The Chronology of Ancient Assyria Re-assessed

The modern reconstruction of the history of ancient Assyria is re-examined with particular emphasis on the two major sources, the eponym canon and the king lists. A previously unnoticed divergence is highlighted for the chronology of the crucial Middle Assyrian Period. Here, although the eponym data is incomplete, it can be seen to have been carefully copied from an older original, and its witness is to be preferred to that of the king lists which are demonstrably inaccurate and of unknown provenance.

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Part 1

The Chronology as Presently Constructed

Source materials

1. In the 19th century Henry Rawlinson discovered the eponym canon which lists the kings of Assyria in sequence with details of the years of their reign. Each year was named after an important personage, usually a high-ranking official – the eponym or *limmu* – but the king himself would be the eponym for one of the early years of the reign (usually the second or third) and for his 'jubilee' in his Year 30. The eponym canon gives an exact chronology back to at least 880 BC and fragmentary details for about two centuries before that. It has always been held to be an impeccable source of information.

2. Royal inscriptions[1] took the chronology back several generations further. A king would name himself on his inscription boasting titles such as 'strong king', 'king of the universe', 'king of Assyria', 'vice-regent of Ashur' (the regent being the god Ashur himself), 'regent of the god Enlil' and so on; he would then give his father's name and (usually identical) titles; after that his grandfather would be mentioned in like fashion; and maybe also previous generations such as great-grandfather or even great-great-grandfather. Some royal inscriptions include chronological details such as the year of writing, e.g. 'in the eponym of Eriba-Sin'.

3. Early this century the Nassouhi King List[2] was discovered, listing the kings of Assyria in sequence often with lengths of reign. In 1942-43 Arno Poebel published a detailed discussion of another king list from the 8th century,[3] giving kings in sequence, almost all with lengths of reign, some at variance with the previous scheme but most in agreement with what was already known. Some discrepancies were noted, with several examples of incorrect genealogical relations revealed when the king lists were compared with royal inscriptions,[4] but also useful information which helped to fill gaps in the eponym canon and royal inscriptions.

Using the information in the king lists, a chronology for ancient Assyria was established from the fall of the empire in the 7th century back into the middle of the second millennium. Notably, the date derived from the king lists for Ashur-uballit I was found to be in agreement with the Egyptologists' preferred date for the Amarna period, *c.* 1360 BC. This was a highly satisfactory outcome because Ashur-uballit was an Amarna correspondent, the author of two letters to pharaoh Akhenaten.

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The king lists are acknowledged to be late compilations, transcribed during the 8th century BC, although it is frequently argued that the Nassouhi King List, which records the kings' reigns only as far as the end of Tiglath-pileser II, might be the two centuries older.[5]

According to Poebel, when copying these texts the scribes refused to amend them and thus perpetuated any accumulated errors.[6] When compared to royal inscriptions, the Nassouhi and the Khorsabad King Lists contain identical errors but also different ones. Even if the Nassouhi version was 200 years older it *cannot be* the ancestor of the Khorsabad King List. The different mistakes can only be explained if there were two parallel versions or separate traditions concerning, for example, Ashur-nadin-apli, Ashur-nasir-pal and Ashur-nirari III in the aftermath of the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I.[7] Poebel concludes that the extant king lists could have a single common ancestor but could not be derived one from the other.

4. The Synchronistic Chronicle was composed by the Assyrians to demonstrate the superiority of Ashur over Babylon but it contains many inaccuracies. For instance, a certain Babylonian ruler might be listed as a contemporary of a particular Assyrian, when in fact one can determine with some considerable accuracy that these two were at best near-contemporaries.[8] The motive of the chronicler seems to have been to ensure that canonical kings were not omitted from the chronicle or history.

5. Another late document is the Synchronistic History, written some time in the 8th century BC. This is a biased history, dealing with military relations between Assyria and Babylon, designed to show that whenever the Babylonians attacked Assyria they were punished. It omits a number of powerful Assyrian rulers (e.g. Ashur-nasir-pal II) but only because these kings did not fight Babylon.

6. Letters and chronicle fragments also provide chronological information.

These are the source materials. Now when examining the chronology of Assyria it is important to discern which of the available documents are the most trustworthy. Since it can be clearly seen that the Synchronistic Chronicle, the Synchronistic History and various chronicle fragments are of late compilation and contain partial and often unreliable information, they are to be regarded as less valuable sources.

Historians have usually based their chronologies round the king lists which present a ready-made dynastic sequence of rulers with reign lengths. As Brinkman notes:

> Because the kinglist preserves a detailed list of Assyrian rulers, their genealogies, and their lengths of reign which is supposed to be complete for more than a millennium preceding 722 BC and because it is the only text which provides such a skeleton essential to all historical work, there has been an understandable tendency on the part of historians to utilize this evidence gratefully, sometimes with little critical examination.[9]

He then goes on to warn the reader:

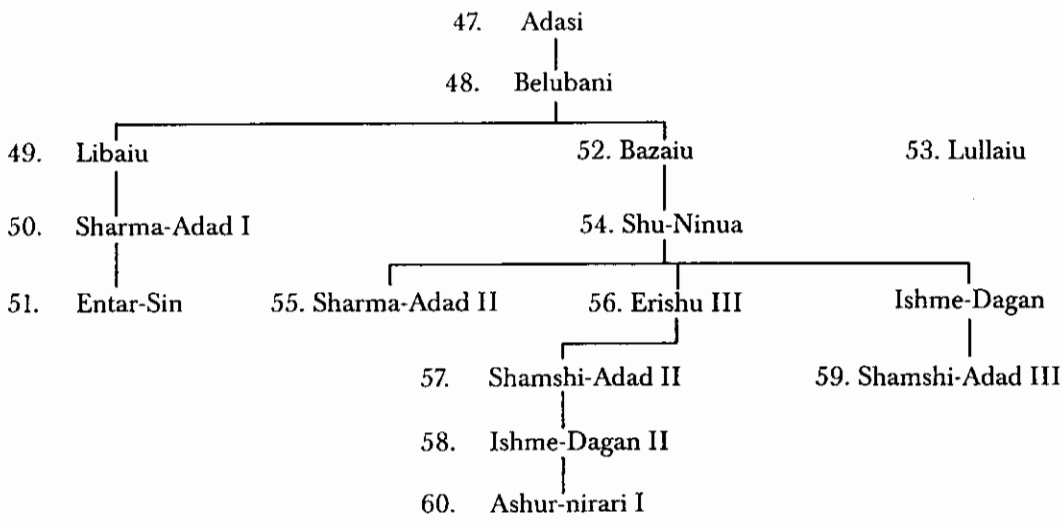
> Rollig has recently presented a short theoretical treatment of the typology and sources for the kinglist; and his assessment of the role of chronicles or chronicle-like documents in the evolution of the kinglist follows in the tradition of Poebel and Landsberger, who either classified the document among the chronicles or said that it was written in chronicle style.[10]

Now these king lists are late transcriptions of earlier texts and are known to contain minor errors in the lineage of the kings. It is therefore to be expected that over the ages other uncorrected mistakes will have been perpetuated. It should also concern us that, over the several centuries of Assyrian history, we are presented with an unvarying picture of sole rulers who succeed one another without co-regencies or overlaps of any sort. We should be suspicious of this because there are two loci in the early history of Assyria where a more complex pattern of succession seems to have been disguised:

(i) From the earliest period of the Adasi Dynasty, where one has three generations of Belubani's family ruling in sequence, starting with his eldest son Libaiu, next (supposedly) Entar-Sin's great-uncle Bazaiu, then an usurper (Lullaiu), then the great-uncle's family continues. The next generation sees Shu-Ninua's eldest son Sharma-Adad II rule, then his brother Erishu III followed by the latter's son Shamshi-Adad II and grandson Ishme-Dagan II. The natural descent is then interrupted by the rule of Shamshi-Adad III, son of an Ishme-Dagan, who was another son of Shu-Ninua but did not himself become king. After Shamshi-Adad III, the Erishu III line resumes rule with Ashur-nirari I, the son of the former king Ishme-Dagan II. This succession is so problematic that one has to consider parallel dynasties as an alternative.

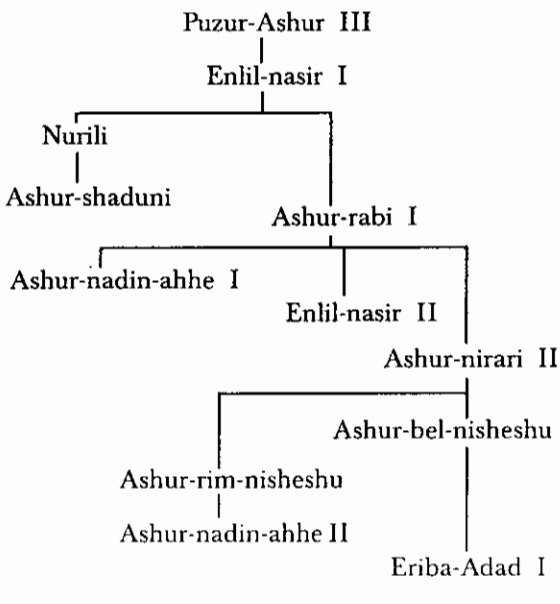
(ii) Similarly, from the Puzur-Ashur to Ashur-uballit (I) period, the family tree is highly complex. The early part of this family tree is readily explicable in conventional terms because three of the rulers, Ashur-shaduni, Ashur-rabi I and Ashur-nadin-ahhe I fail to complete a year of reign, and Enlil-nasir II and Ashur-nirari II have short reigns of six and seven years respectively. The sheer frequency of change of ruler would explain the complex lineage.

Table 1: The Descendants of Adasi[11]



But, according to the king list, Eriba-Adad although directly descended from a previous king (Ashur-bel-nisheshu), has to wait 18 years for two relations to complete their rule – and only then could he begin his long reign. We must not overlook here Ber-nadin-ahhe who, although absent from this official genealogy, is known from two legal texts to have been not only a son of Ashur-nirari II but also a king in his own right.[12] Whose reigns would his have preceded and succeeded: why and how?

Table 2: The Ancestors of Eriba-Adad I[13]



We should therefore entertain the possibility that there were parallel dynasties in this part of the family tree of the kings of Assyria. But there is not even the merest hint of this in any king list. However, the king list 'written in chronicle style' is constrained into presenting a linear sequence. One does not have to impute 'late rationalisation' or a desire to 'exaggerate antiquity' to explain the king list format – essentially this was the way the ancient Assyrians wrote about their past.

The Eponym Canon: a critical appraisal

The eponym canon is often cited as a benchmark, used to confirm the veracity of the data contained in the king lists, and especially in upholding the absolute chronology of Assyria. When, in the aftermath of the publication of *Centuries of Darkness*,[14] the *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* published a series of papers attacking the revised chronology of James *et al.*, one of the most damaging criticisms was made by Nicholas Postgate, using the eponym canon as his main evidence.[15] In particular, he claimed that the traditional years 1086-1074, 1033-1005 and 966-963 BC are confirmed by tablet KAV 21. We shall therefore be examining this, the crown jewels of Assyrian chronology, to determine whether all the claims made for it are justified.

There are many different tablets which together comprise what we call the eponym canon. Although there are data variations, generally the canon and the king lists agree as to the reign lengths for the kings of Assyria from the time of Tukulti-Ninurta II to Ashur-banipal. That is to say, canonical eponyms are the same in number as years reigned. But this equation does not hold for all of

Assyria's history. In the so-called post-canonical period, 648-612 BC, there are 50+ known eponyms for the 37 known regnal years.[16] Moreover, in the pre-canonical era, we have numerous examples of eponym numbers exceeding regnal years, e.g. for Eriba-Adad I and Ashur-uballit,[17] for Shalmaneser I,[18] and for the Adad-nirari I to Tukulti-Ninurta I period generally.[19] This excess of eponyms has been deduced from studies of royal inscriptions, legal texts, business records, etc.

There are many possible explanations for surpluses. One of the experts on the subject of post-canonical eponyms, Whiting, postulated multiple eponyms for single years with one official based in one town and another based elsewhere in the empire.[20] A second expert, Falkner, proposed eponyms appointed at different times of the year to explain 'double' eponymy.[21] If a technical explanation such as one of these (and there may be others) was actually operative then we would regularly witness double or multiple eponymy. But if one takes into account human frailties and political intrigues, instances could also occur sporadically: they might occur in any reign.

We do not know how death in office would be viewed under ordinary circumstances, but if it were deemed inauspicious to record the name of a dead person as *limmu* for the year, another appointment might have been made forthwith. The second appointee would become the 'official' eponym for the year but tablets bearing the first holder's name would undoubtedly also have survived. Similarly, since officials were expendable, one can certainly visualise instances where eponyms would lose their governorship due to perceived incompetence or misdemeanours. In such cases the king might even issue a royal decree ordering the destruction of records bearing the name of the offending eponym but, nevertheless, his name could escape obliteration if recorded on contracts and other legal texts.

So we do not necessarily expect the number of known eponyms to coincide with the number of years of reign of a particular king. We may adduce a rule: there should not be fewer eponyms than full years of reign but, conversely, there will be occasions when we know of more eponyms than years of reign. This being so, the number of discovered eponyms might reflect the maximum possible regnal duration but, unfortunately, it cannot be a reliable guide as to the minimum or even actual reign length.

In the light of the above, the eponym canon tablet $C^{a}2$ for the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta II, during the 880s BC, is most instructive. As published by Ungnad,[22] this king has six lines of eponyms and the usual summary, thus *6 sanati^{mes}*, meaning 'total, 6'. Now Ungnad thought he knew of the names of seven or possibly eight eponyms for this king. He and other contemporary scholars accepted that two of these, Yari and Naid-ili, officiated towards the end of Tukulti-Ninurta's reign. They were aware of references to Ili-milki (the eponym listed previous to Yari in the canon) and to Naid-ili in the 'annals of Tukulti-Ninurta II' in descriptions of what might have been successive campaigns but of this they were not convinced – nor that Yari's and Naid-ili's eponymships occurred in separate years. Instead, they preferred to follow $C^{a}2$ as written, viewing these two as office-holders for the same year.

This problem is addressed by Poebel who arrives at a different conclusion. On the basis that the king list gives Tukulti-Ninurta II a 7-year reign, he would have Yari and Naid-ili as eponyms for consecutive years: thus seven eponyms – one for each year of rule.[23] Later, Gurney and Finkelstein published another text known as STT 1, no. 47,[24] a version of the canon which listed seven eponyms in a 7-year *limmu* list. Quite reasonably, since STT 1, no. 47, agrees with the king list, its evidence is preferred to that of $C^{a}2$.

Nowadays, nobody credits $C^{a}2$. It is supposed that an error has occurred during copying in which one line with the name of a *limmu* was omitted (or two names placed on one line). It is further assumed that the summary line has been altered to read 'total, 6' but, knowing how the scribe operated, seemingly with a good knowledge of the *limmu* periods, there is a difficulty here: the incorrect numeral would have alerted him to the mistake and, if the missing eponym could still not be located, he would surely have inserted a 'one after' official (see below) rather than have to amend the total. Since this complicated form of scribal error is contrary to normal working practices, we may still have in $C^{a}2$ a valid document. Instead, one might adduce a simpler scribal error for STT 1, no. 47: the addition of the double eponym and alteration of the total – in the mistaken belief that one could not have two eponyms for a single year – because in the system operated in Neo-Assyrian times this never happened.[25]

It is usually contended that the eponym canon is accurate back to 911 BC. In fact, this was only realised recently because for the reign of Adad-nirari II during 890s BC the record of $C^{a}2$ is rather fragmentary. When $C^{a}2$ was first published, Adad-nirari II was allocated the years 911-889 BC by Ungnad[26] but, as he noted, his years 901 to 893 consisted of names lifted wholesale from the 'annals of Adad-nirari II'. No names existed for the years 903 and 902 BC in Ungnad's chronology. Grayson records: 'space is left for two eponyms at this point'.[27] When STT 1, no. 47, was published with a more complete list of eponyms for Adad-nirari II, it soon became apparent that only one official was missing and that the reign length was 21 years, not 23 as originally deduced by Ungnad.[28]

Modern scholarship has been content to follow the listing given in STT 1, no. 47, for Adad-nirari II and to adopt its 21-year *limmu* period which is in accordance

with king list data. Whilst the weight of evidence strongly favours this conclusion, it poses problems. As noted by Poebel, we either have to accept Adad-nirari as eponym in his very first year (which would be unique in the Assyrian records) or a 22-year reign coupled with only six years for his successor, Tukulti-Ninurta II.[29] But it is also apparent that the scribe working on $C^{a}2$ thought this was a 23-year *limmu* period.

As noted by Brinkman, the reliability of the eponym lists and chronicles is open to question in the light of 'obvious discrepancies' between these and contemporary inscriptions during the reign of Adad-nirari II.[30] In particular we should note the problem concerning the eponym for his Year 19, conventionally 893 BC. The canons name Shamash-sharra-usur and Shamash-bela-usur but the king's annals give Ilu-napishti-usur, 'eunuch of Adad-nirari' as this official.[31] The substantial difference in names indicates another instance of multiple eponym here.

We can detect evidence of a seemingly dubious process in the section relating to Tiglath-pileser II. There are two tablets KAV 21 and KAV 22[32] which record the eponyms before Ashur-dan II. Although both are in a rather fragmented state it is clear they were originally part of a larger single tablet. For the purposes of this article we shall refer to them as 'KAV 21/22' and to their contents by column. Columns I to V list eponyms for the Middle Assyrian and VI to X (on the reverse) the Neo-Assyrian periods. Near the top of column V we have:

[year 1]	Tiglath-pileser
[year 2]	Ashur-beli-lam[u]
[year 3]	One after Ashur-beli-la[mu]

This is followed by four listings of very similar appearance denoted by Ungnad 'questionable if name';[33] again on Ungnad's lines 20 & 30 we have the phrase 'one after'; on his line 31 we have a 'two after' followed by yet another 'questionable if name' eponym: in other words no real names of eponyms are recorded here. One of the undamaged lines in the list of eponyms for Shalmaneser II in column IV is likewise a 'one after'.

What we are witnessing is a scribe admitting to deficiencies in his knowledge. The 'one after' entries are scattered among the names of the true eponyms, so this is not a matter of padding out an empty king list. Rather, it reflects a copying process wherein the scribe is presented with a damaged tablet on which a number of names are illegible:[34] since he is unable to restore these names from another source, he dutifully records the *limmu* in their exact sequence.

The least valuable information on tablet KAV 21 is the record for the 6-year reign of Ashur-nirari IV. This is a king for whom we have no royal inscriptions: we know him only because he is placed in the king list as son and successor of the hardly-attested Shalmaneser II and as predecessor of the equally little-known Ashur-rabi II. Column IV records:

Ashur-nirari	
One after Ashur-nirari	
Two after	Three after
Four after	Five after
Six total	

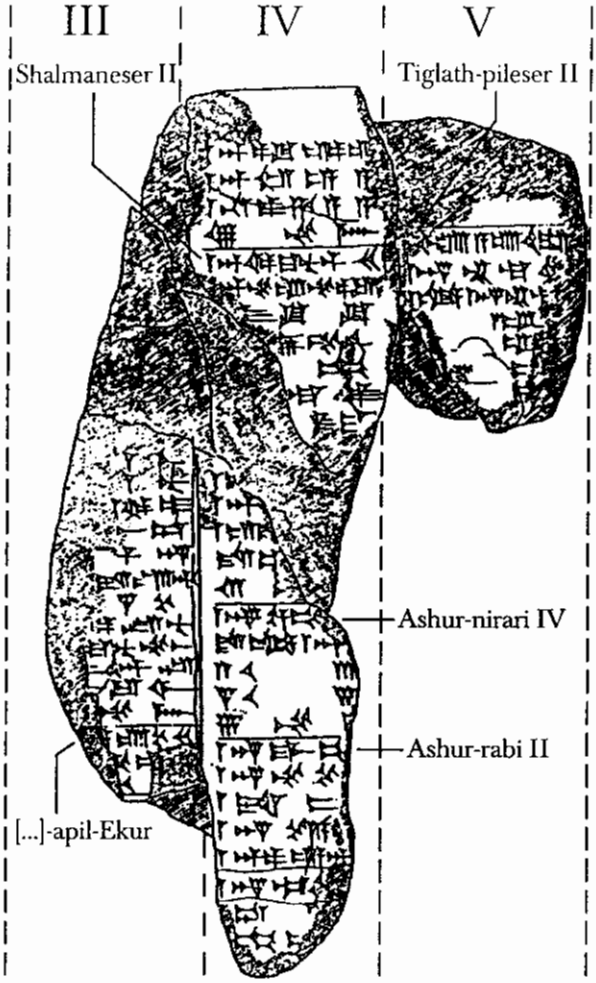
There are no names of eponyms recorded at all! Armed with just one piece of information – the length of this Ashur-nirari's *limmu* period – the scribe has reconstructed an entire reign, albeit a relatively short one.

The above examples illustrate the processes underlying the re-recording of the eponym lists in the seventh century.[35] One might suppose that the scribe had two types of data available to him: firstly a form of king list with a sequence of kings and regnal years recorded, and secondly sources giving names of officials from which he could fill out the stated regnal years to create an eponym canon. But we can see in most instances that the scribe has had access to a list of actual eponyms. In other places he has had problems. Sometimes the records were so scanty that our scribe had to insert artificial entries to fill up the lacunae.

As we have noted, column V records some details of the reign of Tiglath-pileser II. The king's name occurs as eponym both at the start of his *limmu* list and in its 30th line. At the close of the list we have 'total 33 (years)', thus the canon records a reign of 33 years for Tiglath-pileser II and we know this cannot be the result of a miscount since his jubilee occurs on the 30th line of his list. Poebel does not find the 33-year total problematic since it is possible for a king's *limmu* period to exceed his reign length by a year:[36] thus it does not seriously contradict the 32-year datum of the Khorsabad King List.

Part way down column III we find listed the eponyms of a king given by Ungnad as '[Ninurta-a]pil-Ekur'.[37] Here he is in error because there is nowhere enough room to accommodate all this king's attested successors who include such long-lived kings as Ashur-dan I, Ashur-resh-ishi I, Tiglath-pileser I and Ashur-bel-kala. The name should probably be that of *Ashared*-apil-Ekur.[38]

If we do place the reign of Ashared-apil-Ekur at this location, the previous reign will be that of Tiglath-pileser I,[39] which creates further problems. Only the last ten eponyms of this reign are preserved, albeit in a fragmentary state, plus part of the total line (unfortunately, the figure for the total is not discernible). Recalling how we found evidence of a jubilee in the reign of Tiglath-pileser II, Year 30 of Tiglath-pileser I's eponym list should also read 'Tiglath-pileser, *sharru*'. It is not there. None of the last 10 lines of eponyms contain elements of his name or title. Ungnad did not comment on this but, in his day,



Tablet fragment KAV 21 Obverse (after O. Schroeder, op. cit. *[32]).*

Tiglath-pileser I was thought to have had a 27-year reign: the generally-stated figure of 39 years has resulted from the acceptance of a single datum found on the Khorsabad King List. We may conclude that KAV 21 bears witness to a different tradition in which Tiglath-pileser I had less than 30 years of reign.

In summary, we may make the following points:

(i) the eponym canons in our possession are late copies, inscribed in the 7th century, reproduced from earlier documents.

(ii) a number of the original tablets must have been in a severely damaged state, with many lacunae. The scribe has faithfully copied entries, preserving all data.

(iii) the *limmu* periods follow the original documents but, presumably, where these were too poorly preserved the scribe may have had to consult a form of king list.

(iv) similarly, the sequence of kings was determined by eponym data – the final eponym of a *limmu* period being the first official of the succeeding ruler. Where the final eponym was either not recognised or recognisable, the order of kings would again have to follow that of a king list.

(v) if there was an error in the construction of the king lists or of their ancestral line, that error will necessarily have been repeated in the construction of the eponym canon.

(vi) from both early and very late periods, we know of more eponyms than regnal years.

(vii) where there is a conflict of information as to reign length, e.g. for Tiglath-pileser I, Tiglath-pileser II, Adad-nirari II and Tukulti-Ninurta II, scholars prefer to give credence to the king list over the eponym canon.

Which record came first?

We know of eponyms very early in Assyrian history. Already in the reigns of Eriba-Adad I and Ashur-uballit I we have numerous examples, mostly on business documents. Earlier yet, the Khorsabad King List records of its third group of kings (nos. 27-32 in the list) 'a total of 6 kings, [who]se [...] *limmu*'s are destroyed' which implies that these kings had eponyms[40] and that there may have been a form of eponym *list* at that time. But should one really take that statement at face value? Remember, the eponym canons in our possession are already fragmentary from Adad-nirari II's time: why is a comparable statement (that 'the *limmu*'s are not available') not attached to the entries for the early Adasi Dynasty, for the successors of Eriba-Adad I, etc? Surely the redactor intended to convey the message that there is no chronological information on these kings (no reign length known) because the following kings in the list, from Erishu I, do start to appear with reign lengths.[41]

On the other hand, it is evident that some sort of king list was in existence and used, not merely as a school exercise, but by the king himself at the end of the 9th century. Adad-nirari III refers to himself as the descendant of 'Ilu-kapkapu, a king of Ashur, [ruling] even before the kingdom of Sulili'. Poebel interprets this as showing Adad-nirari's knowledge of the divisions of the king list, 'a handy compilation to consult whenever it became necessary to ascertain and to describe to others the position of an earlier king in the long line of Assyrian rulers.'[42]

Like the 'chicken or egg' paradox, we cannot settle the question of which came first, the king or the eponym list. But the known excess of eponyms indicates that, as early as the Middle Assyrian Period, the data kept on

reign lengths was different from, or separate from, the data kept on eponyms.

Thus there may well have been two kinds of lists of *limmus* preserved: (i) an 'official' list which matched the years reigned (such as was being referred to above in the Khorsabad King List for kings 27-32), and (ii) a 'complete' list, compiled from disparate sources including collections of business and legal tablets which survived the ravages of time. If the former list was lost, incomplete or destroyed then scribes of later times, lacking essential information, would need to compile a 'complete' list of their own, including the names of supernumerary eponyms. With respect to the reign of Tiglath-pileser I this seems to have actually occurred in the compilation of the Khorsabad King List or its ancestor.

In much later times, when further material had been lost, damaged or destroyed, the scribes of Ashur-banipal's time can be seen filling out the gaps in their eponym canons: they were certainly in possession of king lists and this medium had been in existence for at least a century.

KAV 21/22: the crown jewels

Our next task is to reconstruct the damaged first columns of tablet KAV 21, the only extant source of eponym canon data for 963 BC and earlier. Those who would object to this extrapolation should pause to consider because KAV 21:

(i) is cited as supporting the traditional years 1086-1074, 1033-1005 and 966-963 BC,[43] a conclusion based on the assumption that a modern calculation is perfectly valid,

(ii) similar calculations have been performed in hypothetical reconstructions of missing portions of king lists[44] and here the process was complicated by unknown factors, e.g. the presence or absence of and length of redaction; and

(iii) the damaged sections may well be based largely upon much more ancient source material. Because in transcription the scribe has had to admit gaps in his knowledge, we can deduce that he has not been able to reconstruct an eponym list but has had to rely entirely on an incomplete original.

Since one can see that, already by the time KAV 21/22 was inscribed, there are lacunae in the records for other Middle Assyrian kings, the project would have to begin at a point from which sufficient information was still available. A start in the Early Assyrian Period is therefore not realistic. Logically, one would expect column I of this tablet to commence from the first year of reign of an important king of (Middle) Assyria. We should be able to identify him by extrapolating backwards in time from the damaged column III.

We can determine that each column contained about 67 or 68 lines but probably fewer on the reverse, column VIII, which is more widely spaced between lines[45] (the numbering of lines referred to below is a modern construct, not something found on the tablet). At the end of each king's list of *limmus* the scribe has thoughtfully provided a total-giving summary so, for example, a reign of 6 years will be recorded as '6+1' (the 1 representing the total line) in our tabulation.

Working entirely from the chronology given in the Khorsabad King List, it is not possible to achieve a satisfactory result: column I would begin part-way through the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I. However, adopting instead a reign length of less than 30 years suggested by the absence of a jubilee for Tiglath-pileser I, the following very tidy solution is obtained:

Column I			
Tukulti-Ninurta	37+1	*or*	37+1
Ashur-nadin-apli	3+1		3+1
Ashur-nirari	6+1		6+1
Enlil-kudur-usur	5+1		5+1
Ninurta-apil-Ekur	3+1		3+1
Ashur-dan	9		8
Total	68		67

Column II			
Ashur-dan	37+1	*or*	38+1
Ninurta-tukulti-Ashur	?1+1		1
Mutakkil-Nusku	?1+1		1
Ashur-resh-ishi	18+1		18+1
Tiglath-pileser	7		7
Total	68		67

It is unknowable how the eponym canon recorded the reigns of Ninurta-tukulti-Ashur and Mutakkil-Nusku, sons of Ashur-dan I, since neither completed a year of reign. We have to presume they would have figured as names (1 line each) in column II. If there were 68 lines a total-giving summary might also be found.

Column III			
Tiglath-pileser	22+1	*or*	22+1
[Ashared]-apil-Ekur	2+1		2+1
Ashur-bel-kala	[x+1]		[x+1]
Eriba-Adad	[y+1]		[y+1]
Shamshi-Adad	[z+1]		[z+1]
Ashur-nasir-pal	16[46]		16
Total	68		67

We have here an equation of x + y + z = 22 or 23. Normally x = 18, y = 2 and z = 4 but clearly one or more of these figures has to be devalued unless the scribe managed to squeeze an extra line into this column. Similarly, in column I, an extra year could be accommodated for the reign of Ashur-nadin-apli (4 years, a rival tradition) without too much trouble.

Column IV	
Ashur-nasir-pal	3+1
Shalmaneser	12+1
Ashur-nirari	4+1[47]
Ashur-rabi	41+1
Ashur-resh-ishi	3
Total	67

Column V	
Ashur-resh-ishi	2+1
Tiglath-pileser	33+1
Ashur-dan	[2+n]
[Lacuna]	
Total	67?

The lacuna resulting from loss and damage at the bottom of column V amounts to about 28 or 29 lines, yet the Khorsabad King List gives Ashur-dan II only 23 years of reign. Allowing a line for the summary, one would have expected the first 6 or 7 *limmu* of the succeeding king, Adad-nirari II, to complete column V.

Column VI	
Adad-nirari II	16+1
Tukulti-Ninurta II	6+1
Ashur-nasir-pal II	25+1
Shalmaneser III	18
Total	68

With column VII we have a clear bottom edge of the tablet and this listing ends with seven of Shalmaneser IV's eponyms:

Column VII	
Shalmaneser III	17+1
Shamshi-Adad V	13+1
Adad-nirari III	28+1
Shalmaneser IV	7
Total	68

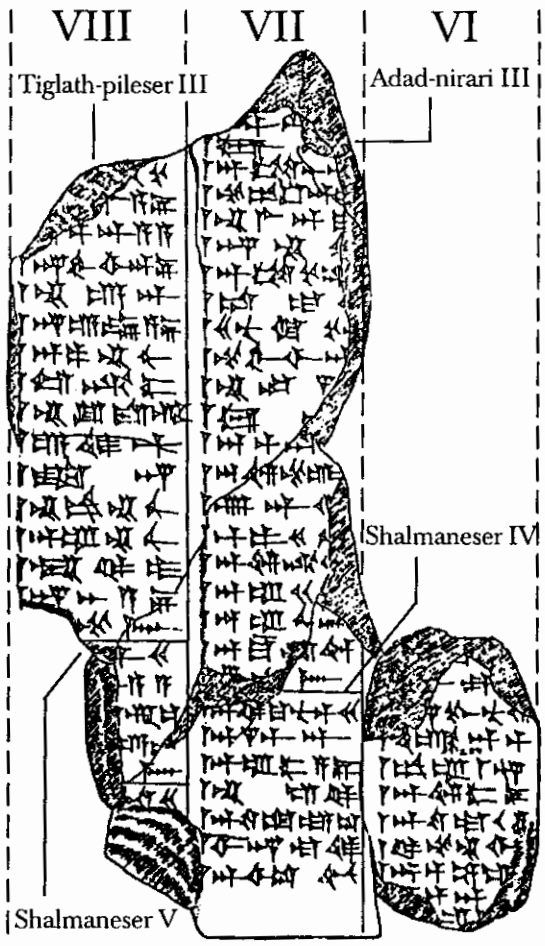
We thus have an internal proof that the reign of Tiglath-pileser was much shorter than the generally accepted 39-year figure which is given in the Khorsabad King List:

(a) if we restore to him the ten years it would mean that column I would necessarily have to begin in mid-reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I. Whilst of itself this is not impossible, it looks unlikely. If one were to attempt to reconstruct a putative 'first' tablet of this eponym canon it would commence way back in history – long before any preserved eponym records!

(b) if we decide that the eponym canon would not record anything at all for the reigns of Ninurta-tukulti-Ashur and Mutakkil-Nusku, we would 'gain' 2-4 years which could be added to the reign of Tiglath-pileser I: but this would make 31-33 years, fewer than the 39 in the king list. As in (a) above, we would still face the problem of how to explain why such an important king was not accorded his jubilee in Year 30.

(c) similarly, the selection of a 3-year reign for Ninurta-apil-Ekur is confirmed. Brinkman remarks of this choice:

> Despite the current historical fashion which prefers '13' rather than '3' years for the length of the reign



Tablet fragment KAV 21 Reverse (after O. Schroeder, op. cit. *[32]).*

> of Ninurta-apil-Ekur, it should be pointed out that there is not a single shred of positive evidence in favor of either alternative.[48]

But now we have the evidence of KAV 21 which tilts the balance in favour of the shorter reign.[49]

Having decided that Tiglath-pileser I's reign was only 29 years, we find that we have many more eponyms than years of reign: Saporetti gives 46+[50] and Freydank, who has considerably revised the latter's work, has at least 30, and possibly as many as 47.[51] If, as we argued, the damaged section of KAV 21/22 was largely copied, not reconstituted, its deduced 29-year reign for Tiglath-pileser I was probably based on the 'official' eponym list. Thus the '39 years' of the Khorsabad King List would be based upon the compilation of later scribes, incorporating some (but not all) of the supernumerary eponyms.

We can elaborate upon this argument. Saporetti, having identified 46+ eponyms for Tiglath-pileser I, attempted to identify the eleven listed on KAV 21. The result was disappointing: five or six matched but five were not identifiable.[52] If his true reign length was 39 years and multiple eponymy occurred only on an occasional basis, one would not expect to discover many more names of *limmu* than the 46+ known to Saporetti. Yet, because of the unmatched officials listed on KAV 21, there should be at least another five as yet undiscovered for this king. Clearly, the idea of sporadic multiple eponyms begins to look untenable. Perhaps, then, we should entertain the notion of regular dual eponymy (i.e. two officials every year), in which case, we could more readily accept a reign of only 29 years and be looking for a total of 58 named officials: among the missing dozen we are likely to find the five hitherto unrecognisable on KAV 21.

But why would the practice of dual eponymy have started in the reign of Tiglath-pileser I? And for that matter, why did it not endure? We may have a clue to these questions from Brinkman's study of the Broken Obelisk, which he argues properly belongs to the reign of Ashur-bel-kala.[53] Various eponyms are named in this inscription in relation to dates from different times of the year. Brinkman concludes that:

> ... the beginning month of the eponymate was subject to variation at this time, in short that the earlier Assyrian lunar calendar had not yet been adjusted to the Babylonian system of intercalary months, despite the recent introduction of Babylonian month names into Assyria.[54]

Tiglath-pileser I's inscriptions usually cite Assyrian month names but in one of his annals he also gives the Babylonian equivalent.[55] By the time Ashur-bel-kala ascends the throne we see the exclusive usage of Babylonian month names. Thus Brinkman deduces that there was a calendar change at about this time.[56] Instability is still detected in Ashur-bel-kala's reign, when eponyms were appointed in the 3rd, 4th and 9th or 10th months. What Brinkman may not have realised is that this situation is just what we would expect where dual eponymy was the norm, as postulated, for example, by Falkner.[57]

A questionable absolute chronology?

We have already noted a number of examples of conflict between the sources: the eponym canon gives reigns of 33 and 23 years for Tiglath-pileser II and Adad-nirari II respectively, whereas modern scholarship has determined that the Khorsabad King List figures of 32 and 21 years are probably correct. In these two instances, scribal errors are blamed for the discrepancies.

But in other instances where scribal error in recording the canon looks improbable, the evidence of the king list would still appear to be paramount. We have seen two examples: the reigns of Tukulti-Ninurta II (where we were unable to decide from textual evidence which tradition was correct) and Tiglath-pileser I. The essential difference in these cases is that the canon records *fewer* years than the king list. For the canon to be at fault would require major scribal error, whereas the king list figure can in each instance be attributed to a compilation which included some of the supernumerary eponyms.

If we compare the chronological details given in the king lists and eponym canons we see that the former presents basic data as to kings' reign-lengths whereas the latter gives detailed data, firstly as a count of individually-named years (which can, luckily, be counted out on a damaged tablet) and secondly in a total-giving summary line. No such detail is given in the king list: we have either to accept or reject its figures without knowing how or from where they were derived. In the light of this, it is very odd that scholarship has chosen to adhere to statements of the king list. It is doubly so because, where the king lists differ from the royal inscriptions on matters of lineage, the king lists are accepted as being faulty.

One has to ask why, when a source is accepted as containing errors of one kind is it used as the benchmark for correcting the data contained in a much more detailed but conflicting source? Here we may again note Brinkman's observations:

> One does not wish to be overly sceptical about the data of the Assyrian kinglist tradition. But there is a tendency when dealing with such a unique and – at least in its later portions – seemingly scientific document, to forget that all of its data may not be equally reliable.[58]

Clearly any methodology which treats the king list tradition as paramount is faulty. The evidence of the

eponym canon is no less reliable than that of the king list. Indeed, in places where the former indicates a shorter reign length than the latter, it is the more credible source of chronological information. Moreover, despite appearances, we should question whether or not the king lists were ever *intended* to be chronologically accurate.

> Oppenheim has pointed out privately the similarity in the distinctive shape of KhKL/SDAS and the ruled-off inscriptional sections of some *limmu* stelae found at Ashur (*WVDOG* 24 nos. 15, 28, etc.) and has suggested that certain copies of the Assyrian kinglist may have been intended for funerary or ceremonial purposes (rather than for strictly chronological ends).[59]

Brinkman continues (in footnote):

> The ceremonial function of the genealogical list of the Hammurabi Dynasty (Finkelstein, *JCS* 20 (1966), 95-118), as indicated in the latter part of the text, is of particular relevance here, since this is the only document of this type for which we have direct evidence concerning its *Sitz im Leben*.[60]

Whilst Brinkman makes these observations of the 8th-century king lists, he does not comment in like fashion on the third main tradition – that described by Nassouhi. This tablet's reverse has its columns reversed and is upside-down to the obverse.[61] Bob Porter has suggested that, since the top is damaged, it also could possibly be an amulet text![62]

Conclusion

We have reason to suspect that the generally accepted chronology is artificially long on these calculations by a minimum of 20 years. Tiglath-pileser I's reign is overstated to the tune of a decade and a similar 10-year reduction of Ninurta-apil-Ekur's tenure is indicated. Furthermore, we have demonstrated that the eponym canon does not, as has been asserted to great effect over the years, entirely support the chronology of the king lists. Rather, in the crucial Middle Assyrian Period, its single, fragmented tablet is in conflict with the latter's long chronology, the provenance of whose statements remains unknown.

In passing, we should note the effect of removing 20 years from Assyrian chronology on the Amarna synchronisms. Brinkman's dates for Ashur-uballit I are generally accepted: 1363-1328 BC.[63] These now become 1343-1308 BC. Likewise, Kitchen's dates for the 18th Dynasty are the norm, Akhenaten's reign (co-regency theory) being 1352-1336,[64] Smenkhkare's 1338-1336, Tutankhamun's 1336-1327, etc. The dates for Suppiluliumas are usually given as *c.* 1380-1340 (these no longer work but those of the 'Low' chronology will: 1343-1323/22 or 1319/18).[65] Therefore the new revised dates for Ashur-uballit I have a decisive role to play in the controversy over 'High, Middle or Low' chronologies.

In Part 2 we shall attempt to reconstruct the chronology of ancient Assyria, initially without referring to the king lists. Our reconstruction will go where the indications naturally take us – free of the over-riding constraint of creating a long chronology which would prove agreeable to the Egyptologists. Since the traditional chronology of Egypt is clearly in conflict with the best data, we shall feel free to examine whether the new, alternative reconstruction of Assyrian chronology can be moulded to accommodate other, revised Egyptian chronologies. □

Notes and References

1. See, for instance, A. K. Grayson: *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden, 1972, 1976).
2. E. Nassouhi: 'Grande Liste des rois d'Assyrie' in *AfO* IV (1927), pp. 1-11.
3. A. Poebel: 'The Assyrian King List from Khorsabad', in *JNES* 1:3 (1942a), pp. 247-306; *JNES* 1:4 (1942b), pp. 460-92; *JNES* 2:1 (1943), pp. 56-90. In all, there are now five Assyrian King Lists: AsKL (= VAT 11554), published as KAV 15; KhKL (= Khorsabad Kinglist in *JNES* 13 [1954], pp. 209-230); NaKL (= Nassouhi Kinglist in *op. cit.*); NiKL (= kinglist fragment from Nineveh BM 128059, published by Millard in *Iraq* 32 [1970], pp. 174-76); SDAS (= Seventh Day Adventist Seminary Kinglist in *JNES* 13 [1954], pp. 209-30).
4. See J. A. Brinkman: 'Comments on the Nassouhi Kinglist and the Assyrian Kinglist Tradition' in *Orientalia* 42 (1973), p. 312.
5. The possible time of writing of the various King List traditions is carefully evaluated by Brinkman, *op. cit.* [4], pp. 314-16. An 8th-century date is certainly indicated for SDAS and KhKL; a 10th-century date possible for NaKL, AsKL and maybe also NiKL.
6. A. Poebel, *op. cit.* [3], 1942b, p. 482.
7. A. Poebel, *op. cit.* [3], 1942b, pp. 484-90. See also Brinkman, *op. cit.* [4], pp. 312-13.
8. For example see A. Poebel, *op. cit.* [3], 1943, p. 60.
9. J. A. Brinkman, *op. cit.* [4], p. 310.
10. J. A. Brinkman, *op. cit.* [4], p. 311.
11. A. Poebel, *op. cit.* [3], 1942b, p. 470.
12. A. K. Grayson, *op. cit.* [1], 1972, p. 37.
13. A. Poebel, *op. cit.* [3], 1942b, pp. 479-82.
14. P. J. James *et al.*: *Centuries of Darkness* (London, 1991).
15. N. Postgate, in *CAJ* (1991), pp. 244-46.
16. R. Whiting: 'The Post-Canonical and Extra-Canonical Eponyms' in A. R. Millard: *The Eponyms of the Assyrian Empire 910-612 BC* (Helsinki, 1994), pp. 72ff.
17. C. Saporetti: *Gli eponimi medio-assiri* (Malibu, 1979), pp. 33-55 gives at least 67 eponyms for the 63 years of the combined reigns of Eriba-Adad I and Assur-uballit I. There is some uncertainty as to the actual numbers of eponyms for two reasons: (a) the central dominant officials who were responsible for the storage of legal and business tablets often lived through more than one reign and (b) because in many instances we have only parts of the names of eponyms these cannot be included in the collection for fear of duplication. H. Freydank: *Beitrage zur Mittelassyrischen Chronologie und Geschichte* (Berlin, 1991), gives rather fewer eponyms for this period – probably not a surplus.
18. H. Freydank, *op. cit.* [17], gives more than 34 eponyms for his 30 years of rule.
19. C. Saporetti, *op. cit.* [17], pp. 57-129 gives at least 108 eponyms for the 99 years whereas Freydank, *op. cit.* [17] gives 109.
20. R. Whiting, *op. cit.* [16], p. 73.
21. M. Falkner, in *AfO* 17 (1954-56), pp. 100-20.
22. R. Ungnad in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, Vol. 2 (1935), p. 418.
23. A. Poebel, *op. cit.* [3], 1943, pp. 73-74.
24. O. R. Gurney & J. J. Finkelstein: *The Sultantepe Tablets I* (London, 1957).
25. See A. R. Millard, *op. cit.* [16].

26. R. Ungnad, *op. cit.* [22], p. 417.
27. A. K. Grayson, *op. cit.* [1], 1976, p. 96.
28. *Idem.*
29. A. Poebel, *op. cit.* [3], 1943, p. 74.
30. A. J. Brinkman's review of A. Millard: *The Eponyms of the Assyrian Empire 910-612 BC* in *JNES* 58 (1999), p. 53.
31. A. K. Grayson, *op. cit.* [1], 1976, p. 92.
32. See O. Schroeder: 'Keilschrifttexte aus Assur verschiedenen Inhalts' in *Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutscher Orient-Gesellschaft* 26 (Leipzig, 1920), pp. 28-29.
33. R. Ungnad, *op. cit.* [22], p. 436, n. 3.
34. In much earlier times, in the Isin-Larsa period (early 2nd millennium BC), year names were often given 'year after' titles pending an official decision on what to call the year. Sometimes a year might be known by two names, one of them being a 'year after' title! See M. Sigrist: *Isin Year Names* (Berrien Springs, 1988), pp. 20-21. The crucial difference between the two systems is that in the Isin-Larsa period a year-name was selected after its completion whereas the Assyrian eponyms were probably decided in advance. Thus, for instance, a king was not eponym in his first year of reign. But naming a year as 'year after' during the Isin-Larsa period may represent a precedent in the usage of the term.
35. For this dating, see A. J. Brinkman, *op. cit.* [30], p. 53.
36. A. Poebel, *op. cit.* [3], 1943, pp. 72-73.
37. R. Ungnad, *op. cit.* [22], p. 436.
38. Instead of Ungnad's *ahu*? we have the second stroke of the number '2': thus a third line stating 'total 2 (years)'.
39. As recognised, for example, by N. Postgate, *op. cit.* [15].
40. A. Poebel, *op. cit.* [3], 1942a, p. 278.
41. See A. Leo Oppenheim in *ANET*, p. 564: 'Everything is uncertain in this sentence. Apparently the scribe gives here the reason why the lengths of the individual rules are not indicated'.
42. A. Poebel, *op. cit.* [3], 1942a, p. 278.
43. N. Postgate, *op. cit.* [15].
44. See J. A. Brinkman, *op. cit.* [4], p. 314.
45. For example see A. R. Millard, *op. cit.* [16], plate 7.
46. Three lines plus a total (of 19 years) appear at the top of column IV.
47. For layout see above. In this reconstruction it is also assumed that the only totally incomplete reign was that of Ashur-nirari IV (for reasons which will be made clear in Part 2), and thus elsewhere we always have one entry per line.
48. J. A. Brinkman, *op. cit.* [4], p. 313.
49. One has also to consider the possibility that both figures, of 3 and 13 years, might be correct! One way of achieving this would be to have a 10-year co-regency with his son Ashur-dan I. Usually the latter is cited as having a 46-year reign on the basis of the evidence given in the Khorsabad King List. An alternative figure of 36 years is cited in *ANET* p. 565 and repeated by P. J. James *et al.* in *JACF* 1, p. 75; and again in *Centuries of Darkness*, pp. 299-300, and by Freydank, *op. cit.* [17], p. 29. But is this itself an error? As noted by J. A. Brinkman, *op. cit.* [4], p. 309, the Nassouhi figure is '26[(+x)]'.
50. Although a small number *might* be eponyms for Ashur-resh-ishi I: see C. Saporetti *op. cit.* [17], pp. 147-64. Even if *several* of these eponyms belonged to Ashur-resh-ishi, there is clear evidence that we still have not identified all those for Tiglath-pileser I (see below), thus multiple eponymy is certain.
51. H. Freydank, *op. cit.* [17], pp. 29-30.
52. C. Saporetti, *op. cit.* [17], p. 163. One fares no better using Freydank's list of eponyms – still only 5 or 6 positive matches.
53. See J. A. Brinkman: *A Political History of Post-Kassite Babylonia, 1158-722 BC* (Rome, 1968), Appendix B, pp. 383-86.
54. J. A. Brinkman, *op. cit.* [53], p. 386.
55. A. K. Grayson, *op. cit.* [1], 1976, p. 29.
56. Gasche *et al.* argue that 'the Assyrian calendar was based on the lunar year, without intercalary months, before the reign of Tiglath-pileser I'. See H. Gasche *et al.*: *Dating the Fall of Babylon* (University of Ghent, 1998), pp. 67-68 and the detailed arguments in sections 3.1.2 and 3.1.3.
57. M. Falkner, *op. cit.* [21].
58. Adding here in footnote: 'Especially when its material on a given ruler may be the only historical information available'; J. A. Brinkman, *op. cit.* [4], p. 314.
59. J. A. Brinkman, *op. cit.* [4], p. 316, but now see S. Yamada in *ZfA* 84 (1994), p. 37, who argues that the use of the King List as an amulet or as a text for an ancestor cult was only secondary. Note, however, the ancestor cult of Shamshi-Adad I for which, as Yamada notes, Finkelstein assumed there was a prototype text of AKL (*JCS* 20, pp. 95-118).
60. J. A. Brinkman, *op. cit.* [4], p. 317.
61. E. Nassouhi, *op. cit.* [2], p. 5.
62. Personal communication from Robert M. Porter, December 1998, based on the observations of A. Leo Oppenheim in *ANET*, p. 564.
63. J. A. Brinkman: *Materials and Studies for Kassite History*, Vol. I (Chicago, 1976), p. 31.
64. K. A. Kitchen in P. Aström (ed.): *High, Middle or Low?* Part 1 (Gothenburg, 1987), p. 52.
65. See G. Wilhelm & J. Boese in P. Aström (ed.), *op. cit.* [64], pp. 107ff.

The Conventional Assyrian Chronology
(based on the King Lists)

Date	Assyrian King	Reign
1390	Eriba-Adad I	27
1363	Ashur-uballit I	36
1327	Enlil-nirari	10
1317	Arik-den-ili	12
1305	Adad-nirari I	32
1273	Shalmaneser I	30
1243	Tukulti-Ninurta I	37
1206	Ashur-nadin-apli	4
1202	Ashur-nirari III	6
1196	Enlil-kudur-usur	5
1191	Ninurta-apil-Ekur	13
1178	Ashur-dan I	46
1133	Ninurta-tukulti-Ashur	0
1133	Mutakkil-Nusku	0
1132	Ashur-resh-ishi I	18
1114	Tiglath-pileser I	39
1075	Ashared-apil-Ekur	2
1073	Ashur-bel-kala	18
1055	Eriba-Adad II	2
1053	Shamshi-Adad IV	4
1049	Ashur-nasir-pal I	19
1030	Shalmaneser II	12
1018	Ashur-nirari IV	6
1012	Ashur-rabi II	41
971	Ashur-resh-ishi II	5
966	Tiglath-pileser II	32
934	Ashur-dan II	23
911	Adad-nirari II	21
890	Tukulti-Ninurta II	7
883	Ashur-nasir-pal II	25
858	Shalmaneser III	35
823	Shamshi-Adad V	13
810	Adad-nirari III	28
782	Shalmaneser IV	10
772	Ashur-dan III	18
754	Ashur-nirari V	10
744	Tiglath-pileser III	18
726	Shalmaneser V	5
721	Sargon II	17
704	Sennacherib	24
680	Esarhaddon	12
668	Ashurbanipal	42