

# **THE ASSYRIAN KING AND HIS SCHOLARS: THE SYRO-ANATOLIAN AND THE EGYPTIAN SCHOOLS<sup>1</sup>**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The article highlights the presence of scholars from Egypt and Syro-Anatolia in the service of the Neo-Assyrian kings.

## **1. THE KING AND HIS RETINUE OF SCHOLARS**

In the mid-7th century, when Assyria was the most powerful state in the Near East and the eastern Mediterranean region, its territories stretched far beyond the Assyrian homeland in Northern Iraq: All of Iraq and most of Syria, wide sweeps of Eastern Turkey and Western Iran and almost the entire eastern Mediterranean coast were under the direct control of the Assyrian king, and after the invasion of 671 BC even Egypt, formerly under Nubian rule, belonged to the Assyrian block.

The king of Assyria ruled as the earthly representative of Assyria's supreme god Aššur and was chosen by the gods; they were thought to constantly guide him in his leadership and decision-making and communicated their wishes through ominous signs encountered everywhere in the natural world, their creation. The king employed scholarly advisors to monitor and interpret the messages of the gods and to perform the rituals necessary to keep the precious relationship with the divine powers in balance. Some 1300 letters and reports addressed to Esarhaddon (680–669 BC) and his successor Assurbanipal (668–c. 630 BC)<sup>2</sup> show dozens of specialists at work, advising their ruler and hence more often than not directly influencing his political actions. The preserved documents stem from the royal archives of Nineveh, then the main residence of the Assyrian court, and allow us

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<sup>1</sup> A first version of this article was presented in July 2007 as a lecture at the symposium “The Empirical Dimension: Assyriological Contributions” held at the University of Vienna at the occasion of Hermann Hunger's retirement; I would like to thank Gebhard Selz for the kind invitation and the participants for their comments. As always, my thanks go to Frans van Koppen for his observations and suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> Edited by Hunger 1992, Parpola 1993a and Starr 1990.

rare insight into the symbiosis and interdependency between the scholars and their patron at that time.

Simo Parpola's ground-breaking editions of the scholars' letters have made this rich material accessible for the first time, and I would like to offer him these pages as a token of my gratitude, for giving me my first job in 1997 but also for almost single-handedly engineering the renaissance of Neo-Assyrian studies. Simo has given many years of his life, and much of his energy, to the *State Archives of Assyria Project* and the *Corpus of Neo-Assyrian Texts*, a noble sacrifice from which the community of Ancient Near Eastern scholars has greatly profited. With great affection, I would like to dedicate this study to him which, as so often, builds directly on the foundation of his work.<sup>3</sup>

When working with the documents of the scholars' communication with their king, it is crucial to be aware that the known letters represent only parts of the correspondence of only two kings with only their Assyrian and Babylonian specialists. In this paper, I would like to focus on a point, which in my opinion, has not quite found the attention it deserves. While the Assyrian rulers of the 7th century certainly relied heavily on the Mesopotamian scholarly tradition we know that they did not do so exclusively: they also enjoyed the service of contingents of scholars trained in the Syro-Anatolian and the Egyptian tradition.

This is best demonstrated by a list of scholarly experts at court,<sup>4</sup> dated to the 17th day of the month of Kanun (X) but without mention of the year. For political and prosopographic reasons, however, the list can be dated to the period shortly after 671 BC when Esarhaddon's second, and successful, invasion of Egypt took place. The list starts with seven astrologers (*tupšar Enūma Anu Enlil*, literally "scribe of the canonical omen series *Enūma Anu Enlil*"; often abbreviated to "scribe" = *tupšarru*), followed by nine exorcists (*āšipu*), then five diviners (*bārū*), nine physicians (*asū*) and six lamenters (*kalū*). So far, this is the expected range of experts representing the five main branches of Mesopotamian scholarship. Diviners, exorcists and physicians, to use the most common if decidedly imprecise translations for these professional titles, are already well attested in royal service during the Middle Assyrian period,<sup>5</sup> as are of course also learned scribes: the "scribe of the tablet house" (*tupšarru ša bīt tuppāte*), who is listed together with two physicians, an exorcist and a diviner in a catalogue of palace staff,<sup>6</sup> is certainly the professional predecessor of the later *tupšar Enūma Anu Enlil*, a term not yet attested in the 2nd millennium texts. While the presence of singers and musicians at court is well

<sup>3</sup> My research was greatly facilitated by the use of the electronic *Corpus of Neo-Assyrian Texts*.

<sup>4</sup> SAA 7 1.

<sup>5</sup> The references are collected and discussed by Jakob 2003: 522–528 (*bārū* = MA *bāri'u*), 528–535 (*āšipu*), 535–537 (*asū* = MA *asi'u*).

<sup>6</sup> MARV 2 17:56; they are acting as supervisors (*bēlē perre*) for workers charged with creating a palace garden, see Jakob 2003: 224.

known from the Middle-Assyrian records,<sup>7</sup> lamenters are not attested at all so far; but it must be pointed out that also the Neo-Assyrian attestations are surprisingly rare, and the lamenters are more often than not missing when the royal scholars are listed as a group in Neo-Assyrian texts.<sup>8</sup> It may not be pure coincidence that theirs is by far the smallest group in the surviving scholarly correspondence of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal.<sup>9</sup>

But let us focus instead on those scholars whose sheer existence at court is not even indicated by the evidence of these letters. In our list the 36 experts representing the five branches of Mesopotamian scholarship are followed by another three groups of advisers, three “bird watchers” (*dāgil iššūri*), three so-called *ḫartībē* and three “Egyptian scribes” (*tupšarru Mušurāyu*). All Egyptian scribes and the *ḫartībē*, a term as we shall see used for Egyptian ritual experts, bear Egyptian names while the “bird watchers” have Akkadian names. Yet augury, the art of divining the gods’ will by interpreting the flight of birds, is a discipline characteristic of the cultural tradition of Anatolia and Northern Syria, and as we shall see the “bird watchers” operating in Assyria are frequently identified as originating from these areas. Obviously the members of the Mesopotamian school vastly outnumber the Syro-Anatolian and Egyptian experts, in the case of our list in the proportion 12 : 1 : 2 – and this is in all likelihood representative of their respective influence. Yet their presence in the royal retinue is highly significant, and in the following I will try to shed some light on what attractions they might have offered to the Assyrian kings.

## 2. THE SCHOLARS OF THE EGYPTIAN SCHOOL

As we shall see below, we are able to trace the augurs’ activities at the royal courts of Assyria from the early 8th century to the end of the empire. Egyptian ritual experts on the other hand would seem to appear in the Assyrian kings’ service only as a consequence of Esarhaddon’s successful invasion of Egypt in 671 BC; this is highlighted by the fact that while Mesopotamian and Syro-Anatolian experts are named among those experts taking an oath on the occasion of the new succession arrangement in 672 BC, Egyptian scholars are not yet mentioned.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, that among the specialists that Esarhaddon had moved to Assyria after the capture of Memphis in 671 BC were “exorcists, *ḫartībē*, [...], veterinary surgeons, Egyptian scribes, [...], snake charmers” is mentioned explicitly in a royal

<sup>7</sup> *zammāru* and *nu’āru*; see Jakob 2003: 518–522 for references and discussion.

<sup>8</sup> Note e.g. the sequence “scribe, diviner, exorcist, physician” in SAA 12 82: 6–7 and SAA 12 83 r. 5, the appointment of Nergal-apil-kumu’a under Assurnāṣirpal II (883–859 BC), and the sequence “the scribes, the diviners, the exorcists, the physicians and the augurs” in SAA 10 7, a letter dating to 672 BC.

<sup>9</sup> SAA 10 338–346.

<sup>10</sup> SAA 10 7. This has already been observed by Parpola 1993a: XXXIV n. 4.

inscription, known only from a badly broken prism fragment from Nineveh.<sup>11</sup> While this sadly incomplete enumeration of Egyptian specialists clearly aims to impress with detail, our list of experts at court features only two of these categories of Egyptian scholars: One group is the “Egyptian scribes” (*tupšarru Mušurāyu*) while the others are designated as *ḥartibu*; this loanword represents Late Egyptian *ḥry-tp* and/or Demotic *ḥr(y)-tb*, both derived from the original Egyptian title *ḥry-ḥb ḥry-tp* “chief lector-priest”, an office closely associated since the Old Kingdom period with the “House of Life”<sup>12</sup> and magical practice: the “chief lector-priest” recited hymns and incantations in the context of temple and state ritual but also performed apotropaic magic and funerary rites for private individuals.<sup>13</sup> In Late Egyptian and Demotic usage, the abbreviated title had become the basic word for magician;<sup>14</sup> this included (but was not limited to<sup>15</sup>) the more specialised meaning of dream interpreter, with oneiromancy being an increasingly popular form of divination from the New Kingdom period onwards.<sup>16</sup> In the Biblical attestations, especially in the stories of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and Joseph in Egypt, the *ḥartummîm*<sup>17</sup> figure prominently as experts in the interpretation of dreams, and it may be this kind of expertise which the *ḥartibē* offered to the Assyrian king; dream oracles were certainly popular with Assurbanipal who used dreams<sup>18</sup> to legitimise his actions in his royal inscriptions<sup>19</sup> and whose library contained the dream omen series *Zaqīqu* (also *Ziqīqu*).<sup>20</sup> Yet members of the Egyptian school may have been valued also for

<sup>11</sup> Bu 91-5-9, 218, column a: 9’-11’: 9’ [... x]x.MEŠ LÚ.MAŠ.MAŠ.MEŠ LÚ.ḥar-ti-’be-e’ 10’ [... LÚ].mu-na-i-šī LÚ.A.BA KUR.Mu-šur-a-a 11’ [...] LÚ.MUŠ.LAḤ<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ. Last edition: Onasch 1994: I 31–32, II 20. My reading of the end of line 10’ was confirmed by collation in the British Museum (31 July 2007). Note the survey of the Egyptian presence in first millennium Assyria and Babylonia in Huber 2006.

<sup>12</sup> The “Houses of Life” were part of temples and probably also palaces and housed knowledge in the form of manuscripts and experts; they were units of knowledge storage, production and administration as well as of education, see Nordh 1996: 107–132, 156.

<sup>13</sup> Ritner 1993: 220, 1995: 52–53; Nordh 1996: 209–210.

<sup>14</sup> Ritner 1995: 53.

<sup>15</sup> As Szpakowska 2003: 64–65 emphasises.

<sup>16</sup> Ray 1976: 135–136 (with Ray 1987: 89–90); Lieven 1999: 113, 121; cf. also Ritner 1995: 55–56 and Noegel 2007: 92–98.

<sup>17</sup> In the Hebrew text of the Bible, the *ḥartummîm* (or *ḥartummê Mišrajim*) are only attested in the plural form (Gen 41:8, 24; Ex 7:11, 22; 8:3, 14–15; 9:11; Dan 1:20; 2:2) but the Aramaic passages of the Book of Daniel also feature the singular form *ḥartom* (Dan 2:10; plural: Dan 2:27, 4:4, 6; 5:11). That this term is to be identified with *ḥry-tp* is a popular opinion among both Biblical scholars and Egyptologists; it is likely due to the setting and context of the stories and accepted e.g. by Edel 1976: 56, Quaegebeur 1985, Ritner 1993: 221 and Nordh 1996: 209. But note that Goedicke (1996) called this interpretation into question and instead advocated a derivation of *ḥartummîm* from *ḥry-tm3* “the one on the mat” → “The one on duty”.

<sup>18</sup> Assurbanipal’s dreams are discussed by Zgoll 2006: 189–215.

<sup>19</sup> As did his contemporary and rival for the control of Egypt, Tantamani king of Kush, in his so-called “Dream Stela” (edition: Breyer 2003; on the dream see most recently Noegel 2007: 100–102).

<sup>20</sup> For an edition of the eleven tablets series see Oppenheim 1956: 261–269, 295–344, with additional material in Oppenheim 1969. The earliest surviving copies come from Assurbanipal’s

their magico-medical knowledge as had been the case half a millennium earlier: in one of the Akkadian letters of Ramesses II to Ḫattušili of Ḫatti,<sup>21</sup> *āšipu* “exorcist” clearly is used to represent Egyptian *ḥry-tp*,<sup>22</sup> and this professional is meant (together with an *asû* “physician” = Egyptian *sjmw*) to prepare a remedy to cure barrenness in the Hittite king’s sister. In any case, the list of deportees from Memphis in Esarhaddon’s already quoted inscription clearly distinguishes between “exorcists” and *ḥartibē* which may indicate that the latter’s specialisation was seen as being profoundly Egyptian.

While structurally the approach of Egyptian and Mesopotamian ritual experts had much in common,<sup>23</sup> we can take it for granted that the Egyptian way of purifying and divining will have differed in detail from the routines of the Assyrian and Babylonian experts but most important of all the language in which incantations and prayers were performed was of course Egyptian, as were the gods the prayers were addressed to. Yet we can be certain that scholars and priests were busy trying to integrate the newly found Egyptian traditions into the Mesopotamian world-view; perhaps most strikingly, in the city of Assur, the heart and soul of Assyrian culture which boasted a sizable Egyptian population in the 7th century,<sup>24</sup> the god Nabû was also worshipped under the name of Horus.<sup>25</sup>

If we identify the *ḥartibē* at the Assyrian court as ritual experts of the Egyptian tradition, what then was the expertise of the “Egyptian scribes”? It is likely that they were specialists in the Hieroglyphic script, rather than the Hieratic and Demotic scripts in which the source material of the ritual experts was composed and which may have seemed to Assyrian eyes like just another variant of a cursive and quasi-alphabetic script. The hieroglyphs, on the other hand, cannot have failed to impress the members of a cultural environment that highly valued tradition and exclusivity in a writing system as a parallel to their own ancient cuneiform tradition, especially at a time when palaeography was a favourite and lively discipline of Assyrian cuneiform scribes.<sup>26</sup>

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library; however, Nineveh library records mention *Zaqīqu* tablets from the libraries of a diviner (SAA 7 50 i 15') and of an exorcist from Nippur (SAA 7 49 iii 2') that had been integrated into the royal library. The compilation process of the series remains unclear, see Butler 1998: 99–101 for a critique of Oppenheim 1956: 295–296. Note that there are remarkable similarities in the Egyptian and Mesopotamian traditions of interpreting dreams which due to certain shared hermeneutic practises cannot easily be explained as parallel developments (Noegel 2006: 102–105 and Noegel 2007: 105); the underlying similarity and therefore familiarity of the Egyptian approach may well have made it popular at the Assyrian court.

<sup>21</sup> KBo 28 30; edition: Edel 1994: 178–181 no. 75.

<sup>22</sup> As argued by Edel 1976: 54–57.

<sup>23</sup> Ritner 1993.

<sup>24</sup> Various Egyptian households can be identified as their members frequently, albeit not always, retain Egyptian names (Pedersén 1986: 125–129; Radner 2000: 101); they are often specifically called “Egyptians” (*Mušurāyu*), and it may be that this is primarily a designation of their profession rather than simply an ethnicon; cf. the similar case of the “people from Ḫundur” in Western Iran (*Ḫundurāyu*), see Radner 2003: 62–63. Are they the Aššur temple’s counterparts of the *ṭupšarrē Mušurāyē* and the *ḥartibē* in the royal entourage?

<sup>25</sup> Radner 1999a: 74.

<sup>26</sup> Scribes reconstructed – or, more correctly, invented – palaeographic sign lists following the

While modern scholars have taken notice of the remarkable influence of Egypt on 7th century Assyrian art,<sup>27</sup> notably the palace reliefs of Assurbanipal,<sup>28</sup> the effects of the presence of Egyptian scholars among the royal entourage – and also among the inhabitants of Assur – have hardly been recognised. The renaissance of dream oracles in Assurbanipal’s reign, for example, may owe something to their influence, as may the curious literary composition that we call “The Underworld Vision of an Assyrian Prince”<sup>29</sup> which seems to emulate Egyptian conceptions of the judgement after death; the topic most certainly deserves further attention.

### 3. THE SCHOLARS OF THE SYRO-ANATOLIAN SCHOOL

In Assyria, augurs are first attested in the lists recording the wine portions distributed to the various members of the royal court of Kalḫu in the early 8th century. They remain a fixture in the Assyrian kings’ service until the end of the empire.

#### 3.1. The augurs of Northern Syria and Anatolia

Augury was a discipline typical of Northern Syria and Anatolia, rather than Mesopotamia, and the origins of the augurs active in Assyria were often specified. These augurs from Ḫamath, Commagene (Kummuḫḫu) and Šubria are the heirs of a well documented 2nd millennium tradition practiced already by Idrimi of Alalah<sup>30</sup> and the experts<sup>31</sup> in the service of the Hittite kings.<sup>32</sup>

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order of entries in Syllabary A; a good example is CTN 4 229 + K 8520 from Kalḫu, see Wiseman & Black 1996: 33, pl. 135 and Curtis & Reade 1995: 203 no. 219 (K 8520). They also used these pseudo-archaic signs for new text compositions, see Finkel 1997 on CTN 4 235. On the phenomenon see Daniels 1992.

<sup>27</sup> On Assyrian “Egyptomania” see most recently Feldman 2004 and Thomason 2004: 157–161, with a convenient list of the known Egyptian objects brought back to Nineveh by Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal (p. 158).

<sup>28</sup> Kaelin 1999, followed by Feldman 2004: 144–145, 148, argues that the artistic conventions of Assurbanipal’s Nineveh palace reliefs showing the battle of Til-Tuba mirror those of the scenes depicting Ramesses’ II victory at the battle of Qadesh and similar scenes commissioned by Seti I and Ramesses III; the sacking of the very temples whose walls were decorated with these reliefs is reported by Assurbanipal in the accounts of his Egyptian campaign. Moreover, the presence of dagger-wielding demons on the reliefs adorning the doorways of Assurbanipal’s palace may be compared with similar representations of Egyptian demons guarding the Netherworld (Ataç 2004: 71).

<sup>29</sup> SAA 3 32.

<sup>30</sup> Smith 1949: 16, ll. 28–29.

<sup>31</sup> Written with the logograms LÚ.IGI.MUŠEN “bird watcher” and LÚ.MUŠEN.DÙ “bird breeder” – the two terms are used in texts of different periods but are synonymous (Kammenhuber 1976: 10, Bawanypeck 2005: 1–2); the underlying Hittite term remains unknown.

<sup>32</sup> Discussed in depth by Ünal 1973 (with a useful summary of the possible movements of the birds on pp. 35–41) and Archi 1975 (with a thorough discussion of the terminology on pp. 158–180); note also the recent summaries by Beal 2001: 67–73 and Bawanypeck 2005: 1–11.

The basic principle governing augury mirrors that of Mesopotamian extispicy: the goal is to receive a confirmation or rejection of a question put forward to the gods and in order to achieve this, various individual observations regarding the birds' movements in the sky, spotted in a certain area and at a certain period of time, are combined into a total result which is either positive ("the birds confirm it") or negative ("the birds reject it").<sup>33</sup> The augurs used both wild birds observed in their natural habitat and birds raised in captivity;<sup>34</sup> a depiction of a Late Hittite augur with his bird, kept on a string, can be found on his memorial stele from Maraş, his writing tablet and stylus identifying him as a scholar.<sup>35</sup> Hittite protocols<sup>36</sup> documenting the registered phenomena and their interpretation, and related letters,<sup>37</sup> allow us to reconstruct the method used by the augurs in some detail but the underlying theory is of course not explained in the available sources.

The discipline practised by the Syro-Anatolian augurs may need to be distinguished from the broader Mesopotamian tradition of observing bird omens, collections of which were integrated into the terrestrial omen series *Šumma ālu*.<sup>38</sup> While the known Hittite omen collections bring together observations on the flight of birds<sup>39</sup> the Mesopotamian omens do also focus on this area,<sup>40</sup> but not exclusively: they show an interest in all sorts of remarkable behaviour observed in different birds; such bird omens also feature in the Nineveh correspondence of the 7th century.<sup>41</sup>

The expertise of the augurs in the service of the Hittite kings was not limited to divination, as ritual instructions unearthed in the royal archives of Ḫattuša reveal. These tablets are the written records of rites performed by specific augurs who

<sup>33</sup> Ünal 1973: 33–34.

<sup>34</sup> Ünal 1973: 55–56.

<sup>35</sup> AO 19222, see Bonatz 2000: 22, Pl. XXII: C 65 and Hawkins 2000: 274–275, Pl. 125: no. IV.11. Note that Bonatz (2000: 99) interprets this scene, and similar ones, as showing a man with a hunting falcon.

<sup>36</sup> In addition to the Ḫattuša material used by Ünal 1973 and Archi 1975, new protocols from Sarissa (modern Kuşaklı) were published by Haas & Wegner 1996.

<sup>37</sup> In addition to the Ḫattuša material used by Ünal 1973 and Archi 1975, three new letters from Tapika (modern Maşat Höyük) were published by Alp 1991: 203–211 and two new letters from Sarissa (modern Kuşaklı) by Wilhelm 1998.

<sup>38</sup> Tablets 66–67, the end of tablet 72, (quite possibly the unknown tablets 73–78) and tablet 79 of *Šumma ālu* deal with the behaviour of birds (McEwan 1980: 61), with the omens of tablet 79 focusing on falcons observed during military campaigns (Maul 1994: 229); moreover, at least two tablets of *Šumma ālu* contain eagle omens and must be assigned to a position between tablets 61 and 66 (Moren & Foster 1988: 278). Forerunners to the bird sections of *Šumma ālu* are attested as early as the Isin-Larsa period (McEwan 1980: 58).

<sup>39</sup> Archi 1982: 293 n. 47 (with references).

<sup>40</sup> See Reiner 1960: 28–29 for a discussion of omens derived from the flight of birds and prayers asking for favourable observations.

<sup>41</sup> The letter SAA 10 58 contains a selection of bird omens quoted to the king by the astrologer Balasi, obviously in response to a specific request by Esarhaddon after a raven had been seen dropping something into a building – a positive omen as it turns out that predicts profits. When a falcon is observed hunting and losing its prey to another falcon, on the other hand (SAA 8 237), this is explained to the king as a bad omen announcing death.



are identified by name and sometimes also place of origin. Most of these rites were meant to neutralise the portents of “bad birds”, that is, of a negative omen,<sup>42</sup> and may be compared to the rituals of the Mesopotamian *namburbi* tradition.<sup>43</sup> But some ritual instructions have a very different goal, and these are linked to the augurs of Arzawa, the region of Western Anatolia. These rites<sup>44</sup> rely on scapegoat rituals to end mass epidemics causing death among men and animals during military campaigns – “if there is a plague in the army camp and people, horses and cattle die horrifically.” Why they are performed by augurs, rather than other ritual experts, is not immediately obvious. Yet this may be in part explained by the fact that augurs habitually went to war with the army<sup>45</sup> and therefore were on the spot when the first signs of an epidemic outbreak were observed. In the confined and crowded setting of a military camp contagious diseases could spread with alarming speed and effectively eradicate the entire army within weeks, if not days.

### 3.2. Excursus: Epidemic outbreaks affecting the Hittite and Assyrian armies

As the epidemic is said to affect not only men but also horses and cattle, some of the more obvious candidates for its identification – bubonic plague, malaria and typhus which do not trouble these animals – must be ruled out as the disease has to be communicable between humans and the animals in question. Therefore, an arbovirus disease<sup>46</sup> in the vein of today’s West Nile Fever<sup>47</sup> or the various forms of Equine Encephalitis<sup>48</sup> would seem to be a likely contender; to claim that the Hittite plague is identical with any of these modern diseases would of course go much too far, as viruses are constantly evolving and adapting.<sup>49</sup>

Yet today’s arbovirus diseases can give us an idea of what the ancient epidemic may have been like. The virus is transmitted from infected wild birds to humans, equids and other domestic animals by mosquitoes,<sup>50</sup> usually in and around hot,

<sup>42</sup> Bawanypeck 2005: 21–125 (editions), 153–241 (textual analysis), 293–298 (discussion).

<sup>43</sup> As also suggested by Bawanypeck 2005: 300–301.

<sup>44</sup> Bawanypeck 2005: 126–148 (editions), 241–264 (textual analysis), 293–295 (discussion).

<sup>45</sup> Únal 1973: 52.

<sup>46</sup> On the natural history of the arboviroses, see Fiennes 1978: 53–62. Bernheim & Zener 1978: 11 suggested to identify the epidemic among the Achaeans before Troy, as reported in the Iliad, with Equine Encephalitis, but to my knowledge an arbovirus disease has not yet been considered for the Hittite outbreaks.

<sup>47</sup> Acha & Szyfres 2003: 372–377.

<sup>48</sup> Acha & Szyfres 2003: 110–117 (Eastern Equine Encephalitis = EEE), 365–372 (Western Equine Encephalitis = WEE).

<sup>49</sup> Recent outbreaks of the West Nile Fever, for example, have been accompanied by an apparent evolution of a new virus variant (Acha & Szyfres 2003: 372), while during a 20-year long epidemiological study in the region of Hapetininga (Brazil) 16 different strains of the EEE virus were isolated from infected animals (Acha & Szyfres 2003: 112).

<sup>50</sup> For diagrams of the virus transmission cycles see Acha & Szyfres 2003: 113 (EEE), 368 (WEE), 375 (West Nile Fever).



swampy areas. Typically the virus first infects the equids; they become amplifiers of the disease which eventually spreads by mosquito bites to the humans and also to a variety of other animals, including cattle and dogs. The virus attacks the central nervous system of its host: the onset of the disease is sudden and its progress rapid – death tolls in the epidemics recorded in the 20th century AD are very high, with e.g. a mortality rate of 75% to 90% in horses and of 65% in humans with signs of Eastern Equine Encephalitis.<sup>51</sup>

The characteristics of these modern viral diseases and their transmission fit the bill for the epidemics killing men, horses and cattle in Hittite military camps well. The disease is encountered during campaigns to Cilicia and the Orontes river valley, swampy areas where mosquito populations are high. Since military campaigns always take place in summer at the only time of possible infection and since there is a high concentration of soldiers and horses, the conditions favour the quick spread of the disease. Finally, since wild birds are the original hosts of the virus, this may be another reason why specifically the augurs are involved in countering the epidemic: charged with observing the birds' behaviour they would be likely to detect the first symptoms of the disease in these animals; today the active surveillance of sentinel birds is part of the efforts to control outbreaks.<sup>52</sup>

We may assume that also the augurs in the service of the Assyrian kings worked beyond the discipline of divination and performed a variety of rituals. A number of *namburbis*<sup>53</sup> show that the idea of neutralising bad omens indicated by the behaviour of birds was well known in the Neo-Assyrian empire, and whether these rituals are Mesopotamian compositions, of Syro-Anatolian origin or the product of a fruitful exchange of ideas, it may have been convenient from a purely practical point of view if the person observing the bad bird omen performed also the appropriate counter ritual. The available sources allow us only to speculate whether also the Assyrian kings valued the augurs of the Syro-Anatolian school as ritual experts to avert epidemics during military campaigns. The fact that contagious diseases frequently haunted the Assyrian army is of course evident from the way ancient armies operated: soldiers' cramped living conditions had not significantly improved since the days that army camp epidemics had not only killed masses of Hittite soldiers but even king Šuppiluliuma I;<sup>54</sup> the famous "plague prayers" of Muršili II<sup>55</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Acha & Szyfres 2003: 112.

<sup>52</sup> E.g. chicken used as sentinel birds for EEE (Acha & Szyfres 2003: 115); note the pheasant casualties preceding an outbreak of EEE in the United States in 1973 (Fiennes 1978: 174).

<sup>53</sup> Copies of bird *namburbis* have been found in the royal library of Nineveh, in the Sultantepe library and in the library of a family of exorcists from Assur; they are edited by Maul 1994: 229–269. But the effect of "bad birds" can also be neutralised by performing a "*namburbi* against any type of evil (omen)", the copies from Nineveh and Assur containing long lists of specific birds; edited by Maul 1994: 465–483.

<sup>54</sup> Klengel 1999: 168.

<sup>55</sup> Singer 2002: 56–69, 113–114.

illustrate how dangerous these outbreaks were considered not only for the army but also for the entire Hittite state.

The fact that also the Assyrian army was ravaged repeatedly by epidemics is clear from the evidence of the Eponym Chronicles which at times supplements the routine mention of the destination of the Assyrian army with the note *mūtānu* “mass death; epidemic”: for the year 802 BC, the entry reads “to the sea; epidemic”; for 765 BC, “to Ḫatarikka; epidemic”; and for 759 BC, “revolt in Guzana; epidemic”.<sup>56</sup> While the mention of the rebellion in Guzana in the Ḫabur triangle, which was part of a widespread uprising lasting for five years, offers no clue to the exact location of the disease outbreak (which may have raged in all of Assyria<sup>57</sup>) the situation is different in the other two cases which state the destination of a military campaign. Both the coastal regions of “the sea”, in the reign of Adad-nerari III (810–783 BC) certainly the Mediterranean, and Ḫatarikka, a district of the kingdom of Ḫamath along the western bank of the Orontes,<sup>58</sup> offer ample possibilities for the swampy, mosquito-friendly setting that we have found to be ideal for the spreading of the arbovirus diseases discussed above.

Yet the most famous Assyrian army epidemic is that which forced Sennacherib (704–681 BC) to end his 701 campaign into Palestine. While the conventions of royal inscriptions ensure that Sennacherib’s official records are silent on this topic,<sup>59</sup> the catastrophe is reported both in Herodotus’ Histories (2: 141) and in the Bible (2 Kings 18 and 19; Isaiah 36 and 37):<sup>60</sup> The latter reports that the “Angel of the Lord” entered the Assyrian camp one night and smote 185,000 men whereupon the Assyrian army retreated from Judah. Herodotus relates what seems to be the same event in a very different way, the Assyrians forced to withdraw from Egypt after mice swarmed one night over their camp in Pelusium in the Nile Delta and weakened the army by devouring quivers, bows and shield handles; while the official Assyrian accounts mention the battle with Egyptian troops who came to the rescue of the Philistine city of Ekron;<sup>61</sup> an attempted invasion of Egypt under Sennacherib is not reported, albeit not entirely unlikely. Both accounts have long been thought to refer to an outbreak of an epidemic;<sup>62</sup> too little is known about the disease ravaging Sennacherib’s army to warrant an identification with a virus disease in the vein of modern Eastern Equine Encephalitis or West Nile Fever, yet the location of a

<sup>56</sup> Millard 1994: 34 (text B 1:16’), 40 (text B 1:54’, text B 2:49’), 41 (text B 1:60’, text B 2:55’), 57–58.

<sup>57</sup> Compare the epidemic of 707 BC, reported in the Babylonian Chronicle series (“There was an epidemic in Assyria”, Grayson 1975: 76: Chronicle 1 ii 5’) and referred to in two letters from Sargon’s correspondence (SAA 1 171:14 and SAA 1 180:11’, both from Western Syria).

<sup>58</sup> Radner 2006c: 58 no. 50.

<sup>59</sup> The official Assyrian reports of the campaign are discussed by Mayer 2003.

<sup>60</sup> For a recent comparison see Grabbe 2003.

<sup>61</sup> Frahm 1997: 11, Knauf 2003: 144–149, and Mayer 2003: 176–178.

<sup>62</sup> Powell 1929: 174–176; see most recently Laato 1995: 220–223 (note the response by Oded 1998) and Gallagher 1999: 241–252.

military camp at Pelusium in the swampy setting of the Nile Delta would certainly provide ideal conditions for the onset of such an epidemic. Herodotus' story can be connected with the "Asiatic" deity Apollo Smintheus,<sup>63</sup> lord of plagues whose sacred animal was the mouse. Classical authors hold the god responsible for various epidemics, most notoriously the pestilence caused among the Achaeans at Troy: Apollo Smintheus is one of the patron deities of Troy, and this of course brings us back to the Hittite counter-plague experts, the augurs of Arzawa, a region that also includes the swampy expanses of Wiluša/Troy. As scapegoat rituals in the manner of the "plague rituals" performed by the augurs of Arzawa were popular in the Levant in the early first millennium, and are even recorded in the Bible,<sup>64</sup> it would be surprising if the Assyrians were not aware of this distinct ritual tradition, and the augurs of the Syro-Anatolian school in the Assyrian king's retinue would seem to be most likely to practise the art.

### 3.3. Augurs in Assyria

Let us now retreat to more secure grounds and survey the evidence for augurs in Assyria, especially in the royal retinue.

The earliest evidence comes from Kalḫu and dates to the years 785 and 784 BC in the late reign of Adad-nerari III (810–783 BC) when augurs are mentioned in a very prominent position in the beginning of two lists of wine distributed to the members of the royal court, the army and foreign delegates. While augurs are named in such expenditure lists among the other wine recipients<sup>65</sup> – as are the scholars of the Mesopotamian tradition: physicians, diviners and exorcists<sup>66</sup> – they also received wine for ritual use. The two lists from the reign of Adad-nerari continue after the heading with the date with the following remark: "One seah and 5 ½ litres, the regular sacrifices. Four litres, the augurs (from Commagene). Two litres, the libations in front of the god Adad."<sup>67</sup> Here the augurs are not mentioned as part of the palace staff but rather in a passage dealing with sacrifice and ritual. We encounter similar, if shorter passages in the beginning of four later lists that can be dated to the

<sup>63</sup> E.g. Bernheim & Zener 1978 and West 1987: 267–271.

<sup>64</sup> Janowski & Wilhelm 1993.

<sup>65</sup> CTN 1 3 + CTN 3 145 iv 5: [x qa LÚ\*.da-gil]-MUŠEN.MEŠ [KUR.Ku]-mu-ḫa-a-a (dated to 784 BC). CTN 3 119: 5: [x qa] 'LÚ\*'.[d]a-gil-'MUŠEN'.[MEŠ] (no year date given).

<sup>66</sup> E.g. the physicians, the diviners and the exorcists in CTN 1 8:35–36 (dated to either 751, 749 or 735 BC) and the chief physician, the diviners and the exorcists in CTN 1 6: 20, 22–23 (date lost); note the new editions of these texts by Fales 1994: 371–374, 377–380.

<sup>67</sup> CTN 1 14:3–5: <sup>3</sup> [1-BÁN 5 ½ qa]a gi-nu-ú <sup>4</sup> [4 qa LÚ.da]-<sup>r</sup>gil'-MUŠ[EN.MEŠ] <sup>5</sup> [2 qa] SUR [ina IG]i [d]IM (dated to 785 BC); CTN 1 3 + CTN 3 145 i 3–6: <sup>3</sup> 1-BÁN 5 ½ qa gi-nu-ú <sup>4</sup> 4 qa LÚ\*.da-gil'-MUŠEN.MEŠ <sup>5</sup> KUR.Ku-mu-ḫa-a-a <sup>6</sup> 2 qa šu-ra-ri ina IGI <sup>d</sup>IM (dated to 784 BC). Parpola (1976: 167–186) suggested a number of improved readings which have been used here and in the case of the other wine lists quoted in the following. The dating of the wine lists follows Fales 1994: 365.

reign of (possibly) Aššur-nerari V (754–745 BC) and (certainly) Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BC): “Six litres, the regular sacrifices. Two litres, the augurs.”<sup>68</sup>

The purpose of the wine expenditure lists from Kalḫu is not stated in the texts themselves, but F.M. Fales, who was the last to discuss their purpose, has convincingly argued against the notion that they list daily wine disbursements and suggested instead, for purely practical reasons, that they are records of wine expenditures for a festival celebrated once a year around the time of the vernal equinox.<sup>69</sup> The fact that all lists, as far as their beginning is preserved, start with the expenditure for ritual activities would seem to further strengthen Fales’ argument. The mention of libation sacrifices to Adad makes it seem likely that the festival was held in honour of the storm god for whom Assurnaširpal II had founded a temple in Kalḫu.<sup>70</sup> Interestingly for us, the festival incorporated an augury performed by specialists from Commagene; whether the connection with the storm god, the most prominent deity in the Syro-Anatolian tradition, is a crucial factor here must remain uncertain.

Kummuḫḫu, as Commagene was known to the Assyrians, is situated just north of the modern border between Turkey and Syria in the region encircled to the west by the curve of the Euphrates and separated from its northern neighbour Melidu by a sizable mountain range. Adad-nerari III entertained close relations with this kingdom, a loyal ally and vassal of Assyria, and intervened on behalf of the Commagenean ruler Šuppiluliuma<sup>71</sup> (Ušpilulume to the Assyrians) when a coalition led by his southern neighbour Attar-šumki of Arpad threatened his borders. In 805 BC, Adad-nerari and his mother Sammu-ramat (Semiramis) followed Šuppiluliuma’s request “to cross the Euphrates”<sup>72</sup> and came to Commagene’s aid; the Assyrian intervention led to the establishment of new boundaries between the Syro-Anatolian kingdoms, commemorated by a number of boundary stones commissioned by the Assyrian ruler. The monument<sup>73</sup> erected on the border between Commagene and its western neighbour Gurgum survived for at least 32 years as Adad-nerari’s successor Shalmaneser IV (782–773 BC) confirmed the boundary in 773 and added his own inscription to the old monument – king Šuppiluliuma, who is therein mentioned by name, is still in power.<sup>74</sup> With Commagene and Assyria so closely connected,

<sup>68</sup> CTN 1 8:2–3: <sup>2</sup> [6<sup>2</sup> qa gi-nu-ú] <sup>3</sup> 2 qa LÚ\*.da-[gil]-MUŠEN.MEŠ (dated to either 751, 749 or 735 BC); note the new transliteration and translation by Fales 1994: 371–374. CTN 1 9:2–3: <sup>2</sup> 6 qa gi-nu-ú <sup>3</sup> 2 qa LÚ\*.d[a-gil]-MUŠEN.MEŠ (dated to either 745 or 732 BC). CTN 1 16 + CTN 3 122:1’–2’: <sup>1</sup> [6<sup>2</sup> q]a g[i-nu-ú] <sup>2</sup> [2<sup>2</sup> qa L]Ú\*.d[a-gil]-MUŠEN.MEŠ (date lost). CTN 1 28 + 29: 1’–2’: <sup>1</sup> [6<sup>2</sup> qa gi]-nu-[ú] <sup>2</sup> [2<sup>2</sup> qa LÚ\*.d]a-gil-MUŠEN.[MEŠ] (date lost).

<sup>69</sup> Fales 1994: 370.

<sup>70</sup> RIMA 2 A.0.101.1 ii 135; A.0.101.28 v 7–9; A.0.101.29:13–14; and A.0.101.30:54–59.

<sup>71</sup> Hawkins 1995: 93, 2000: 331–332.

<sup>72</sup> According to Adad-nerari’s Pazarcık stele: RIMA 3 A.0.104.3:10.

<sup>73</sup> The stele is now in the Archaeological Museum of Kahramanmaraş (= Maraş). For photographs, see Donbaz 1990: 15–24 Figs. 7–16.

<sup>74</sup> RIMA 3 A.0.105.1.

the presence of ritual experts from Commagene at the royal court of Kalḫu can be contextualised in the exchange of specialists that is characteristic of allied powers and so well attested in the diplomatic correspondences from Amarna and Ḫattuša.<sup>75</sup> Cultural transfer is also attested from Assyria to Commagene at the time, in the shape of the rock relief (with an accompanying Luwian inscription) of an official of Šuppiluliuma's son and successor Ḫattušili;<sup>76</sup> the relief at Malpınar is executed "in Assyrianizing style"<sup>77</sup> which is evidence for Assyrian stone masons, or at least their influence, in Commagene. The fact that the ancient art of augury was flourishing in Commagene in the eighth century BC is not surprising, especially in view of the proud celebration of its Hittite heritage as illustrated by the fact that the kings bear the names of some of the most famous rulers of the Hittite imperial period.<sup>78</sup>

As we have seen, augurs are well attested at the royal palace of Kalḫu down to the time of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BC), and to that king's reign dates our first evidence for augury in Šubria. This is not surprising as this kingdom, situated in the mountainous region to the north of the Assyrian holdings on the upper Tigris and stretching from the Tigris headwaters in the west to the borders of Assyria's arch enemy Urartu in the east, had successfully preserved its ancient Hurrian heritage, with its kings bearing Hurrian names.<sup>79</sup> During the reign of Tiglath-pileser, Šubria was allied with Assyria, and we encounter Parnialdê, an augur in the service of the king of Šubria, not only as an informer of the Assyrian officer active in the region but also as a potential advisor to Tiglath-pileser himself. After starting the letter to his king with a passionate appeal to campaign into the very heart of Urartu, to its capital Țurušpâ,<sup>80</sup> the author continues: "(Concerning) the seal(ed letter) of the king, which the king, my lord, has sent to me: I went and questioned Parnialdê."<sup>81</sup> A report follows on the recent manoeuvres of Urartian messengers who are busy forging alliances on behalf of their country, and then the letter continues: "Parnialdê and your servant (i.e. the author) have talked, but maybe I have told lies to the king, my lord? (Therefore) let the king, my lord, write to the Šubrian (king) that he should send Parnialdê, his augur. The king, my lord, may ask him why the birds make (the suggested campaign) favourable."<sup>82</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Zaccagnini 1983: 250–255. See above for the example of an exorcist and a physician requested by the Hittite king from Ramesses II.

<sup>76</sup> Hawkins 2000: 340–344, Pl. 166–168: no. VI.3.

<sup>77</sup> Kalaç & Hawkins 1989: 107; cf. Hawkins 2000: 340: "indistinct through weathering but of a vaguely Assyrianizing appearance".

<sup>78</sup> Šuppiluliuma (Ass. Ušpilulume), Ḫattušili (Ass. Qatazili) and Muwattalli (Ass. Mutallu), see also Hawkins 2000: 333.

<sup>79</sup> Ḫu-Teššup, the contemporary of Sargon II, Ik-Teššup, the contemporary of Esarhaddon and the last king of Šubria, and [...]gi-Teššup, one of Ik-Teššup's sons. For Šubrian translators (*targumannu ša Šubrê*) in Assyria, see Ulshöfer 2000: 166.

<sup>80</sup> For this part of the letter, see Radner 2005a: 95.

<sup>81</sup> ND 2673 = CTN 5 136–138:12–15: <sup>12</sup> [N]A<sub>4</sub>.un-qi<sup>7</sup> LUGAL ša ina UGU-ḫi-ia [L]JUGA[L] <sup>13</sup> EN iš-pu[r]-a-ni a-ta-[a]l-k[a] <sup>14</sup> a-na<sup>m</sup> Pa-[a]r-[n]i-al-de-e<sup>7</sup> <sup>15</sup> a-sa-al.

<sup>82</sup> ND 2673 = CTN 5 136–138: r. 11'–17': <sup>11</sup> mPa-ar-ni-al-de-e LÚ\*.ARAD-ka <sup>12</sup> i-da-bu-bu i-su-ri

The possibility of having the augur of the king of Šubria sent to the Assyrian court raises tantalizing possibilities for us to speculate about the way scholarly expertise was exchanged; this case suggests that experts in the royal retinue could be dispatched abroad by their patrons for short periods, in the expectation to have them return reasonably soon. This is a rather different scenario than the long term presence of Commagenean augurs at Kalḫu who possibly never returned to their home country. Walter Burkert's idea about the activities of "itinerant oriental scholars"<sup>83</sup> to explain the "orientalizing revolution" in the Greek world was met with some scepticism, also and in particular from Ancient Near Eastern scholars who rather focus on the scholars' lives in the shadow of their royal patron. Yet that the rulers of the 8th and 7th century<sup>84</sup> would consider it appropriate to dispatch their top experts abroad on state business gives us ample opportunities to reconsider the transfer of ideas, spearheaded not just by fugitives and disgraced rejects outside of the royal entourage<sup>85</sup> but also by the rulers' most valued specialists.

While it is unknown whether Tiglath-pileser in fact summoned Parnialdê, it is clear that the Assyrian royal court indeed housed Šubrian augurs. A contemporaneous administrative memorandum lists wine libations for the gods of Kalḫu – Šamaš, Ninurta, Nabû and Ištar – and other ritual activities, including that of eight augurs; at least one of them is from Šubria.<sup>86</sup> At the same time, specialists from Commagene continued to be active in Assyrian service: A very fragmentary administrative text lists food rations, probably of grain dispensed during a military campaign, and mentions a Commagenean augur: "From the 19th day to the 23rd day five seah per day, [...] bayu, the augur from Commagene."<sup>87</sup>

The friendly relations between Assyria and Commagene continued to blossom until the reign of Sargon II (721–705 BC) who even added the northern neighbour state of Melidu to the kingdom of his trusted ally Muwattalli (Mutallu to the Assyrians) in 711 BC. But the partnership ended abruptly and brutally when Muwattalli allied himself with Urartu in 709 BC. After the Assyrian invasion in 708 BC Commagene ceased to exist as an independent state and was transformed into the province of the

*a-na-ku*<sup>13'</sup> *la*<sup>14'</sup> *ket-tu*<sup>15'</sup> *ina* IGI LUGAL EN-*ia* *aq-ti-bi*<sup>14'</sup> LUGAL E[N] *a-na* KUR.Šub-*ri-ia-a-e* *liš-pur*<sup>15'</sup> *Pa*<sup>1</sup>-[*ar*]-*na-al-de-e* LÚ\*. *da-gil*-MUŠEN.MEŠ-šú<sup>16'</sup> *lu*-[*še-bi*]-*la* LUGAL EN *li-iš-al-šú*<sup>17'</sup> [*ma-a-na m*]*i-i-ni* MUŠEN.MEŠ *ú-ta-bu-ni*. My reading follows the copy on pl. 27. Lines 14'–15' are quoted by Parpola 1994: XXXIV n. 4.

<sup>83</sup> Burkert 1983 and 1992.

<sup>84</sup> Consider also the role of Mar-Issar, one of Esarhaddon's scholarly advisors, in Babylonia.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Rollinger 1996: 206–208.

<sup>86</sup> Wiseman 1953: 147, Pl. 14 = ND 3476:1–5, r. 1'–4': <sup>1</sup> *8 qa* <sup>2</sup> *qa* <sup>3</sup> *1* <sup>4</sup> *1* <sup>5</sup> *1* *ša* GIŠ.BANŠUR (remainder of obverse too fragmentary); reverse (after a break): <sup>1'</sup> KUR.Šu<sup>1</sup>-*ub*<sup>1</sup>-*ri*<sup>2</sup>-*a-a*<sup>2</sup> <sup>2'</sup> PAP 8 LÚ\*. *da-gil*-MUŠEN.MEŠ <sup>3'</sup> PAP 2-BÁN 8 *qa* SUR.ME[š] <sup>4'</sup> *ka-a-a-m*[*a-nu*]-*te* "Eight litres, Šamaš. Two litres, Ninurta. One litre, Nabû. One litre, Ištar. One litre, for the table. [...] from Šubria, a total of eight augurs. In total, two seah eight litres, the customary libation offerings."

<sup>87</sup> Parker 1961: 26–27, pl. 13 = ND 2442 i 6'–7': <sup>6'</sup> [T]A U<sub>4</sub>-19-KÁM EN U<sub>4</sub>-23 5-BÁ[N š]a U<sub>4</sub>-*me*<sup>7'</sup> [m]x *x*-*na-a-a* LÚ\*. *da-gil*-MUŠEN.MEŠ LÚ\*. *Ku*-*muḫ-a-a*.



General of the Left (*turtānu šumēlu*);<sup>88</sup> Muwattalli managed to flee. We can assume that although all advisers to the last ruler of Commagene were highly welcome additions to the entourage of the Assyrian king, the fact that their erstwhile master was still alive must have posed a serious risk to their loyalty. A letter to Sargon<sup>89</sup> illustrates how a group of augurs travelling with the Assyrian army<sup>90</sup> was kept under close watch; their strategic importance, however, guaranteed them a comfortable living standard and a powerful social position. Upaq-Šamaš, a military official active in the Assyrian-Urartian border regions, informs the king about a complaint raised by the augurs against their guard (*ša-maššarti*) who they claim has stolen from them. Sargon had taken the side of the augurs and ordered the trial of the guard and the return of their property but Upaq-Šamaš's investigation fails to prove the guard's guilt; nevertheless, he is dismissed from his post and replaced by another guard. Clearly, Sargon saw it as a priority to keep the augurs happy but the fact that a guard was set aside to watch over them demonstrates that their trustworthiness, especially so close to the Urartian border, was in doubt. That they had possessions with them that were worth stealing indicates that they travelled in style – a clear sign of their high status.

Yet another country of origin of an augur in the service of an Assyrian king is Ḥamath; the reference is found in a fragmentary letter from the royal correspondence that is difficult to attribute with any certainty.<sup>91</sup> As the augur is mentioned in conjunction with “the beginning of the reign” the letter could date to Esarhaddon's reign<sup>92</sup> whose correspondence occasionally refers to his heroic rise to power after his father's Sennacherib's murder and the omens predicting his kingship.<sup>93</sup> Yet it seems more likely to me that the king in question is Sargon II in whose early reign the city of Ḥamath (mod. Hama) played an important role. The Syrian kingdom of Ḥamath had previously lost its independence during the reign of Tiglath-pileser III who annexed the northern part of the country in 738 BC, thereby creating the Assyrian provinces of Ḥatarikka and Šimirra, while the southern part, with the capital Ḥamath, was conquered in 732 and transformed into the Assyrian provinces of Maṣuate and Šubutu.<sup>94</sup> But after Sargon II gained control of Assyria in the aftermath of the uncertain events surrounding the death of his brother Shalmaneser V (726–722 BC) one Ilu-bi'di

<sup>88</sup> Radner 2006c: 48–49 no. 13.

<sup>89</sup> SAA 5 163.

<sup>90</sup> In addition to making predictions these augurs may have conducted rituals to keep the army safe – note the rich evidence for Hittite military rituals (discussed by Beal 1995); how much of these traditions had been passed on to the Syro-Anatolian ritual experts of the first millennium BC?

<sup>91</sup> SAA 16 8:1–2: <sup>1</sup> [š]a LÚ\*.da-gil–M[UŠEN.MEŠ] <sup>2</sup> [LÚ\*].ḥa-mat-a-a. Due to its abrupt beginning the tablet may be the second “page” of a letter.

<sup>92</sup> Luukko & Van Buylaere 2002: 8–9 edit the letter as part of the correspondence of Esarhaddon but without giving their reasons.

<sup>93</sup> E.g. SAA 10 109.

<sup>94</sup> Radner 2006c: 58 (no. 50), 61 (no. 54), and 62–63 (nos. 60–61).



(also called Iau-bi'di)<sup>95</sup> started a rebellion in Ḥamath that quickly led most western provinces to rise against Sargon's rule; the revolt was subdued in 720 BC, and Iu-bi'di was brought to Assyria for his public execution by flaying. The population of Ḥamath was deported as a consequence and replaced with 6,300 "guilty Assyrians" who had been pardoned by Sargon<sup>96</sup> – these people surely had not supported his claim to the throne. Our letter may need to be seen in this historical context. The only passage that is sufficiently clear seems to refer to the augur's relocation to Assyria and his inauguration into his new surroundings: "I brought him here and personally said the following in front of [...]: 'Let the augur learn!'"<sup>97</sup> Ḥamath was, like Kummuhū and Šubria, a region steeped in its ancient Syro-Anatolian heritage,<sup>98</sup> and it is not surprising that the art of augury was practised there.

If we turn to the reign of Sennacherib (704–681 BC), a fragmentary passage of what may be an account of the building works of Nineveh in an inscription from the aqueduct at Jerwan mentions a sequence of scholars and craftsmen, "[...], an exorcist, a physician, an augur, a [...], a carpenter, a goldsmith, a smith, a [...]"<sup>99</sup>, who seem to have been relocated to the new royal residence just like Assurnāširpal II had personnel moved from Assur to Kalḫu almost two centuries before.<sup>100</sup> Then, however, there had been no mention of augurs<sup>101</sup> which supports the notion that augurs were only introduced to the royal entourage at a later moment. The presence of a sizable number of augurs in Sennacherib's Nineveh is confirmed by a court decision drawn up in 694 BC which deals with a burglary committed by one Kaskayu "The Kaškean" and four other men with foreign, possibly Anatolian names (Kanni, Babiri, Takali, Nanna); six augurs are among the witnesses, and while the only completely preserved name, Tawari, again is unusual the other names seem to be Assyrian: [...]-lamur, Ubru-[...] and [...]-kašir.<sup>102</sup>

When discussing the list of experts at court from which our study took its departure we have already encountered augurs during the time of Esarhaddon (680–669 BC) as a well established faction of the king's scholarly entourage. Augurs are also mentioned, unfortunately in broken context, in an oracle related to Esarhaddon

<sup>95</sup> Hawkins 2000: 401.

<sup>96</sup> According to a stele erected in Ḥamath: Borowski stele, side B:5–8: 6-LIM 3-ME LÚ.AŠ-šur-a-a EN ḫi-it-ti<sup>6</sup> gil-la-su-nu a-miš-ma<sup>7</sup> re-e-ma ar-ši-šū-nu-ti-ma<sup>8</sup> ina qé-reb KUR.ḫa-ma-ti ú-še-šib-šú-nu-ti "I disregarded the crimes of 6,300 guilty Assyrians and had mercy on them; and I settled them in the country of Ḥamath." Edition: Hawkins 2004: 160–161.

<sup>97</sup> SAA 16 8:5–8: <sup>5</sup> at-ta-ša-āš-šū ki-i [an-ni-i] <sup>6</sup> [q]ar-ba-ti-ia ina IGI [x x x] <sup>7</sup> [nu]-uk LÚ\*.da-gil-MUŠEN.[MEŠ] <sup>8</sup> [li]l-mu-du.

<sup>98</sup> Hawkins 2000: 398–403.

<sup>99</sup> Frahm 1997: 158, no. 69 + 121 + 67 + 117: [... LÚ.MAŠ].MAŠ LÚ.A.ZU LÚ.da-gil-MUŠEN [...] LÚ.NAGAR LÚ.KÙ.DÍM LÚ.SIMUG LÚ.[...].

<sup>100</sup> As recorded in the appointment of Nergal-apil-kumu'a: SAA 12 82–84.

<sup>101</sup> The relevant passages in SAA 12 82:6–7 and SAA 12 83 r.5 list the sequence of "scribe, diviner, exorcist, physician, smith, goldsmith."

<sup>102</sup> SAA 6 133 r.8: IGI <sup>m</sup>[x x x x]x da-gil-MUŠEN.MEŠ; the following witnesses are identified as augurs by using the ditto sign.

by Urkittu-šarrat, a prophetess of Ištar from Kalḫu,<sup>103</sup> and when the chief scribe Issar-šumu-ereš reported on the preparations for the scholars “staying in the palace and living in the city” to take the loyalty oath sworn in 672 BC on occasion of Esarhaddon’s new succession arrangements, he listed “the scribes (i.e. astrologers), the diviners, the exorcists, the physicians and the augurs”.<sup>104</sup>

It is certainly relevant to note here that Šubrian independence ended during Esarhaddon’s reign with the conquest and subsequent integration into the Assyrian empire in 673 BC. The hitherto trusted ally stood accused of harbouring Esarhaddon’s enemies, and all efforts of the Šubrian king Ik-Teššup to convince Esarhaddon of his loyalty proved to be in vain. The situation may have escalated due to the fact that the murderers of Esarhaddon’s predecessor Sennacherib were rumoured to have found refuge in the area.<sup>105</sup> That Šubria was very much part of the Syro-Anatolian cultural horizon is again highlighted by the fact that Ik-Teššup attempted to reverse the Assyrian invasion by having an elaborate scapegoat ritual<sup>106</sup> performed – as we have already discussed, a hallmark of the Syro-Anatolian ritual tradition. It was established Assyrian practice to drain an annexed country of its specialists, and the augurs hitherto in the service of the Šubrian royal house would have certainly been considered for the scholarly entourage of Esarhaddon. The three augurs in the already discussed list of experts at court, which can be dated shortly after the conquest of Egypt in 671 BC, may well have been former advisers of Ik-Teššup, the last Šubrian king.

Yet Šubrian augurs continued to practice also in their native lands. The latest evidence was only recently excavated in Ziyaret Tepe, the ancient Assyrian provincial capital of Tušḫan: A private legal document dated to the year of the chief eunuch Nabû-tappātu-alik, one of the very last eponyms of the Assyrian empire,<sup>107</sup> is witnessed, among others, by Šumma-lešir, a Šubrian augur.<sup>108</sup> This man, or another augur, is also mentioned in a short administrative memorandum.<sup>109</sup>

As is so often the case with professional titles, the literal translation of *dāgil iššūri* as “bird watcher” is far too restrictive to do justice to the expertise of these scholars of the Syro-Anatolian tradition. Beyond the art of augury, to which their designation refers, they also worked as ritual experts. They were considered authorities in the containment of epidemics wrecking armies on campaign and typically practised rituals of the scapegoat type. While the evidence for the activities of the augurs in

<sup>103</sup> SAA 9 2 iii 2': LÚ.da-gil-<sup>ˁ</sup>MUŠEN'. [(MES)].

<sup>104</sup> SAA 10 7.

<sup>105</sup> The political context of the annexation of Šubria is also discussed by Dezsö 2006: 35–37.

<sup>106</sup> Known from the information preserved in Esarhaddon’s Letter to the Gods (Borger 1956: 105 Götterbrief II ii 18–27); see the discussion by Leichty 1991: 54. Note also the possible connection with the letter SAA 16 164, advocated by Luukko & Van Buylaere 2002: XXXIX.

<sup>107</sup> According to the reconstruction of Reade 1998: 257 Nabû-tappātu-alik was eponym of the year 616 BC.

<sup>108</sup> ZT 12048:12–13: <sup>12</sup> IGI <sup>m</sup>MU–GIŠ LÚ\*. <sup>ˁ</sup>da-gil<sup>ˁ</sup>–MUŠEN <sup>13</sup> Šub-<sup>ˁ</sup>ri-i<sup>ˁ</sup>a-a-a; partially preserved in the fragmentary envelope ZT 12049 r.5. Edition: Parpola 2008: 40–44 nos. 4–5.

<sup>109</sup> ZT 13463:5: LÚ\*.da-[gil]<sup>ˁ</sup>–[MUŠE]N. Edition: Parpola 2008: 98–100 no. 25.

the Assyrian empire is admittedly limited we have nevertheless been able to trace their presence at the royal court and on military campaigns for about 200 years from the reign of Adad-nerari III to the final years of the Assyrian empire. When the cultural relationship between Syro-Anatolia and Mesopotamia is considered we must not limit ourselves to the Hittite imperial period<sup>110</sup> – our survey of the role of the augurs in Assyria has highlighted that there were ample opportunities for the intellectual exchange between the scholars of the Syro-Anatolian and the Mesopotamian tradition in the service of the Assyrian kings; certain phenomena like the treaty tradition that seem to indicate a cultural continuum from the Hittite to the Neo-Assyrian Empire may have been adapted from Anatolia only in the first millennium, via states like Commagene.

#### 4. OUTSIDE INFLUENCE AT THE ASSYRIAN ROYAL COURT

Let us conclude, then. The Assyrian kings employed not only Mesopotamian scholars as their advisors but also experts from foreign schools of thought, befitting the rulers of the entire world as they styled themselves. The “bird watchers” represent specialists in the Syro-Anatolian tradition of ritual and divination, with the *ḫartibē* their Egyptian counterpart while the “Egyptian scribes” were probably valued for their skill in the hieroglyphic writing system, rather than Demotic and Hieratic.

The presence of these foreign experts at the royal court of Nineveh illustrates its cosmopolitan nature, foreshadowing Achaemenid palace life. Assyrian civilization cannot just be seen as part of the Mesopotamian tradition or, worse, an inferior copy of Babylonian developments and sophistication. Instead, it is a colourful amalgam of features of the many local cultures out of which the Assyrian Empire was forged but also of those with which it was allied. Not all of these traditions are equally visible but this must not stop us from looking for them.

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<sup>110</sup> E.g. Archi 1982.