THE POLITICAL STATUS OF ELAM AFTER 653 B.C. ACCORDING TO ABL 839

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ABL 839 is a well-known letter written to Ashurbanipal by the Sealander Nabû-bêl-šumâte while still a loyal subject of the Assyrian king. Although the letter is in Neo-Babylonian it is written in Assyrian script and the scribe has added a postscript to it in Neo-Assyrian\(^1\). The postscript has been neglected in the discussion of this text due to some inaccuracy in Harper’s copy that has impeded the understanding of it. For this reason a new copy is presented below\(^2\). The whole text is given in transliteration and translation.

Obverse
1 \([a]-na\) LUGAL EN-ia
   [A]RAD-ka \(1^\text{st}\)PA-EN-MU\(\text{MES}\)-te
   lu-u DI-mu a-na LUGAL be-li-ia
   \(2^\text{nd}\)-\(\text{aš-šur}\) \(3^\text{rd}\)PA \(4^\text{th}\)AMAR.UTU
5 a-na LUGAL be-li-ia lik-ru-bu
   \(\text{tu-ub}\) \(5^\text{th}\)SA-bi \(\text{tu-ub}\) UZU\(\text{MES}\)
   \(\text{ù a-ra-ku UD-mi a-na}\) L\[UGAL be-li-ia\]
   li-qi-šā ki-i \(5^\text{th}\)-\(\text{aš-mu-ù}\)
   LUGAL KUR\(\text{NIM. Movie}\)\(1\text{st}\) mi-ši-id
10 \(\text{ù URU} M\(\text{ES}\) ma-a’-du-ù-te
   la \(\text{pa-ni-šu it-li-ik-ru}\)
   um-ma ina ŠU\(\text{HI}\)-ka ul ni-il-lak
   ki-i šā \(\text{aš-mu-ù a-na}\) LUGAL be-li-ia
   al-tap-ra KUR tam-tim šā ul-tu É

\(^1\) I am grateful to prof. Simo Parpola for discussing this text with me.
\(^2\) I wish to thank Dr. Nicholas Postgate for copying the postscript and for collating the first part of this letter. The new copy is published with the kind permission of the Trustees of the British Museum. The exclamations marks used in the transliteration of the postscript mark deviations from the ABL copy.
15 1na-‘i-id-4AMAR.UTU la āš-bu
   LŪhab-tu-te u LŪmun-na-bi-ū tu-tek šā a-na  LŪgu-ra-sim-mu īl-li-ku
   UNMES 5-me šū-nu 1d30-DIN-su-đi-qi bi
   ki-i īš-ba-tu īš-qā-a-ti
20 it-ta-di-šū-nu-tī a-na 1na-ta-[nu]

Edge
   LUGAL šā LŪtam-da-ā-a ENKUR
   šā LUGAL it-ta-din-šū-nu-[t]n-a-[a- x x x]

Reverse
1 ū a-na 1na-‘lan’ iq-ta-bi
   um-ma DUMU.MĪ-a-ā û-[ x x ]
   a-du-ū ina te-qī-ti šā-[ x x ]
   Ū ina LŪtam-da-a-a ip-pu-[uš]
5 ū KUR tam-tim ARADMES ša LU[GAL be-li-ia]
   ū-šā-a-D Dal-ma a-na 1na-tan i-[nam-din]
   a-du-ū ki-i āš-pu-ra LUG[AL]
   be-li-a ul-te-ēš-mu ū a-du-u
   1[a-a-le-e LUGAL LŪ]-be-uzu
10 ina IGU LUGAL LUGAL be-li-a liš-al-šū

d[A dAM]AR.UTU DINGIRMES-ka 1uk-ta-as-si-u
  LŪ[KUR]1MES-ka‘a ina [KI.T]1 GĪR[i]MES-ka
   is-sak-nu ma?-1 a-as [KUR.KUR]1MES gab-bu
   li-be-el DUMU.LU[GAL 1-en] TA* ŠA ARADMES-šū
15 a-na LŪNAM-u-[t]e ina K[U]N[JIM].MA1 liš-kun
   ū 1-en-ma [ina] 1KUR tam-[m]liš-ku-nu
   1[EN] u 4A[G x x x] U[NIM].MA1 [ x )]
   [ina UG]U-[ka uh-tal-li-qu ma-a bi-si

Edge
[x x ] [ x x x x x x x x ]
20 [κι]-ū Â-a-ni-nim-[a x x x x ]
   [ x x ] -tu-šū ta-hal-li[ q x x ]
   [a]-1u-šū ša ARADMES šā DUMU.M[AN]
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Side

im mat\[ \text{[xx]} \text{[xxxx]} \text{[xxxx]} \text{DINGIR}^{\text{MES}} \text{[xx]} \text{[xx]} \text{[xxx]} \text{[xxx]} \text{[xxx]}\]

Translation

To the king, my lord, your servant Nabû-bêl-šumâte: Good health to the king, my lord! May Aššur, Nabû and Marduk bless the king, my lord! May they grant the king, my lord, happiness, physical well-being and the length of days!

(8) Having heard that the king of Elam had suffered a stroke and that several towns had revolted against him saying: “We will not remain your subjects”, I wrote to the king, my lord, what I had heard.

(14) (As to) the Sealand, (which) has not been settled since (the time of) Na’id-Marduk — Sin-balassu-iqbi has arrested the plundered refugees who had gone over to the Gurasimmu tribe, 500 of them, has put them in handcuffs and given them to Natan, the king of Sealanders\(^3\), an enemy of the king, ... and [has said] to Nat[an]: “[..] my daughter”. Now through a pretext\(^4\) [...] he is making my house into Sealanders, ...ing the Sealand, servants of the king, my lord, (and) [giving](them) to Natan. I have now written and informed the king, my lord; Laylê, the king of the Bezu\(^5\), is now in the presence of the king; let the king, my lord, ask him.

(rev. 11) Nabû (and) Marduk, your gods, have tied [your enemies] and placed them under your feet saying: “May he govern all [land]s!” Let him place a prin[ce] from amongst his servants to the governors[hip of EI]am and let him place another in the Sealand! [Bêl] and Na[bû] have destroyed Elam on your behalf saying:

(rest too fragmentary for translation)

The date of this letter can be established on the grounds of lines 8-13 which state

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\(^3\) The rendering of \(\text{LTJtam-da-a-a}\) as “Sealander” is tentative and is taken to denote a contrast to the Sealand under the authority of Nabû-bêl-šumâte. Natan may be identical with the Natan mentioned, always without a title, in letters by Bêl-i nhi concerning events in the Sealand during the Šamaš-šum-ukin rebellion (Dietrich, WO 5, 184-186). On the basis of ABL 622+ Dietrich considers him one of the sheikhs of the Puqûdu (Dietrich, Aramiier, 38 n.1) but in fact he is mentioned along with sheikhs, not as one of them.

\(^4\) For têglû “pretext” see Durand, ARMT 21, 229-230.

\(^5\) For a discussion on the Bezu see Eph’al, Ancient Arabs, 130-137.

\(^6\) Piepkorn, AS 5, 105-109.
that the king of Elam had previously suffered but survived a stroke. This must refer to the paralysis that befell Teumman affecting his face, an incident described in Prism B of Ashurbanipal as a consequence of a lunar eclipse. The fact that the eclipse took place in Du’zu and was visible at sunrise is sufficient to identify it with the one of July 13, 653. Only two months later, in Ululu, Ashurbanipal launched a major attack against Elam. Teumman was defeated at Til Tuba and beheaded. The postscript connects ABL 839 with these events. The enemy being defeated the king is advised to reorganise the rule of Elam and of the Sealand. As suggested here, Urtaku’s son Ummanigas, who had sought refuge in Ninive when Teumman had seized power, was placed on the throne of Elam.

Interestingly enough the term pâhatûta is used in this context, implying that the king of Elam was a mere representative of the Assyrian ruler. It has been questioned whether Elam was ever made into a province of Assyria. Generally this is taken to have happened after the final break-down of Elam in 646. According to ABL 839 Elam was annexed to Assyria already in 653 and its political status was considered comparable with that of a province.

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8) Dietrich’s attempt to connect this letter with the stroke suffered by Humban-haltaš II in 675 (Aramaer, 37) was rejected by Brinkman (Or 46, 308 n.27). Malbran-Labat (JA 263, 13 n.25-26) recognizes that the Elamite king in question is Teumman but dates the letter to 655 without offering any comments.
9) The possible implications of this letter on Nabû-bêl-sumâte’s career are not in the scope of the present study.
10) Carter & Stolper, Elam, 53.