other opposing it. There is no reason to assume there was anything more than courtiers who leaned more in one direction or the other.

left out of the Bab A inscription. In Aššur A the national god of Assyria takes the forefront (95-99). It is important to note that, although these (like Nin A) were foundation inscriptions, destined to be buried, they were probably also meant for contemporary audiences, which their very content seems to suggest: they circulated among scholars and court personnel, copies could be saved in the temples of Assyria and it is even likely they were read to the people on state ceremonies (106-15).

Even in the various texts about the destruction and the rebuilding works in Babylon, inscriptions Bab A-E and G⁴⁸, it is possible to identify subtle but important variations between the versions found in Nineveh and those found in Babylon. Bab B and G have many affinities and they were both found in Nineveh. It is in these versions that we find the more detailed accounts of lawlessness in Babylon, prior to its destruction, and more lengthy and detailed literary descriptions of evil omens, and of Marduk's anger against the city and its destruction and abandonment (Brinkman 1983, 40; Porter 1993, 99-105).⁴⁹ The anger of the Babylonian gods could be more openly celebrated with an Assyrian audience in mind. Even so, the overall picture of all the inscriptions dealing with the destruction and reconstruction of Babylon is the same. Evil omens and the anger of Marduk towards the people of Babylon, usually due to misuse of the treasures of Esaggil, result in the city being destroyed. In contrast, favourable signs from the gods bring Esarhaddon to rebuild the city and its temples. There is an underlying theme of divine alienation leading to devastation, and divine reconciliation leading to reconstruction. The obvious omission is Sennacherib's role in the process of destruction, which is possible because the emphasis of these inscriptions is not on historical narrative, but in providing a religious explanation that can translate *why* things happened as they did (Brinkmann 1983, 40-41).

By focusing on divine will and favour as moving forces, the text of these inscriptions indirectly clears Sennacherib of any guilt, while simultaneously supporting Esarhaddon in reversing his father's policy (Frame 1992, 71).⁵⁰ In this regard, it is similar

⁴⁸ Brinkman (1983) adds to this an extra, more fragmentary, text, which he calls "H", now RINAP 4, 117.

⁴⁹ Brinkman (1983, 39) provides a useful table in which he shows which literary tropes of this account feature in each version.

⁵⁰ On the subject of this reversal of policy, it is worth considering the text known as the *Sin of Sargon* (SAA 3 33). In this text, Sennacherib addresses the gods to try to understand what the sin of his father (Sargon) was, that caused his violent death and the loss of his body, only to discover that the previous king had not paid due respect to the gods of Babylon. If this text was written in the time of Esarhaddon, it can be read as reinforcing his positive Babylonian policy by implying that Sennacherib met the same destiny as his father because he committed the same sin (Frame 1992, 72; Porter 1993, 145). It could, however, date either to the beginning of the reign of Sennacherib, when he was still planning to maintain the traditional

to the Nin A inscription, since both reinterpret controversial historical events using the logic of divine will and sanction. This does not imply that there were no positive omens really transmitted to Esarhaddon encouraging the rebuilding of Babylon or that the idea that the ancient city had lost divine favour was purely a strategical fabrication of the Assyrian king's scholars. The narrative of these inscriptions is very ideologically charged, but this does not mean that, at least to a degree, it wasn't really believed that Babylon had been destroyed because it had caused the gods' anger, since if it were not so the gods would not have allowed it to be destroyed. After all, things only happen as the gods will them.

In this interpretation of events, Esarhaddon acts strictly in alignment with divine will, being an agent of reconciliation. Turning back to the letter of Bel-ušeziḫ, quoted in the previous section, we find that, at least for this scholar, bringing about the reconciliation of the god Marduk and the rebuilding of the Babylonian temples was the mission in view of which Esarhaddon had been elected for kingship. This view is clearly expressed in the Bab A inscription, when, after narrating the destruction of Babylon, Esarhaddon addresses Marduk saying:

You truly selected me, Esarhaddon, in the assembly of my older brothers t[o] put these matters right, and you (are the one) who placed your sweet [pro]tection over me, swept away all of my enemies like a flood, killed all of my foes and made me attain my wish, (and), to appease the heart of your great divinity (and) to please your spirit, you entrusted me with shepherding Assyria. (ii9-23)

In this inscription, intended for Babylonian audiences, it is the god Marduk that selects Esarhaddon for the kingship of Assyria. Where in the Nin A inscription the future king had been appointed by an assembly of gods, here we have only Marduk, and it is also the god of Babylon that takes Ištar's place next to the king, fighting for him in the succession war.

According to Porter (1993, 121-33), it is possible to discern in the official inscriptions, from around the middle point of Esarhaddon's reign, a greater effort in bridging the gap between Assyria and Babylonia. An interesting example is the text Aššur-Babylon A, in which Marduk, among other southern gods, is said to have been born in Ešarra, the temple of his father, Aššur. The aim of this ideological approximation was to prepare for the succession plan: a double crown with Šamaš-šum-ukin on the throne of Babylon answering to his brother on the throne of Assyria. The idea of placing

accommodating approach to Babylonian politics (Brinkman 1973, 94), or to the very last years, signaling a change of mind in the king (Nissinen [2010] 2019, 241).

one of his sons on the throne of Babylon might have been, already in itself, a measure to appease the southern neighbour by giving the ancient city its own king (Frame 1992, 95). There were other reasons, besides securing his succession plan, why Esarhaddon chose an appeasing policy towards Babylonia from the very beginning of his reign, namely the disruptions on the mountainous territories to the East, revolts on the West and the desire to conquer Egypt (Porter 1993, 31).⁵¹ Still, we have seen that the Babylonian question and the matter of succession play into each other both at the moment of Esarhaddon's ascension and later at Assurbanipal's nomination.⁵² The return of the statue of Marduk, absent since Sennacherib plundered the city, would have been the last step in Esarhaddon's Babylonian policy, the natural result of the peaceful union of Assyria and its southern neighbour (Porter 1993, 146-51). This king, however, never accomplished this feat and the statue was taken to its home in Esaggil in 668, after his death, by his son Šamaš-šum-ukin.⁵³

A passage from oracle 2.3 mentions the long absence of the god Marduk from Babylon, equating it to an exile (Parpola 1997, 16; Nissinen [2003a] 2019, 125; Caramelo 2002, 231):

The gods of Esaggil languish in the 'steppe' of mixed evil. Quickly let two burnt offerings be sent out to their presence, and let them go and announce your well-being! (ii24-27)

As Parpola (1997, 16) points out, the sign for "steppe" (EDIN) is used here and in 1.8, the oracle addressed to Naqia, referring there to Esarhaddon's exile before the succession war. The divinity speaking, here Ištar of Arbela, urges the king to consider the regrettable situation of the statues of the gods of Babylon and demands he present them with offerings. While giving messages of continual support, like "Your son and grandson shall rule as kings before Ninurta" (ii13-14), the goddess simultaneously encourages the king to honour the cult of the Esaggil. In this respect, Nissinen likens this oracle with a passage of another letter by Bel-ušeziḫ where the astrologer seemingly quotes prophetic words of Marduk:

The king of the gods, Marduk, is reconciled with the king, my lord; whatever the king my lord says, he can do. Sitting on your throne, you will vanquish your enemies, conquer your foes and plunder the land of your enemy. Bel has said 'Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, is (seated) on the

⁵¹ Frame (1992, 71) similarly suggests that, in all likelihood, Esarhaddon's main motivation in appeasing Babylon was his preference to employ his armies elsewhere.

⁵² It is worth noting that oracle 2.1 and possibly 2.6 are addressed to Naqia, being likely connected to the succession conflict, and they both mention Babylon or the Esaggil.

⁵³ There may, however, have been an earlier attempt at returning the statue (de Jong 2007, 306-7; Frame 1992, 77; SAA 10 24). On the possibility that the original statue of Marduk was destroyed and later replaced by the Assyrians on this date, see Frame (1992, 56-57).

throne like Marduk-šapik-zeri, and (while) he is seated there, I will deliver all the countries into his hands'. (SAA 10 111, r19-26)

The author points out how, while encouraging and promising victory to Esarhaddon, the prophecy simultaneously encourages him to attend to Babylonia's needs by stating that the king seats in the throne like Marduk-šapik-zeri (1081-1069), an Isin II king who worked on Babylon's walls and the temple of Nabû in Borsippa (Nissinen 1998, 100-1).

In the letter just quoted, Bel-ušeziḫ comforts Esarhaddon saying that Marduk is reconciled with him. In oracle 2.5, the speaking deity, again Iṣtar,⁵⁴ tells the king "I will put Assyria in order and reconcile the angry gods with Assyria" (iii19-20). We can interpret these angry gods to be the gods from Esaggil, who will now be reconciled with Esarhaddon (Nissinen [2010] 2019, 240). In the Bab A-E and G inscriptions, considered above, the Assyrian king acts as an agent of reconciliation: the god Marduk had become angry with Babylon, and caused it to be destroyed, but now he was reconciled and, through his divine will, Esarhaddon would rebuild the devastated city. However, both in the letter by Bel-ušeziḫ and in oracle 2.5 we find mention of Marduk being reconciled with Esarhaddon and the gods of Babylonia being reconciled with Assyria, respectively. It seems, then, that the Assyrian king could be represented as seeking favour and reconciliation from the god of Babylon, whom his father had taken from his home in Esaggil, while also being portrayed as the means through which the god was reconciled with his city.⁵⁵

The mention of the gods of Esaggil in 2.3 is the most direct and complete allusion to Babylonian policy in the oracle collections. Nevertheless, connections to Babylonia can be found all throughout collection 2: 2.1 mentions goddesses in Esaggil; 2.4 is spoken by a woman called Urkittu-šarrat, who is from Kalhu, but whose professional name alludes to Iṣtar of Uruk, or Urkittu; 2.6 mentions Babylon and is spoken by Urkittu herself (Nissinen [2010] 2019, 234). Parpola (1997, lxix) considers the main theme of collection 2 to be the stabilization of Esarhaddon's rule, mentioning Babylonia alongside internal unrest in Assyria and the vanquishing of enemies. In oracle 2.3, for instance, Iṣtar of Arbela says:

[I will annihilate] whatever enemies you [have]. As for [you, stay] in your palace; I will [reconcile] Assyria with you. I will protect [you] by day and by dawn and [consolidate] your crown. (ii1-5)

⁵⁴ Although in this oracle it is never stated that the speaking deity is Iṣtar, given the context of the collection, there is no reason to assume this oracle is not the word of the goddess (Parpola 1997; Nissinen 1998).

⁵⁵ The idea of divine reconciliation is further explored in section 3.2.3.

Given the fact that Sennacherib had been murdered in court, where he probably believed himself to be safe, it is not surprising that concern with disloyalty and hidden treason appears several times in the collection:

I will look, I will listen, I will search out the disloyal ones, and I will put them into the hands of my king. (2.4, ii31-33)

I will pull away the cover of your enemies and shed the blood of my king's enemies. I will protect my king; I will bring enemies in neckstocks and vassals with tribute before your feet. (2.5, iii21-25)

In the second passage, from oracle 2.5, the goddess promises victory over internal and foreign enemies alike. To this we can add the mentions of Manneans, Urartians, Elamites and Mugallu, king of Mellid, found in 2.4.

The Babylonian theme aligns perfectly with a collection concerned with the consolidation of Esarhaddon's authority over Assyria and its empire, especially since his policy regarding Babylonia was a complete departure from the previous reign, and an endeavour he started immediately upon attaining the throne. The Babylonian question grows in importance as it is, as we have seen, a fundamental aspect of Esarhaddon's unprecedented succession plan. In this segment we have seen how a trusted official, like Bel-ušeziḫ, could use either omens (SAA 10 109) or prophecy (SAA 10 111) to sway the king, and those closest to him, towards a policy favourable to Babylonia. This does not mean the astrologer did not believe the divine messages he was relaying, but rather that he could use prophecy to push the king in the direction he believed corresponded to the divine will. We are reminded of the three advisors we encountered in segment 1.2.2 trying to influence Zimri-Lim's political stance towards Ešnunna. Oracle 2.3 may have similarly been transmitted to the court in order to encourage Esarhaddon to rebuild the Esaggil and restore the cult. Nissinen goes so far as to suggest that some of the prophets of Assyria "seem to have made the case of Babylonia their own" ([2010] 2019, 244). However, this is no longer the aim of oracle 2.3 in the secondary context of collection 2. Here, 2.3 and the other mentions of Babylonia are combined with messages of divine protection and encouragement, showing that Esarhaddon's decision to rebuild the Esaggil and to favour Babylonia is in alignment with the wishes and plans of the gods, as are all the king's actions.

2.4 – Esarhaddon’s illness

Esarhaddon was a sick man. Over twenty documents, many of which letters from his chief physician Urad-Nanaya show the king chronically ill, suffering from acute symptomatic episodes at irregular intervals, especially towards the end of his reign. Having suffered a severe bout of sickness in 670, the king recovered only to die the following year on his way to Egypt (Parpola 1983b, 230-1). His death is mentioned in a Babylonian chronicle as follows:

The twelfth year: The king of Assyria marched to Egypt (but) became ill on the way and died on the tenth day of the month Marchesvan. (Chron. 1, iv30-31)

Parpola (1983b, 231) lifts from the relevant sources a list of the symptoms that afflicted the king: “fever; feebleness; lack of appetite; articular stiffness; eye affection; cutaneous eruption, blisters; chills; earache”. He then proceeds to make a tentative diagnosis of *systemic lupus erythematosus*, known commonly as lupus (231-4). This is an illness that alternates between flares of unpleasant symptoms and periods of remission and, even today, it is incurable. We will most likely never know exactly what Esarhaddon’s ailment was because a diagnosis based solely on the sources will always be fallible. However, as Parpola (1983b, 234) himself states, the important idea for the historian to consider is that whether or not Esarhaddon had lupus, he suffered from something *similar*. What is relevant is that the king suffered from recurrent episodes of sickness, which were visible, at times incapacitating, and ultimately lethal.

2.4.1 – Illness and succession

Esarhaddon’s disease must have been a real obstacle to his efficient exercise of kingship if it was liable to incapacitate him at unpredictable times. It is even possible that it already caused difficulties at the time of his nomination as crown prince. If the future king’s disease was already known, the calumnies and slander circulated by his brothers may have related to his physical weakness making him unfit to rule (Parpola 1983b, 235). Later, his poor health was likely one of the reasons that led Esarhaddon to officially name

his successors a mere 8 years after being crowned himself (235). The political aspect more directly affected by the king's disease was the need to secure his succession.

After designating Assurbanipal as crown prince, Esarhaddon started involving him in his decision making. It is possible the king leaned more on his designated heir because of his poor health (Frame 1992, 97). In 671 Esarhaddon had the substitute king ritual performed, and he would repeat it two more times on the following years. In this ritual, the king steps down for a hundred days while someone else is installed on the throne as a sort of decoy for ill fates. This implies that, in the later years of his reign, Esarhaddon was partly removed from his duties for a long period of time, which would seem a lot easier if we assume his sons and heirs could take up some of his responsibilities (Radner 2003, 171-2).

Esarhaddon also seems to lean exceptionally on his mother, Naqia. A letter from a Babylonian official concerning political matters (SAA 18 85) is addressed to the queen mother. This does not mean necessarily that the queen had an official position in the region and is more likely an indication that she was an efficient channel of communication to reach the king. Even if this is the case it is possible that Naqia was more involved in her son's politics because of his frail health (Frame 1992, 93).⁵⁶ In fact, this condition coupled with worries about the succession, could explain Naqia's exceptional pre-eminence: Esarhaddon needed the support of someone of unquestionable loyalty in case he came to an untimely death (Melville 1999, 36). The king was evidently concerned with this possibility: there is a provision in his "Succession Treaty" for "If Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, passes away while his sons are minors" (Parpola 1983b, 235; SAA 2 6 o83-84). Finally, the emission of the "Treaty of Zakutu" by the queen mother, supporting Assurbanipal's right to the throne, reveals both that Esarhaddon was highly concerned with ensuring a peaceful succession, and that he believed his mother might outlive him, as she did.

⁵⁶ For a discussion of this document see Melville (1999, 63-67).

2.4.2 – Illness and the image of the king

Esarhaddon's failing health raised very real difficulties, as we have seen, but it also calls into question the king's very image. The Assyrian king was a figure of super-human stature who bore a likeness to the gods themselves, an idea we will explore later in section 3.2.1. For the present, we wish only to point out how this ideal image is incompatible with Esarhaddon's physical debility. No one is immune to sickness, but this king's periodic bouts of illness certainly made it more difficult to forget that he is only human, especially considering the visible manifestations of his condition.

In ancient Assyria, diseases could have a natural explanation, but they could also be seen as a sign of divine disfavour. Esarhaddon was certainly concerned with the origin of his ailment, as is evident in this passage from a letter by Urad-Nanaya, his chief physician:

The king, my lord, keeps on saying to me: 'Why do you not diagnose the nature of this illness of mine and bring about its cure?' (SAA 10 315, o7-10)

In letter SAA 10 43 the king seems determined to fast for several days, and in SAA 10 196 he is in voluntary reclusion. In both cases his scholars try to comfort him and coax him out of his fast and isolation, which might well have been a form of self-imposed penitence. One of these scholars even tries to reason with the king explaining that his behaviour aggravates the illness (Fink 2018, 151-2):

G[ood ad]vice is to be heeded: restlessness, not eating and not drinking disturbs the mind and adds to illness. In this matter the king should listen to [his se]rvant (SAA 10 196 r14-e1)

This correspondence between the king and his scholars reveals a reality entirely different from the heroic picture of his inscriptions: that of an ill man worried about his future (Fink 2018, 153).

Esarhaddon's disease may have been an additional factor contributing to his particular interest in astrology, divination, and prophecy. After all, any of his contemporaries would have been deemed superstitious by our standards, but it seems natural that a very sick man would have had an even greater concern with the plans of the gods (Parpola 1983b, 235).

In the oracle collections there is not any unequivocal mention of the king's illness. De Jong (2007, 267) suggests that the passage in 1.1 where Ištar says "You are paralysed" (i25) should be associated with an acute episode of the king's disease. Nissinen ([2003a]

2019, 112) translates the same passage reading the word *mu-gi* as “cramps”, resulting in “you have got cramps”, but he does not establish any connection to Esarhaddon’s health. In the context of this passage, where Ištar reassures the king of her support and claims she will stand by his side, especially if we prefer Parpola’s translation, the reference to paralysis could simply evoke the king’s fearful stillness before an enemy, a fearfulness the goddess dispels with her encouragement.

Pongratz-Leisten (2015, 339-41) establishes an illuminating parallel between Esarhaddon and the Hittite Hattušili III (c.1267-1240). This king also came to the throne under difficult circumstances. According to his own account, he was the youngest son and of frail health, but Ištar-Šauška sent a dream oracle destined to his father in which she favoured Hattušili and asked that he be surrendered to her worship. He became a priest of Ištar before attaining the kingship, and the goddess constantly stood by his side and delivered his enemies. His circumstances are quite similar to Esarhaddon’s, and so is his reliance on the support of the goddess, namely in the context of succession.

The correlation between Esarhaddon’s illness and the oracle collections is not a direct one. However, the issue of the king’s frail health factors into his political action and especially, as we have seen, into his plan of succession. The oracle collections aim to support the king’s actions showing them in accordance with the divine will, and the issue of succession in particular is one of the most prevalent themes. Thus, Esarhaddon’s disease is another frailty that could threaten his succession plan, which the prophecies aimed at strengthening through the voice of Ištar.

2.5 – Final thoughts

The challenges for Esarhaddon did not end when he won the fratricide war that placed him on the throne. He was certainly occupied, as one would expect, with the continual expansion of the Assyrian empire. Besides, he had an unprecedented plan of succession, which was liable to prompt contestation like his own nomination had, and he devised a new Babylonian policy that went in a direction completely opposite to that of

his father, Sennacherib. All the while, Esarhaddon was grappling with the consequences of his debilitated health.

There is a symmetry between the oracle collections and the royal inscriptions of Esarhaddon: in both, the actions of the king, even the ones that could more easily be called into question, are shown to be in accordance with the will of the gods. As we have seen in Part 1, the fundamental trait that qualified an oracle as being true prophecy was that it affirmed the pre-established world view of its audience. The emphasis is then on permanence and the maintenance of order. The oracles included in the collections align with the dominant ideology that the Assyrian king, having been selected for this role, is meant to achieve it, and carry it with success. The collections dispel worries and anxieties about the future because they show that, even in times of crisis, the gods' favour will lead the Assyrian king to victory, and order will continue to prevail. To paraphrase Caramelo, they aim to show that, even through challenging times, nothing in the future will be fundamentally different from the past (2002, 221; cf. 344-48). Esarhaddon was chosen by the gods for the kingship of Assyria, and they, especially Ištar, are always by his side.

3 – Ištar and the King

There is a strong link, albeit not an exclusive one, between the goddess Ištar and the prophetic phenomenon starting from the very first Mesopotamian attestations. In the Neo-Assyrian oracle collections, the goddess is unquestionably the main speaking deity. She addresses Esarhaddon declaring her support, predicting his success, ensuring his safety, and proclaiming her love for the king with words such as: “I am mindful of you, I have loved you greatly” (1.6, iv22-25). Ištar was not the only deity with whom the Assyrian king had a privileged relationship, but it was a bond of continual importance. This connection was articulated in a number of ways and, in the case of the late Neo-Assyrian kings, one of these ways was through written prophecy. In this chapter we start by considering how Ištar is involved in the oracle collections, and then we reflect upon her connection to the king as expressed through these texts. We will then examine how the goddess manifests her support through loving protection.

3.1 – Ištar in the oracle collections

3.1.1 – The goddess’s liminality as a fundamental aspect

Thorkild Jacobsen famously described Inanna/Ištar as “all woman and of infinite variety” (1976, 143). His study highlights the intricate nature of the goddess and the wide range of her activities. Inanna/Ištar is infinitely complex and an attempt to go over even the main aspects of her personality and mythology is very much beyond the scope of the present study. In this section we briefly consider the variety of her nature in itself, since this characteristic of the goddess plays a role in her connection with prophecy and with the king.

Inanna/Ištar was associated with the planet Venus. Her astral duality, being the morning and evening star, can explain the ambiguities in her character and polarities in her behaviour, at times caring and at times cruel (Westenholz 2007, 345; Almeida 2015, 133). Rivkah Harris (1991) described Inanna/Ištar as a paradox. The goddess is contradictory and at times chaotic. She embodied irreducible paradoxes into her character and action, therefore transcending them. By crossing the line between order and disorder, she gave shape and structure to civilization. Inanna/Ištar is defined by this liminality: “She is neither here nor there. She is betwixt and between” (265).

A central aspect to Harris’s definition of the goddess is her androgyny, particularly, her androgynous behaviour, that blurs the line between the sexes. Zainab Bahrani (2001, 143-4) cautions that an idea of androgynous behaviour results from a definition of certain attitudes as either masculine or feminine, but these categories are neither stable nor universal. The traits defined by Harris as masculine could likewise fit the trope of the *femme fatale*. For Bahrani, Inanna/Ištar represents “derailed femininity” (146). The goddess is chaotic and marginal, embodying otherness, an opposition to the norm of civilized Man. Man is defined as representing order, and Woman is defined as opposite to Man, so a deity embodying alterity must be feminine.⁵⁷ In the author’s words:

Because Woman’s position as a signifier is unfixed and ambiguous, she can be purity and lust, victim and destroyer, and her frightening aspect is often the threat of sexuality joined with death. (152)

The danger and violence of Inanna/Ištar need not be seen as incompatible with her sexuality and femininity. The coexistence of brutality and love in her actions is not a paradox, but rather destruction and death are the outcomes of the goddess’s extremes in love and sex. Adding this important nuance, Bahrani agrees with Harris in that Inanna/Ištar is a figure that transcends the bounds of civilized behaviour, therefore structuring society. To Jean-Jacques Glassner (2012) she is similarly a figure of liminality and transformation, and her femininity is a fundamental trait since “dans un monde qui se pense au masculin, le sexe féminin est l’image inverse de la norme” (263).

Inanna/Ištar crosses the boundaries between the civilized and the uncivilized. The goddess can also be associated with the underworld, the foremost example being the myth known as the *Descent of Ištar*, in which she crosses into this realm to try to conquer it

⁵⁷ Harris (1991, 263) actually alludes to this idea but does not develop it further.

(Almeida 2015, 265-332; cf. Barret 2007).⁵⁸ Caitlín Barret (2007) lists a number of instances where the iconography of objects found in burial contexts can be linked to Inanna/Ištar. The author also points out that, in the myth of *Inanna and Enki*, in which the goddess steals the ME-principles from Enki,⁵⁹ the ME of descending and ascending from the KUR, which can stand for the mountain and for the underworld, are among the ones stolen, which clearly connects the goddess with the transition between the realms of the living and the dead (23). Barret concludes that, as stated by Harris, the goddess is defined by transition and the crossing of boundaries:

Inana/Ishtar was a profoundly liminal figure who embodied the idea of contradiction. Spanning all realms, she was thus particularly concerned with the transition *between* realms. (56)

The goddess's liminality means that the crossing of boundaries between realms of existence is part of her nature. This being so, her continual involvement in prophecy seems natural, for prophecy is the transmission of knowledge from the realm of the divine to the sphere of human existence. Indeed, in the Neo-Assyrian oracle collections, Ištar is definitely the foremost divinity of prophetic communication. However, she is never, even in Assyria, the only divinity concerned with prophecy. This means that, though her liminality certainly plays into her connection with divine-human communication, it alone does not explain her particular involvement in prophecy, and in the oracle collections. In this corpus, the goddess's overwhelming predominance is most likely explained by her close connection to the king. This ties in with the fact, already remarked, that prophecy coming from circles more removed from the Assyrian court and elite deviates from this rule of Ištar's predominance. That being said, the goddess's special bond with the Neo-Assyrian kings, as seen in the oracle collections, must be examined bearing in mind this characteristic of liminality (see below 3.2.2, 3.2.3).

⁵⁸ Tzvi Abusch (1986) suggests that the encounter between Ištar and the hero Gilgameš in the *Gilgameš Epic* can be interpreted in this light. To the author, the goddess's proposition to the hero is, in fact, an invitation for him to join her in the underworld.

⁵⁹ Both these, among other myths, can be read in Stephanie Dalley's (2000) edition and translation.

3.1.2 – Ištar of Arbela and Ištar of Nineveh

Thus far, we have predominantly referred to the goddess communicating with the Assyrian king simply as Ištar. As stated in section 1.2.1, the oracle collections mainly attribute the divine words to Ištar of Arbela and to Mulissu, who, in the Neo-Assyrian period, is to be understood as equivalent to Ištar of Nineveh. As an example, in Esarhaddon's "Succession Treaty" (SAA 2 6), immediately preceding a mention of Ištar of Arbela, Mulissu is referred to as residing in Nineveh (Allen 2015, 177).

In a dedicatory inscription (RIMA 1 A.0.39.2), Samsi-Addu I (1796-1755) states he rebuilt, in Nineveh, a temple dedicated to Ištar that he claims had first been built by the Akkadian king Maništušu. This could be an early attestation of a localized cult of Ištar in Nineveh. Since this city was already a cult centre in the mid-third millennium, it is possible that the tradition of an Ištar cult precedes even this potential Akkadian intervention (Allen 2015, 162-3). The first mentions of Ištar of Arbela are later: Salmanazar I (1263-1234) claims to have worked on the Egašankalamma temple for Ištar of Arbela (RIMA 1 A.0.77.16), while an earlier document from 14th century Nuzi may also mention this localized version of the goddess (Allen 2015, 170-1). Julian Reade (1987) states that during the reign of Sennacherib we witness the promotion of a divine consort to the great god Aššur in the figure of Mulissu. In the Bavian reliefs we even see the king worship Aššur alongside the goddess. The author believes this to reflect an evolution towards the greater valuing of women at court, hinted at by Naqia's extraordinary influence, or by the unusual dedicatory inscription where Sennacherib celebrates his wife, Tašmetu-šarrat (141-2). This official promotion of Mulissu in the role of divine consort to Aššur could have contributed to a greater popularity of this goddess. On the other hand, of the 273 Assyrian texts mentioning Ištar of Arbela or her temple, 188 date to the reigns of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, and only 5.5% pre-date Sennacherib, which suggests this manifestation of the goddess was similarly enjoying mounting popularity under the late Sargonids (Nissinen 2020, 130).

Parpola (1997, xviii) points out that in oracle 2.4 the *incipit* reads "The word of Ištar of Arbela, the word of Queen Mulissu" (ii30) while the discourse that follows is written in first person singular, thus presenting the goddesses of Arbela and Nineveh as interchangeable synonyms. Spencer Allen (2015), while recognizing this to be true of 2.4 (185) maintains that the fundamental feature of this goddesses' identities is their

localization and that they should be viewed as entirely separate divinities that cannot be identified with each other (141-99). Porter (2004) equally argues that Ištar of Arbela and Ištar of Nineveh/Mulissu were thought of as entirely different divinities: they may appear frequently together and collaborate in various endeavours, mainly the protection of the king, but they do so separately and in distinct ways. Both authors point out that the goddesses so often juxtaposed perform different tasks, with Mulissu being usually in the role of mother of the king and Ištar of Arbela in the role of his wet nurse. Both suggest that the writers of SAA 3 3, an Assurbanipal hymn to the two Ištars, wished to present the goddesses as separate and with distinct responsibilities towards the king (Porter 2004, 41; Allen 2015, 155). To Porter, this means that any simple mention of Ištar must allude to either the goddess of Arbela or the goddess of Nineveh, even when her localized identity is not mentioned (43).

The fact that it remained possible to refer to only Ištar without further specification seems, however, relevant. In a text pertaining to a *tākultu*-ritual⁶⁰ of Assurbanipal (SAA 20 40), the goddess is evoked simply as Ištar, alongside with a myriad different appellations and modifications (Porter 2004, 43-4). This would seem to suggest, at least, that a more abstract and broad conception of Ištar coexisted with the worship of her localized manifestations. In the passages quoted previously of Nin A,⁶¹ Ištar of Nineveh and Ištar of Arbela appear together several times, being listed among the gods that support Esarhaddon and condemn his brothers. However, in the same document, when the king evokes his divine protector who stood by his side on the battlefield against his enemies, he calls her simply: “The goddess Ištar, the lady of war and battle” (i74).⁶²

Other than 2.4 in the oracle collections, there are other instances in the Neo-Assyrian prophetic corpus where the voices of Ištar of Arbela and Mulissu converge becoming one, such as oracle 7 and, especially, 9 (Parpola 1997, xviii; Caramelo 2002, 290; Nissinen 2020, 141). Besides, even if less frequently, the goddess of Arbela could also be identified with Mulissu, like her Ninevite counterpart.⁶³ In the psalm SAA 3 9 the name of Mulissu is applied to Nineveh and in the following line to Arbela, seeming to merge the two manifestations together through the identification with Mulissu. Moreover,

⁶⁰ Ritual including a sacred feast, which seems to have gained popularity under the Sargonids.

⁶¹ See above, page 33.

⁶² *ḏiṣ-tar be-leṭ MURUB₄ u MÈ*

⁶³ Allen (2015, 183) recognizes this factor, while maintaining that the goddesses should be seen as separate.

the habitual roles of Ištar of Nineveh as divine mother and Ištar of Arbela as divine nurse can sometimes be inverted (Nissinen 2020, 140-1).

To Nissinen (2020) the fact that the goddesses have slightly different but similar and complementary roles in texts like SAA 3 3 is much more telling of their parallel natures: “The point, hence, is the similarity rather than the difference of their specialties, which makes it possible to see the two goddesses as executing a shared agency” (141). Thus, to the author, the main difference between the two deities is not their role-casting, which is indeed very similar, but simply their attachment to the cults of different cities. With Arbela being the cradle of Neo-Assyrian prophecy, prophetic mediation formed an integral part of the agency of the local Ištar. The fact that this Ištar and her counterpart in Nineveh were so strongly associated is what led to the development of a prevalent idea of the goddesses’ shared agency. And this association could have been what prompted the integration of the cult of the Assyrian capital into the prophetic tradition from Arbela (142). Returning to Parpola’s idea that, in the oracle collections, Ištar of Arbela and Mulissu are interchangeable, it should be added that oracles like 2.4 and 9 could reflect a tendency, at least in certain circles of the cultural milieu, towards a syncretic assimilation of the two local identities of the Ištar-archetype goddesses (Caramelo 2002, 290).

3.1.3 – Briefly considering Ištar’s place in Parpola’s reconstruction of Assyrian religion

Parpola’s (1997) edition of the Neo-Assyrian prophecies is accompanied by a long and complex introduction. One of the more prominent (and debated) points of this text is a reconstruction of Assyrian religion where the author argues powerfully that, at the time of the writing of the oracles, there was a monotheistic understanding of the divine world where the separate deities were essentially aspects and powers of the all-powerful national god, Aššur. For the purposes of the present study, it is fundamental to take into consideration the place ascribed to Ištar in this author’s theory.

First, it is important to keep in mind that, as seen in the previous section, Parpola considers Mulissu and Ištar of Arbela to be entirely equivalent to each other in the prophetic corpus. If the gods of the Neo-Assyrian pantheon are aspects of Aššur, so too

is Ištar. A sign of this correspondence would be found in collection 3, where 3.3 refers to an *adê*-agreement⁶⁴ with Aššur and 3.4 seems to continue addressing this *adê*-agreement but now in the voice of Ištar (xix-xx). This brings us again to the issue of the double ruling dividing collection 3.⁶⁵ It falls precisely between 3.3 and 3.4 and should indicate that they were to be read separately. Parpola fails to consider this aspect which would invalidate this part of his argument. Still, this question alone, of course, does not dispel his hypothesis.

Parpola establishes a comparison between late Assyrian and early Hebrew religion, where entities such as angels exist as *powers* of the one God. Even later in Judaism and Christianity the existence of multiple heavenly entities overlaps with an idea of a transcendent god from which they ultimately derive. The author believes it is possible to establish a link between the Assyrian symbol of the Tree of Life, the sacred tree found often in palace reliefs being tended by *genii*, and the later mystical doctrine of Kabbalah. In kabbalistic lore, the sacred tree is a schematic model that depicts God as the sum total of his powers, seen as other divine entities. Parpola believes it is possible to reconstruct a similar model for Neo-Assyrian religion, in which Ištar and other gods are articulated as aspects of Aššur. The fact that this model can be neatly reconstructed fitting the requirements of kabbalistic doctrine leads him to conclude it is possible to ascertain that there was indeed an Assyrian origin to this scheme. This in turn demonstrates that there were similarities between the Assyrian and the later Hebrew concepts of the divine (xxii-xxiv).⁶⁶ In this we believe he falls into circular reasoning, because it is the connection he establishes between both religious worlds that leads him to the recreation of the tree model, which he in turn utilises as confirmation of that very connection. Parpola's reconstruction of a scheme where the gods of the Neo-Assyrian pantheon, including Ištar, are different aspects of Aššur is indeed possible. However, it cannot be proven this way and must remain hypothetical.

From the standpoint of this parallel between Assyrian and Hebrew religion, Parpola wonders why in Biblical prophecy we find Yahweh himself speaking whereas in the Neo-Assyrian corpus we find Ištar and not Aššur in this role. The author concludes:

⁶⁴ In the Neo-Assyrian period, an oath of loyalty made sacred by evocation of the gods, ceremony, curses.

⁶⁵ See above, page 24.

⁶⁶ The complex reasoning behind this association is explained at greater length in Parpola's 1993 article.

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. (xxvi)

To Parpola, then, in Neo-Assyrian prophecy, the transcendent god, Aššur, communicates with humanity through his motherly aspect, which takes shape in the divine person of Ištar. As we have seen in Part 1, when considering attestations of prophetic activity outside the SAA 9 corpus, which has a marked royal focus, we find that divinities other than Ištar took part in the Assyrian prophetic phenomenon.⁶⁷ Hence, this conclusion Parpola presents regarding the nature of Ištar's involvement with Assyrian prophecy cannot be generalized to the instances outside the corpus of his edition. Stökl (2012, 148) asserts that, although it is possible that this idea of divine unity in Aššur could have circulated among some of the highly educated, we cannot assume that the written oracles were produced by scholars sharing in this belief. Parpola himself recognized that, in everyday practice, a more polytheistic interpretation of religion was probably kept (xxv). Caramelo (2007) similarly states that a notion of divine unity was most likely limited to the intellectual elites. It may be more sensible to suggest, as this author does, that in the late-Sargonid period we are faced rather with a tendency towards monotheism that manifests in multiple ways: both Aššur and Ištar are focuses of theological systematization. The tendency to associate and even merge local divinities like Ištar of Arbela and Ištar of Nineveh, which we addressed in the previous section, is one example of this phenomenon. On this subject, it should be considered that, in the Neo-Assyrian period, *ištaru* is a word commonly used to simply designate "goddess". In the Nin A inscription, the "gods and goddess(es)" said to have constantly sent prophetic messages of encouragement are designated "DINGIR.MEŠ u ^diš-tar".⁶⁸ In the oracle collections, the passage translated as "We are the goddesses" similarly uses this term: "*a-ni-nu* ^dIŠ.TAR.MEŠ" (2.1, i8). The fact that the name of the goddess seems then to have evolved into a designation that encompasses the divine feminine in general can also be interpreted as a sign of a syncretic process.

In spite of the questions just raised, there is a side to Parpola's assessment of Ištar's role in Assyrian prophecy which we believe to be of fundamental significance. In the passage quoted above, the author speaks generally of prophecy but refers specifically to the fact that it is the king who is addressed by Ištar as her child. The oracle collections

⁶⁷ See above, pages 10-11.

⁶⁸ ii7. See above note 39.

(and the whole SAA 9 corpus) are the product of the literary culture of courtly circles and focus on the person of the king. It seems that this goddess, to whom Parpola recognizes at least the ability to act here as a distinct entity, bridges the gap “between man and god”, or, more specifically between the king and the divine. We can then say that, in prophecy, Ištar stands as a link between the king and Aššur, an idea we will further explore in sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.3.

3.1.3.1 – *Excursus*: was Esarhaddon raised in the temple of Ištar?

To the best of my knowledge, the popular hypothesis that Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal were raised in the temple of Ištar is first expressed in Parpola’s introduction to SAA 9. This could then be an explanation for these kings’ particular devotion to this goddess. According to the author, there is a literal sense to passages like “When you were small, I took you to me” (1.4, ii32), or when the goddess claims to have raised the king in place of his human parents (2.5, iii26-27). These clues should be read as indication that Esarhaddon, and later his heir, were delivered as children to the care of the temple personnel of the cult of Ištar and grew up among them. To support this claim, Parpola evokes passages found in SAA 3 3 and 3 13 with a similar sense of the king (here Assurbanipal) being raised by the goddess (xl). It must be taken into consideration, however, that all these examples are lifted from literary compositions marked by ideology and filled with metaphors. This does not mean necessarily that these kings were *not* raised in the temple of Ištar, but we believe there is not enough basis to presume that they *were*, and that those passages have a literal sense.

The parallel between Esarhaddon and Hattušili III again comes to mind.⁶⁹ The Hittite king claimed in his inscriptions that he was surrendered to the temple of Ištar-Šauška and that he even became a priest. On the one hand, this would be a possible precedent, albeit a very distant one, for the practice of devoting a prince to the cult of the goddess. On the other hand, if Esarhaddon was indeed raised in the temple of Ištar, we might perhaps expect him to state this fact clearly in his inscriptions, like Hattušili did.

⁶⁹ See above, page 54.

Parpola also suggests that the support shown by the prophetic circles to Esarhaddon during the struggle for the throne results from the fact that he was raised by the cult personnel of Ištar, while his brothers were not (xliii). However, it is very unclear why the author supposes he was the only child of Sennacherib to have been delivered to the temple. Even if we assume this practice was reserved for the crown prince, both Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal were nominated for the position much later and did not hold it as children.

The last two Sargonids have a special connection with Ištar that could very well result, at least in part, from personal devotion. Nonetheless there is not enough reason to believe this is due to them having been raised in the temple of the goddess. The reason for their preference likely lies elsewhere and will probably never be known to us.

3.2 – The king’s relationship with the divine and with the goddess

There is a reciprocity to the relationship between the human and the divine in Mesopotamia. Upholding the cult is humanity’s duty to the gods and the gods return this devotion with blessings and protection. Misfortune stems from the removal of the gods’ favour, which is seen as originating in a fault committed by humanity (Caramelo 2002, 324-5). We have seen this logic at work, for example, in the Assyrian inscriptions concerning the destruction of Babylon: the cause of the city’s misfortune was the loss of Marduk’s favour due to the actions of its inhabitants.⁷⁰

The king also has this relationship with the divine. In oracle 3.5, Ištar of Arbela even reminds Esarhaddon, in no uncertain terms, of his duties towards the cult:

Did I not bend the four doorjambs of Assyria, and did I not give them to you? Did I not vanquish your enemy? Did I not collect your haters and foes [like but]terflies? [As for yo]u, what have you given to me? [There is no fo]od for my banquet, as if there were no temple; I [am depri]ved of my cup! I am waiting for them, I have cast my eye upon them. Verily, establish a one-seah bowl of food and a one-seah flagon of sweet beer! Let me take and put in my mouth vegetables and soup, let me fill the cup and drink from it, let me restore my charms! (iii20-37)

⁷⁰ See above, pages 45-46.

The goddess instructs the king to provide her temple with offerings which are needed for her to replenish her strength. This he must do in return of Ištar's favour, manifest in her support against his enemies. Still, the king is different from the rest of humanity because he enjoys a privileged relationship with the divine. The oracle collections portray a particularly close connection between Esarhaddon and Ištar. This special bond fits into the broader frame of the Mesopotamian king's, and particularly the Assyrian king's, proximity to the gods, while also resulting from the specific characteristics of this goddess.

3.2.1 – The divine semblance of the king

The Neo-Assyrian king is the image of the gods: he is not divine, but he bears a *likeness* to the divine. In various letters from the exorcist Adad-šuma-ušur to Esarhaddon this idea is very clearly expressed (Winter 2016, 28):

The king is the perfect likeness of the god. (SAA 10 207, r12-13)⁷¹

The father of the king, my lord, was the very image of Bel, and the king, my lord, is likewise the very image of Bel. (SAA 10 228, o18-19)⁷²

This same scholar tries to coax the king out of his seclusion, while he is ill, saying that he is the image of the sun god Šamaš (SAA 10 196). In 3.2, Esarhaddon, while being praised as the greatest of kings, is likened not with Šamaš but with the sun: “he shines as brilliantly as the sun” (ii7).⁷³

Divine semblance is not exclusive to the Assyrian monarchs. The text known as *Sumerian King List*, the older exemplar of which dates back to the third millennium, establishes the divine origin of kingship, which means that there was already, at this early date, a special connection between the Mesopotamian king and the gods (Clancier, forthcoming). In a Neo-Babylonian literary composition, the figure of the king is said to have been fashioned by the gods in a distinct moment, separate from the creation of the rest of humanity (Radner 2010, 27; Clancier, forthcoming; VS 24 92). The king was still

⁷¹ LUGAL šu-ú 'kal' mu-uš-šu-li ša DINGIR

⁷² AD-šú ša LUGAL be-lí-ia ša-lam dEN šu-u ù LUGAL be-lí sa-lam dEN-ma šu-ú

⁷³ The akkadian expression here is: *a-ki ši-it dšá-maš na-mir*. It is worth pointing out that in the original the connection with the god is more evident, for the king is here compared to the sunrise as the “brilliant rise of Šamaš”.

human, but of a different nature. He was endowed with higher qualities of body and mind because he was conceived to exercise kingship (Pongratz-Leisten 2015, 208-10). Textual parallels indicate that this composition was known under the last Sargonids, meaning this idea already shaped Assyrian royal ideology (Radner 2010, 27). The fact that the Assyrian ruling family was able to produce a royal genealogy (real or not) that went back several centuries certainly contributed to the idea that their lineage was of an exceptional nature (Clancier, forthcoming).

From before the dynasty of Akkad down to the Neo-Assyrian kings, Mesopotamian rulers portrayed themselves through various means as being particularly connected to the divine (Winter, 2008). Throughout the history of Ancient Mesopotamia, monarchy always possessed a sacred status, “but the king’s place, between gods and men, has never ceased to lean in one direction or the other” (Clancier, forthcoming). From the second millennium on, the predominant tendency is for kings to be seen as entirely human while keeping a likeness to the divine. This idea often finds expression in the king’s claiming to own *melammu*, an awe-inspiring radiance that is an attribute of certain gods and of divine weapons (Clancier, forthcoming). It is worth considering again how the fact that Esarhaddon was a seriously sick man must have made it all the more complicated to uphold an image of divine-like splendour. In fact, however, *melammu* was not a characteristic of the individual, but rather an attribute of divinely appointed kingship. Thus, it could even be lost if the gods removed their favour, for example, when the king is defeated in battle (Clancier, forthcoming). It was not Esarhaddon as an individual that was god-like, but Esarhaddon in the role of king. Irene Winter (2016, 29-31) points out that in Neo-Assyrian reliefs the kings are not represented with their personal features but as idealized figures, which are extremely similar to the ideal figures of the gods and *genii*, which was certainly intentional. In the Malta reliefs, attributed to Sennacherib, the idealized king appears twice framing a procession of seven gods: the message seems to be that the king is a special human, the only one that can be shown in the presence of the assembled gods (Ornan 2007, 165).

There was also a practice in Neo-Assyria of placing statues of the kings near the statues of the gods in temples. They were votive statues, placed in adoration of the gods, but it seems they could also be the object of offerings. In contemporary documentation we find ^dNU-MAN, the small ‘d’ standing for the cuneiform symbol indicative of divinity. This term could refer to divinized statues of the king (Holloway 2002, 184-5; Clancier,

forthcoming).⁷⁴ In text SAA 20 49 this term is listed several times and an image of Tiglath-Phalazar is also said to reside along with the divine entities of the temple in Aššur (Holloway 2002, 185-6). In their introduction to SAA 13, Steven Cole and Peter Machinist (1998) demonstrate, listing ample sources, that there was a long-standing tradition, stretching all the way back to early dynastic Lagaš, of presenting offerings to statues of kings in temples, in a way that is very similar to the treatment given to the images of gods. The Neo-Assyrian treatment of the royal image is heir to this tradition: statues of the kings were installed next to Marduk, who at the time was kept in the temple of Aššur, and next to Ištar of Arbela, Šîn of Harran, and Tašmettu of Borsippa (xiv). In Esarhaddon's "Succession Treaty" (SAA 2 6) the statue of himself and the statue of Assurbanipal seem to be considered able to upkeep and protect the treaty, much like the deities evoked (Clancier, forthcoming). Previously, in the bronzes from the Balawat gates, Salmanazar III was depicted performing sacrifices next to his royal image. Although the inscriptions clearly distinguish between his image and the honoured gods, the relief shows just the ritual in front of the image of the king: for the intended audience there was probably no contradiction in this (Holloway 2002, 188). The statues of the kings could receive sacrifices like the statues of gods while the king remained distinct from the gods, which places the figure of the king in a realm between the human and the divine.

A particularity of Assyrian royal ideology was that the king wore the title of *šangû*, a high priest concerned with the performance of the cult. Although the king was assisted by other priests in state rituals, in royal ideology he was the great *šangû* of Aššur. Pongratz-Leisten (2015, 202-5) shows that this title came to be, in practice, synonym to *šarru*, king. Thus, being the ruler of Assyria was inextricable from the religious role of high priest of the national god. For this author, another central aspect of Assyrian ideology was the association between the king and Ninurta. Briefly, the Assyrian king is connected with this god who has two important features: he is governor and administrator for his father, the great Enlil, but he is also a heroic warrior, the "strong-man" of the gods. Central to his mythology is the combat against forces of chaos, like the hybrid creature Anzu. An important theme to this myth is that order is achieved through combat. The Assyrian monarch is like Ninurta for he rules in the name of the great god Aššur, who is king, and

⁷⁴ Dalley suggests instead that ^dNU-MAN may be an independent divine name to be related with the pictorial depiction of the winged-disc. Holloway (2002, 186-7) critiques this theory, pointing out that Dalley's proposition ignores the long-standing tradition of installing the king's images in temples, alluded to in this section.

he is the warrior charged with driving back chaos and expanding the god's divine order, a task he achieves through war (228-62). The king is the arm of Aššur, tasked with a divine mandate to enlarge the country of the god. This is a superhuman mission that reshapes the world, bringing chaotic territory into the order of divine rule (Liverani 2017, 537). This ideology simultaneously likens the Assyrian king with the gods, invests him with attributes that are god-like, and places him between humanity and the divine world, because he is an agent of Aššur, enacting the divine will over his people.

Finally, we would like to add a further point to this discussion. The use of epithets expressing world dominion and unparalleled power, such as “king of the world” or “king of the four quarters”, had a very long tradition in Mesopotamia, linking the Neo-Assyrian monarchs to traditional concepts of kingship employed by rulers of the past, most importantly by the kings of Akkad. But in the 7th century, the claims behind these titles had actually come to correspond closely with the political reality (Radner 2010, 28-9). Esarhaddon was king to the largest empire the world had ever known. It must have seemed to many of his contemporaries that he indeed ruled over totality. A traditional trope of royal ideology appeared hence to have been realised in a more complete way than ever before. This must have certainly contributed to the elevation of the late Assyrian kings to a larger than human, god-like stature. After all, totality is the realm of the gods.

3.2.2 – Ištar and kingship: the importance of mediation

The connection between Inanna-Ištar and kingship is very old. One of the ME that the goddess steals from Enki is, in fact, the principle of kingship. Inscriptions from third millennium Aššur show that Ištar was already an important deity to the ruler (Pongratz-Leisten 2015, 105-6). In a 2000 article, Joan Goodnick Westenholz states that the “roots of the concept of ‘king by love of Inanna’ can be traced back to earliest development of political hierarchy” (77). The author points out that the love metaphor, initially expressed in the sacred marriage rite between the king and the goddess, was of central importance to the legitimation of kingship. Westenholz traces an evolution from the Early Dynastic period, in which Inanna can be found as the deity responsible for ascribing kingship, through to a theocracy centred predominantly on Enlil of Nippur, in the beginning of the

second millennium. From this point onwards the general paradigm tends to place Inanna-Ištar as a mediator, interceding between the king and the divine assembly ruled by Enlil.

In the oracle collections, Ištar appears in a similar role. In oracle 1.4, she claims to have reconciled Aššur with the king and in 2.5 states that she will reconcile angered gods with Assyria. She is then mediating and bridging the gap between the king and the great god of Assyria, or between his country and a divine assembly. In 2.3, the goddess advocates the interests of the gods of Esaggil, acting as intermediary between the Assyrian king and the Babylonian divinities. Outside the collections, oracle 9 is a prime example of how Ištar/Mulissu pleads the case of the king (Assurbanipal) in the assembly of the gods (Caramelo 2002, 301). Nissinen ([2010] 2019, 242-3) points out that, in letter SAA 13 139, which seems to contain written prophecy, the god Marduk is speaking to Assurbanipal, but in fact addresses mainly Mulissu, which places the goddess in a position between the king and Marduk, or even the divine council of his temple, Esaggil.

In all these instances Ištar is acting as intermediary between the king and another divinity. The main form of the goddess's mediation is, however, prophecy itself. Nissinen ([2000] 2019, 109-10) suggests that the role of the prophet, a mediator between the divine and the human spheres, reflects the role of Ištar as mediator between the king and the gods. Through prophecy, the king benefits from the goddess's intercession that grants him divine reconciliation. In the case of the Neo-Assyrian oracle collections, Ištar is the sole mediator, coming to the forefront as the link between Esarhaddon and the access to the divine knowledge and divine will of Aššur and the gods of Assyria. Turning back to the idea expressed by Parpola that, in these oracles, the goddess addresses the king under a motherly aspect, we can frame this particular expression of the love of the goddess, motherly love, as a fundamental characteristic of her mediation.

3.2.3 – The king and Ištar as mediators

We have seen from Part 1 how it was believed and accepted that the king had a special right to divine knowledge. This was also a special responsibility placed upon him: the gods speak through signs found in nature and through the voices of inspired prophets, and the king being aware of their messages has to decide and act according to this higher

data of divine origin. If prophecy is the mediation of divine knowledge, we could say that the king too, being the main recipient of prophecy, is a mediator of divine knowledge and will, connecting it to his kingdom through his actions and decision-making. To Winter (2008, 85), the fact that Assyrian ideology combines the office of kingship with the *šangû*-priesthood of Aššur is a way of articulating his ability to act in the domains of heaven and earth, mediating between the two.

Ištar, on the other hand, is a travelling and mediating divinity, whose very liminality is a defining aspect of her character. Her long lasting popularity can very well be linked to the intense engagement with humanity and human affairs that characterizes her action (Westenholz 2007, 344).

Nissinen's ([2003b] 2019) study of the expression *lā tapallah*, meaning "fear not", is particularly illuminating to the matter at hand. This expression is very prominent throughout the oracle collections. When consulting Parpola's translation, one might lose the sense of this repetition, because the author provides slightly different translations for the Akkadian formulation. However, the exact expression appears 16 times, directed usually by the divine speaker at Esarhaddon and twice to Naqia. Nissinen points out that, "fear not" is a promise of protection and an exhortation for the king to display fearlessness and confidence before any possible enemy, while at the same time being a soothing formula to ease the overwhelming experience of divine revelation (204-5). The Neo-Assyrian king uses the same expression to address his subjects. It appears, for example, several times in Assurbanipal's correspondence. To the subjects who approach him, the king is the highest authority, whose support should dispel fear, and whose power should inspire fearsome respect and admiration. In other words, the subjects of the Neo-Assyrian king have nothing to fear but the king himself (209-10).

Caramelo (2002, 281) remarks that it is possible to compare the bond between the king and the gods with the relationship between king and subordinates: the king owes fidelity to the gods, and must honour their cult and temples, receiving protection in turn; at the same time, his subjects must serve and aid him to earn his protection and favour, with the added factor that, in war, the Assyrian king is the armed representative of divine order. Nissinen applies a similar reasoning to the use of the "fear not" expression. When using this expression, Ištar is in the role of superior authority that the king occupies in his correspondence, and similarly, the message is that there is nothing to fear as long as he is in the gods' favour (218).

We have seen previously, in the matter concerning the reconstruction of Babylon, that Esarhaddon could be presented as the agent of reconciliation restoring the favour of Marduk for his city, while at the same time he could be seen, in another context, as seeking reconciliation from the same god.⁷⁵ A possible interpretation for this duality could be that the king is the one human agent that, being closer to the gods, is in a position to garner divine favour, and, having obtained it, is able to transmit it to his subjects. As remarked in the previous section, the goddess Ištar states in oracles 1.4 and 2.5 to have been an agent of divine reconciliation for Esarhaddon and for Assyria. And simply by being the deity of prophecy *for the king*, Ištar is the mediator that enables the king to access the divine knowledge of the council of the gods, and of Aššur. Nissinen concludes his reflection on the expression *lā tappalah* by stating about Ištar:

Her “fear not” to the king is based on the conviction that the divine council will decide in his favor. On the other hand, the position of the king as the child of the goddess makes him a partly divine figure, through whom the people participate in divine favors. Hence, when the king himself says “fear not” to his subjects or vassals, as Assurbanipal does in the above-discussed letters, he does so with divine authority, passing down the very word spoken to himself by the gods. (228)

When, in the oracle collections, Ištar tells Esarhaddon not to fear, she is assuring him that the assembly of the gods (and Aššur) are on his side and continue to support him, hence no earthly hurdle should cause apprehension. The king, receiving this reassurance, can transmit it with divine authority to the people of the Assyrian empire, more so because of his closeness to the divine. Again, we find Ištar where Parpola also places her, between the king and Aššur, and in the guise of the king’s motherly figure.

In Neo-Assyrian religion and ideology, Ištar is a goddess that is closer to humanity, and the king, while being still human, is the closest to the divine. It can then be suggested that they meet, naturally, somewhere in the middle. Their special bond, conveyed through motherly love, is a means of mediation between the divine and the human spheres. Prophecy, or specifically the royal prophecy of the oracle collections, is the means through which their ability to dialogue and transmit divine reconciliation and support from the gods to the people of Assyria was expressed. It is the characteristics ascribed to both Ištar and the Neo-Assyrian king that place them closer to each other in an intermediate realm where this communication can take place.

⁷⁵ See above, page 49.

3.3 – Ištar’s love and protection

The special proximity between Ištar and the king is expressed in the oracle collections through the goddess’s protection and love for Esarhaddon. Louise Pryke (2017, 111) states that it is this bond that connects more of the wide-ranging characteristics and competences of the goddess, namely, her association with love and battle. This author also points out that, as early as the Akkad period, we already find theophoric names revealing the goddess’s role as protector: “Ištar-is-my-mother”, “Ištar-is-protection”, “Ištar-is-a-warrior” (123). Taken together, these names point towards an association between maternity and excellence in battle as expressions of protection. In her motherly bond with the king, Ištar’s love and violence are not opposite, but rather her aggression results from the extremes of affection and motherly care (Caramelo 2002, 307).

3.3.1 – Ištar as warrior for the king

In the oracle collections, Ištar claims that she has fought and will continue to fight the king’s enemies. Emphasis is placed in divine action. This is clearly stated in 2.3 where the goddess says: “[I will annihilate] whatever enemies you [have]. As for [you, stay] in your palace” (ii1-2). The focus on Ištar’s violence, while the king assumes a more passive role, affirms an ideology of divinely justified war where the armies of the Assyrian king are seen as the arms through which the gods enact their will and extend their order (Nissinen 1998, 54).

The goddess’s protection stretches from the field of battle into the uncovering of treason and conspiracies. For example, in oracle 1.7 the goddess states “I will cut the conspiring weasels and shrews to pieces before his feet” (v3-7), and in 2.4 declares “I will look, I will listen, I will search out the disloyal ones, and I will put them into the hands of my king” (ii31-33). In open conflict, Ištar’s violence is communicated through varied expressions and metaphors: “Your enemies will roll before your feet like ripe

apples” (1.1, i8-10); “With an angry dagger in my hand I will finish off your enemies” (1.6, iv7-10); “Did I not vanquish your enemy? Did I not collect your haters and foes [like but]terflies?” (3.5, iii22-24). These examples proclaim the submission of enemies of Assyria in a more vague, general way. However, in certain passages, the goddess goes into greater detail about the treatment reserved for these foes. In these, the language of violence approaches known depictions of Neo-Assyrian reliefs (Cornelius 2009, 27). In oracle 3.5, Ištar says “(As for) [those cou]rtiers and palace [personnel who] rebelled [against] you, [I have sur]rounded them and impaled them by their teeth” (iv25-30). In 1.1, she claims “I will flay your enemies and give them to you” (i19-20). The impalement and flaying of captured enemies by Assyrian soldiers is depicted in palace reliefs. Both actions are portrayed, for example, in the “Lachish Reliefs” from the Southwest Palace of Sennacherib, currently at the British Museum. We also mentioned previously⁷⁶ that the rebel Ilu-bi’di is depicted being flayed alive. Thus, in the oracle collections, Ištar claims acts of violence and punishment that the Neo-Assyrian armies were known to commit. This further emphasizes the idea that the soldiers of the Assyrian king were acting in accordance with the determinations of the gods. In a way, these oracles imply that the goddess is present with the army as it submits the enemies of Esarhaddon.

Ištar’s protective abilities are also expressed through metaphors traditionally associated with the goddess. Her connection to the lion, for instance, is well known. In oracle 2.3, the goddess likens herself to a lion in defending Esarhaddon and uncovering his enemies: “Like a beautiful (lion) cub I will run about in your palace and sniff out your enemies. I will keep you safe in your palace” (ii9-10). In this passage, although it is not stated in the original Akkadian that it is specifically a *lion* cub, the fact that it poses a mortal danger to the king’s enemies and the animal’s traditional association with Ištar would seem to suggest this to be the case (Parpola 1997, 15; Nissinen [2003a] 2019, 124). In the Nin A inscription, in which Esarhaddon narrates his difficult ascension to the throne, it is the king who is compared to the lion “I raged like a lion, and my mood became furious” (i57). Isabel Almeida (2015, 372) notes that the king was idealized as possessing the qualities of the lion even while being depicted in royal hunts dominating the lion, integrating it into the order of civilization: this mirrors the fact that Ištar was simultaneously like a lioness, in her warring qualities, and depicted as dominating the lion.

⁷⁶ See above, page 41.

Again in oracle 2.3, juxtaposed to the passage where the goddess is like a lion cub, she claims “Like a winged bird ov[er its young] I will twitter over you and go in circles around you” (ii6-8). There is a very long tradition of depicting a goddess, at times armed, at times unarmed, with wings. At least some of the representations of the winged goddess with weapons can be safely associated with Ištar (Barrelet 1955; Tsukimoto 2014). The depiction of the winged warrior Ištar could perhaps be likened with an idea of a bird of prey plunging towards its victim (Barrelet 1955, 236). It is worth noting that, also in the Nin A inscription, Esarhaddon again utilizes a similar metaphor to what is here applied to his protector: “Like a flying eagle I spread my wings to drive back my enemies” (i67-68). We see then that, when narrating his military accomplishments, the king could evoke the same metaphors that apply to his protector in the oracle collections. This process is another way of likening him to the divine.

In the oracle just quoted, the metaphor comparing Ištar with a bird combines aggression with protection very clearly. The goddess circles around the nest potentially warding off any threat. This gesture protects the young that the goddess “twitters over”: Esarhaddon is like a bird in a nest being protected by his mother.

3.3.2 – Ištar as mother of the king

Far from being just symbol a of aggression, the association with creatures of the skies could also be used to connote protection, and even *motherly* protection. In oracle 2.5 the goddess claims: “I am your father and mother. I raised you between my wings” (iii26-27). Here the wings metaphor is used to translate the motherly affection for the king, which reaches back to his infancy. In this passage, the goddess says she is the mother *and* the father of Esarhaddon. In this way, she claims complete responsibility for his engendering and upbringing. This does not bring into question the human origin of the Neo-Assyrian king. He is not literally the child of the goddess, but rather *like* a child of the goddess. He is created by Ištar in so far as he is being shaped from birth to the exercise of kingship (Caramelo 2002, 297-8). Esarhaddon’s son-like connection to Ištar/Mulissu, in the oracle collections, can then be framed against the wider picture of the ideology of divine appointment of the Assyrian king. The idea of having been shaped by the goddess

is another way to assert that Esarhaddon, not as an individual but as the king of Assyria, possessed distinctive qualities that made him better suited for kingship and enjoyed special proximity with the gods, who selected him for this position.

The intimate loving connection between Ištar and the king is expressed often throughout the oracle collections. In oracles 1.9 and 2.6, Ištar calls Esarhaddon as her “calf”. In 2.5, after saying she raised him between her wings, the goddess goes on to say “I will place you between my arm and my forearm” (iii30-31), which seems to be a reference to the way a mother holds a small infant. The same expression seems to appear again, in a damaged passage of 2.6. Oracle 1.6 starts in the voice of Ištar of Arbela. She proclaims: “I am your great midwife; I am your excellent wet nurse. For long days and everlasting years I have established your throne under the great heavens” (iii15-22). Later in the same oracle, the king is addressed twice as “Esarhaddon, rightful heir, son of Mulissu” (iv5-6; iv20-21). Here Ištar of Arbela and Mulissu/Ištar of Nineveh appear in their complementary roles as nurse and mother of the king.⁷⁷ The manifestations of the goddess display shared agency in ensuring the longevity of Esarhaddon’s throne. In all these passages, Ištar is not the mother of the king in the sense that she generated him in her divine body. Rather, her motherly love for Esarhaddon translates in various metaphors of caring roles: mother, midwife, nurse. They convey the idea that Ištar has shaped and protects the king, chosen by the gods, as a mother protects her child (Caramelo 2003).

Nissinen ([2003b] 2019, 227-8) shows that in certain instances, oracles 1.4 and 2.5 being two examples, the goddess’s mediation of divine support, expressed through the “fear not” expression, is very closely associated with the stabilization of Assyria, on the one hand, and her motherly love on the other. Not going as far as Parpola when he stated that in prophecy the king connects with a transcendent Aššur in an aspect of mother goddess, we might say instead that, in the oracle collections, the metaphor of the king as beloved son of Ištar was central in articulating the nature and means of his perceived special access to the divine world. The ideas of divine reconciliation and Ištar’s love are particularly well connected in oracle 1.4:

Lift up your eyes, look at me! I am Ištar of Arbela; I reconciled Aššur with you. When you were small, I took you to me. Do not fear; praise me! What enemy has attacked you while I remained silent? The future shall be like the past. (ii28-37)

⁷⁷ See above, pages 60-61.

In a way, this passage articulates beautifully the main messages of the oracle collections. Ištar has stood with Esarhaddon since infancy and shaped him for success. This is closely connected with the statement that she acted as the mediator that guaranteed Aššur's reconciliation with the king. Esarhaddon now has nothing to fear because the goddess, who chose him for kingship from the day he was born and who has loved him as a mother, is continually interceding within the divine council and securing their support, and the favour of Aššur. Thus, he must continually praise Ištar. Since the goddess loves the king as her son, she has stood by his side from the beginning, and has never failed to grant him success against his enemies. Hence, Esarhaddon must believe that it will continue to be so. "The future will be like the past", meaning that the order of the Assyrian empire, being the gods' design, will prevail.

3.4 – Final thoughts

The goddess Ištar has a long-standing connection with the prophetic phenomenon in Mesopotamia. The oracle collections, however, reveal more about the goddess's connection with the Neo-Assyrian king than with prophecy. The characteristics of Ištar are prone to placing her between her fellow gods and humanity. In the Neo-Assyrian period the development of prophetic culture around the popular temple of Arbela could have led to the goddess's dominating role in the oracle collections. Her prominence in these texts has to be equally connected to her special relationship with the king. Ištar's connection with kingship in Mesopotamia is likewise a long-standing tradition. In the Neo-Assyrian period, this connection is expressed, in inscriptions and oracles alike, through the goddess's love and protection of the king.

The Assyrian king, for his part, is characterised in such a way as to place him in a space closer to the divine. He not only bears a likeness to the gods themselves, but his very position as king of Assyria is equated with the highest priesthood of the god Aššur. It is, in essence, a religious role as much as a political one. The collections show the king Esarhaddon to have been selected by the gods for kingship. This divine selection is not an exclusive prerogative of Ištar:

When your mother gave birth to you, sixty great gods stood with me and protected you. Šîn was at your right side, Šamaš at your left; sixty great gods were standing around you and girded your loins. (1.4, ii20-26)

The king enjoys a special proximity to all the divine assembly of Assyria. Still, the collections establish a special bond between the king and Ištar, that is expressed through the mother-like love of the goddess for her protégé. These texts reflect the belief that there was a chain of communication between the human and the divine achieved through the privileged dialogue between Ištar and the king.

Conclusion

As far as we know, Esarhaddon could very well have been the first Assyrian king to promote the compilation of single prophecies into the oracle collections we know today. In this process, the divine words uttered about the present, or the near future, undergo a literary process of reworking at the end of which they become, more often than not, discourse about the past. Even bearing in mind that some of the collections could, in principle, date to an early point in Esarhaddon's reign, when the victories they predict had not been achieved, they were, in all likelihood, designed for archival preservation. This means that they were meant to be kept for posterity, at which time they would have inevitably become discourse about the past. This aspect of the oracle collections comes to the forefront in collection 1. Oracle 1.8, being directed to Naqia, clearly dates back to when the succession conflict surrounding Esarhaddon's ascension was not resolved yet and the heir was still in exile. Here we definitely had a prediction of his success in the near future. However, this and the other oracles were assembled into a collection later, quite probably around the year 673. At this date, collection 1 is already an articulation of recent history, providing an interpretation of the events surrounding Esarhaddon's ascension that could serve as a model for the nomination of his heir, Assurbanipal.

We have seen that the chances of preservation and of archaeological discovery play a role in our knowledge and understanding of the prophetic tradition of Mesopotamia, though it is difficult to ascertain how big a role that is. In the extant documentation we find a strong connection to kingship and an over-representation of periods of crisis. Esarhaddon's short reign was, indeed, a difficult one. This king was faced with numerous challenges and, what is more, in several matters he either chose to or was forced to deviate from tradition. To attain the throne he was heir to, he had to fight and win a succession war against his own brothers, who may have felt overlooked by the irregular nomination of a younger son. A decade later, when setting up his own succession, he again deviates from the principle of primogeniture. In what regards the important question of the policy towards Babylonia, Esarhaddon set in motion a project of pacification and reconstruction which, while being mostly in line with the Assyrian

tradition of deference towards the ancient cities of southern Mesopotamia, was a complete departure from his father's stance. Furthermore, this king's conciliatory Babylonian policy was linked with his plan of succession. Esarhaddon designated Assurbanipal as his main heir while Šamaš-šum-ukin, an older son, was destined for the throne in Babylon as his subordinate, thus giving the ancient capital its own king. This was an innovative and unprecedented project. Finally, Esarhaddon's ill health was an underlying difficulty all throughout his reign, being both a pragmatic concern and a challenge to his image as king of Assyria.

Essentially, it can be said that the oracle collections are very ideologically charged, in that they address the hurdles in Esarhaddon's reign reframing them into the designs of the gods. However, their political utility, so to say, should not lead us to the conclusion that they were merely a scholarly fabrication or that the king and his entourage did not believe in the words of the prophets. The correspondence between king and astrologers, the large quantities of omen literature in the royal libraries, apart from the collections themselves, all point towards the fact that the kings of Assyria and their courtly circles had a firm belief in the power of divine will and the possibility of divining the gods' messages. We even find, in the letters concerning his disease, Esarhaddon seemingly trying to expiate any punishment from the gods through penitence. Considering collection 1 as an example, its ideological purpose is striking, presenting the ugly reality of Esarhaddon's victory in a fratricide war for power as being perfectly aligned with the designs of the gods, who always had him as their favourite. The propagandistic potential of this interpretation of events does not exclude the possibility that the scholars who assembled collection 1, and Esarhaddon himself, really believed he had been divinely appointed and was truly encouraged by words of Ištar. In a world where the gods are real and able to speak, what happens in the realm of humanity is necessarily the result of their divine will, thus it follows that Esarhaddon could only be victorious if he was indeed favoured by the gods.

Reflecting upon the ideological value of the oracle collections points us towards another question. Could this political usefulness have been the cause behind the apparent increase in concern with prophecy during Esarhaddon's time, or should this rather be attributed to this king's and his heir's great devotion to the goddess Ištar? Esarhaddon's worries for his own health, for instance, could have made him more concerned than his average contemporary with the plans of the gods, but at any rate, personal devotion does

not necessarily have or need an explanation. Similarly, while this king's dedication to the worship of Ištar could have been the reason for the increased popularity of Arbela and its prophetic activity, it seems equally possible that it was, rather, the growing renown of Arbela as a cultic and prophetic centre that motivated the promotion of Ištar. It is also possible that we have here a confluence of factors. Esarhaddon as an individual could have been particularly devoted to Ištar at the same time that Arbela gained recognition as a religious centre and these two circumstances do not exclude that there could have been simultaneously a pragmatic intention behind the greater use of prophecy. It is, as of yet, impossible to further determine which of these factors, if any, was the decisive one.

At last, the Neo-Assyrian king is portrayed as larger than life, the god's chosen and their own creation. He is invested with supreme authority over worldly matters and the civilizing mission of expanding the country of Aššur. The oracle collections are one way to emphasize the idea that the king is of a different nature than other people, exhibiting his special access to divine knowledge and portraying him as the beloved son of Ištar, created for kingship and enjoying her care and protection. The reworking of positive oracles into the collections studied here reframes the events of Esarhaddon's reign through the lens of divine election and divine will. These texts give sense to history by showing that the king's actions were aligned with the will of the gods all along, which was being transmitted to him through the voice of Ištar. Even when Esarhaddon was removed from court in exile and fighting a civil war, even when it came to matters as delicate as the total reversal of his father's Babylonian policy, the collections show that, through these hurdles, the king was continually receiving messages of encouragement from Ištar. It follows that Esarhaddon had persistently enjoyed the support of the goddess and, through her power of intercession, was always reconciled with Aššur. Thus, the oracle collections place Esarhaddon between the gods and humanity, a mediator of the divine favour of Aššur who, through the love and protection of Ištar, is able to extend it over the whole of Assyria.

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Appendix

f.	female, feminine
!	collation
!!	emendation
?	uncertain reading
*	graphic variants
x	broken or undeciphered sign
()	supplied word or sign
[[]]	erasure
[...]	minor break (one or two missing words)
[.....]	major break
...	untranslatable word
.....	untranslatable passage

Collection 1

i beginning (about 10 lines) destroyed

1	[x x x x x] <i>dan-ni-te</i>
2	[x x x x (x)] <i>rap-šat[!]</i>
3	[x x x x] [!] K [!] I [!] <i>dan ni</i>

4	[^m aš-šur-PAB]-AŠ LUGAL KUR.KUR
5	[la t]a-pa-làh
6	[a]i [!] - 'u šá-a-ru ša i-di-ba-ka-a-ni
7	<i>a-qa-pu-šú la ak-su-pu-u-ni</i>
8	<i>na-ka-ru-te-ka</i>
9	<i>ki-i šá-ah-šu-ri ša ITI.SIG₄</i>
10	<i>ina IGI GÌR.2.MEŠ-ka i-tan-ga-ra-ru</i>
11	^d GAŠAN GAL-tú <i>a-na-ku</i>
12	<i>a-na-ku</i> ^d 15 ša ^{un} arba-ìl
13	<i>ša na-ka-ru-te-ka</i>
14	<i>ina IGI GÌR.2.MEŠ-ka ak-kar-ru-u-ni</i>
15	<i>ai-ú-te di-ib-bi-ia</i>
16	<i>ša aq-qa-ba-kan-ni</i>
17	<i>ina UGU-hi la ta-zi^{!!}-zu-u-ni</i>
18	<i>a-na-ku</i> ^d 15 ša ^{un} arba-ìl

19	<i>na-ka-ru-te-ka ú-ka-a-ša¹</i>
20	<i>a-da-na-ka [[x]] a-na-ku</i>
21	^d 15 <i>ša^{uru} arba-ìl</i>
22	<i>ina pa-na-tu-u-ka</i>
23	<i>ina ku-tal-li-ka</i>
24	<i>a-la-ka la ta-pa-làh</i>
25	<i>at-ta ina ŠÀ-bi mu-gi</i>
26	<i>a-na-ku ina ŠÀ-bi u₈-u-a</i>
27	<i>a-ta-ab-bi ú-šab</i>
28	<i>ša pi-i^m ^d15-la-ta-ši-ia-aṭ</i>
29	DUMU ^{uru} arba-ìl
30	LUGAL KUR <i>aš-šur la ta-pa-làh</i>
31	<i>na-ak-ru ša MAN KUR aš-šur</i>
32	¹ a ¹ -na <i>ṭa-ba-ah-hi a-da-na</i>
33	[ina] ¹ É ¹ <i>re-du-te-ka</i>
34	[ú-ta-q] <i>a-an-ka</i>
35	[ú-ra-ba] <i>-ak-ka</i>
36	[x x x GA] <i>L-tu a-na-ku</i>
37	[a-na-ku ^d 15 š] <i>a^{uru} arba.ìl</i>
38	[x x x x x T] <i>A¹ ŠÀ-bi¹-šú</i>
39	[x x x x x x x] <i>x-šú</i>
ii	beginning (about 6 lines) destroyed
1	[x x] <i>x[x x x x x x x]</i>
2	<i>a[i]¹- 'u¹ x[x x x x x x]</i>
3	<i>la áš-me-k[a na-ka-ru-te]</i>
4	<i>ina si-ga-r[a-te sa-al-um-ti]</i>
5	<i>ina ma-da-[na-ti x x]</i>
6	<i>na-kar^{ar}-ka ina¹ Š[À[?] qa-ra-bi]</i>
7	<i>e-da-ni- 'e ak-t[a-šá-ad]</i>
8	<i>ú-ta-ki-il-ka la uš-ba-[ku]</i>
9	<i>ša pi-i^m si-in-qi-šá-a-mur</i>
10	DUMU.MÍ ^{uru} arba-ìl
11	<i>ri-i-šá-ak TA*^m aš-šur-PAB-AŠ</i>
12	LUGAL-ia <i>ri-i-ši^{uru} arba-ìl</i>
13	<i>ša pi-i^m re-mu-te-al-la-te</i>
14	<i>ša URU da-ra-a-hu-u-ia</i>
15	<i>ša bir-ti KUR.MEŠ-ni</i>
16	<i>la ta-pa-làh^m aš-šur-PAB-AŠ :¹</i>
17	<i>a-na-ku^d EN is-si-ka</i>
18	<i>a-da-bu-bu</i>
19	^{giš} UR.MEŠ <i>ša ŠÀ-bi-ka</i>
20	<i>a-ha-ri-di ki-i^m AMA-ka</i>

21 *tu-šab-šu-ka-ni*
 22 60 DINGIR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ *is-si-ia*
 23 *it-ti-ti-su it-ta-šar-u-ka*
 24 ^d30 *ina* ZAG-ka ^dUTU *ina* 150-ka
 25 60 DINGIR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ *ina bat-ti-bat-ti-ka*
 26 *i-za-zu* MURUB₄-ka¹ *ir-tak-su*
 27 *ina* UGU *a-me-lu-ti la ta-tak-kil*
 28 *mu-tu-uh* IGI.2.MEŠ-ka
 29 *a-na a-a-ši du-gul-na-ni*
 30 *a-na-ku* ^d15 ša ^{uru}arba-ìl
 31 *aš-šur is-si-ka ú-sa-lim*
 32 *še-he-ra-ka a-ta-ša-ak-ka*
 33 *la ta-pa-làh na-i-da-a-ni*
 34 *ai- 'u¹¹ šu-ú na-ak-ru*
 35 *ša i-di-ba¹-kan-ni*
 36 *a-na-ku qa-la-ku-u-ni*
 37 *ur-ki-ú-te lu-u ki-i pa-ni-u-te*
 38 *a-na-ku* ^dPA EN *qar tup-pi*
 39 *na-i-da-a-ni*

40 *ša pi-i* ^{mí}ba-ia-a DUMU ^{uru}arba-ìl

iii beginning (about 14 lines) destroyed

1 *ku*-[x x x x x x x x]
 2 *a-na-^rku a¹-*[x x x x]
 3 *at-ta tal*-[x x x (x)]
 4 *a-na-ku* ^dN[IN¹.LÍL (x)]

5 *ša pi-i* ^{mí}DINGIR-sa-a-m[ur]

6 ^{uru}ŠÀ-URU-a¹-[a]

7 *a-na-ku* ^d15 ša ^{ur}[^u.arba-ìl]
 8 ^maš-šur-PAB-AŠ MAN KUR *a*[š-šur]
 9 *ina* ^{uru}ŠÀ-URU ^{uru}NIN[A]
 10 ^{uru}kal-ha ^{uru}arba-ì[l]
 11 UD.MEŠ *ar-ku-u-t*[e]
 12 MU.AN.NA.MEŠ *da-ra-t*[e]
 13 *a-na* ^maš-šur-PAB-AŠ LUGAL-i^ra¹
 14 *a-da-na-na* [0]
 15 *sa-ab-su-ub-ta-k*[a]
 16 *ra-bi-tu a-na-ku*
 17 *mu-še-ni*[q¹]-ta-ka
 18 *de-iq-tú a-na-ku*
 19 *ša* UD-me *ar-ku-te*
 20 MU.AN.NA.MEŠ *da-ra-te*
 21 ^{giš}GU.ZA-ka *ina* KI.TA AN-e
 22 *ra-bu-te uk-ti-in*
 23 *ina ma-si-ki ša* KUG.GI

24 *ina* MURUB₄ AN-*e a-ha-ri-di*
 25 *nu-ur ša il-me-ši*
 26 *ina* IGI ^m*aš-šur*-PAB-AŠ MAN KUR *aš-šur*
 27 *ú-šá-na-ma-ra*
 28 *ki-i a-ge-e ša* SAG.DU-*ia*
 29 *a-ha-ri-su*
 30 *la ta-pa-làh* LUGAL
 31 *aq-ṭi-ba-ak*
 32 *la as-li-k[a]*

iv

1 *ú-ta-ki-i[l-ka]*
 2 *la ú-ba-áš-[ka]*
 3 ÍD *ina tu-qu-un-ni*
 4 *ú-še-ba-ar-ka*
 5 ^m*aš-šur*-PAB-AŠ *ap-lu*
 6 *ke-e-nu* DUMU ^dNIN.LÍL
 7 *ha-an-ga-ru ak-ku*
 8 *ina* ŠU.2-*ia*
 9 ^{lú}KÚR.MEŠ-*ka*
 10 *ú-qa-at-ta*
 11 ^m*aš-šur*-PAB-AŠ MAN KUR *aš-šur*
 12 *ka-a-su šá ma-lu-u qi-il-te*
 13 *ka-la-pu ša* 2 GÍN
 14 ^m*aš-šur*-PAB-AŠ *ina* ^{uru}ŠÀ-URU
 15 UD.MEŠ *ar-ku-u-ti*
 16 MU.MEŠ *da-ra-a-ti*
 17 *a-da-nak-k[a]*
 18 ^m*aš-šur*-PAB-AŠ *ina* ŠÀ-bi ^{uru}*arba-il*
 19 *a-ri-it-ka de-iq-tú a-[na-ku]*
 20 ^m*aš-šur*-PAB-AŠ DUMU.UŠ *k[e-e-nu]*
 21 DUMU ^dNIN.[LÍL]
 22 *hi-is-sa-at-[ka]*
 23 *ha-sa-[ku]*
 24 *ar-ta-am-k[a¹]*
 25 *a-dan-[niš]*
 26 *ina ki-zir-ti-k[a]*
 27 *ina* AN-*e* GAL.[†]MEŠ¹
 28 *ú-kal-ka*
 29 *ina* ZAG-*ka*
 30 *qut-ru ú-qa-at-t[ar]*
 31 *ina* KAB- *k[a]*
 32 IZI *ú-[†]šá¹-[haz]*
 33 LUGAL-*tú ina* UGU [x x (x)]
 34 *da-a¹-[x x]*
 35 *ina -[†]UGU da¹-[x x x]*
 rest (about 14 lines) destroyed

v

1 TA* *pa-ni-šú*

2	<i>la i-ma-har</i>
3	<i>ka-kiš-a-ti</i>
4	<i>pu-uš-ha-a-ti</i>
5	<i>šá i-da-ba-bu-u-ni</i>
6	<i>ina IGI GÌR.2-šú</i>
7	<i>ú-bat-taq-šú-nu</i>
8	<i>at-ti at-ti-ma</i>
9	LUGAL <i>šar-ri-ma</i>
10	<i>ša pi-i</i> ^{mí} 15-EN- <i>da-i-ni</i>
11	<i>še-lu-tu</i> <i>ša</i> LUGAL
12	<i>a-na-ku</i> ^d <i>be-let arba-il</i>
13	<i>a-na</i> AMA LUGAL
14	<i>ki-i ta-hu-ri-ni-ni</i>
15	<i>ma-a</i> <i>ša</i> ZAG
16	<i>ša šu-me-li</i>
17	<i>ina su-ni-ki ta-sak-ni</i>
18	<i>ma-a ia-ú</i>
19	<i>ši-it ŠÀ-bi-ia</i>
20	EDIN <i>tu-sar-pi-di</i>
21	<i>ú-ma-a</i> LUGAL <i>la ta-pa-làh</i>
22	LUGAL- <i>tú ik-ku-u</i>
23	<i>da-na-nu ik-ku-u-ma</i>
24	<i>ša pi-i</i> ^{mí} NIN-AD- <i>šá</i>
25	DUMU.MÍ ^{uru} <i>arba-il</i>
26	DI-mu <i>a-na</i> ^m <i>aš-šur</i> -PAB-AŠ MAN KUR <i>aš-šur</i>
27	^d 15 <i>šá</i> ^{uru} <i>arba-il</i>
28	<i>a-na</i> EDIN <i>ta-at-tu-ši</i>
29	<i>šul-mu a-na mu-ri-šá</i>
30	<i>a-na bi-rit URU ta-sap-ra</i>
31	<i>a-na ú-še-^re¹-[šá²]</i>
32	<i>šá ú-[x x x x]</i>
33	LÚ <i>[x x x x (x)]</i>
34	<i>mu-x[x x x x x]</i>
35	<i>ki-^ri²1 [x x x x x x]</i>
36	<i>x[x x x x x x]</i>
	rest (about 8 lines) destroyed
vi	
1	
2	<i>[a-na-ku</i> ^d <i>be-let-^{uru}arb]</i> <i>a-il</i>
3	<i>[^maš-šur-PAB-AŠ šá]</i> <i>ina DÙG.GA</i>
4	<i>[^d15] šá</i> ^{uru} <i>arba-il</i>
5	<i>ha-bu-un-šú</i>
6	<i>tu-mal-lu-u-ni</i>

7	<i>da-ba-bu pa-ni-u</i>
8	<i>šá a-qa-ba-kan-ni</i>
9	<i>ina UGU-hi la ta-zi-zi</i>
10	<i>ú-ma-a</i>
11	<i>ina UGU ur-ki-i</i>
12	<i>ta-za-az-ma</i>
13	<i>na- 'i-da-an-ni</i>
14	<i>ki-i UD-mu</i>
15	<i>i-ši-šu-u-ni</i>
16	<i>zi-qa-a-ti</i>
17	<i>lu-ki-il-lu</i>
18	<i>ina pa-ni na- 'i-da-an-ni</i>
19	<i>[n]i¹-ir-ri-tu</i>
20	<i>[T]A ŠÀ É.GAL-ia</i>
21	<i>ʾú¹-še-ša</i>
22	<i>ak-lu taq-nu ta-kal</i>
23	<i>A.MEŠ taq-nu-ti</i>
24	<i>ta-šá-at-ti</i>
25	<i>ina ŠÀ-bi É.GAL-ka</i>
26	<i>ta-taq-qu-un</i>
27	<i>DUMU-ka DUMU DUMU-ka</i>
28	<i>LUGAL-u-tú</i>
29	<i>ina bur-ki šá ^dMAŠ</i>
30	<i>ú-pa-áš</i>
31	<i>ša pi-i ^mla-da-gíl-DINGIR</i>
32	<i>DUMU ^{ur}arba-ìl</i>

blank space of 5 lines
rest (about 8 lines) broken away

Translation:

i (beginning destroyed)

¹[.....] strong (f.) [.....] is wide (f.) [.....] ...

1.1 Issar-la-tašiyat

⁴ [Esarh]addon, king of the lands, fear [not]! ⁶ What wind has risen against you, whose wing I have not broken? Your enemies will roll before your feet like ripe apples. ¹¹ I am the Great Lady; I am Ištar of Arbela, who cast your enemies before your feet. What words have I spoken to you that you could not rely upon? ¹⁸ I am Ištar of Arbela. I will flay your enemies and give them to you. ²⁰ I am Ištar of Arbela. I will go before you and behind you. ²⁴ Fear not! You are paralysed, but in the midst of woe I will rise and sit down (beside you).

²⁸ By the mouth of Issar-la-tašiyat of Arbela.

1.2 Sinqiša-amur

³⁰ King of Assyria, have no fear! I will deliver up the enemy of the king of Assyria for slaughter. [I will] keep you safe and [make] you [great in] you Palace of Succession. ³⁶ I am the Gr[eat Lady. I am Ištar o]f Arbela ³⁸ [.....] from his midst

(break)

ii ² What [.....] I would not have heard you? [The enemies ...] in neckst[ocks, [the vassals] under tribu[te]; I defea[ted] your enemy in a single [encounter]. ⁸ I have given you faith, I do not sit (idle)!

⁹ By the mouth of the woman Sinqiša-amur of Arbela.

1.3 Remutti-Allati

¹¹ I rejoice with Esarhaddon, my king! Arbela rejoices!

¹³ By the mouth of the woman Remutti-Allati of Dara-ahuya, a town in the mountains.

1.4 Bayâ

¹⁶ Fear not, Esarhaddon! ¹⁷ I am Bel. (Even as) I speak to you, I watch over the beams of your heart. ²⁰ When your mother gave birth to you, sixty great gods stood with me and protected you. Sîn was at your right side, Šamaš at your left; sixty great gods were standing around you and girded your loins. ²⁷ Do not trust in Man. Lift up your eyes, look at me! I am Ištar of Arbela; I reconciled Aššur with you. When you were small, I took you to me. Do not fear; praise me! ³⁴ What enemy has attacked you while I remained silent? The future shall be like the past. I am Nabû, lord of the stylus. Praise me!

⁴⁰ By the mouth of the woman Bayâ, son of Arbela.

1.5 Ilussa-amur

(break)

iii ² I will [.....] ³ you shall [.....]. ⁴ I am Mu[lissu (...)].

⁵ By the mouth of the woman Ilussa-am[ur] of the Inner City.

1.6 Unknown Prophet

⁷ I am Ištar of [Arbela]. ⁸ Esarhaddon, king of A[ssyria]! In the Inner City, Nineveh, Calah and Arbela I will give long days and everlasting years to Esarhaddon, my king. ¹⁵ I am your great midwife; I am your excellent wet nurse. For long days and everlasting years I have established your throne under the great heavens. ²³ I watch in a golden chamber in the midst of the heavens; I let the lamp of amber shine before Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, and I watch him like the crown of my head. ³⁰ Have no fear, my king! I have spoken to you, I have not lied to you; I have given you faith, I will not let you come to shame. I will take you safely across the river.

iv ⁵ Esarhaddon, rightful heir, son of Mullissu! With an angry dagger in my hand I will finish off your enemies. ¹¹ O Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, cup filled with lye, axe of two shekels! ¹⁴ Esarhaddon! I will give you long days and everlasting years in the Inner City. O Esarhaddon, I will be your good shield in Arbela. ²⁰ Esarhaddon, ri[ghtful] heir, son of Mul[lissu]! I am mindul of you, I have loved you greatly. ²⁶ I keep you in the great heavens by your curl. I make smoke rise up on your right side, I kindle fire on your left. ³³ The kingship [is] stro[ng] on [.....]

(break)

1.7 Issar-beli-da''ini

v¹ [.....] shall not receive [...] from him. I will cut the conspiring weasels and shrews to pieces before his feet. ⁸ You (f.) are you. The king is my king!

¹⁰ By the mouth of the woman Issar-beli-da''ini, a votaress of the king.

1.8 Ahat-abiša

¹² I am the Lady of Arbela. ¹³ To the king's mother: ¹⁴ Because you implored me, saying: "You have placed the ones at the (king's) right and left side in your lap, but made my own offspring roam the steppe" ²¹ Now fear not, my king! The kingdom is yours, yours is the power!

²⁴ By the mouth of the woman Ahat-abiša of Arbela.

1.9 Unknown Prophet

²⁶ All is well with Esarhaddon, king of Assyria. ²⁷ Ištar of Arbela has gone out to the steppe and sent (an oracle of) well-being to her calf in the city. ³¹ At [her] coming out [.....]
(break)

vi

1.10 La-dagil-ili

² [I am the Lady of Arb]ela. ³ [O Esarhaddon, whos]e bosom [Ištar] of Arbela has filled with favour! Could you not rely on the previous utterance which I spoke to you? Now you can rely on this later one too. ¹³ Praise me! When daylight declines, let them hold torches! Praise me before them! ¹⁹ I will banish trembling from my palace. You shall eat safe food and drink safe water, and you shall be safe in your palace. Your son and grandson shall rule as kings on the lap of Ninurta.

³¹ By the mouth of La-dagil-ili of Arbela.

Collection 2

- i** beginning (about 5 lines) destroyed
- 1 [x x x x x-b]u¹-bu-ni
 2 [x x x x x ú-da- 'i¹-i-nu¹
 3 [x x x x x x]-š*i*-na
 4 [x x x x x] a-da-an
 5 [x x a-na-ku[?]] r^{d1}ba-ni-tu
 6 [x x x x x] ú-ta-qa-an
 7 [g^{is}GU.ZA[?] ša m*aš-šur*-PAB]-AŠ¹ ú-ka-na
 8 [x x x x x x] a-ni-nu d¹IŠ.TAR.MEŠ
 9 [x x x x i]na É.SAG.ÍL
 10 [x x x x m]aš-šur-PAB-AŠ MAN KUR aš-šur
 11 [lúKÚR.MEŠ-ka] r¹ú¹-sa-pa-ak
 12 [ina GÌR.2-ia] ú-kab-ba-as
 13 [la ta-pa-a]l¹-li-hi AMA MAN
 14 [TA* pi-i m^dPA]-hu-sa-an-ni uruŠÀ-URU-a-a
-
- 15 [la ta-pa]-làh m*aš-šur*-PAB-AŠ
 16 [a-ki lúM]Á¹.LAH₄ dam¹-qí ina ka-a-ri DÙG.GA
 17 [g^{is}MÁ ú-k]al-la a-ki šá pa-ni-ti
 18 [lu ina u]r¹-ki-ti ina bat-bat-ti-ka
 19 [a-sa-hu]r¹ ma-šar-ta-ka a¹-a-šar
 20 [ma-šar-tú šá] KUR.KUR da¹-an-na-at a-dan-niš
 21 [60 DINGIR.MEŠ ina ZAG]-ia 60 DINGIR.MEŠ ina KAB-ia
 22 [i-za-zu m]aš-šur-PAB-AŠ MAN KUR aš-šur
 23 [lúKÚR.MEŠ-k]a¹ a-ka-šá-ad
 24 [x x x x x x]x EN-šú-nu a-na-ku
 25 [x x x x x TA Š]U.2-ia mah-ru
 26 [x x x x x x x] r¹ú¹-da-in-an-ni-ni
 27 [x x x x x x x m]aš-šur-PAB-AŠ
 28 [x x x x x x x].MEŠ šá AN-e
 29 [x x x x x x x x]x par-šá-mu-tú
 30 [x x x x x x x]x ú-šal-lak-šú
 31 [x x x x x x x]x ú-ka-na
 32 [x x x x x x x ú-šá-a]n¹-mar
 33 [x x x x x x š]ul-me r¹šá¹ [m*aš-šur*-PAB]-AŠ¹
 34 [x x x x x x] ú-x[x x]x
 35 [TA* pi-i mⁱba-ia]-r^{a1} uru¹arba-ìl-r^{a1}
-
- 36 [a-na-ku d^b]e-let arba-ìl
 37 [m*aš-šur*-PAB-AŠ MAN] r¹KUR¹ aš-šur
 38 [la ta-pa-làh x x x x x]- r¹ti¹
 rest (about two lines) destroyed
- ii** beginning (3-4 lines) destroyed
- 1 r¹lú¹KÚR.MEŠ-ka mar¹ [šú-nu-ni x x (x)]

2 *ina ŠÀ-bi É.GAL-ka lu [kam-mu-sa-ka²]*
 3 *KUR aš-šur^{ki} is-si-ka ʾú¹-[sal-lam]*
 4 *ša kal UD-me kal-la-ma-r[i ma-šar-ta-ka]*
 5 *a-na-šar a-gu-ka ʾú¹-[ka-na]*
 6 *a-ki iṣ-šur a-kap-pi ina U[GU¹ AMAR-šú]*
 7 *ina UGU-hi-ka a-šab-bur ina bat-ʾbat¹-[ti-k]a*
 8 *a-la-ab-bi a-sa-hu-ur*
 9 *a-ki mu-ra¹-ni dam¹-qí ina É.GAL-ka*
 10 *a-du-al¹ KÚR.MEŠ-ka ú-ša-a-na*
 11 *ina É.GAL-ka ú-ta-qa-an-ka*
 12 *ni-kit-tu ni-ir-ri-tu ú-šá-an-ša-ka*
 13 *DUMU.UŠ-ka DUMU.UŠ DUMU.UŠ-ka*
 14 *LUGAL¹-u-tu ina IGI^dMAŠ up-pa-áš*
 15 *ta-hu-ma-a-ni ša KUR.KUR*
 16 *ú-ga-am-mar a-da-nak-ka*
 17 *a-me-lu-tu ʾul-lu-ma-a*
 18 *a-na-ku ši-i qa-bi-tu e-pi-is-su*
 19 *DUMU.MÍ hu-bur-tu a-na-ku*
 20 *ú-ša-a-na ú-ʾba¹-ra ad-da¹-[nak]-ka¹*
 21 *at-ta a-na a-a-ši na-i-da-an-ni*
 22 *di-ib-bi-ʾia¹ an-nu-ti TA* ŠÀ^{uru}arba-il*
 23 *ina É-a-nu-uk-ka e-si-ip*
 24 *DINGIR.MEŠ ša É.SAG.ÍL ina EDIN HUL¹ bal-li¹*
 25 *šar-bu-bu ar-hi-iš 2 GIBÍL.MEŠ*
 26 *ina pa-ni-šú-nu lu-še-ši-ú lil-li-ku*
 27 *šú-lam-ka li-iq-bi-u*
 28 *TA* pi-i šá^mla-da-gíl-DINGIR^{uru}arba-il-a-a*

29 *a-ki ta-ap-pa-la la ke-nu-ti*
 30 *a-bat^{d15} šá^{uru}arba-il a-bat šar-ra-ti^dNIN¹.LÍL*
 31 *a-da¹-gal as-sa-nam-me*
 32 *ú-ha-a-a-a-ʾa¹ la ke-nu-ti*
 33 *ina ŠU.2 LUGAL-ia a-šá-kan*
 34 *a-da¹-ab-ub¹ a-na ma-a'-[du-ti]*
 35 *si-ta-am-me-a na-pa-ah¹ [dUTU-ši]*
 36 *ra¹-ba¹ dUTU¹-ši a'-x[x x x x]*
 37 *a-ʾba¹-an-ni [x x x x x]*
 38 *a-bat^{d15}-[ša^{uru}arba-il]*
 39 *a-ʾna x¹ [x x x x x x]*

about two lines broken away

iii beginning (about two lines) destroyed

1 *lu-u et-k[a-ka x x x x x x]*
 2 *^{lú}da-gíl ʾMUŠEN¹. [MEŠ x x x x]*
 3 *a-na-ʾku¹-ma bi-[x x x x x]*
 4 *a-g¹a-lal¹ ma-a'-d[u-ti x x x x]*
 5 *a-bi-ar ʾú¹-b[a]-r[a x x x x x]*
 6 *a-ʾna-ku¹ x[x x x]x ʾa¹-x[x x x x]*
 7 *ʾa¹-ke¹-e¹ a'-ke-e ša a-na¹ ^{lú}l[ERIM².MEŠ]*

8 *ma-a 'du-ti ú'-[[sa[?]]]-na- 'u-[x-ni]*
 9 *ma-a im-ma-ti KUR na-ku-ru ib-ba-áš-ši*
 10 *ma-a ina ^{uru}kal-hi NINA^{ki} lu la nu-šab*
 11 *at-ta lu qa-la-ka ^maš-šur-PAB-AŠ*
 12 *^{lu}ši-ra-ni NIM.MA^{ki}-a-a*
 13 *^{kur}man-na-a-a a-bi-ar ^{kur}URI-a-a*
 14 *ši-iṭ-ri-šú a-bar-ri-im*
 15 *i-gi-ib ša ^mmu-gal-li^l ú-bat-taq*
 16 *man-nu LÚ e-du man-nu LÚ ha-ab-lu*
 17 *la ta-pa-làh ina GIŠ.MI ^maš-šur-PAB-AŠ MAN KUR aš-šur*
 18 *TA* pi-i ^{mi}ur-kit-tu-šar-rat ^{uru}kal-hi-tú*

19 *^maš-šur-PAB-AŠ¹ la ta-pa-làh KUR aš-šur ú-ta-qa-an*
 20 *DINGIR.MEŠ¹ 'ze'-nu'-ti'¹ [T]A¹ 'KUR¹ aš-šur¹ ú'-sal'¹-[I]am¹*
 21 *ši-ip-pu-tu ša ^{lu}KUR.MEŠ¹-ka a'-na'-sa-ah*
 22 *da-me ša ^{lu}KUR.MEŠ¹ ša LUGAL-ia a-tab-ba-ak*
 23 *šar-ri a-na-šar ^{lu}KUR.MEŠ¹ ina ^{giš}si-ga'-ra-te*
 24 *^{lu}sa-al-mu-ti ina ma-da'-na-ti*
 25 *ina IGI GÌR.2-šu ub-ba-la*
 26 *a-na-ku AD-ka AMA-ka*
 27 *bir-ti a-gap-pi-ia ur-ta-bi-ka*
 28 *né-ma-al-ka am-mar*
 29 *la ta-pal-làh ^maš-šur-PAB-AŠ*
 30 *bir-ti i-zi-ri-ia am-ma-te-ia*
 31 *a-šá-kan-ka ina ŠĀ-bi u₈-a*
 32 *^{lu}KUR.MEŠ¹ ša LUGAL-ia a-^lka¹-[šá-a]^d*
 33 *KUR aš-šur ú-ta-qa-an ^lLUGAL¹-[u-tu ša]*
 34 *AN¹-e ú-ta-qa-a[n x x x x]*
 35 *[na]-^lpa¹-ah ^dUTU-š[i x x x x]*
 36 *[ra-ba ^dUTU-š]i^l 'x¹ [x x x x]*
 rest (about 5 lines) destroyed
iv beginning (2-3 lines) destroyed
 1 *[x x x x x x še]- ^ltu²-qi*
 2 *[x x x x x a]l ^daš-šur*
 3 *[x x x x x x a]t-ta*
 4 *[x x x É.SAG.Í]L KÁ.DINGIR.KI*
 5 *[x x x x x x e]t-ka-ku*
 6 *[x x x x x x x] ^lx x x¹ LU[GAL[?]]*
 7 *[x x x x] a-ti-din*
 8 *[a-na-ku ^dur-k]i^l-tú na-id-a-ni*
 9 *[bé-et tal-la-k]u¹-u-ni a-na-šar¹-ka*
 10 *[x x x]-ra-ka*
 11 *[x x x x x] na-i-da-an-ni*
 12 *[(x) x x x] ^la¹-dan-niš*
 13 *[x x x x d]a- 'a-at-tú at-ta*
 14 *[x x x x l]a ta-pa-làh*
 15 *[x x x x x I]GI¹.2-ka*
 16 *[x x x x š]ak¹-^lna¹*

- 17 [x x x x x]-^rdu¹
 18 [x x x x x]-^ršī¹
 19 [x x x ú-sa-a]l¹-lam
 20 [la ta-pa-làh] mu-u-ri
 21 [(x) x x x x] gat¹-ta-ka a-šī¹-al
 22 [bir-ti i-z]i¹-ri-ia
 23 [am-ma-te-ia a-n]a-šar-ka
 24 [x x x x x] ke-e-ni
 25 [x x x tu-b]a²- 'a-a-ni
 26 [x x x-b]i² ina pa-ni-ia
 27 [x x x x L]UGAL-ta-ka ú-ta-qa-an
 28 [x x x x l]a¹ ta-pal-li-hi
 29 [x x x x t]u-kul-ti ^daš-šur
 30 [x x x x l]a ta-pa-làh
 31 [x x x x x x x] ^rx¹ [x]x
 rest (about six lines) destroyed

Translation:

i (beginning destroyed)

2.1 [Nabû]-hussani

¹ [..... sp]oke ² [... have stre]ngthened ³ [.....] their ⁴ [.....] I will give ⁵ [... I am] the Creatress.
⁶ I will put [...] in order and consolidate [the throne of Esarha]ddon. ⁸ [.....]. We are the
 goddesses ⁹ [.....i]n Esaggil. ¹⁰ Esarhaddon, king of Assyria! I will seize [your enemies] and
 trample [them under my foot]. ¹³ [Be not a]fraid, mother of the king. ¹⁴ [From the mouth of Nabû]-
 hussani of the Inner City.

2.2 [Bayâ]

¹⁵ [Have no fe]ar, Esarhaddon! ¹⁶ [Like a] skilled pilot [I will st]eer [the ship] into a good port.
 [The fu]ture [shall] be like the past; [I will go] around you and protect you. ²⁰ [The watch over]
 the lands is very strong. [Sixty gods are standing at] my [right side], sixty gods at my left. ²²
 Esarhaddon, king of Assyria! I will vanquish yo[ur enemies]. ²⁴ [.....] I am their lord ²⁵ [... from]
 my hand they have received ²⁶ [.....] strengthened me ²⁷ [.....] Esarhaddon ²⁸ [.....]s of the
 heavens ²⁹ [.....] old age ³⁰ [.....] I will make him go ³¹ [.....] I will consolidate ³² [..... I will
 l]ight ³³ [..... the w]ell-being of [Esarhadd]on ³⁴ [.....] I will [...]. ³⁵ [From the mouth of Bay]â
 of Arbela.

2.3 La-dagil-ili

³⁶ [I am the La]dy of Arbela. [Esarhaddon, king of] Assyria, [fear not!]

(break)

ii ¹ [I will annihilate] whatever enemies you [have]. As for [you, stay] in your palace; I will
 [reconcile] Assyria with you. I will protect [you] by day and by dawn and [consolidate] your
 crown. ⁶ Like a winged bird ov[er its young] I will twitter over you and go in circles around you.
 Like a beautiful (lion) cub I will run about in your palace and sniff out your enemies. ¹¹ I will
 keep you safe in your palace; I will make you overcome anxiety and trembling. Your son and
 grandson shall rule as kings before Ninurta. ¹⁵ I will abolish the frontiers of all the lands and give
 them to you. ¹⁷ Mankind is deceitful; I am the one who says and does. I will sniff out, catch and

give you the ‘noisy daughter’. ²¹ As for you, praise me! Gather into your innards these words of mine from Arbela: ²⁴ The gods of Esaggil languish in the ‘steppe’ of mixed evil. Quickly let two burnt offerings be sent out to their presence, and let them go and announce your well-being! ²⁸ From the mouth of La-dagil-ili of Arbela.

2.4 Urkittu-šarrat

²⁹ Thus shall you answer the disloyal one! ³⁰ The word of Ištar of Arbela, the word of Queen Mulissu: ³¹ I will look, I will listen, I will search out the disloyal ones, and I will put them into the hands of my king. ³⁴ I will speak to the multi[tudes]: ³⁵ Listen, sunr[ise] and sunset! I will create [.....]. ³⁸ The word of Ištar [of Arbela] to [.....]

(break)

iii ¹ Be on [your] guard [.....] ² the augur[s] ³ I myself [.....] ⁴ I will roll many [.....] ⁵ I will choose and catc[h.....] ⁶ I [.....]. ⁷ How, how (to answer) those who ... many [men], saying, “When will the change in the land come about? Let us not stay in Calah and Nineveh!” As for you, keep silent, Esarhaddon! ¹² I will choose the emissaries of the Elamite and the Mannean. I will seal the writings of the Urartian. I will cut off the ... of Mugallu. ¹⁶ Who (then) is the lone man? Who is the wronged man? Have no fear! Well sheltered is Esarhaddon, king of Assyria. ¹⁸ From the mouth of the woman Urkittu-šarrat of Calah.

2.5 [Sinqiša-amur]

¹⁹ Esarhaddon, have no fear! I will put Assyria in order and reconcile the angry gods with Assyria. ²¹ I will pull away the cover of your enemies and shed the blood of my king’s enemies. I will protect my king; I will bring enemies in neckstocks and vassals with tribute before your feet. ²⁶ I am your father and mother. I raised you between my wings; I will see your success. ²⁹ Have no fear, Esarhaddon! I will place you between my arm and my forearm. In woe I will vanquish the enemies of my king. I will put Assyria in order, I will put the kin[gdom of] heaven in order. [...] ³⁵ [t]he sunri[se.....] ³⁶ [the sunse]t [.....]

(break)

2.6 Unknown Prophet

iv ¹ [..... to a]vert ² [.....] Aššur ³ [..... y]ou ⁴ [... Esaggi]l, Babylon ⁵ [.....] I am on my guard ⁶ [..... to my] king ⁷ I gave [.....]. ⁸ [I am Urk]ittu. Praise me! ⁹ [Wherever you g]o, I will guard you. ¹⁰ [.....] you ¹¹ [.....]. Praise me! ¹² [.....] very ¹³ [..... s]trong, you ¹⁴ [.....] Have no fear! ¹⁵ [.....] your eyes

(break)

¹⁹ [I will re]concile [.....] ²⁰ [Have no fear], my calf! ²¹ I will cover your figure [.....]. ²² [I will sh]elter you [between my uppe]r arm ²³ [and my forearm]. ²⁴ [.....] righteous ²⁵ [..... you s]eek me ²⁶ [.....] in my presence ²⁷ [.....] I will put your kingdom in order. ²⁸ [As for you, mother of the king], have no fear! ²⁹ [.....] the support of Aššur. ³⁰ [Esarhaddon], have no fear!

(rest destroyed)

Collection 3

i

- 1 [x x x x x x x x x]
- 2 [x x x x x x x x x]
- 3 [x x x x x x x]-^ran¹
- 4 [x x x x x x x]-nu¹-ni
- 5 [x x x x x x] *ta¹-ab-tú*
- 6 [x x x x x x]x di-na¹
- 7 [x x x x i]h-ti-ši-in¹
- 8 [x x x-šú-n]u¹ us-se-li-a
- 9 [DI-mu a]-na AN-e u KI.TIM
- 10 [DI-m]u¹ a-na É.ŠÁR.RA
- 11 [DI-mu] ^ra¹-na ^maš-šur-PAB-AŠ MAN KUR aš-šur
- 12 [šul-m]u šá ^maš-šur-PAB-AŠ
- 13 [iš-kun]-u¹-ni¹ ina UGU ĠİR.2 lil-lik
- 14 [i-sin-nu ina] ^rÉ¹.ŠÁR.RA ^daš-šur is-sa-kan
- 15 [(x) x x] ša ^{uru}ŠÀ-URU
- 16 [x x x ^maš]-^ršur¹-PAB¹-AŠ
- 17 [(x) x x x x x x x-n]i
- 18 [x x x x i-n]a¹-aš-ši
- 19 [x x x x x x] KUR.KUR
- 20 [x x x x]-^rti¹ ina IGI ^daš-šur
- 21 [x x x]-^ra²¹-ni TA* ^maš-šur-PAB-AŠ
- 22 [x x x] il-lak-u-ni
- 23 [x x x x]-šú i-šar-ru-pu
- 24 [x x a-n]a¹ ga-ri-ni-šú
- 25 [x x x l]u² MUN¹ 3¹ tim-me
- 26 [x x x IG]I.2²-šú ú-še-taq

-
- 27 [si-ta-am]-me-a DUMU.MEŠ KUR aš-šur
 - 28 [LUGAL ^{lu}K]ÚR-šú ik-ta-šad
 - 29 [LUGAL-ku-n]u ^{lu}KÙR-šú
 - 30 [ina KI.TA G]ĠİR.2-šú is-sa-kan
 - 31 [TA* ra-b]a¹ ^dUTU-ši
 - 32 [a-di na-pa-a]h ^dUTU-ši
 - 33 [TA* na-pa-a]h ^dUTU-ši
 - 34 [a-di ra]-ba ^dUTU-ši
 - 35 [^{uru}me-li-d]i a-hap-pi
 - 36 [x x x a-ha]p¹-^rpi¹
 - 37 [x x x x x x x]

ii

- 1 [^{kur}]gi-mir-a-a ina ŠU¹-šú a-^ršá¹-kan¹
- 2 ^ri¹-šá-tu ina KUR el-li-pi um-ma-ad
- 3 kip-pat erbe-tim ^daš-šur it-ta-na-šú
- 4 TA* É i-nap-pa-ha-an-ni

- 5 *É i-rab-bu-u-ni*
6 LUGAL *mi-hir-šú la-áš-šú*
7 *a-ki ši-it ^dšá-maš na-mir*
8 *an-ni-u šul-mu ša ina IGI ^dEN-TÙR*
9 *ina IGI DINGIR.MEŠ-ni šá-ki-nu-u-ni*
-
- 10 *an-nu-rig ^{lu}sar-sar-a-ni¹ an¹-nu-^rti¹*
11 *us-sa-ad-bi-bu-ka us-se-šu-nik¹-ka*
12 *il-ti-bu-ka at-ta pi-i-ka*
13 *tap-ti-ti-a ma-a a-ni-na ^daš-šur¹*
14 *a-na-ku kil-la-ka as-se-me*
15 TA* ŠÀ-bi KÁ.GAL AN-e
16 *at-ta-qa-al-la-al-la*
17 *la¹-ak-ru-ur i-šá-tu lu-šá-kil-šú-nu*
18 *at-ta ina bir-tu-šú-nu ta-za-az*
19 TA* *pa¹-ni-ka at-ti-ši*
20 *a-na KUR-e us-se-li-šú-nu*
21 NA₄.MEŠ *aq-qul-lu ina UGU-hi-šú-nu a-zu-nu-un*
22 ^{lu}KÚR.MEŠ-ka *uh-ta-ti-ip*
23 *da-me-šú-nu ÍD um-tal-li*
24 *le-mu-ru lu-na-i¹-^rdu¹-ni*
25 *a-ki ^daš-šur EN DINGIR.MEŠ a-na-ku-ni*
26 *an-nu-u šul-mu šá ina IGI ša-al-me*
27 *ṭup-pi a-de-e an-ni¹-u šá ^daš-šur*
28 *ina UGU ha-^u-u-ti ina IGI LUGAL e-rab*
29 Ì DÙG.GA *i-za-ar-ri-qu*
30 UDU.SISKUR.MEŠ *ep-pu-šú*
31 ŠEM.HI.A *il-lu-ku*
32 *ina IGI LUGAL i-sa-as-si-u*
-
- 33 *a-bat ^d15 šá ^{uru}arba-ìl*
34 *a-na ^maš-šur-PAB-AŠ MAN KUR aš-šur*
35 DINGIR.MEŠ AD.MEŠ-ia ^rŠEŠ.MEŠ¹-ia¹ *al¹-k¹a¹-ni*
36 *ina ŠÀ a-d[e-e x x x x]*
possibly one line missing
- iii
- 1 [x x x x x x x x x]
2 *ina UGU [tam-l]e-e hi-^rir¹-š[u¹ x x x]*
3 A.MEŠ *šar-ša-ri ta-si-qi-šú-^rnu¹*
4 ^{du}gma-si-tú *ša 1 BÁN*
5 A.MEŠ *šar-ša-ri tu-um-ta-al-li*
6 *ta-at-ta-an-na-šú-nu*
7 *ma-a ta-qab-bi-a ina ŠÀ-ku-nu*
8 *ma-a ^d15¹ pa¹-aq-tú ši-i*
9 *ma-a tal-la-ka ina URU.MEŠ-ku¹-nu*
10 *na-gi-a-ni-ku-nu NINDA.MEŠ ta-ka-la*
11 *ta-maš-ši-a a-de-e an-nu-ti*
12 *ma-a TA ŠÀ A.MEŠ an-nu-ti*

13 *ta-šat-ti-a ta-ha-sa-sa-ni*
 14 *ta-na-ša-ra a-de-e an-nu-ti*
 15 *ša ina UGU ^maš-šur-PAB-AŠ áš-kun-u-ni*

16 *a-bat ^{d15} šá ^{uru}arba-il*
 17 *a-na ^maš-šur-PAB-AŠ MAN KUR aš-šur*
 18 *a-ki šá me-me-ni la e-pa-šú-u-ni*
 19 *la a-di-nak-kan-ni*
 20 *ma-a 4 si-ip-pi šá KUR aš-šur*
 21 *la ak-pu-pa-a la a-di-nak-ka-a*
 22 ^{lu}KÚR-ka la ak-šu-du
 23 ^{lu}gi-ši-ši-ka a-a-bi-ka
 24 *[a-ki gu]r^l-šip-ti la al-qu-tú*
 25 *[at-t]a^l a-na a-a-ši mi-nu ta-di-na*
 26 *[a-k]a^l-li ša qa-ri-te*
 27 *l[a^l-áš-šú] ša ak la^l É DINGIR*
 28 *a[k-ka-l]i a-ka-li*
 29 *ak-k[a]-r^lli^l ka-a-si*
 30 *ma-a ina^l pa^l-ni a-da-gal*
 31 *IGI.2 ina UGU-hi ak-tar-ar*
 32 *ma-a ket-tu-ma 1 BÁN a-kal a-šu^l-di*
 33 *1 BÁN ^{du}ma-si-tú ša KAŠ DÙG.GA*
 34 *ke-in ^uur-qí a-ku-su*
 35 *la-áš-ši-a ina pi-ia la-áš-kun*
 36 *lu-mal-li ka-a-su ina UGU-hi la-as-si*
 37 *la-la-a-a lu-tir-ra*

iv

1 *[x x x x x x x x]*
 2 *[x x x x x x x]-ni*
 3 *[x x x x x x] la-áš-ši*
 4 *[x x x x x x la-a]l-lik*
 5 *[x x x x x] e-ta-li-a*
 6 *[x x x i-sin]-nu a-sa-kan*
 7 *[a-ki ina ŠÀ-bi[?]] a-na-ku-ni*
 8 *[ma-a nu-da[?]] a-ki ^{d15}*
 9 *[šá ^{uru}]r^larba-il^l at-ti-ni*
 10 *[a-na KUR aš]-šur ut-ta-am-me-šá*
 11 *[né-mal[?]-k]a la-mu-ur KUR.MEŠ-ni*
 12 *[ina GÌR.2-ia[?]] la-ak-bu-us*
 13 *[la-ad-bu[?]]-ub ina UGU ^maš-šur-PAB-AŠ*
 14 *[ú-ma]-r^la^l ri-iš ^maš-šur-PAB-AŠ*
 15 *[4 si-ip-p]i ša KUR aš-šur*
 16 *[ak-tap-p]a at-ta-nak-ka*
 17 *[^{lu}KÚR-k]a ak-ta-šá-ad*
 18 *[UN[?].MEŠ š]a is-si-ka i-za-zu-ni*
 19 *[tè-en[?]-šú-n]u na-bal-ku-ut*
 20 *[ina ŠÀ an-ni-t]i ta-am-mar*
 21 *[a-ki ^{d15} šá ^{uru}]arba-il a-na-nu-ki*

22 [ki-ma ^{lú}LUL[?].MEŠ[?] u]s-sa-di-du-ni
 23 [ša i-mit-ti] ša šu-me-li
 24 [ši-ip-ṭu[?]] na-šu i-za-z[u]
 25 [^{lú}man-za-az] É.GA[L]
 26 [^{lú}ARAD] ʾÉ¹.GAL šu-ʾnu¹
 27 [ša ina UGU]-ka i-si-hu-ni
 28 [al-ti]-bi-a ina UGU šin-ni-šú-nu
 29 [a-na ^{giš}]za-qi-ba-a-ni
 30 [as]-sa-kan-šú-nu
 blank space of about 2 lines
 31 [^mla-da-gíl-DI]NGIR¹ ʾ^{lú}ra¹-gi-mu
 32 [^{ur}arba-il]-ʾa-a¹
 33 [x x x x x x] ^d15
 34 [x x x x x x]-lu-ni
 35 [ir-tu-gu-um] (blank)

Translation:

3.1 Introduction

i (beginning destroyed)

⁵ favour [.....] ⁶ give [.....] ⁷ He has taken care of [...], ⁸ he has promoted th[eir ...]. ⁹ Heaven and earth are [well]; Ešarra is [well]; Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, is [well]. ¹² [May the well-being which Esarhaddon [has established] gain footing! ¹⁴ Aššur has arranged [a feast in] Ešarra. ¹⁵ [.....] of the Inner City ¹⁶ [..... Es]arhaddon ¹⁷ [.....] ¹⁸ [..... I]ifts up ¹⁹ [.....] the lands ²⁰ [.....] before Aššur ²¹ [.....] with Esarhaddon ²² [.....] they come ²³ [.....] they burn ²⁴ [... t]o his mother ²⁵ [...] ... three pillars ²⁶ [...] he runs his [ey]e over [...]

3.2 First oracle of salvation

²⁷ [List]en, O Assyrians! ²⁸ [The king] has vanquished his enemy. [You]r [king] has put his enemy [under] his foot, [from] sun[se]t [to] sun[ris]e, [from] sun[ris]e [to] sun[se]t! ³⁵ I will destroy [Meli]d, ³⁶ [I will de]stroy [...], ³⁷ [I will],

ii ¹ I will deliver the Cimmerians into his hands and set the land of Ellipi on fire. ³ Aššur has given the totality of the four regions to him. From sunrise to sunset there is no king equal to him; he shines as brilliantly as the sun. ⁸ This is the (oracle of) well-being placed before Bel-Tarbaši and the gods.

3.3 Second oracle of salvation

¹⁰ Now then, these traitors provoked you, had you banished, and surrounded you; but you opened your mouth (and cried): “Hear me, O Aššur!” ¹⁴ I heard you cry. I issued forth as a fiery glow from the gate of heaven, to hurl down fire and have it devour them. ¹⁸ You were standing in their midst, so I removed them from your presence. I drove them up the mountain and rained (hail)stones and fire of heaven upon them. ²² I slaughtered your enemies and filled the river with their blood. Let them see (it) and praise me, (knowing) that I am Aššur, lord of the gods. ²⁶ This is the well-being (placed) before the Image. ²⁷ This covenant tablet of Aššur enters the king’s presence on a cushion. Fragrant oil is sprinkled, sacrifices are made, incense is burnt, and they read it out in the king’s presence.

3.4 The meal of covenant

³³ The word of Ištar of Arbela to Esarhaddon, king of Assyria: ³⁵ Come, gods, my fathers and brothers, [enter] the cove[nant]
(break)

iii ² [She placed] a slice ... on the [ter]race and gave them water from a cooler to drink. She filled a flagon of one seah with water from the cooler and gave it to them with the words: ⁷ “In your hearts you say, ‘Ištar is slight’, and you will go to your cities and districts, eat (your) bread and forget this covenant. ¹² (But when) you drink from this water, you will remember me and keep this covenant which I have made on behalf of Esarhaddon.”

3.5 Word of Ištar of Arbela

¹⁶ The word of Ištar of Arbela to Esarhaddon, king of Assyria: ¹⁸ As if I did not do or give you anything! ²⁰ Did I not bend the four doorjambs of Assyria, and did I not give them to you? Did I not vanquish your enemy? Did I not collect your haters and foes [like but]terflies? ²⁵ [As for yo]u, what have you given to me? ²⁶ [There is no fo]od for my banquet, as if there were no temple; I [am depri]ved of my cup! I am waiting for them, I have cast my eye upon them. ³² Verily, establish a one-seah bowl of food and a one-seah flagon of sweet beer! Let me take and put in my mouth vegetables and soup, let me fill the cup and drink from it, let me restore my charms!

(break)

iv ³ let me lift [.....] ⁴ [let m]e go [.....] ⁵ I went up [.....] ⁶ and arranged [a fea]st [...]. ⁷ [When] I was [there, they said: “We know] that you are Ištar [of A]rbela.” ¹⁰ I set out [for As]syria to see yo[ur success], to tread the mountains [with my feet], [and to spea]k about Esarhaddon. ¹⁴ [No]w rejoice, Esarhaddon! [I have be]nt [the four doorjamb]s of Assyria and given them to you; I have vanquished yo[ur enemy. The mood of the people] who stand with you has been turned upside down. ²⁰ [From thi]s you shall see [that] I am [Ištar of] Arbela. ²² [As soon as the traitors] have been dragged forth, [the ‘ones at the right and] left side’ shall be there to bear [the punishment]. ²⁵ (As for) [those cou]rtiers and palace [personnel who] rebelled [against] you, [I have sur]rounded them and impaled them by their teeth. ³¹ [La-dagil-i]li, a prophet of [Arbela, prophesied (this) when] Ištar [.....].

Collection 4

beginning (possibly 1 line only) destroyed

- 1 [x x x x x] ʾx x¹ [x x x x]
- 2 [^maš-šur-PAB-A]Š MAN KUR aš-šur [x x x x]
- 3 [ka-ki]š-a-ti ʾú¹-[ba²-ra²]
- 4 [ina IGI] GÌR.2-ka ʾa¹-[kar-ra-ar]
- 5 [at-t]a² la ta-p[a-làh x x]
- 6 [x x]x ur-ki-u-te a-k[aš²-šad² x x x]
- 7 [x x-k]a tap-ta-an-[x x x]
- 8 [x x-t]i a-šá-[kan x x]
- 9 [x x x]x-ʾka-bar¹ ina x[x x x]
rest destroyed

Translation:

(beginning destroyed)

² [Esarhaddo]n, king of Assyria! [.....] ³ I will [catch ... and wease]ls, (and) ⁴ I will [cast them before] your feet. ⁵ [As for yo]u, fe[ar] not! [.....] ⁶ I will v[anquish] the later [.....] ⁷ You shall ... yo[ur] ⁸ [...] I will p[ut] ¹⁰ [...] massive in [...]
(rest destroyed)