The Chronology of Ancient Assyria
Re-assessed

The modern reconstruction of the history of ancient Assyria is re-examined with particular emphasis on the two major sources, the eponym canon and the king lists. A previously unnoticed divergence is highlighted for the chronology of the crucial Middle Assyrian Period. Here, although the eponym data is incomplete, it can be seen to have been carefully copied from an older original, and its witness is to be preferred to that of the king lists which are demonstrably inaccurate and of unknown provenance.

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Part 1

The Chronology as Presently Constructed

Source materials

1. In the 19th century, Henry Rawlinson discovered the eponym canon which lists the kings of Assyria in sequence with dates of the years of their reign. Each year was named after an important personage, usually a high-ranking official – the eponym or šumu – but the king himself would be the eponym for one of the early years of the reign (usually the second or third) and for his jubilee in his Year 30. The eponym canon gives an exact chronology back to at least 880 BC and fragmentary details for about two centuries before that. It has always been held to be an impeccable source of information.

2. Royal inscriptions1 took the chronology back several generations further. A king would name himself on his inscription, boasting titles such as 'strong king', 'king of the universe', 'king of Assyria', 'vice-regent of Ashur' (the regent being the god Ashur himself), 'regent of the god Erītu' and so on. He would then give his father's name and (usually identical) titles, after which his grandfather would be mentioned in like fashion; and maybe also future generations such as great-grandfather or even great-great-grandfather. Some royal inscriptions include chronological details such as the year of writing, e.g. 'in the eponym of Erītu-Sin'.

3. Early this century the Nasouli King List2 was discovered, listing the kings of Assyria in sequence often with lengths of reign. In 1942-43 Arvo Pöebe published a detailed discussion of another king list from the 8th century,3 giving kings in sequence, almost all with lengths of reign, some at variance with the previous scheme, but most in agreement with what was already known. Some discrepancies were noted, with several examples of incorrect genealogical relations revealed when the king lists were compared with royal inscriptions,4 but also useful information which helped to fill gaps in the eponym canon and royal inscriptions.

Using the information in the king lists, a chronology for ancient Assyria was established from the fall of the empire in the 7th century back into the middle of the second millennium. Notably, the date derived from the king lists for Ashur-uballit I was found to be in agreement with the Egyptian Pharaoh's preferred date for the Amarna period, c. 1350 BC. This was a highly satisfactory outcome because Ashur-uballit was an Amarna correspondent, the author of two letters to pharaoh Akhenaten.

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The king lists are acknowledged to be late compilations, transcribed during the 8th century BC, although it is frequently argued that the Naisouhki King List, which recites the kings' reigns only as far as the end of Tiglath-pileser II, might be the two centuries older. 4

According to Poebel, when copying these texts the scribes refused to amend them and thus perpetuated any accumulated errors. 5 When compared to royal inscriptions, the Naisouhki and the Khorsabad King Lists contain identical errors but do different ones. Even if the Naisouhki version was 700 years older it cannot be the ancestor of the Khorsabad King List. The different mistakes can only be explained if there were two parallel versions or separate traditions concerning, for example, Ashur-nadin-apli, Ashur-nasir-apal and Ashur-nasir-Il in the aftermath of the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta II. 6 Poebel concludes that the extant king lists could have a single common ancestor but could not be derived one from the other.

4. The Synchronistic Chronicle was composed by the Assyrians to demonstrate the superiority of Ashur over Babylonia but contains many inaccuracies. For instance, a certain Babylonian ruler might be listed as a contemporaneous of a particular Assyrian, when in fact one cannot determine with any considerable accuracy that these two were at least contemporaneous. The point of the chronicle was to have been to ensure that canonical kings were not omitted from the chronicle or history.

5. Another late document is the Synchronistic History, written some time in the 6th century BC. This is a biased history, dealing with military relations between Assyria and Babylonia. As examples of how these lists and chronicles fragment and omit essential information, scholars have often noted that the chronicles do not list the names of kings, scribes, or other relevant figures.

6. Letters and chronic fragments also provide chronological information. These are the source materials. Now when examining the chronology of Assyria it is important to discern which of the available documents are the most trustworthy. Since it can be clearly seen that the Synchronistic Chronicle, the Synchronistic History, and various chronicle fragments are late compilations and contain partial and often unreliable information, they are to be regarded as less valuable sources.

Historians have usually based their chronologies on the king lists which present a ready-made dynastic sequence of rulers with reign lengths. In Brinkman's notes:

Because the king list preserves a detailed list of Assyrian rulers, their genealogies, and their lengths of reign which is supposed to be complete for more than a millennium preceding 722 BC and because it is the only text which provides such a checklist, essential to all historical work, there has been an understandable tendency on the part of historians to utilize this evidence gratefully, sometimes with little critical examination. 7

He then goes on to warn the reader:

Rollig has recently presented a short theoretical treatment of the typology and sources for kinglist studies and has published an assessment of the role of chronicles and contemporary documents in the evolution of the kinglist. He concludes that the extant king lists of Assyria and Babylonia are not derived from the same sources.

Now these king lists are late transcriptions of earlier texts and are known to contain major errors in the lineage of the kings. It is therefore to be expected that over the ages other uncorrected mistakes will have been perpetuated. It should also concern us that, over the several centuries of Assyrian history, we are presented with an unvarying picture of obsolete rulers who succeeded one another without any regnal labels or regnal numbers. We should be suspicious of this because there are two facts in the early history of Assyria where a more complex pattern of succession seems to have been disguised:

a) From the earliest period of the Adad Dynasty, when there was a three generations of Belshamin's family ruling in succession, starting with his eldest son Libniti, his second (supposedly) Entar-Sin's great-uncle Izbani, then the great-uncle's family continues. The next generation sees Shu-Nina's eldest son Shamma-Addar II rule, then his brother Erish III followed by the latter's son Shamsi-Addar I and grandson Izbane Dagan II. The current king is then interrupted by the rule of Shamsi-Addar III, son of an Izbane-Dagan, who was also the son of Shu-Nina but did not himself become king. Also Izbane-Dagan II, the Erish III line resumes rule with Ashur-nirari, the son of the former king Izbane-Dagan II. This succession is so problematic that one has to consider parallel dynasties as an alternative.

b) Similarly, from the Puzur-Addar to Ashurbanipal period, the family tree is highly complex. The early part of this family tree is readily explicable in conventional terms because three of the rulers, Ashur-sharari, Ashur-nasir-Il and Ashur-nasir-Il have short reigns of six and seven years respectively. The sheer frequency of change of ruler would explain the complex lineage.
Table 1: The Descendants of Adad

| 47. | Adad |
| 48. | Belabani |
| 49. | Libau |
| 50. | Sharma-Adad I |
| 51. | Enme-Sin |
| 52. | Bazu |
| 53. | Lulliu |
| 54. | Shu-Ninna |
| 55. | Sharma-Adad II |
| 56. | Enme-Dagan |
| 57. | Shamshi-Adad II |
| 58. | Enme-Dagan II |
| 59. | Shamshi-Adad III |
| 60. | Ashur-ninari I |

But, according to the king list, Eriba-Adad (although directly descended from a previous king (Ashur-bel-nishesha), has to wait 18 years for two relations to complete their rule — and only then could he begin his long reign. We must not overlook here Ber-suiker-ab who, although absent from this official genealogy, is known from two legal texts to have been not only a son of Ashur-ninari II but also a king in his own right. 

We should therefore entertain the possibility that there were parallel dynasties in this part of the family tree of the kings of Assyria. But there is not even the merest hint of this in any king list. However, the king list written in chronic style is constrained into presenting a linear sequence. One does not have to impute 'false rationalisation' or a desire to 'exaggerate antiquity' to explain the king list format — essentially this was the way the ancient Assyrians wrote about their past.

Table 2: The Ancestors of Eriba-Adad

| Puzur-Ashur III | Enlil-nait I |
| Ashur-shaduni | Ashur-rabi I |
| Ashur-nadin-ahhe I | Exil-nait II |
| Ashur-ninari II | Ashur-bel-nishesha |
| Ashur-nin-machinesha | Ashur-nadin-ahhe II |
| Eriba-Adad I |

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The Eponym Canon: a critical appraisal

The eponym canon is often used as a benchmark, used to confirm the veracity of the data contained in the king lists, and especially in upholding the absolute chronology of Assyria. When, in the aftermath of the publication of *Centaurus of Darkbean*, the Cambridge Archaeological Journal published a series of papers attacking the revised chronology of James et al., one of the most damaging criticisms was made by Nicholas Postgate, using the eponym canon as his main evidence. In particular, he claimed that the traditional years 1036-1074, 1033-1005 and 966-963 BC are confirmed by tablet KAV 21. We shall therefore be examining this, the crown jewels of Assyrian chronology, to determine whether all the claims made for it are justified.

There are many different tablets which together comprise what we call the eponym canon. Although there are data variations, generally the canon and the king lists agree as to the reign lengths for the kings of Assyria from the time of Tidik-Ninurta II to Ashur-hum. That is to say, canonical eponyms are the same in number as years reign. But this equation does not hold for all of...
Asya's history. In the so-called Vena canonical period, 618-641 BC, there are 50 known orphans. This is the first known regnal year. Moreover, in the pre-canonical era, we have numerous examples of eponym numbers exceeding regnal years, e.g. for Eriba Adad I and Ashur-uballit II, for Shalmaneser I, and for the Adamait II to Takultu-Dira I period generally. 65 This excess of eponyms has been deduced from studies of royal inscriptions, legal texts, business records, etc.

There are many possible explanations for surpluses. One of the experts on the subject of post-canonical eponyms. Whiting, postulates multiple eponyms for single years with one official based in one town and another based elsewhere in the empire. 66 A second expert, Falkner, proposed eponyms appointed at different times of the year to explain 'double' eponyms. 67 If a technical explanation such as one of these (and there may be others) was actually operative then we would regularly witness double or multiple eponyms. But if one takes into account human frailties and political intrigues, instances could also occur sporadically: they might occur in any reign.

We do not know how death in office would be viewed under ordinary circumstances, but if it were deemed inappropriate to record the name of a dead person as 'eponym' for the year, another appointment might have been made forthwith. The second appointee would become the 'official' eponym for the year but tablets bearing the first holder's name would undoubtedly also have survived. Similarly, if officials were expendable, one can certainly visualise instances where eponyms would lose their governors due to perceived incompetence or misbehaviour. In such cases the king might even issue a royal decree ordering the destruction of records bearing the name of the offending eponym but, nevertheless, his name could escape obliteration if recorded on contracts and other legal texts.

So we do not necessarily expect the number of known eponyms to coincide with the number of years of reign of a particular king. We may adduce a rule: there should not be fewer eponyms than full years of reign. But, conversely, there will be occasions when we know of more eponyms than years of reign. This being so, the number of discovered eponyms might reflect the maximum possible regnal duration but, unfortunately, it cannot be a reliable guide to the minimum or even actual reign length.

In the light of the above, the eponym canon tablet C92 for the reign of Takultu-Dira I, during the 8th century BC, is most instructive. As published by Ungnad, 68 this king has six lines of eponyms and the usual summary, thus summarizing meaning 'total, 6'. Now Ungnad thought he knew at least seven of actually eight eponyms for this king. He and other contemporary scholars excepted that two of these, Yari and Na'id ii, officiated towards the end of Takultu-Dira's reign. They were aware of references to Bi-milki (the eponym listed prior to Yari in the canon) and to Na'id ii in the 'annals of Takultu-Dira II' in descriptions of what might have been successive campaigns but that this they were not convinced - nor that Yari's and Na'id ii's eponymships occurred in separate years. Instead, they preferred to follow C92 as written, viewing these two as official holders for the same year.

This problem is addressed by Purcell who argues at a different conclusion. On the basis that the king list gives Takultu-Dira I a 7-year reign, he would have Yari and Na'id ii as eponyms for consecutive years: seven eponyms - one for each year of rule. 69 Later, Gurney and Finnie published another text known as STT I, no. 47, 70 a version of the canon which listed seven eponyms in a 7-year 'annum' list. Quite reasonably, since STT I, no. 47, agrees with the king list, its evidence is preferred to that of C92.

Nowadays, nobody credits C92. It is supposed that an error has occurred during copying in which one line with the name of a 'eponym' was omitted (or two names placed on one line). It is further assumed that the summary line has been altered to read 'total, 6' but, knowing how the scribe operated, seemingly with a good knowledge of the annal periods, there is a difficulty here: the incorrect numeral would have alerted him to the mistake and, if the missing eponym could not be located, he would have inserted a 'one after official' (see below) rather than have it amended. Since this complication for the scribal error is contrary to normal scribal practice, we may still have in C92 a valid a document. Instead, one might adduce a simpler scribal error for STT I, no. 47: the addition of the double eponym and alteration of the total - in the mistaken belief that one could not have two eponyms for a single year - because in the system operated in Neo-Assyrian times this never happened.

It is usually contended that the eponym canon is accurate back to 911 BC. In fact, this was only realized recently because for the reign of Adad-nirari II during the 8th century BC the record of C92 is rather fragmentary. When C92 was first published, Adad-nirari II was allocated the years 911-880 BC by Ungnad 71 but, as he noted, his years 500 to 855 consisted of names listed without the 'annals of Adad-nirari II'. No names existed for the years 905 and 902 BC in Ungnad's chronology. Grayson records: 'space is left for two eponyms at this point. 72 When STT I, no. 47, was published with a more complete list of eponyms for Adad-nirari II, it was soon became apparent that only one official was missing and that the reign length was 21 years, not 23 as originally deduced by Ungnad.

Modern scholarship has been content to follow the listing given in STT I, no. 47, for Adad-nirari II and to adopt in its 21-year 'annum' period which is in accordance.
This is followed by four listings of very similar appearance denoted by Ungnad ‘questionable if name’;\textsuperscript{19} again on Ungnad’s lines 20 X 30 we have the phrase ‘one after’. on his line 34 we have a ‘\textit{one after}’ followed by yet another ‘questionable if name’ eponym’ in other words no real names of eponyms are recorded here. One of the un-
damaged lines in the list of eponyms for Shalmanezer IV in column IV is likewise a ‘one after’.

What we are witnessing is a scribe admitting to deficiencies in his knowledge. The ‘one after’ entries are scattered among the names of the true eponyms, so this is not a matter of padding out an empty king list. Rather, it reflects a copying process wherein the scribe is pres-
ented with a damaged tablet on which a number of names are illegible\textsuperscript{20} since he is unable to restore these names from another source, he dutifully records the limma in its exact sequence.

The least valuable information on tablet KAV 21 is the record for the 6-year reign of Ashur-nirari IV. This is a king for whom we have no royal inscriptions: we know him only because he is placed in the king list as son and successor of the hardly-attested Shalmanezer II and as predecessor of the equally little-known Ashur-rali II. Column IV records:

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
& Ashur-nirari & Two after & Three after & Four after & Five after & Six total \\
\hline
year 1 & Tigrash palero & & & & & \\
year 2 & Ashur-bel-bilam & & & & & \\
year 3 & One after Ashur-bel-bilam & & & & & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

There are no names of eponyms recorded at all! Armed with just one piece of information – the length of this Ashur-nirari’s limma period – the scribe has reconstructed an entire reign, albeit a relatively short one.

The above examples illustrate the processes underlying the re-recording of the eponym lists in the seventh century.\textsuperscript{21} One might suppose that the scribe had two types of data available to him: firstly a form of king list with a sequence of kings and regnal years recorded, and secondly sources giving names of officials from which he could fill out the stated regnal years to create an eponym cannon. But we can see in most instances that the scribe has had access to a list of actual eponyms. In other places he has had problems. Sometimes the records were so sparse that our scribe had to insert artificial entries to fill up the lacunae. As we have noted, column V records some details of the reign of Tigrash palero II. The king’s name occurs as eponym both at the start of his limma list and in its 30th line. At the close of the list we have ‘total 33 (years)’ thus the cannon records a reign of 33 years for Tigrash palero II and we know this cannot be the result of a mistake since his jubilee occurs on the 30th line of his list. Poebel does not find the year total problematic since it is possible for a king’s limma period to exceed his reign length by a year;\textsuperscript{22} thus it does not seriously contradict the 32-year datum of the Khorsabad King List.

Part way down column III we find listed the epo-
nyms of a king given by Ungnad as ‘[Ninurta-apil-]
Ekur’.\textsuperscript{23} Here he is error because there is nowhere enough room to accommodate all this king’s attested suc-
cessors who include such long-lived kings as Ashur-dan I, Ashur-eds I, I, Tigrash palero I and Ashur-bel-kala.
The name should probably be that of Ashur-bel-Ekur.\textsuperscript{24} If we do place the reign of Ashur-bel-Ekur at this location, the previous reign will be that of Tigrash-palero I\textsuperscript{25} which causes further problems. Only the last ten eпо-
nyms of this reign are preserved, albeit in a fragmentary
state, plus part of the total line (unfortunately, the figure for the total is not discernible). Recalling how we found evidence of a jubilee in the reign of Tigrash-palero II, Year 30 of Tigrash palero I’s eponym list should also end ‘Tigrash-palero, shares’. It is not there. None of the last 10 lines of eponyms contain elements of his name or title. Ungnad did not comment on this but, in his day.
Table fragment KAV 21 Obverse (after O. Schneider, op. cit. [32]).

Tiglath-pileser I was thought to have had a 27-year reign: the generally stated figure of 38 years has resulted from the acceptance of a single datum found on the Khorasan King List. We may conclude that KAV 21 bears witness to a different tradition in which Tiglath-pileser I had less than 30 years of reign.

In summary, we may make the following points:

(i) the eponym canons in our possession are late copies, inscribed in the 7th century, reproduced from earlier documents.

(ii) a number of the original tablets must have been in a severely damaged state, with many lacunae. The scribe has faithfully copied entries, preserving all data.

(iii) the Amarna periods follow the original documents but, presumably, where these were too poorly preserved the scribe may have had to consult a form of king list.

(iv) similarly, the sequence of kings was determined by eponym data - the final eponym of a šummu-period being the first official of the succeeding ruler. Where the final eponym was either not recognised or recognisable, the order of kings would again have to follow that of a king list.

(v) if there was an error in the construction of the king lists, it was their accidental line that, error necessarily have been repeated in the construction of the eponym canon.

(vi) from both early and very late periods, we know of more eponyms than regnal years.

(vii) where there is a conflict of information as to reign length, e.g. for Tiglath-pileser I, Tiglath-pileser II, Adad-nirari II and Yitalkhu-Nimrate II, scholars prefer to give credence to the king list over the eponym canon.

Which record came first?

We know of eponyms very early in Assyrian history. Already in the reigns of Erītu-Adad I and Ashur-uballit I we have numerous examples, mostly on business documents. Earlier yet, the Khorasan King List records of its third group of kings (nos. 27-32 in the list, 'a total of 6 kings, [whose] [...] arms are destroyed' which implies that these kings had eponyms' and that there may have been a form of eponym list at that time. But should one really take that statement at face value? Remember, the eponym canons in our possession are already fragmentary from Adad-nirari II's time: why is a comparable statement (that the šummu's are not available) not attached to the entries for the early Adasi Dynasty, for the successors of Erītu-Adad I, etc? Surely the redactor intended to convey the message that there is no chronological information on these kings (no reign length known) because the following kings in the list, from Erītu I, do start to appear with reign lengths.

On the other hand, it is evident that some sort of king list was in existence and used, not merely as a school exercise, but by the king himself at the end of the 9th century. Adad-nirari III refers to himself as the descendant of 'Išu-kappara, a king of Ashur, [living] even before the kingdom of [Salhu]. Ptolemy interprets this as showing Adad-nirari's knowledge of the divisions of the king list, 'a handy compilation to consult whenever it became necessary to ascertain and to describe to others the position of an earlier king in the long line of Assyrian rulers.'

Like 'chicken or egg' paradox, we cannot settle the question of which came first, the king or the eponym list. But the known excess of eponyms indicates that, as early as the Middle Assyrian Period, the data kept on
reign length was different from, or separate from, the data kept on eponyms.
Thus there may well have been two kinds of lists of nonna preserved: (i) an 'official' list which matched the years reigned (such as was being referred to above in the Khorsabad King List for kings 27-30), and (ii) a 'complete' list, compiled from disparate sources including collections of business and legal tablets which survived the ravages of time. If the former list was lost, incomplete or destroyed then scribes of later times, lacking essential information, would need to compile a 'complete' list of their own, including the names of supernumerary eponyms. With respect to the reign of Tiglath-pileser I this seems to have actually occurred in the compilation of the Khorsabad King List or its ancestor.

In much later times, when further material had been lost, damaged or destroyed, the scribes of Ashur-balani's time can be seen filling out the gaps in their eponym canons: they were certainly in possession of long lists and this medium had been in existence for at least a century.

KA V 21/22: the crown jewels

Our next task is to reconstruct the damaged first columns of tablet KA V 21, the only extant source of eponym canon data for 963 BC and earlier. Those who would object to this extrapolation should pause to consider because KA V 21:

(i) is cited as supporting the traditional years 1080-1074, 1033-1005 and 966-963 BC,10 a conclusion based on the assumption that a modern calculation is perfectly valid,

(ii) similar calculations have been performed in hypo-
    thetical reconstructions of missing portions of king lists11 and here the process was complicated by unknown factors, e.g. the presence or absence of and length of
    reedition; and

(iii) the damaged sections may well be based largely upon much more ancient source material. Because in transcription the scribe has had to admit gaps in his knowledge, we can deduce that he has not been able to reconstruct an eponym list but has had to rely entirely on an incomplete original.

Since one can see that, already by the time KA V 21/22 was inscribed, there are lacunae in the records for other Middle Assyrian kings, the project would have to begin at a point from which sufficient information was still available. A start in the Early Assyrian Period is therefore not realistic. Logically, theos would expect column I of this tablet to commence from the first year of reign of an important king of (Middle) Assyria. We should be able to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tukulti-Ninurta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashur-nadin-apli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashur-nirari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enlil-kudur-unnau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninurta-apli-Ekur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashur-dan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashur-dan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninurta-tukulti-Ashur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutallki-Ninlu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashur-resh-ishi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiglath-pileser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is unknowable how the eponym canon recorded the reigns of Ninurta tukulti Ashur and Mutallki Ninlu, sons of Ashur-dan I, since neither completed a year of reign. We have to presume they would have figured as names 1 line each in column II. If there were 68 lines a total giving summary might also be found.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tiglath-pileser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Ashurdel] apil-Ekur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashur-bel-kaša</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliba-Adad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shamash-Adad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The lacuna resulting from rosin and damage at the bottom of column V amounts to about 26 or 27 lines, yet the Khuwarshid King List gives Ashur-dan I only 23 years of reign. Allowing a line for the summary, one would have expected for first 6 or 7 lines of the succeeding king, Adad-nirari II, to complete column V.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column VI</th>
<th>Ashur-nirari II</th>
<th>16+1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ishkali-Ninna II</td>
<td>6+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ashur-nirari-pit II</td>
<td>25+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shalmaneser III</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With column VI we have a clear bottom edge of the tablet and this listing ends with seven of Shalmaneser IV’s eponyms:

| Column VII | Shalmaneser I | 17+4 |
|            | Shamsi-Adad V | 12+1 |
|            | Ashur-nirari III | 29+4 |
|            | Shalmaneser IV | 7    |
| Total      |                  | 68   |

We thus have an internal proof that the reign of Tiglath-pileser was much shorter than the generally accepted 50-year figure which is given in the Khuwarshid King List.

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(a) if we extend to him the ten years it would mean that column I would necessarily have to be restructured unless the scribal error was corrected and an extra line was inserted into this column. Similarly, in column I, an extra year could be accommodated for the reign of Ashur-dan I (64 years, a rival tradition) without too much trouble.

(b) if we decide that the eponym cannot be read, according to all the reigns of Ninurta-Tukulti-Adad and Muqail-Nebu, we would have a ‘gap’ of 2-4 years which could be added to the reign of Tiglath-pileser I; but this would make 31 33 years, fewer than the 39 in the king list. As in (a) above, we would still face the problem of explaining why such an important king was not accorded his jubilee in Year 30.

(c) similarly, the selection of a 3-year reign for Ninurta-apil-Ekur is confirmed. Brinkman remarks of this choice:

Despites the current historical fashion which prefers ‘13’ rather than ‘9’ years for the length of the reign.

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Tiglath-pileser III | Ashur-nirari III
VIII | VI
Shalmaneser IV

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Tablet fragment KAV 14 (Restored after O. Suter, op. cit. (32)).
of Nimrate-apil-Ekur, it should be pointed out that there is not a single shred of positive evidence in favor of either alternative.84

But now we have the evidence of KAV 21 which tilts the balance in favor of the shorter reign.85

Having decided that Tighalt-pileser I's reign was only 29 years, we find that we have many more eponyms than reigns of reign.86 Savoretti gives 46+5 and F. Reiner who has considerably revised the latter's work, has at least 38, and possibly as many as 42.87 If, as we argued, the damaged section of KAV 21/22 was largely copied, not reconstructed, its deduced 29-year reign for Tighalt-
pileser I was probably based on the 'official' eponym list, thus the '53 years' of the Khorsabad King List would be based upon the compilation of later scribes, incorporating some (but not all) of the supernumerary eponyms.88

We can elaborate upon this argument. Savoretti, having identified 46+ eponyms for Tighalt-pileser I, attempted to identify the eleven listed on KAV 21. The result was disappointing: five or six matched but five were not identifiable.89 If his true reign length was 39 years and multiples eponyms occurred only on an occasional basis, one would not expect to discover many more names of Eanna than the 46+ known to Savoretti. Yes, because of the unmatched officials listed on KAV 21, there should be at least another five as yet uncovered for this king. Clearly, the area of sporadic multiple eponyms begins to look untenable. Perhaps, then, we should entertain the notion of regular dual eponyms (i.e. two officials every year), in which case, we could more readily accept a reign of only 29 years and be looking for a total of 58 named officials; among the missing dozen we are likely to find the five hitherto unrecognizable on KAV 21.

But why would the practice of dual eponyms have started in the reign of Tighalt-pileser I? And for that matter, why did it not endure? We may have a clue to these questions from Brinkman's study of the Broken Obelisk, which he argues properly belongs to the reign of Ashurbanibal.90 Various eponyms are named in this inscription in relation to dates from different times of the year. Brinkman concludes that:

the beginning month of the eponymate was subject to variation at this time, in short that the earlier Assyrian lunar calendar had not yet been adjusted to the Babylonian system of intercalary months, despite the recent introduction of Babylonian moon names into Assyria.91

Tighalt-pileser I's inscriptions usually cite Assyrian month names but in one of his annals he does give the Babylonian equivalent.92 By the time Ashurbanibal accedes the throne we see the exclusive usage of Babylonian month names. Thus Brinkman deduces that there was a calendar change at about this time.93 Instability is still detected in Ashurbanibal's reign, when eponyms were appointed in the 3rd, 4th and 5th months. What Brinkman may not have realised is that this situation is just what we would expect where dual eponymy was the norm, as postulated, for example, by Fowke.94

A questionable absolute chronology?

We have already noted a number of examples of conflict between the sources: the eponym canon gives reigns of 22 and 23 years for Tighalt-pileser II and Adad-nirari II respectively, whereas modern scholarship has determined that the Khorsabad King List figures of 32 and 21 years are probably correct. In these two instances, scribal errors are blamed for the discrepancies.

But in other instances where scribal error in recording the canon looks improbable, the evidence of the king list would still appear to be paramount. We have seen two examples: the reigns of Tukulti-Ninurta II (where we were unable to decide from internal evidence which tradition was correct) and Tighalt-pileser I. The essential difference in these cases is that the canon records fewer years than the king list. For the latter to be at fault would require major scribal error, whereas the king list figure can in each instance be attributed to a compilation which included some of the supernumerary eponyms.

If we compare the chronological details given in the king lists and eponym canons we see that the former presents basic data as taking its reign-lengths whereas the latter gives detailed data, firstly as a count of individually named years which can, luckily, be counted out on a damaged tablet and secondly in a totally-governing summary line. No such detail is given in the king list: we have either to accept or reject its figures without knowing how or from where they were derived. In the light of this, it is very odd that scholarship has chosen to adhere to statements of the king list. It is doubly so where, because the king lists diverge from the royal inscriptions on matters of lineage, the king lists are accepted at being being more detailed but conflicting sources? Here we may again note Brinkman's observations:

One does not wish to be overly sceptical about the data of the Assyrian kinglist tradition. But there is a tendency when dealing with such a unique and – at least in its later portions – seemingly scientific document, to forget that all of its data may not be equally reliable.95

Clearly any methodology which treats the king list tradition as paramount is faulty. The evidence of the
eponym can be no less reliable than that of the 'Ang list. Indeed, in places where the former indicates a shorter reign length than the latter, it is the more credible source of chronological information. Moreover, despite apparent anomalies, we should question whether or not the king lists were ever intended to be chronologically accurate.

Oppenheim has pointed out privately the similarity in the distinctive shape of Khššš/Sasdas and the ruled-off inscriptive sections of some form of text at Ashur (2WDOD 24 nos. 18, 28, etc.) and has suggested that certain copies of the Assyrian kinglist may have been intended for funerary or ceremonial purposes (rather than for strictly chronological ends). 18

Brinkman continues (in footnote):

The chronological function of the genealogical list of the Harnissu Dynasty (Findsheet, JCS 20 [1960], 95-118), as indicated in the latter part of the text, is of particular relevance here, since this is the only document of this type for which we have direct evidence concerning its Sin in Leben. 19

Weiss Brinkman makes these observations of the 8th-century king lists; he does not comment in like fashion on the third main tradition— that described by Nossouhi. This tablet’s reverse has its columns reversed and is upside down to the obverse. 20 Irvin Porter has suggested that, since the top is damaged, it also could possibly be an amulet text. 21

Conclusion

We have reason to suspect that the generally accepted chronology is artificially long on these calculations by a minimum of 20 years. Tighašeši’s reign is over- stated to the tune of a decade and a similar 10-year reduction of Ninurta-apil-Ekur’s tenure is indicated. Furthermore, we have demonstrated that the eponym canon does not, as has been assumed to great effect over the years, entirely support the chronology of the king lists. Rather, in the crucial Middle Assyrian Period, its single, fragmented tablet is in conflict with the latter’s long chronology, the provenance of whose statements remains unknown.

In passing, we should note the effect of removing 20 years from Assyrian chronology on the Aramaic synchronism. Brinkman’s dates for Ashur-uballit I are generally accepted: 1393-1328 BC. 22 These now become 1343-1308 BC. Likewise, Küchler’s dates for the 18th Dynasty are the norm, Akhenaten’s reign (co-regency theory) being 1332-1326, Solomon’s 1328-1306, Tuthmosis III’s 1326-1279, etc. The dates for Sobekpalas are usually given as c. 1380-1310 (three long reigns, last (fourth) of the Low chronology with 1343-132/12/ 12 or 1319/18). 23 Therefore the new revised dates for Ashur-uballit I have a decisive role to play in the controversy over High, Middle or Low chronologies.

Part II we shall attempt to reconstruct the chronology of ancient Assyria, initially without referring to the king lists. Our reconstructions will go where the indications naturally take us—free of the over-riding constraint of creating a long chronology which would prove agreeable to the Egyptians. Since the traditional chronology of Egypt is clearly in conflict with the best data, we shall feel free to examine whether the new, alternative reconstruction of Assyrian chronology can be moulded to accommodate other, revised Egyptian chronologies.

Notes and References

5. The possible date of writing of the various King Lists is currently evaluated by Brinkman, op. cit. [4], 210-14. An 8th-century date is currently indicated for Sasanids and Nossouhi, a 11th-century date proposed for NAHI, AAIHL, and maybe also NAH.
7. A. Parrot, op. cit. [9], 1984, p. 484-90. See also Brinkman, op. cit. [4], 401-12.
8. For example see Parrot, op. cit. [6], 1984, p. 40.
15. A. Parrot, op. cit. [6], 1984, p. 244-45.
17. C. Sauer: "A palaeo-turkic word: Maqia", JCS 39, 1939, pp. 33-35 gives at least 9 years for the period of the combined reigns of Ashur-uballit I and Ashur-nasirpal I. There is some uncertainty as to the actual numbers of years of their two reigns (at the central diplomatic officials who were responsible for the storage of legal and business tablets often lived through more than one reign and/or because in many instances we have only partial data on the eponyms who cannot be included in the collection). For the Assyrian correspondence of Long and Short reigns, see Delougaz, Turkish Correspondence, pp. 183-84 (1943). For Long and Short reigns, see Delougaz, Turkish Correspondence, pp. 183-84 (1943).
18. D. Poupkal, op. cit. [18], 1975, gives more than 34 synapses for his 32nd year.
20. R. Whiting, op. cit. [16], 1977, p. 72.
22. A. Parrot, op. cit. [6], 1984, p. 244-45.
24. See H. Giller, op. cit. [29].

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