

PREFACE

A student beginning to study Assyriology in Helsinki:

- Knock, knock, knock!
- Come in!
- Hello, Professor Parpola, my name is ... and I am about to start studying Assyriology as my major
- Please, call me Simo. Why do you want to study Assyriology?
- Well, hmm, because I would like to know about the ancient Mesopotamians and about their culture, history, religion and ...
- You should know that you have to work hard for many years in order to become an Assyriologist after which there is no certainty about the job in Assyriology or elsewhere
- Yes, well but, uh ...

Of course the first meeting with the Professor of Assyriology did not exactly go as depicted here. However, certainly we were not promised the kind of self-evident success story that you can read about in self-help books. Rather, the first meeting with our professor could be a slightly daunting and intimidating experience for a new and hesitant student. But if the student in question was determined enough to go on and curious enough in seeing what Assyriological studies would be like, then there was at least an interesting starting point. In fact, we quickly learnt to know a highly intelligent and impulsive man who has been sincerely dedicated to his profession ever since he started his career in the 1960s.

From then until now, Professor Simo Parpola has been a visionary Assyriologist (see, e.g., *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies* 16/1, 2002: 3, 7–16) and a trailblazer for more than 40 years. In his scholarly work, he has followed the fine examples set by his renowned predecessors in Finland, especially those of Tallqvist and Salonen, but with a strong focus on Neo-Assyrian. This has given a great impetus to Neo-Assyrian studies, which have flourished and experienced an ever-expanding interest throughout the world, for much of which we must thank Simo Parpola's extensive and seminal contributions to the field. One of his many virtues in doing research is that he has never shunned controversy when publishing his research, even if this has meant swimming against the current.

Since the mid-1980s the *Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project* has produced more than 50 books under Simo Parpola's direction; these include 18 volumes of the *State Archives of Assyria* series, 19 volumes of the *State Archives of Assyria Studies*, 5

volumes of the *Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, 5 volumes of the *State Archives of Assyria Cuneiform Texts* and many others, including the *Assyrian-English-Assyrian Dictionary*, containing the first ever English-Assyrian dictionary.

These publications, most of them standard works, have increased the visibility of Assyriology immensely. Under Simo's leadership, the *State Archives of Assyria Project* was a Centre of Excellence of the University of Helsinki from 1997 to 2001. In addition, Simo is the creator and promoter of the international and interdisciplinary *Melammu* project and its database. More importantly, the fruits of his research are not limited only to the scholarly world but the general public can also profit from them. This is even more so now when many of the text editions of the *State Archives of Assyria* volumes are already available online, making Neo-Assyrian sources available in English translation worldwide, and the rest of the texts published in the series are soon to follow.

There was a keen interest in the discipline (see Harviainen in this volume) already before the teaching of Assyriology began in Finland (1891) which has continued uninterrupted until the present day (see Aro & Mattila 2007). However, there is also a painful dilemma since, although thanks to Simo's untiring efforts Assyriological studies have truly thrived in Finland, regrettably this has not resulted in any permanent positions in Assyriology at the University of Helsinki, where there are also not any permanent positions in Hittitology (ancient Anatolia, i.e., geographically more or less modern Turkey) nor in Iranian studies (ancient Elam, Media and Persia).

As the world progressively becomes exponentially smaller through improved transportation, communication, and an interconnected global economic system, it is clear that only our shared humanity will make it possible for us to continue to coexist on this one small planet. Our shared humanity is what makes us human and our history is what has made us who we are. The past of humankind, whether in Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, or Meso-America is an inseparable part of our humanity. As Shakespeare says, "what is past is prologue" and we ignore our past at the peril of our future.

Moreover, any single, successful future excavation in the modern Middle East, as at Ugarit in 1929 or at Ebla in 1976, may further change our knowledge about the ancient Near East and about our own roots. Quoting the honouree's own words gives perspective on the importance of Assyriological studies (Parpola in Halén 1998: 19):

The roots of western civilization lie in the Near East, and Europe's cultural heritage is in many ways linked to ancient Mesopotamia. When the Greeks and Romans were only learning to write, the peoples of the ancient Near East had already been living over two millennia in an urban society which had all the attributes of a modern state. The emergence of our religious beliefs, philosophy, science, art, and social and political institutions cannot be properly understood without the background provided by Mesopotamian sources.

For the preparation of this book, we invited Simo Parpola's former students, both Finnish and foreign, to contribute, together with his long-term colleagues and some younger colleagues with whom he has been in contact during the recent years. The first batch of invitations we sent out was met with such an enthusiastic reception that we are very sorry that, because of the, agreed in advance, size of the volume, we could not invite all those scholars we originally wanted to contact.

The division of the book into two main sections consisting of *Neo-Assyrian studies* and *Assyriological and Interdisciplinary studies* attempts to reflect the areas of Simo's scholarly interests. In reality, Simo's interests are however far broader than we could have ever introduced between two covers, encompassing many more disciplines than treated in this volume. In fact, the two sections of the volume partly overlap and the categorization should not be considered entirely rigorous. For example, the papers in *Neo-Assyrian studies* also inform us about many other areas, even if their main focus is on Neo-Assyrian issues. For instance, Ambos studies eunuchs in the context of the whole ancient Near East whilst the article by Hämeen-Anttila concerns Semitic linguistics, and could as well have appeared in the second section of the book, but as his starting point is the camels of Tiglath-pileser III, there is no problem with including it under *Neo-Assyrian studies*. On the other hand, Livingstone's article is clearly post-Assyrian, though it is connected to the glorious Neo-Assyrian past. One way or another, several papers also relate to Syria and Anatolia (Aro, Frame, Lanfranchi, Parker, Radner and Röllig). The same is likewise valid for the papers in the section *Assyriological and Interdisciplinary studies*, since many of them have clear links to Neo-Assyrian studies, e.g., Abusch, Dietrich, Geller and Panaino & Basello either edit or discuss texts that are represented by manuscripts from Assyrian libraries, and elsewhere topics touch upon Assyrians as well, for example, in the case of Near Eastern prophecy (Nissinen). Many of these papers, therefore, clearly indicate that today's Neo-Assyrian studies are genuinely interdisciplinary.

We wish to express our gratitude to all of the contributors of the volume and to those who have otherwise helped us in preparing it. Consequently, our warmest thanks go to Lotta Aunio, Dominique Collon, Tapani Harviainen, Pirjo Lapinkivi, Jaume Llop, Jamie Novotny, Noora Ohvo, Margot Stout Whiting, Greta Van Buylaere, Joost Van Buylaere, Marlena Whiting and last but not least Robert M. Whiting, who read the contributions written by non-native English speakers and not only revised the language of these articles but also pointed out many factual and interpretative ambiguities in them; this immensely facilitated the work of the editors, for which we are extremely grateful to him.

