



THE EPONYMS OF THE
ASSYRIAN EMPIRE
910–612 BC

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THE TEXTS

The last three hundred years of Assyria's existence are well documented so far as the eponyms are concerned. Numerous tablets and inscriptions bear dates by the system, and nineteen manuscripts list the officials in order for some part of the period, although none now extend beyond 649 BC. The lists were found in the ruins of Nineveh (Kuyunjik), at Assur, and at Sultantepe near Harran. Apparently all were copied in the seventh century BC (the fact that A8, from Sultantepe, ends with 750 BC does not prove it was copied half a century before the tablets found with it). Each list started with the eponymate of a king, several beginning with Adad-nērārī II (910 BC), for reasons unknown. One list, A7 from Assur, did begin much earlier, but the continuity is broken, so that 910 stands as the most convenient starting point.

Nine of the manuscripts give lists of names, ten give the names with historical notes. Accordingly, they are divided into two classes, A and B, and each copy is given a separate index number, a scheme Friedrich Delitzsch introduced in his presentation.

Class A 'Eponym Lists' — Beside simple lists of names in order, with 'king' after the royal names, one text from Assur (A7) also states the number of years from the eponymate of one king to his successor's. In the other text from Assur (A9) the titles of the eponyms are added. Insofar as the extra information is merely an extension of the eponyms' names, comparable with the title 'king', this list does not need to be classed separately.

The obvious needs of government and law account for the lists of this class which enable spans of years to be calculated precisely. Some of the Ninevite texts are well written, others (A3, A5) show by their format and less-even script that they may have been made for individual use, or for a single set of calculations. The Sultantepe copy A8 was evidently an exercise, for a series of entries is repeated, and the reverse is occupied by mathematical work. Although these lists survive from three sites only, others are likely to have existed wherever Assyrian administration operated.

Class B 'Eponym Chronicles' — The pattern of entry in all copies is: 'In the eponymate of : name : title : event.' The opening phrase, *ina lime*, points to the event as the significant part of the entry, hence the current name for these texts, 'Eponym Chronicles'. It is noteworthy that the date-lines of inscriptions and tablets may include the titles of the eponyms, but never contain the extra information given in the lists of this class. The 'event' is usually in the form 'to a place'. With this basic pattern there is an unsolved problem: the subject is not expressed in most cases. Where a specific city is named, this 'indicates ... the actual location of the king and his camp at the turn of the year', the time when, supposedly, a report on military activity was

sent to the capital. The entries referring more generally to names of lands and peoples are held to represent years 'when the report was delayed or not dispatched'.¹ However, this does not explain adequately the purpose of those latter entries; they obviously denote a goal (*ana* place X) or a position (*ina* place X). The suggestion may be preferred that they describe the situation of the royal army. These entries are then seen to agree with the royal inscriptions which state that one king did not accompany his army on two campaigns, entrusting it to a high officer instead (830 'to Urartu', 829 'in Unqi', *cf.* the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III, 141-156²). Regrettably, the Eponym Chronicle does not survive for the years 698 and 695 BC when Sennacherib acted in the same way. Entries stating 'in the land', 'plague', or 'revolt' imply that the army was occupied at home.

In addition to military affairs, the events column reports movements of the god of Der (leaving his city in 831, returning in 814 and 785), the re-founding of the Nabû temple at Nineveh and the subsequent entry of the god (788, 787), the solar eclipse (763), the accessions of Tiglath-pileser III and Shalmaneser III (745, 727) and building activities of Sargon and Sennacherib (707-700). How these items qualified for entry is not clear. The later entries and the eclipse aside, it is hard for us to see any outstanding significance in the affairs of the god of Der, a border town constantly changing hands,³ or of Nabû of Nineveh, that could single them out from all other religious occurrences. Moreover, the god of Der returned twice to his temple, according to these texts, but left only once!

On rare occasions two events were recorded for the same year, *e.g.* 788 'to Media; foundation of Nabû's temple at Nineveh laid,' 763 'rebellion in Assur; in Siwan there was an eclipse of the sun' (others are at 831, 814, 802, 787, 785, 765, 759, 754, 745, 743). In their entries for the last years of the eighth century, 714-700 BC, the extant texts become even more detailed.⁴

¹ A. R. Millard and H. Tadmor, *Iraq* 35 (1973) 62.

² A. H. Layard, *ICC* pls. 95, 96; O. Michel, *WdO* 2,3 (1956) 224-27; D. D. Luckenbill, *ARAB* 1 §§ 584, 585.

³ *Cf.* *Iraq* 26 (1964) 17.

⁴ As observed by J. A. Brinkman, *NABU* 1989, no. 3, p. 49.

Sources of the Eponym Lists and Chronicles

None of the Eponym Lists names a source. A master copy was surely kept up-to-date in the capital by the annual addition of the eponym, then each scribal centre might keep its own list *à jour*. The Sultantepe copies show what deviations could arise in a provincial school (see *The Manuscripts*, A8, B10). From close correspondences between the Eponym Lists and the Assyrian King List, some have supposed the King List to be derived from the Eponym Lists. While they were connected, and an early section of the King List

apparently relied on lists of eponyms (see below, pp. 8-9), the King List had other sources, for it relates each king to his predecessor, which the Eponym Lists do not.

The Eponym Lists (Class A) give the names alone, only marking the kings by title until the time of Tiglath-pileser III, as set out above, the change bringing them a little closer to Class B, warning against rigid distinctions on formal grounds. The change may hint at a time of editorial activity in Nineveh or Kalah — it is not found in the Assur list (A7) — about the time when the Khorsabad King List was copied (738 BC) and the Babylonian Chronicle commences.¹¹ In the following decades, too, occur the longer entries of some Eponym Chronicle texts from Nineveh, dealing with the reigns of Sargon and Sennacherib (B6, B7).

The Eponym Chronicles as a whole obviously drew upon fuller sources and, again, their nature cannot be discerned; were they the sources that fed the Class A lists and the King Lists? Whatever they were, they had wide authority, for the entry at 704 BC claims two cities were conquered in Babylonia, Larak and Sarrabanu, and those two only are included in the Babylonian Chronicle entry for that year (Bēl-ibni 3).¹² Note, also, that the Babylonian Chronicle reports 'plague was in Assyria' for 706 BC (ii 5'), whereas the Eponym Chronicle merely states that the king stayed in the land and various other events took place. Furthermore, the Eponym Chronicle's entry for 700 (B7), concerning materials for building a palace, in particular specifying the quarry whence the stone was obtained as Kapar-dagila, has clear affinities with the lengthy reports of Sennacherib's 'Annals'.¹³ There seem to be hints here of fuller sources covering a variety of events, good and bad, that were available to scribes for their different purposes.

¹¹ See Grayson, *op. cit.* 10ff.

¹² *Ibid.* 77, cf. *ibid.* 11, n.23.

¹³ Edition E vi 45-75, I i 33-ii 13, D. D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib* (Chicago 1924) 107-8, 120-2.