STATE ARCHIVES OF ASSYRIA STUDIES

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THE EPONYMS OF THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE 910–612 BC

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INTRODUCTION

Three methods for distinguishing one year from another were used in the ancient Near East. From the start of the Early Dynastic Period in Egypt, *c.* 3000 BC, and from about 2400 BC in Babylonia come examples of years named after an important event.[1] This system, or a variation, continued until the end of the Old Kingdom in Egypt, *c.* 2150 BC, and until the end of the First Dynasty of Babylon in the east *c.* 1595 BC, then it gave way to a simple numbering of the years of each king's reign and, in Egypt, to other, cyclical, reckonings. When a king died, the remaining months of the current year were usually termed the 'accession year' of the next ruler, his first year commencing with the next new calendrical year. The third way of dating was by eponyms. Each year was named after a high officer of state, termed *līmu* (or *limmu*) in Akkadian. How and when this method began is uncertain, for although dating by officials is found in some Sumerian texts of the mid-third millennium BC, it is otherwise confined to Assyria from the nineteenth to the seventh centuries BC. From Assyria this system of naming years is believed to have passed to Greece in the archonship and to Rome in the consular dating.

Applications of all these systems are known from ancient Mesopotamia in dating records of royal campaigns, prestigious building projects, or diplomatic exchanges, but most widely on legal, administrative and business documents that required a date by their very nature. However, neither ancient secretaries nor modern scholars could set documents dated by year names or by eponyms in order without knowledge of the names in correct sequence. Accordingly, the scribes drew up lists and some of them, reaching into the third millennium BC, have survived, though incompletely.[2] With year-names distinction of one from another was relatively easy, while under the eponym system an official might hold the office more than once, or there might be two eponyms bearing the same name, so the men's titles could be added to distinguish between them.

Early in the history of Assyriology, Henry Rawlinson noticed lists of officials among the thousands of tablets and fragments recovered from Nineveh by Layard. After initially setting them aside as uninteresting, Rawlinson

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[1] For the Egyptian material see P. Kaplony, *Die Inschriften der Ägyptischen Frühzeit* (Wiesbaden 1963); for the Babylonian see the collection made by A. Ungnad, RlA 2 (1938) 133-95; more recent lists for the line of Gudea at Lagash and for the Third Dynasty of Ur are given in M. Sigrist and T. Gomi, *The Comprehensive Catalog of Published Ur III Tablets*, (Bethesda, MD 1991) 317-29, and for the Dynasty of Akkad in H. Hirsch, AfO 20 (1963) 1-77 (augmented by yet more recent publications such as M. E. Cohen, JCS 34 [1976] 227-32); A. Archi in A. Archi (ed.), *Eblaite Personal Names and Semitic Name-Giving*, Archivi reali di Ebla, Studi 1 (Rome 1988) 205-206 mentions year names from Ebla, probably from the Early Dynastic III period, which also give the year number, like year names of that time from Lagash and other Babylonian cities.

[2] The basic collection of year name lists from Babylonia is given in RlA 2, 131-96.

realized their importance as lists of the eponym officials in order and issued his first description of them in 1862.[3] He announced more examples during the next five years, publishing some in collaboration with E. Norris in *Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia* II, in 1866. Various scholars immediately investigated and discussed these texts, especially because of their relevance for biblical chronology.

Early in the decipherment of cuneiform inscriptions, scholars were able to identify some Assyrian and Babylonian kings with those named in Hebrew and Greek texts. They constructed tentative chronological schemes using those sources and the rapidly increasing information from Mesopotamia. Especially valuable were the names and lengths of reign of rulers of Babylon which Ptolemy recorded in the second century AD. Some of them are associated with lunar eclipses, the most useful being years one and two of 'Mardokempados' of Babylon, which can be set in 721 and 720 BC through Ptolemy's chronology. After a twelve-year rule that king gave place to 'Arkeanos' ('Αρκεάνος) who reigned for five years, commencing in 709/8 BC. He can be identified with the Assyrian king Sargon,[4] and Assyrian tablets from his reign sometimes bear a double date (see below, pp. 70-71): 'Eponymate of X, year Y of Sargon king of Assyria, year Z king of Babylon.' These dates agree with the length of reign given by Ptolemy, just as the names of the kings before and after Sargon agree sufficiently with Akkadian sources (Mardokempados is Merodach-baladan).[5] The note of a solar eclipse in the eponymate of Bur-Saggilê during the reign of Aššur-dān III, fixed astronomically at 15th/16th June, 763 BC (Julian date), locks the chronology of these independent sources into place.[6]

In 1875, George Smith issued *The Assyrian Eponym Canon*, a monograph containing translations of all the known lists of eponyms and the references to them in date-lines on Assyrian texts of all sorts. Important manuscripts came to light after Smith's publication, both from Nineveh and from Assur, provoking more discussion. Friedrich Delitzsch gave copies of the major texts in his *Assyrische Lesestücke*,[7] and translations of the major texts appeared in several works.[8] No standard, collected edition was published until 1938, when Arthur Ungnad's compilation 'Eponymen' appeared in the *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, edited by E. Ebeling and B. Meissner.[9] Smith had given the texts in English only, Ungnad set them out in transliteration, putting the lists of names side by side in synoptic form. Following Smith's lead, Ungnad listed texts dated by eponyms, for their date-lines could help to restore broken names and titles in the Lists; Smith gave every text known to him, Ungnad only a selection. The article by Ungnad, with some corrections from Ernst Weidner,[10] has remained the basic edition of the Eponym lists.

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3 'Assyrian history,' *The Athenaeum* 1805 (31 May, 1862) 724-25.

4 Note the spelling of his name in the Septuagint at Isiah 20:1, similarly without the initial sibilant: Arna (Αρνα).

5 See G. Smith, *The Assyrian Eponym Canon*, ch. V; A. Ungnad, 'Eponymen,' RlA 2, 414.

6 The discovery of this vital datum was announced by H. C. Rawlinson in *The Athenaeum* 2064 (18 May, 1867) 660-61.

7 2nd edition, Leipzig (1878) 87-94.

8 Notably E. Schrader, *Keilinschriften und das Alte Testament* (Giessen 1872) 308-31, 3rd ed. (1883) 470-89, *Keilinschriftliche Bibliothek* I (Berlin 1889) 208-15, III 2 142-47; H. Winckler, *Keilinschriftliches Textbuch zum Alten Testament*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig 1903) 73-82; R. W. Rogers, *Cuneiform Parallels to the Old Testament* (New York 1912) 219-38; the most widely used is in D. D. Luckenbill ARAB II §§ 1197-98; the most recent is in J.-J. Glassner, *Chroniques mésopotamiens* (Paris 1993) 161-70 (Eponym Chronicles only).

9 Vol. 2, 412-57.

10 AfO 13 (1939-41) 308-18.

The present work gives all the texts from Nineveh in cuneiform copy, with reproductions of copies of texts from Assur made by Otto Schroeder and published in 1920, and O. R. Gurney's copies of two lists found at Sultantepe (ancient Ḫuzirina) in 1952 and published first in 1953, finally in 1957 and 1964. Helpful as Ungnad's synoptic layout is, a year by year arrangement has been preferred, gathering into one entry the information given for a single year by every List.

The date-lines from Assyrian texts have long been recognized as an important supplement to the Eponym Lists, so, following Smith's example, a catalogue of as many examples as could be collected is added. Comparison of the writings of the same dates underlines the variety permitted within the cuneiform writing system and sometimes helps in the understanding of historical spellings.