

AŠIPÂ AGAIN: A MICROHISTORY OF AN ASSYRIAN PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATOR

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I am delighted to have been invited to contribute to a volume that honors a scholar as influential as Simo Parpola. Professor Parpola's contribution to the field of Assyriology, and more specifically to the study of the Assyrian empire, has been nothing short of foundational. The State Archives of Assyria project has made not just a body of material, but practically the entire Neo-Assyrian corpus, easily accessible to a wide audience. It is difficult to imagine now what it must have been like to attempt to compile a book such as Professor Parpola's own *Neo-Assyrian Toponyms*, for example, without the aid of the SAA volumes. In addition to collating and translating the corpus of Assyrian documents in the State Archives of Assyria series, the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project has also been responsible for a number of other tools, studies and stand-alone volumes. I might also add that Professor Parpola contributed greatly to my own personal development as a graduate student during the two years, now more than a decade ago, I spent in Helsinki. It is with the utmost respect and gratitude that I offer this paper in his honor as a small token of my appreciation.

The *Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (PNA) was one of the first attempts to globally sort the *Corpus of Neo-Assyrian* (CNA) database and view the extracted data from a specific standpoint.¹ Interestingly, this tool, when used in combination with the texts published in the SAA series and against the backdrop of the various studies mentioned above, has helped pave the way for synthetic research that takes advantage of historical and anthropological methodologies. The purpose of this paper is to attempt such a synthesis by viewing a small set of Neo-Assyrian data through the lens of an historical methodology. This paper is meant to serve first, as a brief example of what can now be done using the Neo-Assyrian data (in large part due to Professor Parpola's efforts), and second, to act as a corrective for work published in the *Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire*. I will consider a small group of texts that are either attributed to, written to, or mention, a particular individual, namely a provincial official calling himself Ašipâ. I will analyze these texts in light of an historical methodology known as "microhistory."

¹ Other early studies using this methodology include Luukko 1997 and Parker 1997b.

Simply put, microhistory is the study of small pieces of history. Instead of focusing on nation states, ethnic groups, or famous figures (such as presidents or military leaders) for example, microhistory typically concentrates on what are considered to be more “ordinary” villages, families, or individuals. Although the subjects of microhistorical research are not usually responsible for important historical events or processes, they are seen to be representative or illustrative of a particular time. However, the goal of microhistory is not just to illuminate events or circumstances otherwise disconnected from larger historical processes. On the contrary, the premise of microhistory is that history, even major events or long-term trends, are grounded in the actions of individuals. Instead of seeing history as a larger process that is imposed upon people from above, microhistory sees the flow of history as propelled by the accumulated actions of individuals and groups. The goal of microhistory is to add texture and substance to the study of history by tracing the lives of people living during particularly interesting periods and to use those lives to more richly illustrate, and therefore more deeply understand, larger historical pictures. By utilizing microhistory as the lens through which to view a particular provincial administrator, this paper will do two things. First, it will attempt to reconstruct some aspects of this individual’s life by placing him within a particular geographic and chronological framework. Second, this paper will use the resulting narrative to exemplify historical circumstances and processes prevalent in his time. In doing so it will highlight how this history played out at the provincial level.

During the Neo-Assyrian Imperial period Ašipâ was an unusual name. According to the *Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (hereafter referred to as the PNA) there are as many as four, or alternatively as few as two, individuals mentioned in Assyrian texts bearing this name. The relative infrequency of “Ašipâ” is paralleled by the fact that the meaning, etymology and origin of this name are unknown. There are a total of 20 known letters and two known administrative documents in the Neo-Assyrian corpus that pertain directly to a person known as Ašipâ.² Of those a relatively large group of 14 letters certainly belong to or refer to a single individual.³ (Although, as we shall see below, it is not impossible that all but one of the above mentioned 22 texts actually pertain to a single person.) It is this individual who will be the focus of this study (PNA Ašipâ no. 3).

In spite of the fact that even 14 texts attributable to a single person represent a relatively large corpus, none of these documents state explicitly what position this official held. The author of Ašipâ’s entry in the PNA (K. Radner) claims,

² These texts are: ND 2371 (administrative document); ND 2365 (NL 11); ND 2418 (NL 91); ND 2452 (NL 35); ND 2617 (NL 103); ND 2623 (NL 36); ND 2703 (NL 81); SAA 1 5–6; SAA 5 15; SAA 5 21–30; SAA 5 46; SAA 7 5 (administrative document listing court personnel). (For Nimrud Letters see Saggs 2001.) Note that not included in this dossier is SAA 15 274 where the restoration of the name [x x ^ma-šî²]-pa-a is uncertain.

³ These texts are: SAA 1 5–6; SAA 5 15; SAA 5 21–30; SAA 5 46.

rightfully I think, that Ašipâ served as a provincial governor “in the northern part of the Assyrian empire [...]” (PNA 1/I: 142). Although Ašipâ does not appear as a provincial governor in the Assyrian eponym chronicle, there are frequent references to a mountainous landscape in these texts and many of the duties performed by this official are paralleled by those of other governors of northern provinces. While this reasoning makes sense, the PNA goes on to name Tidu as the city from which Ašipâ ruled and then places Ašipâ’s territory “on the bank of the Euphrates east of Amedi” (PNA 1/I: 142). This assertion is problematic because there is no evidence that the city of Tidu was ever the seat of a provincial capital: it does not appear in the eponym list as such, nor is there any mention of a provincial administration at Tidu in the Neo-Assyrian correspondence (cf. Postgate 1995). In fact, Radner later (Radner & Schachner 2001: 769) admitted to having followed the tentative reference in SAA 5 where Lanfranchi and Parpola suggest that Ašipâ could have been stationed in Tidu (cf. Lanfranchi & Parpola 1990: XXXIV n. 5 and 243), even though his letters appear under the heading “Letters from Tušhan” in the same book. Radner also changed “Euphrates” to “Tigris” (Radner & Schachner 2001: 769) in accordance with Kessler who argued almost 30 years ago that the city of Tidu was located on the *Tigris River* (not the Euphrates!) and should be identified with the site of Üçtepe (Kessler 1980: 103–104; Liverani 1992: 38–39; Parker 1998; 2001: 162–163).⁴ This set of circumstances leaves us in a bit of a conundrum: If the data suggest that Ašipâ was a high-ranking provincial official, perhaps even a provincial governor, yet we cannot even say for certain where he served, then where does that leave us?

Some insight into this problem can be gained from the content of Ašipâ’s letters and the toponyms they contain. On the issue of Ašipâ’s role in the Assyrian administration, it should first be noted that all of the letters written by Ašipâ are addressed directly to the king. In addition, two letters are written from Sargon II to Ašipâ⁵ and a number of Ašipâ’s letters contain responses to inquiries from Sargon II that were undoubtedly part of a much wider correspondence now lost to us.⁶ These data show that Ašipâ was in regular and direct contact with the highest echelons of the Assyrian administration – a privilege reserved only for very high-ranking officials (Parpola 1981: 131–132). The information Ašipâ’s letters contain is quite varied but in every instance Ašipâ reports on matters that are of direct relevance to the governance of an Assyrian frontier province. The topics discussed in these texts can be broken down into two broad categories: security matters and economic matters. Ašipâ’s involvement in provincial security is attested by reports on the

⁴ There is no need for me to repeat the philological and geographic arguments articulated by Kessler (1980) and then supported archaeological data (Parker 2001) here. Suffice it to say, the placement of this toponym is not disputed (cf. Parpola & Porter 2001: 17).

⁵ SAA 1 5 and SAA 1 6.

⁶ SAA 5 21 r.1–9, SAA 5 28:7–10, SAA 5 29:8–r.2.

location and movements of Urartian governors and soldiers,⁷ the status of reports from Assyrian spies,⁸ and the activities of Assyrian troops.⁹ Ašipâ's oversight of economic production and the exploitation of provincial resources is attested by reports on the state of Assyrian storehouses,¹⁰ the production of wool,¹¹ and the extraction of natural resources such as logs,¹² stone,¹³ and saplings.¹⁴ Also critical to any interpretation of Ašipâ's role is the beginning of SAA 5 21 where Ašipâ informs the king that he has moved all of the people under his jurisdiction into "fortified places" (*bēt dūrāni*) in anticipation of a possible Urartian attack. This reference suggests that Ašipâ governed a particular area and its inhabitants.

Ašipâ's correspondence also contains a large amount of geographic information which together paints a relatively vivid picture of the location and environment of the region under Ašipâ's control. To begin with, a reference to snow (or in this case lack of snow) in SAA 5 26 combined with several references to a river,¹⁵ limit the possible area of Ašipâ's jurisdiction to the northern and northeastern provinces. This attribution is underscored by Ašipâ's concern with events in Urartu¹⁶ and by the fact that Ašipâ appears to be in charge of monitoring Assyria's interests in Šubria.¹⁷ In addition to this general information, there are two specific references that more precisely locate the area under Ašipâ's control. First, a letter from Našir-Bel¹⁸, the governor of Amedi (modern Diyarbakir) to Sargon II explains that Našir-Bel purchased 400 hectares of land formerly belonging to "the subjects of Ašipâ"¹⁹ and added it to the province of Amedi. In addition to supporting the observation that Ašipâ was in control of a specific region and its inhabitants (above), this letter also suggests that Ašipâ's territory bordered the province of Amedi. However, the most decisive geographic evidence comes from SAA 5 21, where Ašipâ refers to the Urartian provinces of Pulua and Danibani as being "opposite us".²⁰ Pulua occurs

⁷ SAA 5 21:11–20 and probably SAA 5 23:7, SAA 5 22:7–8.

⁸ SAA 5 25:7–11, SAA 5 22:7.

⁹ SAA 5 24:7–17.

¹⁰ SAA 5 21 r.1–8.

¹¹ SAA 5 28:7–10.

¹² SAA 5 25:14–r.7, SAA 5 26 r.6.

¹³ SAA 5 29:8–r.8.

¹⁴ SAA 5 27:7–14.

¹⁵ SAA 5 21:19, SAA 5 25 r.2', SAA 5 26 r.1.

¹⁶ SAA 5 21, SAA 5 22 and probably SAA 5 23.

¹⁷ SAA 5 25.

¹⁸ The name is read as Liphur-Bel in SAA 5. For the reading Našir-Bel or Našur-Bel and the official in question see PNA 2/II: 932 (no. 3).

¹⁹ [LÚ*.A]RAD.[MEŠ] ša m[a]-šī-pa (SAA 5 15 r.1–2).

²⁰ *ina pu-tu-ni* (SAA 5 21:13). "Opposite us" or "opposite me" is a standard phrase in the Assyrian vernacular that should be understood here as "directly across the frontier from me." Note that in the same text Ašipâ mentions that, since there is a threat of attack from Urartu, he has moved all of his oxen and sheep to the south bank of the river, thus indicating that his administrative and military center was located on the south bank of the Tigris river (SAA 5 21:17–19).

again in a letter from Ša-Aššur-dubbu, (a governor of Tušhan [Millard 1994: 60]) who states that Pulua was opposite Tušhan.²¹

This reference to Tušhan and to the office of the governor there is but one of many parallels in content and phraseology between Ašipâ's correspondence and that of Ša-Aššur-dubbu. Ašipâ uses as part of his greeting formula the phrase "the forts and the land of the king my lord are well."²² I have argued elsewhere (Parker 1997a: 79. Also see Radner & Schachner 2001: 769) that many of the greeting formulas used in the Assyrian royal correspondence are geographically specific and I have even suggested that these greeting formulas might be used to infer the provenance of letters whose origin is otherwise unknown. Following this logic, it is important to note that the greeting formula utilized by Ašipâ is found in letters from Tušhan, and to a lesser extent, in letters from Amedi. This commonality in phraseology between Ašipâ's and Ša-Aššur-dubbu's correspondence is also paralleled by commonalities in content. For example, these two groups of letters also share references to frontier fortifications, logging, log drives, Urartu and Šubria. Parallels in phraseology and content can also be drawn between the correspondence of Ašipâ and another, slightly earlier, governor of Tušhan named Duri-Aššur.²³ Although only four letters from Duri-Aššur are extant, two contain the phraseology here compared.²⁴ Ašipâ and Duri-Aššur's correspondence also share references to frontier fortifications, snow, espionage and soldiers.²⁵

Although no single reference can be shown to provide definitive proof of the role that Ašipâ played in the Assyrian administration, the data outlined above strongly suggest that Ašipâ was an Assyrian provincial governor who was, at least for a time, in charge of the Assyrian province of Tušhan (Lanfranchi & Parpola 1990: XV–XVI, Parker 2001: 223). This conclusion is seemingly contradicted by the Assyrian Eponym Chronicle (Millard 1994) which does not include Ašipâ and lists Ša-Aššur-dubbu as the governor of Tušhan during the reign of Sargon II (in 707 BC).²⁶ I would suggest, therefore, that two separate governors of the province of Tušhan are represented in the correspondence of Sargon II (Radner & Schachner 2001: 769). If this is the case, there is, unfortunately, very little information that might help to clarify the internal chronology of the letters in the Neo-Assyrian corpus (Parpola 1981), nor is there any direct evidence as to the order of these two

²¹ SAA 5 33 r.16e–17e.

²² *DI-mu a-na URU.bi-rat a-na KUR ša LUGAL EN-ia.*

²³ Duri-Aššur is listed as the governor of Tušhan in the eponym chronicle for the year 728 (Millard 1994: 59). He is responsible for four letters in the Nimrud corpus including ND 2799 (NL 28), ND 2720 (NL 29), ND 2784 (NL 49) and ND 2666 (NL 67; see PNA 1/II: 389–390 [no. 2]).

²⁴ ND 2720 (NL 29) and ND 2784 (NL 49).

²⁵ ND 2799 (NL 28, soldiers), ND 2720 (NL 29, espionage), ND 2720 (NL 29, snow, in this case too much), and ND 2666 (NL 67, frontier fortifications, see Parker 1997a).

²⁶ For a discussion of the governors of Tušhan attested in the textual sources see Radner & Schachner 2001: 767–770.

governors. The only firm date we have is 707 BC, at which time Ša-Aššur-dubbu is mentioned in the eponym chronicle as the governor of Tušhan (Millard 1994: 60).

To tackle this problem let us turn again to the content of the letters but in this case let us consider the historical, rather than the geographic or administrative information they contain. There is a general consensus among scholars that the continued harassment of the Urartians by the Cimmerian tribes of the north and the decisive defeat of the Urartians during Sargon's eighth campaign in 714 BC marked the beginning of a decline in Urartu.²⁷ In this context let us consider SAA 5 21. This document is a letter from Ašipâ to Sargon II. It mentions that a messenger has come to Ašipâ with a letter from the king warning him of an impending attack from Urartu. Ašipâ replies by reporting on Urartian troop build-ups and then lists the preparations he has taken in compliance with the king's orders concerning supplies, the stationing of soldiers and the protection of the local inhabitants and animals. Although later letters indicate that Urartu continued to be a threat throughout the reign of Sargon,²⁸ the context of this letter suggests that it dates to a period before the above mentioned decline in Urartian power and may even be part of the correspondence that surely took place in the run-up to Sargon's eighth campaign in 714 BC (Lanfranchi 1983). Furthermore, the context of SAA 5 31, a letter written by Ša-Aššur-dubbu, indicates that this text dates to the reign of the Urartian king Argisti II who took the throne of Urartu after Rusâ's failure against the Assyrians in 714 BC.²⁹ These data suggest that Ašipâ was governor of Tušhan in the period prior to the two hard dates we have: Sargon II's eighth campaign in 714 BC and Ša-Aššur-dubbu's tenure in the office of the eponym in 707 BC. This would place Ašipâ in Tušhan before 714 BC and would suggest that Ša-Aššur-dubbu was governor of Tušhan from some time after 714 BC until some time after 707 BC (cf. Lanfranchi & Parpola 1990: XV–XVI).

Having examined in detail the letters in the Sargon corpus attributed to Ašipâ (PNA Ašipâ no. 3) and in doing so established, with the greatest amount of certainty possible given the extant data, his role in the Assyrian provincial administration, we must now consider the remainder of the texts that contain or are attributed to individuals with the same name. In the PNA, Radner considers there to be four separate individuals bearing this name in the Neo-Assyrian corpus (PNA 1/I: 142).

²⁷ On the defeat of Urartu by the Cimmerians at or around this time see SAA 1 30–32, SAA 5 90–92, SAA 5 173–174. The Cimmerian defeat of the Urartians is the subject of several studies by G. B. Lanfranchi who has proposed that all of the letters regarding this incident are either slightly earlier than or contemporary with Sargon's eighth campaign (Lanfranchi 1983).

²⁸ Note especially in this regard SAA 5 3, which mentions the Urartian king Argisti II, thus indicating that the conflict between Assyria and Urartu did not end with the death of Rusâ.

²⁹ This deduction is based on the fact that the author of the letter is demanding the return of *du-ma-qi ša ad-u-a* / [š]a a-na-ku : a-di-a-kan-ni "the jewelry that my father and I gave you" (SAA 5 31 r.16'–17'). Since king Rusâ (II) is reported to have given the above mentioned gifts in r.9' of the same text, the presumption is that it is Rusâ's son Argisti (II) who sent the message quoted in this letter (Lanfranchi & Parpola 1990: XXIII; Deller 1984).

Let us begin by examining the first of these individuals (PNA Ašipâ no. 1). PNA Ašipâ no. 1 is known from five letters in the Nimrud corpus.³⁰ The content of these letters suggests that the Ašipâ of the Nimrud corpus was a mid-ranking official who was responsible for various aspects of the Assyrian administration of Babylonia. In three cases he reports on grain shipments,³¹ and three texts mention boats which were probably used for transporting grain or other products from or within Babylonia.³² It is generally accepted that the letters in the Nimrud corpus date either to the later part of the reign of Tiglath-pileser III or to the beginning of the reign of Sargon II (Parpola 1981).³³ Thus it is safe to say that the Nimrud corpus and the Sargon letters are likely separated by some five to twenty-five years. If this is the case, then it is certainly possible, from a chronological point of view, that the Ašipâ responsible for the Nimrud letters (PNA Ašipâ no. 1) and the Ašipâ responsible for the Sargon letters (PNA Ašipâ no. 3) are the same person.³⁴

The fact that PNA Ašipâ no. 1 is a mid-ranking official who appears to be in charge of relatively mundane tasks fits well, I suggest, with this theory. Following this line of reasoning we might envision a scenario in which a single individual named Ašipâ could have been promoted from a lower ranking administrative position in Babylonia either at the end of the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, during the short reign of Shalmaneser V, or at the beginning of the reign of Sargon II, to the post of a governor of an outlying province in the first decade or so of Sargon II's reign. If we assume that Ašipâ would have been in his early twenties when he took his first posting with the imperial administration, then by the time he became governor early in the reign of Sargon II, he might have been between thirty and forty years old. If he then held his governorship for ten years or so this would mean he was in his forties when he retired and was replaced by Ša-Aššur-dubbu.

If PNA Ašipâ no. 1 and PNA Ašipâ no. 3 are the same person, then what of the other two individuals listed in the PNA as bearing this name? The text attributed to PNA Ašipâ no. 2 (ND 2371) is an administrative document from Nimrud. Although this document belongs to the same general period as those discussed above, there is no evidence to link it to the individual responsible for the Nimrud and Sargon letters.³⁵ The text attributed to PNA Ašipâ no. 4 must also be excluded

³⁰ ND 2365 (NL 11), ND 2452 (NL 35), ND 2623 (NL 36), ND 2703 (NL 81) and ND 2418 (NL 91).

³¹ ND 2365 (NL 11), ND 2452 (NL 35) and ND 2623 (NL 36).

³² ND 2365 (NL 11), ND 2623 (NL 36) and ND 2418 (NL 91).

³³ For this reason Radner listed Ašipâ no. 1 as dating to the "reign of Tiglath-pileser III or Sargon II in the PNA (1/I: 142). Note however that we can neither rule out nor confirm that some of these letters may date to the reign of Shalmaneser V.

³⁴ This theory has been suggested, although not discussed in depth, by Lanfranchi and Parpola (1990: XV–XVI). Also see Parpola 1981: 132.

³⁵ Although ND 2371 is not dated the PNA suggests that the text dates to the "reign of Tiglath-pileser III or Sargon II" (PNA 1/I: 142).

from consideration here since this text is dated to the reign of Esarhaddon (Fales & Postgate 1992: XVII–XIX).³⁶

In summary, I suggest that, although there is no way to be certain exactly how many individuals bearing the name Ašipâ are represented in the Assyrian corpus, a good argument can be made to support the theory that there are either two or three (rather than four as postulated in the PNA). The first is responsible for or mentioned in a total of twenty letters including six from the Nimrud corpus and fourteen from the Sargon corpus. The second individual is known only from a single administrative text (ND 2371) and the third is known from a fragmentary spelling of the name contained in SAA 7. The following analysis is based on this hypothesis.

Drawing a connection between the Nimrud letters and the Sargon letters gives us an interesting perspective on the life and career of an Assyrian official. The data suggest that early in his career Ašipâ served as a mid-ranking administrator in Babylonia. In this capacity Ašipâ arranged and accounted for the transfer of substantial amounts of staples by ship.³⁷ Although Assyro-Babylonian relations have been the topic of considerable work by a number of scholars (for example Brinkman 1991, 1979; Frame 1992; Porter 1993), few studies have focused on the details of how the Assyrians administered the region during the periods that they held control there. In this light it is tempting to see the large shipments of barley described by Ašipâ as tribute or tax revenue extracted from Babylonia by the Assyrians. A second question about these shipments that is difficult to answer is their purpose and destination. There is evidence that the Assyrians attempted to administer directly this area through the establishment of garrisons,³⁸ and thus it is reasonable to assume that these shipments were meant to support Assyrian troops or that they were to be used to barter for other products for this purpose. Although it is possible that these shipments were bound for Assyria, up-stream transport, especially of high-bulk products like barley and other staples, must be ruled out. Furthermore, Lattimore has shown long distance transport by land of high bulk products is equally impractical (Lattimore 1979: 37). It is therefore likely that these shipments were bound for Assyrian storehouses within Babylonia.³⁹ This reconstruction is supported by the fact that in one of his letters mentioning a barley shipment on the obverse (ND 2365 [NL 11]), Ašipâ reports on the reverse that a number of troops under his charge had been killed in an attack while apparently guarding a separate shipment of leather. Interestingly, Ašipâ concludes the letter by assuring the king that the boats (and their cargo) are safe.⁴⁰ These data suggest

³⁶ SAA 7 5 r. i 44. It should also be noted that the name of Ašipâ mentioned in this text is partially broken and thus it is possible that this text does not belong to the corpus attributed to Ašipâ.

³⁷ 6000 homers of barley are mentioned for example in ND 2452:3 (NL 35).

³⁸ Note the letters testifying to this dating to the reign of Sargon contained in SAA 15 and SAA 17.

³⁹ For Inca parallels see especially the studies in LeVine 1992.

⁴⁰ [D]i-mu a-na GIŠ.MÁ.MEŠ (ND 2365 r.12 [NL 11]).

that the soldiers killed were in fact part of an Assyrian cohort meant to guard the transshipment of goods overseen by Ašipâ.

Another interesting aspect of these letters highlighted in the above passage is Ašipâ's use of, and concern for, boats. Babylonia was, of course, not only traversed by the two great rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, but was also dissected by an intricate system of canals. Although the original purpose of these artificial water courses was probably irrigation, their use as transportation routes was likely equally important. Given this, it is worth discussing Ašipâ's references to watercraft in Babylonia. D.T. Potts has argued that Mesopotamian watercraft can be broken down into two categories based on the material of their construction. He suggests that seafaring vessels were made of wood while boats used for canal travel and transport were constructed of reeds (Potts 1997: 122–137).⁴¹ This is particularly interesting given the large corpus of glyptic, mostly from earlier periods, depicting flat boats with high upturned prows and sterns. The evidence suggests that these are in fact depictions of reed boats. It is of course impossible to say with certainty whether or not the boats mentioned in Ašipâ's letters were constructed of reeds, or, more broadly, if the Assyrians utilized this technology for transportation within Babylonia, but several lines of reasoning support such a hypothesis. First, although reed boats sit relatively low in the water they are very buoyant and can thus carry relatively heavy loads. Second, reed boats have no keel and are thus well suited for travel in shallow water. In this context, it is worth quoting Nimrud Letter ND 2623 (NL 36) wherein, in reporting on an expected barley shipment, Ašipâ uses the verb *šadādu* "to tow or drag" in reference to his boats saying "I dragged up the boats."⁴² This suggests that large or heavy boats were dragged by animals or people using ropes from the banks of the canals. And third, reed boats were likely cheaper to construct than wooden boats since reeds were available in many parts of both southern and even in northern Babylonia (Potts 1997: 115).

I have argued elsewhere that Assyrian imperial policy was, to use the Inca scholar Terrance D'Altroy's term, "flexible" (D'Altroy 1992: 24, 222) in that members of the Assyrian court took many factors into consideration in their implementation of Assyrian imperialism (Parker 2001: 252). One question that Ašipâ's Nimrud Letters raise is whether or not mid-ranking officials were given similar flexibility. For example, one could envision a situation in which an official like Ašipâ was given the task of procuring grain levies from village managers, or other local representatives (e.g. ND 2365 [NL 11], ND 2452 [NL 35] and ND 2623 [NL 36]) and transporting them to garrisons or imperial storehouses (e.g. ND 2623 [NL 36]). To do so he is given the support of a cohort of troops (e.g. ND 2365 [NL 11]) but is otherwise left largely on his own to arrange and coordinate the work. In such a

⁴¹ To this I would add the rafts made using inflated animal skins called *keleks* (for discussion see Parker 2001: 81–82).

⁴² GIS.MÁ.MES *a-sa-da-da* (ND 2623 r.7 [NL 36]).

situation, Assyrian officials may have relied on local customs, technologies and perhaps even manpower to carry out their work. This might include, for example, contracting, constructing or commandeering local (in this case reed) vessels (e.g. ND 2623 [NL 36], ND 2418 [NL 91]) and using them to transport levies under guard (e.g. ND 2365 [NL 11]) along established routes.

The second group of texts attributed to Ašipâ is certainly of slightly later date than those just discussed. If the reconstruction presented above and originally postulated by Lanfranchi and Parpola (1990: XV–XVI) is correct, then Ašipâ was placed in charge of the province of Tušḫan at the beginning of, or early in, the reign of Sargon II. Depending on the chronology of the Nimrud Letters there are two possible reconstructions of how Ašipâ came to be the governor of this important province. First, if the Nimrud letters attributed to Ašipâ were produced during the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, then Ašipâ served as a mid-ranking official in Babylonia at the end of the reign of that king. Since the transition from Tiglath-pileser III to Sargon II was anything but a smooth transfer of power, it is quite likely that many of the highest administrators in Tiglath-pileser III's administration were purged either during Shalmaneser V's short reign or when Sargon II came to the throne. Since Sargon would have been in need of officials to fill newly vacated positions, it is possible that Sargon II could have promoted a successful mid-rank official like Ašipâ to the rank of governor. Alternatively, if Ašipâ's Nimrud letters date to early in the reign of Sargon II, then we can only imagine that Sargon's original choice to head the province of Tušḫan was either demoted or died and was subsequently replaced by Ašipâ.

When Ašipâ became a governor, the province of Tušḫan had already been an important part of the Assyrian empire for over one hundred and fifty years. This province, which was originally annexed early in the reign of Assurnāširpal II (Parker 2001: 165–173), was of vital strategic importance to the Assyrians. Not only was the valley formed by the Upper Tigris River an important supply zone, but this province served as a bulkhead against the kingdom of Urartu. The concerns of a governor focused both on the economic exploitation of an important province, and the geopolitical situation of a frontier area, come through clearly in Ašipâ's correspondence. I have already noted that a number of Ašipâ's letters make reference to four activities that can be grouped under the heading "economic matters." These activities are: logging, cutting stone, the acquisition of fruit tree saplings and the production of wool. While these references may seem mundane, they give us interesting insight into how imperial policy affected the economics of an outlying province.

Anthropologist and scholar of South Asia Carla Sinopoli has noted the importance of large scale construction projects in the creation and maintenance of imperial ideologies (Sinopoli 1994: 170). She suggests that the construction of new capitals, or the significant modification of existing ones, may be both a

political and an ideological act meant to differentiate a ruler from his predecessors by reorienting the symbolic center of the empire (Sinopoli 1994: 170). While her discussion of imperial capitals certainly holds true for the Assyrian empire, a focus on microhistory allows us to consider not just the ideological impact of such projects, but how large and small scale construction projects affected a provincial administration.

During the reign of Sargon II much of the resources of the empire was expended on the construction of Sargon II's new capital at Dur-Šarrukin. Parpola has argued that the amount of effort focused on this project is reflected by the fact that as many as one hundred and thirteen letters in the Sargon corpus may pertain to its construction (Parpola 1995: 50). These letters suggest that Assyrian governors were assigned specific tasks and ordered to supply specific materials for the construction.⁴³ It is in this context that we must consider Ašipâ's references to saplings and hewn stone. In both cases, Ašipâ is likely responding to orders for these materials similar to those known to have been sent to other governors.⁴⁴

It is also clear that much of the timber needed, not only for the construction of Dur-Šarrukin, but also for many other construction projects, came from the Upper Tigris River region (Parpola 1995: 59). Although only two of Ašipâ's letters concern logging,⁴⁵ there are quite a number of letters from other governors (including Ša-Aššur-dubbu of Tušhan and Našhir-Bel of Amedi)⁴⁶ that, when combined with those belonging to Ašipâ, shed considerable light on this activity.⁴⁷ There were two grades of lumber available in the Upper Tigris River region: door beams (GIŠ.ŠÚ.A = *šibšutu*) and roof beams (GIŠ.ÜR = *gušūru*). Assyrian exploitation of timber from this region took place on a very large scale. One of the surviving references to logging from Ašipâ's correspondence, for example, mentions 3000 door beams⁴⁸ while references from Ša-Aššur-dubbu and Našhir-Bel list numbers such as 1,200 door beams and 1,200 roof beams,⁴⁹ 2,000 door beams and 500 roof beams⁵⁰ and 500 either door or roof beams.⁵¹

These and other letters about logging show that the provincial governors organized logging expeditions in the mountains north of the Upper Tigris (e.g. SAA 5 25). To do so, crews were sent under guard to predetermined locations to fell the trees and prepare them for shipment (e.g. SAA 5 25, SAA 5 33–34). Later, crews of men were sent to haul the logs to the riverbank (e.g. SAA 5 25, SAA 5 33, SAA

⁴³ This is made abundantly clear in SAA 1 26.

⁴⁴ SAA 1 26 and SAA 1 27 for example.

⁴⁵ SAA 5 25 and SAA 5 26.

⁴⁶ Ša-Aššur-dubbu: SAA 5 32–34, SAA 5 39, SAA 5 43. Našhir-Bel: SAA 5 4, SAA 5 6–8.

⁴⁷ I have already discussed logging in detail elsewhere (Parker 2001: 227–229), but for the sake of completeness I will repeat some of that discussion here.

⁴⁸ SAA 5 26 r.6.

⁴⁹ SAA 5 6:7–8 (Našhir-Bel).

⁵⁰ SAA 5 7:1'–2' (Našhir-Bel).

⁵¹ SAA 5 34 r.29 (Ša-Aššur-dubbu).

5 43). The logs were eventually floated down the river to specific gathering points along the Tigris. Since many of the logs extracted by the governors of Tušhan were almost certainly floated down the Batman River from the highlands of Šubria and beyond, Tušhan's log drive staging point was likely at or near the Tigris-Batman confluence. Once a sufficient number of logs were gathered and Assyrian officials judged there to be enough water in the rivers (e.g. SAA 5 7, SAA 5 26), Assyrian signal stations, forts and settlements along the river and in the down-stream provinces were alerted and the logs were floated down the river (e.g. SAA 5 4, SAA 5 7, SAA 5 26). Needless to say, log drives on the magnitude of the numbers mentioned above were a big undertaking that involved large numbers of personnel and considerable coordination. Logging in the Upper Tigris was complicated by the fact that considerable deforestation had already taken place in the Upper Tigris River region by the end of the eighth century BC and for this reason Assyrian logging crews were forced to venture far into the mountains north of Amedi and Tušhan to find suitable timber.⁵²

Although much of the lumber mentioned in these texts was likely bound for Sargon II's new capital, Dur-Šarrukin was not the only major construction project to take place during the course of Neo-Assyrian history. Similar circumstances would have prevailed not only during the construction of other imperial capitals but during the course of smaller constructions projects both in or around the province of Tušhan (e.g. ND 2666 [NL 67]) and in the Assyrian heartland.

The single reference to "red wool"⁵³ may also be illustrative of larger economic processes taking place in the Upper Tigris. Contrasting the faunal assemblage from sites in the Upper Tigris, I have argued elsewhere that, in an effort to increase revenues and control access to raw materials, Assyrian provincial authorities may have monopolized certain segments of provincial economies (Parker 2003: 547–548). The faunal data augment this reference and support the theory that Ašipâ, and presumably other governors of Tušhan, held tight control over the herding industry. The fact that the above mentioned text specifies "red" wool, lends support to the theory that the provincial authorities also managed facilities to process many of the raw materials produced under their direction.

A number of scholars have studied the rivalry between Assyria and Urartu (Burney & Lang 1972; Deller 1984; Lanfranchi 1983; Levine 1977; Salvini 1995; Zimanski 1985, 1990, among others). The perspective obtained through microhistorical analysis adds depth to this understanding since it focuses our attention on how this rivalry played out at the local level. In this regard, a small group of Ašipâ's Sargon

⁵² In this context it is worth quoting SAA 5 25 r.4'–7' where Ašipâ complains "all my men are in the mountains felling trees in groves where there are (still?) (trunks suitable for) door beams and roof beams." LÚ*.ERIM.[MEŠ] *gab-bu ina KUR-e / ina GIŠ.MURUB₄.MEŠ bé-te GIŠ.ŠÚ.A.MEŠ / bé-te GIŠ.ÜR.MEŠ i-ba-šú-ni / i-na-ki-su.*

⁵³ SAA 5 28:9.

correspondence addresses matters of imperial security.⁵⁴ These texts, and those of the above mentioned authors Ša-Aššur-dubbu and Našir-Bel, demonstrate that the conflict between Assyria and Urartu was manifested in the daily administration of the provinces of Tušhan and Amedi in a number of ways.

First, one of the main preoccupations of officials of these regions was gathering military intelligence about Urartu. There are two texts concerning the “news of the Urartians”⁵⁵ in the correspondence of Ašipâ and one text mentions Urartian governors.⁵⁶ These and other texts concerning espionage suggest that the Assyrian provincial authorities attempted to infiltrate towns and villages beyond the frontier with Assyrian spies, and either bought, co-opted or extorted information from residents and political leaders there (Dubovský 2006). There are a number of references in the Neo-Assyrian corpus to the Šubrian leader’s role in espionage.⁵⁷ One such letter belonging to the correspondence of Ašipâ (SAA 5 25) is not entirely clear about the Šubrian leader’s loyalties. One possibility is that this letter reports that the Šubrian leader is spying for the Urartians. Whether or not this is the case, this possibility highlights the fact that espionage was being initiated from both sides of the frontier. Not only did governors like Ašipâ have to organize and manage their own information gathering, they also had to counter Urartian efforts to infiltrate and even destabilize Assyria’s holdings in their region. One of the texts in Ašipâ’s correspondence shows that the threat of conflict between Assyrian and Urartian forces was real and constant. In SAA 5 21 (discussed above) Ašipâ acts on military intelligence apparently gathered elsewhere and forwarded to Ašipâ from the Assyrian capital. Responding to this warning, Ašipâ confirms that two Urartian governors have moved their forces to within striking distance of Assyrian territory. Ašipâ further reports that he has moved the inhabitants of the north bank of the Tigris into secure locations and has brought the herds to the south bank where they can be more easily protected.⁵⁸

Although parts of the preceding analysis are admittedly speculative, my hope is that this contribution serves to illustrate an important point. Thanks in large part to the tireless efforts of Simo Parpola, a huge amount of textual data, not to mention many studies and analyses, are widely available. This has set the stage for the productive integration of ideas, methodologies and data from a number of regions, disciplines and sub-fields. I hope that by viewing a specific official from the perspective of microhistory I have illustrated the utility of considering new ways of analyzing and synthesizing the existing data. This analysis might lead us to consider social or bureaucratic mobility among Assyrian officials for example.

⁵⁴ SAA 5 21–22, SAA 5 25 and possibly SAA 5 30.

⁵⁵ SAA 5 21–22.

⁵⁶ SAA 5 21 Also see SAA 5 23 and consider SAA 5 41.

⁵⁷ SAA 5 31–33, SAA 5 35 and SAA 5 40 for example.

⁵⁸ SAA 5 21:11–e.22.

Could effective Assyrian officials work their way up Assyria's bureaucratic ladder or were positions in the Assyrian administration only allocated to individuals based on their social position or the influence of their families (cf. Grayson 1991b: 207–208)? The reverse assimilation of the Assyrian empire is another issue that might be addressed through this kind of study. If the name “Ašipâ” could be shown to be non-Assyrian, what does this say about Assyrian ethnicity? Might this official's career document the same process through which the Assyrian empire became “Aramaized” (Tadmor 1982)? And finally, such a study certainly allows us more insight into the mechanics of Assyrian provincial administration. Even though the king sent regular correspondence to his provincial officials, information flow was such that letters were usually written or reached their destination well after the fact. Clearly this left the day to day decision making in the hands of provincial officials. In a province like Tušhan where autonomous states such as Urartu and Šubria were a constant threat, espionage was a part of daily life, and the extraction of natural resources such as timber and stone were essential to the continued legitimacy of the Assyrian king, one miss-step could lead to disaster. In the pre-modern world the functioning of a large state or empire-level bureaucratic apparatus must have relied heavily on officials who, although perhaps guided by royal directives, made daily decisions in relative isolation from the imperial capital.