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Erudite Savagery: Intertextuality in Ashurbanipal's Account of the Siege of Babylon

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Introduction

In 648 BCE,[1] a deadly civil war between two brothers—Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria (668–ca. 631) and Šamaš-šuma-ukīn, king of Babylonia (667–648)—was finally coming to an end.[2] After a two-year siege, Ashurbanipal's army conquered and sacked Babylon, the capital of his once-beloved sibling. The victorious Ashurbanipal did not have the satisfaction of capturing his "unfaithful brother" (*aḫu lā kēnu*)[3] alive, and of executing him as slowly and horrifically as he doubtless would have wished.[4] Yet Šamaš-šuma-ukīn did not manage to escape his city, and his death was nothing short of spectacular: if we are to believe Ashurbanipal, the king of Babylon burned to death.[5] To commemorate his great victory, Ashurbanipal commissioned a new recension of his annals, known as Prism C,[6] most likely composed in 647.[7] The text is largely duplicated by later recensions of the annals, known as Prisms Kh[8] and G,[9] both dated with some confidence to 646.[10] All three recensions contain an identically worded account of the siege of Babylon, henceforth referred to as

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[1] All following dates are BCE.

[2] For a detailed account of the war, see Frame, *Babylonia 689–627* (1992), 102–90. For a short overview of the conflict, with references to earlier literature, see Novotny and Jeffers, *Inscriptions of Ashurbanipal* (2018), 22–23.

[3] For attestations of this moniker for Šamaš-šuma-ukīn in Ashurbanipal's inscriptions, see, among others, Prism Kh (RINAP 5/1 no. 7) vii 24'–25' and Prism G (RINAP 5/1 no. 8) viii 14''–15''.

[4] In Prism Kh vii 75'–79', Ashurbanipal writes that after he defeated his brother and conquered Babylon, *nišī bēlī hiṭṭi annu kabtu ēmissunūti bunnannišunu atbal maškīšunu aššuṭ unakkisa šīrīšunu*, "(As for) the guilty people, I imposed a grievous punishment upon them: I destroyed (lit. took away) their faces, flayed them, and chopped up their flesh." One dares not imagine what the fate of Šamaš-šuma-ukīn, the chief rebel himself, would have been had Ashurbanipal caught him alive.

[5] See, for example Prism Kh vii 55'–61'. On descriptions of Šamaš-šuma-ukīn's death in Ashurbanipal's inscriptions, see Zaia, "My Brother's Keeper" (2019).

[6] RINAP 5/1 no. 6.

[7] For the dating of Prisms C, Kh, and G, see Novotny and Jeffers, *Inscriptions of Ashurbanipal* (2018), 32, based on Novotny, "Classifying Ashurbanipal's Inscriptions" (2008).

[8] RINAP 5/1 no. 7.

[9] RINAP 5/1 no. 8.

[10] See n. 7 above.

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BSA ("Babylon Siege Account"),[11] which Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor (who first identified this textual episode and estimated its size) described as "… the vivid description of the sufferings and deprivations brought upon the populace by the prolonged siege."[12]

This article contends that two sections of BSA contain multiple allusions to Mesopotamian, and more specifically Babylonian, literary and religious works. These allusions infuse the brutality of BSA with learnedness, turning the text into a display of refined and erudite savagery, and a tour de force of violent intertextuality. After an overview of intertextual methodology, the proposed allusions in BSA will be listed, and several interpretations of their presence given.

Intertextual Methodology

The study of intertextuality in Assyrian royal inscriptions has been greatly advanced in the last few decades by the work of scholars such as Elnatan Weissert,[13] Amitai Baruchi-Unna,[14] Carly Crouch,[15] and Johannes Bach.[16] Each used an intertextual method—whether explicit or implicit—to identify and analyze possible allusions (marked in this section as "PA"s for the sake of brevity). The basic problem limiting such methods is that ancient authors, much like modern ones, sometimes announced quotations (as they might in commentaries),[17] but never flagged allusions as such. In the absence of such marking, the modern scholar cannot definitively prove their presence, only argue them to be more or less likely. In this article, the alluding text—in this case BSA—is referred to as the *hypertext*, and the texts alluded to as *hypotexts*, as in Bach's adaptation of Gérard Genette's transtextual methodology.[18]

According to the method created for this article, the likelihood of PAs is estimated while weighing three concepts: complexity, frequency, and distinctiveness.

As to the first of these, *complexity:* the more extensive the similarity between two apparently unconnected phenomena, the more likely it is that they are, in fact, connected. To take one example, if a scholarly article contains a word or two which are also found in an older contribution on the same subject, this hardly indicates plagiarism; yet if it contains suspiciously similar phrases (to say nothing of sentences or whole paragraphs), it more likely to have copied that material. In the same way, the more complex a PA is—the greater its grammatical intricacy and the number of words it contains—the less likely it is to be coincidental, and the more likely it becomes. For instance, a PA made up of two words is more convincing than that composed of one; it is even more compelling when those two words make up a phrase than if they are disconnected from each other.

The second concept is *frequency*: the more numerous the instances of conspicuous similarity between our hypothetical newer article and older work, the greater the odds of plagiarism. In the same way, PAs to the same hypotext can compound: the more of them that are found in the hypotext and the more densely packed they are in a given section, the higher the probability of each of them really being an allusion. For example, the more PAs one finds to the *Gilgamesh Epic*, the more likely each seems. This can be construed as an extension of the concept of complexity, as the presence of repeated PAs to a given composition is more complex (and thus less likely to be random) than that of a single one. Relatedly, the presence of multiple PAs in the hypertext may indicate a pattern of "intertextual

[11] In none of the Prisms are all the lines of BSA attested, and those that are attested are often fragmentary. Lines currently attested are Prism C viii 9'''–21''', ix 1'–24', and ix 1''–10''; Prism Kh viii 1'–79'; and Prism G viii 2'''–22''', viii 1''''–36''''.

[12] Cogan and Tadmor, "Ashurbanipal's Conquest" (1981): 239.

[13] Weissert, "Political Climate" (1997).

[14] Baruchi-Unna, "Crossing the Boundaries" (2008) and "Genres Meet" (2013).

[15] Crouch, "Cosmological Warrior (2013)."

[16] Bach, "Literary Identity" (2020), "Transtextual Stylization" (2020), and *transtexuellen Poetic* (2020).

[17] On citation in Mesopotamian commentaries, see Frahm, *Textual Commentaries* (2011), 86–110, with a concise discussion in 107–110.

[18] Though such use of the terms hypertext and hypotext is established, it could be said that referring to the alluding text as a hypertext rather than a hypotext is counterintuitive, as it subverts the expected genealogical metaphor, in which the earlier is "above" and the later "below," in favor of an archaeological one in which whatever comes later is "above." For Bach's adaptation of Genette, see Bach, "Literary Identity" (2020), 324–25, "Transtextual Stylization" (2020), 30–32, and *transtexuellen Poetic* (2020), 50–74. Bach, after Genette, refers to a relationship between one text and another as *transtextuality*, and has *architextuality and inter/hyper-textuality* as subtypes of such a relationship (Bach, "Literary Identity" [2020]: 324–325). As intertextuality is a far more commonly used term than transtextuality, and since reference to several different types of transtextuality would result in an over-abundance of jargon, this article will use "intertextuality" throughout—with the term understood as "a system where texts relate to each other" (Wisnom, *Weapons of Words* [2019], 2)—in place of "transtextuality," "architextuality," and "intertextuality" as used by Genette and Bach.

behavior" on the part of its author(s), increasing the chances of allusion throughout.

The third concept is *distinctiveness*: to continue the analogy of the scholarly article, what can seem like plagiarism to an outsider may turn out to be nothing but the use of jargon employed throughout an academic field, or even of phrasing that is exceedingly common throughout texts written in the language of the article. To judge the chances that PAs are merely coincidental, or made up of stock phrases, the elements (words, phrases, etc.) of a PA should be searched for in texts other than the hypertext and the proposed hypotext, especially in those of the same genre or type as the hypertext. Unusual or unexpected phrasing may indicate allusion, particularly if it is difficult to account for it otherwise, while the more common and routine the elements of a PA, the more it is "diluted," and its likelihood lowered.

The presence of such elements outside of the hypertext and the proposed hypotext, even in other texts of the same kind as the hypertext, does not necessarily preclude the possibility of allusion—that is to say, the evocation of a hypotext in the hypertext—in a given context. Intertextuality, as a way to account for textual phenomena, should not be treated merely as an explanation of last resort, probable only when all others have been discounted. In sum, the more complex, frequent, and distinctive possible allusions are, the more likely they become; the more atomized, rare, and undistinctive they are, the less likely they seem.

In alluding to a hypotext, the author(s) of a hypertext may transform it in various ways.[19] Four of these transformations (as adapted by Bach from the work of Genette[20]) seem particularly relevant: *extension*, whereby a hypertext extends a hypotext by adding to it; *reduction*, in which a hypertext removes elements from a hypotext; *substitution*, which involves the replacement of an element in the hypotext with another in a hypertext; and *intramodal transformation*, which refers to subtle grammatical modifications of a hypotext by a hypertext (for example, a change from "The man lived in a house" to "The man lives in a house"). In this article, I will reference such transformations exclusively in the context of verbal morphology and involving changes in the stem, tense, person, or number of a verb.

Passages under Consideration

The two sections of BSA that I will focus on—due to the presence within them of possible intertextual allusions, seemingly not to be found in the rest of BSA—are attested in fragmentary versions in Prisms C,[21] Kh,[22] and G.[23] As they are preserved, these versions are identical but for three instances of variant spelling, as will be noted; the reconstruction of the passages given below combines all three recensions. The passages will first be given in transliteration, then analyzed section by section in normalization. After quoting a relevant portion of BSA, the proposed hypotext for it will be given, and possible allusions to the hypotext and their likelihood discussed. Such discussions are helped greatly by the tools offered by RINAP online,[24] which contains the royal inscriptions of the late Neo-Assyrian kings from Tiglath-pileser III (744–627) to Sîn-šarra-iškun (ca. 626–612) in a lemmatized format. RINAP thus serves as an invaluable aid in research concerning textual relationships between different inscriptions, and intertextual ones in particular. It should also be noted that the translations in this article are my own, and that they diverge on some points from those in the RINAP volumes.

Passage 1 (Prism Kh viii 23'–31' || Prism G viii 17'''–22'''):

ina la ma-ka-le-e iq-ta-a i-zu-ba meš-re-e-ti-šú-nu e-mu-u šá-lam-tíš zi-i-me UN^{meš} *ina ku-ri u ni-is-sa-*⌜*ti*⌝ *iq-ṭu-ru* GIM *qut-*[*ri*] *eṭ-lu ša ar-da-ti ar-da-tu ša* ⌜*eṭ*⌝-[*li*] *ina re-bet* URU *i-na-aṭ-ṭa-lu pu-*⌜*zur*⌝-[*šùn*] *ša la ṣu-ba-ti na-an-*⌜*du*⌝-[*qu*$^{?}$] ⌜*te*⌝*-di-iq* EN *ar-ni ba-šá-mu u* […]

From lack of food, their limbs became used up, and withered (lit.: oozed) away, they (the people of Babylon) became like corpses. In suffering and woe, the features of the people darkened as (if by) smoke. The young man of the young

[19] For various kinds of such transformations, see Genette, *Palimpsestes* (1982), 237–453.

[20] For illustrations of the use of these and other intertextual techniques in an Assyriological context, see Bach, "Literary Identity" (2020), 325–32.

[21] Prism C ix 11'–17', only containing lines from passage II.

[22] Only manuscripts of Prism Kh wholly or partially preserve all the lines of both sections (viii 23'–31', 45'–51').

[23] Prism G viii 17'''–22''', 7''''–13''''.

[24] See http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/rinap/corpus/, accessed December 2022.

woman, the young woman of the you[ng man]—in the city square they saw [their] genitals. (Now) unclothed,[25] they don[ned] the garment of a sinner—sackcloth and […].

Passage 2 (Prism C 11'–17' || Prism Kh viii 45'–51', Prism G 7''''–13''''):

GÌR.NÍTA-*šú-nu ina* ŠÀ-*šú-nu iz-zi-iz-ma*[26] *ú-šam-qit si-it-tú*
ADDA^{meš} UN^{meš} SILA *u su-lu-u pur-ru-ku pu-uḫ-ḫu-ú* KÁ^{meš} UGU URU *u* NUN *šá-qu-um-ma-tú na-da-at*[27] *šá-ḫur-ra-tu tab-kàt ga-nun-šú-un šu-uḫ-ru-ub*[28]

The governor, their shepherd, became (lit.: is becoming) angry in their midst (lit.: heart) and felled the remainder (of them). The people's corpses obstructed the streets and alleys, (and) blocked doorways. Over city and ruler a hush was cast. Deathly silence was poured out. Their home was laid waste.

Proposed Intertextual Links

Excerpt A, for instance, may contain allusions to the composition *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*:[29]

Excerpt A (Prism Kh viii 23'–24' || Prism G viii 17'''–18''')

ina lā mākālê iqtâ izūbā mešrêtīšunu ēmû šalamtiš

From lack of food, their limbs became used up, and **withered** (lit.: **oozed**) away**, they became like corpses**.

Ludlul II 91–92:
ina lā mākālê *zīmūya itta*[*krū*]
šīrī ištaḫḫa dāmī ***izzū*****[*ba*]**

From lack of food, my features chang[ed],
My flesh was wasted, **my blood ooz[ed]** (away).

Ludlul II 44:

immuṣāma immâ šalamtiš

(When) they (the people) starve, **they become like corpses**.

The most likely allusion to *Ludlul* in this section of BSA is the phrase used to describe the condition of the famished Babylonians, *ēmû šalamtiš*, "they became like corpses." While grammatically similar phrases appear in the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III[30] and Sargon II (721–705),[31] a variation of *šalamtiš emû*, "to become like corpses," is only attested (outside of *Ludlul* and BSA) in the later *Cyrus Cylinder*, where it is likely also an allusion to *Ludlul*.[32] In alluding to *Ludlul*, the author of BSA slightly modified its phrasing: while *Ludlul* has the feminine plural *nišī*, "the people" as the implicit subject of *immâ šalamtiš*, the subject of *ēmû šalamtiš* is the grammatically masculine multitude of Babylon's inhabitants. This would be an example of substitution followed by an intramodal transformation, as the change in the phrase's subject results in the replacement of *immâ* with *ēmû*.

That *ina lā mākālê iqtâ izūbā mešrêtīšunu* is an allusion to *Ludlul* is less certain, for the distinctiveness of its constituent elements is far lower. W. G Lambert,[33]

[25] On the translation of *ša lā ṣubāti*, see n. 49 below.

[26] Following Prism C ix 11' and Prism G viii 7''''. Prism Kh gives *e-zi-iz-*⌜*ma*⌝ (viii 45'), an Assyrianism, yet one that shows that the verb is derived from *ezēzu*, not *izuzzu*, as the -i- verbal prefix becomes -e- in the Neo-Assyrian dialect in the conjugation of the former, regular I-ʾ verb, and not in that of the latter, irregular one (for the conjugations of Assyrian verbs, see Hämeen-Anttila, *Neo-Assyrian Grammar* [2000], 142–63). The durative *izziz* has a parallel in *Sargon's Letter to Aššur* (RINAP 2 no. 65: 413), in which Sargon II says of the Urartian king Rusâ that *iz-zi-iz-ma ṣurrūšu iḫmuṭa kabattuš*, "his heart became (lit.: is becoming) angry, his mind burned hot."

[27] Following Prism G viii 11''''. Prism Kh has *na-da-ta* (vii 49') for *nadât*—an example of a CV-CV spelling for CVC, common in the first millennium (Worthington, *Textual Criticism* [2012], 170). The word is not preserved in Prism C ix 15'.

[28] Prism G viii 13'''' has *šu-uḫ-ru-bu* for *šuḫrub*, another instance of CV-CV spellings for CVC.

[29] For an edition of *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*, see Annus and Lenzi, *Righteous Sufferer* (2010).

[30] *ša . . . zāqīqiš imnú*, "who reckoned (his enemies) as phantoms," is attested several times as a description of Tiglath-pileser III in his inscriptions (RINAP 1 no. 39: 2; no. 47: obv. 2; no. 51: 2; and no. 52: 2).

[31] *ikšudū mītūtiš*, "they became like the dead" occurs in *Sargon's Letter to Aššur* (RINAP 2 no. 65: 176).

[32] *Cyrus Cylinder* lines 11–12: *Marduk . . . ana . . . nišī Šumeri u Akkad ša īmû šalamtaš usahhir kabattaš irtaši tayyāra*, "Marduk . . . changed his mind concerning the people of Sumer and Akkad, who had become like corpses, and took pity on them." For a transliteration of the Cyrus Cylinder, see Finkel, "Appendix" (2013). For a translation, see Finkel, "Chapter 1" (2013), 4–7.

[33] Lambert, *Wisdom Literature* (1960), 44.

and later Amar Annus and Alan Lenzi,[34] reconstructed *izzū*[*bā*], a G Perfect form of *zâbu*,[35] "to drip, dissolve," at the end of II 92—the very next line of *Ludlul* after that containing *ina lā mākālê*. This could indicate that the author of BSA had *Ludlul* in mind when he put *lā mākālê* and *izūbā* in the same clause. However, a phrase almost identical to *iqtâ izūbā* already occurs in Ashurbanipal's Prisms D and B, inscriptions earlier than BSA,[36] to describe the Elamite king Urtaku: *ša . . . ina tānēḫi iqtû izūbû*, "Who … became used up, and wasted (lit.: oozed) away in wailing."[37] This phrase is copied in Prisms C[38] and Kh,[39] and the author of BSA may have reworked it rather than drawing on *Ludlul*. Outside of Mesopotamia, the verb לזוב, the Hebrew equivalent of *zâbu*, is also used to describe the famished people of Jerusalem in the Book of Lamentations,[40] employing phrasing strikingly similar to BSA.

The phrase *ina lā mākālê* is otherwise unattested in Assyrian royal inscriptions of the period,[41] which suggests it is not a stock phrase, yet it is attested twice outside of BSA and *Ludlul*, found in *The Poor Man of Nippur*[42] and in a loan document from Babylon written during Ashurbanipal's siege of 650–648, the very event described in BSA.[43] In the latter text, it is said that UN^{meš} *ina la ma-ka-le-*⌜*e*⌝ […] *i-mut-tu*, "The people died […] from lack of food."

While the distinctiveness of the elements making up *ina lā mākālê iqtâ izūbā mešrêtīšunu* is low, the density of this section—that is to say, the combined presence in it of *ēmû šalamtiš*, *ina lā mākālê*, and *izūbā*—increases the likelihood of an allusion to, or a reworking of, *Ludlul*. Having one word or phrase evoking the composition would have been suspect, but having three of them in quick succession seems too conspicuous to be coincidental. Ashurbanipal may also have alluded to *Ludlul*, albeit subtly, in his L3 inscription,[44] and a similarly subtle reference may be present here.

Excerpt B (Prism Kh viii 25'–26' || Prism G 19'''–20''')

> ***zīmê nišī ina kūri u nissati iqṭurū*** *kīma qut*[*ri*]
> **In suffering and woe, the features** of the people **darkened** as (if by) smoke.

> *The Babylonian Theodicy* 30:[45]
> ***kūru u nissatu uqattirū zīmū***[*ya*]
> **Suffering and woe have darkened** [my] **features**.

This intertextual link was noted by Ebbe Knudson in his 1967 discussion of the text.[46] It would make sense that after alluding to *Ludlul*, the author of BSA would turn to another text describing the ordeal of a sufferer. In an intramodal transformation, he slightly modified his hypotext by using the G rather than D stem of *qatāru* ("to smoke/darken"),[47] making the verb intransitive rather than transitive. He also extended the phrase, embellishing it with a simile playing on the root q-t-r: the features of the people darkened (*iqṭurū*) "like" or "as if" by smoke (*qutru*).[48]

[34] Annus and Lenzi, *Righteous Sufferer* (2010), 21.

[35] Though *izzū*[*bā*] could also be construed as a Gt Preterite, *zâbu* in the Gt is not attested in the verb's CAD entry. That *izzū*[*bā*] is a G Perfect verb is further supported by its occurrence in parallelism in *Ludlul* II 92 with *ištaḫḫa*, which should likewise be construed as a G Perfect form of *šaḫāḫu*, as *šaḫāḫu* is also not attested in the Gt in that verb's entry in the CAD.

[36] Copies of Prism B (RINAP 5/1 no. 3) on which dates are preserved are dated either to 649 or 648 (Novotny and Jeffers, *Inscriptions of Ashurbanipal* [2018], 51). All copies of Prism D (RINAP 5/1 no. 4) are dated to 648 (*ibid.*, 100).

[37] Prism B iv 49–51, duplicated by the incomplete Prism D iv 18'–20'.

[38] Prism C v 73–76.

[39] Prism Kh v 17–19.

[40] *Lamentations* 1:9: טובים היו חללי חרב מחללי רעב שהם יזובו מדקרים מתנובת שדי, "Better were those who died by the sword than those who die by famine, who waste away, pierced for lack of the produce of the field." For a discussion of this verse and its interpretations, see Salters, *Commentary on Lamentations* (2010), 305–308. יזובו מדקרים מתנובת שדי neatly parallels *ina lā mākālê . . . dāmī izzū*[*ba*] and *ina lā mākālê iqtâ izūbā mešrêtīšunu*, though it is starving people who waste away in *Lamentations*, while it is the sufferer's blood in *Ludlul* and the people's limbs in BSA that do so.

[41] That is to say, those from Tiglath-Pileser III on, according to a search on the RINAP online.

[42] *Poor Man of Nippur* l. 9: *ūmešamma ina lā mākālê biriš iṣallal*, "He goes to sleep hungrily every day for lack of food." For an edition of the composition, see Ottervanger, *Poor Man of Nippur* (2016).

[43] BM 47366: 18–20, quoted in Oppenheim, "'Siege-Documents'" (1955): 77, and edited in Frame, "A Siege Document" (1999): 105. Oppenheim and Frame diverge on some points, and neither claims to have collated the tablet.

[44] RINAP 5/1 no. 185. This possible allusion is set to be discussed in Lenzi, *Suffering in Babylon* (forthcoming 2023).

[45] For an edition and discussion of the *Theodicy*, see Oshima, *Babylonian Theodicy* (2013).

[46] Knudsen, "Fragments of Historical texts" (1967): 56.

[47] CAD Q s.v. *qatāru* v.

[48] In the Assyrian dialect, *t* partially assimilates to *q*, becoming *ṭ*, as in the form *iqṭibi*, "he said" (Hämeen-Anttila, *Neo-Assyrian Grammar* [2000], 21). This means that, despite appearances, *iqṭurū* is not derived from the root *q-ṭ-r, which is not attested, but, like *qutru*, from q-t-r. That the form *iqṭurū* is an Assyrianism

Excerpt C (Prism Kh 27'–31' || Prism G 21'''–22''')

> ***eṭlu*** *ša ardati ardatu ša* ***eṭ[li]*** *ina* ***rebīt āli*** *ina-aṭṭalū puzur*[*šun*] ***ša lā ṣubāti*** *nandu*[*qīʾ*] *tēdiq bēl arni bašāmu u* […]
>
> **The young man** of the young woman, the young woman of the **you[ng man]**—in the city square they saw [their] genitals. (Now) **unclothed**,[49] they don[nedʾ] the garment of a sinner—sackcloth and […]

Erra III 20–21:[50]

> ***ṣubāta*** *ina zumur amēli aparrasma* ***eṭla*** *mērânúššu*
> ***rebīt āli*** *ušallak*
> ***eṭla*** *ana erṣetim* ***ša lā ṣubāti*** *ušerred*
>
> I will cut the clothes from a man's body (and) parade **the young man** naked through the **city square**,
> I will make **the young man** descend to the netherworld **unclothed**.

The meaning of this section of BSA may be better understood by reference to a passage in *Esarhaddon's Letter to Aššur*.[51] In it, it is said of the rebellious king of Šubriya (obv. i 1–4):

> *šū našparti šarrūtīya ša kīma nabli iqammú ayyābī išmēma qabalšu imqussūma libbašu ṣabitma itarrurā išdāšu lubulti šarrūtīšu išḫuṭma bašāmu ṣubāt bēl arni ēdiqa zumuršu zīmūšu ulammimma* . . .
>
> (As for) him—he heard the message of my kingship, which burns enemies like flame; his *center collapsed*, his heart grew distressed (lit.: was seized),[52] his legs (lit.: foundations) were trembling, he took off the garment of his kingship, and put the sackcloth—the clothing of a sinner—upon his body, his features grew sad (lit.: he worsened his features) . . .

This behavior is strikingly similar to that of the king of Nineveh in the Book of Jonah, who, upon hearing of the city's coming doom, strips off his raiment, puts on a sackcloth, and sits down in the dust.[53] In the following lines, the king of Šubriya humbles himself further, and then begs Esarhaddon for mercy.[54] In the scene of contrition described in this passage, one can find a sequence of nakedness (the king takes off his royal clothing), followed by the putting on of a sackcloth, "the clothing of a sinner," and facial features growing unhappy. The sequence of events described in Excerpts B and C is suspiciously similar: the features of the people darken "with depression and woe," they (or only the young men and women among them)[55] strip naked, then put on the sackcloth, similarly called the "garment of a sinner," likely in a show of remorse over the sinful rebellion they committed against Ashurbanipal (and much like the people of Nineveh in the Book of Jonah, who also put on sackcloths in their own remorse upon hearing of their city's coming destruction).[56] It is likely that this resemblance between Excerpts B and C and *Esarhaddon's Letter to Aššur* is not coincidental, but that the former constitute a reworking of the latter. This, however, does not preclude the possibility of intertextual allusions in Excerpts B and C to the *Theodicy* and *Erra* as well. Indeed, such allusions may have been in the spirit of Esarhaddon's account. The phrase *libbašu ṣabitma* is presumably derived from an idiom which can be reconstructed either as *libba*

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was pointed out by Kundson ("Fragments of Historical Texts" [1967]: 56).

[49] I understand *ša lā ṣubāti* to refer to the state of nudity implicit from the young men and women beholding each others' genitals and preceding them putting on sackcloths. Alternatively, the phrase may be translated as "those without clothing," following RINAP 5/1 and construed as the subject of *nandu*[*qīʾ*], producing the phrase "those without clothing donn[edʔ]." Such a nominalized use of *ša lā ṣubāti*, while being different from the adverbial one in *Erra*, would not preclude an allusion to the epic, as the phrase may still have evoked it while having a different meaning.

[50] For a score transliteration and edition of the *Erra Epic* with philological commentary, see Taylor, *Erra Song* (2017), 388–544.

[51] RINAP 4 no. 33.

[52] Alternatively, "he clutched his heart."

[53] *Jonah* 3:6: ויגע הדבר אל מלך נינוה ויקום מכיסאו ויעבר אדרתו מעליו ויכס שק וישב על אפר, "And the matter (of Nineveh's coming destruction) reached the king of Nineveh, and he stepped up from his throne, and took off his raiment, and covered (himself) with a sackcloth, and sat upon dust."

[54] *Esarhaddon's Letter to Aššur* obv. 4–24.

[55] If *ša lā ṣubāti* is translated as "(now) unclothed," the people this phrase is describing would be most naturally taken the young men and women, though they may in fact be the *nišī*, "the people (of Babylon)" referred to in Excerpt B. If one translates *ša lā ṣubāti* as "those without clothing," the identity of the unclothed would be more unclear, with both the young men and women and Babylon's people at large being possible options.

[56] *Jonah* 6:5: ויאמינו אנשי נינוה באלוהים ויקראו צום וילבשו שקים מגדולם ועד קטנם, "And the people of Nineveh believed in God, and called a fast, and put on sackcloths, from the greatest of them to the least of them."

ṣabātu, "to clutch the heart," or *libbu naṣbutu*, "for the heart to be seized," derivations of which appear to be rarely attested, with the CAD only listing two others under *ṣabātu* (s. 3a-4′), neither of which are found in royal inscriptions. That *libbašu ṣabitma* has no known parallel in Assyrian royal inscriptions of the period increases its distinctiveness, and, correspondingly, the chance of it alluding to *Erra* (IV 36):[57]

> *bēlu rabû Marduk īmurma ū'a iqabbīma libbašu iṣṣabat*
>
> The great lord Marduk saw (this), and cried woe, and his heart grew distressed (lit., "was seized").

A variation of the following phrase, *itarrurā išdāšu*, is only otherwise used in Assyrian royal inscriptions of the period to describe humans (rather than dilapidated buildings)[58] in Sargon II's own letter to Aššur,[59] in which the legs (lit., "foundations") of the Urartian soldiers "quake" (*itrurā išdāšun*) in fear.[60] In both letters to Aššur, such a description, when applied to the enemies of the Assyrian king, may evoke *Enūma eliš* IV 89–90, which describes Tiamat's reaction to the speech Marduk delivers upon confronting her: *issīma Tiamat šimuriš elīta/šuršiš malmališ* ***itrurā išdāšu***, "Tiamat yelled furiously, loudly/her (lit. his) foundations trembled." This would not be the only instance in Esarhaddon's inscriptions in which the reactions of his enemies would be compared to those Tiamat exhibited in this very section of *Enūma eliš*, for his *Apology* (RINAP 4 no. 1) also contains allusions to *Enūma eliš* IV 87–88.[61] In sum, in his description of the contrition of the king of Šubriya, the author of Esarhaddon's *Letter to Aššur* may have alluded to *Erra* and *Enūma eliš* in quick succession. The author of BSA, in describing his own scene of remorse, may have likewise alluded to two compositions—the *Theodicy* (in Ex. B) and, as in Esarhaddon's inscription, *Erra* (in Ex. C).

The phrases *rebīt āli*, "the city streets," and *ša lā ṣubāti*, "unclothed" (or, in BSA, possibly rather "those without clothing"),[62] appear in both BSA and *Erra*, and in the same sequence. (However, it should be said that BSA has *ina rebīt āli*, while *Erra* only has *rebīt āli,* and both phrases are attested in other Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions of the period.[63]) In contrast, *ša lā ṣubāti* does not seem to be otherwise attested in those inscriptions, which argues against it being a stock phrase. In fact, it is not found in the *CAD* under *ṣubātu* at all, and the entry cites neither this *Erra* passage nor BSA.

The possible allusion to *Erra* in Excerpt C is less clear than that to the *Theodicy* in Excerpt B, as its constituent elements are less distinctive, and its complexity is lower (isolated words or phrases being less complex than a whole verbal clause). However, the presence of two other possible allusions to *Erra* later in BSA—one in Excerpt D and one in in Excerpt F (both below)—increases the frequency of possible allusions to *Erra* within BSA, and thus the likelihood of an allusion to *Erra* being made in Excerpt C. In addition, the presence of a possible allusion to *Erra* in the passage of *Esarhaddon's Letter to Aššur* on which Excerpts B and C likely draw may increase the likelihood of the author of BSA likewise alluding to *Erra* within them.

Excerpt D (Prism C ix 11'–12' || Prism Kh 45'–46', Prism G 7''''–8'''')

> ***šakkanakku*** *rē'îšunu ina* ***libbīšunu izzizma*** *ušamqit sittu*
>
> The **governor**, their shepherd, **became** (lit. is becoming) **angry**[64] in their midst (lit. **heart**) and felled the rest (of them).

[57] This line is likely paralleled by the partly restored *Erra* III C 6, in which the subject is Enlil rather than Marduk; *libbašu ṣabitma* may have served to evoke both lines.

[58] As it is known to have been used once (RINAP 5/2 no. 231 obv. 4).

[59] RINAP 2 no. 65.

[60] Line 290.

[61] In i 73, Esarhaddon writes, concerning the enemy troops, *tīb tāḫāzīya ēmurūma ēmû maḫḫûtiš*, "They saw the assault of my battle (forces), and became deranged." This, as Simo Parpola notes ("Mesopotamian Precursors" [2001], 185–86), is likely an allusion to *Enūma eliš* IV 87–88, *Tiamat annīta ina šemîša/maḫḫûtiš ītemmi ušanni ṭēnša*, "Tiamat, upon hearing this/became deranged, went out of her mind." Parpola also notes that the earlier line i 71 may likewise allude to *Enūma eliš* IV 92.

[62] See n. 46 above.

[63] The phrase *rebīt āli* occurs in Sennacherib's *Bavian Inscription* (RINAP 3/2 no. 223), which, like BSA, describes a sack of Babylon, though that committed by Sennacherib was far more brutal than that perpetrated by Ashurbanipal: . . . *nišīšu ṣeḫru u rabâ lā ēzibma pagrīšunu rebīt āli umalli*, ". . . Its (Babylon's) people, young and old, I did not spare, and I filled the city streets with their corpses" (l. 45). The phrase *ina rebīt āli* is found in an inscription of Esarhaddon narrating the sack of Memphis: *ina rebīt āli šalamtīšunu eli aḫāmeš* [*atbuk*], "[I heaped] their corpse(s) over each other in the city streets . . ." (RINAP 4 no. 1019: 16).

[64] For the parsing of *izzizma* as a 3rd sg. durative of *ezēzu*, see n. 26 above.

Erra IV 23:
ša ***šakkanakki*** *mutēr gimil Bābili* ***īteziz libbašu***
The **heart** of the **governor**, Babylon's avenger, **became angry**.

In notes regarding this section of BSA, Riekele Borger cautiously noted its similarity to *Erra* IV 23,[65] yet did not go as far as proposing a direct connection. He asked, moreover, "Wer ist mit dem *šakkanakku* gemeint?"[66] That is an intriguing question, in the context of both *Erra* and BSA. It is likely that *šakkanakku* in *Erra* IV 23 refers to an unnamed Babylonian king, rather than to a regional governor.[67] But if so, which king? The identity of the *šakkanakku* in BSA is, likewise, cryptic. Is it Ashurbanipal? One may note that he most likely did not carry the title of *šakkanak Bābili*, "Babylon's governor,"[68] yet here one finds only the title *šakkanakku*, which Ashurbanipal is known to have given himself in at least three of his inscriptions.[69] Still, the governor is called the "shepherd" of the Babylonians, and one would therefore expect him to govern Babylon. Was it rather Šamaš-šuma-ukīn, butchering his own citizens for some unknown cause? He, unlike Ashurbanipal, is known to have assumed the title of *šakkanak Bābili*.[70] Moreover, in an inscription of Ashurbanipal about renovations in the city of Sippar—likely written when Šamaš-šuma-ukīn was still king of Babylon[71]—Ashurbanipal refers to him as *šakkanakkīšun*, "their governor,"[72] a title reminiscent of *šakkanakku rēʾīšunu*. Yet it seems strange for Šamaš-šuma-ukīn to have massacred his own besieged people. Could the *šakkanakku* be someone else entirely? It is difficult to say.

However, the precise identity of the governor is irrelevant to the context of the allusion proposed here. The heart of an unnamed *šakkanakku*, "Babylon's avenger," becomes angry in *Erra*, and in BSA, an unnamed *šakkanakku*, the "shepherd" of the Babylonians, becomes angry "in their heart." The same title is used in both lines, and they are conspicuously similar, whatever the historical reality they describe. Moreover, that the identity of the governor in BSA is unspecified increases the chances of an allusion to *Erra*, as it would be difficult to explain otherwise. If the *šakkanakku* was Ashurbanipal, one would have thought that the king, as the narrator of his inscriptions, would speak of himself in the first person, rather than referring to himself in the third. If it was Šamaš-šuma-ukīn, his name or a derogatory moniker would be expected. And if it was someone else entirely, why would he not be more clearly introduced? Yet the use of *šakkanakku* in BSA would be entirely logical if an allusion to *Erra* was intended, for the one whose heart grows angry in *Erra* IV 23 is also referred to only by that title. Such an association would be poignant, for the massacre in *Erra*, like that in BSA, takes place in Babylon. Real bloodshed would thus be modelled after literary slaughter, and history made to seem like myth.

If this is indeed a reference, as suggested by the complexity of this possible allusion, whereby separate parts of an extended verbal clause were rearranged and refashioned into another, as well as the distinctiveness of its use of *šakkannakku*, the author of BSA elegantly transformed the *Erra* line: playing on two different meanings of *libbu*, "heart," he changed the hypotext, in which the heart of the governor becomes angry, into the governor becoming angry amidst his subjects.

[65] "Vgl. Erra Epos (Cagni) IV 23? . . . ." (Borger, *Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals* [1996], 152).

[66] Ibid., 152.

[67] The title *šakkanak Bābili* was one of the titles of the Babylonian kings, attested for Itti-Marduk-balāṭu (1135–1128; see RIMB 2 B.2.2.1: 7) and Nebuchadnezzar I (1121–1100; see RIMB 2 B.2.4.11: 3). It was taken up by Sargon II and Esarhaddon when they themselves controlled Babylon. For uses of the title in the inscriptions of the Sargonids, see among others, RIMB 2 no. 7: 1, and *Esarhaddon's Apology* i 1. On the question of whether Ashurbanipal used the title, see n. 68 below. *šakkanak Enlil* is attested for Nebuchadnezzar I (RIMB 2 B.2.4.7: 3) and Simbar-Šipak (1021–1104; RIMB 2 B.4.1.1: 20); *šakkanakku* as a standalone title is attested for Nebuchadnezzar I (RIMB 2 B.2.3.10: 10).

[68] While Sargon II and Esarhaddon were called *šakkanak Bābili* in Ashurbanipal's inscriptions—for example, Esarhaddon is given this title in Prism Kh i 4, and Sargon II in RINAP 5/1 no. 13: i 14—there is no good evidence that Ashurbanipal called himself by that title. In RINAP 5/2 no. 229: i 5, Ashurbanipal appears to call himself [GÌR.NITA KÁ.DINGIR].ᵍʳᵃ.KI, yet the line is fragmentary, and, even if the restoration is correct, the appellation of the title to Ashurbanipal in this case may be a scribal error (see footnote on this line in RINAP online). All other possible instances in which Ashurbanipal may have been called *šakkanak Bābili* are also uncertain (Frame, *Babylonia 689–627* [1992], 305, n. 32).

[69] Ashurbanipal is known to have called himself GÌR.ᵍʳNITA [*it*]-*pe*-ᵍʳ*šu*, "[ca]pable governor" (RINAP 5/1 no. 13: i 6); GÌR.NITA ᵍʳ*mut*-*nen*-*nu*, "pious governor" (RINAP 5/1 no. 23: 14); and GÌR.NITA *kan*-ᵍʳ*šu*, "obedient governor," (RINAP 5/2 no. 212: obv. 8').

[70] See RIMB 2 B.6.33.5: 14 and 31 (partly restored). Šamaš-šuma-ukīn also called himself *šakkanak Šuanna* (RIMB 2 B.6.33.2: 5).

[71] RIMB 5/2 no. 231. On this inscription, see Frame and Grayson, "Inscription of Ashurbanipal" (1994).

[72] RIMB 5/2 no. 231: rev. 2'.

This change involves a substitution, with the governor being angry instead of his heart, and an intramodal transformation, with the Perfect *īteziz* replaced with the Durative *izziz*. The author of BSA seems to have substituted the epithet *rē'îšunu*, "their shepherd," for *mutēr gimil Bābili*, "Babylon's avenger." Both epithets refer to the obligation of the governor to protect his people and keep them from harm. In both BSA and *Erra*, however, he does no such thing, but massacres his people, which imbues the titles with painful irony. As he did before while alluding to the *Theodicy*, the author of BSA would also have embellished his hypotext by extending it, adding the phrase *ušamqit sittu*, "he felled the rest (of them)," which may, perhaps, be an allusion to *Erra* as well.[73] The next Excerpt of BSA may have alluded not to *Erra* but to another text describing mass death in Babylonia—the *Marduk Prophecy*:

Excerpt E (Prim C 13'–14' || Prim Kh 47'–48', Prism G 9''''–10'''')

paḫrī ***nišī*** *sūqu u sulû purrukū* ***puḫḫû bābī***
The people's corpses obstructed street and alley, (and) **blocked doorways**.

Marduk Prophecy ii 2:
šalmāt ***nišī bābī puḫḫâ*** (ADDA^{meš} UN.HI.A KÁ^{meš} BE ^{meš}-*a*)
The people's corpses blocked doorways.

The logogram ADDA can be read both as the masculine *paḫru* and the feminine *šalamtu*.[74] In this line of the *Marduk Prophecy*, ADDA is read as *šalamtu* (as shown by the feminine plural stative *puḫḫâ*), while in BSA it is read as *paḫru* (as likewise shown by the masculine stative *puḫḫû*). This possible allusion is relatively complex, as it involves the transformation of the verbal clause *šalmāt nišī bābī puḫḫâ*, the two halves of which the author of BSA would have separated, modified, and extended by inserting the clause *sūqū u sulû purrukū* between them. Its distinctiveness is high, as the phrase "the people's corpses," whether with *paḫru* or *šalamtu*, is only otherwise attested in one other source—Prism A—which was composed at least three years later than BSA,[75] and also describes the downfall of Babylonia after Šamaš-šuma-ukīn's revolt.[76] As the use of the phrase "the people's corpses" is unattested before the composition of BSA (apart from its appearance in the *Marduk Prophecy*), it cannot be considered a stock phrase. That its use was an allusion, with the author of BSA choosing the value *paḫru* instead of *šalamtu* for ADDA, is made more likely by the corpses "blocking doorways" in both the BSA and the *Marduk Prophecy*, a motif which seems to be otherwise unattested. It may also be meaningful that the *Marduk Prophecy* describes corpses blocking doorways in Babylonia, surely including Babylon itself, the very city besieged by Ashurbanipal. That the corpses are likewise obstructing Babylon's doorways in BSA could only have made the reference more poignant.

[73] This phrase has been compared by Borger to *Erra* I 146, *kakkī*[*y*]*a ušatbâmma uḫallaq rēḫa*, "Shall I raise my weapons and destroy the rest?" and its variant version, *kakkīka tušatbīma tuḫalliq rēḫa*, "you raised your weapons and destroyed the rest." (*Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals* [1996], 152: "Vgl. Cagni Epopea I 146 . . ."). However, both *sittu* and *šumqutu* are extremely common in Assyrian royal inscriptions, and the complexity of this possible allusion is low, as it is comprised of just two words. One would be more confident in its likelihood if it contained either *ḫulluqu* or *rēḫu*. This is the case with *uqatti rēḫa*, "he finished (off) the rest," (*Sargon's Letter to Aššur*, line 146), which is a better contender for an allusion to *Erra* I 146; the similarity between *Sargon's Letter to Aššur* line 146 and *Erra* I 146 was already pointed out by Chamaza ("Observations on the Text of the VIIIth Campaign" [1992]: 120 n. 86). The phrase *sittīšunu . . . ušamqit* also occurs in two recensions composed earlier than BSA (Prism D viii 16–17 and the identical Prism B viii 19–20. On the date of the composition of Prism D and Prism B, see n. 34). Intriguingly, however, the subject of *ušamqit* in both cases is Erra, called *Erra qardu*, "valiant Erra" a title almost identical to *qurādu Erra*, "warrior Erra," which appears repeatedly in the *Erra Epic* (see, for example, I 60 and 76). This suggests that the phrase may have been associated with Erra, though *sitti . . . ušamqitū*, "they felled the rest," is attested in Prism A ii 1–2, in which Erra is not said to be involved, as well as in this section of BSA, in which the god himself is not mentioned. With all this in mind, it may be that *ušamqit sittu* is an allusion to *Erra*, as is clearer in the case of the rest of the line. However, the phrase's lexical dissimilarity from *uḫallaq rēḫa*, as well as its low complexity, distinctiveness, and relatively high frequency, militate against confidently identifying it as an allusion.

[74] See the lexical section of CAD P s.v. *paḫru* s.

[75] The possible date of composition of Prism A (RINAP 5/2 no. 11) ranges from 644–640, with 643 or 642 appearing most likely (Novotny and Jeffers, *Inscriptions of Ashurbanipal* [2018], 32–33).

[76] Prism A iv 79–84: *paḫrī nišī ša Erra ušamqitu u ša ina suqqi bubūti iškunū napištu rīḫēt ukulti kalbi šahî ša sūqī purrukū malû rabâte eṣmētīšunu ultu qereb Bābili Kutû Sippar ušēṣīma*, "(As for) the corpses of the people whom Erra felled, and (of those who) laid down their lives from famine (and) starvation, scraps of food for dogs and swine, which were blocking the alleys and filling the streets, their bones I took out of Babylon, Kutha, (and) Sippar." The phrase *paḫrī nišī . . . ša sūqī purrukū malû rabâte* is almost identical to *paḫrī nišī sūqu u sulû purrukū puhhû bābī*, and, as both phrases describe the corpses of Babylonians who died during the defeat of Šamaš-šuma-ukīns's rebellion, their use is most likely linked, with Prism A drawing on BSA here.

Excerpt F (Prism C 17' || Prism Kh 51', Prism G 13''''')

ganūššun šuḫrub
Their home was laid waste.

Erra IV 102:
šâšu ušmāssūma ***ušaḫraba ganūššu***
I will put him to death and **lay waste to his home**.

The word *ganūnu* (uncommon in sources written in Standard Babylonian) meaning "storeroom" or "abode"[77] occurs three times in Assyrian royal inscriptions of the period outside of BSA, all in inscriptions of Ashurbanipal.[78] However, in none of them is a *ganūnu* said to have been destroyed. In fact, no grammatical variation of the phrase *ganūnu ḫarābu* is attested, outside of BSA and the *Erra* line quoted above, under the CAD entry for *ganūnu*. Moreover, while the Babylonians doubtless lived in many different homes, it is not said in this excerpt that the "homes" of the Babylonians were destroyed, but rather their "home" (*ganūššun*), in the singular. This is conspicuous and may increase the likelihood of an allusion to *Erra* IV 102, as it too speaks of the destruction of a single *ganūnu*. However, it should be said that this possible peculiarity of phrasing might rather be explained by *ganūššun* referring to the individual home of each Babylonian, in which case the likelihood of allusion to *Erra* would not be increased. In sum, while the complexity of the possible allusion to *Erra* in Excerpt F is low, as it is made up of only two words, its likelihood may be increased by the presence of the singular *ganūššun*, as well as by the high frequency of possible allusions to *Erra* throughout BSA. If this is indeed an allusion, it would mean that just as Ištarān destroys the homes of the people of Dēr,[79] his own city, Ashurbanipal wrecks the abodes of the people of Babylon. The author of BSA seems to have reduced his hypertext, only borrowing from the latter half of *Erra* IV 102, and chiastically reversed the order of *ḫarābu* and *ganūnu*, in keeping with the common use of such reversals as an intertextual device in Akkadian texts.[80]

Analysis

Erudite Savagery

Unlike rulers of various other and no-less brutal empires, Ashurbanipal did not sweep atrocities under the rug, but gloried in violence. The reliefs that lined his palace walls depicted the massacre of his enemies, whether human or animal, and his inscriptions gleefully narrated the immense destruction caused by the Assyrian army, the sacking of cities and the murder of multitudes. In keeping with this tendency to showcase the miseries of the enemies of Assyria, the author of BSA described the suffering the Assyrians inflicted on the people of Babylon in loving detail. Yet this account of violence is suffused with a passion for culture and literature, producing a kind of erudite savagery. The same can be said of certain inscriptions of other Assyrian kings, such as Sargon,[81] Sennacherib (704–681),[82] and Esarhaddon,[83] which are likewise violent and rich in intertextual references to elevated literary and religious works. These inscriptions show the Assyrian king to be both a warrior and a scholar, demonstrating his proclivity for torturing his enemies, body and soul, as well as his interest in Mesopotamian culture. In Ashurbanipal's case specifically, the allusions in BSA may have served to validate his self-professed erudition,[84] and shown him to be not only a collector of texts, but an avid and attentive reader. The same could be said of

[77] CAD G s.v. *ganūnu* s.

[78] RINAP 5/1 no. 61 obv. 13: *ina* GÁ.[NUN]-[*ni-šú*$^{?}$ *u*]-[*šar*]-[*ma*]-*a*$^{?}$ *šu-bat-su*, "I made (Marduk) [set up$^{?}$] his dwelling in [his$^{?}$] living quarter[s]" RINAP 5/2 no. 209: rev. 19: *u ša gištallê šunūti unakkarūma . . . Sîn bēlu rabû ganūššu lušaglissūma* x x (x) *ti lirpud*, "But (as for) whoever removes these crossbars . . . May Sîn, the great lord, make his living quarters terrifying, so that he roams . . . *outside*." On the uncertainty regarding *x x* (x) *ti*, and the possible translation of *outside*, see the footnote on this line in RINAP online. For a different interpretation of this passage, see Hätinen, *Moon God* (2021), 259–60. RINAP 5/2 no. 216: rev. 3' duplicates RINAP 5/2 no. 209, but has *lirpuda kamāti* instead of x x (x) *ti lirpud*.

[79] For an argument in favor of the ascription of the line to Ištarān, see Taylor, *Erra Song* (2017), 44–51.

[80] As Bach writes ("Narrative Art" [2021]: 34–35), "Chiastic rearrangements of hypotexts are common in Akkadian literature. . . . Whatever the exact reason for such chiastic operations when transforming a hypotext (perhaps a gesture of respect towards an older text?), they are a clear indicator of a direct borrowing, that is, they are structural intertextual markers."

[81] *Sargon's Letter to Aššur*, analyzed in Bach, *transtexuellen Poetic* (2020), 221–95.

[82] Sennacherib's account of his 8th campaign in the *Taylor Prism* (RINAP 3/1 no. 22: v 17–vi 35), analyzed in Weissert, "Political Climate" (1997).

[83] The aforementioned *Apology*, analyzed in Bach, *transtexuellen Poetic* (2020), 303–50, and Esarhaddon's inscriptions commemorating the reconstruction of Babylon, discussed in n. 105.

[84] On the question of Ashurbanipal's erudition, see Livingstone, "Ashurbanipal" (2007).

another instance of intertextuality in Ashurbanipal's inscriptions: the presence, discussed by Carly Crouch, of allusions to *Enūma eliš* in Prism B.[85]

Assyria, Babylonia, and "Cultural Cannibalism"

By Ashurbanipal's time, Assyria's culture had long since become overwhelmingly influenced by that of its southern neighbor. Its pantheon was largely borrowed from that of Babylonia, as was a large portion of its literature. Even the royal inscriptions of its later monarchs, including Ashurbanipal himself, were written in Standard Babylonian—albeit with a few minor Assyrian linguistic features.[86] The relationship between the two kingdoms was anything but harmonious, however, and it repeatedly devolved into deadly conflict.[87] Yet, though Babylonia rebelled again and again against its northern neighbor, the Neo-Assyrian kings often treated it more leniently than any other province in the empire,[88] and, with the notable exception of Sennacherib, discussed below, seem to have had great respect for it. Yet whichever way Assyria treated Babylonia, it always sought to dominate it, and its love for the southern kingdom was violent and possessive. When Babylonia rebelled, asserting its independence in the face of Assyrian aggression, Assyria reacted with the violent fury of an ardent yet domineering suitor whose beloved dared refuse him. The situation was further complicated by the Assyrians' evident adoration of Babylonian civilization, which may have contained no small component of envy. Thus, Assyria loved Babylonia yet sought to subjugate it, adored its culture yet may have resented it. Theirs was a deeply ambivalent relationship.

Assyria's aggression towards Babylonia is especially evident in the actions of Ashurbanipal's grandfather Sennacherib, who claimed to have leveled Babylon completely after sacking it in 689,[89] and attacked its religious supremacy by asserting that it was Ashur, not Marduk, who was the hero of the Babylonian epic of creation, *Enūma eliš*.[90] He also modeled the cultic topography of Assur on that of Babylon,[91] evidently with the intent of replacing it. This act attests to both Sennacherib's envy of Babylon and the aggression he felt towards it: in destroying the physical Babylon while openly mimicking it, he acted like the nightmarish doppelganger of fiction, who, in many narratives, not only apes its original but seeks to destroy it. One can also observe a desire for domination, albeit in a subtler and less violent form, in the actions of Ashurbanipal's father. Esarhaddon may have rebuilt the ruined Babylon and renovated Marduk's statue,[92] but he also declared Marduk the son of Ashur, honoring him yet subordinating him to an inferior position in the Assyrian pantheon.[93] Ashurbanipal's own actions towards Babylonia were also ambivalent. He claimed to have renovated Esagil and personally returned Marduk's statue to Babylon,[94] and his great respect for Babylonia's culture is likewise evidenced by his efforts to collect the products of Babylonian learning in his library.[95] Yet these efforts may have involved coercion, at least after the defeat of Šamaš-šuma-ukīn's rebellion in 648. The transfer of massive amounts of Babylonian scholarly works to Ashurbanipal's Library in 647, noted in library records, may have been carried out by force.[96]

[85] Crouch, "Cosmological Warrior" (2013).

[86] Frahm, "Inscriptions as Text" (2019), 144–45.

[87] For an overview of Assyrian-Babylonian relations see Galter, "Looking Down the Tigris" (2007), Frame, "Babylon," (2008), and Frahm, "Assyria and the South" (2017), 286–98, with literature.

[88] "Like Greek civilization among the Romans, Babylonian culture enjoyed enormous prestige among the Assyrians, who often treated their southern 'brothers' more leniently than any other people in their vast empire" (Frahm, "Neo-Assyrian Period" [2017], 162).

[89] *Bavian Inscription* (RINAP 3/2 no. 223) lines 50–54, duplicated in fragmentary form in RINAP 3/2 no. 24: vi 7'–16'.

[90] Sennacherib composed a new version of *Enūma eliš*, in which Marduk was replaced by Aššur (Frahm, "Neo-Assyrian Period" [2017], 186), and commissioned reliefs showings Aššur's victory over Tiamat, as he narrates in the *Akītu-House Inscription* (RINAP 3/2 no. 160).

[91] Frahm, "Neo-Assyrian Period" (2017), 186. On Sennacherib's building activities in Assur, see Grayson and Novotny, *Inscriptions of Sennacherib*, *Part 2* (2014), 18–22.

[92] A description of Esarhaddon's renovation of Marduk's statue can be found in *Aššur-Babylon A* (RINAP 4 no. 48). The text known under the name *The Sin of Sargon and Sennacherib's Last Will* may have been composed to lend support to this undertaking, as well as Esarhaddon's favorable attitude to Babylonian religion at large: see Tadmor, Landsberger, and Parpola, "Sin of Sargon" (1989): 45–49, and Weaver, "'Sin of Sargon'" (2004).

[93] Porter, *Images, Power, and Politics* (1993), 152.

[94] RINAP 5/1 no. 61, dated to 655 (Novotny and Jeffers, *Inscriptions of Ashurbanipal* [2018], 354). In this inscription Ashurbanipal may have been taking credit for, or overstating his involvement in, things his brother had accomplished, for it was Šamaš-šuma-ukīn who returned Marduk's statue to Babylon in 668 (Frame, *Babylonia 689–627* [1992], 103).

[95] For an overview of our knowledge about Ashurbanipal's library, see Finkel, "Ashurbanipal's Library" (2019).

[96] Parpola, "Library Records" (1983).

In addition, in a letter sent by an Assyrian king, likely Ashurbanipal, to a man by the name of Šadûnu, an Assyrian agent in Borsippa, and preserved in later copies, the king instructs him to forcibly confiscate tablets from the collections of scholars in the city, as well as all the tablets stored in Ezida,[97] and writes "In the houses to which you set to work, no one shall withhold tablets from you."[98] The very creation of the library can also be seen as an aggressive act: by collecting the totality of Babylonian learning in Nineveh, the real Babylon was made superfluous, and the Assyrian capital superseded it as a center of learning.

In his sometimes-violent love for Babylonian scholarship, Ashurbanipal resembles the earlier Assyrian king Tukultī-Ninurta I (1243–1207), who sacked Babylon and took texts from its libraries to Assyria.[99] The *Tukultī-Ninurta Epic*, a composition recounting the king's war against Babylonia, itself contained multiple allusions to *Lugal-e*, which served to equate the heroic monarch with Ninurta, the divine warrior.[100] Thus, Tukultī-Ninurta not only plundered Babylonian texts, but incorporated them into a narrative describing Babylonia's defeat at the hands of Assyria. Centuries later, the author of BSA did the same, evincing the mixture of reverence and aggression that molded Assyria's general attitude towards Babylonia. By alluding extensively to Babylonian literary and religious works, he certainly showed appreciation for them. Yet there is a strong aggressive element to his use of intertextuality: not only does Assyria sack the physical Babylon in BSA, but appropriates its culture, using Babylonia's own texts to describe its subjugation. This type of appropriation may reflect something more than a benign wish to copy and emulate, and may attest, rather, to an envious desire on the part of the Assyrian elite for Assyria to subsume and replace Babylonia and its civilization. Thus, it may be termed not merely cultural appropriation, but "cultural cannibalism."

This pernicious type of appropriation is already evident under Sennacherib, whose account of his 8th campaign,[101] which he undertook against the Babylonians, contains probable allusions to *Enūma eliš*,[102] which cast Sennacherib as Marduk and the Babylonians as the god's demonic enemies. Similarly, Esarhaddon's account of Babylon's destruction in 689 places the blame for the city's fall squarely on the shoulders of its inhabitants, all while alluding to another Babylonian composition, *Erra* (in which, as noted above, Babylon is also sacked).[103]

While these royal inscriptions told of Assyria's triumphs over Babylonia, the allusions found in them would have served to legitimate Assyrian domination over its southern neighbor, all while demonstrating the Assyrian king's mastery of Babylonian culture. In much the same way that Sargon[104] and then Esarhaddon[105] marshalled Babylonia's own gods against it, claiming that they willed its domination by Assyria, Assyria marshalled Babylonia's own texts against it through intertextuality. While there may have been an element of mockery in these displays of offensive allusion, it also evinces the great love Assyrians had for Babylonian cultural artifacts, however envious and violent that love was. If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, outright theft can also be a sign of appreciation.

[97] This letter, the authenticity of which is uncertain, may have been written sometime after the capture of Babylon in 648 (Finkel, "Ashurbanipal's Library" [2019], 376), and is preserved in two Late Babylonian scribal exercise tablets from Borsippa (BM 25676 = 98–2–16, 730 and BM 25678 = 98–2–16, 732). For an edition and discussion of the text, see Frame and George, "Royal Libraries" (2005): 280–82. Frame and George also discuss more peaceful and cooperative efforts on Ashurbanipal's part to procure tablets from Babylon and Borsippa, which involved appeals to scholars living in these cities (*ibid.*: 265–77, 282–83). These overtures most likely took place around 664, more than a decade before Šamaš-šuma-ukīn's rebellion (*ibid.*: 282). It is possible that, after Ashurbanipal defeated his brother and conquered Babylonia, he dispensed with the niceties and ordered his agents in Babylonia to confiscate tablets by force.

[98] *ina bīt qātīka taltaknu mamma ṭuppī ul ikillāka* (ii. 33–34).

[99] Machinist, "Babylonian Problem" (1984/1985): 361.

[100] Bach, *transtexuellen Poetic* (2020), 132–79.

[101] RINAP 3/1 no. 22 v 17–vi 35.

[102] Weissert, "Political Climate" (1997), 192–97.

[103] Several such allusions, found in Esarhaddon's *Babylon A Inscription* (RINAP 4 no. 104: i 34–37), and duplicated in other inscriptions of Esarhaddon from Babylon, are reviewed by Bach ("Transtextual Stylization" [2020], 34).

[104] See, for example, the Annals of Room II (RINAP 2 no. 1: 268–71), in which Sargon claims that Marduk-apla-iddina II (721–710, 703) ruled Babylonia against the will of the gods, and that Marduk ordained his removal from the Babylonian throne, selected Sargon to accomplish it, and made him victorious over the Chaldeans. This rhetoric on Sargon's part was, most likely, a deliberate reversal of that of Marduk-apla-iddina, who had claimed that he had defeated the Assyrians and ascended the Babylonian throne with Marduk's help (Tadmor, "Propaganda, Literature, Historiography" [1995], 333–34).

[105] See, for example, Esarhaddon's aforementioned *Babylon A Inscription*, in which he claims that Marduk caused Babylon's destruction in 689 because of the sins of the Babylonians and describes the destruction itself as though the Assyrians had nothing to do with it—claiming, rather, that a canal of Babylonia overflowed and levelled the city (i 18–ii 2).

The Will of the Gods

The theme of divinely inflicted suffering is found in most of the hypotexts to which the author of the inscription alluded. *Ludlul* concerns the wrath and relenting of Marduk and their effects on the life of the poem's narrator, Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan. It is Marduk's anger that leads to the narrator's features being distorted by hunger and his blood running dry,[106] and it is because of the ever-changing will of the gods that humans "become like corpses."[107] Likewise, the protagonist of the *Babylonian Theodicy* suffers terribly because of the inscrutable designs of the gods, and it is divine disfavor that causes mental anguish to darken his features.[108] It is also Erra who orchestrates the manifold miseries described in his eponymous epic, and it is he who says that he will parade and then execute the naked young man in the public square. By his mere presence he sparks anger in the heart of Babylon's governor, who then massacres his own people.[109] The *Marduk Prophecy* narrates the disastrous consequences of the god's self-imposed exiles from Babylon, one of which is corpses "blocking doorways." When noticing these allusions, an educated reader of our inscription may have concluded that the suffering of the Babylonians was similarly willed by its own gods. Selena Wisnom observes that "allusions are active agents in the rhetorical arsenal of Akkadian poetry, key weapons in the battles of the gods."[110] Here, the author of BSA wielded them as weapons in the battle between kingdoms, justifying the victory of one over the other. The possible allusions to the *Marduk Prophecy* may have been especially relevant in this regard, as it concerns, among other things, the defeat of Babylonia at the hands of an Assyrian king.[111] In the text, Marduk is said to have travelled of his own will to Assyria, most likely referring to the capture of the Marduk statue by Tukultī-Ninurta I.[112] It is notable that, though the passage is fragmentary, it seems that Marduk shows great favor to the Assyrians, with the god saying that he "blessed the land of Aššur."[113] An attentive reader may have surmised that Ashurbanipal's sack of Babylon was also in accordance with Marduk's wishes.

The idea that the defeat of Šamaš-šuma-ukīn's rebellion and the destruction it entailed for Babylonia were divinely ordained is expressed in multiple Assyrian sources of the period. The author of BSA,[114] along with those of many other Ashurbanipal inscriptions,[115] stressed that the death of Šamaš-šuma-ukīn, the chief rebel, was the work of the gods, and that it was they who consigned him to the flames. A letter likely written by Ashurbanipal himself during Šamaš-šuma-ukīn's rebellion[116] states that "Surely, God himself commanded the destruction of the land of Akkad. What can we say? […] before God (or: "What can we say before God" […])."[117] The Assyrian reader of BSA may have interpreted the allusions found in it in accordance with such propagandistic messaging, further edifying the belief that the Babylonians' torment was divinely ordained.

[106] That Marduk's anger is the cause of all of Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's misfortunes is made clear by *Ludlul*'s opening hymn to Marduk (*Ludlul* I 1–39), as well as the statement *lušāpi uqqassu ša kīma nūni ākulu rušumtu*, "I, who ate mud like a fish, will proclaim his (Marduk's) anger" (*Ludlul* I 37), and the narrative of Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's ordeal beginning with *iš*[*tu*] *ūmi Bēlum īninanni/u qarradu Marduk isbusu* [*it*]*tīya*, "Fr[om] the day the lord punished me/and the hero Marduk was furious with me" (*Ludlul* I 41–42). For a discussion of the ultimate cause of Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's suffering, see Annus and Lenzi, *Righteous Sufferer* (2010), xxiii.

[107] For an analysis of the passage in which the simile appears, see Stol, "Human Fate" (1996).

[108] See *Theodicy* ll. 72–77, in which the sufferer claims he was pious, but that (ll. 74–75) *ilku ša lā nēmeli išāṭ abšānu/iltakan ilu kī mašrê katûta*, "I bear a labor without profit (as) a yoke/God has appointed poverty instead of wealth (for me)." That the gods were responsible for his suffering is also made clear by his wish, in the concluding stanza of the work, that *rīṣa liškun*(*liš-ku-nu*) *ilu* (DINGIR^{meš}) *ša iddâni/rēma liršâ Ištar ša i*[*zbanni*], "May the god who abandoned me help me/May the goddess who l[eft me] have mercy (on me)" (*Theodicy* ll. 295–96). *iš-ku-nu* is here taken to be an example of CV-CV spelling for CVC. For the spelling of the singular *ilu* as DINGIR^{meš} in this line and others in the *Theodicy*, see Lambert, *Wisdom Literature* (1960), 67.

[109] *Erra* IV, 20–34.

[110] Wisnom, *Weapons of Words* (2019), 4.

[111] *Marduk Prophecy* i 1'–17'.

[112] Neujahr, *Predicting the Past* (2012), 38.

[113] *Marduk Prophecy* i 12': . . . *māt Assur akrub*, ". . . I blessed the land of Assur."

[114] Prism Kh viii 55–61; Prism G viii 16''''–20''''; Prism C likely also contained these lines, though they are not preserved.

[115] As detailed in Zaia, "My Brother's Keeper" (2019): 33–46, writing (p. 33): "That the gods turn their backs on Šamaš-šuma-ukīn is a critical component of Assurbanipal's depiction of his brother's fate."

[116] Parpola, *Correspondence of Assurbanipal* (2018) no. 7, discussed in Ito, *Royal Image* (2015), 106. She dates the letter to 647–646 (*ibid.*, 34). Ashurbanipal's statement that *kī Aššur Marduk* [*ilānī*]*ya ušal'ú'inni* [*eppuš*], "If Aššur (and) Marduk, my [gods], enable me, [I shall accomplish (it)]." (rev. 4–6), may imply that the rebellion was not yet quelled at the time of the writing of the letter.

[117] *mindēma ilu šû hapú ša Māt-Akkadi iqtabi mīnu niqabbi ina pān ili nu*-[x x] (rev. 1–4).

Conclusion

Ashurbanipal's account of the sack of Babylon in 648 masterfully weaves allusions to works of Babylonian literature and religion into its narrative. In two sections, it manages to reference *Ludlul*, the *Theodicy*, *Erra*, and the *Marduk Prophecy*. Three main interpretations regarding these allusions have been offered. First, they imbued the violence of BSA with learnedness, and may have served to demonstrate Ashurbanipal's erudition. Second, the plethora of references to Babylonian compositions in a description of the sack of Babylon itself reflects an appropriation of Babylonian culture so aggressive it could be termed "cultural cannibalism"—for not only was Babylon itself sacked, but its own culture was marshalled against it to legitimize its defeat and prove Assyria's superiority to it. Third, by alluding to literary descriptions of divinely inflicted suffering, the author of BSA meant to suggest that the Babylonians' plight was likewise willed by the gods.

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Abbreviations

RIMB 2 = Frame, *Rulers of Babylonia . . .* (1995).
RINAP 1 = Tadmor and Yamada, *Royal Inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III . . .* (2011).
RINAP 2 = Frame, *Royal Inscriptions of Sargon II* (2021).
RINAP 3/1 = Grayson and Novotny, *Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib . . . Part 1* (2012).
RINAP 3/2 = Grayson and Novotny, *Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib . . . Part 2* (2014).
RINAP 4 = Leichty, *Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon* (2011).
RINAP 5/1 = Novotny and Jeffers, *Royal Inscriptions of Ashurbanipal . . . Part 1* (2018).
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