

ASSYRIAN DEPORTATION PROPAGANDA

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An empire which attempts to subdue rebellious peoples through deportation must provide incentives to convince them that deportation is in their best interest. The negative incentives of Assyria, its brutality and horror, are well known. Positive incentives are less known to us, although these were surely important for the well-being of the empire. The stability of an empire not only depends on people fearing it: its subjects must also be well integrated into the empire and believe in its legitimacy.

Only one example of Assyrian deportation propaganda has been widely recognized up to now: the speech of the *rāb šaqê* to the Jerusalemites in II Kings 18:19-35 (// Isaiah 36:4-20). Here is a situation in which part of the Assyrian army stands before one of the largest and best fortified cities in the western half of the fertile crescent. A siege would be long and costly, so they try to convince the inhabitants to surrender. The *rāb šaqê* shouts to the Jerusalemites on the wall, telling them that they could trust neither Hezekiah, their king, nor his claim that the God of Judah would save them. Then comes a concrete offer:

“... for thus says the king of Assyria: ‘Make peace with me and come forth to me and eat, each from his vine and each from his fig tree and drink, each from the water of his well, —when I come¹ and take you to a land like your land, a land of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, (a land of olive oil and honey, and you will live and not die, but do not listen to Hezekiah because he is inciting you ...)’ ” (II Kings 18:31-32)².

Not all the problems of this passage can be discussed here. The main point is that this offer has the sophistication of modern propaganda. The *rāb šaqê* not only offered

1) “... when I come ...”, literally “at my coming (‘*ad bôî*)”. The usual meaning of ‘*ad*’ as “until” is incomprehensible in this context. Examples of ‘*ad*’ meaning “at/upon, when, after” are in *Gen.* 27:45, I Kings 15:29 and *Ez.* 33:22.

2) The phrases in parentheses are missing in the parallel Isaiah text (*Is.* 36:16-17).

a land with good possibilities for agriculture, he also employed words which worked on the Judean subconscious. Some of these words were used in the Judean tradition to describe the promised land and idyllic living conditions³. For this and other reasons, scholars often regard part or all of this passage as not being genuine Assyrian propaganda.

There is at least one other major example of Assyrian deportation propaganda which has not been widely recognized as such up to now, a Kuyunjik letter recently reedited by S. Parpola and G.B. Lanfranchi in SAA V. A transliteration and translation of SAA V, 210 is below:

Obverse

1. *a-na* LUGAL EN-*ia*
2. ARAD-*ka* ^{Id}PA—*ḥa-mat-u-[a]*
3. *lu-u šul-mu a-na* LUGAL
4. EN-*ia šul-mu a-na*
5. URU.ḪAL.ŠU.MEŠ *ša* LUGAL
6. EN-*ia e-gír-ti*
7. TA IGI LÚ.EN.NAM
8. LÚ.KUR.*ma-da-a-a ú-se-ši-ia-a*
9. *ma-a* LÚ.A.KIN-*ka ina* É.GAL
10. *lu-bíl* UN.MEŠ KUR
11. *ša* DUMU ^{Id}EN—SUM-*na*
12. *dib-bi* DÙG.GA.MEŠ *i-si-šú-nu*
13. *ad-du-bu-ub*
14. *ša-bi ú-sa-áš-kin-šú-nu*
15. *muk*⁴ DUMU ^{Id}EN—SUM-*na*
16. EN *ḥi-i-tu šu-ú*
17. [L]Ú.*par-ri-šu šu-ú*

Translation

- “To the king my lord!
Your servant, Nabû-ḥamātū⁵[a].
May the king my lord be well! It is well with
the fortresses of the king my lord.
- A man of Media has brought a tablet from
the governor (which says):
- ‘Let your messenger bring (it) to the pal-
ace!’ The countrymen of Bēl-iddina’s son
— with them I have spoken good words and
I have encouraged them.
- I said, ‘The son of Bēl-iddina is a malefactor
and a criminal.

Reverse

1. [*a-na* LUGAL] *la i-šá-am-me*
 2. [*muk at-t*]u-nu *ia-a-mut-tu*
 3. [*lil-lik*]⁵ *ina* ŠÀ A.ŠÀ-šú
- He does not heed [the king. As for y]ou, let
each one [go] into his own field.

³) Cf. *Deut.*, 8:8; 33:28, and I Kings, 5:5; also *Micah*, 4:4.

⁴) Following R.H. Pfeiffer, *State Letters of Assyria* (AOS 6), New Haven 1935, no. 87 (pp. 73-74).

⁵) Or should we follow Parpola’s and Lanfranchi’s restoration [*ina é-šú*] [*lil-lik*] does not yield the best syntax; one would expect the verb to be after A.ŠÀ-šú. However the verb *alāku* is desirable in the context (cf. r. 9-11) and *iāmuttu* also takes precative verbs later in the letter (r. 12-13). There are also two problems

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|--|---|
| 4. <i>ṛdul-la-ku-nu ep-šá</i> | Do your work! |
| 5. <i>šà-ba-ku-nu lu-u DÙG.GA-ku-nu</i> | Let your hearts be glad. |
| 6. <i>muk¹ LÚ.ARAD.MEŠ ša LUGAL</i> | You are servants of the king'. (Now) they |
| 7. <i>at-tu-nu né-e-ḥu</i> | are at peace and are doing their work. |
| 8. <i>dul-la-šú-nu ep-pu-šú</i> | |
| 9. <i>TA ŠÀ 6 URU.ḪAL.ŠU.MEŠ</i> | I sent them out of six fortresses, saying, 'Go, |
| 10. <i>ú-se-ši-šú-nu</i> | one and all! Each to a field! Let him build, |
| 11. <i>muk a-lik al-ka</i> | let him settle!' . |
| 12. <i>ia-a-mut-tu ana UGU A.ŠÀ</i> | |
| 13. <i>li-ir-šip lu-ši-ib</i> | |
| 14. <i>LÚ.ARAD.MEŠ ša LUGAL EN-ia</i> | The king my lord's servants have entered |
| 15. <i>ina šà-bi e-tar-bu</i> | into (the area). The guard will be strong until |
| 16. <i>EN.NUN dan-na-at</i> | the governor comes. |
| 17. <i>a-di LÚ.EN.NAM</i> | |
| 18. <i>il-la-kan-ni</i> | |

Edge

- | | |
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| 19. <i>me-ni ša LUGAL E[N]</i> | Whatever the l[ord] king laid down as in- |
| 20. <i>ṭè-e-me</i> | structions for him, I shall do." |
| 21. <i>iš-ku-nu-šu-u-[ni]</i> ⁶ | |

Much of the background for this letter has been clarified by Parpola's research⁷. The letter mentions four main people: Nabû-ḥamātū²a, the king, a governor and a man alluded to as the son of Bēl-iddina. Nabû-ḥamātū²a, the sender of the letter, has been identified by Parpola as the deputy governor of Māzama⁸. This is surely

with *ina é-šú*: 1. The houses are not yet built (r. 13), so why would they be mentioned here as if they were already built? 2. The syntax is also awkward with *ina é-šú* because it creates a longer sentence having vacillations between the second person plural forms (*attunu*, *dullakunu*, *epšā*) and third person singular forms (*iāmattu*, *eqlišu*).

⁶) The restoration [-ni], following Lanfranchi and Parpola, gives the verb the proper NA subjunctive ending. Note, however, that the older reading, *iš-ku-nu šu-u*, conforms more closely to the distribution pattern of *šu* and *šú* elsewhere in this letter, in which *šu* is used for the subject pronoun *šú* (ll. 16, 17) while *šú* is used for suffixed pronouns -*šu* and -*šunu*.

⁷) Particularly helpful was S. Parpola, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions and Neo-Assyrian Letters*, in F.M. Fales (Ed.), *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: New Horizons* (= ARINH), Rome 1981, pp. 117-142.

⁸) ARINH, [p. 139], Chart 3.

correct; his subordination to the governor is evident in this letter and in SAA V, 199, r. 11'-13'.

The governor himself is not named here, but he is almost certainly Šarru-ēmuranni. We can be confident of this identification for two reasons. First, just as Nabû-ḥamātū⁹ is an assistant to the governor in this letter, he is Šarru-ēmuranni's assistant in SAA V, 199, r. 11'-13'. Second, just as the governor intensively dislikes the son of Bēl-iddina in this letter, Šarru-ēmuranni intensively disliked the son of Bēl-iddina in SAA V, 200, r. 5'-16'. Šarru-ēmuranni appears in the eponym list as the governor of Māzamuā for the year 712 B.C.⁹ SAA V includes seven letters or letter fragments sent directly from him to the king¹⁰.

The eponym list is our main evidence for dating this letter. Because 712 is roughly the middle of Sargon's reign, we can be confident that the recipient of this letter was Sargon, as the editors of SAA V have assumed¹¹.

The fourth person, the son of Bēl-iddina, was probably the son of the king of Allabria, whose full name was Bēl-apla-iddina¹². Sargon appointed Bēl-apla-iddina as king of Allabria in 716 after crushing a rebellion in this area¹³. In Sargon's eighth campaign (714) Bēl-apla-iddina was an obedient vassal who paid tribute and provided the Assyrian army with animals as Sargon passed by¹⁴. SAA V, incidentally, has three letters sent by Bēl-apla-iddina to Sargon. Using the short form of his name, Bēl-iddina, he mainly reported on military activities in Urartu¹⁵.

The son of Bēl-iddina —his actual name is unknown— was not only the king of Allabria's son, he was probably a mule-stable attendant in the Assyrian hierarchy. The evidence for this, SAA V, 200, is worth considering more closely. Šarru-ēmuranni wrote to the king that the son of Bēl-iddina did not go on campaign with him the previous year, but rather kept his best men at home and sent young boys to accompany Šarru-ēmuranni. Then a difficult passage follows which proposes Šarru-ēmuranni's solution to the problem: *ú-ma-a LÚ.šá—É—ku-din LUGAL EN / liš-pu-ra lu-še-ši-šú i-si-ia / lil-li-ki* (r. 9'-11'). The editors have translated this passage, "Now let the king, my lord, send me a mule stable attendant to make him come forth and go

⁹ Cf. H. Tadmor, *The Campaigns of Sargon II of Assur*, JCS 12 (1958), p. 85, C^b4, l. 12.

¹⁰ SAA V, 199, 200, 201, 204, 205, 206, and 209(?). Note that SAA V, 202, 203 and 207 should be attributed to the Šarru-ēmuranni who resided in Babylonia. For 203 and 207 this is evident from the content. SAA V, 202 should be included with 203 and 207 because of handwriting (cf. the editors' remarks on pp. 147 and 149).

¹¹ To be sure we cannot eliminate Sennacherib's kingship with complete certainty, as the editors have noted in SAA V, pp. xxxi-xxxii. Cf. the discussion of S. Parpola in ARINH, pp. 117-134 esp. p. 119.

¹² This identification was made by S. Parpola, [p. 139], Chart 3.

¹³ Cf. Assur prism fragment VA 8424, col. A, ll. 21-22, in E. Weidner, AfO 14 (1941-44), pp. 41, 43.

¹⁴ F. Thureau-Dangin, TCL 3, p. 8, l. 38.

¹⁵ SAA V, 164, 165 and probably 166.

with me”¹⁶. This translation, however, may not be the best choice. Note that it requires a different subject for each verb and the phrase “make him come forth” should reflect the ventive form *lu-še-ša-šú* or the like. This translation also brings a mule stable attendant into the picture out of nowhere. Would the king really have needed a fourth party to settle the problems between the son of Bēl-iddina and Šarru-ēmuranni?

I believe it is preferable to regard the son of Bēl-iddina himself as the mule stable attendant and to translate the passage “Now let the lord king send me the mule stable attendant and make him go forth, that he may go with me”¹⁷. One may object that Bēl-iddina’s son would not have had such a low position in the Assyrian military, but one must remember that Bēl-iddina himself was merely an Assyrian appointee, possibly not of very high rank before his enthronement. Šarru-ēmuranni called the son of Bēl-iddina the mule stable attendant to emphasize his pretentiousness. Although he was a vassal prince, he still had this insignificant rank in the Assyrian hierarchy. The outcome of this request, incidentally, is recorded in SAA V, 199, r. 8’-10’. Sargon told Šarru-ēmuranni that the son of Bēl-iddina would accompany him on the campaign.

We must now determine the point of origin of the governor’s message. The editors have given this letter the heading “Taking over the Forts of Allabria”. This is logical in view of what we know of Bēl-iddina, but Media is actually a better possibility as the setting of this incident. Nabû-ḥamātū²a mentioned that a Mede had forwarded the governor’s letter (ll. 6-8). Unless this information is irrelevant, it can only mean that Media was the place of origin.

Now the question arises as to why the son of Bēl-iddina’s “countrymen” were in Media. I believe that these people were deported to Media for two reasons.

The most compelling reason is the governor’s speech. He offered the countrymen fields and told them to build houses. This is natural for deportees at their final destination. Another background for such instructions is difficult to imagine. The second reason for believing these people are deportees is that they had been under the son of Bēl-iddina’s authority and, as we have seen, the son of Bēl-iddina was probably a mule stable attendant. One of the functions of mule stable attendants was to deport people. This was already noted by Fales¹⁸ and is discussed further in an Appendix to this article.

Šarru-ēmuranni’s instructions (r. 2-7, 11-13) resemble another speech quoted in ABL 314, 5-10: ⁵50 *ša il-li-ku-ni-ni* ⁶É.MEŠ-šú-nu *i-ra-ši-pu* ⁷aq-ṭi-ba-šú-nu *muk’ia-mu-tú* ⁸É-su *li-ir-ši-pi* ⁹li-ri-bu *ina É-šú* ¹⁰lu-še-bi, “The 50 who have come are building their houses. I told them, ‘Let each one build and enter his own house. Let

¹⁶) SAA V, 200, p. 145.

¹⁷) Alternatively one may translate “now let the lord king dispatch the mule stable manager to me that I may send him forth and he may go with me ...”, but this requires two changes of subject instead of one.

¹⁸) F.M. Fales, CLNA I, pp. 142f..

him live in his own house' ". This speech, given by another Šarru-ēmuranni who resided in Babylonia, was directed to deportees who were perhaps from Bīt-Adini in Syria¹⁹. Once again the verb *rašāpu* is used for building the houses (cf. SAA V, 210, r. 13); also conspicuous are the reappearance of *iāmuttu* (cf. SAA V, 210, r. 2, 12) and the invitation to dwell in the houses (cf. SAA V, 210, r.13).

The son of Bēl-iddina's deportees are referred to as *nišē māti*, countrymen. This term was sometimes used for people having a sort of citizen's status. Thus *nišē māti* had to perform military and *ilku* service: they could also take part in festivals²⁰. I suggest that the term here was a label given to deportees to make them aware of being Assyrians. It is related to the phrase sometimes found in royal inscriptions and used for deportees: *itti nišē māt—Aššur amnušunūti*²¹. Another instance of *nišē māti* occurring in connection with a deportation is SAA V, 79. In this letter the *nišē māti* had fled into the mountains where the mule stable attendant could only reach them with great difficulty. He had probably intended to deport these people, or perhaps they were deportees who had fled after arriving at their destination²².

The origin of the deportees of SAA V, 210 cannot be determined with certainty. Oded has compiled a table of deportations which contains points of origin and final destinations²³. The actual situation was, of course, more complicated and detailed than the table can indicate because we have only fragmentary knowledge of all that occurred. One of the attested deportations having Media as a final destination is the deportation from Samaria²⁴. It occurred in Sargon's reign and is recorded in II Kings 17:6²⁵. Thus the governor may have spoken these words to some ancient Israelites.

With this background we can now partially reconstruct the situation of our letter. The son of Bēl-iddina, in his function as mule stable attendant, was bringing some deportees from the West to Media. When they were at or near the final destination he abused his authority somehow and caused the deportees to panic and flee. Perhaps the incident was connected with a violent storm which created havoc in their camp,

19) This assumes that r.3' should be restored [*Bīt*]-*adini* and that this refers to the point of origin of the 50 people.

20) Cf. SAA V, 52, ll. 16-19 for military service and forced labour. For festivals cf. R. Borger, *Ash.*, p. 6, VII, 27. Further references are in CAD N/2, p. 287a.

21) The phrase is discussed by B. Oded, *Mass Deportations and Deportees in the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, Wiesbaden 1979, pp. 81-83, 89f.

22) This latter possibility is how Parpola and Lanfranchi apparently understand the letter. Cf. SAA V, p. xxix.

23) Oded, *cit.*, pp. 116-135.

24) Oded, *cit.*, p. 128.

25) "In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria conquered Samaria and deported Israel to Assyria. And he settled them in Chalach and on the Chabor, the river of Gozan, and the mountains (emendation to *harē*) of Media". Sargon's inscriptions themselves do not have so much precision. They report that Sargon brought deportees to Media from conquered territories (*nišē māti kišitti qātija*, —these were settled in Harhar, Winckler, *Sg.*, pp. 14-16, ll. 70-72) and from Hatti, *i.e.* the West (Winckler, *Sg.*, p. 176, ll. 29-34).

assuming that SAA V, 249, concerns the same incident (cf. r. 6). In any case the son of Bēl-iddina handled the situation badly and the deportees fled to six fortresses in the area. These may have been some abandoned fortresses, but more likely they were quickly built structures in nearly inaccessible places. The situation was clearly out of the son of Bēl-iddina's control, so the governor stepped in.

The governor spoke pleasing words to the deportees. There are four main elements in his speech: 1) He emphasized the benevolent disposition of the king towards the people: he consequently had to repudiate the son of Bēl-iddina and dissociate him from the king (Obv. 15-r. 1). 2) He reminded the people of their being servants of the king; this title plus the label *nišē māti* assured them that they had a meaningful place in the Assyrian empire (Obv. 10, r. 6-7). 3) He offered the people fields (r. 2-3, 12-12). 4) He told them to build their houses (r. 13). These last two points were, of course, the main motivation for the deportees to cooperate. Šarru-ēmuranni offered them the resumption of normal family life.

My interest here is not to discuss the personality cult of the king, but the final two points call for some comment. Underlying the offer of a field for each household is an idea which resembles distributism, *i.e.* the ideology that every household should have its own plot of land from which it can sustain itself. The distributism is emphasized here and in ABL 314, r. 5-10, quoted earlier (pp. 7-8), with the enumerative pronoun *iāmūttu*, "each". Of course the Assyrians took part of the agricultural produce for taxes, perhaps a large part, but the message here is that people with a low social standing can become property owners, thanks to the generosity of the Assyrian empire. Land grants to individuals are attested in cuneiform texts often enough, but speeches such as ABL 314, r. 5-10 and SAA V, 210 are, to my knowledge, unique among Mesopotamian texts.

When we turn back to the *rāb-šāqê*'s speech, quoted earlier, some differences with SAA V, 210 emerge. Perhaps the main difference is the detailed description of the land which the *rāb-šāqê* offered the Jerusalemites. SAA V, 210 does not have such a description, nor would it have been necessary. Unlike the Jerusalemites, the deportees to Media were already at or near their final destination. Another difference is that the *rāb-šāqê* does not try to instil a new nationalistic awareness into the Jerusalemites. This too, may be due to the different settings. The immediate goal of the *rāb-šāqê* was to convince the people to surrender; Assyrianization would be a later step²⁶.

The speeches also have some similarities. Both try to win the cooperation of some recalcitrant people. Both emphasize the Assyrian king's good will towards the people, while counterparts to the Assyrian king, Hezekiah and the son of Bēl-iddina

²⁶) Also worthy of mention is Oded's belief that the Assyrian government ceased giving deportees the *nišē māti Aššur* status from Sennacherib's reign on. Cf. Oded, *cit.*, pp. 83, 89-91.

respectively, are repudiated. Most interesting, however, is that the distributism of SAA V, 210 is matched by a distributism in the *rāb-šāqē*'s speech. The *rāb-šāqē* states that each individual will have his own vine, fig tree and well; in SAA V, 210, r. 2-3, each individual will have his own field. Moreover, the *rāb-šāqē* uses the word 𐎠𐎵 in its enumerative sense. It is the semantic equivalent of *iāmuttu* in Šarru-ēmuranni's speech (SAA V, 210, r. 2, 12). These common features are evidence for the basic authenticity of the *rāb-šāqē*'s speech.

APPENDIX

^{LÚ}ša bīt kūdini

The mule stable attendant's title, ^{LÚ}ša bīt kūdini, presumably reflects this officer's main responsibility in the Assyrian army, the caring of mules in their stables. However our sources do not attest to this function. As noted in the article, mule stable attendants carried through some of the deportations of the Assyrian empire. The evidence for this, already noted by Fales²⁷, is repeated below:

1. SAA V, 79, 15-r. 4, tells of a mule stable attendant who has turned over some people to Aššur-bēlu-da'in of Ḫalziatbar. This same mule stable attendant was to bring some Chaldaeans to Aššur-bēlu-da'in at a later time (r. 7-10). That these were deportations is substantiated by another, presumably later letter of Aššur-bēlu-da'in. This letter, SAA V, 80, reports that the Chaldaeans were building their houses (r. 3-4). They had clearly been resettled.
2. ND 2803, a ration list, mentions a mule stable attendant and a king's eunuch bringing some deportees into Arrapha²⁸. The food which has been allotted to them would have met the minimal nutritional requirements of 130 people for one day²⁹.
3. The same ration list, Rev. I, 6-7, mentions a mule stable attendant who had transported some people from Bīt-Rirua³⁰, identified with Bīt-Barrua by Parpola³¹. The rations would have been enough for 50 people on a single day.

²⁷) F.M. Fales, CLNA I, pp. 142-143.

²⁸) Published by B. Parker, «Iraq» 23 (1961), p. 56, Obv. II, 23'-25'. For the reading of GA.ÁB as *ga-liti*, cf. K. Deller, OrNS 35 (1966), p. 194.

²⁹) 1 *emāru* and 3 *sūtu* equal 130 *qa*. The *qa* was the daily "minimum survival" quantity for a human being. Cf. F.M. Fales, SAAB 4 (1990), p. 29.

³⁰) B. Parker, *ibid.*, p. 56.

³¹) S. Parpola, NAT, p. 79.

Mule stable attendants are also associated with fugitives on certain occasions, which has led to the conjecture that they were responsible for capturing such people³². However capturing fugitives was probably a secondary development to their job of carrying through deportations, due to the widespread tendency of deportees to flee. To my knowledge the only clear cases of mule stable attendants trying to catch some runaways is SAA V, 79, and here the main goal was to enact or complete a deportation.

One letter, SAA V, 48, tells of a mule stable attendant transporting some animals. This is logical given the mule stable attendant's expertise in animal care. Perhaps deporting people was an expansion of his original job of transporting animals.

As noted in the article, the mule stable attendant was not among the highest ranking officers of the Assyrian hierarchy. Two administrative documents from Nineveh, SAA VII, 21, Obv. 5' and 22, Obv. 1', may indicate that there were 300 mule stable attendants among the palace officials³³. The position had enough importance to it, however, to be listed among the officials who were potential plotters against the king in Esarhaddon's queries to Šamaš³⁴.

³²) Cf. G.B. Lanfranchi and S. Parpola, SAA V, p. xxix.

³³) F.M. Fales and J.N. Postgate have noted that the numbers which stand before the listed professions may enumerate the personnel or some items associated with them (SAA VII, p. 28).

³⁴) I. Starr, SAA IV, Nos. 139, 8 (p. 148) and 147, 6' (p. 156).