THE EPONYMS OF THE
ASSYRIAN EMPIRE
910–612 BC

By
ALAN MILLARD

with a Contribution by
ROBERT WHITING

THE NEO-ASSYRIAN TEXT CORPUS PROJECT

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The Office of Eponym

Eponym dates appear as a regular feature in the earliest Assyrian texts, but the duties of the office are obscure (see below). In the Middle Assyrian period, the titles of the eponyms sometimes follow their names in date-lines, showing that it was the leading men of the state who held the office, the *turtānu, rab šāqê, masennu*,[14] *šakin māti* and governors of various cities.[15] The king held the office at some point of his reign, although at present the evidence for the Middle Assyrian period is too scanty to indicate which year was given to him. The first king known to have been eponym is Enlil-nērārī (*c.* 1327-1318 BC).[16] Kings appear regularly at the commencement of their

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[14] The reading (*amēl*)*masennu* for (LÚ)IGI.DUB is preferred over (*amēl*)*abarakku* for the Neo-Assyrian period. There is no doubt, both from syllabic writings and Aramaic correspondences, that *masennu* was the correct reading in the seventh century. Since a syllabic writing of *masennu* appears already in the Nuzi texts and, apart from literary sources, there are no syllabic writings of *abarakku* after the Old Babylonian period (see CAD *s.v. abarakku* and *mašennu*), it is extrapolated that *masennu* was correct for the ninth and eighth centuries and probably for the Middle Assyrian period as well. [RMW]

[15] See C. Saporetti, *Gli eponimi medio-assiri*, Bibliotheca Mesopotamica 9 (Malibu 1979) 20f.

[16] *Ibid.* 18, 56; for the possibility that Erība-Adad, named as eponym in one text, was a royal eponym, see *ibid.* 43.

reigns in the badly damaged list (A7) covering the period from Tiglath-pileser I to Aššur-dān II (*c.* 1186-932 BC). The practice continued into the time of the Assyrian Empire, when centuries of tradition may have overlain the original concept. A pattern of succession can be traced through the century from Shalmaneser III (see Table 1). A new king acted as eponym in his second year of reign (see p. 13), then followed four ministers of state: the *turtānu*, or commander-in-chief, the *rab šāqê*, 'chief cupbearer', *nāgir ekalli*, 'palace herald', and the *masennu*, the chamberlain. Governors of major cities came after them, some taking precedence over others as the empire grew. The sequence was not rigid, except for the *turtānu* following the king. A chance discovery seems to reveal the reason for that: lots were cast to determine the order. The Yale Babylonian Collection owns a clay cube, 2.8 × 2.7 cm, inscribed for the *masennu* Yaḫalu who served as eponym three times, in 833, 824 and 821 BC. The text reads:

i *aš-šur bēlu rab[û]* ii *šá* ^{md}*šùl-* iii ^{mât}*me-eḫ-ra-ni* iv *ebūr* ^{mât}*aš-šur*
   ^d*adad bēlu rabû*   *ma-nu-ašarēd*   ^{mât}*ú-q[i]*   *lišir* ^{ᵘᵈ}*lidmiq*
   pu-ú-ru   *šar₄* ^{mât}*aš-šur*   ^{šad}*e-ri-ni[m]*   *ina pāni aš-šur*
   šá ^m*ia-ḫa-li*   ^{amēl}*šá-kìn*   *ráb ka-a-ri*   ^d*adad*
   [m]asenni rabî   ^{āl}*kip-šu-ni*   *ina li-mì-šú*   *pu-ur-šu*
         ^{mât}*qu-me-[n]i*   *pu-ri-šú*   *li-l[i]-a*[17]

O Aššur, great lord! O Adad, great lord! (This is) the lot of Yaḫalu, the great chamberlain of Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, the governor of Kipshuni, of Qumeni, Mehrani, Uqi, the Cedar Mountain, customs officer. In his eponymate, his lot, may the crops of Assyria grow well and soundly. Before Aššur and Adad may his lot come up (*or* fall out).[18]

We assume such dice were prepared for the next two or three men in line for the office, shaken together in a jug and one thrown out, perhaps by a priest. The choice was probably made a year in advance, perhaps at the New Year ceremonies. The result of the draw may have settled the order for more than one year, according to the sequence of the lots. Occasionally the system was disrupted by civil war or an eponym-designate's death. If the scribe dating a document did not know the name of the current eponym, he might use the form 'eponymate after PN,' (see below, pp. 67-68). The death of an eponym prior to assuming office is one explanation for the name Balaṭu, entered in list A3 for 786 BC, which is not found in any other manuscript.[19] Other possibilities are, on one hand, that the text is corrupt, or, on the other, that it is the only correct record.

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[17] Hallo, *Biblical Archaeologist* 46 p. 20 reads *liddā*.
[18] F. J. Stephens, YOS 9 (1937), Pls. XXVII, XLV, no. 73 (YBC 7058); E. F. Weidner, AfO 13 (1939) 30; E. Michel, WdO 1,4 (1949) 261-64; M. T. Larsen, *The Old Assyrian City-State and its Colonies* (Copenhagen 1976) 211-12; W. W. Hallo, *Biblical Archaeologist* 46 (1983) 19-27; for photographs of the piece, see the frontispiece.
[19] E. Forrer, MVAG 20 (1915) 3.