

ROYAL DECISIONS AND COURTIER'S COMPLIANCE: ON SOME FORMULAE IN NEO-ASSYRIAN AND NEO-BABYLONIAN LETTERS ¹

Simonetta Ponchia — Padova

The image of Assyrian *šarrūtu* and the epistolary code

Among the numerous epistolary formulae used in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian letters, a particular sector may be shown to constitute a fully structured communicational code, and therefore to give rise to a subsystem within the general ideology of Assyrian kingship. The formulae under examination are among those used by courtiers writing to the Assyrian king, and in the main present the particle *kī*. Their function is partly to underscore and to acknowledge, but partly also to modify and influence, a *decision-making process* on the part of the king himself. This process may be basically outlined as follows:

the king

- receives information;
- makes his decisions;
- gives orders and waits for reports on their implementation.

The compliance of the officials with this process, as well as their influencing role in it, is essentially marked by the following five formulae, all well-attested but of varying use and importance in the overall epistolary context:

(1) *šarru uda kī*: this formula introduces an information, laying emphasis on its relevance;

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- (2) *šarru lū uda*: in a conclusive phase, this formula emphasizes the informative character of the message and its importance;
- (3) *šumma (/kī) ina pān šarre maher*: introduces a suggestion;
- (4) *kī ša ina pān šarre maherūni lēpuš*: stresses the tone of suggestion at the end of the message;
- (5) *kī ša šarru ilā'ūni lēpuš*: marks the request of a royal intervention ².

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That these formulae were not “empty”, and were in fact significant in the decision-making process indicated above, may be shown preliminarily by a few references to the nature of royal power, included in non-epistolary texts. Such references allow us to outline a more general ideological framework with which our formulae may be compared.

Within historiographic texts the most explicit statement about the total control by the king over the administrative system as a whole stems from a stele of Ashurbanipal: *ba-lu-a* ^{LÚ}*pahatu ul ip-pa-qid* ^{LÚ}*šaknu ul iš-ša-kan*, “Without me, no governor was appointed, no prefect was placed in office” ³. In the context of the commemorative inscriptions, the idea of decisional power is likely to be rather absorbed in the traditional Babylonian image of the *king of justice*, whose wise rulership prevents mankind from social disorder and injury ⁴. However, the presence of, and the insistence on this image in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions may be tightly connected with the issue of the *relationship between the king and the ruling class* and with the attempt to elaborate in this respect a proper definition of royal power.

One of the clauses of the “loyalty treaties” of Esarhaddon defines the essential aspect of the Assyrian *šarrūtu*, presenting the king as the supreme judge, the one who has the absolute power to decree life and death of his subjects: *šu-u la LUGAL-ka-nu-ni la EN-ka-nu-u-ni dan-nu la ú-šap-pal-u-ni šap-lu la i-ma-táh-u-ni šá du-a-ki la i-du-ku-u-ni š[a] bal-lu-ṭi la ú-bal-laṭ-u-ni*, “(Ashurbanipal) shall be your king and your lord; he

²⁾ Due to the general character of this study I shall not take into account the variants which each formula presents, nor consider separately the NA and NB forms. As elements of the same bureaucratic code they may, in fact, be evaluated as a whole at least at this stage of the research.

³⁾ Streck, p.258, 28.

⁴⁾ For general reference to the theme of royal justice see the paragraph *šar mišari* in the article *Königtum* in *RIA* VI, pp. 163ff. For the Neo-Assyrian period, see also J.N. Postgate, *Royal Exercise of Justice under the Assyrian Empire*, in P. Garelli (Ed.), *Le palais et la royauté*, CRRAI 19 (1971), pp. 417ff, and “*Princeps Iudex*” in *Assyria*, RA 74 (1980), pp. 180ff.

shall abase the mighty, raise up the lowly, put to death him who is worthy of death, and pardon him who deserves to be pardoned.”⁵

The decrees granting lands and benefits mark the royal function of “rewarding the obedient one”, as an expression of justice and source of social welfare: SIPA *ke-e-nu e-piš ta-ab-ti* LUGAL *mi-ša-ri ra-im kit-ti mu-šam-me-hu* UN^{MEŠ}-šú ša a-na LU^Ušú-ut SAG^{MEŠ} *man-za-az pa-ni-šú it-ta-nab-ba-lu i-na dam-qa-a-ti a-na pa-li-hi na-šir a-mat* LUGAL-ti-šú *ú-tir-ru gi-mil-li du-un-qí*, “(Ashurbanipal ...), true shepherd, who does good, king of righteousness, lover of justice, who makes his people content, who always behaves kindly towards the officials who serve him and rewards the reverent who obey his command royal”⁶.

It is significant that, in establishing and confirming the relations with members of the ruling class, the king emphasizes both the topical image of his traditional *re'utu*, and his will to play an active role in the administration of justice: [šúm-ma² (x x) a-n]a LUGAL EN-šú *ih-ti-ti [ù lu(-u)]² Š*]U^{II}-su *i-na lib-bi* DINGIR *it-tu-bíl i-na* UGU *pi-i ša a-kil kar-ši za-²i-i-ra-ni la tal-lak ša-²a-al ki-e-in šúm-ma a-bu-tu šá-li-in-tu ši-i* *TA *pa-an un-qí na-di a-hi la ta-ra-áš-ši i-na pu-ut hi-ti-šú hi-it-tu e-me-es-su*, “(Any future prince ...) if one of them? has sinned against the king his lord, (or) lifted his hand against a god, do not go on the word of a hostile informer, (but) investigate, and establish whether that statement is true. Do not act negligently against the seal, but impose punishment upon him in accordance with his guilt.”⁷ It may be noted that the reference to information is emphasized also in this case, showing — albeit in the specific context of judicial activity — the different stages of the process that concerns us: from information-gathering to decision-making to orders.

In this paper I shall attempt to clarify the value of the epistolary formulae seen above (and of the *topoi* with which they are often connected) against the background of the ideological subsystem which is borne out by the letters themselves. I will follow the decision-making process step by step, in its separate items of (a) information and knowledge; (b) counsel, proposal and request; (c) royal intervention.

⁵) SAA 2, p.36, 191-4.

⁶) RGD, texts 9-12, pp. 27ff, 5-10, transl. p.36.

⁷) RGD, pp. 29ff, 46-51, transl. p.37. Cf. also the following passage (reign of Ashurbanipal): *mu-bal-lit ke-e-ni [x mu]-kal-lim* dUTU *la ma-hir kar-ši [x x x a² mu-še-zib hab-li*, “who gives life to the righteous one, [...] the revealer of Šamaš, who does not countenance calumny, [...] who rescues the wronged one.” (SAA 3, 28, 8ff, Fragment of an Adulatory Letter to a King = Streck p.232, 13ff, with duplicates).

šarru massû mūdê amatum (formulae 1-2)

The verb *udā'u* takes us into the sphere of royal knowledge, which evidences two main aspects, as shown by letters and royal inscriptions. We may label them respectively with the attributes *massû* and *mūdê amatum* employed in the conclusive sentence of a NB letter, *ABL* 702⁸.

The first epithet indicates knowledge and experience. These qualities derive from wisdom and discernment, with which the king is endowed directly by the gods. In some epistolary appeals the sender reminds the king of his role in preserving justice, by referring to this level of knowledge: ^dEN u ^dAG *uz-nu ra-pa-áš-tu a-na LUGAL EN-ia it-ta-nu*⁹. And gods are not only invoked as witnesses for the innocent in topical oath-formulae, but also as guarantors in procedures of ordalic investigation of the truth¹⁰.

The second epithet is more relevant for the present issue. The king is, in fact, *mūdê amatum* insofar as he is the center of a communicational network. Knowledge, in this respect, is provided by the information normally organized, specifically ordered, and urgently requested by the Palace — and, as such, forwarded by the officials.

In point of fact, both the interest in timely and trustworthy information — which has been noted and emphasized in different occasions as regards the centralized Neo-Assyrian administrative system — as well as the care in protecting the communicational network from disruptions and interceptions, may be considered to contribute to the wider context of correctly functioning decisional procedures on the part of the king¹¹. Both aspects, in brief, assure the king of the correct use of information and of his general control over each operation.

⁸) On parallel attestations of *massû*, as name and adjective, see *CAD* M1, p.327f. On the use of *mūdû* as royal epithet, see Seux, *Épithètes*, pp. 168ff.

⁹) *ABL* 211, r.13f. The letter contains an appeal to the king. The sender also points out his long-standing loyalty and the privileges he previously enjoyed at court: *LUGAL be-lí ú-da a-ki i-da-gal-an-ni-ù pa-ni-šú ina UGU-hi-ia-a-ni*, "The king my lord knows that he considered me (as a faithful servant) and his face was toward me" (obv. 14ff).

¹⁰) See, e. g., *ABL* 462 (from Bel-ibni), *LAS* 163 (where Adad-šumu-ušur invokes the illuminating role of the gods to avoid an annoying task) and *ABL* 390 in which the *huršānu*-ordeal is mentioned. On the latter, see K. Deller, *Die Rolle des Richters im neuassyrischen Prozessrecht*, in: *Studi in onore di Edoardo Volterra*, VI (Milano 1971), pp. 645-7.

¹¹) About state correspondence, see recently Parpola, *SAA* 1, p. XIII with other references. The classical study on the argument is that of A.L. Oppenheim, *The Eyes of the Lord*, *JAOS* 88 (1968), pp. 173ff. On the specific terminology used in NA/NB letters to send information, see also by the same author *Idiomatic Akkadian*, *JAOS* 61 (1941), p. 264 n.64, and the reexamination of the topic in S. Parpola, *A Letter from Šamaš-šumu-ukin to Esarhaddon*, *Iraq* 34 (1972), particularly pp. 30ff. It is worth noticing that the *adê*-clauses also take into account specific situations in the communication system such as the purveyance of information coming from a third person to the king (*SAA* 2, p.66).

In this context, the formulae with *udā'u* (= formulae nos. 1-2) have the function of highlighting what is particularly worth noting. The courtier's insistence on this point may of course have different motivations, from a mere reference to the informative character of the message to an actual emphasis on the sender's personal position. The latter case is in fact quite frequently attested, and virtually corresponds to a request for royal acknowledgement of the situation in which the official is operating.

Thus, e.g., Bel-ibni asks in one of his letters: *i-da-ti šá ÌR-ú-ti [ša šarri belija] ina UGU-hi-ia tab-ba-ši-ma*, "That an official acknowledgement of my status as a servant of the king my lord come forth." and *Á i-da-ti šá LUGAL be-lí-[ia] lu-mur-ma*, "One such acknowledgement of the king my lord may I see" ¹². The concept of *ardūtu/urdūtu* is defined, in other contexts, through a technical expression, recurring in the *adê*-obligations: *be-lí lu-ú i-di ki-i lib-ba-a it-ti É be-lí-ia gu-um-mu-ru* ¹³. The official further insists, depicting risks and difficulties he has to cope with for his allegiance to Assyrian politics in the Babylonian scenario: *LUGAL i-di KUR KUR gab-bi a-na UGU KUR-Aš+šur^{KI} i-zi-ir-ú-na-ši* ¹⁴.

The underscoring of ties with the Crown was required either when general allegiance to Assyrian politics was considered to be precarious (as for Babylon and the south) or when an official's trust was considered to be questionable (as in the case of a denunciation) ¹⁵. Both situations were considered to be similar as endangering the existence and functioning of the Assyrian political system (both as an administrative regulation and as a hierarchy of privileges).

However, when letters refer to litigations and to the unbalanced distribution of privileges and benefits among functionaries, other elements come into the picture as well. The sender may appeal to the concept of the king's knowledge of all matters and to

¹²) *ABL* 793 (= *LFM* 90), r.10 and 14, and *ABL* 283, r. 9 and 12 (sent to the *rab-rēši*). An example of the moods and of the relations of local functionaries and rulers of the southern Mesopotamian regions with Sargonid monarchs is given in the review article by J.A. Brinkman, *Ur: 721-605 B. C.*, *Or NS* 34 (1965), pp. 241-258.

¹³) *ABL* 917, r.13ff, see also *ABL* 846, r.19. *Gammurtu/gummurtu* has been noted as an institutionalized expression in K. Watanabe, *Die adê-Vereidigung anlässlich der Thronfolgergelegung Asarhaddons*, *BaM Beiheft* 3, Berlin 1987, p. 178: "Gemeint dürfte mit *gammurti libbi* am ehesten die ungeteilte Loyalität sein", with other references, among which particularly interesting is that to *RGD* nos. 9-11, 16f, where the officer is defined: *ŠĀ-šú gu-um-mu-ru a-na EN-šu i-na mah-ri-ia i-na ki-na-a-ti i-zi-zu-ma*, "(who) was devoted to his lord, who served before me in faithfulness". The last expression may be compared with another epistolary *topos*, see e.g. *ABL* 1230, r.5ff: *LUGAL EN-a i-di ki-i ÌR^{MES}-ka LUUD.UD^{KI.MES} it-ti LUGAL ki-i-ni*.

¹⁴) *ABL* 327, 11f. At the beginning a more personal matter is stressed: *LUGAL i-di šá lu ma-a²-da mar-ša-ak* (5f). See also *ABL* 269 quoted below.

¹⁵) A sampler of denunciations texts (with formulae 1-2) is the following: *ABL* 84, 177, 415, 498, 511, 716, 852, 912, 1052; for letters from scholars, see the list in *LAS* 2, p. 475, and fn. 24, below.

his power of justice¹⁶; he may thereupon stress the need for the king's direct intervention by using formal devices such as rhetorical questions or the repetition of marking formulae, e.g.: "Does the king not know that the governor of Arrapha has confiscated the gift which the king gave to our lords? The king our lord should know that the estate of our lords has been dilapidated. (And) the king knows that our lords cannot speak with their adversary ..." ¹⁷.

Quite surely, the best-known story of trouble and toil suffered by an Assyrian official gone out of royal favor is that of the court scholar Urad-Gula¹⁸. On the other hand, some elements of the complex picture presented in the letters related to this figure are sparsely attested elsewhere in the Neo-Assyrian epistolary corpus and allow us to draw a more general outline. The complaint of the sender is usually centered on the following items:

- the lack of acknowledgement from the Palace of his relationship of *ardūtu*. (No message comes, although the official has been loyal; he multiplies the messages and the references to previous pleas therein)¹⁹;
- the deprivation of previously granted benefits²⁰ (by other members of the ruling class, or by the king)²⁰;
- the exclusion from a community of equals (no one is going to say a word in favor of the denounced or discharged official; he is surrounded by the threatening presence of enemies)²¹;
- the victim's readiness to continue with his previous tasks and his renewed statement

¹⁶) For a proverbial reference to the royal aiding role see, e. g., *ABL* 1250: BÀD *ma-ki-i* LUGAL, "The king is the protective wall of the poor".

¹⁷) *ABL* 415, 10ff. On rhetorical question see also *ABL* 912, addressed to an official: *be-lí ul i-du-ú ki-i a-na UGU-hi É hi-pu-ú u na-du-ú ir-ru-bu*, "Does my lord not know that they enter to demolish and throw down the house?".

¹⁸) On the case of Urad-Gula and for references to some of these topics in letters and literary texts, see S. Parpola, *The Forlorn Scholar*, in F. Rochberg-Halton (ed.), *Studies Presented to E. Reiner*, AOS 67 (1987), pp. 257-278. A list of texts relating to the difficult position of scholars or officials is given at p. 257 n. 2 and 258 n. 3, for scholars' petitions see also *LAS* 2, p. 475 (NA texts) and 497 (NB texts). On the same item see also F.M. Fales, *L' "ideologo" Adad-šumu-ušur*, *Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Rendiconti* 29 (1974), pp. 453-496. For texts of appeal to the king see Postgate, *Royal exercise of Justice*, *cit.*

¹⁹) E.g., *ši-pi-ir-ti a-na muh-hi-šú a-na* LUGAL *be-lí-ia ki-i áš-pu-ru ga-ba-ru-ú ul a-mur* (*ABL* 852, 12ff); see also *ABL* 462.

²⁰) See, for example, (with *udā'u*) *ABL* 84, 177, 852, 912. Compare also *ABL* 152 and 885.

²¹) For the isolated position of an official, beside the well known passage in Adad-šumu-ušur's letter (*LAS* 121, r.14-19) see *BBEA*, 9, 52f, and again *ABL* 84, r.15ff, *ABL* 912, r.1-3, *ABL* 852, r.2f, and *ABL* 716, r.1ff.

of loyalty (the sender describes also the condition of extreme poverty in which he continues to fulfill his duty) ²².

In NA times, as is well known, the main “inner” control over the *ardūtu* was granted by the texts and ideology of the *adê* to the mechanism of denunciations. This state of affairs forced the official in not a few occasions to adopt the device of anticipating the adversary and denying in advance possible accusations against himself, or — more generally — any version of the facts not entirely favourable to himself. This was done with the use of formulae of type 1, e.g.: LUGAL *be-lí lu-u i-di ki-i tē-e-mu ul-tu É la DÙG! šak-nu* ²³.

The same introductory and conclusive formulae with *udā'u* appear either in accusations / informative reports sent by intelligence officers or in letters reporting the execution of a specific order ²⁴. The lack of a lexical distinction between these cases and the ones seen above conforms fully, to my mind, to the existence of a single procedural and ideological system of decision-making. In this system, the king's decisions and interventions were univocally determined on the basis of two equally-ranking “inputs” of information: the solidity of trust in his officials, and matters of factual knowledge ²⁵. By sending reliable information to the Palace, the official intends, in fact, to provide the king with a double set of fundamental elements to decide in his own favour.

milku dumqu (formulae 1-2 + 3-4)

Let us now move on from the level of bare information to that of outright suggestions for action made by the official to the king. In the official's expectation his informative message is meant to give rise to a mechanism of action by the king, and if this does not succeed the sender will not hide his disappointment: “Am I informing

²²) *LAS* 114: “The king my lord knows that I am a poor man, keep the watch of the king my lord (and) am guilty of no negligence within the Palace”; see also *ABL* 716, 885, 1250, 1261.

²³) *ABL* 511: r.8ff; see also *SAA* 1, 179, 19f: *šum-ma ina UGU LUGAL EN-ia i-ša-pa-ra LUGAL be-lí lu-u-da*, “The king my lord should know this in case he writes to the king my lord”; compare also *ABL* 1374 and (without the stressing formula) *SAA* 1, 236 and 237.

²⁴) This is clearly evident in Mar-ištar's letters where the use of *lū udi* reveals a high frequency pitch, concluding virtually each argument of the communication. See the texts *LAS* 276, 277, 279, 280, 281, 283, 284, 286, 290, 291, 292, 293, 296. This type of messages derives from the particular function of Mar-ištar, on which see Landsberger, *BBEA*. Particularly worth noticing is the final part of *LAS* 291, which informs of an arbitrary action of two functionaries.

²⁵) See in general the letters bulk ascribed to Bel-ibni (*ABL* 280-286, 460, 462, 521, 622+, 789, 790+, 791-793+, 794, 795+, [989], [1000], [1010], 1136, [1323], [1456], 1459, where the two levels usually appear together; for a general presentation of the functionary and a bibliography on related studies see *RIA* 1, 477ff).

without being heard? [The king, my lord, knows that] I am (but) a dog of the king, my lord, (that) I am loyal [to the king], my lord. I have [now] written [to] the king, my lord; let [the king, my lord], act as it best suits him until the assets of the temple have been collected again.”²⁶

Again, in this “itinerary” from suggestion to action, the key-motifs are fixed but the range of rhetorical organization of the text may present a number of variations. The sender of the information may choose a step by step presentation of facts: “The king my lord knows that the temple of the god Amurru fell in ruins (and) Amurru was moved into the temple of Anu. Now the temple of Amurru has been completely built (anew). What is that the king my lord says?”²⁷

Informations may be already well known or, to the contrary, quite specific and probably ignored by the ruler. For example in *ABL* 1241+ the structure of the utterance is evidently aimed to make the king initially reflect on a well known fact (“The king my lord knows that Ur is in the middle of Akkad”), and then to focus on the acute state of the events (“The inhabitants of Puqudu and Sealand hate us”). We may classify the formula here as a rhetoric device to persuade.

On the contrary, several messages are aimed at illustrating aspects and particular problems pertaining to different administrative sectors, that probably the imperial bureaucratic standardization failed to take into account. In *ABL* 408 the precise information is the necessary premise to a concrete proposal: “The king my lord knows that GN is situated in a crossroads (and that) the road stretch from GN to GN is too long and heavy for the animals; the king my lord should give order that a post-station should be erected in GN”²⁸.

But, in general, officials “in the field” tend to project self-images as having to cope with an ever-changing reality and with many small and great difficulties. Thus, epistolary messages to the royal chancery are replete with self justifications and with excuses for delays. With different tactics, additional informations may be offered in order to avoid the heavier burden of duty and possibly even to cut off larger margins of personal profit and maneuvering space²⁹.

²⁶) *LAS* 275, r. 9ff.

²⁷) *LAS* 19, r. 9'ff.

²⁸) In r. 4ff, the translation has been kindly indicated by G. B. Lanfranchi. Similar settings are those of *NL* 62 (Iraq 21, pp. 172ff), in which the sender points out to the king the lack of a post station and his consequent difficulties in carrying out the order (r. 1), and of *SAA* 1, 177 (with *šum-ma ma-hi-ir*). A proposal is also the main object of a well known letter of Tab-šil-Ešarra about fluvial ferry organisation, *SAA* 1, 94 (14: *LUGAL EN ú-da ki-i*).

²⁹) Different are the issues of the *ilku*-duty mentioned: *SAA* 1, 93 (9: *LUGAL·EN ú-da*, on cutting of timbers), *SAA* 1, 172 (30: *LUGAL be-lí ú-da*, 34: *LUGAL be-lí lu ú-da*, on taking care of road system), *SAA* 1, 179 (r. 18: *LUGAL be-lí ú-da*, on the scarcity of specialised personnel), *SAA* 1, 223 (4: *LUGAL be-lí ú-da ki-i*, premise to proposals relating to soldiers movements in different contingents, due probably to a

Even in plainly informative messages the emphasis on zealous reporting may depend on the relevance and urgency of the matter or conceal the answer to a royal reproach, as shown by some formulaic amplifications: LUGAL *be-lí lu-u ú-da* LUGAL EN *lu-u la i-qab-bi ma-a ki-i taš-m[u]-u-ni ma-a a-ta-a la ʾtaš-pu-ra*³⁰.

In other cases, the sender's proposal is explicitly marked by the formulae: *šum-mal(kī) ina pān šarre maher* and *kī ša ina pān šarre maherūni lēpuš* (=formulae 3-4, above). Sometimes the official distinguishes the two moments (information and proposal), as in the following letter where, after the concluding formula, the process is run through a second time: *ki-i ša ina IGI LUGAL [mah]-ru-u-ni li-pu-šu [as-sa]-par ú-ma-a šum-ma ma-hi-ir ina IGI LUGAL EN-ia*³¹.

These formulae are especially characteristic of a sector of the correspondence (the letters from scholars), where the two moments coincide. Basing their role of king's counselors or advisors on a specific technical competence, the senders are in fact in the position of giving instructions to the king on particular matters. They quite often maintain, however, the formal compliance to the communicational code, by leaving room for a final word of the king³².

In the case of unsolicited informations (or non-routine reports) the same senders prove to recall their official duties and refer to the concept of *milku*: *ki-ma ana-ku ú-ma-a a-na LUGAL EN-ia la-a aq-bi ina ši-a-ri LUGAL a-na ʾIR-šú la i-qa-bi-i ma-a ʾIR ša AD-ia at-ta a-ta-a la ta-am-li-kan-ni la tu-šah-kim-a-ni*, "If I had not addressed the king today wouldn't the king say to his servant tomorrow: 'You were a servant of my father; why didn't you advise and instruct me?'"³³.

general men scarcity). *SAA* 1, 48 (concerning levy of horses and deputed officials' movements), 128 (about difficulties in sending supplies to the central administration), 205, 233 (on land assignation), NL 96 (Iraq 36 [1974], pp. 200ff, r.28: *a[n-nu-ri]gʷ LU[GAL] ú-da-a ki-i ŠE.PAD-i : la-áš-šu-ni*, on the difficulties in feeding the entrusted hostages, and duty subdivision suggestions). For the circle of court scribes the dislike for the overwhelming royal insistence is quite evident in sentences like the following: "As regards the watch of the Sun about which the king my lord wrote to me, does the king my lord not know (*šarru bēli lā uda kī*) that the watch is strong?" (*LAS* 42).

³⁰) CT 53, 7, r.3'-7'. Of the same sender, Aššur-rešuwā, see also *ABL* 145 in which he insists on the correctness of information *a-bi-te an-ni-te be-lí lu-da* and *dib-bi an-nu-te ku-un-nu-te šu-nu <ina> UGU be-lí-ia a-sap-ra*. Formula no. 1 introduces informations about the sender's position and time schedule in *SAA* 1, 148, *ABL* 274 and 778.

³¹) *ABL* 981, referring to difficulties in providing food for the assigned contingent. To the same problem refer *ABL* 794, r.15ff, and *SAA* 1, 176, 20. See also *ABL* 258, 281, 849 and *SAA* 1, 257.

³²) For the introductory formula *šumma ina pān šarre maher*, see *LAS* 45, 135, 147, 165, 174, 185, 195, 246, 275, 277, 280, 291, 294, 331. For the conclusive expression *kī ša ina pān šarri maherūni lēpuš*, see *LAS* 60, 72, 73, 228, 281, 291. Compare, on the other hand, the flattery in accepting a royal suggestion in *LAS* 144: *a-na-ku-ma mi-i-nu a-qab-bi ʾpar-šu-mu ša ʾen-šu la-áš-šu-u-ni ša LUGAL EN iq-bu-u-ni ki-i ša DINGIR gam-rat* (r.2-7).

³³) *LAS* 298 r.17'-20'. For an abbreviated formulation see *LAS* 302, 305, 306 (all by Akkullanu).

This reprise of the idea of *milku* is further to be compared with the specific entry dedicated in Esarhaddon's treaty to the advisory role of the king's subject: *šum-ma la DÛG.GA-tú la te-ep-pa-šá-niš-šú-un-ni mil-ku la dam-qu ta-mal-lik-a-šú-u-ni KASKAL la šal-mu ina GÌR^{II}-šú ta-šá-kan-a-ni ina ke-na-a-te tar-ša-a-te la ta-ta-nab-bal-a-šú-u-ni* "You shall not do for him what is not good, nor give him an improper counsel or direct him in an unwholesome course, but continually serve him in a true and fitting manner."³⁴

In epistolary texts the principle is taken up again and reoffered to the king in a literary elaboration also: [*man-nu šu-u*] ^ršá^r a-na ^dUTU-šú *mil-ku la mil-ku [i-mal-li-k]a ša it-ti LUGAL i-da-bu-ba [su-ul-l]e-e u sur-ra-ti [i-šid-su m]e-hu-u ù pa-na-as-su šá-a-ru,* "Who would give an untrue counsel to his Sun? He who talks lies and rubbish to the king his stance is (unsteady as) storm and his front is (deceiving as) wind."³⁵

"*Vuolsi così colà dove si puote ciò che si vuole*": Dante, *Inferno*, III, 95 (formula 5)

The last formula taken into account here is *kī ša šarru ilā'ūni lēpuš*, aimed at hastening the king's final and decisive intervention. The connected use of the three formulae nos. 1-3-5 is well exemplified in *ABL* 269, a NB letter of Nabû-ušabši referring to war difficulties in southern Mesopotamia. The three main parts of the message (situation report, suggestion, request) are equally emphasized: "*The gods of the king my lord know that since Bel-iqiša has rebelled against the king my lord, he has drawn Elam to his side and has destroyed my father's estate and came to slay my brother. And have I not prayed daily unto Šamaš saying [...]?* Now, that the king wrote to me I will work day and night to accomplish the order of the king my lord. When could I have stayed in the city of Gambulu if an order had not been sent? *If it is agreeable to the king my lord, let a messenger of the king my lord come, we will levy in the entire land of Akkad and go together with him; we will give back the land to the king my lord. I have written to the king my lord, the king my lord may act according to his power. Preserve this letter.*"

The translation given above, *the king my lord may act according to his power*, represents a tentative effort to express the complex meaning of *kī ša ilā'ū lēpuš*. The root *lē'ū* condenses of course different semantic values, from knowledge to skill, from

³⁴) *SAA* 2, p.38, 233-236. On KASKAL see Watanabe, BaM, Beiheft 3, p. 178: "Einen guten Weg für seine Füße bereiten heisst wohl 'Für seine gute (Lebens)laufbahn sorgen' ". Cf. also F.M.Fales, *ZA* 73 (1983), pp.247-248.

³⁵) *LAS* 321, r. 7ff., Ištār-šumu-ereš. For references to other texts, see *LAS* 2, pp.334ff. On the contrary the official who needs help lays emphasis on his severing of links with the center of decision-making: LUGAL *i-di a-na ře-mi-i a-na-ku*, "The king knows that I am acting according to my own discretion" (*ABL* 496, r. 8f).

capacity and will, to power³⁶. The idea of decisional power without limits is well expressed in the following context: *t]a-le-²a-a ma-al-la at-me-ka*, “you can accomplish whatever you say”³⁷. In *ABL* 702, on the other hand, the explicit connection with *udā'u* (LUGAL EN [*le-²⁷-ú mas-su-ú mu-di-e a-ma-tum [ki]-i šá i-li-²-ú li-pu-uš*) points out to the final step of the decision-making process, in which the king's will and power coincide³⁸.

Usually, however, the concepts of power and will are differently stressed in various epistolary contexts, functioning as the extreme poles of a wide gamut of possibilities. In experts' letters the formula is sometimes a stylistical “shrug of the shoulders”, i.e. it indicates the absence of interfering obstacles for royal action, or the virtual indifferentiated character of slightly different opportunities³⁹. But in a more dramatic circumstance the sender may suggest a specific step which only the king can accomplish: ^d*Bēl-usātu* ^{LU}*rē³ i lâti ša šarri ana muhhi pî ša Šillāja šabit ša lā šarri imâti gabbi ša šibūti-šunu ippušu u ša šarri umaššarū šarru kī ša ile³ ū lipuš*, “Bel-usatu, the king's herdsman has been captured by Sillaja's order. Without the king's intervention, he will die. Everybody always act as they please and do not consider the king. May the king intervene according to his power.”⁴⁰.

In other contexts the official urges haste in royal action, sometimes implicitly stating that he has no possibility to complete, or even to perform, his task for lack of institutional power or of effective means. The value of the formula thus shifts toward an admission of impotence, bearing a connotation like “I cannot/couldn't do more”. And at the same time, it points out the royal duty of providing help to the king's servants.

In some occasions the sender describes the wished-for decisional process in full, including in the picture the presumable effects of the suggested operation. In *ABL* 542,

³⁶) Note particularly that the epithet *lē³ ū* is used in royal inscriptions in various connections, see Seux, *Épithètes*, pp. 149f and, for the sumerian equivalent, pp. 384f. See particularly Borger, *Asarh.*, p.45, 18 for the connection with *udā'u*: *lē³ ū itpēšu hassu mūdū*.

³⁷) *SAA* 3, 25, 6; the passage is from a letter sent to Ashurbanipal. The context is unluckily damaged, anyway the sender seems to elaborate a laudatory definition of *šarrūtu*.

³⁸) The idea of power is clear in formulations where gods are subjects. See *ABL* 1203, 8f (= *SAA* 1, 250) *ki-i šá DINGIR^{MES}-ni ša LUGAL i-la-³u-ú-ni le-pu-šu*, and the royal letters: *ABL* 295, r.7 and *ABL* 1260, r.17 (*ki-i šá AN.ŠÁR ū^d AMAR.UTU DINGIR^{MES}-e-a ū-šal-ú-in-ni ep-pu-uš*, for which *CAD* has the translation “I will do as my gods enable me”.) In the latter texts the message is built as a demonstration based on the following points: 1) while the Assyrian king has behaved peacefully, the enemy has returned hostility, 2) in this situation there are only two possible solutions: the enemy's repentance induced by gods or the satisfaction of the king's wrath. The same scheme is employed in royal inscriptions and *adē*, where the revolt determines the king's intervention as executor of the gods' will.

³⁹) See for example *LAS* 309.

⁴⁰) *ABL* 738+1111, Translit. from Dietrich, *Aramäer*, no. 47. A dramatic situation is referred to also in *ABL* 1250, r.17-22, where significantly a second appeal is addressed to the receiving scribe: *man-nu at-ta^{LU}A.BA ša ta-sa-su-u-ni TA IGI LUGAL EN-ka la tu-pa⁵zar⁷ ta-ab-ti ina IGI LUGAL qi-bi EN^dAG ta-ab-ta-ka ina IGI LUGAL liq-bi-ú*.

a report from Bel-iqiša concerning the city of Larak, the official expressly suggests to the king, with a direct quotation, the order that he should give. The final part of the letter is devoted to reinforce the ideas previously expressed from the practical point of view. The official's anxiety concerning a doubtful outcome is in the main linked with his total compliance to royal projects: *ni-ni ma-la ni-du-ú a-na LUGAL ni-il-tap-ra LUGAL ki-i šá i-li²-ú li-pu-uš ki-i an-ni-ti LUGAL i-tip-šú LUGAL liq-bi um-ma KUR ra-bi-ti ut-tir-ra ù bi-ir-ti dan-na-ti ina qa-ti KUR.KUR aq-ta-šar ki-i na-kut-tu à-na LUGAL be-lí-ia al-tap-ra*, "We have written to the king everything we know, may the king intervene according to his power. If the king will have done this, the king may say: 'I have enlarged the country and strengthened the fortress in the lands.' In anguish I have written to the king my lord" ⁴¹.

The use of this device among particular writers is worth noting not only as a purely stylistic choice but for the clues it can provide about the specific official's role ⁴².

In general, *kī ša šarru ilā'ūni lēpuš* defines a matter of competence, either when the official attempts to avoid an unpleasant task, or when he lays emphasis on his weak and dangerous position. It represents the formal compliance to the system of distinction of responsibilities. The use of *assapra* before the *lē³ū*-clause contributes to distinguish the specific roles of the king and of the officials in several messages ⁴³. This is particularly

⁴¹) Rev. 15ff. See *ABL* 1241+, for a similar phraseology.

⁴²) See in general the case of Bel-ušeziš's correspondence. Particularly *ABL* 1237, r.19-20: *LUGAL DINGIR^{ME} dAMAR.UTU it-ti LUGAL be-lí-ia sa-lim mim+ma ma-la LUGAL be-lí-ia i-qab-bu-ú ip-pu-uš*, "The king of the deities, Marduk, is friendly toward the king my lord. Whatever the king my lord mentions, he will fulfill". After the quotation of another prophecy Bel-ušeziš concludes: *LUGAL EN-li [lu-u-di] ha-di-iš LUGAL a-ki-i šá i-li-[-u] lí-pu-uš*, "The king my lord is (now) [informed]. In satisfaction may the king act as he feels it fitting" (Rev. 26ff; for edition and commentary see F.M. Fales - G.B. Lanfranchi, *ABL 1237: The Role of the Cimmerians in a Letter to Esarhaddon*, East and West NS 31 (1981), pp. 9-33). See also, although the text is badly broken, *ABL* 1373, r.7ff: [...] *il-tap-ra ù EN LUGAL^{MES} ki-i šá i-li²-u li-pu-šú [İR ša EN (?)]-ia a-na-ku mim+ma ma-la a-šim-mu-u a-na LUGAL be-lí-ia [al-tap-ra] ù EN LUGAL^{MES} ki-i li²-ú-ti-šú li-pu-uš [mi-ni]-i LUGAL be-lí-ia i-li²-i*, "[...] he has written, may the lord of kings act according to his power. [I am a servant of the king my lord], whatever I heard [I have written] to the king my lord, and the lord of kings may act according to his power. What does the king, my lord, decide?". From Zakir, the author of *ABL* 702 quoted above, see *ABL* 137 (on which cf. Landsberger, *BBEA* p.43). The letter describes a lunar eclipse and the relevant interpretation. The favorable situation for the success of the Assyrian king is therefore secure and the final result is emphasized: "The king my lord can intervene as he wishes, he will reach his <aim> and decree his defeat" (12-18).

⁴³) See, e.g., *ABL* 85 (= *LFM* 88): "I have written to the king my lord what I know about the matter. The king my lord should act according to his power". Other examples are *ABL* 267, 366, 542, 1136. For other references to the problem of competence delimitation, see also *LAS* 119: *is-su-ri LUGAL be-lí ma a-ta-a at-ta la tap-ru-[us...]*, "Perhaps the king my lord, (now) says: 'Why didn't you decide (about the matter)?' ". See also the king's reproach quoted in *LAS* 2, 361, 5: *a-ta-a ki lib-[bi-ka] te-pa-àš*, "Why do you act arbitrarily?".

evident in messages of denunciation where, at the outset of the inquisition procedure, the expression could be clearly interpreted as: "this question is of royal competence" ⁴⁴.

The royal answer

In a general view, formulae have the function of stressing the secondary level of communication, that is of indicating the character of message implicit in the communication itself. They thus allow us to clarify the framework of the utterances illustrated and broadcasted by means of *adê*, royal grants and inscriptions, and to adapt it to the actual situations reported in letters. We may consider, at this point, the occurrences, albeit very scanty, of symmetric formulae in the king's letters, in order to complete the different stages of a communicational circle corresponding to the ideal relation between king and ruling class.

Some royal letters consist of or include an acknowledgement of the subjects' *ardûtu* and *kinûtu*. The king underscores the sympathetic links with his supporters, who cope with difficult situations, and points out the consideration he always has had for their loyalty, while showing in the same time (in a game of rebounds) the final success and the general positivity of the Assyrian ruling system: *u ina ŠÀ šá ki-nu-ut-ka i-du-ú [u]-tir ri-mu* ⁴⁵.

It is more difficult to find positive statements about the participation of officials to the mechanism of the decision-making process in royal letters. *ABL* 517, however, attests the participation of a functionary to the ascertainment of the truth in a loyalty case. The king orders to transmit his message: *LUGAL pur-su-šú-nu la i-par-ras a-di* ^{1d}*EN.GI ana IGI LUGAL EN-ia il-la-kám-ma mil-ku šá ina UGU LUGAL EN-ia ta-a-bu a-na LUGAL i-ma-al-li-ku*, "The king cannot determine their decision until Bel-ušallim shall come before the king my lord and shall impart the counsel which is good to the king my lord." ⁴⁶.

Another royal letter (*ABL* 402) probably represents the stereotyped answer to messages denouncing cases of doubtful political trust and leaving the matter to king's competence. After having paid tribute to the reporting activity, the letter is in fact concluded by the sentence: *a-na-ku ki-i šá a-li-ú-ú ip-pu-uš*.

⁴⁴) For example: *ABL* 85, 493, 1389, 336, 277, 752, 866.

⁴⁵) *ABL* 290, r.4f. See also *ABL* 1380, r.16f: *en-na a-na-ku ul i-di-e šá áš-šu-ti-ia iz-e-ru-ú-ka*, "now do I not know that they hate you because of me?"; *ABL* 291, 13ff: *at-ta ša LU man-za-az IGI-ia at-ta ù pu-luh-ta-a ti-du-u lib-bu-ú a-ga-a-ú i te-te-pu-uš u šá la i-du-u ak-ka-a-a-i ip-pu-uš*; *ABL* 287, r.12f: *a-na-ku i-di-e a-ga-a man-nu ù a-ga-a man-nu*; *LAS* 125, 15ff: *ina pi-i šá AD-ia as-se-m[e] ki-i qin-nu ke-en-tu at-tu-nu-u-ni ù a-na-ku ú-ma-a ú-da a-ta-mar* (quotation from a royal letter).

⁴⁶) Rev.4-9. Compare with *ABL* 896.

Although not homogeneously attested in both directions of the king-ruling class relationship, these formulae denote however the constant reinput of concepts of faith and favour and of the central idea of mutual support and interest in the communicational circle. The same idea is expressed in letters of officials which present these reciprocal functions in a cosmic light: ^dUTU ZÁLAG AN-*e* ù KI-*tim a-na de-en kit-ti-ka lit-taš-ka-na uz-na-a-šú* LUGAL *be-lí a-na de-ni ša* ARAD-šú *li-qu-la di-ib-bi gab-bu* LUGAL *le-e-mur*, “May Šamaš, the light of heaven and earth, be receptive to a just verdict concerning you. May the king, my lord, heed the case of his servant, let the king see the whole situation!”⁴⁷.

Final Considerations

Epistolary formulae show complex functions. First of all they mark a bureaucratic procedure, and work as the elements of a technical language. In this respect they are useful in order to clarify the process of elaboration and fixation of the king-ruling class relationship model.

They represent, at the same time, a rhetorical device. By means of formulae, in fact, the sender can transform his claim into the compliance to a bureaucratic protocol and sometimes in the appreciative sketch of a perfect government machinery. At this level the technical code is connected with a repertoire of literary images equally provided by scribal education⁴⁸. This allows the sender to express distress, request, claim (i.e. the personal aspect) while still using a traditional, generally accepted terminology, and even referring to a religious concept of kingship which is complementary to the political one. In this general picture the ideological premises of absolute power are pointed out, as well as the position of the faithful servant, whose informative and advising role is shown as fundamental in the decision-making process.

⁴⁷) ABL 1285, 12ff, in Parpola, *The Forlorn Scholar*, cit., pp. 258ff. Cf. also ABL 916, 9ff: [*a-na* ^dEN⁷ ^dPA *u* ^dUTU *ka-a+a-man ina* UGU LUGAL EN-*ia ú-šal-li* {*mu*}-*uk* DUMU LUGAL *be-lí* ^{G1S}GU.ZA LUGAL-*ú-tu šá É* AD-šú *li-iš-bat a-na-ku* ĪR-*su* UR.GI₇-šú *u haṭ-ṭu-šú i-na* MI-šú *la-mur nu-ú-ru*, “To Bel Nabú and Šamaš constantly I pray for the king my lord: ‘May the crown prince my lord receive the throne of royalty of the house of his father’. May I, his servant, his dog, his staff, in his shadow, see light.”. On the biunivocal relation of favour between king and subject, expressed from the servant position in the benediction act, see F.M. Fales, *L’“ideologo” Adad-šumu-ušur*, cit., pp. 485f and 490f.

⁴⁸) For epistolary models see W.W. Hallo, *Individual Prayer in Sumerian: the Continuity of a Tradition*, in *Essays in Memory of E.A. Speiser*, AOS 53 (1968), pp. 71ff; particularly pp. 78-80, for the use of *topoi* and stressing formulae; see also, by the same author, *The Royal Correspondence of Larsa: II. The Appeal to UTU*, in *Zikir šumim, Assyriological Studies Presented to F.R. Kraus*, Leiden 1982, pp. 95-109.