

THE CNA PROJECT, 1986: DIRECTOR'S REPORT

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The launching of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project of the Academy of Finland in late 1985 signified a major turning point in Neo-Assyrian Studies. In a communication read at the 33rd Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale and subsequently published in *Akkadica* 49 (1986) 20ff, I have briefly described the goals, organization and operational patterns of the project. Here it is my purpose to review what has been actually achieved during the project's first year and where we stand at present.

I believe I am justified in saying that all things considered, we can be proud of our achievement. In just one year, we have grown from a modest beginning into the publication stage, and taken long strides towards establishing a functioning data bank of Neo-Assyrian which, once operational, is sure to boost research in our field enormously. This would not have been possible without hard and dedicated work by all project participants, especially the editorial committee and the staff in Helsinki, nor without the support we have received from institutions, organizations, companies and individuals not directly involved with the project itself.

We gratefully acknowledge the cooperation and sponsorship of the University of Helsinki, the University of Helsinki Computing Centre, the Helsinki University Press, the RIM Project, the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft and the Olivetti Corporation, and wish to extend our thanks to all the persons instrumental in bringing about this cooperation, in particular Prof. A.K.Grayson and Dr. L.D.Levine of the RIM Project, Prof. B.Hrouda and Dr. D.Sürenhagen of the DOG, Mr. S.Laurilla, Director of the Helsinki UP, and Mr. P.K.Rantalainen, Marketing Director, Olivetti (Suomi) Oy. All along the way, many fellow Assyriologists and other colleagues have also given us a hand on various occasions and in a variety of ways. My special thanks go to Dominique Collon, Jöran Friberg and Alan Millard, but I also wish to thank R.D.Biggs, J.A.Brinkman, R.Caplice, M.Dietrich, P.Garelli, K.Hecker, M.T.Larsen and T.Vejola, who helped us in questions relating to the publication and marketing process.

A good start is essential to the success of any long-term project, but it is of course not enough. We are determined to keep the momentum in the years to come, and hope our efforts to make the Neo-Assyrian archives properly accessible will meet with continued and increasing support in the future as well.

The Corpus

At the beginning, the project's machine-readable textfiles consisted of approximately 60,000 lines of Neo-Assyrian text partly dating from the late sixties or early seventies and hence in many respects out-of-date. During the past years, we have added 60,000 lines more and brought the early parts of the corpus completely up-to-date. The corpus now comprises all available Neo-Assyrian letters, reports, oracle queries, rituals, literary and legal texts, treaties, prophecies, royal grants, and eponym lists, and a fair amount of administrative texts, both from royal and provincial archives.

At the moment, we estimate to have computerized close to 95% of all currently accessible Neo-Assyrian texts. The bulk of the material not yet entered consists of administrative texts from Nineveh, which are currently being systematically collated. Otherwise only lexical texts and isolated odds and ends (private inscriptions, etc.) remain to be entered. We expect to be through with these by the end of Spring 1987.

The corpus also contains several hundred texts written in Neo-Babylonian, primarily astrological reports and oracle queries to be included in the new editions of these text groups now in preparation. We intend to expand the corpus further in this direction and computerize all the Neo-Babylonian Kuyunjik letters as well, so that eventually the entire archival material of the Assyrian empire, irrespective of language, will be available in digital form.

Texts included in the corpus are for the moment in various stages of perfection. Newly entered texts are beset by occasional inconsistencies and errors, and readings are improved and errors corrected gradually as the work on the editions progresses. Notwithstanding the present imperfections, we intend to make the corpus available for research on a data bank basis once it is complete.

The exact policy for operating this data bank remains to be defined. At the moment, the most feasible solution seems to be that the files would at request be opened for information on any given research problem, and that portions of the corpus would be 'for sale' on an exchange basis. Other forms of service, like direct access to the files, are also within possibilities. All our textfiles are the copyright of the CNA project and the authors of the respective source transliterations.

Publications

At the time this report is being written (February 1987), the manuscript of the first part of my edition of the Sargon correspondence (SAA 1) is in its final stages of preparation and will go to press shortly. Work on five further volumes (SAA 2: Deller,

Royal Rituals and Cultic Texts; SAA 3: Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties*; SAA 4: Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*; SAA 5: Starr, *Queries to the Sungod*; SAA 10: Hunger, *Astrological Reports*) is in progress. The authors of these volumes have already months ago received the basic tools to support their editorial work (complete indices, reverse word indices, KWIC concordances, and a computer printout of the texts), and research on SAA 2 through 5 is well advanced. All the texts included in these volumes were collated in late 1986 with the exception of those of SAA 2, which are scheduled to be collated later this year.

Editorial work on SAA 8 (Fales and Postgate, *Imperial Administrative Records*) will start in September, 1987.

Programs

The textfiles of the project are processed with the help of programs specifically written for this purpose, mostly by myself. A year ago we had about twenty functioning programs, most of which had been used for years for the production of various research tools, such as word and sign lists, indices, concordances, frequency counts etc. The programs in question are written in LINUS, a set of procedures in Extended Algol specifically designed for linguistic data processing, and they run at present only on the B8700 mainframe of the University of Helsinki Computing Centre.

At the moment, we have a total of 40 different LINUS programs, and the degree of sophistication by which we can process our files has increased considerably. LINUS is currently being rewritten in the C language, and a version running on microcomputers will hopefully be ready by the end of this year.

In collaboration with the Helsinki University Press, we have also developed a system by which the project's textfiles, as well as indices generated from them, can be directly output on the UP's photocompositor. The relevant programs are written in the BETA system of Benny Brodda of the Institute of Linguistics, University of Stockholm, which is available in Fortran, Pascal and Lisp versions and run on 16-bit microcomputers.

Our programs can naturally be used for processing other cuneiform corpora as well, supposing these are properly structured and formatted, and they will if desired be made available for this purpose by arrangement with the project.

Organization

We started with a bare minimum of personnel: a four-member editorial committee and three research assistants. In the course of the past year, we have been fortunate to recruit seven highly competent editors for the volumes in our publication schedule, and four distinguished Assyriologists have agreed to serve in the project's advisory committee. In addition, we expect this year to be able to employ two more research assistants on a temporary basis. Thus the strength of our undertaking has increased considerably.

Of course, we could do with more personnel. During the past year I have out of necessity also functioned as project manager, coordinator, editor, programmer, secretary, and a sort of PR-man. To have a competent person take care of any of these functions full time would have been a real relief, for it has undeniably been a demanding year. But on the other hand it has been good to establish that it is possible to guide the project even through its most laborious phases with the present limited staff. This bodes good for the future of our undertaking.