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Ashurbanipal and Objects for Esagil and Ešarra: A Case Study of Erasing, Removing, and Replacing Texts at the Height of the Assyrian Empire

Abstract: The destruction of Babylon and the removal of the god Marduk and prized cult objects from his temple Esagil in 689 BCE caused a great deal of changes in Babylonia and Assyria. Sennacherib's alterations to the Aššur temple and cult during the final years of his reign (r. 704–681 BCE) had a significant impact on the how his son Esarhaddon (r. 680–669 BCE) and grandson Ashurbanipal (r. 668–c. 631 BCE) supported the principal cults of the Assyrian Empire. This paper explores how Ashurbanipal navigated the complex alterations made to the Aššur temple and cult in Assur by his grandfather in order to restore Marduk's temple and cult in Babylon. This difficult-to-navigate task required Ashurbanipal to appropriate metal-plated objects from the Aššur temple (Ešarra), to remove inscriptions of his grandfather written on those holy items, and to replace those texts with new inscriptions dedicated to the objects' original owner, Marduk.

1 Introduction

When Assyria's last great king, Ashurbanipal (r. 668–c. 631 BCE), ascended the throne in late 669 BCE, he inherited the Assyrian Empire at the apex of its territorial expansion.¹ His vast holdings stretched from the Zagros Mountains in the east to the Mediterranean Sea and Cilicia in the west. From the very outset of his long reign, Ashurbanipal actively supported Assyria's most important temple Ešarra

¹ For overviews of Ashurbanipal's reign and inscriptions (with references to previous literature), see, for example, Novotny and Jeffers 2018, 1–36; Jeffers and Novotny 2023, 1–26; Frahm 2023, 273–300; Novotny, Jeffers and Frame 2023, 1–46; and Ponchia and Lanfranchi 2024, 293–328. The dates for Ashurbanipal's reign follow those given by the Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period (RINAP) project (<<https://oracc.org/rinap/index.html>>, accessed on 21 January 2025). For a recent discussion, see Novotny, Jeffers and Frame 2023, 26–31. Note that the name of the Assyrian national god and the city with the same name are spelled respectively here as (the god) Aššur and (the city) Assur. The translations used here follow the RINAP project, but with minor variations.

(‘House of the Universe’) and Babylon’s main sanctuary Esagil (‘House Whose Top Is High’) – although that holy building was under the direct control of his older brother Šamaš-šuma-ukīn (r. 667–647 BCE), the king of Babylon – together with their patron gods, respectively Aššur (the Assyrian national god) and Marduk (the tutelary deity of Babylon).² The simultaneous care for these two important religious institutions, both of which were then regarded as a ‘bond of heaven and earth’, had become entangled not only due to his grandfather Sennacherib’s destruction of Babylon and its cults in late 689 BCE, but also due to that Assyrian king’s transformation of the Aššur cult and temple in the aftermath of Marduk’s abduction from Esagil (688–681 BCE), which included rededicating several important cult objects of Marduk to Aššur.³ In order to restore Esagil and Marduk’s cult to their former, pre-689 BCE glory, Ashurbanipal had to carefully appropriate metal-plated items originally belonging to Marduk that his grandfather had proudly given to Aššur. Part of Ashurbanipal’s delicate task involved removing inscriptions that Sennacherib had had written on the metal parts of those cult objects before he dedicated them to Assyria’s national god. Although none of these original objects survive today, some traces of Ashurbanipal ‘erasing’ or removing older inscriptions and replacing those texts with new inscriptions written in his own name exist.⁴ In this paper, the available evidence will be examined, in addition to presenting a few details that demonstrate that Ashurbanipal’s treatment of older inscriptions was not unusual, that is, he followed in the footsteps of his im-

2 For discussions of Ashurbanipal’s work on Ešarra and Esagil, see Jeffers and Novotny 2023, 18–19; and Novotny, Jeffers and Frame 2023, 17–20. For further information on these two temples, see, for example, Grayson and Novotny 2014, 20–22; Greis 2017; Pedersén 2021, 142–153; and Novotny 2023, 407–411. The English translations of the Sumerian ceremonial names of temples generally follow George 1993.

3 On Sennacherib’s religious reforms, which involved Assyrian scribes rewriting the Babylonian Epic of Creation (*Enūma eliš*) in such a way that Aššur was the protagonist and Assur was the universal bond, see, for example, Machinist 1984–1985; Frahm 1997, 20 and 282–288; Vera Chamaiza 2002, 111–167; Pongratz-Leisten 2015, 416–426; and Novotny 2023, 407–411.

4 This does not come as a surprise as relatively few inscribed metal objects from the Neo-Assyrian Period (as well as the Neo-Babylonian Period) have survived or are presently known. Thanks to tablet copies of inscriptions written on metal(-plated) objects decorating the interior of temples (and palaces), together with their scribal notes (often referred to in scholarly literature as ‘subscripts’), we have information about some of these metal objects. For some details, see Grayson and Novotny 2014, 5–8; and Jeffers and Novotny 2023, 4–9.

mediate predecessors, in particular his grandfather Sennacherib (r. 704–681 BCE) and his father Esarhaddon (r. 680–669 BCE).⁵

2 Brief historical background

Before diving into the central theme, it is necessary to briefly provide some historical context for Ashurbanipal's actions regarding the refurbishment and reinscribing of cult objects that he had returned to Marduk's temple Esagil in Babylon during his first fourteen years on the throne (668–655 BCE). In short, why was it necessary for Ashurbanipal to undertake this task? In order to do so, let us jump back twenty years before he became king, when his grandfather Sennacherib sat on the Assyrian throne.

Babylon was a constant and painful thorn in Sennacherib's side from the very moment he ascended the Assyrian throne in 705 BCE.⁶ However, it was not until the middle of his fifteenth year as king, in 690 BCE, that that city's very existence was threatened. Despite suffering a significant setback in a pitched battle near the city of Ḫalulê the year before (691 BCE), Assyria's armies laid siege to Babylon, leaving its king Mušēzib-Marduk and his troops to defend the city from inside the city walls. After fifteen long months, Babylon fell. Sennacherib, in the typical Assyrian fashion, recorded that he utterly destroyed the city and its temples. The so-called 'Bavian Inscription' described the events as follows:

I handed the property of that city – silver, gold, choice stones, possessions (and) property – over to my [people] and they kept it for themselves. My people seized and smashed the gods living inside it, and (then) they took their [possessions] (and) property. ... I destroyed, devastated, (and) burned with fire the city, and (its) buildings, from its foundations to its crenellations. I removed the brick(s) and earth, as much as there was, from the (inner) wall and outer wall, the temples, (and) the ziggurat, (and) I threw (it) into the Araḫtu river. I dug canals into the centre of that city and (thus) levelled their site with water. I destroyed the outline of its foundations and (thereby) made its destruction surpass that of the Deluge. So that in the

5 For overviews of these kings' reigns and inscriptions, see, for example, Frahm 1997; Leichty 2011, 1–8; Grayson and Novotny 2012, 1–27; Grayson and Novotny 2014, 1–30; Frahm 2023, 191–272; and Ponchia and Lanfranchi 2024, 240–292.

6 On Sennacherib's Babylonia problem (with references to earlier studies), see Grayson and Novotny 2012, 11–14; Frahm 2023, 213–235; and Ponchia and Lanfranchi 2024, 246–260.

future, the site of that city and (its) temples will be unrecognizable, I dissolved it (Babylon) in water and annihilated (it), (making it) like a meadow.⁷

In reality, the actual destruction was probably not as bad as he described. Babylon's principal temple, Esagil (and perhaps also the ziggurat Etemenanki ['House, Foundation Platform of Heaven and Netherworld']), which was regarded as the 'bond of heaven and earth', bore the brunt of Assyrian aggression (see Fig. 1). The destruction of Esagil – together with removal (and damaging) of its divine statues, furniture, and paraphernalia – did the unthinkable: it severed the universal bond that connected the divine and human realms. Despite Sennacherib's claims that his troops took the possessions and property of Marduk's temple for themselves, it is clear from inscriptions of his son Esarhaddon and his grandson Ashurbanipal (see below) that the most-prized and holy objects belonging to Babylon's tutelary god Marduk became the property of the Assyrian national god Aššur and were placed in Ešarra, situated in the heart of the city of Assur – the religious capital of the empire – and Ehursaggalkurkurra ('House of the Great Mountain of the Lands'), the cella of the god Aššur. Before some of these objects officially changed ownership, Sennacherib had inscriptions added to their metal plating. A few of the texts, including one that was written on Marduk's former bed and throne, included a lengthy opening dedication to the Assyrian national god. The prologue, as far as that text is preserved, read as follows:

[To (the god) Aššur], the king of the gods, the father of the gods, the lofty one, the creator, the great god, [*the one who moulds*] the Igīgū and Anunnakū gods, the one who holds the lead-rope of the [*great*] heavens, (the) deep-hearted (one) who deliberates (only) with himself, the assiduous one, [the regu]lator, the one who decrees fates, the splendid one, the perfect one, [the l]eader of absolutely everything, controller of the gods of heaven (and) netherworld; the exalted force that makes devastation come like the Deluge to the land where there is *negligence* (and) [har]dship, who makes a destructive flood sweep over all four quarters (of the world) – which are unsubmitive to his governor (Sennacherib) – so that tribute and payment is imposed upon them (and) so that they carry their (work) baskets daily, without interruption; the lord of everything who holds the lead-rope of heaven and netherworld, the one who dwells in Ehursagkurkur<ra> – the awe-inspiring shrine, exalted sanctuary, (and)

7 Grayson and Novotny 2014, 316–317 Senn. 223 lines 47–54a. Sennacherib's description of the destruction of Babylon is principally known from the so-called 'Bavian Inscription', a text written several times on the face of a cliff in stele-like panels in the vicinity of Hinnis (now Kharusa). Inscriptions of Sennacherib's son Esarhaddon and of the Neo-Babylonian ruler Nabonidus (r. 555–539 BCE) also refer to Sennacherib's destruction of Babylon. See, for example, Leichty 2011, 195–196 Esar. 104 i 18b–ii 9a; and Weiershäuser and Novotny 2020, 61–62 Nbn. 3 i 1'–19'. For an assessment of Sennacherib's destruction of Babylon and Marduk's abduction, see in particular Frame 1992, 55–56; and Richardson 2012, especially 237–238.

holy dwelling place – *the awesome radiance* (and) awe-inspiring luminosity that has mercy on their governor(s), his great [..., who] quickly accepts [supplicat]ions (and) prayers addressed to him, [who] makes his angry weapons rage [against] the unyielding, [...] the road to joy, [...] ... weapons [...] ... [...]⁸

It is unclear, as no textual evidence presently survives, whether or not Sennacherib erased or removed existing texts on those objects. These rededicated and (re)inscribed objects were only a small part of his numerous religious reforms that ‘Babylonised’ the god Aššur, his temple, his cult, and his New Year’s festival (the *akītu*). During the final years of Sennacherib’s reign (688–681 BCE), while Babylon and Esagil lay in ruins and Marduk and his entourage were held ‘hostage’ in Assyria, the god Aššur was transformed to be more like Marduk and his significantly remodelled Ešarra temple, with its new square, multi-room complex (the so-called ‘Ostanbau’), became the bond that held the universe together.⁹ Despite all of this lavish attention and support of Assyria’s most holy temple and cult, Sennacherib’s ‘Babylonisation’ of Aššur and Ešarra do not appear to have been well received.¹⁰

8 Grayson and Novotny 2014, 227 Senn. 161 obv. 1–20. Sennacherib had this new inscription placed on the metal coverings of the bed and throne.

9 Sennacherib’s multi-room complex (the so-called ‘eastern annex building’ or ‘Ostanbau’), whose construction is recorded in the ‘Aššur Temple Inscription’ (Grayson and Novotny 2014, 239–244 Senn. 166), was modelled on Esagil’s square-shaped ‘Sublime Court’, which was, according to inscriptions of his son Esarhaddon (Leichty 2011, 198 Esar. 104 iii 50–51), a replica of the constellation known as the ‘Field’ (*ikū*, the ‘Square of Pegasus’). The god Aššur’s Ešarra as the Assyrian counterpart of Marduk’s Esagil, at least the so-called ‘Ostanbau’, is referred to in several inscriptions of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. Esarhaddon (Leichty 2011, 198 Esar. 104 iii 48–49) refers to Esagil as ‘a replica of Ešarra’ (*tamšil Ešarra*) and Ashurbanipal (Novotny and Jeffers 2018, 301 Asb. 23 line 29) states that the Aššur temple was ‘a replica of the temple of the Enlil of the heavens (i.e. Marduk)’ (*tamšil bīt Enlil ša šamē*). Moreover, one text of Esarhaddon (Leichty 2011, 109 Esar. 48 lines 98–99) explicitly calls Eḫursaggalkurkurra (the cella of Aššur) ‘the bond of heaven and earth’ (*markas šamē u eršetī*). Although Sennacherib himself does not record that the eight-gated complex that he had built onto Aššur’s temple was a replica of a key part of Marduk’s temple, it is clear from texts of his son and his grandson that the ‘Ostanbau’ was in fact modelled on Esagil’s ‘Sublime Court’ and its celestial counterpart, the ‘Square of Pegasus’, and was intended to create a link between heaven and earth, principally since the one at Babylon had been severed.

10 See, for example, the comments in Novotny 2014; and Novotny 2023, 411.

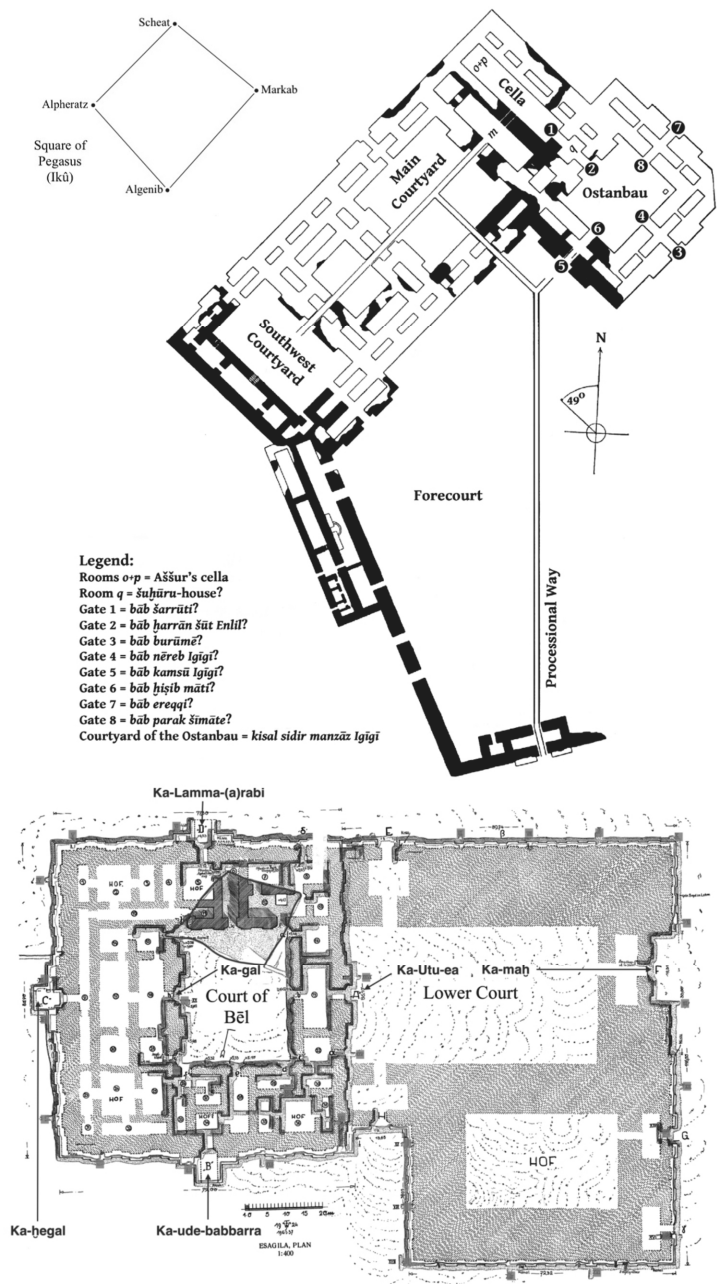


Fig. 1: Ešarra (top right), Esagil (bottom), and the ‘Square of Pegasus’ (ikû; top left). Adapted from Andrae 1977, 53, fig. 35; and Wetzel and Weissbach 1938, plate 3.

After Sennacherib's murder in 681 BCE, his son and immediate Esarhaddon almost immediately began reversing some of his father's religious reforms, presumably with the assistance of a disgruntled Aššur priesthood, men who might have been displeased with what Sennacherib had done between 688 and 681 BCE.¹¹ Most significantly, Esarhaddon began rebuilding Babylon and the Esagil temple complex, together with the nearby ziggurat Etemenanki.¹² While the brick structures of Babylon's holiest buildings were being constructed, important objects from Esagil, especially its cult statues, were being refurbished in a divinely-sanctioned workshop in Assur; divine approval, a positive response to a query addressed to the sun-god Šamaš, was received through extispicy.¹³ The process of returning the god Marduk and his property to Esagil in Babylon and making that temple once again the 'bond of heaven and earth' could not have been an easy task, especially because Sennacherib had significantly complicated matters by dedicating Marduk's possessions to Aššur, as well as by adding inscriptions on their decorative metal plating. Prayers, expressions of humility, and divination, in addition to other rites and rituals, were required at every stage of the process.¹⁴ Any misstep could anger the Assyrian national god and Esarhaddon, his advisors, and workmen did their best to ensure that the process of re-instituting the Marduk cult went as smoothly as humanly possible. This was especially important as objects originally belonging to Babylon's patron god were in the hands of the Assyrian national god. It is unknown how many pieces of cult furniture and paraphernalia Esarhaddon reappropriated during his reign, as this information is not recorded or preserved in presently-extant sources, but it is likely that he did retrieve the metal-plated pedestal upon which Marduk's statue stood. Although it is clear that at least two texts were added to it, it is unknown if Esarhaddon's workmen had to remove inscription(s) of his father from it before rededicating it to Marduk.

11 On Sennacherib's murder, see Grayson and Novotny 2014, 28–29 (with references to previous studies); Knapp 2020; Dalley and Siddall 2021; and Jones 2023.

12 Information about Esarhaddon's building activities are known principally from that king's so-called 'Babylon Inscriptions' and from letters. See in particular Parpola 1993, nos 24, 109, 111–112, 169, 253, 348, 354, 364, and 368; Cole and Machinist 1998, nos 161–164, 166, 168, 172–176, 178–181, and 190; Reynolds 2003, no. 14; and Leichty 2011, 191–258 Esar. 104–126. For studies, see in particular Streck 2002; Porter 2003; Novotny 2015; and Novotny, Jeffers and Frame 2023, 14–16.

13 Leichty 2011, 107 Esar. 48 lines 72b–79b. See n. 46 below for a translation of this passage. Making the divine statues suitable to be placed back on their daises in Babylon might have taken place during the final years of Esarhaddon's reign, perhaps between 672 and 669 BCE. However, this cannot be proven and the work could have begun earlier, c. 674 or 673 BCE. The task of rebuilding the structures of Babylon's temples and ziggurat, on the other hand, started much earlier, perhaps already in 678, eleven years after Sennacherib had sacked and destroyed Babylon.

14 For example, see Leichty 2011, 107 Esar. 48 line 65: 'I prayed to the divinity of the god Aššur, the king of the gods, and the great lord, the god Marduk, with raised hands, prayers, and expressions of humility'.

This is clear from scribal notes on two fragmentarily-preserved clay tablets (K 2388 and K 7862; see Fig. 2). The subscripts read respectively as ‘Written on the pedestal [of] the great lord, the god [Marduk]’; and ‘Written on the pedestal of (the statue of) the god Bēl (Marduk). [Like] its [origi]nal, written and collated. [Tablet (belonging to)] Marduk-šākin-šumi, the young apprentice (scribe). [Written by] Nabû-zēra-ikšur, scribe, [son of] Ina-tēši-ētir, scribe (and) descendant of Nabû-nāšir, scribe’. Both inscriptions seem to have been fairly lengthy. This is not a surprise given the available surface space on the pedestal.¹⁵

Despite Esarhaddon’s best efforts, and contrary to what his inscriptions record, work on Esagil remained unfinished and the refurbished statue of Marduk was still in Assyria when he died in late 669 BCE.¹⁶ The completion of that work fell to Ashurbanipal and Šamaš-šuma-ukīn, whom Esarhaddon had officially designated to replace him in early 672 BCE. Shortly after Ashurbanipal’s official coronation as the king of Assyria at the very beginning of 668 BCE, he travelled south to Babylon with his older brother Šamaš-šuma-ukīn, the statues of Marduk and his entourage (Zarpanītu, Bēlet-Bābili, Ea, and Mandānu), and numerous priests and temple personnel. Marduk’s statue and probably some of the possessions of Esagil reacquired by Esarhaddon – very likely the aforementioned pedestal – were returned and Šamaš-šuma-ukīn was placed on the throne, just as Esarhaddon had intended to do.¹⁷ As work in Babylon was still incomplete, Ashurbanipal, despite the fact that his brother was the king of Babylon, took it upon himself to finish what his father had started. He completed Esagil’s structure; adorned its interior, especially its cella; and roofed it with beams of cedar and cypress.¹⁸ Esagil, with

¹⁵ For editions of these two still-incomplete inscriptions, see Leichty 2011, 98–101 Esar. 44–45. Whether or not Sennacherib had inscription(s) added to Marduk’s pedestal is unknown since no tablet stating that it contains a copy of a text of Sennacherib from that object has yet been identified. The assumption that Marduk’s pedestal might have borne a text is based solely on the fact that Marduk’s bed and throne had inscriptions placed on them when they were dedicated to Aššur. See below for further details.

¹⁶ Several inscriptions of Esarhaddon prematurely record Marduk’s triumphant return to Esagil and the installation of Šamaš-šuma-ukīn as king of Babylon. See Leichty 2011, 113 Esar. 52 and Leichty 2011, 114–115 Esar. 53. For further details, see Novotny, Jeffers and Frame 2023, 16, n. 103.

¹⁷ For a recent overview of Ashurbanipal’s building activities at Babylon, see Novotny, Jeffers and Frame 2023, 16–21. Late in Nisannu (I) 668 BCE, Ashurbanipal instructed his diviners to determine whether Šamaš-šuma-ukīn should take the hand of Marduk during that year and take that god’s statue back to Babylon; see Starr 1990, 236–237, no. 262). On 28-I-668 BCE, the Assyrian king’s haruspices returned with a ‘firm yes’ from the gods Šamaš and Marduk and the journey to Babylon set out shortly thereafter. The return journey is described in the so-called ‘School Days Inscription’. For an edition of that passage, see Jeffers and Novotny 2023, 326–327 Asb. 220 iii 1’–22’.

¹⁸ For example, Novotny, Jeffers and Frame 2023, 50 Asb. 241 lines 14b–16a: ‘Moreover, I decorated Esagil with silver, gold, (and) precious stones and made Eumuša glisten like the stars (lit. “writing”) of

Marduk back in his cella, once again became a bond that connected the human and divine realms and its cult resumed for the first time since late 689 BCE.

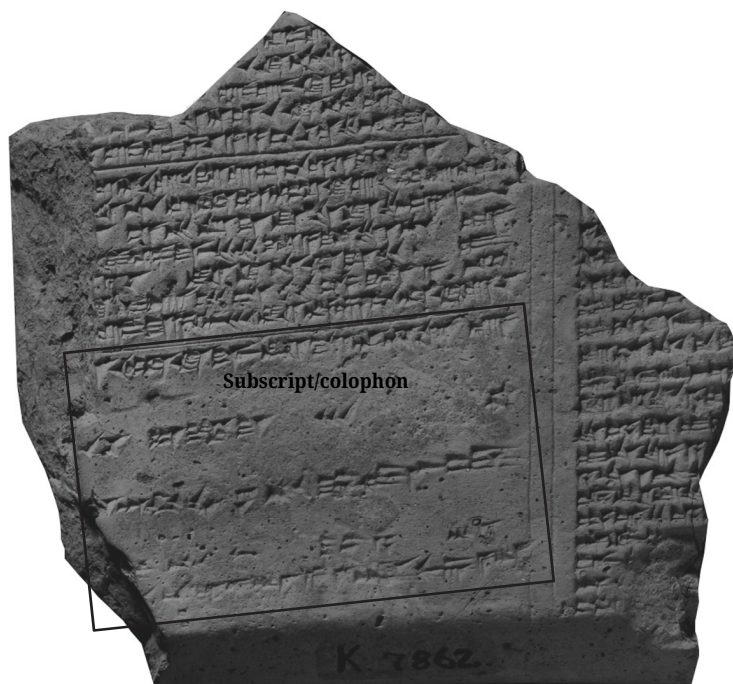


Fig. 2: Annotated photograph of K 7862, a fragment of a multi-column tablet bearing a copy of an inscription that Esarhaddon had placed on Marduk's (metal-plated) pedestal. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.

the firmament'; and Novotny, Jeffers and Frame 2023, 61 Asb. 246 lines 56–63a: 'Moreover, I completed the work on Esagil which my father had not finished. I roofed it with long beams of cedar and cypress, the produce of Mount Amanus and Mount Lebanon. I had doors made of boxwood, *musukkannu*-wood, juniper, and cedar and I fixed (them) [in] its gates'. Ashurbanipal's completion of Esagil's structure can be confirmed from numerous bricks with a nine-line Akkadian inscription found in Floor k (third pavement) and Floor l (fourth pavement). This work might have been due in part to the fact that Esarhaddon's architects had not sufficiently raised the temple above the water table and that Esagil's inadequately waterproofed floor needed to be fixed. Ashurbanipal's workmen raised the level of the temple's pavement by nearly a half meter. The wood was probably supplied by one or more of Assyria's vassals in the Levant. It is possible that Ba'alu of Tyre, Milki-ašapa of Byblos, Iakin-Lû (Ikki-lû) of Arwad, and Abi-Ba'al of Samsimurruna aided in the transport of the timber since Mount Amanus and Mount Lebanon were in their spheres of influence.

3 Extant evidence for Ashurbanipal erasing and rewriting texts

Although Marduk and many of his prized possessions were back in Esagil, Ashurbanipal continued from time to time to grapple with the aftermath of his grandfather Sennacherib's sack of Babylon and his subsequent transformation of the Aššur temple and cult. This is clear from a scribal note written on a multi-column clay tablet (K 2411; see Fig. 3) and from the entry in the so-called 'Šamaš-šuma-ukin Chronicle' for Ashurbanipal's fourteenth year (655 BCE).¹⁹ Both sources record that Marduk's pleasure bed was returned to its rightful place in Babylon.²⁰ One of the texts (K 2411) also states that that god's throne was also brought back to Esagil at the same time; the same might be true for an ornate chariot, but there is insufficient information about whether it was created anew by Ashurbanipal or if it was one of the cult objects brought to Assur by Sennacherib and, thus, little attention will be given to that project in this paper.²¹ Let us examine the situation in more detail.

¹⁹ Respectively Jeffers and Novotny 2023, 333 Asb. 223 iii 36'–40' (translated below); and Novotny and Jeffers 2018, 35: 'The fourteenth year: The former bed of the god Bēl (Marduk) came from [*Baltil* (*Aššur*)] to Babylon'. The date in the 'Šamaš-šuma-ukin Chronicle' conflicts with the scribal note written on K 2411 (= Asb. 223), which states that the bed was returned on the twenty-seventh day of Simānu (III) of the eponymy of Awiānu (655 BCE). The date of 655 can be confirmed from a second inscription of Ashurbanipal dated to the 'eponymy of Awiānu': Novotny and Jeffers 2018, 356 Asb. 61 rev. 24'–25'. Therefore, the fourteenth year mentioned in the 'Šamaš-šuma-ukin Chronicle' appears to be a mistake for the king of Babylon's thirteenth regnal year. However, if it refers to Ashurbanipal's fourteenth year, then the date is correct. For comments on the confusion of dates in Babylonian chronicles, see Novotny, Jeffers and Frame 2023, 20, n. 126.

²⁰ According to numerous other inscriptions, this bed was placed in 'Kaḫilisu, the bed chamber of the goddess Zarpanītu, which is laden with sexual charms'. See, for example, Novotny and Jeffers 2018, 216 Asb. 10 i 52–54. Kaḫilisu is a byname of Eḫalanki ('House of the Secrets of Heaven and Netherworld') and named in Ashurbanipal's inscriptions instead of Edara'ana ('House of the Ibex of Heaven'), the actual name of the cella of Zarpanītu in Esagil.

²¹ The 'Šamaš-šuma-ukin Chronicle' (Novotny and Jeffers 2018, 35 [entry for the fifteenth year]) records that the chariot was new, however, this is less certain from Ashurbanipal's own inscriptions, which vaguely state the following: '(As for) the exalted chariot, the vehicle of the god Marduk, the pre-eminent one among the gods, the lord of lords, I completed its feature(s) with gold, silver, (and) precious stones. I gave (it) as a gift to the god Marduk, the king of the totality of heaven and netherworld, the one who overwhelms my enemies'. See, for example, Novotny and Jeffers 2018, 216 Asb. 10 i 39–45. The vagueness of the description does not rule out the possibility that the chariot was an existing object that had been brought back to Assur when Sennacherib destroyed Babylon and Esagil in 689 BCE. Compare the description of the refurbished pleasure bed below, which seems to suggest that Ashurbanipal's workmen made that ornate object anew, rather than refurbishing it. A fragmentarily-



Fig. 3: Annotated photograph of the reverse of K 2411, a badly-preserved multi-column tablet containing a copy of the Sennacherib inscription(s) that Ashurbanipal's workmen had removed from Marduk's bed and throne, detail descriptions of those two cult objects, a scribal note providing some context to the situation, and a copy of the replacement text of Ashurbanipal placed on the substantially refurbished bed and throne. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.

preserved bilingual Sumerian-Akkadian text describing Marduk's chariot (K 9008 + 83-1-18,141), which could date to the Second Dynasty of Isin, might provide proof that that object existed long before the seventh century. For a study and edition of that text, see Lambert 1973, 275–279.

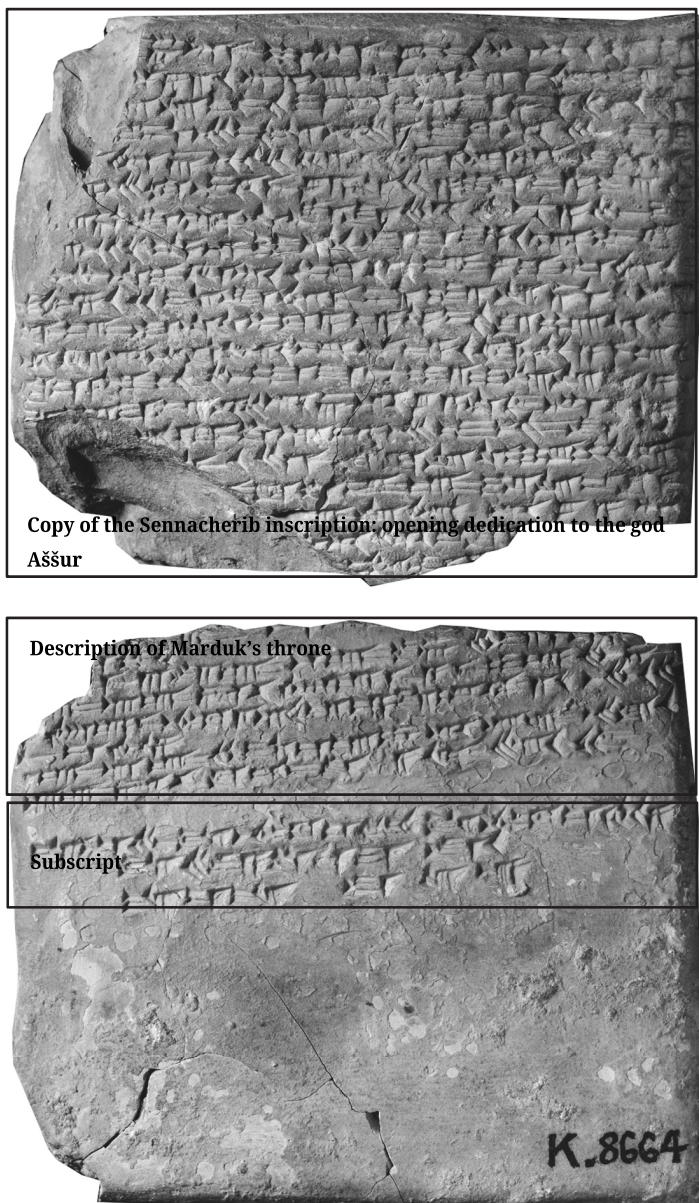


Fig. 4: Annotated photograph of the obverse and reverse of K 8664, a fragmentary single-column tablet containing a copy of an inscription of Sennacherib that Ashurbanipal's workmen had removed from Marduk's bed and throne, together with detail descriptions of those two cult objects. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.

Fourteen presently-known inscriptions record that Ashurbanipal worked on Marduk's pleasure bed, while none currently make any mention of the restoration of that god's throne. The latter cult object, Marduk's throne, is known only from references to it in two scribal notes on clay tablets (K 2411, see Fig. 3, and K 8664, see Fig. 4).²² As for the bed, according to K 2411, looked as follows before Ashurbanipal had it completely renovated:

The length of the sideboard is six and two-thirds cubits, measured by the royal cubit. The frontpiece is three and one-third cubits, measured by the royal cubit. (There are) twelve gold platings on the side of the bed; six ditto (= gold platings) on the side. (There is) a ... *mušḫuššu*-dragon on top of the sidewalls. The mattress (has) a *nalbattu*-form that has [...] ... of *pa[ppardilū]*-stones, (and) *ḥašhur-api* (ornaments) of obsidian, carnelian, (and) lapis-lazuli arranged around (it). The lower mattress is gold (and) water is ... on (it). The legs are *lamassu*-figures. Beneath the *lamassu*-figures a [...] claw(-shaped ornament). There are eight *lamassu*-figures on the two rungs of the sid[es]. (There is) one *lamassu*-figure on each ... [(...)]. Water surrounds *lamassu*-figures The rungs are ... with water. The leg(s) of the be[d] are one and two-thirds cubits, measured by the royal cubit.²³

Ashurbanipal's 'canonical' description of the renovation work on Marduk's pleasure bed reads as follows:

I skilfully made a bed of *musukkannu*-wood, a durable wood, that is clad with *pašallu*-gold (and) studded with precious stones, as a pleasure bed for the god Bēl (Marduk) (and) the goddess Bēltiya (Zarpanītu) to carry out the wedding (and) to make love. I placed (it) in Kaḫilisu, the bed chamber of the goddess Zarpanītu, which is laden with sexual charm.²⁴

The 'standard' description of the renovation of the bed, which is known from texts composed between 655 and 638 BCE, does not refer to the fact that the Ashurbanipal's workmen simply renovated the bed that Sennacherib had removed from Esagil in 689 BCE and had placed in the Ešarra temple in Assur, but rather seems to

²² Grayson and Novotny 2014, 228 Senn. 161 rev. 9'–11': 'Wording (of the inscription) that (is) on the bed (and) the throne at the footend. *It is a single (text)*. That of the chest was not copied'; and Jeffers and Novotny 2023, 333 Asb. 223 iii 36'–40' (= Grayson and Novotny 2014, 231 Senn. 162). See below for a translation of the second passage. According to K 2411 (Grayson and Novotny 2014, 231 Senn. 162 iii 30'–35'), the throne looked as follows: 'The length of the thr[one] is three and one-thirds cubits, measured by the royal cubit. Its width is one and two-thirds cubits. Water surround[s] *lamassu*-figures. There are four *lamassu*-figures on the two rungs of the sides; two ditto (= *lamassu*-figure) on the frontpiece. The entire throne: The length of the *kitturru* is one and two-thirds cubits. (Its) height is two-thirds of a cubit. The width of the *kuptu*, as far as the *mušḫuššu*-dragon, is two-thirds of a cubit'.

²³ Grayson and Novotny 2014, 231 Senn. 162 iii 17'–29'.

²⁴ Novotny and Jeffers 2018, 216 Asb. 10 i 46–54.

suggest that it had been newly made and ornately decorated. As one expects from an Assyrian inscription, no mention is made of an inscription being written on the bed's new gold-alloy plating. This is clear only from the copy of that text written on K 2411 (and on K 8664). The entry for the 'fourteenth year' in the 'Šamaš-šumaukin Chronicle' not only records that this object was sent from Assur (from the sacred Baltil district) to Babylon, but also states that the bed had existed previously, thus, making it clear that Ashurbanipal's workmen had not created a new piece of furniture for Babylon's divine patron, but rather renovated the existing one in 656 BCE, or at the very beginning of 655 BCE at the latest.²⁵ In addition, more detailed information is provided by a short scribal note written on a multi-column clay tablet that was probably inscribed in 655 BCE, Ashurbanipal's fourteenth regnal year, when the Assyrian king was made aware of the fact that several objects of Marduk were still in the Aššur temple in Assur. That notation reads as follows:

Wording (of the inscription) that was erased from the bed (and) the throne of the god Bēl (Marduk), which were deposited in the temple of (the god) Aššur, (and that of the inscription) written upon (them) in the name of Ashurbanipal. Simānu (III), the twenty-seventh day, eponymy of Awīānu (655), th[ey were returned t]o Ba[byl]on [...].²⁶

Not only does the note record the exact date that the bed was returned to Esagil, but it also explicitly states that Marduk's bed, in addition to his throne, both of which were in Aššur's temple, had earlier inscriptions on them.²⁷ Those texts were erased by Ashurbanipal's workmen and then replaced with Ashurbanipal's own inscription. That text, as far as it is preserved, reads as follows:

[...] ... [...] ... [...], O l]ord, being furious (and) relenting, [*destroying* (and) c]reating, (and) depopulating (and) (re)populating (regions) [are] in your hands. (As for) Esagil, the terrifying cella, the seat of [your] supreme pow[er, *you command*ed your beloved king to restore you[r] divine work. I, Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria, your pious servant; [son of E]sarhad-don, king of Assyria; (grand)son of Sennacherib, king of Assyria; [who reve]res the command of your great divinity, who is assiduous towards your places (of worship) and your daises, who carries out in full your cultic rites, (and) who placates your mood: I completed [Esa]gil. I decorated the replica of the *apsū*, the palace of your lordly majesty, with [g]old, making (it) shine like daylight. [I mad]e the exalted chariot of the king of the gods (Marduk), the vehicle of the lord of lords. [*I skilfully made* a bed of] [*m*]usukkannu-[woo]d, a durable wood, (as) a pleasure bed, [that is c]lad with [*pašallu*-gold] (and) studded with precious stones, [...] whose

²⁵ See n. 19 above.

²⁶ Jeffers and Novotny 2023, 333 Asb. 223 iii 36'–40' (= Grayson and Novotny 2014, 231 Senn. 162).

²⁷ According to the scribal note on K 8664 (Grayson and Novotny 2014, 228 Senn. 161 rev. 9'–11' [translated above in n. 22]), the bed had two inscriptions written on it. One text was also written on Marduk's throne (on the footend).

sid[e]s are surrounded with [...] ... [...] it was truly set up [fo]r the god Marduk (and) the goddess Zarpanītu, the de[iti]es who l[ove] each other. [To *preserve*] my [li]fe (and) prolong my days, I presented (these objects) as a gift (to them). [When] they perform [the m]arriage rites (and) enter the house of lovemaking, may both gods speak about my [...] to each other, (and) may they bless my kingship [with] their holy [p]ronouncement(s), which cannot be altered. May they let me, the one who is assiduous towards their places (of worship), achieve my heart's [d]esire. May they flatten my enemies (for me), the one who fulfils their heart's wish. [(But) as for the one who] erases my inscribed name and writes his (own) name, (or) effaces (and) destroys [the m]ention of the king who is assiduous towards the sanctuaries of the god Marduk (and) the goddess Zarpanītu by any crafty device that there is, may the god Marduk, king of the gods, take away his libido (and) make his seed disappear, (and) may the goddess Zarpanītu speak evil about him in the bedroom, the (private) room of the head of the family.²⁸

Although clay tablet K 2411 is damaged, especially its obverse, the copy of the pre-Ashurbanipal text(s) is sufficiently preserved to be able to determine that the inscription(s) on the bed and throne were put there by Sennacherib, as he is mentioned by name, and that those objects had been dedicated to the god Aššur. The preserved portions of Sennacherib's inscription(s) written on K 2411 read as follows:

[... t]o my land [...] ... [...] (long lacuna) [... I ...] to (the god) Aššur, *king of [the gods, ... for (...)]* the securing of my reign, the increasing of [...], ..., [...] the foundation of my throne for [...] days. May (the god) Aššur, king of the gods, the great god, ... look kindly up[on] my [de]eds. When he looks, may the works that are the desire of [...], as much I ha[ve] do[n]e, please him and be acceptable to him. May he make the people of the four quarters (of the world) bow down to him so that they pull his yoke. May he make the substantial tribute of the settlements, the abundance of heaven (and) earth, pour into Ešarra, the seat of his great divinity, annually. May the goddess Mullissu, the queen of Ešarra, the consort of (the god) Aššur, creator of the great gods, have a good word about Sennacherib, king of Assyria, set upon her lips daily before (the god) Aššur. May (the god) Aššur and the goddess Mullissu discuss [the ... of po]wer, the attainment of very old age, the lengthening of his (Sennacherib's) days, the securing of his reign, (and) the ... of the throne of his kingship forever and ever.²⁹

The transfer of ownership from Marduk to Aššur is confirmed by a second clay tablet (K 8664), which preserves a portion of the opening dedication to the Assyrian national god.³⁰ The scribal notation on that badly-damaged tablet records that the bed and throne bore one and the same dedicatory inscription, as well as not-

²⁸ Jeffers and Novotny 2023, 333–334 Asb. 223 iv 1'–29'.

²⁹ Grayson and Novotny 2014, 229–231 Senn. 162 ii 1–iii 16'. For a translation of the opening dedication, which is preserved on K 8664, see above.

³⁰ See above.

ing that the throne had a second inscription written on it.³¹ K 2411, the tablet that included the replacement text of Ashurbanipal for Marduk, presumably had both Sennacherib texts copied on it. The scribes (faithfully) copied the texts not only out of respect for Ashurbanipal's grandfather, but also because it was important since it was common knowledge that erasing, removing, and/or altering inscriptions from objects, especially those belonging to the gods, could anger the gods, who would then exact terrible revenge for the transgression. Preparing a copy of the former inscription and storing it in a safe place appears to have been a loophole that allowed one text to be removed and replaced by another and, thereby, exempt from impending divine retribution. Presumably, the whole process was accompanied by prayers, rituals, and extispicy. Matters, of course, were complicated by the fact the objects in question belonged to Aššur and were housed in his temple. As the bed and throne originally belonged to the tutelary god of Babylon and because the local priesthood might have been in favour of removing any object formerly belonging to Marduk from Ešarra, Ashurbanipal probably had little trouble reappropriating Marduk's possessions, at least from the human agents involved in the matter. Unfortunately, Ashurbanipal's inscriptions do not provide any insight into the process, including exactly how his grandfather's inscriptions were 'erased'. Based on the extremely vague details given in the inscriptions themselves, which suggest that the bed had been significantly renovated, one might surmise that the inscribed metal plating was entirely removed and replaced by a new metal covering, rather than having its inscribed area erased and then reinscribed with a replacement text. This supposition is likely supported by the fact that the scribes who copied Sennacherib's inscriptions onto clay tablets recorded numerous details about the size, structure, and decoration of the bed and throne in order that the renovated and Ashurbanipal-inscription bearing object looked as close as possible, if not identical, to the originals, minus Sennacherib's inscriptions dedicated to Aššur.³² If this proposal proves correct, then it is not impossible that the metal coverings bearing Ashurbanipal's grandfather's texts were not destroyed, but kept for posterity (see below). This would have further ensured that no divine wrath occurred due to the removal of a royally commissioned text. Exactly where and how the removed metal would have been stored is not clear.

It is possible that Marduk's chariot underwent a similar process before making its way into Esagil in 655 BCE. Given the available information in the extant

31 See n. 22 above. The second inscription was placed on the chest of the object. That text was not on copied onto K 8664.

32 For translations of these passages, see above, as well as n. 22.

textual record, it is unclear whether Ashurbanipal's workmen heavily refurbished an existing and dilapidating object or if they created an entirely new one.³³ Based on one fragmentarily-preserved contemporary inscription (Eš 6699 = Ass 900+), the former scenario might have been the more likely of the two. The relevant passage of that text reads

At that time, the *trap[pil]ngs* of the exalted chariot of [*the king of the god(s) (Marduk)*], the v[ehicle of] the lord of lo<rd>s, (and) a bed of *mus[ukkan]u*-wood, a [du]rable wo[od], that is cla[d] with gold [...] as a bed for the god(dess) [...] (*the god*) *Aššur* [and] the god(dess) [...] my [...].³⁴

This inscription gives the impression that Marduk's chariot, just like the pleasure bed, existed prior to Ashurbanipal's reign. This might explain why most of Ashurbanipal's texts just refer to the lavish decoration of that cult object rather than its construction and subsequent decoration. Moreover, this passage in Eš 6699 (Ass 900+) also seems to infer that it had been dedicated to the Assyrian national god and, thus, it is not impossible that Ashurbanipal replaced an inscription of Sennacherib with one of his own on that chariot's metal decoration. Because it is said to have been in a deplorable state, it is not unlikely that the 'renovated' chariot looked significantly different and, thus, was seen by the Babylonians as a 'new chariot', as the 'Šamaš-šuma-ukīn Chronicle' records.³⁵

Thanks to two short, yet informative scribal notes, as well as a laconic entry in a Babylonian chronographic text, we have some insight into Ashurbanipal 'erasing' or removing inscriptions of one of his immediate predecessors and replacing those texts with ones of his own. Unfortunately, no contemporary details about the complex process involved are recorded or preserved. Based on information given in at least one text composed while his father Esarhaddon was king, it can be assumed that divine approval in the form of a 'firm yes' (Akkadian *annu kēnu*) through extispicy was regularly obtained to ensure that neither Aššur nor Marduk was angered as the metal-plated objects were removed from Ešarra, had their old inscriptions removed, were renovated and had replacement texts added

³³ See n. 21 above.

³⁴ Novotny and Jeffers 2018, 355 Asb. 61 obv. 27b–33. On the chariot, see n. 21 above.

³⁵ For a translation of the 'canonical' description of Ashurbanipal's work on Marduk's chariot, see n. 21 above. K 2411 (Jeffers and Novotny 2023, 333–234 Asb. 223) also gives the impression that Marduk's chariot was built anew. The relevant line (iv 13') reads '[I mad]e the exalted chariot of the king of the gods (Marduk), the vehicle of the lord of lords'. Note that Ashurbanipal also infers that he made Marduk's pleasure bed anew, when it is clear that that object was extensively refurbished and not an entirely new creation. See above, for a text which might provide evidence that the chariot was not newly fashioned by Ashurbanipal.

to them, and were placed once again in Esagil. As inscribed metal and metal-plated objects were regularly repaired and renovated in Assyrian temples, Ashurbanipal's advisors and workmen would have been well accustomed to the protocols involved in such delicate work. Surely, the actions of Assyria's last great king did not break or deviate from tradition when it came to handling older inscribed objects. However, the circumstances leading up to him replacing inscriptions of his grandfather written on behalf of Aššur with his own texts composed for Marduk is not, since this could have happened only while he and his father Esarhaddon sat on the Assyrian throne.

4 Following the footsteps of Sennacherib and Esarhaddon

A careful review of the presently-extant and published texts reveals that Ashurbanipal's treatment of older inscriptions, especially those written on the metal plating of cult objects, was not at all unusual. There is some evidence that demonstrates that his grandfather and father also added new texts to important objects, including those belonging to the gods, thus making it sufficiently clear that Ashurbanipal followed in the footsteps of his (immediate) predecessors.

Sennacherib's own inscriptions provide very few details about the fate of the cult statues and cult items after the fall of Babylon in late 689 BCE. Two texts state that Babylon's gods were damaged, while one records that the Assyrian troops took the possessions and property of that city's temples for themselves.³⁶ It is clear from later sources, as mentioned above, that some of the most important objects from those religious institutions made their way into Ešarra, the most important temple of the Assyrian Empire. Scribal notes written on two clay tablets record that Sennacherib had inscriptions written on the metal plating of at least two of Marduk's cult objects: his pleasure bed and throne (as described in the previous section). The throne, which had one text written on its footend and one on its chest, and the bed, which was engraved with only one inscription – the same one that was written on the throne's footend – were rededicated to Aššur.³⁷ This is evident from the opening dedication of the inscription, which is partially preserved on one of the tablets (K 8664) on which Ashurbanipal's scribes had the

³⁶ Grayson and Novotny 2012, 205–206 Senn. 24 vi 1'–16'; and Grayson and Novotny 2014, 316–317 Senn. 223 lines 47–54a.

³⁷ For further information, see n. 22.

original inscription copied before it was removed from the throne and bed.³⁸ It is unknown at this time whether or not Sennacherib had his scribes copy and remove earlier inscriptions from those two objects, should they have borne texts. Undoubtedly, this would have certainly been the case had those pieces had a dedicatory text addressed to Marduk on them. Presumably, other important pieces of property looted from Esagil and Babylon received similar treatment. For example, Sennacherib had a short inscription added to a royal seal of the Kassite king Šagarakti-Šuriaš (r. 1245–1233 BCE), which the Middle Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (r. 1243–1207 BCE) had ‘600 years earlier’ also taken from Babylon and engraved with his own inscription. In this instance, Sennacherib’s behaviour was modelled on a much earlier Assyrian king (Tukulti-Ninurta I), one who also destroyed Babylon. All of the inscriptions on that now-lost lapis lazuli seal were written down on a clay tablet (K 2673).³⁹ The original seal had ‘Property of Šagarakti-Šuriaš, king of the world’ written on it. When Tukulti-Ninurta I took it as booty from Babylon, he had the following added to this large lapis lazuli seal:

Tukulti-Ninurta (I), king of the world, son of Shalmaneser (I), king of Assyria: Booty of Karduniaš (Babylonia). As for the one who removes my inscription (and) my name, may (the god) Aššur (and) the god Adad make his name disappear from the land.

The seal was returned to Babylon and was then taken back to Assyria by Sennacherib in 689 BCE. He then added his own inscription, which read:

This seal was given as a gift from Assyria to Akkad. I, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, after six hundred years conquered Babylon and took it out from the property of Babylon.

It is clear from the scribal note at the end of this clay tablet, that the three inscriptions included on K 2673 were from a seal made of lapis lazuli. Although the seal is now lost, it must have been a rather large seal given the fact that it had three inscriptions (totalling forty-seven words) written on it. Compare the ‘Adad Seal’ rededicated to Marduk by Esarhaddon (see Fig. 5 below), which measures 15.5 cm in length and 3.2 cm in diameter.

³⁸ For a translation of the opening dedication, see above.

³⁹ Grayson and Novotny 2014, 215–217 Senn. 156.

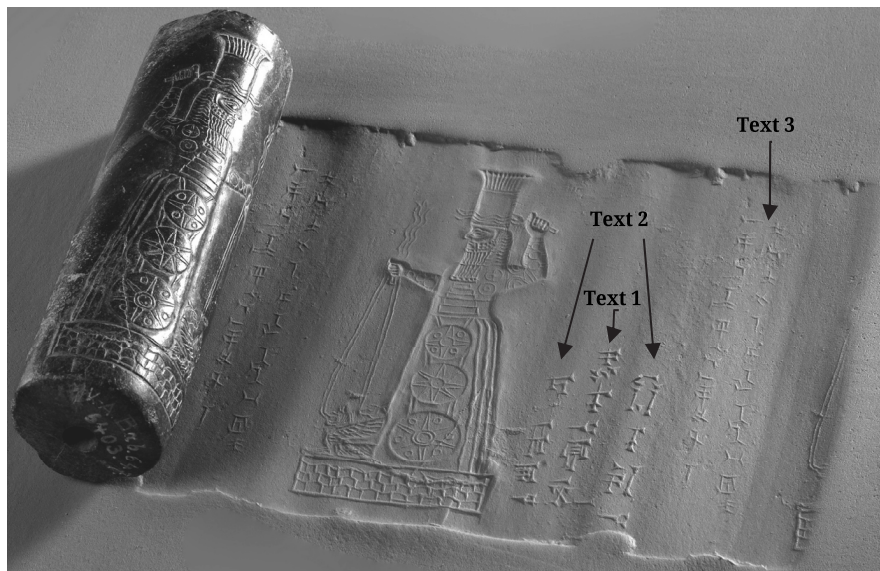


Fig. 5: Annotated photograph of Esar. 118 = VA Bab. 647, a monumental lapis lazuli cylinder seal from Babylon that has three Akkadian inscriptions engraved upon it. © Vorderasiatisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Photo: Olaf M. Teßmer. Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.

Šagarakti-Šuriaš's seal might not have been the only seal taken from Babylon in 689 BCE. The seal of the storm-god Adad was possibly taken to Assyria at the same time. Esarhaddon, Sennacherib's son and immediate successor, had a short, fourteen-word inscription added to that large lapis lazuli seal before it was rededicated to Marduk:

To the god Marduk, great lord, his lord: Esarhaddon, king of the world, king of Assyria, presented (this object) for the sake of his life.⁴⁰

Because Esarhaddon died before his work on Esagil was completed, the seal was probably returned in early 668 BCE, when construction of Babylon's most holy

⁴⁰ Leichty 2011, 248–249 Esar. 118 (with fig. 16). This seal also has three texts written on it. The first reads 'The seal of the god Adad of Esagil', while the second and third, which were later added read respectively as 'Property of the god Marduk' and 'To the god Marduk, great lord, his lord: Esarhaddon, king of the world, king of Assyria, presented (this object) for the sake of his life'. For further information on how the texts were inscribed, see Leichty 2011, 248 (with references to earlier literature).

temple was completed and when the statue of Marduk, together with other divine images, were returned to the Esagil temple complex.⁴¹ Esarhaddon appears to have been informed about the location of cult items taken from Babylon: the most important pieces seem to have been in Ešarra since they had been rededicated to Aššur as part of Sennacherib's transformation of the cult of the Assyrian national god between 688 and 681 BCE. The local priesthood might have been keenly aware of which objects of Babylon's tutelary deity then belonged to Aššur and they might have been happy to inform Esarhaddon, who was in the process of rebuilding Babylon's temples, which pieces of cult furniture and paraphernalia should be removed from Ešarra and returned to Esagil. The process appears to have begun fairly late in Esarhaddon's eleven-year reign, probably sometime between 672 and 669 BCE (although an earlier date, perhaps 674–673 BCE, cannot be ruled out), when work on rebuilding Esagil was closer to completion and the king was starting to plan Marduk's return. One such item might have been the metal-plated pedestal upon which Babylon's tutelary deity stood. Two clay tablets (K 2388 and K 7862) preserve parts of at least two different inscriptions that would have been written on that important item.⁴² It is unknown from the scribal notes on those tablets, however, whether or not this pedestal had been twice reinscribed and rededicated in the seventh century – first by Sennacherib for Aššur and second by Esarhaddon for Marduk, the object's original and rightful owner – or whether it had been fashioned anew by Esarhaddon. Given the complete lack of information, it is impossible to know which scenario actually transpired. Because it is known that some important cult objects of Marduk were rededicated to Aššur when Sennacherib made the Assyrian national god 'the new Marduk', it is not implausible that the pedestal in question was treated in the same manner as that deity's bed and throne. Specifically, Esarhaddon had to appropriate it from the Ešarra temple and remove the (dedicatory) inscription(s) that Sennacherib had written on it when he gave it as a gift to Aššur before he could add new inscriptions to its metal plating. Esarhaddon died before work on Esagil was completed and Marduk's statue was returned and, therefore, the task of returning the pedestal to Babylon fell to his son Ashurbanipal.

This proposed scenario might be supported by the fact that Esarhaddon also had a dais of Aššur, the so-called 'Dais of Destinies', rebuilt and replated with a new (inscribed and) decorated metal casing. The text in question, which is written on a stone tablet (as well as on a clay tablet), clearly states that the Assyrian king

⁴¹ See n. 17.

⁴² See n. 15 for further information.

replaced the old *zaḥalû*-metal covering with a new one made from *ešmarû*-metal, a different type of metal alloy. The relevant passage reads

The dais of destiny, the lofty dais on which the god Aššur lives (and) where they (the gods) decree the destiny of heaven and netherworld, which the kings, my ancestors, had made of baked bricks and covered with *zaḥalû*-silver, I (now) had (it) skilfully made of 180 talents of [ca]st *ešmarû*-silver. I fashioned on it (the dais) my royal image (shown) praying to their divinity (and) imploring (them) constantly to give me life, and an image of Ashurbanipal, my crown prince.⁴³

The identity of the last king to have encased that dais' baked-brick core in metal is not recorded. However, because Sennacherib worked on the 'Dais of Destinies' as part of his work on the Aššur temple, the metal plating that Esarhaddon had removed was probably the one put there by his father. An inscribed fragment of the bronze plating of an object (very possibly a dais) now in the British Museum in London might have been used to encase the holy 'Dais of Destinies'.⁴⁴ Rather than have the old inscription and decorations erased, which might have been too complicated as the new casing was to also be accompanied by new representations of the king and his heir designate Ashurbanipal, the old metal plating was simply removed. Due to the holiness of the object, Sennacherib's plating for the 'Dais of Destinies' was not destroyed and it was stored for posterity. Whether this followed or deviated from standard procedure is not at all clear from the textual and archaeological records. It is clear, on the other hand, that Neo-Babylonian kings regularly changed the metal plating of daises in Babylon and Borsippa, thus, demonstrating that seventh-century Assyrian kings were not an exception to the rule.⁴⁵

⁴³ Leichty 2011, 136 Esar. 60 lines 26'–29'a.

⁴⁴ Grayson and Novotny 2014, 273–274 Senn. 194. BM 91157 is a fragment of the bronze plating of an object (possibly part of the 'Dais of Destinies') made for the god Aššur sometime between 688 and 681 BCE. It is not impossible, although it cannot be proven with certainty, that it was the metal covering of that Esarhaddon had removed when he had the 'Dais of Destinies' replated during the final years of his reign (between 672 and 669 BCE).

⁴⁵ This is clear from inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar II (r. 604–562 BCE) and Neriglissar (r. 559–556 BCE), who refurbished the Marduk's 'Dais of Destiny' at Babylon and Nabû's at Borsippa. With regard to the dais at Babylon, see, for example, Novotny and Weiershäuser 2024, 84 Nbk. 2 ii 54–iii 14. As for the dais at Borsippa, see, for example, Novotny and Weiershäuser 2024, 188 Nbk. 32 ii 9–11; and Weiershäuser and Novotny 2020, 44–45 Ner. 3 i 30–40. These daises had been plated previously by Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. These two Assyrian kings are presumably the unnamed rulers referred to in these Neo-Babylonian inscriptions.

5 Conclusions

Based on presently-available evidence, it is clear that Ashurbanipal's treatment of older inscriptions was not out of the ordinary. As far as it is possible to tell from the snippets of information preserved, some of which is known from clay tablets presumably found at Nineveh, Assyria's last great king followed in the footsteps of his predecessors, including his father Esarhaddon and his grandfather Sennacherib. Although Ashurbanipal erased or removed inscriptions of Sennacherib from important cult objects housed in the temple of Assyria's national god, he showed his grandfather a great deal of respect by having his scribes copy the inscriptions on clay tablets so that those texts would be remembered long after the originals had been destroyed or stored in a different place. The appropriation and alteration of these prized possessions of the great gods must have involved a great deal of tact. Despite the fact that the Aššur priesthood might very well have been happy to rid Ešarra of Marduk's property, everyone involved in the process of transitioning these important cult objects back to Babylon's tutelary deity had to tread carefully in order to avoid angering Aššur. Undoubtedly, divine confirmation through extispicy would have been required at each and every step, including ensuring that the right craftsman in the right workshop undertook this delicate and religiously-complicated task. Presumably, the job fell to a workshop in Baltil, in the city of Assur.⁴⁶ In the end, Ashurbanipal was able to return Marduk's cultic furniture and paraphernalia to their rightful place in Esagil. To ensure the happiness of these objects' original owner, the inscriptions that Sennacherib had written on them were erased or removed and replaced with new and appropriate ones. Although his grandfather's inscriptions were gone, Ashurbanipal made sure they were not forgotten.

⁴⁶ This suggestion/assumption is based solely on the fact that an inscription of Esarhaddon records that other objects from Esagil (including Marduk's statue) were refurbished, repaired, or created anew in a workshop located in Assur. The relevant passage of that text (Leichty 2011 Esar. 48 lines 72b–77a) reads 'I kneeled reverently (seeking) the judgment of the gods Šamaš and Adad, and I stationed diviners to (ascertain) their true decisions. I had an extispicy performed concerning (the selection of the) use of the workshop in Baltil (Assur), Babylon, or Nineveh, and I placed (before the diviners) separate lists of craftsmen who should do the work and be allowed to enter the secret place. The omens were unanimous: they answered me with a firm "yes", (and) told me (it should be) in Baltil (Aššur), (my) dynastic city, the residence of the father of the gods, the god Aššur. They indicated to me the workshop to use (and) the craftsmen to perform the work'.

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