

A NEO-ASSYRIAN DOCUMENT ON TWO CASES OF RIVER ORDEAL

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The text published here with the kind permission of the Trustees of the British Museum¹ records two denunciations made by a certain Asalluhi-nādin-ahi. In spite of its shortness it is unique in a number of respects. The tablet has the horizontally oblong *u'iltu* format, typical e.g. of the judicial documents of the Neo-Assyrian period². It measures 71 x 36 mm. But no judicial document proper can be in question since the text begins directly with the denunciations, without the standard introductory formulae, and lacks a judicial decision, a list of witnesses and sealing. Texts of this type are rare but not totally unrepresented in the Neo-Assyrian text corpus. There are a few documents that undoubtedly belong to the same genre and can be collectively defined as “cases brought to the attention of the king”³.

This conclusion is confirmed by the text itself. The denunciations were made with reference to a “king’s word”, *abat šarri*. This means that the informer based his accusations on a royal decree and was asking the king himself to intervene in the matter as “princeps iudex”⁴. So the case recorded was by no means closed but only waiting the king’s decision.

The accusations made in the text had already led to two cases of river ordeal,

¹) I wish to thank Prof. Simo Parpola for discussing this text with me and waiving his prior publication rights to me.

²) See J.N. Postgate, *FNALD*, p.58. Besides being the standard format of court proceedings and judicial documents, *u'iltu* shaped tablets were used for short debt-notes, receipts, prophecies and astrological reports.

³) *ADD 680*, *ABL 1024* (denunciations), *ADD 1139* (a dictated appeal to the king) and *ADD 1076* (an account of charges written down from oral denunciations). However, none of these texts have the *u'iltu* format, the first three being letter (*egirtu*)-shaped tablets, while *ADD 1076* is a two-column tablet.

⁴) J.N. Postgate, *Royal Exercise of Justice under the Assyrian Empire*, *CRRAI* 19 (1974), pp.417-426; *Princeps Iudex in Assyria*, *RA* 74 (1980), pp.180-182.

hursānu. There are quite a few references to this legal institution in Mesopotamian texts of all periods, including the Neo-Assyrian one⁵. Most of the references are however literary and actually executed ordeals are rarely reported⁶. In the present text it is stated twice that the accused persons had “returned” from the ordeal, i.e. had refused to undergo it and thus admitted their guilt⁷.

Maybe the most remarkable thing in the text is the nature of the crimes in question. It is clearly implied that giving the name of the ruling king (or the crown prince) to a commoner, or even planning to do so, was a strict taboo, a sacrilege to the extent that an ordeal was possible.

The official mentioned in line 2 (Milki-nūri) is probably to be identified with a prominent eunuch of the same name known from several Ninevite documents dating from about 670 B.C.⁸. Thus the text probably dates either from the end of the reign of Esarhaddon or from the very beginning of the reign of Ashurbanipal.

83-1-18,231

Transliteration

Obverse

- 1 [d^dAS]AR.LÚ.HI-AŠ-PAB LÚEN-pi-qit-ti ša
- 2 [ina IGI ¹m]il-ki-ZÁLAG ba-ti-qu
- 3 [ša ina UGU] ¹šum-ma-DINGIR^{MES} LÚEN-URU
- 4 [ša ^{UR}U] ar-ku-hi ša ina ^{URU}kaš-ia-a-ri
- 5 [a-ba]t MAN ina [UGU]-[šú] iz-kur-u-ni
- 6 [ma-a] ¹šum-ma-DINGIR^{MES} i-qab-bi
- 7 [ma]-[a] ki-ma DUMU-a-a GÁL-ši ¹AN.ŠÁR-DÛ-A MU GAR-an
- 8 [hu]r-sa-an it-tal-ku ¹šum-ma-DINGIR^{MES} GUR-ra

⁵) CAD *huršānu* B and AHW *hursānu*; note also ABL 550:10 and 12, where the word is written *hu-ur-san* (SAG, collated), against normal *hur-sa-an*.

⁶) Only in MB Nuzi it is mentioned in a few more instances.

⁷) Compare Postgate, *FNALD* No.44 (p.159); the ordeal recorded in this text is connected with a case of theft and manslaughter.

⁸) See ADD 287:6f. (¹mil-ki-ZÁLAG [LÚSA]G M¹É.GAL), ADD 316:6 ([¹mil]-ki-ZÁLAG LÚSAG ša M¹É.GAL), ADD 452:3' ([mil-ki]-ZÁLAG LÚSAG [ša M¹É.GAL]), ADD 472:12 (¹mil-ki-ZÁLAG LÚSAG ša M¹KUR, 668 B.C.), ADD 627:6f. (¹mil-ki-ZÁLAG [LÚSAG ša] M¹É.GAL, 671 B.C.), ADD 727:4f. (¹mi]-ki-ZÁLAG [LÚSAG ša] M¹É.GAL), CT 53 17:r.12' ([¹mi]-ki-ZÁLAG, a letter pertaining to the conspiracy of Sāsi, ca. 670 B.C.), CT 53 26:r.1' (*iq-ṭi-bi a-na ¹mil-ki-ZÁLAG*, a letter probably by the crown prince Ashurbanipal, and thus dating from the period 671-669).

- 9 [^{Id}ASAR].LÚ.HI-AŠ-PAB-*ma šá ina* UGU ¹PAB-SU
 10 [^{LÚ} x x] x ša ^{LÚ}GAL-KAŠ.LUL
 11 [*a-bat* MAN] *iz-kur-u-ni*

Edge

- 12 [*ma-a šu-mu š*]a ^{Id}30-PAB^M[^{EŠ}]-SU
 13 [x x x x -n]i ú-[┐]x[┐]-[x x]-ni

Reverse

- 1 [x x x x x x] x [x x]-bi
 2 [x x x x x x] x i-[┐]pa[┐]-ra-as
 3 [¹PAB-SU *ša ina* UGU-šú] [┐]an[┐]-ni-tú *iq-bu-u-ni* GUR-ra

remainder uninscribed

Translation

Asalluhi-nādin-ahi, an official [in the service of] Milki-nūri, (is) the informer who cited “the king’s word” against Šumma-ilāni, the ruler of the city of Arkuhi in Kašīari⁹, (saying):

- (6) Šumma-ilāni says: “after my son has been born, I shall name him Ashurbanipal”.
 (8) They went to the ordeal and Šumma-ilāni turned back.

- (9) The same Asalluhi-nādin-ahi, who cited the “king’s word” against Ahu-erība, the [...] of the chief cupbearer, (saying):
 (12) [the name] of Sennacherib
 (two untranslatable lines)
 (r.2) [...] he decides
 (3) [Ahu-erība, against whom] he said this, turned back.

⁹ Of the two localities mentioned, Arkuhi is a *hapax legomenon*. Kašīari is not known as a town from elsewhere, but with a mountain determinative it occurs several times and is known to correspond to the modern Tūr ‘Abdīn. See S. Parpola, *Neo-Assyrian Toponyms, sub voce*. The name could also be read ^{URU}*bi-ia-a-ri*. This would, however, yield an otherwise unknown toponym, while the context implies that a well-known place was in question. The interchange of KUR and URU is well attested in Neo-Assyrian toponyms, cf. e.g. ^{KUR/URU}*Bāzu* and ^{KUR/URU}*Bit-Ammān*.

83-1-18,231, Obverse



83-1-18,231, Reverse



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