Empire’s Inner Theatre

Interiority and Power during the Neo-Assyrian Period, c.750-650 BC

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
I, Chaitanya Dutta Kanchan, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.
Abstract

What role do concepts of the thinking and feeling self play in the processes of imperial rule? How do individuals within empire manage and subvert the government of the self the ecumenical power demands? I address these questions through an exploration of the inner theatre of operations of the Assyrian Empire, which dominated the Middle East in the early first millennium BC from its capitals in North Iraq. The key sources are the state correspondence, c.4,000 letters on clay tablets, written in the Semitic Akkadian language in the cuneiform script. They provide a window into the everyday practice of empire, supplemented by royal inscriptions on clay and stone. These texts have recently been edited and published in high quality interactive scholarly editions online.

In the first part of the thesis, I propose the concept of an ‘intentional loop’ traversing the interior and exterior world. I explore the concepts of ṭemu ‘thought, intention, order, news’ and libbu ‘interior,’ which linked these worlds. Ṭemu, a thought traversing the libbu, unfolded through language and action, manifesting events which looped around into further thought and action. I then analyse techniques used by the Assyrians to shape the interiorities of subjects to satisfy the demands posed by these concepts, using the material to interrogate theories of governmentality and biopolitics.

The second part of the thesis explores how subjects negotiated this regime of interiority through language, before proceeding to explore alternative relationships defined by kinship terminology, and finally antagonistic relationships. By employing methods inspired by linguistic anthropology’s application of Bakhtin’s insights into dialogue and quotation, the dyadic relations explored in this section are resituated in the larger currents of imperial ideology. Thus, building on the recent work by Pongratz-Leisten and Liverani, the thesis further advances our understanding of the Assyrian imperial phenomenon.
Impact Statement

This thesis is the product of a four year Economic and Social Sciences Research Council & Arts and Humanities Research Council multidisciplinary studentship under the rubric of 'Intercultural Interactions,' exploring processes that take place above the level of states and nations. It fulfils this aim by exploring the ontological and linguistic processes that motivated a well-documented ancient empire, the Assyrian Empire of the first millennium BC. Spanning the entirety of the Middle East, this empire produced ideas, infrastructures and cultural changes utilised by the subsequent Achaemenid Persian, Greek Seleucid and Roman empires. The Assyrian Empire's representation in the Hebrew Bible, as well as in nineteenth century European discourse, serve to underline the historical importance of understanding this hitherto obscure period of world history.

This thesis integrates historical and linguistic anthropological approaches and offers impactful methodological contributions to both disciplines. In particular, it shows how a linguistic anthropology might be performed using historical sources, in contradistinction to requiring a participant-observer or ethnographer applying qualitative collection methods. The cuneiform letter's peculiar advantages and disadvantages as a 'transcript' are evaluated, before then being used to develop new concepts and knowledge regarding ancient ontology, subjectivity and biopower. Though sociocultural anthropology enjoys a productive dialogue with history, the extended application of procedures developed in the ethnography of speaking is novel. As the letters represent ephemeral, quotidian utterances, they serve as a particularly effective case study into the multidisciplinary use of historical documents.

Consequently, not only does the thesis open up an entire historical period to a discipline previously distant from it, but also demonstrates that historical documents can be used to partially reconstruct interactive practice despite the impossibility of participant observation. Furthermore, by successfully applying anthropological approaches to the state correspondence of the Assyrian empire, the thesis generates new insights which advance our historical understanding of the Middle East, superstate processes, time, and the human subject's place in the world.
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Bibliographical Abbreviations

CAD
Biggs et al. 1956-2010

CDA
Black et al. 2000

GAG
Soden 1995

MZL
Borger 2004

OED
Oxford English Dictionary n.d.

RINAP 1
Tadmor & Yamada 2012

RINAP 3/1
Grayson & Novotny 2012

RINAP 4
Leichty 2011

SAA 1
Parpola 1987

SAA 2
Parpola & Kazuko Watanabe 1988

SAA 3
Livingstone 1989

SAA 5
Lanfranchi & Parpola 1990

SAA 8
Hunger 1992

SAA 10
Parpola 1993

SAA 13
Cole & Machinist 1998

SAA 15
Fuchs & Parpola 2001

SAA 16
Luukko & van Buylaere 2002

SAA 17
Dietrich 2003

SAA 18
Reynolds 2003

SAA 19
Luukko 2013a
Text Abbreviations

',  line numbering beginning, or continuing, after damage
1  first person
3  third person
b.  bottom
col.  column
e.  edge
l.  line (in columnar inscriptions only)
NA  Neo-Assyrian dialect
NB  Neo-Babylonian dialect
obv.  obverse
QuOT  Babylonian quotative particle *umma*
1QuOT  Neo-Assyrian first person quotative particle *muk*nuk
3QuOT  Neo-Assyrian third person quotative particle *ma*
rev.  reverse
SB  Standard Babylonian dialect
x  damaged or illegible sign
[  beginning of damage
]  end of damage
⸢  beginning of partial damage
⸣  end of partial damage
...  lines omitted
Figure 1 - Known Locations of Mentioned Places
Introduction

This thesis is an experiment in ‘taking things too seriously.’ The preserved letters of the Assyrian Empire offer us an unparalleled window into the practice of power in a non-modern form, made available to us by the painstaking work of lexicographers, philologists and translators over the past two centuries.\(^1\) The successful enterprise to translate the dead Akkadian language of tablets from an ancient past has been refracted through the living prisms of modern academes, interpreting, prioritising, slicing and dicing. Here, I offer another refraction, through a prism of the ethnography of language.

How do concepts of subject, person and action shape the practices of large scale political structures? Assyria has left us around four thousand letters spanning the gamut of topics relevant for ruling a territorial state spanning the Middle East:\(^1\) war, peace, resource extraction, infrastructure, diplomacy, divining the will of the gods. These letters, preserved in their original copies (Radner 2014: 64), provide us with a direct view into the everyday language practices of a social, political and cultural elite.

In this thesis, I explore the boundary zone between the subjective interior and the intersubjective, historical exterior. Flowing across this zone, speech, sound, perceptions, and intentions move back and forth in a dialogue that constituted an Assyrian empire and the subjects that lived it. This exploration is divided into three sections, a tripartite analysis of Assyrian concepts, practices of interior control, and relationships.

The first part comprises chapters one and two, which excavate from the correspondence the ontological terms that implicitly structured the schemas of imperial rule. Chapter one presents the concept of temu. This was a culturally specific model of causation—of thought, intention, action and event—which bound the divine, interior and exterior worlds together in a deliberate universe. The second chapter investigates the interior world of the subject, mapping a ‘topography of self’

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\(^1\) Holbraad & Pedersen 2017 p. 291, 308.
\(^2\) For a critical history of decipherment, see Holloway 2002: 1-79.
\(^3\) See Fincke 2017: 391 for a breakdown of the tablets found in the Assyrian capital Nineveh, and the introduction to Luukko 2013a for a corresponding breakdown of the tablets found in the capital Kalhu.
comprising the indexical ‘I,’ the bodily interior of the libbu, and a partially disjunct ramanu ‘self’ that was associated with the ‘will.’

The second part is concerned with the thoughts, ideals and acts of the imperial elite. The third chapter zooms out to a larger scale, exploring the strategies by which the imperial elite moulded and coerced the interiorities of their subjects in their effort to propagate the temu of the Assyrian gods successfully. We then zoom back in to explore the relationships that made up the network of elite subjects that claimed dominion over the imperial territory. The fourth chapter explores the socially distributed speaking strategies that assigned specific ways of conceptualising the self as a historical subject, in dialogue with the past and projected into the future, focusing on members of the Assyrian hierarchy in particular.

The final part continues with interpersonal relationships, but those which resist the imperialistic, elite model. Chapter five uses the limited evidence available for relationships defined by kinship terms to explore a contrasting value system held by those who did not define themselves solely as members of a ruling elite. Finally, the sixth chapter explores the abject: those set against the idealised imperial order, the ways in which they were conceptualised and denigrated, and how resistance was perceived and responded to in the everyday texts.

In the rest of this introduction, I introduce the ‘ethnographic background’ for this study: the geography, language and history of the Assyrian Empire in this period. We then move to the nature of the sources, the correspondence tablets, where I introduce how anthropological methods can be usefully adapted to get at the unwritten complexities of the dialogues contained therein.
The Assyrian Empire in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries

From the fourth millennium BC, the history of the Middle East was one of a rich contact zone of languages, traditions and communities. Ancient South Iraq was where the first cities and stratified societies in the region coalesced; from these a graphical accounting system was born, which eventually developed into the fully fledged cuneiform script. This script, a complex assemblage of ideographic and syllabic meanings, was associated with cosmological traditions which regarded all events in the world as intentionally authored by divinities, who constantly communicated via readable signs.

Over two thousand years of history sedimented over this ancient past, as the geopolitical landscape underwent upheaval and drastic transformation: mass demographic changes, the rise of new technologies, and the constant violence wrought by warring states fighting for supremacy. Sounds like 2018 AD, but in fact 745 BC. Sumerians, Akkadians, Mittanians, Ḫurrians, Kassites, Hittites, Aramaeans, Arabs and Chaldeans intermingled over millennia spanning the Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages. We enter the scene at the apex of the most powerful societal order that had hitherto existed in documented Middle Eastern history—the Assyrian Empire. Combining technological advantage (such as road systems, standing armies and iron weaponry) with an imperial administration steeped in the ancient practices of cuneiform culture, the Assyrian elite dominated the diverse population.

Beginning circa 900 and extending until the destruction of the final imperial capital Nineveh in 612, the Assyrian elite practiced an expansive, extractive imperialism across the Middle East. From their heartland in northern Iraq, the Assyrians expanded their territory to encompass Egypt in the West and the Zagros mountains in the East, incorporating ancient Babylonia in the South and the modern-day territories of Syria, Israel-Palestine, Lebanon, and the southernmost reaches of Turkey.

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4 An account of cuneiform’s emergence from token based accounting is sketched in Schmandt-Besserat 1995, and also see Houston 2004: 238-239, which cautions against the gradualist view and favours an episodic timeline.
5 All subsequent dates in this thesis will refer to BC/BCE dates unless stated otherwise.
6 This state has also been known as the ‘Neo-Assyrian Empire.’ This term carries connotations that that this was the ‘last’ phase of the Assyrian state, preceded by a Middle Assyrian ‘kingdom’; and an Old Assyrian polity that some have attempted to describe as an ‘empire’ in its own right, though it was really a trading network. These teleological schemes are ultimately unhelpful and so I simply use ‘Assyrian Empire’ here. ‘Neo-Assyrian period’ is used to refer to the timespan rather than the state.
7 The first millennium saw Assyrian kings moving their capitals away from the ancient city of Aššur for various geopolitical reasons, beginning with Assurnaṣîrpal II (r. 883-859), who moved to the site of Kalḫu. Sargon II (r. 744-727) began the new foundation of Dur-Šarruken, but after his death on the battlefield his son abandoned the site and moved to Nineveh, which remained the capital until its destruction.
From 745, following a coup by a man who took the throne name Tiglath-pileser (r. 744-727), this territory was reorganised into a carefully administered and highly centralised provincial system. The provinces were ruled by governors appointed by the Assyrian king, and were supplemented by client kings and tribal chiefs. This was a complex geopolitical landscape, encompassing ancient cities with distinctive local traditions, non-Assyrian countries, and independent tribes itinerant and sedentary. Figure 2 maps the territories and phases of growth of the empire across the first millennium:

![Figure 2 - Phases of Assyrian Expansion, reproduced from Frahm 2017b: 179](image)

The imperial elite, speaking the Neo-Assyrian dialect of the East Semitic Akkadian language, favoured the cuneiform script as part of the wholesale package of an ontological universe populated by signs and intentions. This was set above and within an increasingly Aramaic speaking milieu, with the cuneiform chancellery consciously resisting the wholesale adoption of the Aramaic alphabetic script, written upon parchment.

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8 All regnal dates from Frahm 2017a.
However, despite the ancient, seemingly cumbersome cuneiform script, clay tablets were used to produce vast amounts of bureaucratic ephemera. Contracts, receipts, catalogues and correspondence made their way around the empire by mule express on the royal roads, and were deposited in archives at the capital cities for preservation when necessary. The closely related Babylonian language was spoken in the South and carried connotations of high culture (Barjamovic 2012: 149); it was also an acceptable language for state communication, and, in its archaising Standard Babylonian register, was the literary language of the highly edited heroic accounts of the reigns of the Assyrian kings, known to modern editors as the Assyrian royal inscriptions. These accounts comprised the first primary sources for narrative histories of the ancient Middle East, ‘building blocks of an histoire événementielle,’ though now they are appropriately read more critically as cultural artefacts (Van De Mieroop 2013: 89 ff.).

‘Lightning in the Night’—Sources and Scholarship

The chronology and history of the empire in this period is secure (Frahm 2017b: 162-3). The history of this period has up until fairly recently tended to be characterised as a succession of kings, based on the royal inscriptions, which offer a pseudo-historical narrative account of events.⁹ Added to these have been the over six thousand tablets that form the ‘everyday texts’ concerned with running the Assyrian Empire; these texts have been rightly described as ‘a truly outstanding wealth of administrative and related data’ (Fales 2007: 96). Nevertheless, the letters on which this study is based

cluster around limited periods of time... illuminating, like lightning in the night, brief moments of Late Assyrian history only; but what they reveal about the power dynamics within the Assyrian state, the role of military and civilian officials, spies, priests, and scholars, most likely applies mutatis mutandis, to all of it.

Frahm 2017b: 164

The letters offer a close view on the day to day running of an empire that encompassed numerous states and nations within its ambit. This enables the Assyrian material to modify academic theories of power, which, particularly at the level of large territorial formations, tends to prefer thinking through ideologies, power over, and rational economic or political explanations for state

⁹Dassow 1999; See also Van De Mieroop 1997: 298-9, who notes ‘this tendentiousness is not taken seriously enough when history is written by the modern scholar.’
processes.10 Recent Assyriological work has emphasised an ‘ideological’ aspect of Assyrian power: Beate Pongratz-Leisten (2015) foregrounds the importance of ‘religion’ as an integral component of Assyrian ideology, as opposed to a separate structural component; Mattias Karlsson (2016)catalogues a large amount of textual data. Eckart Frahm, following Ariel Bagg, describes Assyria as ‘an empire without mission’ (2017c: 193). Contemporaneously, Mario Liverani has published a book actually entitled ‘Assyria: The Imperial Mission,’ where he emphasises Assyria’s commonalities with other empires, especially the requirement that there be an ideological ‘mission’ to attain hegemony over the whole world (2017: 1).11 This particular combination of philological method and interpretation through the ‘empire’ concept seems to give rise to cross-talking conclusions about a unitary ‘nature’ of Assyrian domination. Whilst Liverani employs the ‘empire’ concept as a basis for comparative analysis, he flags up a certain yearning for legitimacy and relevance that leads scholars to define ancient phenomena such as Assyria in this way (2017: 2-3).12

By using the correspondence, ephemeral records of everyday dialogue, I aim to further problematise and augment our conceptual complement for theorising ancient power. Taking a leaf from the Indologist Sheldon Pollock’s book on the Sanskrit cosmopolis of the first millennium AD, this thesis attempts to derive a specific assemblage of ‘culture-power’ for the long Assyrian century under study,13 setting it in contrast to the ‘culture-power practices and their associated theories—legitimation, ideology, nationalism, civilizationism, and the like—that came into being in modern Europe’ (Pollock 2006: 9-10). Though I retain the use of the term ‘Assyrian Empire’ for the culture-power assemblage under study, I hope to show the multiple, overlapping and oftentimes paradoxical practices surrounding the dominion of the Assyrian elite. An understanding of ‘Assyrian Empire’ as one where an ‘imperial ideology’ distilled from ‘propaganda’ documents centred on the

10 The concept of a rational, autonomous self largely derives from a tradition of European philosophy, which developed a dualist model of mind-body, reason-emotion (associated with Descartes), subsequently privileging the ‘sovereignty of reason’ above denigrated emotionality (Plamper 2015: 18-24 provides a good overview of this). These definitions of ‘rational’ and ‘autonomous’ themselves are also situated within European philosophy: Descola draws our attention to the fact that the ‘rational’ is itself contingent on the ontology of a given society, as he evokes the Achuar hunter, singing the ament-plea to its prey (Descola 2013: 83). Upon these hulks the sciences were raised, shaping the analytical categories and approaches used to this day (Descola 2013: 68 ff.).
11 This book in effect serves as a sequel to Liverani’s structuralist-Marxist reading of Assyrian imperial ideology (1979). Though an innovative interpretation at the time, Liverani’s paper has been cited as the work on Assyrian ideology for three decades.
12 This reaction towards both defining a ‘legitimate’ object of academic study, as well as reacting against Orientalist interpretations, is particularly evident in the application of ethnocratic terms like ‘prime minister,’ ‘chief of staff,’ ‘the Assyrian cabinet,’ contra ‘emperor,’ ‘vizier,’ or ‘harem.’
13 Pace Pollock’s own dislike of this term, which he uses anyway (2006: 11-12)
King gives way to the interactions between local concepts of sign, act and time (temu), understandings of the subject (libbu-ramanu), affect-shaping practices, and the agencies of subjects as they act in the interstices, gaps, and contradictions of these terms of power.

The Assyrian Letter

\textit{egertu... ki mari edî attaşarşî}

I guarded the letter like an only son\textsuperscript{14}

The letter evidence from Assyria provides us with a unique, if lacunose, dossier of the operation of ‘power’ over a large geographic region across a span of a long century. The letters themselves are written on clay tablets in cuneiform script, in the Assyrian or Babylonian dialects of the Akkadian language, an East Semitic language distantly related to Arabic or Hebrew. A photograph of a cuneiform letter tablet, whence the epigraph above derives, is reproduced in Figure 3. These letters have only recently been made available to wider audiences through the \textit{State Archives of Assyria} project.\textsuperscript{15} Combined with the completion of a comprehensive Akkadian dictionary,\textsuperscript{16} together with various other text publication initiatives, ancient documents are now far easier to work with for the modern historian; reading and interpreting unclear, damaged cuneiform signs, or translating reams of difficult and dead language are all issues presently obviated.

These issues also existed in the Neo-Assyrian period: Assyrian, a language superseded by Aramaic in day to day activities, written in the unsuitable and difficult cuneiform logosyllabary, was mandated by court practice. Consequently, reading and writing in cuneiform was restricted, by dint of its complexity, to a learned group of individuals who could afford to specialise in the skill.\textsuperscript{17}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[14] SAA 13 no. 294 rev. 2, Urad-Gula \textit{ašipu} to Assurbanipal.
\item[15] 1987 —, twenty volumes so far, as well as online editions available at http://oracc.org.
\item[16] The \textit{Chicago Assyrian Dictionary}.
\item[17] Though Assyrian governors were trained to a basic level of literacy—see Parpola 1997.
\end{footnotes}
Figure 3 - Example of a cuneiform tablet (SAA 10 no. 294) © Trustees of the British Museum
The letters thus represent a highly mediated, ossified view into quotidian ways of speaking about power. This enables us to partially interpret the ways Assyrian elites considered and thought about their duties, actions, and the world they operated upon.

Something we must always bear in mind is that, not only is our sample just a partial representation of the cuneiform correspondence that must have been generated, but cuneiform letters were only one way in which Assyrian governance was practiced: interaction written in Aramaic script, on biodegradable parchment, and actual face-to-face interactions, one of the most valued ways of communication, are lost to us.

The Assyrian letter itself represented a complex hybrid of orality and textuality. The vast majority of the documents were composed to be understood as speech. On one end, the message would be dictated by the person sending the message to the scribe. Sometimes, these roles were combined: the scribe was the sender. Then, this document would travel via mule-express to the recipient, who would use a literate scribe to read out the message encoded on the tablet. The oral nature of the letter utterance is evident in the presence of discourse markers. Yet the recognition of the entextualisation process by the parties involved allowed for a flexibility a slavish representation of speech would not offer. Letters may quote the entire contents of other letters, or even shift genres into quoting bureaucratic lists, which were not intended to be spoken at all. Finally, metadiscursive markers such as address to the scribe reading out the letter, or desiring that a letter itself become an incantation indicate a keen awareness of the written nature of cuneiform letters.

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19 E.g., *minu aḫḫu* ‘what else?’ SAA 13 no. 40 rev. 4, Taqiša to Aššur-šarru-ussur; *alimma minu* ‘what else?’ SAA 16 no. 52 obv. 9, rev. 6, unassigned to unassigned. See p.232 for discussion on how emotional oral interjection might have penetrated the conventional ‘scribal filter’ that compressed oral utterances with generic, tropic forms.
20 For example the letter SAA 16 no. 148, in which the official Aššur-usallim quotes an extensive, apparently contiguous passage from a previous letter he received from Esarhaddon.
21 For example, a letter sent by Nabu-zeru-lešir, basically a list (SAA 16 no. 50); also SAA 15 no. 181, where a list is framed by a letter in the more usual epistolary style.
22 *mannu atta tupšarru ša tasassuni issu pan šarri beliša la tupazzar ūḫti ina pan šarri qibi Bel Nabu tahtaka ina pan šarri liqišu* ‘Whoever you are scribe who reads out, you will not hide (this) before the king, your lord. Speak my goodness in the presence of the king, and may Bel and Nabu speak your goodness before the king’ (SAA 16 no. 32, rev. 17-22).
23 *egūtu anittu lu šiptu* ‘may this letter be an incantation’ (SAA 16 no. 63, rev. 16).
Disentangling the various parties involved in a correspondence interaction takes some doing. Martti Nissinen derives a scheme to describe how prophetic utterances were recorded, drawing out the scribal layer interposed between speaker and addressee \((2000: 268-9)\). He also emphasises that, despite whatever priority may be attached to rendering the utterance as faithfully as possible, a ‘scribal filter’ persists which transforms the utterance as it is transmuted \(\text{(Nissinen 2000: 245)}\).

Dominique Charpin, drawing on both Neo-Assyrian practices and those at the court of the city of Mari a millennium earlier, posits a particularly thick filter. A king would dictate a memo to the scribe, who later would compose a ‘definitive text’ in the king’s voice \(\text{(Charpin 2010: 122-123)}\). Thus, even at the letter’s genesis we have multiple subjects behind the singly voiced utterance a tablet might represent: the king’s original utterance, recorded in both written memo and the scribe’s memory, and the scribe’s own ‘royal voice’ that emerges from this.

We can build on these models of the letter production process by drawing on concepts and tools created by sociologists and linguistic anthropologists studying the production of utterances in verbal exchanges. In his seminal study of conversational experience, Goffman differentiates between a number of roles that can be taken in the presentation of a single utterance:

- **the principal**, ‘the party who is held responsible for having wilfully taken up the position to which the meaning of the utterance attests’;
- **the emitter**, ‘the current, actual sounding box from which the transmission of articulated sound comes’;
- **the animator**, encompassing the role of the emitter but recognising the stylistic, embodied presentation of the emitted utterance.

\[\text{Goffman 1986: 517-518}\]

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\(^{24}\) SAA 19 no. 30, rev. 5-8, Issar-šumu-ereš to Esarhaddon.
To these Goffman adds the concept of the *figure*, an imaginative entity the speech of which neither the principal nor the animator claims responsibility for. This emphasises a disjuncture between ‘authoring,’ and ‘making’ (1986: 523). However, this term is not particularly helpful when thinking through the Assyrian letters: all speech carries responsibility in a world composed entirely by the actions of intentional beings.

These roles help us to think through the transmission process of an Assyrian letter a bit more carefully. The principal is the subject or subjects whose names are inscribed in the letterhead of the tablet; the animator is the scribe who speaks the utterance from the tablet at the end. Still, this remains inadequate: it recognises only the cataphoric nature of the oral utterance, and effaces the inscription activity in between.

To really get at what was going on we can mobilise Judith Irvine’s decomposition of roles into ‘shadow conversations.’ Irvine critiques the destructuring of speaker roles suggested by Goffman and, contemporaneously, Hymes: they have got things ‘back to front’ (1996: 134). She suggests that rather than assigning a repertoire of fixed roles to various entities in a conversation, which ‘reifies the fragments’, we focus on the ‘fragmentation’ process’ (1996: 134).

![Figure 4 - Shadow Dialogues](image)

The above diagram captures the different dialogues and modalities a single speaker → addressee message is transformed by when sent through the mail system. The message is transformed across

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15 Judith Irvine’s ethnography draws on her fieldwork in a rural Wolof community in Senegal, which particularly focused on language and ways of speaking in a complex, hierarchical social structure (1995: 251-2).
a subjective ‘intent’ to author an utterance, through spoken language, into the interiority of a scribe, who encodes it into cuneiform script, whereupon it is transmitted across space and time to its destination, whereupon it undergoes a decoding process by a literate being, who utters the message to its recipient. In particular, the transcoding of a spoken utterance into cuneiform is a powerful site for the imposition of a linguistic-ideological ‘rationalisation’ of the utterance: procedures such as regularising structure and compressing idiosyncrasies (Woolard 1998: 12). This phenomenon is opaque to us and must be teased out through its traces, two examples being the non-lexical expression of affect in a letter between imperial officials, and a conflict between expressive language and generic conventions in a woman’s private letter to her brother.

Linguistically, during this period not only was Aramaic the daily language of most people in the Middle East, but it most likely also interacted and interfered with the Assyrian and Babylonian languages themselves, leading to a ‘Assyro-Aramaic symbiosis’ (Fales 2007: 111). Not only this, but the cuneiform letters transparently translate utterances in non-related languages such as Urartian, which further complicates the multiple meanings, voices and, interpretations and dialogues a single tablet represents. For the purposes of this thesis we will flag up when the linguistic issue become pertinent, but otherwise restrict ourselves to assuming the best of the letters, as the Assyrians did. This thesis also makes use of tools developed by the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin and his associates. In particular, the concept of dialogism, which emphasises that language-in-use never conforms to a systematically pure vision, but is ‘saturated with history… permeated with the intentions of others’ (Mannheim & Vleet 1998: 332). Words, quotes, tropes and talk are soaked with the context and meanings of previous uses, and, situated in an utterance, look forward to being heard by a speaker (Vološinov 1973: 86).

The questions posed by a dialogically-oriented approach—whose voices are ‘behind’ which word, the ownership, framing or interpretation of utterances—bring into the foreground interactive power dynamics that can be obscured by

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26 P.49
27 P.233
28 Such as the Saussurean langue in relation to its parole. Vološinov decries such structural linguistics as ‘hypostasizing abstract objectivism,’ creating a ‘synchronic system’ which ‘does not correspond to any real moment in the historical process of becoming’ (Vološinov 1973: 66-67). Irvine further notes that the Saussurean model itself embeds a temporal language ideology, one that freezes languages into a ‘single plane of simultaneity’ (2004: 107). We take up the theme of simultaneity in contrast with linearity in our discussion of šemu later on.
29 Ironically, Vološinov lays the blame for the neglect of spoken language at the feet of ‘philologists’ who concern themselves with ‘dead, written, alien language’ (1973: 73).
plumbing the letters solely for their referential content. In addition, I adopt the *chronotope* to capture specific temporalities of subjects in historical space. Despite the ‘daunting Greekness of the term’ (Blommaert 2015: 106), it enables us to talk of time-space ideas at a higher level than the specific context: for example, I propose a chronotope of royal suzerainty, which implicates subjects in a temporalised narrative.³⁷ There, a conception of Assyria as the source of unfolding authority, with various subjects such as its king in his palace and his deputies in the field, is contrasted with a narrative of familial succession,³⁸ shadowed by the same chronotope of royal authority transposed to the kingdom of Elam instead. These histories are furthermore juxtaposed on a temporality of *ṭemu*, a looping time evoking somewhat Walter Benjamin’s idea of ‘messianic temporality’ (Irvine 2004: 99-100).

**Transcription and Normalisation**

Traditionally, Assyriologists have represented the texts found on cuneiform tablets in three ways. The first, *transliteration*, represents each discrete cuneiform sign in the Roman script according to a set of fixed conventions, for example:

{s1}⁵{gir-tu} ṭA GIŠ.GU.ZA ša ṭ3PA ina ṭÅ tukul-ti as-sa-kan-ši ki-i DUMU e-⁵-di⁸
{s2}⁵{ašar} ši

*egertu issi kussie ša Nabu ina libbi tukulti assakanši ki mari edi attašarši*

I placed the letter in trust before the throne of Nabu and guarded it like an only son

SAA 10 294 rev. 8-9, Urad-Gula *ašīpu* to Assurbanipal

This is generally a lossless process. Each sign is separated either by the hyphen or by whitespace from its neighbours, and each sign is assigned a specific reading by the transliterator. However, knowing the reading of the sign (whether it is the first variant of phonetic *gir*, the second variant *gîr*, etc.) allows one to convert it back to its graphic variant. This thus preserves on some level the polyvalency of the cuneiform system, but it interposes the transliterator’s opinions and interpretations about how a sign should be read. Signs read as Akkadian syllabograms are written

³⁷ See p.197
³⁸ Itself evoking a small scale kinship temporality, instead of the stately, divine temporalities of the Empire.
in italic script; signs read as Sumerian logograms in CAPITAL script; full breakages are indicated by square brackets, and partially readable signs by half brackets. \[f \] and \[1 \].

A transliteration is an attempt to represent the tablet as a written document. By contrast, *normalisation* attempts to render the signs on the tablet into a grammatically regularised form, smoothing out the irregularities in cuneiform spellings. Though this process is ‘destructive’ in that it loses the spellings and idiosyncratic writings of the scribes, it is a representation that foregrounds the language instead of the script, making it preferable for use here.\[32\]

In this thesis, I have adopted a modified form of the normalisation process, as what we are interested in is imagining the text as spoken utterance.\[33\] The normalisations are formatted to graphically make clear the nested discourse frames demarcated by the quotative speech marker, *ma* or \{muk|nuk\} in Neo-Assyrian, *umma* in Neo-Babylonian. This example from chapter four demonstrates the advantages of this approach:

\[
\begin{array}{llll}
\text{ŠB and NN} & \text{Past TP} & \text{Future TP} \\
\text{ŠB/NN} & \\
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{anini \( ki \) anni ana mar Babili niqiṭibi} \\
\text{šarru ina muḫḫikanu issa[prannaši]} \\
\text{ma} & \text{ ina piḫunu issi mar [Babili] \( ki \) [anni ladbub]} \\
\text{ma} & \text{ [a]na [da]ra[r]i ša Babili u kidinnutku laškun ana Babili allaka}
\end{align*}
\]

We spoke with the sons of Babylon like this

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{2.QUOT} & \text{ The king has s[en]t us before you} \\
\text{3.QUOT} & \text{ [I shall talk] with the sons [of Babylon] with your mouths like [this]} \\
\text{3.QUOT} & \text{ I shall establish [the am]ne[sty 0]f Babylon and your privileged status} \\
& \text{ and I am coming to Babylon.}
\end{align*}
\]

SAA 19 no. 98, obv. 11-18, Šamaš-bunaya and Nabu-nammir to Tiglath-pileser

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\[32\] Von Soden in his standard grammar of the Akkadian language emphasises the importance of ‘zusammenhängender Umschrift’ for establishing grammars and dictionaries (GAG §6, p.33). These normalisation procedures—smoothing out misspellings and selecting the ‘grammatisch korrekte’ form of an Akkadian word—bear notable similarities to other contemporary transmutations. For example, Haviland explores some of the issues of normalisation in the process of transcribing Tzotzil to text. Of particular interest are his observations of the imposition of a ‘standard or normal form on pragmatic features of the original speech context,’ which reflects some of the attempts to show the structures of nested dialogues in this work as well (1996: 47).

\[33\] I deviate from standard Assyriological practice here in omitting vowel length markers such as the macron and circumflex. Though this is unorthodox, it reflects the lack of consensus on how to represent the Neo-Assyrian dialect in normalisation. Von Soden noted the ‘sehr uneinheitlich’ variety of normalised forms in Assyriological texts in 1974, and though the system he outlines in his grammar provide a consistent scheme for normalising the fairly regular Old Babylonian form of Akkadian, no standard grammar yet exists for the Neo-Assyrian dialect. This is illustrated by the heterogeneity of normalisations of the letters on the Oracc interface, and so I deem the issue out of scope for the purposes of this thesis.
Hopefully, the nested indentation helps to make it clear to the reader increasingly embedded citation frames, in a way following the tablet formatting would not.

For the complete transliteration of signs, the reader is advised to consult the SAA edition indicated with its extensive markup and critical apparatus. Otherwise, full breaks in the tablet are indicated with square brackets; partially broken signs are generally not indicated unless the breakage is of critical importance to the interpretation of the text, whereupon these breaks are marked with the square half bracket characters ⸣ and ⸢. Lines I have omitted in the quotation are indicated with ellipses; a series of damaged or broken lines by ellipses in square brackets.

Finally, as a Semitic language, the majority of Akkadian words fell into morphological categories defined by triliteral roots: three consonants which, when placed into vowel patterns and supplemented with infixes, formed a morpheme.\(^{34}\) For example, from the root √grr were derived the words gararu ‘to be frighten, to be scared’ and ussagüiri ‘they frightened.’ Methodologically, this thesis is interested in moving away from neat, fixed dictionary definitions, and so I use the √ semantic root in the text to indicate the domains of meaning without actualising them into a specific verbal or substantive form. In particular, we question translations such as √plḫ, √grr, √gld as ‘fear,’ √dbb √qb as ‘talk, speak,’ and {libbu|ṭemu} √škn as ‘to establish’ {libbu|ṭemu}. Where a word can be translated with multiple terms, those terms are separated by /; when an expression can be formed with a choice of words occupying a single slot, the slot is demarcated with curly braces {} and alternatives separated by |.

\(^{34}\) NB that not all Akkadian words can be easily assigned to a semantic root e.g. ṭemu; some words are loanwords from other languages, e.g., sukallu from Sumerian, unzarḫu, from Ḫurrian.
Overview of Key Events

c. 4000
Nascent development of stratified city societies and cuneiform writing in southern Iraq

c. 879
Assurnaṣirpal (II) begins to move the Assyrian political capital away from Assur to Kalḥu

754
Assyrian army defeated by an Urartian coalition

745
Tiglath-pileser (III) takes the Assyrian throne in a coup

726
Shalmaneser (V) succeeds his father

722
Sargon (II) takes the Assyrian throne in a coup

713
Construction of Dur-Šarruken begins

705
Sargon dies in battle and his corpse is lost

704
Sennacherib ascends to the Assyrian throne and moves the capital to Nineveh

689
‘Destruction of Babylon’ — deportations, lapses of cults, kingless years

683
Sennacherib appoints Esarhaddon mar-šarrī, his official successor, passing over Urdu-Mullissu

681, 20e of Tebet (X)
Murder of Sennacherib by his son Urdu-Mullissu

680
Esarhaddon takes the Assyrian war after fighting a violent war of succession

673
Esarhaddon’s wife Ešarra-ḫamat dies

672, 18e of Iyyar (II)
Esarhaddon appoints Assurbanipal mar-šarrī and Šamaš-šumu-ukin mar-šarrī Bābili
Conspiracy of Sasi
Purge of high officials

Esarhaddon dies en-route to a military campaign to put down rebellion
in Egypt
Smooth accession of Assurbanipal, supported by his grandmother Naqi’a

‘Brother War’ between Assurbanipal, king of Assyria, and Šamaš-šumu-ukin, king of Babylonia
Period of historical obscurity

Destruction of the city of Assur and the Temple of Aššur

Destruction of Nineveh
Clay tablets in palace storage are preserved by fire and buried in the ruins

Destruction of Ḥarran
Assyrian Empire comes to an end
1 Ṭemu, Evidentiality and the Intentional Loop

Introduction

The motor driving Assyrian imperialism has long been conceived of as the will of the god Aššur, enacted by his representative in the mortal realm, the Assyrian king. A variety of terms were used to describe the communication of the divine command to the king, and thence to his subjects in a chain of delegation: qibitu ‘command,’ {abatu|abutu |amatu} ‘word,’ and ṭemu. Of these, only ṭemu is not derived from a semantic root associated with speaking. It remains one of the most puzzling terms in the Assyrian lexicon. Ṭemu appears in a number of different contexts, which at initial glance appear quite incongruous to us:

Aššur-reṣuwa issapra
ma ṭemu ša Urartaya
ma paniu ša ašpuranni

Aššur-reṣuwa has sent to me
3.QUOT The ṭemu of the Urartians
3.QUOT that I sent previously...

SAA 1 no. 31, obv. 22-23, Sennacherib mar-šarri to Sargon

minu ša ṭemuni aḫuwa lišpur
Whatever is ṭemu, let my brother send

SAA 5 no. 81, rev. 4-5, Aššur-zeru-ibni to Nergal-eṭir

šar Urartu[ya ana] bel paḫetēšu ṭemu i[sakkan]
ma emuqikušu ina qatikušu šabta...

The king of Urartu es[tablished] ṭemu upon his governors
3.QUOT Take your troops in your hands...

SAA 1 no. 29, obv. 14-15, Sennacherib mar-šarri to Sargon

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35 Parts of this chapter were presented as the paper ‘Evidentiality and Power in the Assyrian Empire’ in the ‘Evidentiality and Contact Zones’ panel of the 115th Meeting of the American Anthropological Association 2016. Much gratitude is due Professor Judith Irvine for her generous comments as respondent.

36 Qibitu is derived from ʾqib, ‘speak, say, command,’ which was often used in verbal form in this period, as well as substantivised; {abatu | abatu | amatu} is derived from ṑw’ ‘speak,’ though its usage in verbal form is only attested for Old Assyrian period texts. See p.184 for discussion on the language ideology behind some of these terms.
In these five excerpts alone, ṭemu demonstrates an extensive polyvalence:

- it is an object that can be sent, or that can be requested to be sent in the future, optionally with linguistic content;
- it is something that can be ‘established’ (√škn) upon others, also optionally with linguistic content;
- it is something that can be shared intersubjectively;
- it is something that, when disturbed, adds to illness.

During the Neo-Assyrian period, all of these meanings were operative in an everyday capacity: they were all frequently employed throughout the correspondence, and this was regarded as unremarkable. Consequently, ṭemu resides in the interesting position of being a complex and difficult concept for us that was central and essential to the Assyrian elite. Understanding what ṭemu was is thus critical in understanding the subjective experience and ontological world of the Assyrian Empire.

Modern translators have attempted to resolve this problem in various ways, most straightforwardly by imputing multiple meanings to ṭemu sharing a vaguely common semantic sphere: thus, ṭemu in the first two examples could be taken as ‘news’; when used with √škn ‘put, place, establish,’ it could mean ‘order’ or ‘instruction,’ especially when accompanied by linguistic content with future aspect; ṭemu could mean intention, or a subjective attribute even more inchoate. Dividing ṭemu up into these multiple meanings is the preferred strategy of the standard Assyrian and Akkadian

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37 For a definition of ašipu and the other Mesopotamian sciences, see p.79.
38 The quoted speech attached to the ṭemu contains an imperative or precative form, expressing something that should be done, or might be done, at some point in the future. The imperative form was almost exclusively used when attached to ṭemu—see p.190 for more.
dictionaries. Alternatively, other authors have chosen to focus on only one aspect of *temu*, without attempting to address its polyvalent nature.

This chapter presents a challenge to the reader in attempting to think *temu* as a single, unitary phenomenon whose axis of variation is time. I propose that *temu* can be conceived of as an intentional process, a phenomenon unfolding through time, originating from within an interiority and being actualised in the world; something that can be perceived via sensory apparatus, reported upon, and thus reacted upon by the Assyrian elite—in effect, a loop.

To clarify, we can step through *temu* from a different perspective. The Assyrian correspondence network was, in one aspect, an extensive information gathering network, receiving reports, rumours and information from across the imperial domain (i.e., *temu*) and transmitting it to the officials, governors, magnates and kings. In concert with this worked the scholars specialising in celestial and terrestrial divination, who would read the cosmos for signs indicating the intent of the gods (again, *temu*). Decision-makers, who would ideally possess the *nous* for making correct decisions (a quality known as *temu*) would thence formulate instructions and orders in response (called *temu*), which, when enacted, would cause changes in the world.

This schema did not solely apply to the Assyrian imperial machine: all thinking beings were possessed of *temu*, and especially the gods. As nothing that happened in the world happened against the *temu* of the gods, it stood to reason that all actions in the world were *temu*. This is in complete

39 The CAD divides *temu* into seven different lemmata (CAD Ṭ s.v. *temu*, p. 85) whereas CDA prefers just four (CDA s.v. *temu*, p. 414).

40 Most recently, Ulrike Steinert explores *temu* synchronically through an investigation of divinatory and medical texts from the second and first millennia, choosing to exclusively investigate its associations with intelligence and understanding. She writes:

Temu bezeichnet besonders die menschlichen intellektuellen Fähigkeiten, über sein handeln zu reflektieren, es bewußt und zielgerichtet zu steuern, an Veränderungen anzupassen. Temu ähnelt somit unserer Vorstellung von Bewußtsein/Geist (oder dem Englischen *mind*).

2012: 395

In his review, Foster takes Steinert’s conclusions forward and highlights the ‘motivational’ aspect of *temu*. His favoured translation, ‘reason,’ attempts to map that word’s polyvalency—‘reason’ as mental faculty, ‘reason’ as cause, justification—to *temu*’s multiple meanings (Foster 2014: 316). Though a particularly excellent use of punning and meaning, it does not really capture all of *temu*’s senses; his further offering, ‘intelligence,’ with its overloaded meaning of ‘intelligence report,’ is also subject to a similar inadequacy of scope.

41 It was these gods, above all Aššur, who ruled the world, and the Assyrian king was but their ‘deputy.’ This delegation of authority, and the need to divine the intentions of the ruling deities, is similar to the principles of the Late Shang polity described by Campbell (2009: 8a6).
contrast to certain Western understandings of intentional action, unintended actions, unintended consequences, accidents, natural events and the like, and is symbolic of an ontology that fully incorporates subjective, inhuman entities.

Thus, conceptualising temu in this way allows us to think the subjective, intersubjective and introspective dimensions of action, an Assyrian notion of intentional action, and directly link the ‘thought-world’ and the ‘real-world,’ the imagined, and the future. Rather than being an esoteric and obscure term, temu was a central concern of the Assyrian correspondence, and thus investigating its facets exposes the central motivations of this ancient imperium.

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42 I use ‘Western’ as a shorthand term to cover the Euro-American intellectual tradition and English language ideologies in which this thesis is situated.

43 Hill and Irvine briefly draw attention to the historical development of liability in English law (1992: 2-3). Duranti draws attention to the fact that there are a variety of attitudes and theories towards intention and interpretation that fall under a ‘Western’ tradition (2015: 40), which includes the intentional meaning behind utterances as described by speech act theory, pragmatists and their emphasis on ‘consequences and effects of human actions,’ and neuroscientific models of action (2015: 41). He notes that, in Samoan, ‘one cannot say “I didn’t mean it”’ (Duranti 2015: 121). All these models are situated within what Descola calls a ‘naturalist’ ontology: one which creates a discursive concept of ‘nature,’ which is subject to non-intentional laws. In this ontology, only humanity is granted the capacity for intentionality, which strongly differs from the Assyrian ontology.

44 Although in this chapter I propose we think of fact, orders, intentions and the temu mental attribute all as aspects of a single ontologically specific Assyrian concept, I will continue to use the English terms to differentiate between these aspects to enable us to follow along without getting too confused.
1.1 Everyone’s Actions Must Be Reported

*mar tammaruni [tašammuni] issu paniya la tupazzar*

Do not conceal from me anything you see or hear

In 672, three years before his death, Esarhaddon announced his succession arrangements for the continued stability of the Assyrian realm: the appointment of his eldest son, Šamaš-šumu-ukin, to the throne of Babylon, and a younger son, Assurbanipal, to the throne of Assyria. This dual succession was unprecedented, as the king’s personal healer Adad-šumu-uṣur so breathlessly proclaims. Throughout the empire spoken loyalty oaths were thus sworn to uphold these arrangements, the treaty tablets then set up in temples throughout the land (Lauinger 2012: 87). Enshrined in the oath was the obligation, *mar tammaruni tašammuni issu paniya la tupazzar* ‘Do not conceal from me anything you see or hear.’ Variations on this injunction appear not only in this *ade* treaty, but throughout Assyrian letters from the eighth and seventh centuries, highlighting the importance of information gathering for the Assyrian ruling elite. All were enjoined to look out and listen up: Sargon writes to his governor about the Phrygian ruler Midas *kayyamani minu ša ṭenšuni šimi* ‘constantly hear whatever is his *temu*’; the client ruler of Šubria writes *ina muḫḫi ṭeme ša Uraṯaya ša šarru beli išpuranni ma [m]inu ša tašmuni arḫiš [šupra] ‘Regarding the *temu* of the Uraṭian of which the king sent “Whatever you hear, [send] swiftly!”’ This request was so pervasive

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45 SAA 16 no.66, obv.5-6’, unassigned to Esarhaddon
46 See p.221.
47 Though I gloss *ade* as ‘treaty’ here, the term refers to a more complex assemblage of ‘duty, destiny.’ See Lauinger’s critique of *ade* (2013: 133-104) and p.161.
48 E.g., SAA 19 no. 119, rev. 17’-18’ *abutuma ša ašmuni ša amar[uni] aq[tib] ‘I am tel[ling] a word that I have heard, that I have se[en];‘ SAA 16 no. 78, obv. 11-12 *abutu ša amuruni ašmuni ana šarrri beliya laqbi ’I shall speak to the king my lord the word that I have seen and heard;‘ SAA 18 no. 83 obv. 1-5 [ana] ade šar šari beli ašmuni u šarru beli ašmuni ša šarrri beliyanumma minma mala tammaruša u tašammašupmani ‘We entered [into] the *ade* of the king your father [and] we entered into the *ade* of the king, our lord, and the king sent to us, “Send to me whatever you see and hear.”’
49 SAA 1 no. 1, obv. 15; see p. 112ff.
50 Cf. SAA 5 no. 85, obv. 3-5 ša šarru beli išpuranni ma dayalika ana qanni ṣurus pašur ma *temu ḫarsu liš’ullu ‘As to that the king my lord sent to me “Send your scouts to the environs of Ṣurushpā’ 3.QUOT “may they investigate detailed *temu*”’; no. 144, obv. 6-8, rev. 12’, where a similar order of Sargon is quoted, and then replicated by the unknown correspondent when he gives the same instruction to a subordinate client king.
that correspondents would pre-empt it with *issuri šarru iqabbi* ‘perhaps the king will speak,’ followed by a question about events.\(^5\)

*Ṭemu*, as an account of facts, was essential for the operation of the Assyrian machine. Sargon’s chosen successor, *mar-šarrı* ‘son of the king’ Sennacherib, forwarded edited compilations of letters to him.\(^5\) These letters were introduced with the formula PN *issapra ma* ’PN has written to me,’ with the quotative particle *ma* (NB *umma*) introducing third person speech. They were terminated with the phrase *anniʾu ṭemu ša* PN, ‘this is the ṭemu of PN.’\(^5\) There are two levels of ṭemu here: the letter as reported speech, and the reported speech as evidence of the doings of the speaker. Further, the veracity and verifiability of ṭemu was paramount. A hierarchy of the senses and experience thus underlay evidence: personal experience was emphasised above the written word, and the written word was authenticated by many control mechanisms (Radner 2014: 92-93). Personal experience itself was further subdivided, with a specific differentiation between √ʾ*mr* ‘seeing’ and √š*ṃ* ‘hearing.’

\[\text{ina kette qibiʾa}\]

Speak in truth to me

What is truth? Intuitively, we could simply regard it as the correspondence between a linguistic statement and the ‘real world.’ In truth, truth is a complex, socially mediated affair, cross-culturally variable and a key site for the manifestation of power. Duranti problematises truth, beginning with the European tradition differentiating analytic and contingent truths (2015: 106). He draws attention to the meaning-making aspect of truth: that it can emerge through social action, or negotiated in dialogue (2015: 132). This punctures a model of truth as ‘word-to-world’ fit, restituting it into the realm of unfolding relationships.

*Ṭemu*, in its protean relation to the world, fares well from the problematisation of truth. As we will see, ṭemu was not only a reflection of a ‘true’ world, but was itself a constituent of what the ‘true world’ was. Nevertheless, it did not coincide with the semantic zone usually translated as truth, √ʾkʾn.

\(^5\) This use of the modal particle *issuri* is an example of imaginative ‘time-travel’ and modelling of the future (Maurice Bloch 2016 p. S85), for which see p.188.

\(^5\) E.g., SAA i nos. 29, 31.

\(^5\) *anniʾu ṭemu ša Arike* SAA i no. 29, obv. 22; *anniʾu ṭemu ša Aššur-reṣuwa* rev. 11.
This root, associated with meanings of firmness and stability, was the subject of particularly affect-laden disputes, of which we explore three below.

*Lahḫinnutu* Nabu-šallim-aḥhe

3.QUOT You! You! [Wh]y will you die in untruth? Bring out the goods in your possession and bring them to me.

3.QUOT Nabu-abu-da”in the cook cried out

3.QUOT he picked up Warrior Erra and gave it to him along with one set of clothing.

3.QUOT That evening, and the morning, he produced two *qapirana* containers. This cook, Nabu-abu-da”in, was beaten on the fifth day, and died from the beatings.

SAA 13 no. 157, obv. 20'-rev. 8, unassigned to Esarhaddon

In this damaged letter, the author quotes the report of an unknown *lahḫinnutu*'-temple stewardess’ detailing the investigation into the theft of temple valuables. The sequence of events is striking: the investigator, Nabu-šallim-aḥhe, asks a question to Nabu-zer-ketti-lešir: ‘you, you, why will you die in untruth?’ This utterance is unusually charged with its duplication of the second person independent pronoun *atta*. Grammatically, this pronoun is not usually necessary in a verbal clause.54 *Atta* once indicates emphasis; *atta* twice strongly intensifies the whole phrase. Consequently, another man present, Nabu-abu-da”in the ‘cook,’ *irtugum* ‘cries out,’ making a wordless, almost meaninglessly animalistic noise.55 He then renders up the missing goods, and meets a violent end.

Presenting the idea of ‘dying in untruth’ thus seems to have been enough to provoke Nabu-abu-da”in to expose himself to punishment and death. Whether the cook feared such a fate for himself, wanted to take the heat off Nabu-zer-ketti-lešir, or was overwhelmed by

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54 Here, *tamuat* ‘you will die’ supplies the second-person case.

55 The distinction between meaningful speech and inhuman noise was a particular locus for differentiating between worthy and worthless subjects—see p.251.
Nabu-šallim-ahhe’s intensity, we cannot know—only that ‘death in untruth’ was a sufficiently powerful statement to resolve the investigation.56

The importance of √kʾn to the Assyrian state was so highly prioritised that a metadiscourse about the truthfulness and accuracy of reports and events overlaid most communication, either implicitly, with the use of √kʾn as an emphatic particle or discourse marker,57 or more explicitly with accusation and protest. The governor of Sargon’s new royal foundation city responds to an accusation from the king:

\[ \text{ina muḫḫi betani ša mušarkisani ša šarrī beli isiparanni} \]
\[ ma \quad \text{betani raspate šina} \]
\[ ma \quad \text{tasallaʾanni} \]
\[ ma \quad \text{basi tadani ana urdanika} \]
\[ \text{issu mašin anaku la ketu ina pan šarrī beliya addabbubuni} \]

In regards the houses of the procurement officers that the king my lord sent to me

3.QUOT The houses, they are built
3.QUOT you are deceiving me,
3.QUOT soon you will give them to your servants.

As if I, I would talk untruth before the king my lord

SAA 1 no. 124, obv. 3-9, Kišir-Asšur to Sargon

Unsurprisingly, Kišir-Asšur’s response to Sargon is emphatic: a counterfactual state of affairs introduced by issu mašin, with further affective charge supplied by the anaku first-person pronoun. A similar challenge-response couplet occurs in an exchange between a minor official and the king Esarhaddon:

\[ \text{ake anaku issi šarrī beliya la ketu addabbub} \]

Why would I, I talk untruth with the king, my lord?

SAA 16 no. 78, obv. 6-7, Mannu-ki-Libbali to Esarhaddon

Here, Mannu-ki-Libbali phrases the counterfactual as a question, rather than a hanging subjunctive, but the underlying proposition is the same. However, this response did not always need to be

56 For violent reprisal for deception, see p.238.
57 E.g., SAA 15 no. 4, obv. 13 ketu anaku lu ubbarri la aqabbaššunu bet šarru beli isapparšanuni “Truth, I have not disclosed nor told them where the king, my lord, is sending them”; SAA 10 no. 243 rev. 9 ketu šumma ina pan šarrī beliya maḫīr “Truth, if it is agreeable before the king”; see also SAA 10 no. 242, rev. 8; 254 rev. 10; 257 obv. 8; 284 rev. 8.
phrased counterfactually: a letter to Esarhaddon from the asipu Nabu-naṣir simply has ketu issi šarri beliya addabbub 'I talk the truth with the king my lord."

All three correspondents thus report important information to the king: Kišir-Aššur, building affairs; Mannu-ki-Libbali, a palace dispute; Nabu-naṣir, the health of a royal child. All are challenged regarding the √kʾn of their words: √kʾn {šupra|qibiʾa} ‘{send|speak} the truth to me,’ or directly accused of deceit, as with Kišir-Aššur. The three correspondents diverge after this in their approaches to reporting truth. Nabu-naṣir continues in an unmarked manner, suggesting that the king’s injunction was not something to be worried about in his case. Nabu-naṣir was able to assert ketu... addabbub by virtue of his medical expertise: his access and training in ašiputu granted him the authority to pronounce the truth in health matters, borne out of immersion in the discipline’s esoteric texts. This kind of construction of authority is explicitly found through citations of ašiputu and other scholarly texts in correspondence to the king, for example in another of Nabu-naṣir’s letters,59 foregrounding the entextualised, communicative and replicative nature of scholarly authority.60

By contrast, Kišir-Aššur requests a trustworthy emissary, a ša-reši of the king, to observe the situation on the ground firsthand and inform the king in person:

ša reši ša šarri beliya illary ša ketu issi šarri beliya idabbubani betati annate ša mušarkisani lemuru
May a ša-reši of the king my lord, who will speak the truth with the king my lord, come and see these houses of the recruitment officers

SAA 1 no. 124, obv. 10-13

This request is demonstrative both of the social determination of truth and of the hierarchy of sensorial information. Unlike Nabu-naṣir the ašipu, Kišir-Aššur was unable to rely on entextualised authority, being accused of misusing his official authority. Consequently, he cannot rely on his assertions being taken as valid truth on their own. Rather, truth is determined in a dialogical, communicative process between Sargon, his trusted ša-reši, Kišir-Aššur and his accuser, with

58 SAA 10 no. 302, obv. 9-11.
59 SAA 10, no. 298, obv. 8-rev. 1.
60 Kuipers, following Urban’s definition of entextualisation as ‘a process rendering a given instance of discourse a text, detachable from its local context’ (1996: 21), conceives of authority as incorporating a fundamental entextualisation component (2013: 404). He critiques Bakhtin’s position that authoritative discourse has ‘its authority already fused to it,’ instead drawing attention to processes of authorisation (2013: 404). Being able to cite ašiputu-texts, as Nabu-naṣir does, is thus not only a process which demonstrates Nabu-naṣir’s qualifications and ašiputu-authority, but reproduces the authority of that ancient text by having it be recognised as authoritative in the contemporary Neo-Assyrian milieu.
Sargon’s ability to rule upon √k’n a constituent of his sociopolitical power. The gradations of trusted testimony are thus inscribed in the social hierarchy: the closer an official was to the king, the more reliable their words were construed. We might compare this to the ‘communal explanation’ for the construction of trust underlying epistemology (Lipton 1998: 12). Describing the community of gentleman scholars in seventeenth century AD Britain, Lipton adapts Shapin’s explanation that this was based on shared values and an ‘honor code,’ suggesting that this arose out of communal proximity (1998: 11-12). Though the Assyrian administrators were all members of the same ruling elite, we can detect smaller communities or networks of trust—such as the king, his ša-rešis and ša-qurbuti ‘Close Ones’—that determined truths. This multiplicity of truth-networks, ṭemu-networks, manifested itself in disagreements, conflicts and paradoxes, resolved by royal fiat, as seen here.

In addition to this social dimension, Kiṣir-Aššur requested that the ša-reši come and see, lemuru, and then speak to the king directly, alluding to a hierarchy of sensorial experience intertwined with a valorised system of evidentiality. The words of a close royal confidante, having witnessed the situation with his own eyes, were more trustworthy than that of a governor’s tablet. Multiple hierarchical systems are embedded in this assumption of trustworthiness: that of the imperial power hierarchy itself, where the ša-reši or ša-qurbuti dispatched by the king is able to provide ‘expert’ testimony as a result of his station.61

Underlining the importance of witnessing and informing is Mannu-ki-Libbali, who after further counterfactual spinning finally asserts abutu ša amuruni ašmuni ana šarri beliya laqbi ‘I shall speak to the king the word that which I have seen and heard.’62 Thus, senses were marshalled towards the constant reporting of truth. However, truth was both socially mediated (the higher status one was, the more trustworthy your sensorial experience), and inflected by circumstance:

61 Somewhat analogous to the hierarchies of authoritative speech present in a 1980s American court system: expert witnesses trained in specialist knowledge are trusted to interpret specific kinds of evidence (Philips 1992: 251- 254); in this Assyrian context, the ša-reši or ša-qurbuti possess a similar social asset which allows them to interpret the evidence of their own eyes, over and above their act of witnessing, and thus offer the king more valuable evidence than that presented by Kiṣir-Aššur on his tablet.

62 Compare amiri emma ra šemu išemme ‘Will he who can see it see it? Will he who can hear it, hear it?’ found repeatedly in oracle queries (e.g., SAA 4 no. 129, obv. 9).
Temu on the war-torn northern frontier seems to have been held to different evidential standards, at least by Upaq-Šamaš's description of his sources. Rather than providing names, or attesting to having seen that which he reports, the √kʾn of his report comes from repetition. This is an unusual and marked circumstance, yet considering that Upaq-Šamaš is monitoring enemy movements, it might have been that hearsay was satisfactory here. By contrast, the easily accessible core of the empire was a realm open to the eyes of the highest officials, their first-person eyewitnessing being the height of truth-making:

śarru beli kettu ūmar
May the king my lord see the truth!

Once again, someone upon whom have been cast aspersions exhorts that Sargon himself see the truth: the highest status man in the world, using the most privileged sense, eliminating all mediation.

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63 Lanfranchi and Parpola’s translation of Upaq-Samaš’s subsequent words, annurig maṣṣartu[šu] anaṣṣar (rev 7-8) as ‘I am keeping an eye on [him] now’ is unduly creative; ‘Now I am guarding his guard’ is more literally correct, whilst also bringing up the question of how this expression maṣṣartu ūnṣr relates to the linguistically equivalent maṣṣartu ša šarri ūnṣr. The discussion on p.279 considers this guard as a guard against divine disfavour expressed in untoward ūmu: uprisings and rebellion, demons and curses. In this context, we can consider maṣṣartu ūnṣr of this enemy king in a similar light: protecting against untoward ūmu. The untoward ūmu for this hostile king, however, would not be one that, from his defective perspective, materially benefited him. Rather, the correct and appropriate ūmu for him would, hazarding conjecture, be one of his defeat by the forces of Assyria, to be followed by a suitable punishment. This would be good for him, as he would be fully integrated into the divinely sanctioned ūmu of Aššur. By this logic, maṣṣartu ūnṣr, as a procedure of guarding for the correct outcome, works as a consistent translation here.
Two Letters—The Sealanders and the Elamites

To have mastery over ṭemu as the knowledge of people’s actions and doings could be a powerful advantage in the contentious geopolitical circumference of Assyria’s orbit. The Assyrian state demanded a monopoly on ṭemu—to report all that you see and hear—but nevertheless it could be accessed and employed by others for their own ends. Claiming privileged access to ṭemu and its distribution was one of the main rhetorical strategies through which one of Assyria’s erstwhile enemies attempted to replace Assyria as a suzerain in southern Babylonia.

The marshy region at the head of the Gulf known as the Sealand was a focal point for conflict between the Assyrians to the north and the Elamites to the east, centred around the powerful Bit-Yakin tribe. At the end of the eighth century, the chief of the Bit-Yakin, Marduk-apla-iddina, declared himself king of Babylon, with Elamite support; by Esarhaddon’s reign, Assyria was again ascendant in the area. Nevertheless, the region remained volatile.

A sequence of three extant letters from the Elders of the Sealand recount their interactions with Elamite messengers. The first is a retelling by the Sealand Elders of their first interactions with the Elamites, who are attempting to install Nabu-ušallim, son of Marduk-apla-iddina, as ruler of the region.

Once, twice a messenger of Teumman, the king of Elam’s brother, of the herald and of Zineni have come before us

Come, embrace Nabu-ušallim, the son of your lord, may he go before you

We, we did not consent

Na’id-Marduk our lord is alive
and we are the servants of the king of Assyria. If his magnification in the land is your wish, send him to the presence of the king of Assyria, let the rejoicing king magnify him. Wherever he is, you will have sent him here. We will not do wrong, he will not be magnified over us. We will send him in manacles to the king of Assyria.
Now they have brought him in, taken the Targibateans, Naḥaleans, Duteans, the Bananu, the border regions of our land, and given them to him. And now his messenger has come before the elders of the Sealand.

QUOT

Ascend to me and lead the forces to the Sealand.
And if you do not ascend to me and do not speak my speech, I will come and I will destroy your land and houses.
And maybe you will say

QUOT

We areamble before the king of Assyria
It is I, I will carry responsibility (lit. forehead) of the king of Assyria.

In presenting this temporally straightforward narrative, the Elders of the Sealand emphasise that they are satisfying the duty minu ša tašmuni šupra ‘write me whatever you hear’: ki nišmu šarri nulte[šm] ‘as we heard, we are making the king [hear].’ Implicit throughout the letter is the direct experience of the Sealanders: they report direct speech conversations between themselves and the enemy messengers, those messengers being de-emphasised vessels for the speech of the Elamite King and Nabu-ushi. Throughout this narrative, they inform Esarhaddon of their loyalties, and present their impeccable conduct against the Elamite threat.

In particular, the Sealanders demonstrate their loyalty through their own self-reported speech, where they use indirection and imperatives to demarcate a hierarchy debasing the Elamites and situating the king of Assyria at its apex. The Elamite messenger, and thus his superior, are addressed in the second-person in the phrase ana pan šar mat Aššur šupurraššuma... ina bit šutunu taltapraniššu ‘send him to the presence of the king of Assyria... in the house (where) he is, you will have sent him.’ The parallelism between šupurraššuma and taltapraniššu emphasises the
disclaiming of responsibility on behalf of the Sealanders for the actions of the Elamites; the imperative and second-person forms indicate that they view the Elamites as inferior in status. Finally, the character of the Assyrian king himself is introduced and presented with maximum agency: ḫadu šarru lurabbiš ‘may the king magnify him.’ The precative form of the verb (lu- or li-prefix) roughly indicates a desire for the events described by the clause to occur.⁶⁵ Further, by supplying Ṽḥd’, an adjective associated with emphatic happiness, the free agency of the king is boosted to profound levels. The juxtaposition of this with the Sealanders’ obvious expectation and desire that Nabu-ušallim fail suggests that this statement, whilst reinforcing a pro-Assyrian power structure, mocks the Elamites with the ironic presentation of an impossible future.

Contrasting with the loyal self-presentation of the Sealanders is the direct speech of the messengers. We cannot be certain to what extent the mediation of the reported speech of the messengers has altered the ‘real words’ dictated by Nabu-ušallim. Even without alteration, selective quotation and framing devices provide a powerful means for the dialogic representation and reinterpretation of the words of others. As it happens, the Sealanders present Nabu-ušallim as particularly villainous: ki ana paniya la tatelanu qib’a la taqabba allakamma matkunu u bitatikuni aḥeppu ‘If you do not ascend to me and do not speak my speech, I shall come and destroy your land and house.’ Again, a particular concern with speech and replication is found in Nabu-ušallim’s threat: ki... qibaya la taqabba ‘if you do not speak my speech...’ That this is one of two actions the messenger demands of the Sealanders is significant: replicated speech is prioritised above other demonstrations of loyalty, indicating the primacy of language ideology in the construction of relationships.⁶⁶

The Elders send a second letter to Esarhaddon, narrating more of their misadventures with the Elamites. The letter opens with a recapitulation of the events described above: the Elders have received no reply to the first letter, under the belief Esarhaddon did not hear it, so they send another one. In new developments, the Elamite king’s messenger reveals he knows of an alarming šemu:

u uttirma mar-šipri ša šar Elamti ana panini ittalku
umma mare [x x x x] amelu qablišunu [x] Nabu-ušallim belišunu lišumu
[ana] muḫḫikunu ina mati lirbi
u mindema taqabba
umma Naʾid-Marduk
anaku šemu ša Naʾid-Marduk alla [x x] ḥaršak Naʾid-Marduk mitu

⁶⁵ See p.188 for discussion.
⁶⁶ For more on which, see p.77 on libbu Ṽgmr as ‘loyalty,’ p.184 for language ideology.
And a messenger of the King of Elam returned and came before us

QUOT
Sons...man... their battle... let Nabu-ušallim be made your lord, let him become great over you in the land. And maybe you will speak

QUOT
Naʾid-Marduk
It is I, I am clear re: the temu of Naʾid-Marduk moreso than (you?): Naʾid-Marduk is dead. I am going to bring in Nabu-ušallim, in your joyousness, or in your unjoyousness, and I shall magnify him over you. You are my men. From henceforth, the king of Assyria does not exert authority over you.

SAA 18 no. 87, obv. 14'-rev. 2, [Elders of the Sealand] to Esarhaddon

As in the first letter, a messenger anticipates the Elders' objections with an irrealis, here mindema ‘perhaps.’ Previously, the Elders were √plḥ before the king of Assyria; Nabu-ušallim would ‘carry responsibility’ for him. Here, the Elamites have changed tack: the Elders of the Sealand might proclaim their allegiance to Naʾid-Marduk, but the Elamites are in possession of temu unknown to the Sealanders: Naʾid-Marduk mitu, ‘Naʾid-Marduk is dead.’

From our evidence we cannot be certain whether Naʾid-Marduk really was dead, as the Elamite messenger claims. However, the messenger’s attempt to use his privileged access to temu against the Sealanders remains pertinent. This scenario demonstrates that temu reports, regardless of the veracity of their content, could be used to manipulate and influence affects and political events: it is notable that the Elamites have not militarily attacked the Sealanders, but are still using communicative channels at this stage. By deploying this temu of Naʾid-Marduk at this juncture, the Elamites intended to break the Sealanders’ resistance. That this was the case is emphasised by what the messenger says next: he will install Nabu-ušallim ina ḫudikunu u ina la ḫudikunu ‘in your joyousness or in your unjoyousness.’ There is no precative used here: a bald durative aspect asserts the inexorability of this enthronement, with due disregard for the Sealanders’ response expressed with the binary opposition of ḫudu (√ḥd’). Potentially, this use of ḫudu might even be in response to the Sealanders’ ironic use of it described in the previous letter: an aggressive requotation of the Sealanders’ words.

67 √plḥ is usually translated ‘fear, revere,’ which works as a gloss. In chapter three (p.131) I reread √plḥ as a specific, socially mediated and practiced emotion, a superset of ‘fear, revere’ without the negative connotations of ‘fear’ that inhere in the English language.

68 The Akkadian verb does not distinguish between the present and future tenses, a characteristic which Richardson suggests leads to a temporal ‘ambivalence’ over past, present and future (2013: 248).

69 For more on this, see p.192ff.
The conclusion of the letter once again illuminates the importance of replicating words, reporting and hearing, as the Elders vie for royal support:

[...]du mar-šipri ana pan šarri bel[ni n]ištapra mimma ša šar Elamti ana panini išpuraššu ana šarri belini liqbi
[N]ow we have sent a messenger to the presence of the king [our] lord; whatever the king of Elam sent to us, may he speak it to the king our lord.

u m̱indem Elamu ana muḫḫini ḫakunu Kaldanu šarru tēmu liškuna ana ayalinux...
And perhaps Elam will proceed against us. May the king establish a tēmu on the Chaldeans for our aid...

mamma šanamma [x x] ana muḫḫinu la išemmi [ar[de] ša šarrri ninni mar-šipri šar Elamti išpurannaši aду ana šarri belini nītapraššu ša pīšu šarru lišmi
Whatever another... against us, he must not hear. We are the [servant]s of the king. The king of Elam sent a messenger to us; now we have sent him to the king, our lord. May the king hear that of his mouth.

rev. 11-rev. 22

The Sealanders employ a couple of linguistic strategies to underscore to Esarhaddon the importance of listening to the Elamite's words. Firstly, they explicitly demarcate their accurate transmission of the messenger's speech, mimma ša šar Elamti ana panini išpuraššu 'whatever the king of Elam sent to us,' ana šarri belini liqbi 'let (the messenger) speak it to the king our lord.' Secondly, they narrate out their expectations of how the verbal audience should proceed as an engaged, reciprocal process. The king should attend to the words of the messenger: ša pīšu 'that of his mouth.' Correspondingly, Esarhaddon must engage in active hearing: he must not hear anyone else (la išemmi), but he should hear the messenger (lišmi). The importance of hearing is inverted: instead of telling the king whatever one sees and hears, now it is the king who should hear whatever the Sealanders show and tell.  

All of this is to induce the king to royal action: the only request the Elders make is that the king tēmu liškuna: may he establish a tēmu. This tēmu, that the Chaldeans come to the aid of the Sealanders, is not something that is reportable: it has not happened yet. However, it is still described as tēmu: in this case, a tēmu to be established: an intention.

70 This might be compared with the couplet in the text known as the ‘Coronation Hymn of Assurbanipal’: šēḫru liqhiba [rabu] lišme rabu liqhiba [šēḫru] lišme ‘May the small speak and the [great] listen; may the great speak and the [small] listen’ (SAA 3, no. 11 obv. 12-13).
1.2 Intention

šarru beli ũemu liškun
May the king establish ũemu

In the first part of this chapter, we explored how the term ũemu described ‘facts,’ things done in the word; how ũemu-reports in this aspect were a field in which √k’n-truth was constructed through sensorial experience and contingent on social position; how knowledge of ũemu could be deployed to manipulate others such as the Sealand Elders. Reports on ũemu facts were thus not only a locus of power, but the ũemu described by language was itself a record of a universe of exclusively intentional actions.

The use of the word ũemu to refer to what we translate as both reports and intents in the letters is widespread and unproblematic: we have already seen it used in both senses in the letter SAA 18, no. 87 above. We see the same duality in Sennacherib’s compilation of reports about Urartu, where the quotation of a ũemu of the king of Urartu is embedded in the quotation of a letter of an Assyrian client. The client’s letter is itself described as ũemu, resulting in a Matryoshka-like nesting:

Sennacherib  Ariye  King of Urartu
ša Urartu  bel pahatešu ũemu ša ssakkān
aša  emuqikunu ina qatěkunu šaštā...

The king of Urartu imposed a ũemu on his governors
3.quot  Take your forces in your hands...

anni’u ũemu ša Ariye
This is the ũemu of Ariye

SAA 1 no. 29, obv. 14-16+22

This description of the Urartian king suggests that the Assyrians easily applied their schema of action and intentionality to actors outside their collective group: that their model of interiority was
open to recognising the same kinds of actions amongst other collectives.\(^71\) Establishing a *temu* was an act that was conceivably open to anyone, and thus practiced throughout the Assyrian hierarchy.\(^72\)

How is it that the word *temu* can refer to both an account of facts, as well as the words that bring those acts about? Duranti’s historical exegesis of truth, in its relation to intentionality, highlights that an Aristotelian conception of truth represents a ‘correspondence between mind and world’ (2015: 105); intentionality, in its widest sense as mind directed towards world,\(^73\) encompasses the widest array of relations between mind and world (2015: 108). Duranti proceeds to critique these concepts, drawing attention to notions of the individual actor acting intentionally as the site of ethical and social movement (Duranti 2015: 109-111). *Temu* also seems to question these notions. Though it captures a ‘truth’ relation as well as an ‘intention’ relation, it does not differentiate between the two; it collapses the linear temporality of act→fact into a single instance. The temporality of *temu* is differentiated then only by the words used to describe it:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{šarru beli} & \text{ temu issaknanni} \\
\text{ma} & \text{ sissu kayamanute muḫuru ana Dadi dini} \\
\text{ma} & \text{ sissu ša šarru muḫuru}
\end{align*}
\]

The king my lord established *temu* for me

3.QUOT Receive regular horses and give them to Dadi

3.QUOT Receive the horse of the king

SAA 19 no. 91, obv. 9-11, Aššur-da’ınanni, governor of Mazamua to Tiglath-pileser

Here Aššur-da’ınanni quotes, as direct speech encoded in a previously received letter, the king’s *temu*. The royal utterance establishes *temu* by means of imperatives—a verbal mood that replicates

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\(^{71}\) Historically, groups considered to be alien to the Mesopotamian way of life, such as the Gutians, were described as having the *temu* of animals, as opposed to lacking *temu* at all (Steinert 2012: 388). This is in stark contrast to individuals denigrated in royal inscriptions (on which see below) and thus creates an interesting tension in the classifications that could give rise to relations within an Assyrian ontology (to adapt terms from Descola 2013: 113). The Gutians, with their animal *temu*, were integrated into an Assyrian order in a way that those *la teme* ‘without *temu*’ were not: thus in the royal inscriptions, the legitimacy of Assyrian might is underlined by the fact that their enemies cannot inherently be related to in any fashion, unlike the Gutians, who, as *temu* bearing animalistic entities within the Assyrian ontology, could be dealt with and related to as phenomena of ‘nature.’

\(^{72}\) Various non-royal examples include SAA 10 no. 212 rev. 9-15, the *ašipu* Adad-šumu-ūṣur and lamentation priest Urad-Ea; SAA 15, no. 63, rev. 13’-15’, Aššur-belu-ūṣur, governor of a province to Sargon; SAA 16 no. 93, obv. 4’-5’, unassigned to Esarhaddon; SAA 19 no. 33, obv. 16, Inurta-belu-ūṣur to Sargon.

\(^{73}\) Duranti builds on Husserl’s phenomenology, which interpreted intention as the inherent quality of ‘aboutness’ present within human thought (2015: 26). ‘Intention’ as the will to do something is thus a subcategory of this definition.

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itself across codes, from language sign to physical sign. The imperative appears as a language to world relation, carrying illocutionary force to change the world to fit the word (Duranti 2015: 15). The ḫemu does not share this temporality: it is what it is.

Here, though the king has established ḫemu, uttering royal imperatives, the imperatives have not been effective. Aššur-da’’inanni reports that he is not in fact receiving the regular horses, nor the king’s horse, due to personal rivalry with the ruler of a city in Iran. It is because of this failure to establish the king’s ḫemu that the letter has been written.

Indeed, just as reports of actualised- ḫemu were ideologically and practically central to the operation of the Assyrian machine, the circulation of potential- ḫemu was the blood-flow that kept it alive and moving. The number of letters in which ḫemu is requested is vast: again, these requests for ḫemu could be described linguistically or remain open. Requests for open ḫemu appeared as little more than requests for instructions,75 indicative of a lack of agency on the part of the correspondent. Requests for described ḫemu, whilst also indicative of the correspondent’s inability to act autonomously, also presented a strategy through which they could potentially shape imperial action:

\[ \text{šarru beli aṭemu liškun kallî } \text{u } \text{ina Dur-Atanate lašazzizu ahe’iši nutin} \]

The king my lord should establish a ḫemu, a mule-express should be stationed at Dur-Atanate that we strengthen each other.

SAA 5 no. 227, rev. 10-15, Šamaš-belu-uṣur, governor of Arzuḫina to Sargon

\[ \text{issi lîbbini la nida[bbub] kettu ḫemu liškunu kayamani lušeribunaši} \]

We do not talk with our interior. Truth—may a ḫemu be established, let them have us enter regularly.

SAA 10 no. 293, rev. 1’-3’ Urad-Gula, ašīpu to Esarhaddon

\[ \text{šarru beli ḫemu liškun kima } \text{ḥiddu etiqiši liddinuni } \text{ša da’anî } \text{ša la m anni } \text{ḥiddu iddanuni} \]

May the king my lord establish a ḫemu that he daub her with ḫiddu, they will give it to me, they will give the ḫiddu to me by force, without anybody

SAA 16 no. 65, rev. 7’-10’, unassigned to Esarhaddon

These three correspondents all use the construction šarru beli ḫemu liškun ‘may the king my lord establish a ḫemu’ to make a request, in three very different contexts. The governor Šamaš-belu-uṣur suggests that a communication upgrade be installed in his province, a matter of optimising Assyrian

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74 Discussed in detail p.193.
75 For example: minu ša ḫemuni šarru beli lišpura ‘May the king send me what the ḫemu is’ (SAA 16, no. 49, rev. 8’, Aššur-la’i to Tigrath-pilesert); also SAA 15 no. 33, rev. 17-18.
rule; the ašipu-exorcist Urad-Gula needs access to conduct a rite, underlined with an emphatic kettu ‘truth’; an unknown informant takes it as a given that šemu will be established according to his wishes, proclaiming he will gain the ḫiddu by force, with no one stopping him. Whilst the three of them lack sufficient authority to make these scenarios a reality, by requesting the king establish šemu they are able to suggestively shape the future within the constraints of the Assyrian hierarchy.

utra šemu tere šummu ibašši šummu laššu
Return šemu—whether it exists or not!

It was essential that šemu-intentions were communicated smoothly, without disruption or delay. In the vast majority of letters, the requests for šemu-instructions are relatively unmarked: they appear at the end of a narrative, without additional comment, implying that routine communication was in operation and that the request for šemu was typical and expected. Letters were sent indicating the successful establishment of a šemu received from central officials:

ša šarru belini išpurannašini
ma  ki annaka attanuni
ma  šemu assakankunu...

Regarding what the king our lord sent to us:
3.QUOT  While you were here
3.QUOT  I established this šemu upon you...

SAA 1 no. 98, obv. 5–7, Ṭab-šill-Ešarra and Na’di-ilu to Sargon

The disruption of šemu communication resulted in strong affective responses. A letter sent by Ariḫu, an official of uncertain position demonstrates frustration at the lack of šemu received from his superior:

ana Nabu-dari-uṣur Ṭappi Ariḫu lu šulmu ana DUMU
ina muḫḫi nasaḫ ša Šamirnaya beli šemu latere šummu  идеальнě šummu laššu ina muḫḫi liḫḫini lu ḑab bel piqittate qalu izzazzu la 七星išpušu la  Followers
ki annima ša šaddaqliš adunakanni ina muḫḫi eribi attanaḫḫarka eribuna la nsērih
utra šemu tere šummu ibašši šummu laššu

76 The question of what ḫiddu actually refers to remains open.
To Nabu‑duri‑uṣur, a tablet of Ariḫu, may wellbeing be for DUMU

Regarding the corn tax of the Samarians, may my lord return a temu if either it exists or it does not exist, and let it be good inside us concerning it.

The officials are silent, they stand still and do not go and perform their work, we cannot impose temu on them.

I have been appealing to you just like this since the previous year concerning the income, and we have not brought in any income. Now return (imp.) a temu if it exists or it does not exist.

SAA 1 no. 220, obv. 1-edge. 1, Ariḫu to Nabu‑duri‑uṣur

Subordinates requesting a temu to be imposed by a superior figure are found throughout the letters, and occasionally those subordinates would address their superior with an imperative, just as in this letter. We notice in the first part of this letter the usual characteristics of address towards a superior: third person address, with precative constructions (beli temu lutere) and a standard greeting formula. However, after Ariḫu describes the situation on the ground, his language becomes more direct, with a second-person suffix address and an imperative (uma temu tere). Although this is just one letter, we can draw some tentative conclusions by contrasting it with the use of imperatives throughout the letters. We know that the king and most officials each had a scribe (or scribes) to whom they dictated their letters to in normal circumstances, and that these letters were likely reviewed before sending. It therefore seems that this shift in tone actually does represent an affective shift, during dictation, towards what we might call frustration or anger, especially in light of Ariḫu’s statement about his officials not working properly. In addition, if this were reviewed before sending, it may have been deemed appropriate to forward such a terse letter to the governor, presumably because either the imperative order indeed corresponded to the governor’s normal duties, or simply because Ariḫu thought he could get away with it without being punished. Taken together with Taklak-ana-Bel’s letter to the sukkallu discussed in chapter six, we have two

77 The sign on this tablet has been read DUMU, a logogram usually interpreted as maru ‘son’. Parpola, in his translation, simply translates the expected ‘my lord’ here. However, there are no other attested readings of DUMU with a value of belu, at least when consulting a recent sign list (MZL s.v. TUR, p. 255). This is particularly puzzling in that the remainder of the letter uses the expected logogram EN for belu, so why DUMU should mean belu here is a question Parpola does not answer. This could be a scribal error, or it could be a misreading as the sign is partially broken on the tablet. I have not had the opportunity to consult the tablet myself, and thus make no reading here.

78 See for example SAA 15 no. 186, a letter from Šamaš-abu-uṣur, an Assyrian official of unknown position, to an unnamed Assyrian governor. It contains an intelligence report, ending with the line temu ina ekalli tere batiqtu ši assapparakka ‘Return this temu to the palace. I have sent this information to you’ (rev. 7-10).

79 See Parpola 1997: 319 ff. where he discusses normal circumstances by way of abnormal circumstance: an Assyrian official writing to the king asking for a scribe. In order to write to the king, however, the official would need basic cuneiform literacy, which is what Parpola suggests.

80 P. 255.
instances of register shift towards more direct forms of speaking indicating a more emotive, frustrated underlying affect. This suggests that one of the problems caused by a stopped flow of ṭemu is an inability to enact Assyrian authority. Arīḫu requires that his superior send him ṭemu so that he can establish his own ṭemu towards his subordinate officials: without ṭemu flowing downwards through the hierarchy, Arīḫu is powerless. Thus, not only is ṭemu as intent ubiquitous, it is an essential component of Assyrian dominion.81

Underscoring this point, not only was ṭemu needed as a prerequisite for authoritative speech, but it was actively desired. A letter from an unknown cultic functionary to the mar-šarri Assurbanipal demonstrates a longing for his patronage:

mar-šarri lu uṣia panešu šulanšu lu amur issiya lu tadub ṭemu lu taškunanni
Would that the son of the king came out, would that I saw his face and health, would that you talked with me, would that you established a ṭemu for me.

SAA 13 no. 158, obv. 8’-10’, unknown to Assurbanipal

Though the letter is somewhat broken and the context unknown, the pleading use of language is interesting. Requests to see the king and crown prince’s face and health—i.e. audience requests—are fairly frequent for supplicants such as the scholars who rely on the patronage of the royal family (Westbrook 2005). Here, however, the verbs are in the past tense, emphasised with the optative particle lu (Huehnergard 1983: 572), indicating an impossible wish in this case. Furthermore, the desire to have talked with Assurbanipal (lu tadub) and have him impose a ṭemu (ṭemu lu taškunanni) are atypical. In this case, they seem to emphasise the author’s desire to be part of the Assyrian household,82 to be subject to, driven, and made to implement the crown prince’s ṭemu. That this is not the case is the cause for ‘weeping before all the lands.’ To be part of a relationship within the Assyrian hierarchy, in which one would receive ṭemu from one’s social superior in

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81 A further example underlining the supreme importance of ṭemu is potentially offered by the events described in the letter SAA 5 no. 142. This tablet is unfortunately severely damaged. However, if we take Lanfranchi and Parpola’s suggested restoration of ṭemu for line rev. 4, then we have a sequence of events where an official does not listen (la išammani, obv. 7’), does not establish the ṭemu (ṭemu la iš’ kun’, rev. 4), and is to be whipped for this transgression.

82 The social position of scholars was precarious: unlike political appointees, they did not possess a named, abstract office and status and were reliant on the personal whims of royal family members to keep them in post.
constant communication—this was an idealised position for the subordinate, one which resulted in anger and upset when defective.\(^8\)

\[
\text{ki ŭemešuma biltu u mandattu ilqamma ana Ninua adi mahriyailikamma inaššiq šepeya}
\]

According to his \textit{temu} he brought tribute and gifts, came before me in Nineveh and kissed my feet\(^8\).

The \textit{temu}-intentions of the Assyrian hierarchy were the motors that powered the Assyrian imperial machine. However, the Assyrian elite recognised that other beings were possessed of \textit{temu}, were intentional actors. Assyrian ontology recognised that this \textit{temu} indicated others possessed their own agency. This could be something to proudly celebrate: in a royal inscription, Esarhaddon describes how a Chaldean chieftain, \textit{ki ŭemešuma} 'according to his own \textit{temu}', submitted to Assyrian authority. As memorial texts, highly literate and authored, the royal inscriptions foregrounded the most important aspects of an Assyrian king's record, emphasising their greatest triumphs. That Esarhaddon, in concert with his scribes, deliberately mentions Bel-iqiša's submission as one according to \textit{temu} suggests that it was viewed as a substantial achievement.

More often than not, the agency of others' \textit{temu} represented a threat. Another passage from Esarhaddon's accession account narrates his inner speech as he tells the story of his brothers:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{itti ūbbiya atammuma uštabila kabattī} \\
\text{umma epšetišu na šurruḫama ana ŭeme ramaninšunu takluma ša la ilani mina ippušu}
\end{align*}
\]

I debated with my interior and my 'liver' considered thoroughly

\textsc{quot}

Their deeds are haughty and they trust in the \textit{temu} of their own \textit{ramanu}. What will they do that is not of the gods?

\textsc{rinap 4 Esarhaddon 1, col. i 32-34}

This passage is deeply interested in describing interior state: using florid Standard Babylonian idioms for interior speech, Esarhaddon describes the failure of his brothers in trusting in their own

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\(^8\) The theme of constant instruction is one that reappears in several contexts throughout this thesis, for example chapter six, where dogs without direction wander about aimlessly (p.242); the need for upkeep in communication is discussed in chapter five (p.230).

\(^8\) RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 1 col. iii 71-83
\textit{ṭemu}. As a result, instead of acting together with the gods, as is right, their actions are completely untrammelled and consequently dangerous.

That such views of \textit{ṭemu} were not just confined to ideological literature is demonstrated in this letter written on behalf of Nabu-iqbi. A Babylonian of unknown status providing information to the Assyrian king, he speculates through rhetorical questioning on the interiors of some potentates:

\begin{quote}
\textit{minu i\text{bašši} ki itti li\text{biššanu} idab\text{bubu} ša 3 šanati aga ana šulmu ša šarri beliššanu la i\text{liššanu} ki ašmu il\text{tud riğišṣunu} u il\text{tud ţenšunu} u min\text{ma} ša la a\text{ẖameš} ul īppušu min\text{u i\text{bašši} ki itti li\text{biššanu} ipiṭqanu}}
\end{quote}

What is it that they have been talking with their interior that for three years they have not come for the wellbeing of the king, their lord? I have heard that they have one resolve and a single \textit{ṭemu}, and they do not do anything separately. Whatever is it that they are plotting with their interior?

SAA 18 no. 132, rev. 2-rev. 12, Nabu-iqbi to Assurbanipal

Whoever he is writing about must have been of some import, as they appear to be under obligation to maintain audience with the king of Assyria, an obligation usually required of the king's highest staff. Notably, Nabu-iqbi emphasises the unity of this group of people: \textit{il\text{tud riğišṣunu} u il\text{tud ţenšunu}—}and this unity is a unity of intention. This concern with unified interiority is further underlined when he asks, what are they plotting with their interior? The interior of other human beings, not being directly accessible to the loyal informers of Assyria, is a dangerous, mysterious place where sedition and disorder can roost, just like they do in a 'chaotic periphery' (Liverani 1979: 306).

\begin{quote}
\textit{ki ţem ilani}
\end{quote}

According to the \textit{ṭemu} of the gods

Thus far, we have seen that the flow of \textit{ṭemu}-intention was critical to the action of the Assyrian state. \textit{Ṭemu} was requested, required, desired and demanded by the army of administrators, scholars and cultic functionaries that carried out the day-to-day duties of domination. \textit{Ṭemu} was communicated through signs and speech, established in ascending order through the Assyrian hierarchical chain, up to the king himself. The king of Assyria is not an autonomous source of \textit{ṭemu}, however. As we

\footnote{Specifically, the \textit{ṭemu} of their \textit{ramanu}, which is commonly translated ‘self’ and often rendered transparent in translation. However, \textit{ramanu} is rather a fully fledged descriptor in an Assyrian understanding of the topography of the subjective self, which we deal with in the following chapter.}
have seen, autonomous acts of ṭemu, unless aligned with Assyrian interests, were unbridled and dangerous. The Assyrian king derived his ṭemu from following that of the gods.

Enacting the ṭemu of the gods was the key mission of the Assyrian king and his state. The scholars maintained in the Assyrian court allowed the king to inquire as to the ṭemu of the gods through divinatory acts both active and passive: reading ominous signs written on the livers of sheep, or the movements of the celestial bodies.

Ṭem Šamaš Adad almadma ‘I learnt the ṭemu of Šamaš and Adad,’ the voice of Sennacherib proclaims in a royal inscription. Royal ṭemu, royal action, and all events validly deriving thenceforth are justified as enacting the will of the gods. That the Assyrian king’s actions are ki ṭem ilani is repeated over and over again in royal inscriptions, to emphasise this point.

The perception of the gods acting in the world, events unfolding according to their ṭemu, was not restricted to literature: a Babylonian letter attempts to persuade Esarhaddon to implement beneficent tax policies for the city of Nippur by describing the ṭem ilani:

[ṭem ilani rabuti] ašibu šame u erṣeti ultu ullanumma [x x ina muḫḫi Nı]ppuri u Babili ťenšunu ilteni
[The great gods] dwellers in heaven and earth, suddenly their ṭemu has changed [regarding] Babylon and Nippur.

SAA 18 no. 124, obv. 6-7, Bel-ušezib to Esarhaddon

86 The kingship of the Assyrian ruler was founded on implementing and ‘maintaining’ the order of the great gods of Assyria and Babylonia (Liverani 2017: 13-14). Pongratz-Leisten likens the claims to explicit divine authorisation as a ‘cultural strategy’ (2015: 5).
87 The integration of divination practices into the evidential system of the Assyrian empire was not only undifferentiated from other ‘commonplace categories of evidential coding systems’ (Bois 1987: 91), but was specifically conceived of as a communicative act with intentional divinities. This demarcates the practice from the doubly unintentional divinations presented by Du Bois, where although the oracle ‘cannot in a direct sense vocalize… which words are selected, and which meanings, are in principle beyond the utterer’s control’ (1987: 92, emphasis mine). The Assyrian diviners, just as the Yoruba and Sisala diviners, are restricted in that their utterances are chosen by the oracle, but in a different code that needs to be transposed into language. In particular, the Yoruba procedure, where specific configurations of cowrie shells point to specific ritual verses, strongly parallels the Assyrian tradition, which relied on ancient omen compendia; both traditions thus employ ‘duplex speech events’ uttered (at least) once in the past, and once in the present, forming a complex temporality. However, unlike the impersonal divinations, which are more like sensorial extensions which open up a space for interpretation (1987: 107), the Assyrian divination is explicitly intentionally driven: the procedures are designed to discover the ṭemu of the gods, which directly feeds into the imperial ideology with the Assyrian king and hierarchy as interpreters and implementers of ṭemu.
88 RINAP 3 Sennacherib no. 168, 29.
89 For example: epeš šipru šuati ki ṭem ilani ina uzušiya ibleša ‘The performing of this work existed in my ear according to the ṭemu of the gods’ RINAP 3 Sennacherib no. 1, 70; 2, 41; 3, 41; 68, ff.; in another context in 17, vii 16; RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 1, i. 38.
As an astrologer, Bel-ušezib was well-placed to pronounce upon the ṭemu of the gods, qualified to read the signs in the sky indicating their intent.93 Much like the Elamite messenger's privileged access to ṭemu, the report that Na'id-Marduk was dead, Bel-ušezib uses his privileged access to the ṭemu of the gods to influence Esarhaddon's intentions towards Nippur. Despite the ṭemu in these two situations being in different temporal states,90 the function it plays is the same.92

Importantly, the gods were conceived of as the ultimate source of ṭemu—as the creators of the world and of humankind, all intention ultimately originated form the divine. Though subjects could act according to their ramanu against the gods, this too was considered a ṭemu, though one that was in opposition to the divine ṭemu supported by the Assyrian hierarchy, and yet paradoxically also a divine ṭemu.

Consequently, all perceptible events within the world were attributable to some kind of ṭemu behind them, leading to an ontology where not only is nothing unintentional, but a Western style model of intentional acts having a one-to-one mapping with an autonomous individual breaks down. Returning to Duranti's exploration of truth and intentionality, he notes that it is individual actors and their acts that serve not only as a 'point of reference for universal ethics' but enable us to make suppositions about the mental intentions of others (2015: 110). At the same time, there is the possibility for things that happen to be unintended; speech act theory does not consider something like 'tripping on a banana peel' to be an intentional action, whereas a conversational utterance does not encode intention in a formulation like 'he tripped on the banana' (Duranti 2015: 19). By contrast, Assyria resembles more the causality described by Evans-Pritchard, who concluded of the Central African Azande that 'witchcraft' was a cause of events that we might explain as accidents (1976: 22-25). However, ṭemu did not indicate a simple causative temporality that might be suggested by

90 Celestial signs were specifically expressions of the 'will' of a god: there was no causal connection between a celestial omen and the event it portended, rather, the event is caused by the god's intention to enact it, and the celestial sign is an index of this intent. See Ossendrijver 2016: 148.
91 Na'id-Marduk being dead is completed in the past; the god's ṭemu, though they changed it in the past, is potential: it is up to Esarhaddon to actualise it.
92 This opens up an intriguing avenue of thought: as ṭemu plays the same role in both these narratives, and furthermore points to the same 'thing,' do we need to alter our understanding of Assyrian temporality in order to accommodate this schema? We return to this question in the conclusion to this study, which composes evidence from this thesis and understandings of Assyrian divination practices to posit a 'firm yes' in answer.
witchcraft causing accidents; rather, there was a paradoxical simultaneity to it, which we will return to in the conclusion.

Finally, the grammatical construction of ṭemu—ṭemu √škn 'establish ṭemu'—demonstrates how action was not conceived of as directly linked to an autonomous individual. Firstly, ṭemu does not exhibit any possessive suffixes indicating ownership of acts. Secondly, the verb itself, √škn, evinces a particularly durative temporality: instead of giving an order, a speech act that, once uttered, leaves responsibility for implementing the order to its audience, ṭemu √škn openly implicates both establisher and established in a perpetually unfolded process. Ṭemu is established, and once established continues to be established, rather than being spoken and thence completed. This consequently suggests why ṭemu is never described in terms of truth or falsity. Ṭemu is not a linguistic reflection corresponding to a world 'out there,' but is language fully integrated with the world, and is in effect always 'true.'

---

93 This is to be differentiated from constructions like ki ṭemešuma, which locate ṭemu as a kind of character quality and are not verbally described with √škn.
1.3 Mind

\[
\text{mil[ku] damqu iḥḥassasa ka[ru] ikku la a[ka]lu la šaṭu ŭemu ušašša murṣu urrad}
\]

Good advice is to be contemplated: not eating, not drinking disturbs ŭemu and adds to illness

Thus far, we have seen ŭemu used in several ways: as reporting on the activities of the intentional beings that inhabit the Assyrian world; as linguistically enunciated orders or instructions, required and desired; as the motivating intention that drives the Assyrian machine and flows down from the gods through to the meanest functionary; as a dangerous intention that can lead to chaotic action.

In this final part of the chapter, we complete the association of ŭemu with intentional being by observing it in a completely interiorised, non-verbal state: when ŭemu is used to describe an interior attribute.

As Adad-šumu-uṣur implies in a letter to Esarhaddon, ŭemu indexes not only events, orders and intentions, but a mental attribute that can be disturbed by physical distress.\(^94\) Considering that the king was the prime conduit of ŭemu for Assyria, that this ŭemu could be disturbed was, as the letter describes, a matter for alarm: Adad-šumu-uṣur exhorts the king to listen, \(lîšmi\). Esarhaddon’s father, Sennacherib, was not modest in describing his own ŭemu:

\[
\text{ina milik ŭemey a mene khabatiya pitiq eru ubaššimma}
\]

I created a work of copper in the advice of my ŭemu and the wisdom of my kabattu.

RINAP 3/1 Sennacherib 17 col. vii 5-7

Further to this, Sennacherib frequently denigrates his Elamite enemies as being \(la\) ŭemu throughout his inscriptions.\(^95\)

This abstract form of ŭemu enabled the production of authoritative speech;\(^96\) it was differential and

\(^{94}\) SAA 10 no. 196, rev. 14-right edge. 18.

\(^{95}\) For example, RINAP 3/1 Sennacherib 22 col. v. 15, v. 34 \(arkišu Umman-menanu la raš ŭeme u mîkî aḫišu uppušu ina kussešu aššma \text{‘After him, Umman-menanu, one who does not have ŭemu or mîkî, his younger brother sat on his throne’;}\); Sennacherib 230 l. 20 \(šu šar Elamti la ḫasis amatê ša la ỉsu ŭemu u mîkî \text{‘He, the king of Elam, the unwise, his words without ŭemu or mîkî.’;}\) That ŭemu is paired with mîkî \text{‘advice, counsel’} here is a Standard Babylonian literary device, and is not a pairing that occurs in the spoken Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian dialects.

\(^{96}\) Steinert notes that the Sumerian terms dimma and umuši mean both ‘mind’ and ‘command,’ similar to ŭemu. She explicitly draws a parallel with Western understandings of language and thought (2012: 386).
could apply in certain circumstances, and not others. This is suggested by Adad-šumu-uṣur’s remark when Esarhaddon corrects his medical instructions:

anakuma minu aqabbi paršumu ša ūnšu laššu
Who am I to speak, an old man that is without his ūnu?

SAA 10 no. 191 rev. 2-5, Adad-šumu-uṣur to Esarhaddon

Here, Parpola translates this as ‘an old man who has got no sense’; Steinert views this as a description of senility (2012: 388-389). However, drawing on our understandings of ūnu as intimately associated with intents and the actualisation of those intents in events, we can think of its use here more specifically as an effective intentionality, a specific agency to act. In this situation, rather than self-abnegating himself with derogatory language, Adad-šumu-uṣur is recognising that he does not have the authority to issue ūnu himself, implying that there is also a status, hierarchical dimension to the possession of ūnu and thus the authorisation to speak effectively. Here, it will be Esarhaddon who issues the decision, and Adad-šumu-uṣur is only claiming to advise, therefore it is not his intention that is being actualised, but that of Esarhaddon’s. This is further underlined by stating the king’s word ‘is like the god’s.’ This letter thus redistributes intentionality and responsibility: attributing ūnu to the king, but emphasising the cooperative jointness of action with the use of first-person plural verbs.
Conclusions

The Looping ṭemu and the Imperial Mission

In this chapter, we have moved from the world as perceived and described in language, via the world as performatively shaped by language, to a concept of subjective interiority. These phenomena are indexed by a single word, ṭemu, and I have contended that, rather than functioning as a term with distinct meanings, ṭemu represents a specifically Assyrian ontological concept that integrates thought, intent, act and fact into a single temporality. This temporality manifested itself in at least two ways: as a looping temporality, where facts and acts are linked by intentionality, and a more compressed, almost simultaneous temporality, where future and past almost collapse into each other. We will explore each of these in turn in this concluding section.

Consider the metaphor of a cuneiform tablet. Like a lump of clay that has the potential to be transformed into a meaningful tablet, reality is inchoate until intentionally acted upon; the words to be written on the tablet must be chosen by the scribe—an intentional process; they must then be inscribed upon the tablet, a transmutation between a mental code and a physical reality; once inscribed, the tablet can be read, the signs turning back into interior words as their readings are seen, selected, spoken, and heard.\(^97\) In a similar way, ṭemu is subject to transmutation: from a relation in the stars, upon a liver, into human interiority, into cuneiform, into action, into actualisation, each of which engages differing schemas of translation and mediation.

The difficulty in mapping ‘ṭemu’ to a single English lexeme is not due to the term possessing multiple meanings: rather, it indexes a single concept, and it is English that is deficient in translating it (Duranti 2015: 31). Duranti explores the ‘subtle differences’ in terms for mind, intention, and meaning, noting that French and German have no word corresponding to ‘mind’—the word ‘mind’ itself is derived from Old English gemyn, which covers ‘memory, remembering, state of mind, purpose, intention’ (Duranti 2015: 32-33). He suggests one cause of this difference is that the map of interiority and physicality is drawn by different cultures in different ways (Duranti 2015: 33). Indeed, Steinert concludes from her study of Mesopotamian concepts of the human that the

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\(^{97}\) The concept of ‘transmutation’ derives from Jakobson’s typology of translation varieties, where transmutation is an ‘interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems’ (1959: 233).
Mesopotamians did draw the map of interiority and physicality in a culturally specific way: mind and body were a singular unity of substance (2012: 385). We will explore the topography of the interior as understood by the Assyrian elite more fully in the next chapter, but it is evident that ṭemu is not limited to the interior alone, but can be encoded and travel across ominous signs, language, and manifested act. Rather than representing a specifically embodied ‘intention’ alone, as the Latinate intentio does (Duranti 2015: 31), the Assyrian ṭemu ‘escapes’ interiors, and pervades the world.  

Another idiosyncrasy of ṭemu is that it is not found in verbal form in the letters excavated from Nineveh and Kalḫu during this period, despite its processual characteristics. However, instances of a derived verb ṭemu is attested in a tablet from the provincial town of Ḫuzirina (modern Sultantepe):

\[
\text{ki ša tareminima} \\
\text{ṭem ilutiki rabiti taṭeminni ṭem ilutiki rabiti šuprimma} \\
\text{puya lušesi} \\
\text{Just as you were merciful to me and} \\
\text{you √ʾmr the ṭemu of your divinity for me, send the ṭemu of your divinity and} \\
\text{I will cause it to go out of my mouth.}
\]

Figure 5 - The Looping ṭemu

This text, a ritual to obtain an oracular decision, is particularly interesting because of its ‘peripheral’ status: not only was it excavated in a small town outside the Assyrian imperial core, but it also provides evidence for private divinatory practices not associated with the ruling elite (Reiner 1960: 24). Consequently, the adaptation of ṭemu to a verbal form occurring in this markedly different context to the evidence presented in this thesis suggests the possibility of different models of intentionality in operation, or even emerging, in the cuneiform world at this time. It is telling that van Buylaere translates taṭeminni as 'looked after me.'
Figure 5 illustrates the different aspects of ṭemu, as well as their looping transformations. The grey text illustrates the mechanisms by which ṭemu was communicated; the bold text shows locations where ṭemu could inhere. The looping aspect clearly comes out in this representation, showing how the actions and perceptions of human subjects allowed ṭemu to propagate throughout the Empire. ṭemu traversed many subjects, those perceiving, reporting and interpreting ṭemu-facts (which might include ominous signs); those voicing ṭemu-intentions and everyone associated with them in the ‘shadow dialogues’ of the mule-express; those performing the labour of transforming a ṭemu-imperative into a ṭemu-fact i.e., making orders reality. ṭemu can thus be thought of as representing a ‘socially extended mind’ (Gallagher 2017: 469). The Assyrian communication network is a machine of collective intentions: a manifestation of ‘longer-term, distributed processes that require the formation of detailed [distal]-intentions,’ ‘prior intentions specified in a reflective (prospective) process of deliberation’ (Gallagher 2017: 468). That collective ṭemu, in whatever state, was a concept recognised by the Assyrians is clear from multiple expressions throughout the letters;99 thinking of Assyria as a collectively held ṭemu can thus be justified.100

On one level then, Frahm and Bagg's thesis that Assyria was 'without mission' fails when considering Assyrian ṭemu and its inscription upon the world (Frahm 2017c: 193). Not only was Assyria on a mission to implement the ṭemu of its gods, through the king and a hypercognised chain of dependency hierarchically stretching downwards, this ṭemu was socially constructed through the multiple ṭemu of all the actors involved, a social process (Gallagher 2017: 469). This must however be qualified: the Assyrians implement the ṭemu of the gods; however, the gods provide no explanation for their messages, only the means by which those messages can be read. Despite an avowedly ‘mentalist' view of causality (Danziger 2017: 452), there is no justification for the divine ṭemu, only its imperative:

   Everything is fixed by the gods: all historical vicissitudes are signalled and explained by astral omina and hepatoscopy... human and political events are at the mercy of the capricious gods, of the unalterable position of the stars, of the signs inscribed on the livers of sacrificial victims.

   Liverani 2017: 156

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99 SAA 15 no. 1, obv. 19-20, Issar-duri to Sargon la paḫuru aḫḫur mar-šiprišunu u ṭen[šunu] la išparuššu ‘They are not assembled and have not sent [their] ṭemu to him’; SAA 17 no. 111, obv. 5, Aqr-Bel-humur to Sargon ṭem ša niši mati šulam ‘The ṭemu of the people of the land is well’; SAA 18 no. 132, rev. 7-8, Nabu-iqbi to Esarhaddon ki ašmu ilten rikissunu u ilten ūṭenšunu ‘I have heard they are of a single bond and a single ṭemu.’

100 The union of ‘action’ and ‘intention’ in a single word (ṭemu) is perhaps paralleled by the Samoan word uiga, meaning ‘meaning’ but also ‘deed, action’ (Duranti 2015: 121).
The Simultaneous Temu and Divine Ambiguity

Assyria was not only an Empire that fulfilled this imperative temu of the gods—Assyria was a terrain of temu itself. Temu not only covered intentions to be realised, but the realised intentions themselves: the facts of the acts. These facts—the perceptible world—contained within them ominous signs, the writing of the gods, through which their intent could be interpreted, their future actions revealed. The future is thus partially located in the past, suggesting an even more complex temporality than the notion of ‘loop’ might suppose.

We can experimentally divorce ourselves from a ‘sequential’ understanding of temu, attempting to understand it as something different. Mobilising Pillen’s destabilisation of the indexical relation through her exploration of the ‘antipodal utterance’—that which contains “a radical opposition of meaning and perspective”¹⁰¹—and the simultaneity it entails helps us to understand what temu might be.

The notion of temu as being a thought, intention, order, news report transgresses our understandings of substance, speech and causality. Thought, word, and world are clearly not the same thing. Yet temu encompasses them all. Thought, word, and world are the same thing—they are temu—and thus we need to reach a different understanding of what ‘thing’ was to the Assyrian elite. Pillen sets out a manifesto for us to step back from our linguistically mediated notions of stuff and substance:

Our concept of substance—a very powerful faith—is conceived as an outcome of our concept of the subject. The subject connotes our belief in an entity underlying all the different moments of intense sensation of reality. We believe in our belief to such an extent that—on its account alone—we imagine “substantiality” (1913: 13-15). Nietzsche concludes that our ontological categories are illusions perpetuated by the chance subject/predicate structure and grammatical habits of Indo-European languages (Benes 2006:220). In other words, familiar categories of reality reflect a misplaced faith in our grammar.

2017: 726, emphasis mine

Even in this thesis, we are forced to use Indo-European terminology to at best approximate an ontology of word, writing and reality quite different to ours. The temu was a term that embedded within it a specifically Mesopotamian temporality. The concept of ‘intentional loop’ in effect implies a closed system, which is deliberate. The creation of the universe by the great gods, and the

¹⁰¹ Pillen 2017: 728.
association of the Assyrian imperium with enacting the *ṭēmu* of the great gods, was set within a world where every act and fact was intentional, decreed by divinities. Pongratz-Leisten evokes Jorge Luis Borges when she writes of

> the writing of the god as instantaneous absolute plenitude that leaves diachronic writing behind in merging the past, present, and the future into the cosmic plan.

2015: 359

Further to this, Bahrani writes:

> Divination is a reading of a previously written sign in the real. In other words, it is, to some extent at least, in the past.... there appears to have been a perceived circulation of past and present, the one having an effect on the other, inseparably and continuously.

2008: 65

The signs of divination thus form a locus of temporal collapse, just as *ṭēmu* collapses by combining mind, intent, order and fact into one concept. Taking this to its conclusion however, we can draw on Rochberg’s analysis of omen divination, where she writes:

> T. Abusch has shown the parallelism between *ṭēmu* and *alaktu* in the meaning “decision,” “decree,” or “oracle,” suggesting specifically that this oracular decision is conveyed through ominous celestial signs, as the request for such a divine pronouncement is addressed to the gods of the night, or to specifically named astral deities...

Omen divination therefore evinces a fundamental anthropomorphism, where what we call nature is perceived as divine speech, matter turned expressive, meaning materialized in the world of phenomena.

2010: 414-415, emphasis mine

Rochberg’s critique of matter and nature as divine speech echoes the findings synthesised from exploring *ṭēmu*’s usage in quotidian speech, significantly strengthening both conclusions. She compellingly develops this line of thinking in a subsequent work, mobilising Descola’s ontological deconstruction of the nature-culture divide to show that cuneiform science was not only a ‘rational’ enterprise, but one that was predicated on an entirely different ontological basis to our...

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132 This specifically cuneiform schema of sign and reality provides an important corrective to ideas of ‘word magic.’ Tambiah’s 1968 Malinowski Lecture explored this magical word power, noting particularly that ‘the Semites and the Sumerians have held that the world and its objects were created by the word of God’ (1968: 182-3). Though this is certainly one way to interpret the opening lines of *Enuma Eliš*, not only does it describe a simple temporality but Tambiah utterly neglects the importance of non-alphabetic writing systems. Instead of the cosmological primacy of the ‘word’ utterance, we have a multiplicity of utterance, sign and interpretation, with the ambiguities, temporalities and disjunctures between them forming an essential component of ontology, a space in which ‘free will’ can exist in a world of fixed destiny.
contemporary sciences which culturally construct a category of ‘nature’ as object (Rochberg 2016: 135-6).

A further, experimental approach in thinking we might take would be considering the Assyrian language verbal system in light of ṭemu. The Assyrian verb does not distinguish between present and future tense: rather, there are the preterite and perfect aspects, and the durative aspect, indicating an unfolding action. This grammatical system, like ṭemu, seems to collapse the present and the future together, rendering the future immanent in the present.

Considering the temporal aspects of ṭemu, as well as the subjects which encompassed it—divinities, diviners, king, subjects, and even ‘expressive matter’—we can construe ṭemu as a sort of chronotope. Ṭemu, as envisaged by the imperial elite, captured a looping temporality where future led into past, where act and fact merged—and where there was a defined assignment of subjects to specific biographical stations. The gods would communicate ṭemu, diviners would interpret it, the king and his administration would command it, and the people would act it. This schema, with the future foreclosed in the past and tied up in the imperial system, brooked no differentiation, disruption, disjuncture or dissent amongst the subjects implicated in it.

However—there remained an interpretive gap. As the cuneiform sign was polyvalent, so was the divine sign. There was a fundamental disjuncture between the singularity of a sign form, and its multiple meanings, requiring the extensive expertise of scholars learned in tupšarratu—the scribal discipline—just to interpret into a linguistic form. This meant that the divine ṭemu was never unambiguous, reflecting an ontological instability at the core of what was otherwise a confident system. Furthermore, this principle of disjuncture permeated not only the sign, but the human being itself, and the language it spoke in. In the next two chapters, we explore the disjuncture of the human being through a tour of the subjective interior and the disciplinary instruments used by the Assyrians to minimise this disjuncture through the establishment of an affective regime. We then explore how language-in-interaction was used to negotiate the potential for disjuncture: cultivated by subordinates who used imagined futures to stake autonomy; collapsed by authoritative speakers who entextualised past authority and uttered imperatives that mingled utterance and act. We then move to spheres resistant to the ontology of ṭemu itself, demonstrating the existence of coexisting
and even conflicting notions of time, subject and social order, and thus showing how the *temu*-driven pretension to dominion failed in its aim of collapsing ambiguity and openness into a single hierarchical machine.
2 Ramaniya, Libbiya u Anaku: Myself, My Interior and I—
Mapping the Assyrian Subject

šumma attunu... abutu la ţabtu ša Aššur-bani-apli mar-šarri rabu ša bit-reduti ina
libbikunu tašakkanani
You will not place a bad word in your interior about Assurbanipal, the great son of
the king of the House of Succession.193

In the last chapter we reintegrated the concept of ţemu as a unitary model of mind, thought, action,
and fact, distancing ourselves from the modern English concepts of ‘intention’ and ‘reason’ that have
been mapped onto it by previous translators. By doing so, we saw how ţemu was a concept that
could be used to explain Assyrian concepts of dominance, as the extension and unfolding of divine
and royal ‘intentions’ across a distributed network of agents. A corollary to this was that ţemu
underwent processes of translation and transmutation across boundaries: from the inchoate ţemu
of the gods, solicited and read by divination, to the written ţemu of the king, to the ţemu of other
beings that could be read, seen, heard. Ţemu was a phenomenon that traversed both the exterior
world and the interior. Assyria’s wellbeing depended on controlling both these territories.

Ţemu however was not a prerogative of the gods of Assyria alone. The Assyrian ruling elite had to
contend with a world of subjects each with their own ţemu, which represented a serious issue: how
to gauge the ţemu of people who might not act to Assyria’s benefit? As we may recall, in the year
672, when Esarhaddon announced his succession arrangements, he imposed a loyalty oath upon all
the subjects of Assyria. One of the clauses of this treaty policed the territory of the libbu—bad words
against Assurbanipal were not to be placed there, evil designs against him were not to be thought.
This powerful example of concern with the libbu of Assyrian subjects demonstrates the importance
with which the interior was held by the ruling elite. As ţemu linked and traversed the interior and
exterior worlds—a thought, an order, a fact—the libbu represented an important locus of control
for the Assyrian state.

The libbu could not be accessed by force, so it was necessary to legislate against it, as we see in the
words of the treaty cited in the above epigraph. Sincere words come from the libbu, as we will see

193 SAA 2 no. 6 obv. 180-185
in a letter by Abi-yaqiya and friends, local rulers desperate for Assyrian military aid, where they insist on the truth of their account; in another letter, the men of Na’id-Marduk, declare his *libbu* is completely with the king, Esarhaddon, his lord.

The variable permeability of the *libbu*, then, was a key component in the functioning of Assyrian power. The social acceptability of the practice of making inferences regarding interior state of another being is unremarkable to the average European. No-one thinks twice about trying to guess at the thoughts and intent behind someone's actions, an aspect integral to modern judicial procedure (Philips 1992: 256). However, whilst the ability to make these inferences may be unsurprising, the appropriateness of voicing them is in no way a cross-cultural universal. Many societies in the Pacific, for example, consider making statements about another's interiority to be absolutely taboo. The Nukulaelae consider such conjecture ‘irresponsible, demented, asocial’ (Besnier 1992: 166). The problematisation of our intuitive understanding of the minds of others has been a rich source of theory questioning causality and intentionality, from an Anthropological Quarterly issue on the ‘Opacity of Minds’ to Duranti’s concept of an ‘intentional continuum.’

By contrast, Assyrian epistolary discourse is rife with *libbu* references, about oneself and others. However, the *libbu* was not the only component that could represent a threat to the Assyrian hegemony. Disobedience was railed against as acts enacted *ki ramanu* ‘according to the *ramanu*.’ This *ramanu* further complicated the Assyrian ‘topography of the self’ by positing a third element, one that could pose a significant threat to the Assyrian elite.

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104 For which see Duranti 2008; Keane 2008; Robbins 2008; Robbins & Rumsey 2008; Rumsey 2008; Schieffelin 2008; Stasch 2008.

105 Presented in Duranti 2015: 238 ff. and see also Duranti 2017.
2.1 The Topography of the Interior

Libbu

The question of how *libbu* related to the Assyrian subject has exercised scholars for a century, symptomatic of the wider interest into subjectivity and consciousness that continues to engage the humanities. In 1912 AD, the Orientalist Morris Jastrow published the article 'The Liver as the Seat of the Soul,' its very title already taking as given the concept of a 'soul' which can be localised in a bodily organ. He considered *libbu*, and its collocated term *kabattu*, to refer to the organs of the heart and liver respectively (Jastrow 1912: 155). A century later, Steinert considers the terms 'partiell synonymen,' together with *karšu* 'stomach' and *qerbu* 'insides' (2012: 133). Both seek to associate and localise interior phenomena according to the topographical scheme of human anatomy: Jastrow proposes *libbu*, as the heart, as the site of intellect, and *kabattu*, as the liver, as the site of the emotions (1912: 155); Steinert moves towards a more nuanced, undifferentiated view where the specific role of each organ is less important than the fact that there was no division between the physical flesh and psychic process (2012: 232).

Both these approaches have interesting insights, but rely on an embedded anatomical model which, particularly in Jastrow's case, uses Mesopotamian hepatomantic practices as evidence for the liver's importance in the human body, thus implicitly equating ovine and human interiority. A glance at the pragmatics of these anatomical terms in Assyrian texts actually exceeds Steinert's undifferentiation model. *Libbu* is the only term used to refer to human interiority in regular language: *kabattu* appears only twice, in the generic blessing *nummur kabatti* 'brightening of the liver,' both times in letters written by scholars heavily steeped in Standard Babylonian literary language. Similarly, *karšu* 'stomach' is only used to refer to the stomachs of animals in lists of goods, never to that of humans.

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106 SAA 13 no. 97, obv. 3-5; Akkullanu to Esarhaddon ʾulšu baltu ʾhidatu melalu u nummur kabatti ana šarri beliya lu taqiš 'May she gift the king my lord delight, pride, joy, play, and brightening of the liver'; no. 197 rev. 13-18, Adad-šumu-usur to Esarhaddon ʾuṭ libbi ʾuṭ širi nummur kabatti... ana šarri beliya liqisšu 'May they gift the king my lord goodness of interior, goodness of flesh, brightening of the liver...'

107 For example, in lists of offerings made at the Aššur temple, SAA 7 no. 197, obv. 3 ša 1 GUD kar-šá UR5.ŪŠ BIR-MEŠ ŠÁ 'of 1 ox: the stomach, liver, kidneys, heart'; cf. no. 203, obv. 3, no. 203, 206, and others following. I have reproduced a transliteration to further demonstrate the documentary function of the text. Rather than transmuting an oral utterance into written form, to be read out at a later date, this administrative list uses a terse ideographic written register more suited to taking notes.
Thus, during the Neo-Assyrian period *libbu* was the only word used to describe human interiority explicitly, and attempting to map psychic phenomena according to our contemporary concepts are at best anachronistic.\(^{108}\) Indeed, mappings of the interior are highly variable cross-culturally: the Tzeltal of Cancuc Mexico see seventeen souls to one being; the Dogon in Mali count eight (Descola 2013: 120). Words do not map neatly to English concepts either: for example, Tamil *ullam* 'spans the distance between the English “mind” and “heart”' (Pandian 2010: 74). In mid-first millennium Assyria, *libbu* was the exclusive term used to describe interior space in Neo-Assyrian everyday discourse. How are we to understand how the Assyrian interior space was conceptualised?

Firstly, the word *libbu* is not restricted to a human context. It is most often attested in prepositional constrictions: {ina|ana|issu} *libbi* X, roughly ‘{in(to)|at|with|from out of}’ the *libbu* of X. In this position, we can see that a wide variety of objects can be described as possessing a *libbu*: items can be located within built containers such as *betu* ‘house’ or *eleppu* ‘boat,’ shading into geographical zones such as cities (which can be construed as built containers if they possess a city-wall), *taḫumu* ‘border,’ *matu* ‘land,’ *midbaru* ‘steppe.’ Single instances could be extracted from the *libbu* of mass or collective objects, such as groups of people,\(^{109}\) or quantities of goods like gold or wool. More abstractly, words and messages were contained *ina libbi egirte* ‘within a tablet,’ or *ina libbi leʾi, ‘within a wooden writing-board.’\(^{110}\) Whilst these terms were highly conventional, they do indicate that in its most general aspect *libbu* indexes an interior of some kind, which extended even to the use of *libbu* to describe time periods,\(^{111}\) a concept without a clear physical correlate.

Contrasted with this spatial or temporal use is the sense of *libbu* translated as ‘heart’—a human attribute which, like the metaphorical ‘heart’ we are familiar with, was closely associated with affect, thought and other interior processes. This seems mostly irreconcilable with the purely prepositional meaning of *libbu*: all that they share is a spatial, ‘interior’ aspect. However, rather than specifically separating the human *libbu* from the prepositional *libbu a priori* based on our own cultural assumptions (and then contemplating whether houses, tablets and days have ‘hearts’), let us vacate

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\(^{108}\) As Descola notes, even the contemporary West has a profusion of differing interior maps, from the Christian soul to the Freudian trinity *inter alia* (2013: 120).

\(^{109}\) E.g., SAA 1 no. 11; isseṭ LÚ.NAGAR.MEŠ issu *libbišunu*; see also no. 96.

\(^{110}\) SAA 1 no. 233, obv. 23-24 *ki ša ina libbi egerte ša šarrī bēliya ša[t]runi etapaš ‘As that the king my lord wrote in the *libbu* of the tablet, I have done’; no. 192, rev. 3-4 *ammar rešuni ina libbi leʾi asṣatar ‘As many as remained I wrote in the *libbu* of a wooden writing-board.’

\(^{111}\) Most frequently *umu* ‘day’, e.g., SAA 1 no. 64 obv. 9 *ina libbi* ud.3.kam ‘on the 3rd.’
our understanding of the human ‘heart’ and consider *libbu* almost literally, as the zone bounded by the envelope of the human body.

**Privacy**

Like the *libbu* of a protected place, a fortified space, the *libbu* of the human being was treated as variably permeable: only those authorised were able to access it freely. Subjects could talk either with (\{ittí\|issu\}) or in (ina) the *libbu* attributed to them without restriction.¹² Otherwise, access to a subject’s *libbu* was authorised either through consent, or derived from the authority of the accessor’s office (kingship or divinity). Forcefully transgressing the boundary through violence was imagined with horror as a terrible fate:

*dektu aya\[a\]ši libbi ikaššad*

Slaughter will reach my interior.

SAA 5 no. 46, rev. 7, client king to Sargon

In this letter, an unidentified client ruler writes to Sargon about the difficulties he is having with a neighbouring potentate; according to the sender, his adversary is attacking his towns, taking his people and slandering his reputation. Worse, instead of revealing the *temu* of his terrible acts, he refuses to communicate.¹³ Without Sargon’s intervention, his adversary’s attacks will penetrate right to the very heart of this client’s kingdom—to the client’s interior itself.

The sender uses uncommon language to emphasise the agency of his oppressor and problematise his actions. Firstly, he reports his own words to his oppressor: *ale milikka* ‘where is your sense?’ (obv. 12’), before repeating twice that his tormentor does not provide *temu*. As we have seen, *milku* and *temu* were portrayed as positive attributes of authority in the Standard Babylonian dialect royal inscriptions;¹⁴ we might posit that a client king might be familiar with the ceremonial trappings of his far more powerful suzerain. Rather than accusing the other party outright of lacking these things (and thus casting them in an ‘enemy’ role), the sender suggestively highlights that his oppressor is not demonstrating these aspects when dealing with him. This implicitly reinforces the power relationships between the sender, his tormentor, and Sargon, drawing out their differential access to intention and interiority. Whilst the clients are in a fraught relationship, and the sender from his

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¹² This was not necessarily a fully ‘transparent’ or passive relationship: one needed to actively *talk* with the interior and thus solicit ‘thought’ or feeling in a process.

¹³ *temumma la šišakan* ‘he does not establish *temu*’ (obv. 13’).

¹⁴ P. 57.
point of view is the victim of a senseless attack, Sargon, by dint of his authority and perspective, can see the *temu* and *milku* of the situation, intercede, and change it.

Having set up a context foregrounding *temu, milku*, and correct access and exercise of these interiorly associated attributes, the sender’s description of his fate if Sargon ignores his plea is given particular punch. His oppressor will reach his *libbu*, an access cast as the ultimate transgression, a fate where *temu, milku* and Sargon are nowhere to be seen.

That the *libbu* of a human being was indeed a special and protected place, whose access by unauthorised parties was a horror, is underlined by one of the curses in Esarhaddon’s succession treaty. Unlike the situation described above, the treaty curses, activated upon the breaking of its covenant, were granted untrammelled authority. Thus, their access to the *libbu* of the oathbreakers was indeed legitimate, allowing this fate to be inflicted:

\[ ki ša libbu ša ḫuppi raquni libbikunu liriqu \]

Just as the interior of a hole is empty, may your interior be empty.

SAA 2 no. 6, obv. 641-642

Situated within the context of many awful fates, this *libbu* curse epitomises the most undesirable state of affairs: an interior as empty as a hole. The text swiftly moves on and thus we as readers do not get any further elaboration of what this ‘emptiness’ entails: whether it refers to a prosaic empty stomach, or a more spiritual void. However, the uses of *libbu* throughout the rest of the text are instructive:

\[ ina ketti ša libbikunu isseriu la tadakkabani milku damqu ša gummurti libbikunu la tamallkašuni \]

[If] you do not speak with him in the truth of your interior, if you do not counsel him good counsel that is of the completeness of your interior...

SAA 2 no. 6, obv. 51-53; cf. obv. 98-99

\[ šabani ša barti eppašanisšuni ina gummurti libbikunu la tadukan ŋi \]

[If] you do not kill, in the completeness of your interior, the force that committed rebellion against him...

SAA 2 no. 6, obv. 169-170

This pair of examples are illustrative of a phrase that is repeated throughout the treaty: {ša|ina} *gummurti* (Babylonian *gummurti*) *libbikunu*, literally ‘that/in the completeness of your interior.’ It is telling that this is repeated multiple times, in contexts that do not necessarily require it: though it might appear to function as an emphatic, additional gloss, it rather underlines the absolute
control and commitment the Assyrians demanded. The totality of the individual, not just the exterior that could be perceived through the senses, but the interior as well, needed to obey and implement the terms of the treaty. The recognition of the disjuncture between exterior and interior, and the need for both to be with Assyria, is even more evident in this clause:

šamma attunu ki ina qaqqar tamîtı annitu tazzazani tamitu ša dababti šapti tattamani ina gummurti libbiku lu tattamani...

If you stand on the place of this oath, and swear an oath that is talk of the lips, and you do not swear in the completeness of your interior...

SAA 2 no.6, obv. 385-387

Here, a contrast between spoken talk—dababti šapti ‘talking of the lips’—and completeness of interior is explicitly recognised. Swearing only with the lips is grounds for divine punishment. The terms of the treaty need to be implemented in the subjects’ interiors, and to dissemble, to speak without cultivating the corresponding interior state, is to unleash hell. The Assyrian treaty-writers insisted on this sincerity, using the powerful tool of the oath to ensure it. The quality of this demanded sincerity is particularly interesting: one recent definition of sincerity describes it as a state

achieved when feelings, thoughts, and intentions are matched by exterior, spontaneous speech that expresses that interiority without the mediation of persons, things, and other people’s words.

Haeri 2017: 123-4

This definition reflects the extended engagement of the anthropology of Christianity with the question of what sincerity is. Particularly worth highlighting are the emphasis on spontaneity and a lack of external mediation. By contrast, the stipulation in the Assyrian treaty is fundamentally mediating: its words, its oath are ostensibly the external creations of the Assyrian royal scribes. Yet the oath must be fully internalised (ina gummurti libbî), and not under duress. This already seems to modify our understanding of ancient Assyrian interiority and subjectivity: individuals were perfectly capable of sincerely expressing oaths in words devised by others. However, rather than this being a kind of indoctrination, dissimulation or doublethink, we can conceptualise this logic

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115 See also Robbins 2004, where he explores the hybridisation of an Urapmin ‘opaque mind’ ethics with the demands of Christian subjectivity and morality (which, like the Assyrian, emphasise internal transparency with external conjuncture). Robbins 2004: 225 is particularly useful for the transformation of interiority to accord with a Christian ethics, and note the ‘peaceful heart’ achieved by the ‘renunciation of will,’ which bears striking correspondences with the effacement of ramanu and the promotion of libbu vṭb (p.148).
through a ātemu-inspired lens: as the flow of divine ātemu proceeds through human agents, and especially the organisation that was the state of Aššur, so a subject's libbu could express ina gammurti libbi obeisance to Aššur. This oath would indeed be their own, coming from their interior, because if this oath was the divine ātemu of the gods, then those swearing the oath and those imposing it would both have sincerely drawn the words out from their libbu separately: two parties reaching the same conclusion from the same divine ātemu.

We can glean two further insights from this. The first is that, ironically for a ‘totalitarian’ state, personal autonomy and interior integrity was valued. Recall Esarhaddon’s pride in having a potential enemy swear fealty to Assyria ki ātemešuma ‘according to his own ātemu’; similarly, the treaty-writers wanted everything sworn ina gammurti libbi. To be without this kind of interior capability—to have an interior as empty as a hole—was a worthy punishment and grievous fate therefore: the implication is that with an empty libbu, one cannot do anything sincerely, one cannot libbu ṣdbb, ‘speak with the interior.’ The libbu was not to be coerced or transgressed by force: as the client king of SAA 5 no. 46 laments, this is a violation associated with death. These emerging concepts of personal integrity and sincerity feed into our second important insight, concerning the consequences of a libbu that is not completely with Assyria. This is explicitly pointed at in the treaty clause that is the epigraph to this chapter:

ṣamma attumu... abatu la ṣabl tu ša Aššur-hani-apli mar-šarri rabu ša bit-reduti ina libbikunu tašakkanani
If you place a word of not-goodness of Assurbanipal the great son of the king of the House of Succession in your interior...

SAA 2 no. 6, obv. 180-185

The interior of the human could be perceived or penetrated neither arbitrarily nor easily. It could be reached by ‘slaughter,’ but this meant the death of the subject with whom the libbu was associated. For an organisation dedicated to bringing about the ātemu of Aššur, slaughtering everyone to get at their interior would have proven counterproductive. As we shall see, the Assyrian rulers rather favoured living people with libbu ṣdbb ‘good interior’ getting on with their work. See also Rosenzweig 2016: 311ff.

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116 As we shall see, the Assyrian rulers rather favoured living people with libbu ṣdbb ‘good interior’ getting on with their work. See also Rosenzweig 2016: 311ff.
Guard your ramanu!

The cleavage of the Assyrian ‘self’ between a speaking subject and a *libbu* associated with them is further complicated by subjects also being associated with a *ramanu*. *Ramanu*, confusingly translated ‘self’ by most editors, represented an alternative source of intentional action, differentiated from the *libbu* or the *ṭemu* of self or deity. *Ṭemu*, when associated with the self, was an abstract attribute; *libbu* was a location, a storehouse, a communicative partner. The *ramanu* was not identified with either of these things: unlike *libbu*, things did not go in or out of it, it could not be good (√ṭʾb), broken (√ḫʾpʾ), or otherwise affected. Steinert notes that *ramanu* substitutes for a reflexive pronoun, which the Akkadian language does not possess (Steinert 2012: 257).

*Ramanu* instead was associated with the practice of √nṣr, ‘guarding, protecting,’ implying a further association with aspects of self-integrity:

\[
\text{maššartu ša ramenikunu uṣra} \\
\text{Guard the guard of your ramanu}
\]

SAA 19 no. 1, obv. 13-14, Tiglath-pileser to the Babylonians

\[
\text{maššarti ša ramnišu šarra liṣṣur} \\
\text{Let the king guard the guard of his ramanu}
\]

SAA 8 no. 387, Rašil the older ṭupšar Enuma Anu Enlil to Esarhaddon

\[
\text{šalam ramanka ḫussu} \\
\text{Be mindful of the wellbeing of your ramanu}
\]

SAA 18 no. 64, rev. 5-6, Bel-upaq to his father Kuna

The same self-operation—care of the *ramanu*—is being exhorted across three different power relationships: the first is a letter from the Assyrian king to his Babylonian supporters in the midst of a conflict for supremacy in that city. The second is an astrological report to the Assyrian king from a scholar specialising in celestial omens: this expression of guarding the royal *ramanu* was thus an exhortation in the face of potential cosmic threat. Finally, the last example is from a letter defined

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117 See also SAA 8, no. 386 obv. 13-11, no. 399, rev. 1-2 for more letters by Rašil; SAA 18 no. 92, rev. 7-8;
exclusively with kinship terminology, showing that the concept of guarding *ramanu* was consistent across several social spheres.\textsuperscript{118}

The association of a subject’s wellbeing with the *ramanu* is further underlined by passages associating it with ‘bare’ life processes:

\begin{verbatim}
ma rameni la uṣarra
ma qaqqad urhi šu
ma kusapi lakul karani lassi
\end{verbatim}

Imagined direct speech of Esarhaddon in the future

3.\textsc{quot} I will not starve my *ramanu*

3.\textsc{quot} It is the beginning of the month

3.\textsc{quot} I shall eat crumbs and drink wine

\textit{SAA 10 no. 43, obv. 18-rev. 4, Balasi and Nabu-ahhe-eriba, astrologers, to Esarhaddon}

\begin{verbatim}
urdani ša šarri iqabbuni
ma šarru muḫur alik ramanu balliṭ
\end{verbatim}

The servants of the king speak to me

3.\textsc{quot} Go, face the king, vivify your *ramanu*

\textit{SAA 13 no. 66, Urdu-Nabu, sangu-priest, to Esarhaddon}

In both of these letters the authors link the *ramanu* to life processes. The first is a letter from two scholars to Esarhaddon imploring him to take food and drink. They do this by using the device of future speech, which allows them to safely and appropriately project their wishes through an imagined, inchoate future state of affairs.\textsuperscript{119} A kind of reflexivity is created through the future king’s voice uttering ‘I will not starve my *ramanu*’—the king acts on an object associated with his self, rather than simply ‘starving.’ This formulation thus attributes agency to the king whilst at the same time implicitly linking the *ramanu* to the life process of food consumption. The second example

\textsuperscript{118} See also p.225.

\textsuperscript{119} See p.198.
makes the link between the ramanu and life explicit, with the imperative balliṭ ‘vivify,’ in quoted medical advice the author received about how to deal with an illness he was suffering.\footnote{Though there is no space to explore further, it is striking that an audience with the king was described (albeit in unspecific voice) as possessing vivifying properties. This evokes belief in the ‘sacred touch’ of European monarchs in the Mediaeval period (Marc Léopold Benjamin Bloch 1973: 3); Sahlins suggests royal powers more generally were derived from a ‘usurpation’ of divine power (Sahlins 2017: 60).}
2.2 Completeness of the Interior

The Men of Naʾid-Marduk

Recognition of human psychic privacy as a locus of agency and a locus of threat meant that, as with the exterior, earthly territories Aššur sought to envelop, the internal landscape of the *libbu* also needed to be completely for Aššur: *libbu √gmr*. We have already encountered this phrase repeatedly in Esarhaddon’s official succession treaty, but it is also tellingly deployed in epistolary discourse. Subjects caught in situations of varying stakes make this claim about themselves, or even others: a Babylonian scholar recommends a candidate to rule Borsippa whose *libbu* is completely for Assyria;[121] the Assyrian king’s personal ašipu-exorcist praises him; a supposed criminal submits his *libbu* to be crushed by the king’s chariot; the men of Naʾid-Marduk desperately advertise his pro-Assyrian *libbu* during his ouster by the Elamites. In all of these situations the author believed that emphasising the *libbu √gmr* would be efficacious. Indeed, considering the frequent specification *ina gannurti libbi* in the clauses of Esarhaddon’s succession treaty, such statements would certainly have drawn the king’s notice.

We return to the Sealand, caught between Babylonia, Assyria and Elam. The tribal elders of the region repeatedly sent letters to Esarhaddon’s palace begging for military support for their seemingly missing leader, Naʾid-Marduk, in the face of Elamite attempts to install their own, anti-Assyrian candidate in the region. Unlike the previous missives, which emphasised the imminent Elamite threat, the authors here focus on the character of Naʾid-Marduk himself:

\[
\text{ki nīšmu libbi ša šarri ana muḫḫi belini šeḫtu nipṭalḫ umma šeḫtu še hušu ša šarri }\]
\[
\text{ḫḫi beši ni šeḫṭu }\]
\[
\text{umma ša-belini ina pan šarri }\]
\[
\text{yanu }\]
\[
\text{ina libbi ša šeru u kašu umu Šamaš u Bel ana balaṭi napšati }\]
\[
\text{ša šarri belišu ušallu }\]
\[
\text{u libbašu itti šarri beši qatu}\
\]

When we heard that the *libbu* of the king our lord jumped up concerning our lord, we were √plḫ

**QUOT**  There is no crime that is our lords before the king.

During the morning and evening every day he beseeches Šamaš and Bel for the life and breath of the king his lord, and his *libbu* is completely with the king, his lord.

SAA 18 no. 88, [the men of Naʾid-Marduk] to Esarhaddon, rev. 3'-10'

In their concern with establishing a case for Assyrian military support, the senders of this letter narrate an argument deeply invested in interior state. Despite their insistence that there is no reason

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[121] Further examples include SAA 10 no. 118, rev. 5 libbašu ana mat Aššur gummur ‘his interior is completely for the land of Assur.’
for the king to be angry (and this is insisted upon in indirect language), the affects described are appropriate and idealised. Esarhaddon is described as having *libbu šeḥtu*, ‘jumping interior,’ seemingly a prerogative of the king. In response, the authors practice the appropriate √*plḥ*, before advancing their case that Na‘id-Marduk is the ideal Assyrian client: Na‘id-Marduk prays constantly, and *libbašu itti šarri qatu*. Here, *qatu* (√*qt*) is similar in meaning to √*gmr*, emphasising a complete totality of devotion. Thus, we get an idea of common conceptions of an idealised Assyrian subject: interiority and action were combined into a unified gesture dedicated to the wellbeing of the king, and thus Aššur.

The authors’ engagement with interior states does not end there, but proceeds to a paean praising the *libbu* of Esarhaddon’s royal father, before shading into direct quotations drawing on his ancient authority:

```
abuka ša ana la šarrane gabbitu patu u putqedu libbu aga iqabbi
umma ina Akkadi u matati gabbitu sibuta ya’nā
ki la ki ina libbišu Na‘id-Marduk enna šarru la iqabbi
umma Na‘id-Marduk ilten šu
s-me s-lim šabe šu
```

Your father, of whom the *libbu* was open and attentive to all the non-kings, spoke thus:125

```
QUOT In Akkad and all the lands there is no desire of mine.
```

```
Whether or not Na‘id-Marduk was in his interior, now the king should not speak
```

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QUOT Na‘id-Marduk, he is one
He is one hundred thousand troops.
```

SAA 18 no. 88, [the men of Na‘id-Marduk] to Esarhaddon, rev. 12’-19’

The quotational strategies used in this letter are a creative and ambivalent manipulation of a typical device used for bolstering authority, the citation of the words of royal ancestors.126 The authors open

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122 CAD separates out *šahaṭu* ‘to jump’ and *šahaṭu* ‘to be angry’ into separate headwords A and C, the latter only having three citations. I find this unconvincing.

123 This is emblematic of a socially determined distribution of affective expression. Expressions of affects such as ‘anger’ were particularly associated with socially powerful subjects, such as the king of Assyria; by contrast, the emotion √*plḥ* was practiced by all subjects in the Assyrian order, but was intertwined within specific social relationships, rather than a basic affect.

124 √*plḥ*, commonly translated ‘to fear’ or ‘to revere’, is the most frequently mentioned emotions in the Assyrian material, and was one of the central emotions driving the Assyrian state; see p.131 for full discussion.

125 Reynolds translates this passage differently, taking *libbu* as prepositional and thus having ‘Your father, who was more attentive and circumspect than all (other) kings…’. Mark Weeden suggests that the placement of *la* must mean that it is *šarrane* that is negated, thus requiring *libbu* to be translated substantively and resulting in the present, very attractive interpretation.

126 See p.182.
with direct reported speech attributed to Sennacherib, seemingly implying he was speaking on the
topic of Na’id-Marduk. However, the authors then immediately distance themselves from
speculating on the intentions behind his words with the equivocal ki la ki ina libbišu ‘Whether or
not [he] was in his interior.’ This reminds us of the Elamite messenger’s sinister speech to the Elders
of the Sealand: the Elamites would install their candidate ina ḫudikuṇu u ina la ḫudikuṇu ‘in your
joy or not in your joy.’ In both cases, it implies a disregard: the Elamites of the Sealander’s feelings,
and the authors of SAA 18 no. 88 of Sennacherib’s intentions. It is a complex manoeuvre for these
authors: on the one hand, it implies a certain propriety in refraining to attach intentions to,
speculate on the contents of, penetrate the libbu of, a king of Assyria. On the other hand, the authors
extensively engage in describing Sennacherib’s libbu in positive terms, characterising it as ‘open,’
which perhaps offers some explanation as to why they felt they might describe this king’s interior
in the first place. Nevertheless, it is a masterful example of the artful framing of discourse whilst
maintaining decorum and status relationships.

Adad-šumu-ušur’s Devotion
Moving from a geopolitical to a domestic scope, we now meet a healer working closely with royal
bodies. Adad-šumu-ušur was an ašipu, a practitioner who battled invisible, intentional agents who
do not fall easily into our ontology—what we would call ‘supernatural’ forces, demons, witches and
angry gods. Together with experts from four other learned disciplines,127 he formed the ‘inner circle’
of counsellors who resided at the royal court, a traditional fixture of Mesopotamian kingship (Frahm
2011: 516 ff.; Parpola 1993 pp. xxv-xxvi). As part of his role, Adad-šumu-ušur had privileged access to
the king’s body, dealing with his various ailments, which, in Esarhaddon’s case, included chronic
mental distress, seizures, and disfigured skin (Radner 2003: 169). Furthermore, as a healing
professional vying with malady-causing deities and spirits, he was probably conceived of as a
powerful agent in his own right (Worthington 2010). Here, he describes his manifest dedication to
the king in a letter rich with praise:

anaku karib šarri beliya ina pan šarri beliya laazzizma ina gummurti libbiya ina aḥiya laplaḥ kima aḥiya etanḫa ina
kisir ammatiya emuqiya ṭuqammir

127 These were: aşutu, healing through herbal and physical therapies; ṭupšarrutu, the reading of celestial (astrological)
and terrestrial omens; barutu, querying the divine through ritual sacrifice of a lamb and examination of its entrails;
kalutu, professional lamenters who appeased spirits and the divine through ritual (Parpola 1971: 12-15).
I, precent of the king my lord, may I stand before the king my lord, may I ūpla him with my arms in the completeness of my interior, and when my arms are weary may I complete my strength in the clasping of my elbows.

SAA 10 no. 198, rev. 1-8, Adad-šumu-uṣur to Esarhaddon/Assurbanipal

Adad-šumu-uṣur conveys his body as one totally devoted to the king. He exercises the correct affective subjectivity towards his superior, ūpla, in the completeness of his libbu. But not only is his interior completely (gummurti) marshalled towards ūpla, he describes his body as physically in the presence of the king, blessing him with prayer—using his mouth—and adopting penitent gestures, utilising his physical strength completely, lugammir. Now, the circumstances prompting this panegyric missive are unclear, although the language of the ancient scholars has been frequently characterised by their modern counterparts as being particularly (over)emotional as a result of their precarious position e.g. Radner 2011: 365. Nevertheless, this presentation of an ‘ideal’ subject suggests a complete unity of embodied devotion towards the king.¹⁸

In a similar vein, we find a peculiar petition to Esarhaddon from an unknown author, who describes himself as the author of a terrible crime, a recipient of undeserved mercy, and a deeply devoted subject:

\[\text{hiṭu damnu ina bet beleya aḥtiṭi ša duaki anaku la ša balluṭi anaku}\\\text{I committed a great transgression in the house of my lords; I am for dying, I am not for living.}\\\text{šarru beli remu ana kalbišu issakan ina kume anaku mina ana šarri beleya ušallim}\\\text{The king my lord established mercy for his dog—what conciliating have I done for the king my lord in stead?}\\\text{libbi ahiya ĥepeya ina šapal mugir ša šarri beliya šakin}\\\text{My interior, my arms, my feet are placed beneath the chariot of the king my lord.}\\\text{kayyamanu enatiya issi šarri beliya šakna u kayyamanu mar-šarri beli libbu išakkananni}\\\text{My eyes are constantly fixed on the king, my lord, and constantly the son of the king my lord establishes interior for me.}\]

SAA 16 no. 36, obv. 7’-8’, unassigned to Esarhaddon

This enumeration of body and gesture mirrors that of Adad-šumu-uṣur’s above: libbu and ahe, interior and arms, but also šepe, feet, and instead of standing, the petitioner places his attributes beneath the chariot of the king. Even more than Adad-šumu-uṣur, this professes a complete submission, where even the libbu-interior, an attribute not really characterised with any physical

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¹⁸ Also of note is the fact that scholars frequently needed to schedule face-to-face personal interactions with the king, which may also account for the florid description of the totally devoted Adad-šumu-uṣur.
materiality, is given place beneath the chariot. The man’s gaze is locked onto the king, evoking a sensorial gesture in the same register as Adad-šumu-uṣur’s vocalised blessing. We can consider these dramatically described gestures, and praise delivered to superiors in Assyria, in light of Appadurai’s insights about the topography of the Hindu self (1990). He notes that Hindu praise ‘often appears exaggerated, formal, and unrelated to the emotional interior of the person who praises’ (1990: 105-6), but to see praise as concerned with reflecting an ‘authentic’ inner state is to misunderstand its purpose. Rather, seemingly ‘hyperbolic’ praise is a skilful art related to the Sanskrit aesthetic tradition of rasa, the creation of an interdependent field of sentiment. This interdependent field of sentiment is thus one where gestures, acts and deeds generate a shared, durative and interpersonal ‘situational affect,’ one not defined by linguistic representation of an ‘authentic’ interior state, but fundamentally embedded in relationship and shared intentionality.\(^{129}\)

Here, at least, expressions of praise are also accompanied by statements of describing extremely loyal inner state. Whilst we might similarly be sceptical of just how ‘sincere’ Adad-šumu-uṣur is about his feelings, to do so would be to perhaps miss the point that although the Assyrians recognised the disjuncture between interiority and exteriority and the possibilities for insincerity, that discontinuity is completely elided here through the homogenisation of libbu and gesture, interior and exterior. In a sense, this perfectly homogenised interior-exterior relationship mirrors the Assur-Aššur relationship: one the town, one the empire, both different aspects of a unity.

Concluding the latter letter is the phrase mar-šarri beli libbu išakkananni: ‘the son of the king my lord establishes interior for me.’ This fascinating phrase, often translated just as ‘encouraged,’ suggests more complex libbu-characteristics. Firstly, it portrays an operation upon libbu by a third party, but this is an operation that retains the bounded integrity of libbu. More pointedly, libbu in this phrase usually carries no personal possessive pronoun: grammatically, it appears to be independent, neither the mar-šarri’s libbu nor the author’s. Finally, the use of the verb √škn ‘place, establish’ in this construction is telling, paralleling the expression temu √škn discussed previously.\(^{33}\)

If temu √škn takes an intention in a subjective form and transmutes it into a communicated order

\(^{129}\) Brenneis explores the notion of ‘situational affect’ in reference to the Fiji Indian development of rasa-bhava theory into bhaw, which unites a prefixed affect, situation, display, and experience (Brenneis 1995: 244-245).

\(^{33}\) P.46.
for implementation, what does \textit{libbu} \textit{škn} do? For an exploration of this question we must wait until chapter three, which sets \textit{libbu} \textit{škn} in a wider repertoire of imperial interiority management techniques.

\footnote{I am assuming \textit{libbu} is not to be taken in a ‘literal’ sense and Assyrians were not piling bloody hearts and innards on each other.}
2.3 A Storehouse of Words: Libbu, Loyalty and Sincerity

Bel u Zarpanitu Nabu u Marduk igigallu lu idu ki dibbi mala ina šipirti aqa ana šarri belini nišpura gabbi la kinu libbina

Bel and Zarpanitu, Nabu and Marduk the wise know that the words, as many as we have sent to the king our lord in this letter, if they are all not true, of our interior.\textsuperscript{132}

Killing the enemies of the Assyrian king, speaking the truth of one’s libbu, giving him advice from the libbu, swearing an oath to him from the libbu—to have one’s exterior and interior attributes synchronised and serving the Assyrian king was an emphatic desideratum for the rulers of the Empire. However, this emphasis on complete and free submission did not only apply to the arguably exceptional and cosmically dangerous occasion of the royal succession, but appears time and again in the correspondence. These moments shed further light on libbu interiority, particularly its politically pertinent points.

As we have seen, the ade gave special consideration to abutu la ṭabtu ‘not good words’ being placed in the libbu.\textsuperscript{133} We find similar ideas of words being placed in the libbu, and indeed moving in and out of them. The first example, the epigraph above, comes from a letter written by the sheikhs of Tubliaš, a border region between Babylonia and the kingdom of Elam. During Sargon’s reign, Elam and Assyria violently contended for supremacy over southern Mesopotamia; the letter thus originates from a volatile and war-torn region. In this joint letter, the senders describe a messy situation where they require the king’s military support in the face of a traitorous potentate who is out for tukte, ‘revenge.’

Though the specific details of the situation are unimportant, tellingly the senders close the letter swearing by the gods that all their dibbi (‘words’) are libbina, ‘of our interior.’ That they chose to close their letter with such a statement implies what a powerful claim it must have been. It suggests that not only were words situated in/from the libbu sincere words, but they were also strongly associated with truth (\(\sqrt{k’n}\)).\textsuperscript{134} Considering the importance assigned to the words of the treaty-oath

\textsuperscript{132} SAA 17 no. 152, rev. 22-rev. edge 26, Abi-yaqiya and the other sheikhs of Tubliaš to Sargon

\textsuperscript{133} SAA 2 no. 6, obv. 180 ff. discussed above.

\textsuperscript{134} ‘Sincere’ works as a gloss here, but we should be aware of the specificity of the term to Protestant Christianity. Keane characterises it as making available an ‘inner self’ to a specific other, without external compulsion (2002: 75). Though here Abi-yaqiya \textit{et al.} emphasise truth, they are not asserting that the words represent an interior state.
being sworn *ina gammadri libbi*, the association of words located in the *libbu* with truth is unsurprising.

On a different scale but in similar vein, Akkullanu, the high priest of the Aššur temple, writes to Esarhaddon concerning expiatory rites against cosmic evil. After a fusillade of objurgation directed against other scholars and their bad advice, he writes:

\[
\text{šatu anaku dibhimmā annute issu libbiya uttassiq}
\]

\[
muk \text{ ina pani šarri adabbūb ina muḫḫi abaki ša lūmni ša Subarti}
\]

I chose these very words from my interior

\[
\text{I will talk before the king concerning the leading away of the evil of Su[bartu]}
\]

SAA 10 no. 90, rev. 21'-right edge 22', Akkullanu to Assurbanipal

Though at first glance the context appears less ‘life-or-death’ to us than that of a theatre of war, the ritual duties of the scholars were of profound importance to the wellbeing of the Assyrian order, and thus the world. Here, Akkullanu writes that the words that originate from his *libbu* are not words relating to the specific rites to be conducted, but rather, his *intention* that he will speak before the king about them. *Libbu* is thus further implicated in the operation of directed action. Here, we see a self-narrative of the formulation of a future action, originating as *dibbu* in the *libbu*, and framed as direct speech with the NA first-person quotative particle *nuk*. Akkullanu goes on to describe how he sent these words to the king, thus narrating a transmission chain of authentic words from his *libbu* to the king.

That Akkullanu’s words describe his future intentions begs the question as to why he does not mention *ṭemu* once. As it happened, Akkullanu ended his letter with lament that he had not, in fact, been able to speak to the king; his narrated intentions had been stymied. Scholars were unable to gain an audience save at the king’s pleasure, thus their ability to shift *ṭemu* from intent to event was negligible in this relationship. Rather than describing his words as *ṭemu*, drawing attention to his conflicting plans vis-a-vis the king, Akkullanu emphasises only the sincerity of his words. Indeed, by downplaying their effectiveness, he creates a certain pathos from his powerlessness. The absence of *ṭemu* here then is further evidence for a differential ‘regime of *ṭemu*.’
Interior Dialogue

The last decades of the nineteenth century saw a “move toward [envisioning thought as] a kind of inner speech... more authentic than conventional language” (Sass 1992: 184; emphasis added). V. N. Volosinov, a Soviet-era linguist who has influenced recent linguistic anthropology, indeed described thought as inner speech, although thought is (to Volosinov) a kind of speech, speech may have but an unsure connection with mind.

(Wilce 2009: 146)

Despite Akkullanu’s words from his libbu failing to effect intent into event, the source of his dibbi was clearly important enough to emphasise. Indeed, the association of words with the libbu was strong. The libbu was not only a passive storehouse for words, dibbu or abutu, but it was conceptualised as an active participant in dialogue. The idea of libbu √dbb, to talk with the libbu, is pervasive and unremarkable, appearing throughout the Assyrian letter corpus. Indeed, to not engage in dialogue with the libbu could be considered peculiar, as Sargon queries:

issi libbika la tadbbu
ma ki našu rešīšunu illakanni
ma paniya ina beti mannu ašakkan

Did you not talk with your interior
3.QUOT When the time comes for me to summon them
3.QUOT to whose house will I go for help?

SAA 1 no. 11, obv. 13-14, Sargon to Mannu-ki-Adad

Writing to a governor of his in the east, Sargon upbraids him for reassigning men under his care to military duty. As part of his rebuke, couched in a counterfactual query, he speculates why Mannu-ki-Adad did not ask his libbu about the eventual negative outcome: the king summoning these men. This suggests a rich theory of mind: Sargon is free to speculate upon the libbu-self dialogue that could—and in his opinion should—have taken place.\(^{135}\) We may notice, however, that not only is Sargon in a great position of authority, which potentially grants him such access to speculativity, but more generally that the contents of Mannu-ki-Adad’s libbu are not being directly accessed: its integrity is maintained as it is cast in this dialogue. Consequently, this does not contradict the idea that libbu was normally impenetrable.

\(^{135}\) The acceptability of ‘talking with oneself’ is not constant cross-culturally, as Kuipers shows in his study on Weyewa speakers on the island of Sumba in eastern Indonesia (1992: 95). The li’i ‘word’ was granted to ancestors, who gifted it to their descendants, creating a chain of social obligations of exchange (1992: 101); in this context, autonomous dialogue with the self was situated outside the social exchanges of li’i, and was ‘an image of utter desolation... a sign of total despair or even insanity’ (1992: 95).
Nevertheless, although *libbu √dbb* was considered a normal activity, its affective valency was highly contextual. In a couple of circumstances, the process of interior dialogue resembles considered deliberation resulting in directed, intentional action:

*ina maḫhi sangi ša šarru beli išpurannini annurig šalšu ina ume anni issi libbišu iddubub ki anni iqṭibia...*  
Concerning the priest that the king my lord wrote to me about, now today is the third day, he spoke with his interior and said to me like this...

SAA 10 no. 95, obv. 3-7, Akkullanu to Esarhaddon

In this letter, Akkullanu is describing a conversation he had with an unnamed *sang*-priest about an unclear cultic topic. Recounting his own experience, Akkullanu describes the priest as engaging in a dialogue with his *libbu*. Keeping in mind the ideas about *libbu* proposed above, it is unlikely that Akkullanu was able to see and hear this dialogue occurring. Rather, he observed the priest’s external state, and made his own speculations about his interior activity, just as Sargon does above. Again, the integrity of the priest’s *libbu* is not compromised: only that he was having a dialogue with it is what Akkullanu says. Consequently, not only was speculation on *libbu √dbb* open, but this activity could occur in face-to-face interactions, and carry a neutral value.

An equally interesting example is to be found in a troop report. He describes the actions of some unknown subordinate trying to arrange the passage of sheep and oxen:

*ume 5 ina Deri [kam]musu adu libbušu iqbaššani [u]ssetiqaššunu*  
(The soldiers) stayed five days in Der until his interior spoke to him and he made them cross over.

SAA 15 no. 37, obv. 16'-18', Nabu-belu-kaʾʾin, governor of Kar-Šarrukin, to Sargon

Again, we have a third party describing another’s interior dialogue, but the construction of interior speech is quite unusual. Firstly, *libbu* is in subject position, emphasising that it is the active agent in this dialogue. Secondly, the verb is not *√dbb* ‘to talk,’ but *√qbʾ* ‘to speak, command’: a *verbum dicendi* with greater connotation of purposeful speech.\(^\text{136}\) How to explain this peculiar turn of phrase?

On the one hand, Nabu-belu-kaʾʾin suggests a possibility that these words may be self-ascribed: he says he has sent the words of another letter written by the man in question. On the other hand, the quotation of his words, such as they are, is far less explicitly demarcated than, say, a letter quoted

\(^{136}\) *√dbb* covered a wide range of speaking valencies; *√qbʾ* was generally restricted to authoritative speech, and was the root from which *qibitu* ‘command’ was derived. See p.184ff.
in one of Sennacherib’s compilations to Sargon: throughout the primary voice is that of Nabu-belu-ka’i’in. Now, earlier in the narrative woven by Nabu-belu-ka’i’in is described some disagreement between him and this other man: the governor wants the sheep and oxen to graze in one place, the other man, another place. Nabu-belu-ka’i’in concedes, and sends out some troops to escort the sheep, who are then turned back by the other man due to attacks by unspecified enemies. Only once libbušu iqbaššuni, ‘his libbu spoke to him,’ is the process completed. Consequently, in light of the governor’s indulgence of the other man, and the drawn out attempts to have the livestock graze, it seems that Nabu-belu-ka’i’in is emphasising the other man’s wilfulness. Rather than talking with his libbu, issu libbi √dbb, his libbu is speaking to him. The reciprocality of the internal dialogue is dissolved: he acts according to what his libbu commands. As we shall see later, this is associated with wilfulness and desire—fine in certain contexts, but inherently dangerous when untrammeled.

Most occurrences of libbu √dbb were not quite so emphatic, instead describing a process of deliberation. This deliberation often appears in negative situations, such that libbu √dbb has had negative connotations imputed to it by translators. These renderings are most frequently favoured in letters from scholars to the king advising him on various cosmic dangers and apotropaic matters, for example:

ina mabḥi la ṭub širru beli issi libbišu la idabbub
The king my lord should not talk with his interior concerning this badness of flesh.

SAA 8 no. 1, obv. 6-7, Issar-šumu-ereš to Esarhaddon

In his rendition, Parpola translates this as ‘The king my lord need not worry about this illness,’ and in similar vein restores and translates libbu √dbb as ‘worry’ even in instances where it may not be warranted.137 Ultimately though, libbu √dbb as ‘worry’ only incontrovertibly appears in letters to the king from scholars, a specific circumstance which we might reconsider.

137 For example SAA 10 no. 43 rev. 8-9, issi libbini niddubub niptaṭal ‘we became worried and were afraid’ (Parpola’s translation), which could also be translated ‘we talked amongst ourselves’ (Mark Weeden pers. comm.). Similarly, SAA 10 no. 289, [ša] muṭaṭe issi libbini ni[ddubub] ‘we... worri[ed to] death.’
As we have already seen, *libbu √dbb*’s association with internal dialogue could possess a neutral affective valency; the translation as ‘worry’ arises because of its use in a context of cosmic danger. Though adequate, ‘worry’ as a translation masks the dialogical aspect of the phrase, and also obscures the deliberative aspect. A translation as ‘talk with the interior’ is not incompatible with Parpola’s ‘worry,’ but rather adds to and nuances it. *Libbu √dbb* could represent both considered deliberation and an anxious worry at the same time, suggesting a conception of the valency of internal dialogue not necessarily corresponding to ours. Consider this further example:

\[
\text{ina maḫḫi tamarti annūti ša Sin šu issi lībbīya addubub milki la šu}
\]

I have been talking with my interior concerning this observation of the Moon: let this be my advice.

SAA 10 no. 240, rev. 15, Marduk-šakin-šumi to Esarhaddon

Parpola translates *libbu √dbb* as ‘worry’ here, which can make sense. However the valency of Marduk-šakin-šumi’s dialogue about the lunar observation need not be negative at all, rather being a learned contemplation. We can compare this to Urad-Gula’s letter requesting *temu* we saw in the previous chapter.138 Now, if we reconsider the senior scholar Issar-šumu-ereš telling the king not to speak with his interior about a disease, it is in this context that ‘worry’ makes the greatest sense. In this situation, Esarhaddon, talking with his interior about the disease, would not possess the same breadth of medical expertise as Issar-šumu-ereš; thus, the internal dialogue might potentially take on anxious aspects.139 By contrast, it is appropriate for Issar-šumu-ereš to think upon medical matters, and indeed it is appropriate for all the scholars to discuss the matters of their discipline with their *libbu*. Similarly, it would have been appropriate for a soldier’s *libbu* to tell him to make manoeuvres; for a governor to discuss his king’s future actions. The valency of *libbu √dbb* then appears to link to position and expertise, bringing to mind the analogous social distribution of *temu*.140

Illuminating this further, we may return to a line in Esarhaddon’s accession account we read in chapter one, where he is portrayed as criticising the self-concerned *temu* of his brothers:141

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138 See p.48.
139 There are terms for describing anxiety more explicitly, for example *ḫip lēbbi*, breaking of the interior, or *nakuttu* ‘throbbing.’ Both of these are suggestive of the embodied experience of *libbu*. See footnote 146 on p.92 for more on *nakuttu*.
140 See p.57.
141 P.52.
Recalling that royal inscriptions are written in the archaising, literary Standard Babylonian dialect, the self-portrayal of Esarhaddon’s interior dialogue bears striking similarities to the quotidian descriptions of such experiences in the correspondence, though couched in suitably portentous language. Instead of *libbu* √dbb we have the verb √ʾwʾ, a verb also meaning ‘to speak’ but one having passed into exclusively literary use centuries before.\(^{142}\) Similarly, we find *kabattu* in parallelism, a term used exclusively in literary texts to describe the bodily interior.\(^{143}\) Nevertheless, this passage, despite its grandiloquence, provides an example of internal dialogue which is considered, deliberative and wise.

\(^{142}\) Though recall that this root was the basis for (awatu|abatu|amatu) ‘word.’

\(^{143}\) Interestingly, CAD K s.v. *kabattu* suggests that the words does not mean ‘liver’ at all and is due only to a misunderstood equivalence in the synonym list CT 18 g K.4233+ (CAD K: p. 13).
2.4 The Permeable *libbu*

In and Out of the *Libbu*

We have now seen that the *libbu* was a key component of an Assyrian’s ability to be deliberate, loyal, and utter truthful language. Furthermore, the *libbu* was protected: it could not be breached by force normally, and to be deprived of its contents was a powerful curse. However, the *libbu* was not a passive component of a human subject: it played a dialogical role in the formation of thought and speech, indicated by *libbu* ṣ̣dbb, but also by Assyrian ideas of a ‘permeable’ *libbu*.

Two examples demonstrate a voluntary permeability of *libbu*, with the self being able to take action with respect to the *libbu*’s contents. As it happens, both examples concern scholars writing to the king advising him on words he shouldn’t entertain. The first, from the high priest of the Aššur temple, is fairly straightforward:

```plaintext
šumu anniu sili ate šatu šarru beli ina muḫḫi libbišu la išak[kanšu]
This omen, a lie it is. The king my lord must not place it in his interior
SAA 8 no. 101, rev. 2-3, Akkullanu to Esarhaddon
```

Akkullanu’s letter is fairly straightforward, advising Esarhaddon not to place the words of a false omen in his *libbu*, an omen that the king could have heard from one of Akkullanu’s colleagues. As we have already seen, the *libbu* was a location whence the truest words were derived; to be of complete *libbu* was to be utterly devoted; the forced violation of *libbu* was death. To place false words in the *libbu*, to take lies to heart, would be not only to fall for deception, but to accept the deception deeply within one’s subjectivity. For the interior of the king of Assyria, the human apex of truth and order, to be sullied by untruth—unconceivable.

Adad-šumu-ušur’s advice, by contrast, sheds more light on ideas of impermeability, providing explanation for why Esarhaddon should take his advice:

```plaintext
dababu la danqi šarru beli issu muḫḫi libbišu lušeli ina libbi teanniš
To talk the not beautiful the king my lord should expel from his interior; you will become weak in the interior.
SAA 10 no. 185, Adad-šumu-ušur to Esarhaddon
```

He mentions the unspecific *dababu la danqi*, literally ‘to talk the not beautiful.’ The infinitive verb suggests that, rather than concrete *dibbi*, substantive ‘words,’ the speech that Adad-šumu-ušur
warns against is processual, unfolding. Furthermore, the verb has no subject: the talking seems to come from nowhere. The ašipu advises his lord that he expel, literally ‘cause to go up,’ this talking.\footnote{The spatial aspect of this metaphor is interesting: the dababu is going up, from the king’s libbu to (presumably) the exterior. This puts one in mind of the phrase ‘to throw up’ for ‘to vomit,’ which also expels harmful substances from a body.} This is the first example we have come across so far of the libbu being affected by an entity without a clear subject ‘behind’ it. Adad-šumu-uṣur does not explain whence dababu la danqi could arise—he only takes as given that it could arise. His advice, lušeli, attributes agency to the king: he is in control of the contents of his libbu and is thus able to expel this debilitating phenomenon. This therefore suggests a conception of a mindful interiority, the possibility of a subject purposively cultivating practice to influence their own interior, characterised as part of the self but not identified as the whole of it.

A second, markedly more prosaic letter, illustrates the embeddedness of libbu-talk in even the most mundane matters of administration:

\begin{quote}
\textit{ki memmeni abutu ina muhhišunu la x x} ina muhhi libbišunu lašša
As no one has [x x] the word in the[ir x x], it is not in their interior.
\end{quote}

SAA 15 no. 248, rev. 9’-10’, unassigned to unassigned

In this letter, probably written to Sargon, the unknown author laments he has not enough wood to do his construction work: as no one has told the local potentates, they are unaware of it: it is not in their interior. Whilst this is an example obvious and uninteresting to us (if you do not tell someone something then they do not know about it), it does demonstrate that even in the most prosaic proceedings knowledge of matters and affairs could be couched in libbu language, further demonstrating the embeddedness of the libbu concept in an Assyrian interpersonal schema.

But what does it mean to place words \textit{ina muhhi libbi}? Where do these words come from? In the two instances above, though the scholars emphasise the voluntary nature of placing and expelling dibbi-words in the king’s interior, those words have specific origins, if not necessarily clear. The Assyrians recognised that words \textit{ina muhhi libbi} were dialogical: written or spoken by other entities. Intertwined with dialogue was power: the authoritative speaker’s words could enter \textit{ina muhhi libbi} without destructive consequence, providing a vector for shaping the subjectivities of others.
In most relationships, the *libbu* of any given subject was not normally permeable to anyone else. However, there are some occasions in which a kind of direct penetration and insertion of *dibbu* into another’s *libbu* is described. Neither of these occasions are violent, and indeed in both of these there is a clear gradient of authority and a willing receptiveness on the part of the receiver.

In this first letter, sent by an unknown correspondent to the palace, the author freely describes how his *libbu* was directly manipulated by the king:

*ana muḫḫi dibbi agannu* [ša] *ana šarri beliya qabu [x x x x]-dišu libbi ḫassu u [x x x x] šu la išmu u adi šinišu šalaššu šarru beliya išpuranni libbi ša ardišu ušaškin*

Concerning these words [that] were spoken to the king [x x x x] my interior remembers and [x x x x] it had not heard, and that which the king my lord has sent to me twice, thrice till now, he has caused to be established in the interior of his servant.

SAA 18 no. 142, rev. 8-13, Raši-il? to Esarhaddon

Here the author is at pains to emphasise that he has very much listened to what the king had written to him—to the extreme that those words were established in his very interior. In addition to that, this interior is something that autonomously remembers (*ḫassu*). These statements of receptivity, like statements including *libbu √gmr*, declare how totally subject this individual is to the king: his *libbu* is easily affected and reconfigured by royal letters. Taking this together with the epigraph that opens this chapter, and Sargon’s easy speculation over the thoughts of his governor, we can confidently assert that the interior was not completely private, a bounded personal space, but permeable to the powerful, and that this permeability was something that the Assyrian elite sought to take advantage of, in order to shape and mould thoughts and feelings.\(^\text{146}\)

\^\text{145} Establishing words in someone else’s interior is reminiscent of Urban’s concept of the ‘internal copy’ (2017: 24). Urban posits an ‘anaphoric replication’ where indexicals uttered in speech point to the internalised copy, such as *dibbi agannuti* here. However, although this seems to imply the presence of Urban’s ‘word-for-word’ copy, no copying process is mentioned in the Assyrian text itself: it is the original utterance that has been established in the interior in this description, not a replication as such.

\^\text{146} A striking contrast to this letter is to be found in a missive from the official Nabu-belu-ka’in, who also receives a communication from the king thrice, four times:

*ša šarri beli išpuranni*  
*ma* *ina muḫḫi dulli ša [x x x]...*
Turning to the epigraph for this section, we now look at the fascinating text known to modern scholars as *The Netherworld Vision of an Assyrian Crown Prince* (SAA 3 no. 32). This literary composition, of which one copy exists, excavated from a ‘private house in Assur,’ has recently been proposed as being a counterdiscursive commentary by a scribe critical of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal (Finn 2017: 104 ff.). Consequently, though it was written by a member of the same scribal, textual and affective communities as the Assyrian texts from the palace archives, as an ‘unofficial’ text it would have been written in relative freedom, for ‘private’ uses.

In the text, an Assyrian crown prince, named Kumaya but identified with Assurbanipal, twice visits the Netherworld in his dreams, first in an audience with the goddess Ereškigal, in a sadly damaged passage. The next night he finds himself before the throne of Nergal, her husband, who is not pleased with him, makes to kill him, but is persuaded to relent by an advisor. However, Nergal delivers a homily on the virtues of kingship,\(^{147}\) sharply closing thus:

\[
\begin{align*}
& \text{ma la taşammanni} \\
& \text{ša ana šarri beliya la aşammuni ana mannimma aḫḫur lašme annurig} \\
& \text{3 4 šarru beli aki annie šiappara ake lablaš ali} \\
& \text{nikitti dameya ina libbiya etablu} \\
& \text{ina qanni meḫrça lašu epaš lā ašaredumma ša libbišunu anaku la maku anaku aki ša šunu epašuni anaku epaš}
\end{align*}
\]

As to that which the king my lord wrote to me

\(^{3, QUI}^{O N E T Y P E}\) concerning the work of [x x x]...

\(^{3, QUI}^{O N E T Y P E}\) you are not listening

As to not listening to the king my lord, to who else would I listen? Now the king has sent thrice, four times just like this, how can I live? Where is my throbbing? My blood has dried up in my interior.

I do my work on the fringe of my equals. From amongst them, I am not the foremost, I am not the weak. I do as they do.

\[\text{SAA 15 no. 30, obv. 4-21}\]

In contrast to Raši-il’s interior, receptive to the words of the king, Nabu-belu-ka’ìn describes his response in a highly physical, somatic fashion; in contrast to the words Raši-il receives, Nabu-belu-ka’ìn is accused of disobedience par excellence (for more on which see chapter six). The question *ali nikitti* ‘where is my throbbing?’ raises the term *nakuttu*, which is almost invariably used in a negative fashion, something to be avoided. Here however, its absence is noted, even lamented—associated with dried-up blood, we get the image of a body whose life processes have ceased: how can a body like this live? This raises interesting questions as to the Assyrian understanding of *nakuttu*—referring to what we understand as the heartbeat, *nakuttu √ṛš* ‘to acquire throbbing’ thus alludes to the heightened heart rate that accompanies a stress and potentially anxiety response. Yet here, it is recognised as a prerequisite of life itself, despite its otherwise overwhelmingly negative associations. Thus, we are left to question whether *nakuttu* as anxiety was considered an essential aspect of life process, consequently undergirding the structure of √*grr*-√*plh*-√*ṭ*b that we explore in the next chapter. Space limitations mean that we cannot explore this any further here unfortunately.

\(^{147}\) Wherein lies the meat of the text's counterdiscursive thrust.
This passage can be read on two levels. First, in the narrative world of the text, we have a being of great authority—Nergal the deity—placing words in the libbu of a subordinate. This reminds us of Raši-il, attributing the king’s repeated letters ‘causing [the king’s words] to be established’ (ušaškin) in his libbu. Here, however, the words are likened to a thorn, ki gišši, evoking a sharp, penetrative quality much unlike the passive, almost gentle ušaškin. The harsher simile can be explained as a function of the artistic license of the author. If the text is to be read counterdiscursively, a product of the author’s disapproval of the Assyrian kings, then characterising Nergal’s speech on good kingship as a ‘thorn’ in the libbu of the prince character makes sense: the correct and wise words of kingly wisdom are a piercing intrusion into the libbu of the wayward prince.

Over and above illustrating another image of the permeable libbu, what is fascinating about this text is the author’s preoccupation with describing Kumaya’s libbu. The opening passage immediately describes Kumaya’s flawed subjectivity:

| ušuittiṣurrišuulitamašalammatuimšima [xxx xxx x x] -gi-itlibbi [ṣa pu]luḫtu labšatu išipma ikpudma libbašu anapešṭabi | x x ... |
| But he, he did not consult with his interior, he forgot the divine radiance ... in the carelessness of his libbu that was clothed in √plh he was negligent, but his libbu plotted the doing of good... |

This small passage, describing Kumaya’s failings as a ruler, beautifully underlines the understanding of libbu we have developed in this chapter. His first flaw is not discussing with his interior, ittiṣurrišu itama. The author has used the deliberately archaising Standard Babylonian dialect, and thus, though the phrase is not quite libbu √dbb, the underlying concept is equivalent. Nevertheless, by pointing out Kumaya does not do this, we have yet another example where the desirability of internal dialogue varies upon social position: for a king-in-waiting, to act without deliberation was clearly a violation of established royal prerequisites.
Kumaya’s second flaw is his negligence, triply emphasised with his forgetting the šalumattu ‘divine radiance,’ his active negligence as the subject of the verb šētu, and the negligence of his interior. In this sentence Kumaya’s libbu almost takes on a life of its own. It is described as pu]laḫtu labšatu ‘clothed in √plḥ.’ As we will explore in the following chapter, √plḥ was a complex concept shading into fear, reverence and awe, but most importantly it was a social affect defining appropriate hierarchical and power relationships. Livingstone’s translation of ‘heart… clothed in fear’ thus elides the respectful, appropriate dimensions of √plḥ, and by doing so obscures the meaning of this description. Taken straightforwardly, a libbu cannot be penetrated to discover the truth of its contents; a libbu ‘clothed’ in √plḥ thus appears to be exhibiting the correct social emotion, in this case that of an Assyrian ruler towards his deities. However, the underlying truth is inaccessible to the ruler’s subjects, and thus thoroughly obscured.

This dichotomy between internal reality and external appearances is further weighted by the author’s description of Kumaya’s libbu as ikpudma… ana epeš tabi ‘plotting the doing of good.’ Here, the autonomy of the libbu, which has been hinted at in such phrases as libbu √qbd ‘the interior spoke,’ libbu √šht ‘the jumping interior,’ is given nearly full force in a literary world. The imaginary Kumaya is set against himself: his act are unworthy of kingship, but his libbu ‘plots’ correct behaviour. The use of √kpd ‘plot’ is particularly colourful: it frequently appears throughout Assyrian texts, letters and royal inscription both, to refer to malevolent agents scheming against the Assyrian order. Here, however, we have a libbu scheming against the disorder of the Assyrian prince. Thus, a vision of a world of the self turned upside down.

Stepping out from the textual to the contextual level, the author of this piece, whatever his intentions, was not only concerned with the interiority of the powerful and defining what an ‘ethical’ sovereign should be, but also felt perfectly at ease committing a story to clay about the interiority of someone more powerful than he was. Though the character was ‘imaginary,’ that he can be identified with Assurbanipal strongly suggests that this was implicitly the author’s intention

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148 Such radiance was a salient feature in the Assyrian sensorium. Thomason describes the ‘haptic vision’ engaged by the melammu-radiance of the Assyrian wall reliefs (2016: 246), whilst Pongratz-Leisten draws attention to the historical adoption of the melammu by the Assyrian kings (2015: 220). This radiance is implicated in the enveloping √plḥ of the Assyrian king (Liverani 2017: 38).

149 Having said that, the libbu’s limits are also implicitly clarified here: Kumaya does not actually commit good deeds, and the libbu does not commit these deeds on its own: bound to a named subject, it can only ‘plot,’ it cannot act without the subject-self engaging with it.
as well. It might be the case that this individual was particularly daring in thinking to comment on the interiority of the most powerful individuals in the world (albeit obliquely)—or perhaps critique and speculation on the intents and thoughts of superiors was more widespread and socially acceptable than the official palatial archives would suggest.

That open question notwithstanding, the problem of interiority was not just one confined to moralistic literature, but indeed preoccupied the Assyrian rulers constantly.

The affected *libbu*

*Libbu* could thus be affected by self-practices, or the words of others, whether divine or invested with earthly authority. However, the *libbu* could also be acted upon by ‘impersonal’ forces: things that had no motivating named being behind them. We have already encountered *dababu la danqi* but there existed a variety of such phenomena, the description of which was a key component in the Assyrian repertoire of affect.

The *libbu* often featured in what we might call indirect representations of emotion: ones which do not implicate the self as subject or agent (e.g. ‘I am happy,’ ‘I raged’) but locate the agent or object away from self (e.g. ‘Wellbeing is for me,’ ‘My heart was broken’). This conception was so heavily embedded in Assyrian convention that it was a regular feature of standard Assyrian greetings:

\[
\text{ana šarri beliya urdaka Sin-ahhe-eriba lu šulmu ana šarri beliya šulmu ana Aššur šulmu ana ekurrate šulmu ana birat ša šarri gabbu libbu ša šarri beliya adanniš lu ṭab}
\]

To the king my lord, your servant Sennacherib. EMPH wellbeing for the king my lord. Wellbeing is for Assyria, wellbeing is for the temples, wellbeing is for all the fortresses of the king. The interior of the king, my lord, let it be very good.

\[
\text{SAA 1 no. 31, obv. 1-7, Sennacherib mar-šarri to Sargon}
\]

This is but one example but holds throughout letters sent to superiors.\(^{150}\) Not only is it demonstrative of indirked affect—an affect affecting the *libbu*-interior and not the ‘self’ as such—but is also diagnostic of a socially structured regime of good interiors.\(^{151}\)


\(^{151}\) See p.148.
Similarly, we have Adad-šumu-uṣur writing to Esarhaddon speaking with a plural voice, writing that Esarhaddon’s succession arrangements *libbinni ibtal[ṭa] ‘our interiors revived’; further in the passage, he exhorts the king:

> marʾeka annunte damqute dugul libbaka tu ḫaddi
> Look at these beautiful sons of yours, let your interior rejoice

*SAA 10 no. 185, rev. 19-20

Conversely, the *libbu* was not only the subject of positive affects: a surfeit of explicitly negative experiences could be attributed to it. For example, it could be *murṣu ‘sick,’ as Esarhaddon’s is when he is quoted as saying *libbi mariš adanniš ‘my interior is very sick,’* as Urad-Gula the ašipu’s is when he writes *muruš libbi uktammera ‘I heaped up the sickness of my interior.’* The *libbu* could move about, as the troubled Nabu-tabni-uṣur writes *libbi issgu adanniš, ‘my interior is very displaced,’* as Esarhaddon writes *libbi ṣiṣṭu ‘my interior descends,’* as Adad-šumu-uṣur writes *libbini šapil ‘our interior is low.’ We might recall Naʾid-Marduk’s men mention Esarhaddon *libbi ša šarri ana mnuḫi belini šeḫtu ‘The interior of the king jumped up regarding our lord;* similarly, ṣarru libbašu ana muḫḫikunu ilteḫṭa ‘the king, his interior jumped up concerning you’. Finally, subjects could experience *ḫip libbi, ‘broken-interior,’* as for example, Nabu-tabni-uṣur again *ḫip libbi AMESPACEK = ḫip libbi iṣṣabtani ‘broken-interior has seized me.’

This dense catalogue of *libbu* experiences is not meant to be an exhaustive list of every affect associated with the *libbu* in this period; rather, it serves to demonstrate how the *libbu* could be

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152 *SAA 10 no. 185, obv. 15.*
153 *SAA 10 187, obv. 7, Adad-šumu-uṣur to Esarhaddon.*
154 *SAA 10 no. 294, rev. 4, Urad-Gula to Assurbanipal.*
155 *SAA 10 no. 334, rev. 14. The meaning of *is-su-gu = sagu* is uncertain: Parpola translates ‘startled.’ The editors of the SAA glossary suggest ‘to be(com)e displaced?’ The CDA suggests ‘to trouble(?)’. To be troubled, to be displaced: how to reconcile these two quite different translations? If we consider the English etymology of *trouble,* the OED proposes it derives ultimately from Latin *turba* ‘crowd, disturbance’: a word that itself carries connotations of ‘matter out of place.’ Thus, an association between displacement and trouble is not unwarranted for the translator to propose here, though without further examples of *sagu* this must remain an open question.
156 *SAA 10 no. 187, obv. 9, Adad-šumu-uṣur to Esarhaddon.*
157 *SAA 10 no. 226, rev. 5-6, Adad-šumu-uṣur to Esarhaddon or Assurbanipal.*
158 *SAA 18 no. 334, rev. 15.*
159 *SAA 10 no. 110, obv. 7. Though the context is broken, the person being described was probably not the king as the passage is devoid of the usual deferential markers.*
conceived of as a corollary subject to the named self in its own right. It could be that specifying the *libbu* as the subject of these affects can be interpreted as a straightforward localisation of feeling: language such as *libbu šuptu* ‘lowering interior’ maps to the English expression ‘feeling down,’ *hip-libbi* the ‘broken heart’. Many of these phrases have Akkadian language counterparts that apply directly to the subject ‘I’, not to their *libbu*: √ḫdʾ ‘rejoice’ for *libbu* √ṭʾb, √rʾb ‘shake (with anger)’ for *libbu* √šḥt. Why do speakers and writers choose to use *libbu* phrases over direct affective language? Perhaps not just for artistry or colour, but a way of speaking that diffuses responsibility for affective experiences and the actions that arise from them across different parts of the self. Furthermore, this is not just a linguistic technique, but an ontologically conditioned experience of interiority. It was a specifically Assyrian conception of the subject that construed it as consisting of named body, *libbu* and *ramanu*, a subject embedded in a world filled with intentional forces; specifying that *libbu* was the agent of affect was thus an understanding of embodied experience, not solely an artistic flourish. 

The *libbu* was conceptualised as experiencing a variety of affects that could be attributed to individuals, and that these experiences could not all be directly traced to specific agents. Coupled with *libbu* √dbb, we get an increasing sense of the *libbu* as not just an interior zone, but as an incompletely controlled realm subject to its own subjectivity. The Assyrians recognised this, and their empire had ambivalent attitudes to it: as with *temu*, to act *ki libbišunu* ‘according to one’s interior’ was laudable, if one’s interior accorded with Aššur’s; otherwise, it threatened the integrity of the imperial project.

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The notion of ‘diffuse responsibility’ as a procedure for expressing particular affects, sometimes dangerous ones, has been explored by various linguistically-oriented anthropologists (Hill & Irvine 1992: 12-13). In particular, Irvine’s work on Wolof *xaxaar* performances highlights the intersubjective distribution of the ‘venting of affect’: responsibility for the authorship of a particular insulting utterance is highly diffused across many parties: low-status *griot* performers, groups of high-status women (Irvine 1992: 123). In this Wolof example, diffuse responsibility is particularly demarcated by the aesthetic *xaxaar* genre; by contrast, *libbu* language serves rather as small-scale generic expressions, which diffuse responsibility within a specific subjective constellation of *libbu-ramanu*-name.
2.5 The Impermeable Libbu: interiority, wilfulness and the ramanu

**ki libbi**

Throughout the correspondence, we find libbu associated with will and intent. This will or intent, depending on the context, could be evaluated positively or negatively. Unsurprisingly, the Assyrian state correspondence tended to evaluate libbu actions that benefited Assyria, or were granted by Assyrian fiat, positively. This example, taken from a report from the Phoenician coast, describes the desired outcome of some newly implemented tax orders:

`urdanišu ki libbšunu bit-karrani erruβu uşšu iddušu imaḫḫaruni Labnana ina panišu ki libbšunu elli ūrruda eše ušerraduni`

His servants, according to their interior, enter and leave the trading stations and sell and buy. Lebanon is before him and according to their interior they go up and down and collect the wood.

SAA 19 no. 22, obv. 6-10, Qurdi-Aššur-lamur to Tiglath-pileser

Here, Qurdi-Aššur-lamur, Tiglath-pileser’s envoy to the nominally independent city of Tyre, describes how he has implemented the king’s order *dibbi issišu lu ṭab* ‘The words with him should be good.’ This policy appears to have granted the Tyrians a measure of latitude and freedom, as reflected by their ability to go up and down *ki libbšunu.* In a similar vein, Sargon expressly grants his governor Aššur-šarru-uṣur latitude to do what he likes, writing *ki lābbika dulu* ‘wander about according to your interior’ (SAA 1 no. 1, rev. 15). Conceptualisation of some kind of autonomy as being able to act *ki libbi* extended even to the most mundane shopping transactions:

`sibirtu ša pitte libbi ša beliya laššu`

There are no belts that accord with the interior of my lord

SAA 19 no. 14, rev.2, Bel-abu’a to the Palace Scribe

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62 Main examples of this are given in the subsequent body text, but a few examples are noted here: šumma libbušu šadu lušabalkita lušēšibšunu ‘If it is his interior, he may take them over the mountains and settle them’ SAA 1 no. 1, rev. 22—see p.112ff. for extended discussion; šumrat libbi ana šarri beliya lušakšidu ‘May the king, my lord, attain the wish of his interior’ SAA 10 no. 123, obv. 7-8; la imaggar ma šumma libbakunu gilme ‘He does not consent, 3.quot ‘If it is your interior, oblige (uncertain translation)’ SAA 15 no. 199, e.3.

63 Thus, although not specifically outlined as an explicit outcome, we have an example of Assyrian ‘policy’ having observable, remarkable effects on the interiorities and subjectivities of those subject to the empire, a foundational link explored fully in the next chapter.

64 This kind of wandering about ‘according to the *libbu*’ can be contrasted with the ‘aimless’ directionality associated with dogs, whom subjects explicitly liken themselves to in certain self-abnegatory contexts. See p.242ff.
The implications of defining autonomy and desire in terms of *ki libbi* are subtle. As with many other affects and attitudes associated with the *libbu*, there existed Akkadian equivalents that could express desire without invoking *libbu: summurat ša šarrī bel[iya lušak]šidu* ‘may the desires of the king my lord be achieved’;⁶⁵ *ardanuti ša šarrī aššībi* ‘I desire servitude under the king.’⁶⁶ Again, we might postulate differing ways to distribute responsibility for desires as being the prime reason these variants exist; alternatively, that desires associated with the *libbu* are not clearly verbalisable.

However, acting *ki libbi* unbound by the parameters of the Assyrian state could have dangerous consequences. On one end of the spectrum, we find (probably biased) reports of cultic functionaries enacting non-traditional rites:

\[ \textit{kima } \text{libbišunu } [x \ x \ x \ x \ x \ x \ x] \ma \text{libbišunu } \text{ina } \text{muṣallī dariu...} \]

According to their interior\[x \ x \ x \ x \ x \ x \ x\]according to their interior, the morning sheep offering...

SAA 13 no. 134, rev. 9-10, unassigned to the king

In this letter, an unknown priest is informing Esarhaddon about the actions of Pulu the lamentation priest, whom he alleges to have instituted widespread cultic changes in the temple of the god Nabu, without the permission of the king, even messing around with work done by Sargon himself. The wilfulness of Pulu and his associates acting *kima libbišunu* is very much disapproved of.⁶⁷ On the other end of the spectrum, wilfulness could lead to immediate disaster, as this statement in a damaged letter revealing a murderous conspiracy against Esarhaddon suggests: *ina muḫḫi libbi irtiḫš, ‘he √ṛḫš concerning his interior.’*⁶⁸

That the *libbu* was both a source of autonomy and wishing and an impermeable stronghold to the agents of the king is highlighted by this letter from Bel-ūšezib the scholar, in which the unknown interior of a possible traitor could potentially be the birthing ground of sedition:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{\textsuperscript{165}} & \text{SAA 16 no. 132, obv. 9} \\
\text{\textsuperscript{166}} & \text{SAA 17 no. 53 obv. 14} \\
\text{\textsuperscript{167}} & \text{Earlier in the letter as well Pulu is described as acting *ki ra[menišu] ‘according to his self’ (SAA 13 no. 134, obv. 5’), although as we can see the key word is almost entirely broken off. See also SAA 13 no. 181, rev. 5.} \\
\text{\textsuperscript{168}} & \text{SAA 16 no. 60, obv. 9’}.
\end{align*}\]
Bel-ušezib effectively summarises the problem that the impermeable libbu poses to Assyrian power. He tells the story of a certain Šinnumu, who is attempting to take rulership of the city of Uruk by claiming that Esarhaddon speaks gabbi pirṣata ‘all lies.’ However, whilst Bel-ušezib is able to report upon everything he has heard, he is thoroughly unable to speculate upon Šinnumu’s intentions, writing about them in the most equivocal language. He emphasises that only he and his interior know, in a construction that makes it sound like they are two parties working together.

\textit{ki ramani}

Unlike acting \textit{ki libbi}, the autonomy described by \{ \textit{ki} \mid \textit{ina} \mid \textit{ana} \} \textit{raman}- was deemed at best neutral, and usually negative. Not only could it be used to indicated that a subject was acting in an autonomous fashion, but unlike the \textit{libbu} the \textit{ramanu} could also be assigned physical property; the property-possessing \textit{ramanu} was similarly regarded at best neutrally, usually negatively. The overlap between these two realms of operation and ownership is illustrated by these two examples:

\begin{quote}
\texttt{\textit{attalaka issišu addubub}}
\texttt{\textit{muku}}
\texttt{\textit{ata girri raminika ša la šani'e karme ša šarri tapti}}
\end{quote}

I went and talked with him

\textbf{Why did you, by the way of your \textit{ramanu}, open the granary of the king without the deputy?}

SAA 1 no. 181, obv. 15-19, Bel-liqbi, governor of Šupat, to Sargon

\begin{quote}
evli betu niše mar'e šelu'ate Urdu-Nabu sangu ina libbi unqi issaṯar ana ramanišu uttere
\end{quote}

Urdu-Nabu the sangu-priest has written a field, a house and people, sons of temple votaries, in a sealed document and turned them to his own \textit{ramanu}

SAA 13 126, rev. 6'-9', Iddin-Ea, priest of the Ninurta temple at Kalḫu, to Assurbanipal

\footnote{ki ašmu ana šarri belya altapra ‘As I heard this I wrote to the king my lord’ (obv. 16)}

\footnote{The variable permeability of the \textit{libbu} is here represented as an explicit problem, and suggests that, unlike Stasch’s conclusion that ‘anti-telepathic’ values also assert a ‘pro-autonomy’ stance (2008: 445-6), the valency of an opacity value was contingent on relationship and social domain.}

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These two quotations are exemplary of a significant number of instances where subjects appropriate property for their own ramanu. The first demonstrates how acting according to ramanu could directly contravene the chain of command of Assyrian authority: the lack of permission from the deputy governor is simply and typically described as la šani’e ‘without the deputy.’ This suggests a fungibility between the two terms: one can act according to ramanu, or according to the royal authority as delegated to an Assyrian official.

The second example features the ramanu of Urdu-Nabu, who was told by the servants of the king to vivify his ramanu above. Here the author of this letter is appealing to the king regarding what he considers to be Urdu-Nabu’s inappropriate appropriation of his property. The ramanu was generally recognised as a holder of property, but is frequently attested as becoming the owner of property in negatively charged ways such as these. A final example demonstrates the peculiarity of this ramanu split self:

\[\text{ina datuwa rama[nšu]} \text{ ina šubri šarri utamme 5 alani issarap}\]

After, he put [his] ramanu under oath, in the interior of the king, but he burnt five towns.

SAA 19 no. 192, rev.5-8, Nabu-belu-ka”in to Sargon

The governor of Kar-Šarrukin is describing the activities of a certain subject active in the Zagros, possibly Dalta, a client of the Assyrian kings. Here, Nabu-belu-ka”in describes a disjuncture between Dalta’s ramanu and his actual activities: though he subjected his ramanu to the oath of the Assyrian king, his violent actions belie this. Not only does this put us in mind of the clause Esarhaddon imposed in his succession treaty, but it also uses a factitive inflexion of √tm’, emphasising a disjuncture between Dalta the named subject and the ramanu he is associated with. Rather than Dalta acting according to his ramanu, he acts despite it. His actions, burning five towns, contravene

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171 For example, as in the letters SAA 1 no. 33, obv. 14 kusapi ša ramenišu ekkul ‘He eats the bread of his ramanu,’ Sennacherib mar-šarri to Sargon; SAA 13 no. 172, rev. 8-9’ kettu aninu ša ramenni ana Bel nušakkal ‘Truth, we have caused Bel to eat those (sheep) of our ramanu’, Urdu-ahšešu to Assurbanipal; SAA 19 no. 15 rev. 7-8 zar’e ša ramanini šu ‘It is the sown field of our ramanu’ Aššur-šimanni to Tiglath-pileser or Sargon; SAA 19 no. 37, rev. 6’ ša ramenišunu lilqiš šekula ‘Let them buy and eat that of their ramanu,’ Šamaš-ahu-iddina to Tiglath-pileser.

172 See also SAA 1 no. 11 obv. 12, where Sargon accuses Mannu-ki-Adad of appropriating troops for himself; SAA 1 no. 139 obv. 2’.

173 See p.77.
the oath he swore and placed his *ramanu* under. The fact that Dalta was able to dissimulate in this way is thus evocative of a split self.

\{ki\|ina\|ana\} *ramanu* was used to indicate an autonomy which was undesirable on the part of the speaker, and thus it presented a useful rhetorical strategy when presenting work disputes to the king:

\begin{quote}
\begin{center}
anaku issu pani la ammagguru la eppaš ina muḫḫi bunni ina muḫḫi memmeni aqabbaššunu la išammuni aki raman śmierci \[x\ x\ ...\]
I myself before this do not consent, I will not do it. Concerning its countenance, concerning anything, I am speaking with them but they do not listen, according to their *ramanu*...
\end{center}
\end{quote}

SAA 13 no. 34, rev. 7-12, Nabu-ašared to the king

\begin{quote}
\begin{center}
uma Pulu kalu ki ramenišu ina bet Nabu uppaš...
bel piqittate ša ramenišu ina libbi ekurri uptaqqiq
Now Pulu the lamentation priest does according to his *ramanu* in the temple of Nabu...
he has appointed appointees of his *ramanu* within the temple
\end{center}
\end{quote}

SAA 13 no. 134, obv. 5'-6' + obv. 16'-17', unassigned to the king

Both of these instances describe competition between priests; the first refers to aesthetic decisions regarding the casting of a statue, and the second is an unknown author complaining about the royally sanctioned appointment of Pulu by attempting to paint him as overly wilful. Both of these appear to be fairly innocuous professional disputes, at least to us, but we find far more grievous infractions against royal authority occurring blamed on the *ramanu*:

\begin{quote}
\begin{center}
\begin{flushleft}
Abi-yaqar Puqudaya šulmu ša mati ana pan šarri beliya uš šebi
tukte uba’a šakin [ša] adannu ša iškunu ultennu makatu rakšu u ḫubti
\end{flushleft}
\begin{flushright}
\begin{center}
\begin{flushleft}
\textit{QUOT}
\end{flushleft}
\end{center}
\end{flushright}
\end{flushleft}
Abi-yaqar the Puqudean does not desire the wellbeing of the land before the king my lord
He seeks revenge, the date that he established he has changed—destitution, binding and plunder
\end{center}
\end{quote}

SAA 17 no. 152, rev. 1-6, Abi-yaqiya et al. to Sargon
He does not ṭaplu the king

I will give in my ramanu and establish my name

SAA 13 no. 181, rev. 4-6, Šuma-iddin to Esarhaddon

Such infractions could be so extreme that they were described as neglecting the temu of the king itself, which would present a significant threat to the Assyrian order.⁷⁴

In a similar fashion to libbu-autonomy, the appraisal of ramanu-autonomy was variable according to relationship and context. Unlike libbu-autonomy however, the neutral to negative valuation of ramanu was deliberately marshalled by the Assyrian elite, who were directed to dissimulate for their own purposes. The negative valorisation of interior-exterior disjuncture was only applicable to those presenting themselves to the Assyrian empire. Two examples illustrate this ambivalent, dissimulating ramanu well:

I interrogated him and he spoke like this

As to that which the king sent to me

See how the face of Iyaze is

Concerning those Cimmerians, speak to him, go according to your ramanu

SAA 16 no. 15, obv. 7-9, Assurbanipal mar-šarrī to Esarhaddon

I inquired of the priest according to my ramanu

SAA 10 no. 99, obv. 7-8, Akkulanu to Esarhaddon

⁷⁴ For more on this, see p.237ff.
Not only this but Esarhaddon inquires of one of his scholars

\textit{iba\textsuperscript{š}i issi ramenika tadi\textsuperscript{š}i}

\textit{Is it that you have been concerned with your \textit{ramanu}?}

SAA 10 no. 320, rev. 7-9, Urad-Nanaya to Esarhaddon

Esarhaddon’s inquiry illustrates that, despite the negative valorisation of acting \textit{ina ramani}, it appeared to be something that a subject needed to attend to. This potentially illustrates a zone of overlap with a non-imperialised set of values, which we explore in chapter five.

Ultimately, the \textit{ramanu} appears at least as a more opaque component of self than the \textit{libbu} does. Unlike the \textit{libbu}, the \textit{ramanu} is not a particular locus of affect, nor does it engage in dialogue, nor is it something permeable. Now, as we flagged up earlier, topographies of the human subject are in no way a cross-cultural universal, with multiple models prevailing in the Western context alone. It is thus illuminating to compare this Assyrian tripartite structure of self with one that shares some striking similarities.\textsuperscript{175} Joel Robbins describes a triple arrangement of the self in his ethnography on Urapmin subjects in Papua New Guinea (2004). This model of self consisted of ‘thoughts (\textit{aget fukunun}), feelings (\textit{aget tem}), and desires (\textit{san})’; of these, \textit{san} has striking correspondences with the \textit{ramanu} we have just described:

\begin{quote}
Although like thoughts and unlike feelings, the will is definitely part of the person and is, on the linguistic level, obligatorily possessed, it is less like thoughts and more like feelings in that it seems to have a force of its own and can make the thinking part of people a passive onlooker as it “pushes” them in directions their hearts might not be inclined to take them.
\end{quote}

Robbins 2004: 185

Unlike the Assyrian however, the Urapmin model refers to ‘feelings’ and the interior with the same term (\textit{aget tem}); more importantly, though Assyrian understanding recognises that the \textit{libbu} cannot be perceived through normal hearing, the Urapmin build on this a strong dispreference for talk regarding the thoughts, intents, and interiors of any others. The Assyrian empire, by contrast, developed a strong preference for transparency, controlling unauthorised disjuncture with threats, curses and punishments. If we clamber up towards an ontological level, Robbins notes that the

\textsuperscript{175} We might also consider the Freudian \textit{ego-superego-id} a tripartite model, exemplifying a highly culturally specific and historically contingent ethnotheory.
Urapmin considered the landscape as which they lived as comprised by ‘outer shells (ipnal, lit. ‘skin’) that obscure hidden ‘insides’ (ibak tem)’; for the cuneiform culture of Mesopotamia, the outer world was a tablet upon which one might read the ominous inscriptions of the gods.

Polyautonomy

The everyday Assyrian subject was thus not an individual as we might understand it: rather than a single named being to which responsibility is assigned for their actions, we find instead a subject composed of named body, libbu, and ramanu. Responsibility for an action could be assigned to all three of these subject components. However, to imperial eyes, certain responsible components were more highly regarded than others: a libbu acting for Assyria was laudable. By contrast, ramanu was self-interested: it seemingly could not be acted upon, disciplined towards the imperial interest. These multiple aspects of the subject, and the various potentials of responsibility assigned to them, give rise to a conceptual ‘polyautonomy’: in lieu of a defined system of subjective ‘rights’ or ‘freedoms’ assigned to a single ‘human’ subject, the various ways in which a subject was free to act were differentially distributed by internal topography. As we have seen, acting ki ramanı was construed almost exclusively as bad in imperial eyes. Yet, as we have also seen, the ramanu was a holder of property, something to be guarded, and assuredly not something to talk to, implicated in truth or sincerity, or a locus of affect. This suggests that the specific autonomies that the ramanu exhibited were a potential reason for why it was held in such low regard by the imperial elite.\footnote{By contrast, we see a markedly different attitude to the ramanu in the kinship-defined letters, p.225.} By contrast, the libbu, whilst not necessarily valorised, represented autonomies that would be valuable for Assyria if directed to its benefit. Speech was an important part of this, but also certain kinds of action, and particular affective states, which we explore in the next chapter.
2.6 Libbali, Libbi Šarri: The Importance of Heart in Assyrian Ontology

Models and Maps of the Self

Theft, lying, false witness, cheating in weights and measures, all kind of dissembling such as speaking ill of the deaf (and presumably smiling to their face), hating your brother in your heart (while presumably speaking kindly to him), these are clearly contradictions between what seems and what is.

Douglas 1966: 54-55, discussing Leviticus XIX

In this chapter we have explored the ways in which Assyrian subjects conceptualised their interior within the correspondence discourse, whilst emphasising the cross-cultural variability of topographies of the self and situating the Assyrian model in a comparative context. This loosely organised ‘tripartite’ self, of a named I, a libbu and a ramanu is suggestive of a complex distribution of responsibilities and capabilities across a body dwelling within a social hierarchy. It is this territory that the ţemu undergoes one of its many transmutations; thus, it is continuous with the exterior realm of “fact” events. Unlike the exterior world of facts and thought, the libbu and ramanu were unable to be apprehended directly using the sensorium of √’mr and √šm’. Consequently, the interior spaces of the Assyrian subject represented a locus for threatening disjuncture, a disjuncture which, like ţemu, stemmed from a gap between what could be perceived and an underlying ‘true’ meaning.

Though there are commonalities between the libbu and the ţemu in that both share an association with interiorised processes and interior words, the relation between these two terms remains obscure and indirect. For example, there is no one-to-one mapping between an English language model of thoughts contained within the mind, and ţemu contained within a libbu; rather, words (√dbb) can be sourced from the libbu, and in a similar way ţemu can be tagged with words. Additionally, libbu is not directly equated with any concept of ‘thought’ itself, as the Korowai xulmelun, which glosses both thought-concept and bodily interior does (Stasch 2008: 444). Thus, though libbu was in fact an interior, and libbu √dbb represented an interior dialogue, the concept of ‘a thought’ as a discrete quantum of mental ‘stuff’ did not exist as such. Instead, processes such as √dbb, interactivity between the libbu, ramanu and the I, and forces affecting and reacting with each other created the graph of dynamic unfoldings which constituted an Assyrian subject in this period.

The consciousness of a disjuncture between interior and exterior aspects of the self enables particularly complex attitudes to be expressed with an economy of language. In particular, this
disjuncture allows ironic utterances to be expressed (Fernandez & Huber 2001: 1-3). We will see this used to great effect in chapters five and six, where ironic utterances are used to comment on, criticise and parody the pretensions of the Assyrian Empire. The threat of this disjuncture was clearly recognised by the imperial elite, as the stipulations in their treaties demand.

*ina libbi šarrī ittila... memeni issišū [lu] la iddabbub*
He lies in the interior of the king—no one may talk against him

In a letter to Esarhaddon advising him on the best way to deal with all the cases he hears, an Assyrian of unknown standing writes that a ‘servant of an Assyrian’ who is the target of a lawsuit is protected: he lies *ina libbi šarrī*. This deceptively short statement in a peculiar letter packs within it an ontology of the Assyrian world, psyche, and body politic.

*Libbu* in its most general sense referred to the interior of things, in the broadest sense: the interior of a house, the interior of a message, the interior of a day, the interior of a human, a god, a city, a realm. These *libbu* spaces were not just metaphors or abstractions, but very real arenas in which the Assyrian world unfolded: just as towns and cities could participate in—or fight against—the Assyrian project, so could the *libbu* of human beings. Dominion over the *libbu* was thus a key part of the Assyrian programme.

The peculiar characteristics of the human *libbu* posed a challenge to the empire that laid claim to the knowledge of everything seen and heard. The privacy of *libbu*, although not absolute, was generally insurmountable. Although the dialogical nature of internal speech was recognised, it was also recognised that ‘taking words to heart’ required an active assent on the part of the individual. However, the individual and the *libbu* were not coterminous: word could arise in the *libbu* with no clear human source, and the *libbu* could experience affect of its own, overlapping with but not entirely identified with the individual. However, to act in accordance with one’s *libbu*, and to converse with it before action, were practices regarded as those belonging to a self-possessed individual. Whether this was a good thing or not simply depended on ‘what side you were on’: if you

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177 SAA 16 no. 64 obv. 13, unknown to Esarhaddon.
178 See also p.148 for the *šālī šarrī* ‘shadow of the king,’ which appears repeatedly in descriptions of the ideal Assyrian subject.
cultivated a thoughtful self with a *libbu* completely for Assyria, the members of the Assyrian state were bound to look on you favourably.

To lie in the interior of the king, then, was no simple metaphor. The *libbu* of the king represented the protected space of the man who was the *envoy of Aššur* himself. The desires of the king were the desires of Aššur; the contents of his *libbu*, the morally correct words and intents for Aššur. To be a servant of an Assyrian, enveloped within the *libbu* of the king of Assyria, was to be enveloped within a single affective, intentional and intellectual totality. This hypostatic ontology applied not only to this bodily conception of the *šar Aššur*, but to the language referring to the geographical phenomenon of Assyria itself: the *mat Aššur* 'land of Aššur,' the heart of which was the city of Aššur, home of the god Aššur—known to most as Libbali, *Libbi-ali*—the 'Interior City.'
3 Instruments of Imperial Interiority

Do your work, each in his house, each in his field. Let your interior be good, you are the servants of the king.179

In the preceding two chapters, we explored concepts central to the ontological makeup of the Assyrian Empire. The first, temu, was a unitary conception of thoughts, intentions and facts, in some ways resembling a loop. The second was the makeup of the Assyrian self: the indexical I, the libbu, and the ramanu, which together formed a dynamic, interactive subject where responsibility and valorisation was distributed across the different terms. The interior libbu represented a hidden space to which the Assyrian elite had only indirect access; though it could be a guarantor of loyalty, it was primarily a space of potential threat. The self of Assyrian subjects thus needed to be transformed into a state suitable for the smooth unfolding of the temu of the gods of the king.

In this chapter, we address the question of how these subjectivities and states were established by the Assyrian ruling machine. The link between affect and power in this period has not really been explored (Van De Mieroop 2016a: 17). As evidenced by an ‘emotional turn’ in recent historiography, the paucity of subjective, feeling interpretations on this level has been observed. This has been attributed to European academic and societal norms condemning emotion and its study to a domestic, undervalued feminine sphere (Wilce 2009: 103). Certain assays into Assyrian affect have, unfortunately, been little more than toy applications of ethnocentric, naïve Freudianism (Frahm 2014); more serious work has looked at the royal inscriptions (Van De Mieroop 2016a), or the Old Assyrian letters from a thousand years before the period under study (Larsen 2001). The subjective and affective dimensions of state power are thus a rich seam for investigation, a gap foregrounded by Plamper in a recent overview of the subfield (2015: 281). The problem of establishing and maintaining the ideal domain for Aššur (constituted of beings of good libbu and the unfolding of the divine temu) articulates with wider questions on the nature not only of self and feeling, but political power, statehood and ontological systems. Within Assyriology itself, understandings of the despotic

179 SAA 5 no. 210, rev. 2-7, Nabu-ḫamatu’a to Sargon
military state, projected by fearsome stone reliefs and lurid royal inscriptions have given way to more nuanced ideas regarding ‘consensus’ building (Lanfranchi 1997). In particular, Parker’s deployment of ‘hegemonic power’ is an illustrative example of this shift in thinking:

Hegemony is ... a very interesting concept since it does not describe the image most commonly held of the Assyrian Empire in the modern world... it does not describe the Assyrian Empire as a militaristic colonial state. Instead, the idea of hegemonic rule emphasizes indirect power, the power to persuade or coerce without the direct use of military force.

Modifying this idea somewhat, we can say that indirect power is fundamentally an affective phenomenon, using methods of communication and display to shape attitudes and interiorities towards power’s desires. This chapter explores how the Assyrian elite implicitly conceptualised their actions in the ‘political sphere’ (a heuristic definition here) as intended to shape and mould subjectivities, such as those of internal potentates, members of the ‘formal’ Assyrian hierarchy (including the šarru), and external polities. What was the ‘calculated frightfulness’ of Assyria, the projection of fear, if not an affective management technique underlying the maintenance of the Assyrian elite?

---

80 This is to say nothing of immanent forces operating within Assyrian ontology: Šamaš and his liver omens, Ištar and her dream oracles, and the various demons and sorcerers who constantly threatened the Assyrian elite. Pongratz-Leisten’s 2015 monograph analyses the permeation of Assyrian society and culture by mythic and mystic elements, interpreting the whole as an Assyrian Weltanschauung. In this thesis, I specifically limit myself to the ‘everyday’ discourse found in the Assyrian letters, to which this larger ontology serves as a structuring structure.

81 A memorable phrase from Olmstead 1918.
3.1 The Managed Interior

The King’s Word to Aššur-šarru-uṣur

\[ \text{dibbi ṭabuti issišu ladhub libbi laškunšu} \]

I shall say good words with them and I shall establish their \textit{libbu}

As we saw in the previous chapter, the Assyrian ruling elite were keen to ensure that their subjects’ fealty to Assyria was not just lip-service (\textit{dababi šapti} ‘talk of the lips’) but a fully interiorised experience (\textit{ina gummurti libbi} ‘in the completeness of the interior’). There was a real concern with the hidden, potential acts of \textit{libbu}, an opaque interior that could not be seen or heard without verbal mediation: a verbal mediation that could be falsified. The freedom to not say what you really think was yet another reason why the Assyrians insisted so sternly on truth-telling practices.

The Assyrian mission thus required not merely territorial expansion, but the creation and maintenance of certain kinds of interiority and subjectivity. This could arise spontaneously, which gratified the Assyrian rulers. More often, it required a suite of techniques to shape the interiority of others. Whilst these techniques were not enumerated in any treatise of government, they were repeatedly used to elicit specific affective outcomes. Consider these words from a letter composed by Sargon to Aššur-šarru-uṣur, governor of Que:

\[ \text{dibbi ṭabuti šupraššu...} \]
\[ \text{šebilaššu basi libbusu issini ippaššar} \]
Send good words to him (Midas, a Phrygian king)...
Send (his servants) to him, soon his interior will relent with us.

\hspace{1cm} SAA 1 no. 1, obv. 14 + obv. 18, Sargon to Aššur-šarru-uṣur

\hspace{1cm} \text{\textsuperscript{182} Recall our discussion in chapter one regarding Esarhaddon’s boast of a Chaldean chieftain submitting \textit{ki ţemešuma} ‘according to his own ţemu.’}
ki anni qibašu
ma  ina timali šašši-ume issu pan Muskaya palḫaka
ma  uma Muskaya issina issilim
ma  atta issu pan mini palḫaka
ma  uma šill šarri beliya kusapiša akul meka šiti
ma  libbaka lu šabaka

Say to him like this
3.QUOT  Yesterday, the day before yesterday, you were √ph before the Phrygian.
3.QUOT  Now the Phrygian is reconciled with us.
3.QUOT  Before what are you √ph
3.QUOT  Now in the shadow of the king my lord eat your bread, drink your water.
3.QUOT  Let your interior be good.

obv. 36-41

šumma libbušu šadu lišabalkita lušēšibišu...
ana šašu taššaka issen ana kallie lintuššašu liššika dibbi šabutu issišu ladbušu libbu šaškunšu

If it is [Balassu’s] interior, he may bring (his people) over the mountains and settle them...

As for him, let one of your ‘third men’ carry him by express that he can come here. I shall speak good words with him and establish libbu for him.

rev. 60 + rev. 62-64

Three different men in different parts of the world, yet Sargon’s attention to the affective state of all three of them is striking. Rather than just communicating in terse imperatives, he explains the expected outcomes of his instructions, each outcome being a manipulation of another’s libbu into an idealised state. In the first episode, Sargon directs his governor to return Phrygian prisoners to their king, Midas, who had captured some enemies of Assyria and sent them to Aššur-šarru-ūṣur. Phrygia was a powerful rival to Assyria in Anatolia and Sargon’s gratification at Midas’ conciliation is most apparent: tARIŠ adanniš ‘very correct,’183 he replies, before directing Aššur-šarru-uṣur to tell Midas that šarru beli iḫtuštadu adanniš ‘the king my lord rejoiced greatly.’184 Most important for us here is that Sargon justifies sending dibbi šabuti, a letter about how happy he is, and Phrygian prisoners, as acts to influence Midas’ libbu.

183 SAA 1 no. 1, obv. 7.
184 SAA 1 no. 1, obv. 20-21
In the second situation, Sargon advises Aššur-šarru-uṣur on how to manage a client king, Kilar, in light of these new developments, illustrating two key Assyrian engagements with interiority. Firstly, he demonstrates a sort of ‘empathy,’ narrating Kilar’s √ₚ₇₅ḫ, and explaining that there is no reason to experience it with respect to Midas. Secondly, he describes the ideal conception of a subject in the universe of Aššur: eat and drink in the protection of the king, and let your libbu be good.

Finally, Sargon addresses the business of Balassu the Babylonian. Libbu manifests itself both in a recognition and assurance of Balassu’s autonomy—let him do whatever according to his libbu—and the explicit practice of using dibbi ṭabuti to affect interior state: here, libbu √škn ‘to establish libbu,’ though šurḫuṣu ‘to make confident’ is also attested.

This letter was probably a draft or an unsent copy, breaking off as it does ‘in the middle.’ Nevertheless it shows that Sargon’s attention to the interiorities of his subjects was detailed and sensitive. Action is linked to intended affective outcome, this outcome being a libbu attuned to Aššur. In the following section, we will explore the various Assyrian strategies for managing the libbu (through speech acts like dibbi ṭabuti and otherwise). Subsequently, we will look at the idealised interior of the Assyrian subject: libbu √ṭ’b ‘good interior.’ Integral to this was √ₚ₇₅ḥ, a complex concept broadly indicating fear, respect, or reverence, but with an important component of submissive obedience. The idealised Assyrian subject also embodied the correct √ₚ₇₅ḥ appropriate to their station, and the Assyrian elite possessed more violent instruments to inculcate this. Importantly, these aspects of libbu √ṭ’b and √ₚ₇₅ḥ were not exclusive to those ‘subjects’ subject to Assyrian power, but applied to the person of the king himself: all were subservient to Aššur and the gods.
They are √plḥ people; may libbu be established for them, may they be secured.\textsuperscript{185}

In chapter two, we briefly encountered the phrase libbu √škn, literally ‘to place interior’. This expression has frequently been translated into English as ‘to encourage,’ a word which is derived from a similar underlying idiom, en, ‘in’ + courage, derived from Latin cor ‘heart’.\textsuperscript{186} Nevertheless, the modern English connotations of ‘encourage’ obscure the underlying Akkadian concepts of libbu, which we’ve discussed at length as not coterminous with ‘heart’, and √škn, with its stronger associations of establishing. Additionally, libbu √škn parallels ṭemu √škn ‘establish ṭemu,’ which we discussed in chapter one (p.46): libbu reflects ṭemu in that libbu as a spatial-topographical designation takes on the qualities of an affective, personal characteristic. Both involve the imposition, establishment, of an inchoate state, ṭemu the shift from ordered intention to potential outcome, libbu a state associated with confidence (√rḥṣ), peacefulness (√nʾḥ), order (√tqn).

The most frequently attested strategies for establishing libbu were linguistic and communicative strategies. Of these, dibbi ṭabuti ‘good words’ has already been fruitfully investigated by the Assyriologist Mario Fales as a distinct component of Assyrian political discourse (2009). Fales concludes that this speech activity was intended to expand and maintain Pax Assyriaca: friendly relations that favoured Assyrian interests outside the explicitly defined scope of royal territory (2009: 38-39). I would add to this that not only did speaking dibbi ṭabuti further Assyria’s political and economic position, but helped to shape the interiorities of their non-Assyrian audience into those of the ideal Assyrian subject. We have already seen this in Sargon’s letter quoted above, where he describes his intention to speak dibbi ṭabuti to Balassu libbu laškunšu ‘that I may establish his libbu.’ Balassu, as the leader of the pro-Assyrian Bit-Dakkuri tribe, was an asset to Sargon’s interests in Babylonia. Thus we have this ‘diplomatic’ manoeuvre here, a speech act to establish a specific ‘encouraged’ state within him. Additionally in the same passage we have Sargon writing that Balassu be allowed to act šunma libbušu ‘if it is his libbu’—according to his interior. Consequently, in this advisory to his governor we find that Sargon is quite preoccupied with securing and validating the interior state, libbu of a valued pro-Assyrian chief.

\textsuperscript{185} SAA 10 no. 354, rev. 13-14, Mar-Issar to Esarhaddon.
\textsuperscript{186} OED s.v. ‘encourage’
Nabu-ḥamatu’a and the Medes

In a similar fashion we have a letter sent on behalf of Nabu-ḥamatu’a, a deputy governor in the Zagros region, where he is recorded as saying

\[
\text{nīše mati ša mar Bel-iddina dibbiṭabuti issišunu addubub libbi ussionšunu...}
\]

\[
\text{muk attunu yammuttu ina betiššu ina libbi eqlišu dullakunu epša libbakunu lu ṣabanunu}
\]

\[
\text{muk urdani ša šarri attunu}
\]

\[
\text{nehu dullašunu eppušu}
\]

To the people of the land of Bel-iddina’s son, I spoke good words and caused \text{libbu} to be established for them,

\[
\text{1.QUOTE You, each of you in his house and in the interior of his field, do your work, may your \text{libbu be good}}
\]

\[
\text{1.QUOTE you are servants of the king.}
\]

They are peaceful, they do their work.

SAA 5 no. 213, obv. 10-14 + rev. 2-9, Nabu-ḥamatu’a to Sargon

Here, though the progression \text{dibbiṭabuti} → \text{libbu ṣškn} is the same as in Sargon’s letter, the circumstances are markedly different. Firstly, we have a governor speaking these words in order to effect the affect, indicating that \text{libbu} management through speech acts was not restricted to the voice of the king alone. Secondly, rather than a singular, high-ranking other being the target of \text{libbu} management, we have a collective group, the \text{nīše mati ša mar Bel-iddina} ‘people of the land of Bel-iddina’s son.’ This man, who is given no designation except as Bel-iddina’s son, is described as \text{bel ḫitu}, literally ‘master of crime’ and \text{parrišu}, ‘liar,’ who does not listen to the word of the king,\(^{187}\) a veritable catalogue of calumny. Nabu-ḥamatu’a does not go into the specifics of the son’s misdemeanours, bypassing him entirely and speaking to his men instead. This suggests that \text{dibbiṭabuti} only worked on those receptive to the royal word, which further implies a dialogic component to the process of affective Assyrianisation: rather than speaking \text{dibbiṭabuti} indiscriminately in an attempt to establish \text{libbu} on just anyone, this procedure only occurred with those who were already willing and able to listen. Other techniques were required to condition the recalcitrant.

Most importantly, in this letter Nabu-ḥamatu’a reports his first-person speech to the people, invoking a picture of idealised subjectivity: ‘may your \text{libbu} be good, you are servants of the king.’ This statement explicitly associates work and being underlings of the Assyrian king with a \text{libbu ṣṭb}, ‘good interior,’ a phrase used not only in this kind of address but frequently throughout the letters between the king and his underlings. \text{Libbu ṣṭb}, the good interior, was indelibly associated with the

\(^{187}\) \text{abat šarri la šamme}, a negation of appropriate behaviour that was associated with anti-Assyrian disorder and rebellion; see p.267.
smooth functioning of Assyrian administration: imperial wellbeing and personal wellbeing were as one, with the specific situational circumstances guaranteeing this dependent only on the individual’s place in the social hierarchy. To be a servant of the king and peacefully do one’s work was a cause of libbu √ṭb for the people (rather than libbu √ṭb being a prerequisite for obedience or such); for the people of Bel-iddina’s son, in order to get on with work they needed the Assyrian administrator to libbi ussaškinšunu ‘cause libbu to be established for them.’ An implicit sequence of subjective and embodied practice emerges here:

1. abat šarri √šmʾ ‘listen to the king’s word’
2. libbu √škn ‘interior established’
3. dullu √ʾpš ‘do work’
4. libbu √ṭb ‘good interior’

Not only does performing the allotted work lead to a good interior on behalf of the people performing it, but the performance of this work is associated with a good interior for the king himself, as evidenced frequently throughout the letters. Libbu √ṭb was thus in Assyrian administrative practice almost an ethical state borne out of active listening to orders (√šmʾ) and performance of work: this kind of subjectivity was reinforced through libbu √škn (indeed, libbu √škn can be thought of as specifically reinforcing interiority), achieved via the speech act described by dibbi ṭabuti.

La tapallah and Interior Work

As a genre of discourse named specifically by the Assyrians, dibbi ṭabuti usefully shows how specific political practices—here, speech practices—were used to elicit specific affective outcomes (at least in the instances where the use of dibbi ṭabuti is justified within a letter). However, dibbi ṭabuti was not the only way in which the Assyrians established libbu upon others. In a damaged letter from the reign of Tiglath-pileser, an unknown correspondent reports his own speech to the ‘heralds’ of an unknown town:

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188 Libbu √škn was not the only outcome of dibbi ṭabuti; we also find √rḥṣ ʾ to make confident e.g. SAA 15 no. 159, obv. 7’-9’, discussed below.
naggaratešunu ana paniya [ittalkuni] libbu ussaškinšunu
[muk] la tapallah
muk šiāni

Their heralds [came] before me and I established interior for them

[QUOT] Do not √plḫ!
[QUOT] Come out!

SAA 19 no. 128, rev. 4-5, unassigned to Tiglath-pileser

In this instance, libbu ussaškinšunu ‘I established interior for them’ is used as a framing device, indeed as a verbum dicendi with the correspondent’s direct speech indelibly associated with the act libbu šškn. Furthermore, the actual speech quoted as the instrument of libbu šškn contains what could be described as an emotive: la tapallah ‘do not ššh,’ which we can gloss ‘fear’ temporarily.

The concept of ‘emotive’ was coined by the historian William Reddy in his work on the affective dimensions of the French Revolution, where he situated it as a third kind of speech act between ‘performatives’ and ‘constatives’. An emotive, he argues, functions as a translation device between a notationally non-linguistic interiority (‘feelings’) and the socio-cultural realm of language: an emotive not only describes interior state but can also alter and shape it (Reddy 2001: 105). Now here we do not have one of Reddy’s emotives per se, but rather, as a second person description, a speech act that has the potential to cause the other party to ‘rehearse’ the affect (Reddy 2001: 107).

In terms of the context, we have quite a complex layering of affective interplay. We have the correspondent of the letter undertaking an operation to alter the affectivity of these heralds (libbu ussaškinšunu)—this is described in the past tense as something already achieved. This affective manipulation is narrated as a speech act which exhorts the heralds not to be fearful—la tapallah. This is a ‘prohibitive,’ the negated equivalent of the imperative. We shall have more to say about the role of the imperative in chapter four, but right now we can see that, in his act of establishing libbu for these heralds, the speaker has implicitly concluded first that the heralds are indeed experiencing ššh, and secondly that he can bring about a state of affairs where they are not experiencing ššh solely through the utterance of this prohibitive. It is this statement, la tapallah... šiāni (do not ššh, come out) which is the performative fulcrum of the libbu šškn procedure here: by using a

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189 As we have already observed, libbu šškn could be achieved through the speech act dibbi ṭabutī: it could very well be argued that, as direct speech causing libbu šškn, the words here could also fall into the category of dibbi ṭabutī, even though this is not explicitly stated. I do not think this is a convincing assertion, especially as it easily becomes circular reasoning.

190 The specificities of ššh are extensively discussed in the next section of this chapter.
prohibitive, the utterance is not simply one of reassurance or encouragement, as a simple translation would have it, but carries much more of a transformative power-relation within it: the speaker is directing the heralds to not fear, and transforming their interiorities through this utterance, not simply using his speech to indirectly affect the interiority of another through their hearing and processing of it. Furthermore, this is not achieved through libbu-transgression as such. Rather, the imperative imposed upon these subjects, to alter their affective state to no longer express √plh, expresses the outcome, and it is incumbent upon the subjects to perform the necessary interior work themselves, through whatever method they wish.190

190 In his comparative study of the phrase ‘fear not,’ though pinning √plh as ‘fear, reverence,’ Nissinen concludes that not only was la tapallaḥ ‘an encouraging and soothing formula,’ but it was one whose utterance associated the utterer with the power of divine speech, a ‘supreme authority whose word is equal to the divine word’ (2003: 161). He writes:

The words la tapallaḥ mean here more than neighborly consolation or encouragement: they are royal words coming from the one who himself is to be feared and whose “fear not” should inspire one with particular confidence in powers vested in him. In other words, the people have only the king to fear; otherwise, they have nothing to fear.

Nissinen 2003: 137
Words of the Powerful

The association of *libbu* √škn with Assyrians of authority is underlined by this final description of speech, where the authors respond to Sargon:

\[
\text{ki ša šarru beli anā urdišu ışparranni ki annimma issišunu nidabbub libbu nišakkanšunu}
\]

Just like the king wrote to his servant, just like this we will talk with them and establish *libbu* for them.  

SAA 15 no. 305, rev. 2’-5’

In this letter, of unknown sender and context, we find the author specifically describing their future intention to accurately replicate the words of the king: *ki ša šarru beli... ki annimma*. We shall explore this concern with the accurate replication of words more fully in chapter four, but for our purposes here it suffices to say that it shows that the replicated speech of the authoritative and powerful was substantially linked to the affective outcome of *libbu* √škn, the establishment of a pro-Assyrian interiority; this is mirrored by Sargon’s directive to Aššur-šarru-uṣur regarding Midas:

\[
\text{ki anni šupaššu}
\]

\[
\text{ma šabani Quwaya ša tušebilanni}
\]

\[
\text{ma ina mubhi šarru beliya assappar}
\]

\[
\text{ma šarru beli ihtudu adanniš}
\]

Write to [Midas] just like this

3.QUOT Regarding the men of Que that you sent to me

3.QUOT concerning whom I wrote to the king my lord

3.QUOT the king my lord rejoiced greatly...

SAA 1 no. 1, obv. 19-21 Sargon to Aššur-šarru-uṣur

Here we have Sargon explicitly ‘putting words in the mouth of’ his governor, in order to achieve an affective manipulation of the newly diplomatic Midas.\(^{192}\) Most notably, we have the king directing his underling to illustrate the royal personage as *iḥtudu adanniš*, ‘rejoicing greatly,’ a very strong self-representation.\(^ {193}\)

The link between authoritative, royal communication and *libbu* √škn was not limited solely to the replication of words or the artful deployment of *dibbi ūbatu*. Rather, it was an aspect of

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\(^{192}\) basi *libbušu* issini ūppašar ‘so his *libbu* will be appeased with us’ obv. 18.

\(^{193}\) Sargon did not only direct his administrators to replicate his words in order to *libbu* √škn: in a damaged letter he also is cited as asking his official to give someone a house, a field and plough to establish *libbu* for them (SAA 5 no. 263, obv. 12’ ff.). This has echoes of the ‘ideal interiority’—everyone in his house, in his field, do work and may your *libbu* be good.
communication with a beneficent authority more generally, and was thus actively solicited by those subject to that authority. A letter to Esarhaddon from Šumaya is illustrative:

\[
mamma ina libbi ali aga issiḫu mar-šipri ša šarri beliya liliškamma ali lušarḫiš u yašu libbi ṭabu liškunanni
\]

Whoever is in this city is rebellious. May a messenger of the king my lord come and make the city confident, and establish good libbu for myself

SAA 18 no. 113, rev. 15’-18’, Šumaya to Esarhaddon

Though Šumaya does not request Esarhaddon write dibbi ṭabuti or suchlike to his city, he does request a mar-šipri messenger to be dispatched, implying some kind of message from the king. He hopes for two outcomes: for the city, lušarḫiš ‘let it be made confident,’ and for himself, libbi ṭabu liškunanni. This additional gloss on libbu √škn is unusual here, indicating an especially marked request, which in the context of a ‘rebellious’ city makes sense. The use of libbu √ṭb alludes to the kind of ‘ideal subjectivity’ implicitly permeating the Assyrian correspondence: libbu ša šarri lu ṭab ‘let the king’s interior be good’ whenever things are going well politically; ‘be glad, you are servants of the king’. Here, however, the phrase is not employed in a report but is framed in an explicit request to the king, again making sense in the context of unrest being a disruption of the ideal order. Additionally, Šumaya describes a different affective outcome for the city itself: lušarḫiš ‘let it be made √ṛhṣ.’ Previous translations usually elide or fudge the difference between libbu √škn and √ṛhṣ, subsuming them both under the category of ‘confidence,’ but Šumaya himself makes a distinction between them here, demarcated with emphasis with yašu ‘for me.’ We can explain this by noting that libbu √škn applies only to a subject interiority already partial to Assyria—an Assyrian administrator is a paradigmatic example of this.\(^{194}\) The rebellious city, however, does not just need to have libbu established: its interiority, intentions, desires are more troublesome and dangerous, and thus it needs a different, potentially stronger affective reining in, which is what √ṛhṣ Š seems to describe here. Finally, to further ballast his request for libbu √škn, Šumaya writes:

\[
piḥatu šarru liš’al ki libba ana šarri beliya la gummuru
\]

Let the king ask the governor if my interior is not completely for the king my lord.

SAA 18 no. 113, rev. 18’-20’

\(^{194}\) Another example of requesting libbu √škn directly from the king is to be found in a damaged, unattributed letter to Esarhaddon where the author writes: šulmu ana šarri beliya lašme u minu ša šutuni šarru lǐṣpura libbu ana urdišu liškun ‘Let me hear wellbeing for the king my lord and may the king send to me whatever there is, may he establish libbu for his servant’ SAA 16 no. 196, obv. 6-rev. 2.
This counterfactual declaration recalls our discussion of *libbu ñgmr*.\(^{195}\) We noted that the injunction to exercise *libbu ñgmr* was pervasive in imperial treaties and repeatedly asserted in letters. Šumaya requesting that *libbu* be established for him, even though his *libbu* is already completely for the king suggests that *libbu ñškn* was consequently not an operation for ensuring loyalty, but rather an affective establishment.

**Building Forts, Breaking Hearts**

*Libbu ñškn* seems primarily to have been established via communicative act, but one that was not restricted to simply sending delineated, replicated speech. More overt communicative expressions were used, such as the request for a *mar-šípri* messenger (presumably with a message). Moving even further in the direction of human movement instead of speech transmission we have Raši-il’s letter to Esarhaddon, whom we might recall from chapter two as having the words of the king placed in his *libbu*.\(^{196}\) In the same letter, he writes:

\[\text{ina kutallíšunu birti nikaşšarma \{x x x\} ana libbi nušellima nişi ipallahu ana amat šanitamma utarru u libbi ḫepu ūšakkīnu} \]

\[\text{In their rear we are constructing a fortress, \{x x x\} we are causing to go up within it; the people will be ñplḫ, they will answer the other, and broken interiors will be established.} \]

SAA 18 no. 142, obv. 16'-rev. 3, Raši-il? to Esarhaddon

Raši-il explicitly associates affective outcomes with militarisation here: a fortress is being built, and potentially supplied with troops (as Parpola reconstructs it), leading to three outcomes. Firstly, the people of the land will experience ñplḫ. As discussed extensively in a subsequent section, this was a central emotion underpinning the Assyrian state, loosely tying into ‘reverence,’ ‘fear,’ ‘obedience,’ and was a prerequisite for participating in Assyrian subjectivity; its association here with military activity and the hegemonic threat of violence is unproblematic.

However, the remainder of the sentence is challenging. Parpola considers the phrasing of the second outcome, *ana amat šanitamma utarru*, as ungrammatical, proposing the ‘very conjectural’ translation ‘turn to other matters’ (Reynolds 2003: 113). Similarly, my rendering here is tentative, following the CAD’s attestation of ñ*tʾr*’s D-stem usage with *amatu* (CAD T s.v. tāru 10.a.1, 271).

Following these previous usages has the attractive consequence of emphasising a kind of dialogicality, which parallels certain relational aspects of ñ*plḥ* we will explore in the following

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\(^{195}\) P. 77.  
\(^{196}\) P. 92.
chapter. Ultimately, the meaning of this phrase remains an open question, owing to the damage of the letter and the limited discussion it has received. We receive no clarification from Raši-il’s third and final outcome: *libbi ḫepu iššakkinu* ‘the broken interiors will be established’. The phrase *libbi ḫepu*, literally ‘broken interior,’ appears familiar to us as ‘broken heart,’ which is how Parpola translates it, and as a result he suggests ‘the broken heart(s) will be put in place.’ However, we might compare this phrase with a previous modification of *libbu škn*, when Šumaya wrote *yašu libbi ṭabu liškunnanni* ‘for myself, let good interior be established.’ In Šumaya’s letter, *libbu ṣḥb* was still to be established, a prefigured future by way of the precative mood. In comparison, Raši-il uses a third person plural (referring to the *niši* ‘people’) in what appears to be an N-stem form indicating the passive mood. Drawing this parallelism fully then means we should remove the connotation ‘put in place,’ indicating a ‘broken heart’ being repaired, and translate more in line ‘broken interior will be established,’ which changes the meaning of the phrase significantly. Rather than this militarisation resulting in ‘reverent’ people with mended hearts, it becomes a display of force, provoking *ṣḥl* and leading to *libbu ḥp* ‘broken interior.’ This suggests a violence done to these people’s interiority, and that to create an appropriate subjectivity conducive to Assyrian interests, inculcating *ṣḥl*, these people’s *libbu* must first be broken.

**Crushing, Tearing, Calming**

Whilst this reinterpretation must remain conjectural due to the lack of context, the violent reconfiguration of interiority through military hegemony can be traced in other letters, a reconfiguration ultimately leading to the peaceful, desirable subjectivity alluded to already. For example in this letter to Sargon from the governor Bel-lešir, we find *libbu* being violently crushed:

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adi niši akabbusuni libbu ša mati akabbusuni ḭaramamma assappara
As soon as I crushed the people and crushed the interior of the land, then I wrote.
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SAA 19 no. 176, rev. 11’-13’, Bel-lešir to Sargon

Our attention is drawn once again to *libbu*, which here is used in juxtaposition with *niši*, the mass noun for people; both are used in epistrophe with *akabbusuni*. Now we could interpret a literal usage

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997 Parpola notes that the letter entered as SAA 18 no. 142 had not been previously edited or discussed; later bibliography is sparse, to my knowledge. In her review of this volume, Dalley suggests the reading *ana amat ša nitamma* (Dalley 2006: 143) which would be ‘(They will answer) the word we discussed.’
for the verb √kbs, which has a basic meaning of ‘trample’: trampling upon people and trampling upon the interior of the land, where libbu is used in its locative meaning rather than a psychic one. However, an affective interpretation is justifiable here. Firstly, the use of √kbs to describe an affective state is found in the letter from Abi-yaqiya we encountered previously. In that letter, they emphasised that their words were true, out of their libbu, and to further emphasise their desperate state, they wrote:

\[\text{anaku Indabiya rab-lim ittiya ina bitya kabsanni} \]
\[\text{I myself, Indabiya the chiliarch with me, in my house—we are crushed.}\]

SAA 17 no. 152, rev.7-8, Abi-yaqiya et al. to Sargon

This description is likely not literal, instead being an evocative description of affect in line with the attention to interior state found in the rest of the letter. Correspondingly, the usage of √kbs in Bel-lešir’s report is potentially a similar incidence. In addition, we find matu described affectively in other ways throughout the letters, but there is a progression from matu √kbs through to an ideal affective state. We can see this described in an unknown official’s letter to Tigrath-pileser:

\[\text{Turmuna bet šarri iqpiddannini šulmu adanniš matu kabsat zarʾ e erruš uri isirru} \]
\[\text{[ina] ali aki issen nizza[za]ma} \]

The city of Turmuna where the king appointed me is very well. The land is subjugated, they sow the seed, they plaster the roofs. We stand in the city as one. SAA 19 no. 21 obv. 3-8, unassigned to Tigrath-pileser

Here, the land once again has been trampled (√kbs), but now is šulmu adanniš, very well. We have seen this phrase used, albeit formulaically, multiple times to describe individuals and here we find it applied to matu as well. To underline that matu refers to the collective inhabiting it, third-person nouns describe a bucolic work scene, followed by the image of standing in the city ‘as one’. This is

\[\text{198 See p.83.} \]
\[\text{199 Despite the greeting declaring that this letter is spoken by five men, the voice of the letter throughout refers to itself in the first person singular.} \]
\[\text{200 For example, libbi mati adanniš taba ‘The interior of the land is good’ SAA 5 no. 132, obv.6-7; mati gabbišu ana šarri beliya ikarrubu ‘All the lands pray for the king my lord’ SAA 16 no. 126, rev.23; matati gabbi ana pan šarri beliya šamu ‘All the lands are √hm’ positive before the king, my lord’ SAA 18 no. 14, rev.10-13, Ubaru šakin-temi of Babylon to Esarhaddon; matati gabbi ana muḫḫi Aššur čirranaši ‘All the lands hate us due to Assyria’ no. 79, obv. 11, šandabakku (governor of Nippur) to Esarhaddon.} \]
taken by Rosenzweig in her study of land-use and subjectivity in Assyria as ‘the author intentionally signal[ling] a shift in subjects’ attachments from lineage-based families to corporate, political affiliations, wrought not by brutality or bribery, but by land-use practice’ (2016: 311). Notwithstanding the brutal oppression that has taken place (√kbs again), this points to an idealised norm of Assyrian subjects as engaging in cultivation and construction and being serene, content, happy: in other words, an affective subjectivity as a component of the Assyrian imperial affective regime. This approval of peaceability extended through all territories of Aššur, whether directly governed, as here, or client states.²⁰¹ That the affective wellbeing of the land was a desired state is emphasised by a letter from a Babylonian official to Sennacherib, advising him on a group of Aramaeans loyal to Marduk-apla-iddina:

šarru beli lissuḫšunu vita lībbi mati lu šab
arde ša šarrī bēliya la ušadlapu ša kine šunu

The king my lord should extract them so that the interior of the land may be good. They must not disturb the servants of the king my lord. They are not reliable.

SAA 17 140, rev.9'-14', Nabu-ušallim to Sennacherib

Here, Nabu-ušallim proposes that Sennacherib deport the Aramaeans in order to achieve √ṭḇ in the land. Clearly Nabu-ušallim, as a pro-Assyrian Babylonian, has an interested opinion regarding what a positive, sweet country would be; he has no qualms about proposing an instrument of violence be deployed by the Assyrian imperial machine in order to secure his vision of lībbi mati. He describes the targeted Aramaeans as la kine, ‘not reliable,’ nuancing his conception of a good land—one that does not contain unreliable elements, and thus conforming to an Assyrian order.

Wrapping up our exploration of lībbu √škn, let us recall Nabu-ḫamatu’a’s narrative. There, we have a chain where he speaks dibbi ṭabuti to a collective,²⁰² the loyalty of whom Assyria wishes to retain. By doing so, he implements lībbu √škn—establishing interior—and by doing that, these people’s

²⁰¹ For example, in a report to Tiglath-pileser about an unknown vassal king, the author writes ina matišu ša dullušu eppaš massu nehat dullašunu eppušu ‘He is in his country; he does his work, and his whole country is peaceful, they are doing their work’ (SAA 19 no. 78, rev. 4'-rev. 6’).
²⁰² The people of the son of a certain Bel-iddina, whom Nabu-ḫamatu’a characterises as bel-ḫitu šu parišu šu [abat šarrī] la išamme ‘He is a criminal, a traitor, he does not listen to [the word of the king]’ (SAA 5 no. 210, obv. 16-rev. 1). In this context it seems his ‘people’ are not associated with the son of Bel-iddina’s misdemeanours, however.
Libbus become good. Consequently, this suggests a model of Assyrian political practice which associates itself with the control, and maintenance, of interior state. Indeed, we can compare the sentence Nabu-ḫamatu’a utters to the people of the son of Bel-iddina with what Sargon directed Assur-šarru-şur to write to Kilar previously, which again featured an image of calm activity. We will go into further detail regarding replication and authority in the following chapter; it suffices to observe here that this image of calm activity under the protection of the king is decontextualisable and reapplied, in its general shape, to different situations throughout the empire.

These examples have shown that dibbi ṭabuti and military procedures were useful strategies for the affective management of Assyrian subjects. We have seen how these were used to establish libbu, but we also find them being used to elicit the affect ṭrḫṣ.

[annurig] dibbi ṭabuti issāšu niddubub [xx]x
muk ana ayale ša Larakaya [la nilik ana] ayalika ikke la nillaka
[emuqi] ina muḫḫišu lu talluka lušaruḫušu

[Now] we have spoken good words with him,
1.quot Did we [not go] to the assistance of the Larakeans? Why would we not come [to] your assistance?
[The army] should go to him and cause him to be ṭrḫṣ

SAA 19 no. 87, rev. 5-8, Aššur-šallimanni to Tiglath-pileser

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203 Subjects who were nervous would also request libbu ṭškn from the king or other officials, for example SAA 16 no. 196 šarru lišpura libbu ana ardišu liškun ‘Let the king write and let him set interior for his servant.’

204 Also contrast the letter SAA 19 no. 87 discussed above, where dibbi ṭabuti are spoken followed by the author’s suggestion that Tiglath-pileser dispatch an army to the Chaldean chief of Malilatu in order to encourage him, lušaruḫušu
As we saw in Šumaya’s letter to Esarhaddon, associated with libbu škn was the affective outcome vrḫš, usually translated ‘to be confident, to trust.’ In that letter, vrḫš was anticipated as an outcome of the king sending a messenger to a troubled city, and various other strategies were used to bring vrḫš about. Firstly, the familiar dibbi ṭabuti was used, as in this letter from the governor of Der, advising Sargon on Babylonian strategy:

šarru beli dibbi ṭabuti issešu lidbubu šarru beli lušarḥissu basi lilika dibbi ṭabuti ana niše matišu u ana ahhešu liškan

The king my lord should talk good words with him, the king my lord should make him confident so that he will go and establish the good word for the people of his land and for his brothers.

SAA 15 no. 159, obv. 7'-11’, Il-yada’ to Sargon

Though Sargon’s talk of good words to the unknown chief is not explicitly linked to vrḫš Ś here, the opposite link is made: that by Sargon making this man confident (lušarḥissu) this man will go and establish (lišken) the dibbi ṭabuti on his comrade. The usage of škn here is telling: Sargon is to talk the dibbi ṭabuti (lidbubu) whereas the chief is to impose/set/establish it. This suggests a delineated degree of authorship and responsibility for the dibbi ṭabuti: Sargon actively talks them whereas the chief transmits them. However, the transmission itself requires an affective prerequisite, the vrḫš that Il-yada’ advises.

Another letter from Babylonia sheds further light on the role of vrḫš in the political economy of affect. The military official Aqar-Bel-lumur writes to Sargon effusively after the free submission of a rebellious chief to Assyria suzerainty:

dibbi ṭabuti iti[tšunu] adabbub ūtem a[jšakkanšunati] ušarḥassunuti
I talked good words with them, I established ūtem, I made them vrḫš.

SAA 17 no. 111, rev. 8-9, Aqar-Bel-lumur to Sargon

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205 SAA 17 no. 40, Qišti-Marduk to Sargon
206 SAA 18 no. 113, discussed on p.121.
207 In Assyrian correspondence we usually find the suffix -ma linking two clauses, either as a sequential conjunction or more specifically indicating a causal relationship (Cohen’s ‘-ma of sequence’ (2000: 220)). No such link is made here, however.
208 This link is explicitly described with the conjunction basi ‘as soon as, until.’
209 See also SAA 17 no. 102, rev. 4-5 itti arde[ya x] lidbub lušarḥisssunuti ‘Let him talk with [my] servants and cause [them] to be vrḫš.’
Although the tablet is damaged, Aqar-Bel-lumur’s letter chains dibbi ʿtabuti, ṭemu and √ṛḥṣ. As discussed in the first chapter, ṭemu was a temporalised, unfolding force of intention and action which animated Assyrian imperial machinery: its association here with √ṛḥṣ suggests that to partake in Assyrian ṭemu-action is ‘confidence-building’. Taking this together with Il-yada”’s letter, to be made confident (√ṛḥṣ Š) implies an affective state that is able to act on behalf of Assyrian interest, in contradistinction to acting on one’s own, wilful behalf.

Further attestations of √ṛḥṣ provide additional support for thinking of it as an enabling disposition towards pro-Assyrian activity. It is used often in letters from theatres of conflict in Babylonia, for example in a letter attributed to the Elders of the Sealand, whom we met previously:

šarru belani [x x x x x x] ša-qurrubatu ittapra[nnnši x x x] 
[um]ma la-pan Naʾid-[Marduk x x x a]na šulmiya [x x x ittal]ka [la] tapallaḫa adu [x x te]mu ašakkanšuma...

ana muḫḫi amat ša šarri belini ša libbu amat ša li la ušannu ki nīrḫuṣu matu nu-[x x x x]-šu u maašartani nuddannin

The king our lord [...] has sen[t us a Clo]se One””

QUOT [...] from the presence of Naʾid-[Marduk, he has com]e to greet m[e ... Do not] fear, now I will establish [te]mu for him

Concerning the word of the king our lord which like the word of the god cannot be changed, which we trusted, we reinforced the land [ x x x x ] and our guard.

SAA 18 no. 89, obv. 23’-b.e. 28’ + rev. 3-rev. 6, Elders of the Sealand to Esarhaddon

Though this letter is damaged, the preserved part narrates that the elders received a communication from the king (amat ša šarri) and that, because they trusted it (ki nīrḫuṣu) they were able to enact pro-Assyrian military reinforcement. Though the king’s words themselves do not survive, Reynolds restores a potential ṭemu √škn, which not only reinforces a link between ṭemu and √ṛḥṣ, but is doubly interesting when we consider the Elamite messenger and his contention over ṭemu.”” Both cases concern reports of the ṭemu of Naʾid-Marduk: one by the Elamite messenger with the content Naʾid-Marduk mitu ‘Naʾid-Marduk is dead’; the other a ṭemu established by Esarhaddon upon Naʾid-Marduk, an act described by the ša-qurbuti. In this case, the ṭemu, which elicits √ṛḥṣ,

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“” The title ša-qurbuti is usually translated ‘bodyguard’ or ‘confidant,’ and referred to an official who was close to the royal authority.

“” See p.41.
consequently leads to a productive subjectivity advantageous to the Assyrians. In much the same way as Il-yada’s and Aššur-šallimanni’s letters previously, all demonstrate a ‘virality’ of √ṛḫṣ leading to restored pro-Assyrian active subjects, especially in a military context.

_Aššur ša takluka napištašu gimilma_  
Aššur, spare the life of the one who √vtkl you^212_

Tiglath-pileser, the Biblical rendering of Tukulti-apil-Ešarra, ‘My √vtkl is in the Heir of the Ešarra’; Taklak-ana-Bel, ‘I √vtkl Bel’; Ana-Nabu-taklak ‘I √vtkl for Nabu’: these are some of the names we encounter throughout this thesis. All of these men’s names contain √vtkl, which, like √ṛḫṣ, falls into the semantic field of trusting and confidence. However, whilst √ṛḫṣ appears frequently in text and rarely in proper names, √vtkl has the converse distribution, appearing rarely in daily use, being reserved for onomastics and the hefty pronouncements of the Standard Babylonian literary dialect. A glance at the uses of √vtkl in use in the correspondence reveals three highly limited spheres. The first, echoing the onomastic use, is in praise of the gods;^213_the second is used to affirm personal qualities of imperial staff.^214_

Finally, we find a pair of instances where √vtkl is misplaced, just like √ṛḫṣ:

`ana muḫḫi šarrī beliya rahṣaku...  
la liḥḥi ša šarrī beliya la elli  
Marduk-šarru-ibni ana muḫḫi Urdu-Nabu u Nadinu ki ittklu dibbiya biʾšatu idabbub  
u anaku ana muḫḫi šarri beliya taklak`

I √ṛḫṣ concerning the king, my lord...
May I not go out from the interior of the king, my lord
Marduk-šarru-ibni is talking my smelly words as he was √vtkl for Urdu-Nabu and Nadinu and I am √vtkl for the king, my lord.

SAA 13 no. 174, rev. 2 + rev. 6-10, Rašil to Esarhaddon/Assurbanipal

^212_ SAA 10 no. 365 obv. 11'-12'. The extract is damaged and napiššatu has been restored. It can alternately be read as Aššur ša takluka [...] gimilma ‘Aššur, do a favour for the one who √vtkl you’.

^213_For example, SAA 10 no. 316 rev. 11; Aššur Šamaš Bel u Nabu ša utakkilukan ši Aššur, Šamaš, Bel and Nabu, the ones who made you √vtkl; cf. SAA 10 no. 333, rev. 2.

^214_SAA 10 no. 234, rev. 12-14: Marduk-šarru-uṣurma ša-qurbutu amelu taklu ummuru šu ‘Marduk-šarru-uṣur the Close One, he is a √vtkl and reliable man; no. 369 rev. 10-12: šarru beli ša-qurbutu taklu lispura lîš'al ‘The king my lord should sent a √vtkl Close One to inquire’; SAA 5 no. 204 obv. 15-17: Šamaš-ukin amelu taklu ummuru ša dibbi ila ‘uni’ Šamaš-ukin is √vtkl and reliable, able in words.'
SAA 18 no. 123, rev. 6-8, unassigned to unassigned

These instances function much like Ṛḫṣ, especially in Rašil’s letter where ṛḫṣaku and taklak parallel each other. Furthermore, both of these letters convey the implication of misplaced ṛtkl: SAA 18 no. 123’s unattributed speech in an unassigned letter seems to convey that the author’s ṛtkl in Esarhaddon is in error due to the niklata; Rašil more clearly assigns misplaced ṛtkl to Marduk-zeru-ibni, who by contrast with Rašil does not ṛtkl the king. These kinds of manoeuvres and contrasts are familiar to us from how ramanu is deployed;\(^{215}\) it seems that the unique characteristics of ṛtkl are restricted to its evocation of the weightier Standard Babylonian and onomastic usages of the semantic root, rather than any subtle distinction between ṛtkl and Ṛḫṣ.

\(^{215}\) For which see p.131.
3.2 √\textit{plh} as Practice and Virtue

*palaḥ ilani damaqu ullad: palaḥ Annunaki balaṭu utar
√\textit{plh} of the gods begets beauty: √\textit{plh} of the infernal deities returns life\textsuperscript{26}

‘Before what are you √\textit{plh}?’ Sargon has Aššur-šarru-ušur ask a client ruler requesting more territory.

In the context of Sargon’s letter, this question is intended to puncture the client ruler’s requests and render him peaceable in the face of shifting alliances in the region: as we may recall, the powerful Phrygian king has made positive overtures towards the Assyrians, leading Sargon to believe he no longer poses a military threat.

This leading question provides a window into a central sentiment underlying the Assyrian elite’s view of the political, even ontological, landscape of the Middle East during this period. Like ṭemu and libbu, √\textit{plh} was a force through which Assyrians engaged with the world. So, like ṭemu and libbu, to translate it simply is to do it a disservice and produce unproductive misunderstandings. That √\textit{plh} has a complex nature has already attracted interest, though mostly through a comparative engagement with the contemporary Hebrew experience of religious emotion (Gruber 1990). This has led to a dichotomy between translations of √\textit{plh} as ‘fear’ or ‘reverence’,\textsuperscript{27} a tendency to select either one or the other, and the transfer of meanings from the complex Biblical tradition. Furthermore, these connotations almost entirely charge √\textit{plh} with a negative meaning, which are clearly not helped by the Assyrian royal inscriptions themselves promulgating an image of terrifying, overwhelming √\textit{plh} (Liverani 2017: 142).

\textsuperscript{26} SAA 10 no. 188, rev. 9-10, Adad-šumu-ušur to Esarhaddon

\textsuperscript{27} The distinction between ‘fear’ and ‘reverence’ is complicated by their etymologies: ‘fear’ deriving from a Germanic root, and ‘reverence’ deriving from a Latin root \textit{vereri} with intensifying \textit{re-} prefix.
However, the epigraph above, taken from a letter by the king's ašipu Adad-šumu-usur, illustrates the high regard in which √plḥ was held. Throughout the letters we find √plḥ upheld as a virtue, essential to an idealised Assyrian society:

_A good reign, truthful days, years of justice, copious rains, massive floods, a good market, salubrious deities, much _√plḥ_ of the gods, the temples are bountiful, the great gods of heaven and earth have gone up in the time of the king my lord, the old men dance, the little ones sing, the women and little ones (f.) are happy and joyful..._

SAA 10 no. 226, obv. 9-18, Adad-šumu-usur to Esarhaddon/Assurbanipal

This quotation, taken from an extremely detailed panegyric, praises the king’s reign at length. Intermingled amongst song and dance is _palah ili_. √plḥ then was not a paralysing fear,217 but rather an affect entirely compatible with song and dance. Of note is that this √plḥ is not embodied: there is no subject experiencing it, but it is rather a free-floating phenomenon.

**√plḥ as Royal Practice**

√plḥ was not a passive affect, experienced in response to the external world, nor solely a free-floating, inchoate force. It was an active practice to be undertaken by every good Assyrian subject. This is emphasised by the fact that it was not just lowly subjects who were required to experience √plḥ towards their superiors, but that the powerful members of the royal family actively nurtured √plḥ themselves:

_Harranu alaka ilaniya apallah_
I shall come to Ḫarran and √plḥ my gods.

SAA 16 no. 5, rev. 18-19, Esarhaddon to unknown recipient

_ilani ammar ša umu ann[u šarru be]li ṭpla[n]uni ina deni ša šarri [Aššur]-bani-apli u Šamaš-šumu-ukin adanniš adanniš lizzizu_
May all the gods whom the [king] my [lord] √plḥ-ed today very much very much stand at the trial of the king, [Assur]baniapal and Šamaš-šumu-ukin.

SAA 10 no. 289, obv. 3-6, Urad-Gula to Esarhaddon

 Таšmetu ša tašpla[n]isióni qateki lu tašbat
May Tašmetu whom you √plḥ take your hand.

SAA 13 no. 76, obv. 6-7, Nergal-šarrani to Naqi’a

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In these three quotations we have examples of the royal family actively performing √plḫ for their gods. The first is from a letter of Esarhaddon himself, where he describes his intentions to perform this activity on a trip to the city of Ḫarran, describing the target of the activity as ilaniya ‘my gods.’ The following two extracts are taken from the blessings of a scholar and priest to Esarhaddon and his mother respectively. As they were involved in cultic activities, these individuals would have played a role in supporting the √plḫ activity of the royal family, an activity which seems to have fallen into a more ‘domestic’ than ‘public’ sphere. This is hinted at by Esarhaddon specifying ‘my gods’, and by the fact that mentions of royal √plḫ in the letters are confined to dialogues with scholars and priests in the royal entourage.

A final dimension to royal √plḫ as described in the letters is the √plḫ experienced in the face of omens and cultic observances. Esarhaddon is quoted as writing to Adad-šumu-ūṣur:

\[ \text{ina muḫḫi adanni massarti Asalluḥi ša tašpuranni } [x x x x] \text{ aptalah} \]

Regarding the period of the watch of Asalluḥi about which you wrote to me [x x x x] I am √plḫ

SAA 10 no. 208, obv. 7-10, Adad-šumu-ūṣur to Esarhaddon

The massartu-watch of Asalluḥi referred to the observation of celestial signs at night, which were regarded as communications from the gods (Rochberg 2016: 24). As already emphasised, √plḫ before the gods was a correct attitude for the king to express, and thus Esarhaddon’s expression of it here is not out of the ordinary. Nevertheless, scholars frequently write to the king exhorting him not to experience √plḫ regarding various omens, suggesting that √plḫ before a divine communication was not equivalent to √plḫ of the divine itself.  

219 The most important takeaway from this is that the king does not experience √plḫ regarding what we would call earthly actors: only due to deities, communications from them, and interactions with them.  

220 This ostensible difference between the king and the ‘regular’ subjects of Assyria does not actually indicate an inconsistency in how √plḫ was practiced or manifest. The king in fact is merely practicing √plḫ as everyone else in the imperial

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219 E.g., SAA 10 no. 57, obv. 6.
220 In much the same regarding √plḫ as an appropriate response regarding communication from deities, we have a letter reporting a storm, which contains: masḵanate gabbu mel[hu] bašši uttasbihi niši iptalḫu adanniš ‘The storm was such all the tents were torn out, the people became very √plḫ’ SAA 5 no. 249, obv. 8-10’.

On first glance this just seems like these people were scared of a violent storm, but, taking the assumption that they would have viewed the storm as a communication from Adad or another wind-deity, exhibiting √plḫ as a complex response to an awesome divine communication is eminently appropriate here, as well as being a more ontologically sensitive understanding of these peoples’ emotions than a simple translation of ‘panic’ or ‘fear.’
ontology does: he practices $\sqrt{plh}$ for his superiors in the hierarchy, a continuous hierarchy spanning humans and the divine without differentiation.

Danger of deficient $\sqrt{plh}$

Ultimately, the fact that $\sqrt{plh}$ was not just a simple ‘fear’ or divine ‘reverence,’ but something actively practiced and desired by even the upper echelons of the Assyrian power hierarchy suggests that a view of the Assyrians as using military might to impose $\sqrt{plh}$-fear upon their subject populations is incomplete, and not how Assyrians might have understood their imperial project. To be depleted of $\sqrt{plh}$ presented active danger to the Assyrian order in terms of reprisals from deities on the most prosaic level:

ikkaratī ša zar‘ē irušūni akanni ana Adad [x x] la ipalluḫu ina libbi šu ʾšatu u:ssanqit
The farmers who seeded the fields now do not $\sqrt{plh}$ Adad: he caused fire to fall into its interior.

SAA 10 no. 69, obv. 13-rev. 2, Nabu-aḫḫē-eriba to Esarhaddon

The lack of $\sqrt{plh}$ for the storm god Adad here results in violent reprisal, the destruction of a previously productive field, attributed to an incorrect subjectivity on behalf of the farmers dwelling there. The association of a lack of $\sqrt{plh}$ with dysfunction in imperial activity is nicely demonstrated in this priest’s exasperation regarding disobedient shepherds:

muk ata šarru la taḵalluha

[They do] not agree to come in [for the tax collection]. They do not $\sqrt{plh}$ [the king]. They wander like fugitives. I have now written to them

SAA 13 no. 20, bottom e. 12-rev. 6, Dadi to the king

These are [sons] of the land of Aššur, and they do not consent to $\sqrt{plh}$ the [king] my lord—how will [sons] of the foreign land go [for] the king my lord?

SAA 13 no. 19, rev. 2-rev. 6, Dadi to the king

This pair of letters explicitly associates a lack of $\sqrt{plh}$ with the shepherds not providing their dues. What particularly stands out however is Dadi’s rhetorical question, which places the lack of $\sqrt{plh}$ on the part of Assyrians as being particularly unconscionable. This suggests that $\sqrt{plh}$ for the king was
an essential characteristic of those *mar’e mat Aššur* ‘sons of the land of Aššur.’ From Dadi’s perspective, a deficiency in √*pll* would lead to universal chaos.\(^{221}\)

\(^{221}\) For more on this threat, see chapter six.
Flavours of Fear

As noted above, \( \sqrt{plh} \) does not neatly map onto translations of ‘fear, reverence.’ Indeed, much in the same way that English has a number of terms for this semantic field—fear and fright (Germanic), scare (Norse), terror and horror (Latin)—a number of terms were in use for this affective sphere in the Assyrian letters. Of these, \( \sqrt{plh}, \sqrt{grr}, \) and \( \sqrt{gld} \) have all been translated loosely into English with ‘fear’ and its companions. However, to the Assyrian language community, these were not synonymous terms. The use of \( \sqrt{plh} \) with \( \sqrt{grr} \) or \( \sqrt{gld} \) in the same sentence suggests there was a distinction between these terms. More importantly that \( \sqrt{grr} \) and \( \sqrt{gld} \) could result in a state of \( \sqrt{plh} \), demonstrating a causal relationship not captured by synonymy.

Developing this further, it appears that \( \sqrt{grr} \) was a response to violence, coercion or intimidation.\(^{223}\)

We find examples of this in a description of refugees fleeing from an Elamite army into the city of Der:

\[ niše \, alpani \, gab[bu] \, ḫta[tu \, ammar \, ušebibani \, igdurrini \, ina \, Deri \, etarbuni \]

They plundered all the people and oxen. Those that escaped were \( \sqrt{grr} \), and entered Der.

SAA 15 no. 118, obv. 6'-obv 9', Šamaš-belu-ušur to Sargon

This example, set in the context of the conflict between Elam and Assyria for supremacy over Babylonia, is illustrative of the simple relationship between violent acts and \( \sqrt{grr} \). This is mirrored in two letters from kings to subjects imploring them not to be \( \sqrt{grr} \) in the face of warfare:

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\(^{222}\) Sometimes transcribed \( \sqrt{qrr} \).

\(^{223}\) There are few instances of \( \sqrt{gld} \) in the corpus but it seem to have been roughly synonymous with \( \sqrt{grr} \); for more, see below.
Aššur-rešuwa Messenger: Argišti: Unattributed

[ma] [ma] issu bet ina kusse kammusa[kan] ša ana šulmeya tašpurni
ma laššu [ina] lübbi Aššur ilanikušu ina muḫḫiya ilūk
u ma asëme
ma iɡdanarr[ru]
ma ata taqdanarra[ra]
m[a] Ursama ina muḫḫi ħape ša [matikunu] la id dibbub [anakuna] la addi bub...

annute dibbī ša mar-šipri annišu id dibbub[uni]

[3.QUOT] [3.QUOT] Since I have been siti[ng] on the throne, my wellbeing-(gift) you sent me —
3.QUOT and 3.QUOT there wasn’t (one)
3.QUOT I have heard
3.QUOT [they] are vɡrr
3.QUOT Why are you vɡrr?
3.QUOT As Rusa did not talk of the destruction of [your land, so I] am not talking...

These were the words talked by this messenger.

SAA 5 no. 95, obv. 3-11 + rev. 1-2, Aššur-rešuwa to Sargon

This letter, although inscribed on a partially damaged tablet, is an example of what is ostensibly the royal speech of Argišti, king of Uraḫtu. As the multiply nested levels of speech suggest, the exchange of words described here is heavily mediated: Argišti’s words pass through a messenger and through Aššur-rešuwa and his scribe. Furthermore, Argišti would almost certainly not have spoken Assyrian to the Kummeans, and so at some stage before reaching the tablet the utterances would have had to be translated.

However as a consequence of this, the letter is good evidence for an Assyrianised interpretation of the events of the conversation. The Assyrians translate the Kummeans experience of the threat of Uraḫtian violence—ḥape ša mati—as vɡrr. Casting more light on this exchange is a copy of a letter sent by Tiglath-pileser to some Babylonian elites, where he writes:

[3.QUOT] This letter also provides another example of Assyrian attention to sources of information, the reliability of which was highly desirable, as we saw in chapter one. Rev. 1-2 helpfully frame the previous lines as being the reported speech of a messenger, which not only enables us to disentangle the nest of quotatives, but also demonstrates Aššur-rešuwa’s emphasis on the close replication of these words. Furthermore, the careful demarcation of voices through the interpolation of quotative ma signifies both a heightened awareness of the need to accurately assign speaker roles, as well as an emphasis on responsibility for replicating speech. For more on this, see chapter four.
Now then I myself am approaching you, Naʾdi-ilu the Close One spoke to me

They are √grr √plh

SAA 19 no.1, obv. 13-b.e. 18, Tiglath-pileser to the Babylons

Here, Tiglath-pileser writes to the Babylonians to reassure them following the murder of their brothers. The similarities between these letters are striking, with both rulers bolstering their subjects by means of words in the face of physical attacks.

√grr in Conversation, √grr as Bodily Threat

However, √grr was not limited to the depredations of the battlefield. Two further letters place √grr in conversational contexts. The first is a description of an audience between Assurbanipal mar-šarri and Milki-nuri, a eunuch involved in a conspiracy against Esarhaddon:

I spoke to Milki-nuri just as the king my lord spoke to me. He looked at the feet and was continuously √grr. I spoke to him

He spoke

Let not the kingship for the crown prince [x x x x x x x x x] the years that I am alive.

SAA 16 no. 20, rev. 2'-edge 1, Assurbanipal mar-šarri to Esarhaddon

Though the tablet is damaged, it is clear Assurbanipal and Milki-nuri are not having a friendly conversation and that this is during or after the conspiracy was unmasked. Milki-nuri’s bodily demeanour is described not only as √grr but also as one with downcast glance. This is the first

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225 Specifically, he writes libbakunu adanniš lu tabakunu ‘Let your interior be good’ (rev. 11). The ‘brothers’ (aḫḫe) of the Babylonians in this case were likely not consanguines; rather, this kinship term was used to indicate a ‘political’ affiliation. See chapter six for more.

226 The edge of the tablet is broken off here; Luukko and van Buylaere have restored the last two signs but it is extremely conjectural and likely unwarranted (Mark Weeden pers. comm.).
description we have encountered so far of one subject being described as √grr in a directly witnessed encounter, and it is telling that Assurbanipal adds the further postural detail. This suggests that someone’s √grr was perceptible to outside observers, and not just imputed or reported. Assurbanipal then utters orders that are mostly obscure to us, but the mention of blood (dameka) potentially hints at some kind of violence, though we cannot be sure. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the interaction between Milki-nuri and Assurbanipal is one of an extreme power differential, perhaps physical threat, and thus results in both Milki-nuri’s √grr and his deeply hostile response.

The direct threat to Milki-nuri’s bodily integrity is complemented by a letter from a medical context, where Nabu-našir the ašipu reports on the health of an unnamed man of interest to Esarhaddon. Here, Nabu-našir describes being told about the patient’s recovery:

ma ina mušša ti[mali] irtibarari[ti] širanisu ittas[ar]
ma igdurur
ma ašip[x] etarbuni[x] uṣanni’a igdurur [x x] la igrur
ma umu itta[lak] širanisu ([tibisu] [u]ma [šulmu]

3.QUOT Ye[sterday] night, on the flank of the evening[watch] he guarded[ed] his flesh
3.QUOT He was √grr
3.QUOT The ašipu-healers entered, he again was √grr... he was not √grr
3.QUOT The day arrived[ed], his flesh [became good], [n]ow [he is well].

SAA 10 no. 304, rev. 1-12, Nabu-našir to Esarhaddon

The tablet here is once again damaged, but the main point is apparent: this fellow had some ailment of the flesh which caused him to experience √grr. As we are already aware, nothing happened in Assyria that was not the intentional act of some divine being, and so it was with aetiologies: the flesh disease the patient is suffering in this letter was the deliberate work of a god or demon (Geller 2010: 14). Thus, this scenario is more similar to the previous instances of √grr we have seen, where an intentional being inflicting violence on another being leads to a √grr response.

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227 The item of the sash may refer to a marker of office or social status, thus meaning its removal indicated demotion in standing.

228 We cannot make firm conclusions from just one tablet, but intriguingly, despite Milki-nuri’s hostility he is still portrayed as addressing Assurbanipal through indirect means, maintaining social distance even as he utters the curse.
Disciplinary √grr
Eliciting the √grr response was thus the intended outcome of the rawest of Assyrian disciplinary techniques. Inculcating √grr was proposed as the solution to several instances of disobedience and corruption bubbling up in the Assyrian hierarchy:

The man that incited (lit. ‘caused to talk’) the governor, a judgement should be established in his interior. Let them know, let them be √grr [el]se the governors will dissipate all[l] the [treasure] of the temples.

SAA 10 no. 369, rev. 12-17, Mar-Issar to Esarhaddon

kima šiptu ina ṭupšarri issen šarru la iškun [repute] la išarraru
If the king does not establish a judgement for one scribe, [the rest] will not be √grr

SAA 13 no. 31, rev. 1-3, Iddin-Âššur to Esarhaddon/Assurbanipal

Both these examples are from scholars associated with temples writing to the king about the misfeasance of high officials: Mar-Issar on theft, Iddin-Âššur on nonpayment of tax. The implications of this corruption are explored more fully in chapter six, but here it is evident that the šiptu ‘judgement’ is for display and deterrence. The specifics of the šiptu are completely elided, but if it was designed to instigate √grr amongst the victim’s cohort then from the foregoing we can infer that it was a violent act. It is especially noticeable that in both cases the high officials are not to be the victims of the punishment, but the unspecified underlings who were said to have ‘incited’ them. This is almost certainly some form of scapegoating, suggestive of both the expendability of lower status individuals and the difficulty of the king inflicting punishments on high officials who might potentially oppose him. We could describe this as an ‘indirected violence,’ and it is one we see performed not only in the imperial hierarchy but also by Assyrian townspeople. ²²⁹

Finally, there are a couple of instances where √grr is deliberately elicited without the threat of direct bodily violence. However, in both these cases there remains some kind of threat of social violence from the Assyrian state machine, which is particularly explicit in this first example:

²²⁹ See p.270.
Deportation in the Assyrian period was a powerful biopolitical procedure which transferred productive bodies both intellectual and manual across the entirety of the Middle East according to imperial whims.\textsuperscript{230} Just as importantly for imperial purposes was the destruction of identities bound to kin and land, which is presumably the threat that precipitates √\textit{grr} in the above letter. \textsuperscript{231}

We can read a letter to Sargon from Bel-liqbi, governor of the province of Ṣupat in a similar light. Here, \textit{mākisu}—‘tax collectors’—have been installed in order to prevent itinerant Arabs from being sold precious iron:

\begin{quote}
\textit{issen mākisu ina abulli ša Ṣupat issakkanu una šani u Ḫuzaza issakkanu Arbaya uṣṣu ina liibbi la ʾillakuni igdurr}
They have placed one tax collector at the city gate of Ṣupat and now they have placed a second at Ḫuzaza. The Arabs are leaving and do not come inside—they are scared.
\end{quote}

Though here the Arabs are not threatened physically, their response is still described as √\textit{grr}. The installation of \textit{mākisu} appears to have been no small inconvenience, serving as grounds for active resistance to Assyrian rule in some cases.\textsuperscript{232} Liverani suggests that the excessive tribute demands proclaimed in the royal inscriptions are symptomatic of an Assyrian strategy of ‘wearing out’ their clients (Liverani 2017: 190) and we can understand the depredations of the \textit{mākisu} in the same light. The tolls of the \textit{mākisu} would likely have been extremely heavy, the act of payment a serious privation, and the consequences of nonpayment a potential loss of freedom or life. Thus, the appearance of agents of the Assyrian extraction machine represented an assertion of Assyrian power over freedom and life and the potential to be ensnared in the violent machine, which would thus explain the suitability of √\textit{grr} here.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{230} See Liverani 2017: 191-192. The biopolitical conception of human bodies as raw resources is also found in aesthetic evidence. Bahrani’s observation that human bodies and material goods are compositionally treated the same way in the relief depicting Sennacherib’s destruction of the city of Lachish leads her to conclude that bodies and booty were conceived of as one and the same (2008: 175-181).
\textsuperscript{231} Though see later in this chapter for an inversion of this.
\textsuperscript{232} See the response of the Sidonites below and chapter six.
\end{flushright}
\[\sqrt{grr} \rightarrow \sqrt{plh}\]

\[\sqrt{grr}\] was thus one of the affects deliberately targeted in the suite of Assyrian governmental techniques. Not only did it stand on its own as a useful endpoint for subjects, but it was used to further shape their interiorities into becoming appropriately \(\sqrt{plh}\) beings. We find a sequenced script of actions and states that is employed repeatedly: an act of violence \(\rightarrow \sqrt{grr} \rightarrow \sqrt{plh}\).\(^{233}\)

For example, the Assyrian envoy to the Phoenician cities writes to Tiglath-pileser, briefly describing how he restored royal tax-collection in the city of Sidon:

\begin{verbatim}
makisu ša ina muḫḫi karrani ša ina Šiduni uradduninni aptiqidi Šidunaya uktaššiduniššu harammama Ituʾaya ina Labnana assappar nīše ušsagariru urkite issaparuni makisu ittasṣu ina Šiduni usseribu
\end{verbatim}

The tax collector that I appointed over the trading ports that were added to me in Sidon—the Sidonites drove him away.
Subsequently, I sent the Ituʾaeans to Mount Lebanon to make the people \(\sqrt{grr}\).
Consequently, they wrote to me, took the tax collector and brought him into Sidon.

SAA 19 no. 22 obv. 14-22, Qurdi-Aššur-lamur to Tiglath-pileser

Qurdi-Aššur-lamur describes the restoration of imperial order: an act of resistance occurs against Assyrian authority,\(^ {234}\) he sends troops to make the people \(\sqrt{grr}\), and then the people themselves reinitiate communication with the Assyrian representative and themselves restore the makisu. Two things are noteworthy about this. Firstly, the specific actions taken by the Ituʾaeans are not described, only the desired affective response; this completely elides whatever forms of violence were used to induce \(\sqrt{grr}\), in stark contradistinction to Assyrian celebratory media.\(^ {235}\) Secondly, the emphasis on the Sidonites themselves writing and restoring the makisu strongly correlates with the conception of an ideal Assyrian subject as one that willingly and in the completeness of their interior takes the right actions. That this ‘willingness’ was elicited by means of coercion was by-the-by, as violence was one of the prerogative instruments of the Assyrian empire and thus an entirely appropriate disciplinary measure.

This violent inculcation of appropriate attitudes is even more explicitly defined in a letter from the

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\(^{233}\) For this script set in a wider context of procedures, see Figure 6 at the end of this chapter.

\(^ {234}\) For more acts of resistance, see p. 267.

\(^ {235}\) Fuchs suggests that the violence portrayed on palace wall reliefs and in royal inscriptions was foregrounded as an exemplar of the king’s just and legal power, rather than as a celebration of bloodlust (2009: 113-114).
governor of Mazamua to Sargon:

adaggal ina pani[šunu]
kī maṣin ina muḫḫiya la diłikunikin nišassappar urdani ša šarri beliya Kibatki igtaldū niše pi patar parzilla issaknu
kī Kibatki igladuni ıptallu ıssapparuni ina muḫḫiya edamu assakanšunu

I awaited [their presence]; as it was that they did not come before me, I sent the servants of the king, my lord, to šgld-frighten the city of Kibatki—the people were put to the mouth of iron sword.
Since Kibatki was šgld, they became šplḥ and they wrote to me, and I imposed a deadline on them.

SAA 5 no. 202 rev. 2'-right edge 16, Šarru-emuranni, governor of Mazamua, to Sargon

Here, Šarru-emuranni describes the consequences of the citizens of Kibatki failing to meet him and provide horses for the king: death. It might be argued, therefore, that the šgld-'terror' so parenthetically described was simply a stand-in for indiscriminate murder.

\[\text{abatu} \rightarrow \text{šplḥ}\]

Techniques for eliciting šgrr were thus used both as a disciplinary endpoint in themselves and as a means of inculcating the appropriate šplḥ subjectivity. These šgrr \(\rightarrow\) šplḥ procedures were primarily inflicted upon subject populations, whereas pure šgrr techniques were only used to deter within the imperial hierarchy. The need for šgrr \(\rightarrow\) šplḥ procedures within the imperial hierarchy itself was essentially obviated by the implication that, in order to be a member of the Assyrian elite, the subject already practiced the requisite šplḥ—this is what made him suitable to be an Assyrian official in the first place.

This is borne out by correspondents' self-ascriptions of šplḥ. The most basic self-ascription, 'I šplḥ the king,' is repeated constantly.\(^{236}\) However, we find that the words contained within the letters themselves are conceived of as engendering šplḥ amongst officials and their collaborators. Take for example this interaction between Ṭab-šill-Ešarra and a qepu:

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\(^{236}\) E.g. SAA 17 no. 123 right edge 35-36 šarru belini palḫanumma 'we šplḥ the king' and many others too numerous to list here.
The sequence of events in this letter, *abat šarri* → *plḥ* is suggestive in its implication that *plḥ* is an active engagement. Ṭab-ṣill-Ešarra seems surprised by Nabu-bel-šumati’s arrival—so much so he dispatches this letter to the king to inform him—suggesting at the very least he was not expecting it. The *qepe* explains his arrival as a response to his √*plḥ*, which itself was engendered by the king’s speech. This shows √*plḥ* functioning as a motivator for action. If we think of it in its interpretation as ‘fear’ then that makes some sense: Nabu-bel-šumati was scared into obedience. However, this is too simplistic a viewpoint: √*plḥ* is a positive obedience, a motivator and something to be practiced and it seems that receiving the message here was a reinforcement of what must already have existed in his interior.

For the Assyrian officials, √*plḥ* was engendered both by reward and threat. We already encountered the √*grr* function of the šiptu-judgement above, where the infliction of šiptu on a ‘scapegoat’ would instill √*grr* in officials. However, the constant possibility of šiptu itself was a cause for √*plḥ*:

SAA 1 no. 84, obv. 6-rev. 2 + rev. 9-11, Ṭab-ṣill-Ešarra to Sargon

SAA 15 no. 181, rev. 7-11, Aššur-belu-taqqin to Sargon
Here, it is not the actuality of an inflicted šiptu that elicits an emotional reaction from Aššur-belu-taqquin, but rather the potential for a šiptu to be inflicted upon him which engenders the appropriate √plḥ. Fuchs notes that the king’s ability to arbitrarily order death was fundamental to his authority (2009: 82), and it seems that this also applied to his ability to order šiptu.

√plḥ the relationship

Our discussion of √plḥ has shown that it was ultimately a more complex ‘emotion’ than a simple rendering of ‘fear’ or ‘reverence’ can capture. Not only was it laudable, desired, practiced and promoted, it was inherently relational and internalised. √plḥ was a practice integral to maintaining appropriate social bonds within the Assyrian order: subjects would be bound to their superiors through practicing √plḥ for them, and these superiors would also be bound to their superiors, in a matryoshka-like nesting all the way up to the king’s relationship with his gods. This relational, practiced aspect of √plḥ was one absent for √grr and √gld, other flavours of ‘fear,’ further differentiating √plḥ from simple fright and promoting it into the realm of permanent and idealised subjectivity.

The links of √plḥ were, furthermore, not one-sided relations; beings receiving √plḥ were similarly required to reciprocate this feeling-fealty in an appropriate manner. Though never explicitly specified in any kind of contractual format, these responsibilities and disbursements were noticeable by their absence:

*aššu šarru bēlu aptalahl ki mitakku ekanu liqibiru’inni*

Although I have √plḥ the king my lord, when I am dead, where might they bury me?

SAA 18 no. 61, rev. 8-10, unassigned to Esarhaddon

Šula baru iqabbi u ziqnišu ibaggan

*aššu šarru qablišu irakkasi la qaplahl [x]*

Šula the diviner speaks, and tears at his beard

QUOT For what does the king gird his loins? He does not √plḥ before him [x]

SAA 17 no. 105, rev. 10-rev.edge 14, Aqar-Bel-lumur to Bel-ibni

In this vein, we might retranslate statements along the lines of *ana šarri beliya ki ašpuru gabaru ul amur aptalahl,*\(^{237}\) which have been interpreted as √plḥ ‘fear’ as a consequence of not receiving a response from the king, instead as ‘I have been √plḥ, but I wrote to the king my lord and saw no

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\(^{237}\) SAA 18 no. 69, obv. 14-rev.1, Aqar-Bel-lumur to Esarhaddon
reply.’ This flips the script on its head: rather than the correspondent becoming ‘scared’ because of no reply, he is in fact invoking his √plḥ practice to critique the king’s failure to respond.238

Aššur-šarru-ibni, a man of unknown standing tasked with managing works, writes to Sargon concerning difficulties with the governor of Arbela:

1 [me] 20 šab šarrī ša ana ḫulu issi šarri la ʾillaqi ne ina pan paḫiti ša Arbaʾil la immaγγuru la ʾiddana
issu pan šarrī palalḥku šabanšu ša uṣabbat
[One hundred and twenty] men of the king who did not go to the campaign with the king are in the presence of the governor of Arbela: he does not consent (√mgr), he does not give. I am √plḥ before the king: I will not seize his men.

SAA 1 no. 149, obv. 4-11, Aššur-šarru-ibni to Sargon

His declaration of √plḥ towards the king here enables Aššur-šarru-ibni to disclaim responsibility for taking action in this situation, deflecting the decision to Sargon instead. That √plḥ was used as a linguistic strategy here is both indicative of its role in the social distribution of authority (to be √plḥ of someone was to defer decision-making to them) and its flexibility in managing obedience. As we will see later, high officials in Assyria had more latitude to act than is usually supposed,239 suggesting that the obedience required of √plḥ relationships was pragmatic. Aššur-šarru-ibni’s emphatic declaration of it here thus shows him using √plḥ as a strategy to his advantage, demonstrating that √plḥ was not a one-way ‘reverence.’

Underlining the centrality of √plḥ to the Assyrian hierarchy are two final examples. The first alludes to the reciprocality inherent in the √plḥ-relation, on an even higher order level. The ašipu Urad-Gula laments his disfavour with the king, and writes:

puluḫtu ša ekalli urdani ša-ziqni u ša-rešani ussammiḏ minu ina ʾobbī aḫzaku
I have taught √plḥ of the palace to the servants, bearded and eunuch—what have I got for it?

SAA 10 no. 294, obv. 29-31, Urad-Gula to Assurbanipal

This higher-order √plḥ illustrates how the inculcation of √plḥ was perceived as a deliberate process. √plḥ did not come about passively or spontaneously, but could be taught (√lmd), or

238 The objection might be raised that the tense structure preterite→perfect necessitates that aptalḥ is the consequence in this sentence, the lack of an explicit conjunction between amur and aptalḥ leaves the temporal relation between the two ambiguous and thus open to reinterpretation like this.
239 P.258
stimulated with the techniques described above. Here, Urad-Gula expects some kind of recompense for instructing members of the imperial hierarchy in √pluck. This expectation suggests that the scholars attached to the king played an important role in facilitating the appropriate √pluck practices throughout the empire. We need only recall Adad-šumu-usur’s utterance regarding √pluck of the gods, or Dadi the priest’s disapproval of the Assyrian shepherds, to see how matters of √pluck exercised the experts steeped in sacred knowledge.

Finally, a damaged tablet bears a letter from an unknown author, who suggests a certain outcome to Esarhaddon regarding a problem now lost to us:

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yamut[ti ina] libbi eqilišu kiršu lu kamma[su a] mar-šarri lipluḫu
   Each should stay in his field, his garden, and √pluck the son of the king

   SAA 5 no. 109, obv. 6’-8’, unassigned to Esarhaddon
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This short suggestion associates √pluck with the image of subjects staying in their fields, the place of their agricultural labour for the empire. This image, as we are about to see, was a fundamental endpoint of all the techniques we have explored so far, resulting in a universal, idyllic, good empire—one with √pluck at its core.

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240 Epigraph to p.131.
241 See p.262.
3.3 The Good Empire

kusapika akul meka šiti libbaka lu šabka
Eat your crumbs, drink your water, let your interior be good

At the beginning of this chapter, we encountered a letter authored by Sargon in which he concerns himself with the emotions of his various clients. We saw how Sargon manipulated the Babylonian prelate Balassu through libbu škn. We explored ṣplḥ as a pervasive, practiced emotion that needed to be nurtured in relational chains stretching from the gods of the king down to the meanest subject; this emotion needed to be carefully managed so that, like temu, interiors would be intersubjectively linked to the Assyrian hierarchy, and no other. Consequently, in Sargon’s letter he directs the client king Kilar to no longer be ṣplḥ before a powerful new Assyrian ally. ²⁴²

In this section, we turn to the final ‘endpoint’ of ṣplḥ, the subjective states alluded to as outcomes of Assyrian imperial control. As we may recall from the letter of Sargon’s which opened this chapter, the king directed his governor to write to Kilar ‘eat your crumbs, drink your water… let your interior be good.’²⁴³ Eating, drinking—these basics are suggested to Kilar, together with a libbu ṣṭʾb, under the protection of the king. Though seeming to be an idyllic, peaceful state of affairs, Sargon’s mollifying orders (and they are orders, akul ‘eat’ šiti ‘drink’ being imperatives, for more on which see the next chapter) are issued in response to Kilar’s request to be assigned more territory. Sargon’s words to his subject king, despite their overtly soothing tone, pointedly limit Kilar’s agency and autonomy to the most restricted of scopes: the basic life activities of eating and drinking the plainest of comestibles. It is in this limited state that Kilar is expected to exhibit the libbu ṣṭʾb, a good interior. Though he remains a ‘client king,’ nominally in charge of an independent territory, his role is expressly to be subject to the šilli šarrī: the shadow of the king.²⁴⁴

When we contrast the language used to address Kilar with that Nabu-ḫamatu’a uses to address some people newly subject to direct Assyrian authority, the hierarchical assignation of emotion becomes

²⁴² SAA 1 no. 1, obv. 36-41. See p.112ff.
²⁴³ SAA 1 no.1, rev. 40-41.
²⁴⁴ The notion of eating and drinking peacefully under the aegis of a social superior was well-known, such that it could be parodied; see p.222.
readily apparent. Whilst Kilar is directed simply to eat and drink (and exercise no authority), the people of the land of Bel-iddina’s son are told:

\[
muk \quad \text{attunu yamuttu ina betišu ina libbi eqšišu dullakunu epša libbakunu lu ṭabakunu} \\
muk \quad \text{urdani ša šarri attunu}
\]

1.QUOT You, each of you in his house and in the interior of his field, do your labour, may your interior be good
1.QUOT You are servants of the king

SAA 5 no. 210, rev. 2-6, Nabu-ḫamatu’a to Sargon

Unlike Kilar the client king, the people’s libbu √ṭ’b is predicated upon their performance of dullu: ‘labour,’ but also ‘hardship, misery.’ Nabu-ḫamatu’a further underlines their subjection to the king, as opposed to their protection: urdani ša šarri attunu. That the appropriate response to subjugation by Assyria was, for the Assyrian administrators, positive, not negative is apparent in a number of reports, some of which stretch their descriptions to breaking point:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Lahiri alani [ša a]hul[a ša batbattešunu ḫadiu [a]danniš} \\
\text{ma uma nuda [ak]i urdani ša šarri belini [a]nini}
\end{align*}
\]

Lahiri and the towns that are beyond and around it are ḫad’ very much
3.QUOT Now we know that we are servants of the king our lord

SAA 15 no. 136 obv. 8-12, Nabu-šumu-iddina to Sargon

This report, brief though it is, is marked by strong intensifiers, from adanniš through to the independent third-person plural pronoun in the quoted speech of the towns, which only serve to emphasise the idyllic state of affairs being described here—people experiencing joy at their subjection to the Assyrian order.

A last example on the theme of idyllic subjects comes from a rare example of a female author who also seems to occupy a prestigious station in the imperial hierarchy. Barsipitu, scion of a

\footnote{CAD s.v. dullu 1., 2., p. 173.}
\footnote{This is particularly rare as this author is not a member of the Assyrian royal family, unlike, for example, Naqi’a, one of Sennacherib’s wives and mother of Esarhaddon.}

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A prestigious family of Bit-Dakkuri,²⁴⁷ writes to Sargon to inform him of her arrival in her home country, reporting on the state of the population there:

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ana šarri beli'ya] amatka Barsi[putu] lu šulmu ana šarri [beliya]
ina šilli ilani ša [šarri] ina šulmu ana Bit-[Dakkuru] niterub
Ana-Nabu-[taklak] u niši mati ša Dakkuru gabbišumu ina panini ihtamu
minma ana šarri belini iktanarrabu

To the king [my] lord, your female servant Barsi[putu], may wellbeing be for the king [my lord]
By the protection of the gods of the [king] we have entered Bit-Dakkuri in safety
Ana-Nabu-taklak and the people of the land of Dakkuru, all of them were √ḫmʾ before us, they continually bless
the king with
```

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QUOT: Now we know [the king] our lord has tied up Bit-Dakkuri
and (lit. expelled for its nose) has sent us the son of our lord,
and we will live in the protection of the king our lord forever.

SAA 17 no. 73, obv. 1-rev. 4, Barsipitu to Sargon
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Unlike the previous two letters, which emphasised the people as urdanu 'servants', here Barsipitu portrays the people as voicing their praise for the protection of the king. This clearly has thematic links with the topic of Barsipitu's report, namely that she was able to reach her country safely in the midst of the Assyrian conflict with Chaldean tribes in Babylonia; we thus might consider the words placed in the voice of the people as being a sort of indiroduced praise for the king, voiced not in Barsipitu's direct speech, but placed in the mouths of her own subjects.²⁴⁸ Consequently, this would tie the emphasis on the šilli šarri together with what we saw in Sargon's letter to Aššur-šarru-usur, where he had the governor emphasise the šilli šarri to Kilar—both Kilar and Barsipitu being nominally independent rulers under the Assyrian aegis, choosing to dwell in the royal shade.

This final letter to the king demonstrates how attempts to portray the status of imperial subjects in an idealised light could lead to absurd self-contradiction. A report from two officers opens with a fairly standardised greeting formula:

²⁴⁷ A tribal polity with lands south of Babylon.
²⁴⁸ The register of this letter is not at all dissimilar from letters sent to the king from other officials. Aside from the gendered change of urdaka to amatka, this is broadly the same as a report from any official. We can compare this to letters addressed to the ummi šarri ‘mother of the king,’ which treat the designation ummi šarri no differently to any other official title, and continue to refer to her in the masculine third-person, with the indirect beliya ‘my lord’ (SAA 13 nos. 76-77, SAA 18 no. 10).
To the king our lord, your servants Nabu-šuma-lišir and Aqar-Bel-lumur EMPH wellbeing for the king our lord
Wellbeing for the fortresses and troops of the king, the šemu of the people is well, the interior of the king our lord,
let it be good

SAA 17 no. 123, obv. 1-7, Nabu-šuma-lišir and Aqar-Bel-lumur to Sennacherib

Like all of Nabu-šuma-lišir and Aqar-Bel-lumur's joint letters, they take care to include a description of the šemu ša niši. This presents an interesting challenge in translation: we could conceive of šemu ša niši as referring to the interior attribute, thus mirroring the libbi ša šarri; the people's motivation, capacity, intentionality to act being well, attuned to the purposes of Assyria. Alternatively, it could be read as šemu as completed šemu: the report, status, news of the people is good, thus mirroring the wellbeing of the fortresses and troops. However, I would argue that its placement, sandwiched between the reports on physical military resources and the interiorised well-wishes directed to the king underlines the multiple temporality of šemu as being described here: it is because the inchoate intentions of the people are well that the report on these people are well, and the intentions and the report cannot be cleanly separated from each other—thus, šemu.

However, with that said, Nabu-šuma-lišir and Aqar-Bel-lumur contradict this statement later in the letter:

Concerning the work of the river of Bit-Deraya that the king our lord established šemu
Let it be shut off...

the days have come and the people, as much as they are, their interior is not loose, they do not act according to their interior...

they will not listen to us, they do not do the work. Let the king do as he is able.

SAA 17 no. 123, rev. 22-23 + rev. 28-29 + rev. 31-32

Unusually, this letter is dateable to the year 693, firmly placing it in Sennacherib's reign (Parpola 2002: 560)
Again, we find a careful description of the interiority of the people, which together with the greeting formulae of these authors suggests an idiosyncratic concern with interiority over and above the majority of correspondents reporting on population groups. Yet here, they seem to contradict their description of the țemu ša niši šulmu, through describing their defective libbu. Ultimately, despite the people being described in the same breath as the useful military resources of the king in a generic greeting description, in actuality they do not listen to the royal țemu at all. The imperative to describe subjects of the empire as well, as productive and as acting aki libbišunu ‘according to their interior,’ this interior being one willing to perform the dullu of the king, was one that apparently was able to override coherent description of factuality, leading to the contradictory correspondence here.

Nabu-šuma-lišir and Aqar-Bel-lumur’s letter also illustrates the final component of a good empire: the libbu √tʼb of the Assyrian king himself. The greeting formula, describing the wellbeing of various imperial resources and concluding with libbu ša šarri lu ṭab, or variations on it, was profligate throughout the entirety of the royal correspondence. That the √tʼb of the king’s interior was dependent on the status of his imperial holdings is suggestive of the effacement of the king’s ‘individuality’: his subjectivity and affectivity are dependent upon the ‘external’ imperium, rather than ‘personal’ goals, aims or desires. This is again a ‘situational affect,’ one where an emotional state does not derive from an autonomous individual and their reactions to the world, but are a joint achievement comprising act, gesture and social relationships. We might even conceive of the Empire itself as a very large affective performance, establishing libbu √tʼb in king, client and subject.

However, not only was the king’s affectivity dependent on the empire, but the wellbeing of the empire and its subjects was dependent on the king’s wellbeing, in a reciprocal relationship. This is reflected in standardised royal greetings, ending with the stereotypical phrase šulmu ayaši šulmu ana Aššur libbaka lu ṭabka, ‘Wellbeing is for me, wellbeing is for Assyria, your interior’ emph be

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250 This kind of țemu disruption across the imperial hierarchy is covered in full in chapter six.

251 For example, in letters from officials to the king stationed in the north-east (e.g. SAA 5 no. 152 obv. 18-21), Media (SAA 15 no. 98 obv. 4-7), and Babylonia (SAA 17 no. 131 obv. 4-6; SAA 18 no. 201 obv. 5-8).

252 See the above discussion on libbu √gmr, p.77.
A letter from Assurbanipal throws further light on this. In a report about the mollified threat of the Cimmerians, a tribe threatening the eastern border of Assyria. Assurbanipal appears to be describing the state of the people there when he writes:

\[
\text{ina libbi ilani annute } \underbrace{\text{ni}}_{\text{[x]}} \text{ ina } \text{tibute } \underbrace{\text{s}}_{\text{[i]}} \text{a } \text{šarri baštu}
\]

In the interior of these gods, [they are] calm, they are alive in the goodness of the king

SAA 16 no. 16, obv. 3'-4', Assurbanipal mar-šarri to Esarhaddon

If we accept the editors’ restoration of nehu ‘calm,’ this sentence of Assurbanipal’s is an unusually affect-laden one. Not only are the notional people described as calm, but this is described as caused by the gods as well as a quality of the king, tibutu. And, if we look at Assurbanipal’s preceding letter, also about the Cimmerian threat, which contains a few descriptions of the exceptional √plh and √grr on the part of an Assyrian official, we can infer that this was a serious issue, and that therefore there was some warrant to Assurbanipal’s restrained relief. Something, contained inside the gods (ina libbi ilani), was responsible for the wellbeing of these unknown subjects, showing that, whether thought, intention, emotion or otherwise, interior states had direct causal links with changes in the physical-political world.

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\(^{853}\) Pirngruber suggests that this phrase appears only in limited contexts, appearing in two out of seven letters in the volume SAA 1 (Sargon’s letters) and the same two out of seven in SAA 19 (Tiglath-pileser and Sargon’s letters excavated at Kalhu) (2015: 319). However, the phrase additionally appears in SAA 13 nos. 1, 4-6; SAA 16 nos. 3-5, SAA 17 nos. 2-3, which significantly increases the proportion of royal letters that contain this phrase; the beginnings of several tablets are damaged and thus we cannot be certain whether they contained this phrase. The regularity of this phrase is most noticeable in its omission in a letter written by Esarhaddon to a group he addresses as the ‘non-Babylonians,’ further explored p.239; Pirngruber makes a note of this omission, but it is an omission that would only have slighting force if libbaka lu ṭabka was routinised and consequently expected.

\(^{854}\) SAA 16 no. 15.

\(^{855}\) paliḫ adammīš ‘he was very √plh’ (SAA 16 no. 15 obv. 10); libbi ussagiri ‘(it) has frightened my interior’ (ibid. rev.22’).
3.4 Conclusions

From Emotions to Biopower
In this chapter we have explored the methods used in Assyrian correspondence to mould affective subjects, primarily along the poles of *libbu* manipulation and √*plḥ* cultivation. These two broad categories of subject and affect delineate idealised subjects within the Assyrian polity. The methods and instruments described in the correspondence to cultivate this affective self thus form a useful window into understanding the motivations behind large-scale power structures more generally. Figure 6 graphs the various techniques explored in this chapter, culminating in an idealised imperial subject. Visually, we can see a clear difference between √*grr* and other affects. The number of strategies for eliciting √*grr* were manifold, suggesting a high specificity depending on the situation. By contrast, acts resulting in *libbu* √*škn* were few, characteristic of the discursive visibility of its operation for the Assyrian elite. That is, unlike violence leading to raw fear, *libbu* √*škn* was a recognised procedure carried out through practiced methods: methods founded in communication.
Figure 6 - Scripts of Imperial Interiority
The concepts of disciplinary techniques for the shaping of subjectivities brings us to thoughts presented by Foucault in his later lectures on governmentality. Foucault’s analysis, arising from his ideas about modern rationality, defined ‘governmentality’ as:

... the ensemble formed by institutions, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and dispositives of security as its essential technical instrument...

... by ‘governmentality’ I think we should understand the process, or rather the result of the process, by which the state of justice of the Middle Ages became the administrative state in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and was gradually ‘governmentalized’...

Foucault derives governmentality as a concept associated specifically with the transition from the Middle Ages to modernity, arguing in another lecture that it was only by this period, with the development of the ‘police,’ that concern with the ‘population’s particular nature and character’ began to manifest (Raffnsøe et al. 2016: 272). However, as the preceding chapters have shown, Assyria was indeed an ancient polity that had concerns about the subjectivity and character of its subjects and, indeed, its rulers. The array of disciplinary techniques for the establishment of √ššk, the importance of libbu ššk for both ruler and ruled, and the maintenance of pro-Assyrian subjectivity (libbu šškn), as well as techniques of the self alluded to previously (e.g., Adad-šumu-usur exhorting Esarhaddon to expel bad thoughts from his libbu)—all of these call for an expanded concept of ‘governmentality’ to include the ancient Assyrian state. Further comments can be made about Assyrian ‘modernity’: the voluminous archives and contracts, documents like the Ḥarran census, large scale techniques like deportation and city building, the king’s attention to the smallest details of work-gangs and concern with welfare and marriage—all point to a ‘political culture’ invested in the control of bodies on a ‘biopolitical’ level as well as the interior one.

This contrasts with the derivation of biopolitics as being as old as a sovereign state, a definition which Agamben derived from the concept of the sovereign and the *homo sacer* of the Roman

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256 SAA 11 nos. 220-219.
257 For deportation, see the study by Oded (1979) which remains the most comprehensive analysis so far.
258 E.g., SAA 19 no. 18.
Republic (1998: 6). Agamben builds his analysis on the notion of the ‘state of exception,’ an opposition of bare life and the political being, upon which the sovereign power over bare life is established (1998: 8). Agamben is thus able to resituate biopolitics within a pre-modern time period, proving contra Foucault that power’s concern with raw life was not exclusively a phenomenon of modernity. From this, Agamben theorises an essential violence of the sovereign state, the sovereign’s ‘natural right to do anything to anyone, which now appears as the right to punish’ (1998: 136). However, it would be uncritical to adopt his bios-zoōn divide (which itself echoes the ‘Nature-Culture’ division relativised by Descola) to explain Assyrian biopolitics. As he says, when explicating upon the problem of constituting and constituted power posed by Antonio Negri, ‘politics is returned to its ontological position’ (1998: 44).

The ontological categories of the Assyrian Empire do not coincide with the classical, and thence modern state. The constituting power, the extralegal violence upon which the state is founded, and the constituted power, the monopoly of legitimate violence that undergirds the law, can at best only be etic interpretations. How then might we explain the techniques surveyed in this chapter, governing procedures that act upon interior subjectivities of bodies encompassed by the Assyrian state, bodies furthermore subject to the raw biological procedures of √grr-violence or √gld-deportation? What is biopolitics to a state ante bios, ante polis?

The nature of the Imperial Command offers some insight. Ţemu, the quotidian term that spanned intent, act and fact, was representative of both a paradoxical temporality as well as a continuity between thought and deed. The perceptible world represented both past—the accrued facts of acts—and future—the signs indexing the intent of the gods.

Now, we have encountered this slippage between an exterior form and internal meaning before:

\[ ki\ baniti\ u\ ki\ la\ baniti\ [x\ x\ x]\ \ıppušu\\ itti\\ \ibbišu\\ medaššu \]

\(\text{Whether good, or not good... what he will do, is known to him, with his interior.}\)

SAA 18 no. 125, obv. 21'–22', Bel-ušezib to Esarhaddon
Ambiguity was common to ṭemu, the cuneiform sign, the divine sign, and the human subject. The Assyrian Empire, predicated on a monopolistic link between the gods, the king, and the imperial hierarchy, consequently represented an attempt to collapse ambiguity. Concepts of ‘law,’ ‘legitimation’ and ‘state’ were inchoate in an order which was predicated upon directly enacting the plan of the gods, a plan at once completely fixed, yet unfolding. Thus, rather than conceiving of the Assyrian Empire as a totalitarian despotism, or solely caught in a cosmic fight against kratogenic chaos,259 the Empire’s ‘biopolitical mission’ to win hearts and minds was one that took the open-ended polyautonomous subject, and sought to condition it in such a way that the multiple interpretations of a divine sign, ṭemu were collapsed into a single, uniformly willed, serene Assyrian imperium. The surest security is to unify the hidden, make interior exterior and exterior interior, and close the loop.

From Biopower to Ideology
We have thus attempted to establish an ‘emic’ interpretation for what we observe as an ancient biopolitics antecedent to both the modern and Classical worlds, one which marshals Assyrian ontological concepts to explain some of their imperial practices.

The question of large-scale imperial practices implicates the thorny issue of ‘ideology,’ which this thesis has hitherto skirted around. As summarised in the introduction, ‘Assyrian imperial ideology’ has long been an object of interest to historians of the Ancient Middle East, with most recently the esteemed Liverani (2017) and Pongratz-Leisten (2015) offering magnum opus contributions.260 Their primary concern is with what they dub ‘official ideology.’ Liverani builds his study out of the pronouncements of the royal inscriptions. Pongratz-Leisten sets off ‘royal ideology’ as a subcategory of cultural discourse ‘from a royal perspective,’ which cannot be divorced from religion, which ‘entirely dominated and permeated’ the Mesopotamian world-view (2015: 21-23). Pongratz-Leisten almost makes the move to destabilising categories of inquiry, but doesn’t quite take that step.

259 Pongratz-Leisten’s term, which she traces from the texts of Tukulti-Ninurta I (r. ca.1233-1197) through to the Neo-Assyrian period (2015: 16). ‘Cosmic order’ is defined as Kittu, which recalls our discussion of √kʾn p.35; additionally she emphasises mitgurtu ‘concord,’ from √mgr which I translate ‘consent,’ for which see p.262.

260 P.18.
With our newly minted ontological instruments, mined from the everyday correspondence, we can offer an ‘imperial ideology’ from the fields and offices of Assyria, helping to refine our understanding of the questions of what an Assyrian empire and its ideology are. We have already encountered an ontological paradox—the ṭemu—a looping concept of intent, act, and fact that unified the Assyrian and divine, the interior and the exterior. The paradox being, despite this cyclical temporality, it was not the only temporality that existed in the Assyrian universe: the temporality of sequence, and the various autonomies of subjects with a libbu and ramanu meant that the Assyrian elite faced an extraordinarily complex and not necessarily coherent universe.

Now, Liverani rightfully asserts that Assyria take its place at a table of Empires: extractive, transcultural core-periphery forms that are driven by a mission (2017: 7-8). However, the Assyrians did not conceive of their realm in terms of empire, state, religion, or ideology. How then can we square a form that looked and acted like an Empire with the specific problems this form found itself facing? It is illuminating to return to Sheldon Pollock and his critique of uncritical theory:

...nothing compels us to believe that legitimation, or its higher-order form, ideology—two key components in the social analysis of capitalist modernity—have anything like the salience in noncapitalist nonmodernity that scholars have attributed to them.

Pollock 2006: 517

Divesting ourselves of legitimation and ideology, as Pollock suggests, we find instead a colossal agglomeration of ‘culture-power.’ The cuneiform scholars, whom Pongratz-Leisten assigns a starring role in her religion-ideology complex (2015: 9), filtered Assyria not only through their ‘shadow dialogues’ but through what we could dub a ‘shadow ontology.’ The mule express enabled Aššur’s ṭemu to spread far and wide: ṭemu in a simple sense of ‘orders,’ but ṭemu also as a looping temporality, an ontological concept.

Crucially, the Assyrian kings in all their history never deified themselves: they acted solely as Aššur’s vicegerent. This explicitly led to a centralisation of scribal expertise, reflected both in the patronage system binding scholars to the royal household as well as the monopoly on divination

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a6a Though see p.184 for further discussion of ideology in its ‘linguistic ideology’ guise.

a6a For which see p.23.

a63 In stark contrast to other ‘ancients,’ the Roman Emperors, Egyptian Pharaohs, or even the Akkadian ruler Naram-Sin being cases in point.
practices the kings imposed throughout their realm. This concentration of cuneiform expertise carried with it the essential epistemological entailment of the cuneiform writing system: the ambiguity and open interpretation of the cuneiform sign. This ambiguity was a potent, virtual one, one where the future was written in the past, but not fixed.

A deified king could act with certainty: his word was god. The Assyrian king was no god. His world was founded on an ontology predicated upon an interpretive gap. The Assyrian Empire, though an organisation granting immense power, prestige and riches to its elite, though promulgating in imperial accounts narratives that smack of legitimation and ideology, the right king against chaos—the Assyrian Empire, as a thought-process, sought to collapse the interpretive gap. The disjuncture between a looping ṭemū that was certain and uncertain, a future in the past, the disjuncture between the exterior sign of faces and words, and interior words and selves—this interpretive gap gave rise to an ‘imperial system’ that integrated biopolitical procedure, pervasive ‘intelligence gathering,’ and increasingly heavy processes of extraction and control. Rather than controlling a future, or indeed caring much about subjects, the Empire was one that sought to control ambiguity in the critical link between the divine and the perceived.

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\(^{264}\) This contrasts with the ‘virtual marketplace competition for power’ that existed in Syria and south Iraq during the second millennium (Richardson 2010: 252). There, the proliferation of small, competing courts meant that qualified diviners could potentially move between courts, which Richardson considers the impetus for the development of knowledge secrecy and binding diviners by oaths (2010: 253).
Intermezzo – From Ideology to Language

At this point in the thesis we move from the grand vistas of the ontological landscape to the scope of the spoken, the dialogues that were the 'capillaries' through which imperial power circulated.

We have just seen that a fundamental ambiguity inhered in several essential ontological principles undergirding the Assyrian imperial phenomenon—the paradoxical unfolding-simultaneity of ṭemu, the polyvalency of the cuneiform sign, and the polyautonomous human subject. The biopolitical repertoire of disciplinary techniques provided a useful, ad-hoc avenue for controlling the ambiguity of the subject. These strategies, though occasionally employing linguistic tools, sought primarily non-linguistic, affective outcomes.

By contrast, the ade was a tool that unified the ‘ideological,’ biopolitical and linguistic aspects of Assyrian control, thus offering a pathway we might take from the governmental to the conversational. The ade imposed by Esarhaddon upon the subjects of his empire is the best preserved, with copies extant from both the imperial capitals and the provinces. Figure 7 depicts a conserved tuppi ade ‘treaty tablet’ excavated at the provincial capital of Kullania. This tablet, and presumably others like it, was installed in prominent display within a temple, a position emphasising some importance (Lauinger 2011: 12):

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265 SAA 2 no.6, obv. i-iv.
266 I take the capillary metaphor from Van De Mieroop 2016b: 136.
Figure 7: ṭuppi ađe Treaty Tablet from Tell Tayinat, reproduced from Lauinger 2012: 88.

Removed for reasons of copyright
We have encountered Esarhaddon’s *ade* several times already: in its strictures to enforce reporting everything you see and hear,\footnote{P.34.} to forbid anti-Assurbanipal words from entering your heart,\footnote{P.73.} to speak truly and completely with your interior.\footnote{P.71.} These clauses illustrate the elite concern with negating the disjuncture between interior and exterior. They also illustrate a concern with *language*—with the capacity of language to dissemble, to not reflect that of the interior—the *dababti šapti* ‘speech of the lips.’ We return to Agamben, whose restitution of ancient classical governmentality helped us to make sense of Assyrian biopower in the previous chapter. In his again Classicist archaeology, he notes that the oath

contains the memory of a more archaic stage, in which it was concerned with the very consistency of human language and the very nature of humans as "speaking animals." The "scourge" that it had to stem was not only the unreliability of men, incapable of staying true to their word, but a weakness pertaining to language itself, the capacity of words themselves to refer to things and the ability of men to make profession of their condition as speaking beings.

Agamben 2011: 8

The oath as a fixity against the ‘weakness’ of language—a device to pin down the spoken word, as the scholars pin down the cuneiform sign, and the administrative apparatus pins down hearts and minds. This fixity is almost literally underlined by the act of sealing the tablet with the Seal of Aššur (Figure 8). Not only does the seal emphasise the absolute unchangeability of the word,\footnote{P.73.} but it elevates the tablet from ‘an ordinary clay tablet into a Tablet of Destinies’ (Lauinger 2013: 115).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Sennacherib-Seal-of-Destinies.png}
\caption{Reproduction of Sennacherib’s ‘Seal of Destinies’ from Wiseman 1958: 16}
\end{figure}

\footnote{267} P.34.
\footnote{268} P.73.
\footnote{269} P.71.
\footnote{270} We might recall the Sealand Elders describing ‘the word of the king… which like the word of the god cannot be changed’ (SAA 18 no. 89, rev. 3-5).
The ṭuppi šimati ‘Tablet of Destinies’ was, as the name implies, a cuneiform tablet upon which the destinies of all things were inscribed by the great gods. An artefact of the divine realm wielded by the chiefs of the gods, Enlil, Marduk, and now Aššur, its transposition into historical time granted the Assyrian kings potent capability in establishing further links and guarantees between human and divine entities. Lauinger argues that, by sealing the ṭuppi ade with the Seal, it rendered the subordinate parties subjects to the destiny of the tablet in the same way the gods were subjected to Marduk in the Babylonian Enuma eliš ‘Once on High’ creation account (2013: 114-115). Finally, Lauinger draws attention to a certain temporality of action between parties in Esarhaddon’s treaty:

the contracting parties are ordered to speak of the ade as one which Esarhaddon “wrote” (issatar) and “established” (issakan) in the perfect tense but which the king “causes them to swear” (utammanaši) in the present tense...

(2013: 114)

This whole package—establishing relational bonds in chains underwritten by the divine, framed in a temporality of absolute establishment by authority (√škn) followed by its action by the imperial subordinate—parallels the mechanisms that emerged through examining the quotidian business of the correspondence in the prior three chapters. The Assyrian hierarchy was predicated on an almost Matryoshka-like series of √plḫ relationships: each subordinate bound to a superior through an internalised, active and subjective emotion; the superior bound in turn to his superior, in a nested series of interior practices reaching through the king up into the divine sphere. The √plḫ-bonds, underwritten by the divine were framed in a temporality of absolute establishment by authority (temu √škn) followed by its enactment by the imperial subordinate.

Like the temu, the ade utterance is caught in a loop—in this case, a perpetual recurrence, illustrated by the durative utammanaši ‘causes them to swear.’ This perpetual recurrence is an act of speech—the oath, which we saw was a guarantor against slippage between the exterior words of the lips, and the interior world. Cementing the bond between oath, word, interior, exterior, god, subject, tablet

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273 This sequence does not imply historical progression in the divine sphere. Rather, the chief of the gods varied depending on period and locality: in the second millennium Enlil was regarded as the divine head; in the first, Marduk was preferred in Babylon, whereas obviously Aššur was identified as the supreme god in Assyria. The promotion of Aššur in Mesopotamian cosmogony is nicely traced in Machinist 1984.
and destiny was the ritual intake of water, mirroring the internalisation of the ade and thus utterly fixing the oath-takers' subjectivities within the Assyrian hierarchical system.

The ade thus represents a nexus, where the large-scale imperial, ontological concerns of the Assyrian elite coincided with the topography and autonomy of the subject. Mediating and binding these axes was the spoken word. The temu and the cuneiform sign were the domain of empire; the spoken utterance, the dialogue, the domain of subjects and relationships, and the subject of the second half of this thesis.

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272 Radner 2003: 166.
4 Temporality, Tablets and Text: Talk in the Time of Ṭemu

The Mule Express, Revisited

In the thesis introduction, we saw how an Assyrian letter was an artefact produced by a chain of communicative interactions which transported utterances across large stretches of time and space, carried on a clay tablet via the mule express. We now focus on the interactions themselves: the ways in which the correspondence network was used to propagate the ṭemu across the varied modalities of mind, mouth and clay. Implicit in the political correspondence of the Assyrian empire was a cosmology and ontology fixated upon implementing the ṭemu of Aššur: a continual authoring of a divine script for the world. This concept of action and intention traversed the boundaries of interior and exterior selves, necessitating a political form that was equipped to dominate both. A repertoire of techniques were used to inculcate the appropriate emotions within the inhabitants of the Assyrian world: the appropriate libbu, the exhibition of ṣplḥ and ṣrhṣ.

The ṭemu of Aššur—manifested in the Assyrian imperial project—was not alone in having designs on shaping the world. All beings had the capacity for autonomous action, including the elite whose task it was to shape the world in accordance with the divine design. The multiple communicative events of the letters represented sites for the instantiation and reproduction of the Assyrian hierarchy and ṭemu-order, but also, through various linguistic strategies of citation, presentation and indirection, they allowed the self to navigate the totalising process of empire, and even afforded an opportunity to nudge its trajectory.

This chapter is divided into three parts: how subjects used language to relate to the past, to the future, and to each other. In the first, we explore how speakers situated themselves in relation to the past: to ṭemu already unfolded, past thoughts, intents and acts now inscribed in the perceptible world. Through quotation and citation, an Assyrian speaking subject was able to situate themselves within a dialogic chain of intentional beings. This site of quotation was thus a field in which subjects

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273 See p.22.
274 For which see p.57 on differential ṭemu and p.106 on autonomies.
275 Research into these social categories of speaking to, with and about others has been a strong current of linguistic anthropology. Brenneis’ typology of indirect language use indeed posits whether any language can be completely direct (1986: 345), and see also Lempert 2012.
were able to negotiate their own agency in the face of an imperial imperative, the vehicle of temu, a linguistic form which foresaw only is own manifestation.

The second section delves into the imperative and the imagined futures more generally. Fractally embedded within the quotations addressed in the first section, or contained within the projected future dialogue of the letter itself (that is, the words directly owned by the ‘speaker’ of the letter which were transcribed by a scribe (who could also be a speaker) to be read out in a future dialogue), these future-facing forms were another field in which the temu-intentions of imperial subjects wrestled with each other. These linguistic styles of relating to the future were socially distributed across registers, thus reproducing a socially bound hierarchy of agency. However, despite the provisionality of precative forms, these linguistic strategies provided a space in which subordinate subjects could reassert their own agency through indirection, allusion and suggestion, reasserting their own intentionality and affectivity in the face of a totalising imperial temu.

Finally, we examine how these strategies of relating to past and future were employed to manage relations between subjects of the imperial state. A brief survey of the norms of the official register leads us into a case study of a small dossier of letters between two provincial imperial officials, which allows us to see how these norms were manifested and manipulated in a non-royal relationship.

Tablets and Time
Cuneiform communication could manipulate time itself. Inscription preserved an utterance by transmuting it into signs, allowing it to endure beyond a sound event. For some texts, this could result in their deliberate transmission over thousands of years, a phenomenon that historians have dubbed the ‘stream of tradition.’ However, the documents we are concerned with were not part of any tradition. They represented artefacts of the processes of imperial communication, localised and ephemeral: a sequence of multiple procedures.

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276 Verbal moods indicating a possible, or even hoped for future event.
277 Veldhuis has critiqued the metaphor of the ‘stream of tradition,’ arguing that it strips ancient scribes of their own personal agency when preserving, copying and revising texts (2012: 12).
278 For which see p.23.
Two intermediary dialogues bookended this sequence of procedures: the face-to-face dictation and inscription of the letter by the speaker to the scribe, and the decoding of the message and its performance to the recipient at the other end. As we saw in the introduction, the two ‘real-time’ events are also ‘shadow dialogues’: though necessary to the process of cuneiform correspondence, they were covert and appeared only in trace form. Correspondence norms portrayed a direct dialogue between the principal and the recipient—the animator is effaced.279 Thus, the interaction is socially and temporally ‘collapsed,’ mimicking a single dialogue by stitching together at least two events into a single whole. Linguistic anthropologist Richard Bauman, whose interests lie in the ethnography of speaking and verbal performance,280 conceptualises this more formally:

Following Judith Irvine (1996), we may say that mediation sets up implicational or indexical relationships between a sequence of dialogues. I will call the first dialogue in the sequence the source dialogue and the second and subsequent dialogue(s) in the sequence the target dialogue(s). Stated more fully, the source dialogue reaches ahead cataphorically to at least one target dialogue, involving the recontextualization of at least one utterance (which I will term the source utterance) from the source dialogue, and, reciprocally, the target dialogue reaches back anaphorically to—or presupposes—a source dialogue from which the recontextualized utterance (the target utterance) is projected into the target dialogue.

Bauman:2004: 130

What implications will this have for our understanding of Assyrian correspondence? Firstly, the cataphoric nature of a petition or command, by presupposing a future context in which it will be relevant, necessitates a certain level of political imagination, whether that be the king expecting his officials to obey his commands, or a supplicant hoping that the king might hear his pleas. Such imaginations are reflected in grammatical constructions that indicate this futurity, distributed across socially stratified speaking registers. The imperative was generally used when the target dialogue was with someone of lower status; the third-person precative if the target dialogue was with someone of higher status. This social distribution of linguistic devices for relating to the future led to an equally hierarchical distribution of the relationships of Assyrian subjects towards a future, one where those with social power envisaged act and fact, and lesser agents a shifting, indirect realm of possibilities.

279 For more on the typology of ‘animator,’ ‘principal’ and ‘recipient,’ see p.22.
280 See Bauman 2018: 10-11; the whole article offers an intellectual autobiography.
On the scale of the whole letter-utterance, we find some extraordinarily complex projected dialogues: see Šamaš-bunaya and Nabu-nammir’s letter to Tiglath-pileser, or Sargon’s letter cited by Mannu-ki-Ninua later in this chapter for examples. Correspondence provided a space, afforded by the inscribed nature of writing, where alternative futures could be envisioned, attitudes and affects to them explored, and consequences worked out. In the letter, the Assyrian elite could ‘shape’ reality through social action.

Finally, the space of Assyrian correspondence was filled with various voices, characters, entities, all speaking, making claims, ordering, begging, insulting, delivered through various forms of reported speech. The analysis of the representation of voices and dialogic speech has a rich history in sociolinguistic anthropology, which draws on Bakhtin and Vološinov’s work, introduced on p.24. Not only do they emphasise the dialogic, communicative aspect of utterance-in-use as opposed to a reified structural linguistics, but their approach foregrounds the consciousness and interiority of the speaker. All verbal utterances participate in an extended chain of dialogue with each other, to the point that ‘any utterance... is only a moment in the continuous process of verbal communication’ (Vološinov 1973: 95). All human language is in response to another, and through its quotation it is subject to manipulation within the reporter’s consciousness (Vološinov 1973: 116-117).

This has been taken up by ethnographers of communication, who were particularly interested in the representation of voices in reported speech. A narrator will have to make choices about what voices represent what, which utterances to align oneself to and distance oneself from, thus creating and negotiating subjectivity, as exemplified in Hill’s expert analysis of a Mexicano peasant’s narrative on the murder of his son (1995). Similar kinds of negotiation occur in Assyrian correspondence narratives, for example, with the lamination of the speaker into a past voice, the voice narrating the letter, an internal dialogue voice, and future voices, together with a wide cast of other people’s thoughts and voices (including unattributed speech, such as popular proverbs). This led to the richly polyphonic utterances we are about to encounter.
4.1 Citationality, Authority and the Past

There is a word... He who has been wounded in his back may talk with his mouth, but he who is wounded in his mouth, how can he talk?28a

The Assyrian communicative network was predicated on the ability to project through time. To compose a message, one needed to reach into the past to establish authority for one’s words, to manifest one’s subjectivity in the present and manage one’s relationship with interlocutors, and to imagine and shape the future with language. This artful composition was mediated by the method of transmission: rather than an unfolding face-to-face dialogue, the correspondence which comprises our evidence base was filtered through multiple consciousnesses and codes, an act of speech with one’s mouth becoming a ‘verbal performance’ in clay (to adapt Vološinov 1973: 95). The dialogic nature of interaction through Assyrian correspondence is thus magnified and extended across time and actors, a series of source and target dialogues reaching for each other across times and minds (Bauman 2004: 130).

Consequently, Assyrian correspondence is deeply intertwined with the interior-exterior relationship pulsating throughout the documents of their empire. Ṭemu, the expression of the will of the gods in thought, order, faculty and event, needed to traverse dangerous boundaries. The divine ṭemu was to be established in the earthly realm by the Assyrian elite, yet the code in which it crossed the boundary from the heavenly to the mundane needed the heavy weight of venerable Mesopotamian scholarship practiced by Assyrian experts to even interpret. In order to understand orders from his superiors, the gods, the Assyrian king needed to have their messages read out by the scribes: the ṭemu central to the movements of the Assyrian state thus already had to traverse the libbu of a scribe in order to be translated into a form intelligible to the king. From there, the king’s ṭemu, mediated through speech, tablet and scribe, flowed in and out of the libbus of the Assyrian people, manifested in the world as historical unfolding.

28a SAA 10 no. 294, rev. 11-12, Urad-Gula to Assurbanipal
To this end it was essential that the libbu was conditioned towards a state compatible with the authoring of Aššur’s ṭemu. We reviewed the capacities and conditions for the ideal Assyrian libbu in chapter two, and the techniques used to guide Assyrian subjects towards this ideal were the subject of chapter three. However, despite the ideal vision of a domain of Aššur comprised solely by subjects peacefully eating bread, drinking beer and working in their houses and fields, the slaves of the king, people were messy. They could act ki ramani, ‘according to self,’ harbouring hidden words in the privacy of the libbu, and through acting ki ramani they could even come into conflict with Aššur’s ṭemu, and defy it.

None of this could be discerned without language: reading the signs from the gods, promulgating ṭemu, reporting whatever you see and hear. The field of communication was thus a battleground upon which battles for Assyrian supremacy over territory, exterior and interior, were fought.

Propagating Power through Chains of Conversation

The thread of ṭemu was implicitly woven throughout the Assyrian correspondence through the use of endless quotation linking order and act. On the one hand, these quotations served as an aide-memoire, reminding the recipient of the letter of its background; adopting a framework characterising the classical European letter, Pirnguber describes these couplets as a straightforward case of a ‘narratio-petitio’ pairing (2015: 319-320).

On the other hand, the parallelism between these quotations and the subsequent ‘petitio’ could be extreme. This generic fidelity was indeed a convention, but a convention that produced and reproduced a scheme of powerful individuals affecting the world through speech:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ana kaspi ša ina paniya ša beli špura} \\
\text{umma ina qate rab kasîr šubila} \\
\text{adu ina qate ša rab kasîr ana bëliya ultebila}
\end{align*}
\]

Regarding the silver which is before me which my lord sent to me

\textit{QUOT} Send it to me in the hands of the chief tailor

Now, I have sent it to my lord in the hands of the chief tailor.

SAA 18 no. 21, obv. 9-rev. 13, Nurea to the sukkallu
There is almost a one-to-one correspondence between the words attributed to the sukallu, in direct speech, and the words of Nurea. The indexical transformation takes on features of status marking: the sukallu, a high ranking official in the Assyrian hierarchy, uses direct address and the imperative to talk down to his subordinate; Nurea, in return, refers to the sukallu indirectly, using a description of their relationship (beliya ‘my lord’) instead of direct second-person. Finally, the imperative šubila ‘send to me’ is transformed into the perfect past ultebila ‘I have sent,’ indicating the manifestation of the imperative.

This slavish imitation of the words of the powerful was so embedded in routine it became a conventional feature of correspondence discourse. However, even though such replication was conventional it was certainly not an unrecognised, subconscious habit, but specifically and intentionally directed. Esarhaddon writes to Aššur-ušallim, a royal agent of unknown standing, directing him to ensure that the accurately encoded words were transmitted securely:

ma ṭupšarru issen ... ısu pišu lištur ina libbi ispillurte lišnu Ahu-dur-enši rab kišir ša mar-šarri ina libbi kalli arḫiš ana muḫḫiya lubila

QUOT One scribe... should write it from his mouth and seal it with the Y-shaped seal, and Aḫu-dur-enshi the cohort commander of the son of the king should bring it to my presence quickly via the mule-express.

SAA 16 no. 148, rev. 9-18, Aššur-ušallim to Esarhaddon

The emphasis on high fidelity movement of words to Esarhaddon, is evident here: the king demands only one scribe transcribe words from ‘his’ mouth, and that this tablet be sealed with the crown prince’s seal and sent in the hands of a trusted man via exclusive roads. Thus, the utterance was, as far as possible, replicated to the utmost of Assyrian ability, hedged about with security measures to ensure its words would not be altered, changed or intercepted.

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282 E.g., SAA 16 no. 137 obv. 8 šalšu nissallu, and even Esarhaddon does it when corresponding with his mother: ki ša ummi šarri taqbu nianu ina pittema aqšibi ‘Just as the mother of the king has spoken, in the same way I have spoken’ SAA 16 no. 2, obv. 8-rev. 1. Further examples are too numerous to list here.

283 Who the -šu in pišu ‘his mouth’ refers to is unclear, as the tablet is damaged here.

284 That there was a concern with the changeability of the cuneiform utterance could be found in Esarhaddon’s ade-treaty: šumma abutu ša Aššur-aḫu-iddina šar Aššur tennani tušannani ‘If you change or cause to be change the word of Esarhaddon the king of Assyria’ (SAA 2 no. 6, obv. 58); see also the curses in SAA 18 no. 24, prefaced with ša dababu anna innu ‘The one that changes these words...’ (obv. 12’).
Nested Dialogues and Communication Diagrams

The accurate replication of utterances was paramount to the exercise of Assyrian power, as emphasised in this letter from the envoys Šamaš-bunaya and Nabu-nammir, whom Tiglath-pileser sent to acquire the fealty of the Babylonians:

We spoke with the sons of Babylon like this

3.QUOT The king has sent us before you

3.QUOT [I shall speak] with the sons [of Babylon] with your mouths like [this]:

3.QUOT I shall establish [the am]ne[sty o]f Babylon and your privileged status and I am coming to Babylon.

Here, the letter-writers take great pains to describe the dialogic map underlying the assignation of responsibility for various utterances, ultimately leading to Tiglath-pileser himself. They write that they spoke *ki anni* ‘like this’, introducing their direct quoted speech in the first person (Past ŠB and NN). Then, in their speech to the Babylonian, Past ŠB and NN immediately transfer responsibility for their words to the king Tiglath-pileser (Past TP), by quoting him directly, again introduced with *ma*. We can represent the various nested speech events by way of the following diagram (Figure 9):
The quoted speech of Tiglath-pileser is unfortunately damaged at a pivotal line where Past TP frames his speech. Here, Luukko reconstructs *anni ladbub*, which is a justified suggestion in this context; we have *ina pikunu* ‘in your mouths,’ and a *ma* indicating direct speech. I differ from Luukko in considering the following sentence to be another nested layer of speech. He attributes the *ma* to Past ŠB and NN’s speech layer, whereas I consider it to be a continuation of Past TP’s speech, indicating precisely what words he intended his envoys to speak. This is clearly indicated by the word *kiddinutkunu*, ‘your privileged status,’ which in this clause can only refer to the Babylonians he intends to speak to, marking an indexical shift from the *-kunu* in the previous clause, which referred to Past ŠB and NN.
The final speech layer then is an incredibly deeply nested voice: from Past TP’s perspective, it is a voice of Future TP, coming out of the mouths of Future ŠB and NN; yet from the perspective of Past ŠB and NN, Future TP is only a more recent Past TP; from the point of view of Šamaš-bunaya and Nabu-nammir, the voices of the letter indexed by anini, all this is past narration, embedded in a dialogue cataphorically stretching forward to Tiglath-pilesar once more.

The complexity of this utterance is managed through the economic usage of keying devices: phrases which transpose the interactions described (Goffman 1986: 45). Here, the keys move from a report to the king (the key of the tablet) to the audience with the Babylonians (ana mar Babili niqṭibi), to the envoys’ audience with the king (ma), and the imagined future utterance ([ladbub], plus ma again). However, as all these utterances are framed within the tablet representing Šamaš-bunaya’s and Nabu-nammir’s message to Tiglath-pilesar, they form a single set of what Goffman calls laminations, where each rekeying adds a new layer to the framed activity of communicating this report to the king.

We have stepped through this convoluted communication diagram in detail because it aptly demonstrates the careful allocation of responsibility and voices taking place in these delicate discussions with the Babylonians. Ultimately, the final responsibility rests with the voice of the king, who is the only one the Babylonians wish to negotiate with, as Šamaš-bunaya and Nabu-nammir go on to write:

They did not consent [to open the gate for us]. ‘If we let you enter Babylon what can I say to the king when the king himself comes?’

SAA 19 no. 98, obv. 24-29, Šamaš-bunaya and Nabu-nammir to Tiglath-pilesar

This refusal explains at least why Šamaš-bunaya and Nabu-nammir, in their account to the king, were at pains to strictly lay out the communication diagram to emphasise that, despite portraying themselves as nothing more than vessels for the king’s words, the Babylonians did not view them as coterminous with the king, though the king ‘spoke with their mouths.’ Indeed, in the subsequent

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286 The refusal of consent—la immaggur (obv. 24) here—was a key way in which the imperial temu was resisted, and subjective autonomy reasserted. See p.262.
narrative detailing the rest of their interactions the envoys are at pains to emphasise direct quotation and replication.\(^\text{287}\) This careful accounting of quoted speech appears throughout the correspondence in potentially challenging exchanges:

\[
\text{mar-špriya ša ina muḫḫi paḥtti ša putuwa aṣpurun ittalka ki ša šarru beli išpuranni iddubaššu}
\]
\[
\text{ma at-a aninu salmani attunu attunu bi-ri-tiši tu-šabbata}
\]

My messenger whom I sent [to] the governor who is my opposite has come back. He talked to him like the king my lord wrote to me

\[3.\text{QUOT}\]

Why, when we are reconciled, do you seize our forts?

SAA 5 no. 2, obv. 7-15, Nashir-Bel to Sargon

In this letter, a governor writes to Sargon describing an interaction with a correspondingly powerful individual in Uraṛtu. Once again, in a delicate situation involving autonomous subjects, we have the king’s speech being carefully replicated: the messenger speaks to the Uraṛtian governor with words just like what the king wrote. By emphasising the citational, royal origin of the spoken utterance, the speakers in these later contexts are thus able to not only authorise their dialogue with the authority of the king,\(^\text{288}\) but disclaim responsibility for the outcomes of the exchange. Citing the king’s speech directly thus effaced the responsibility and autonomy of the subjects along the transmission chain: they deliberately reduced themselves to mouths through which the king spoke.\(^\text{289}\)

\(^{287}\) dibbi ma’duti issišunu niddubub ‘we spoke many words with them’ (SAA 19 no. 98 obv. 18); ki anni nīqiṭbaššunu ‘we spoke to them like this’ (rev. 1); ki annimma issi Babili nidabbub ‘we have been talking with the sons of Babylon just like this’ (rev. 6).

\(^{288}\) This authority is especially drawn upon through entextualisation processes, as reviewed by Kuipers (2013: 404). The ability to detach words from a specific context and render them repeatable, with this repetition of the authoritative words continually reauthorising the words through time. This is extensively encountered in the Assyrian ritual text, but also in contexts such as citing the ‘the king’s father,’ as below. See also SAA 18 no. 72, obv. 12’–rev. 6 for a nice example.

\(^{289}\) The Assyrian recognition of the creative potential that could arise from this kind of verbal transmission is evident in the way in which subjects could envision future ‘personae’ to place words into:

\[
\text{ša šarru beli išpuranni}
\]
\[
\text{ma ina muḫḫi Ludu šupru}
\]
\[
\text{ma issi ekall li ina muḫḫi issa[pruni] iṛtu’ubuni}
\]
\[
\text{ma [x x x x]}
\]

Concerning that which the king my lord sent to me

\[3.\text{QUOT}\]

Write to Ludu

\[3.\text{QUOT}\]

They se[nt to me] from the Palace, shaking

\[3.\text{QUOT}\]

\[x x x x]\]

SAA 15 no. 100, obv. 16-19, Mannu-ki-Nimua to Sargon
This attention to accuracy and replication was not restricted to large geopolitical contexts however, but is also found in scholarly contexts:

\textit{ina muḫḫi ṭeme ša šarru beli īškunannini dūbi gabbu ina ūppi āssatār ki ša šarru beli ina pišu iqbanī ina puti iqiṭibunu salmu šu}

Concerning the \textit{ṭemu} that the king my lord established upon me, I wrote all the words on a tablet. Just as the king my lord spoke from his mouth they spoke correspondingly; it is safe.

SAA 10 no. 245, rev. 1-6, Marduk-šakin-šumi to the king

Though the specific context to this letter is obscure, Marduk-šakin-šumi’s duties as the chief \textit{āšipu} involved maintaining the spiritual wellbeing of the royal family, requiring interventions in the cosmic sphere of divine powers. His office was such that his duties were just as consequential as those of governors on the Assyrian frontier: thus we have the king speaking specific words, and Marduk-šakin-šumi emphasising the flow of those words from the king’s mouth to the tablet, in his account.

The accurate replication of the words of the king and Assyrian officials was a cornerstone in transmitting and unfolding the \textit{ṭemu} of Aššur throughout the realm. However, though integral to the perpetuation of Assyrian power, quoting the speech of the powerful was used to achieve a speaker’s ends as well. For example, in a letter between two unnamed Babylonian cities, the author writes:

\textit{šarru belani iqabbi}
\textit{umma ẖubassuna la tahabbata}
\textit{u attunu ana kunnutu tallakani ġuhtī ultū libbi alini taḥabbata’}

The king our lord says
\textbf{QUOT} You will not plunder booty from them!
And you are in truth coming here and plundering booty from the interior of our city.

SAA 18 no. 72, rev. 1-6

As with Nurea and Aššur-ušallim’s letters above, we have a parallelism between the cited words of the king and the speaker’s own voice. However, here we have a disjuncture: the king has said one

\textbf{I have indented the translation of this example to demonstrate just how heavily nested the speech is, which shows marked adeptness in conceptually managing polyphonic voices in communication to convey certain messages. An interesting aspect of this quotation is the unspecified ‘they’ who wrote from the Palace. This collective voice, which is described as exhibiting √\textit{rʾb}, demonstrates the deployment of a specific affect—the somatic visual evidence of anger—to intimidate and control. This can be contrasted with similar deployments of √\textit{rʾb} which are directly assigned to the king, e.g., SAA 16 nos. 71, 121.}
thing, but the state of affairs is in fact the opposite. Furthermore, the king is not a present party to
this interaction: his past voice is being used to contrast the way things should be with the way things
are, *ana kunnutu* ‘in truth.’

Here we thus have an instance in which the royal words, the *ḥemu* of Aššur, are currently ineffective:
the unnamed second party is still plundering in spite of the king’s orders. The implication here is
that citing the king’s words draws on his royal authority to change the presently problematic
situation. The king’s words are framed with *iqabbi* ‘he says,’ a durative form indicating a continuing
process. This suggests that the transformation of the world to the royally ordered state remains an
ongoing process; the king’s words are still effective and in the process of being spoken.

In a similar fashion we have a letter written to Esarhaddon citing Esarhaddon’s unfulfilled past
speech, in an attempt to get the king to act upon his words. The quotation is framed in particularly
florid terms:

\[
\text{ina pika ellu ša Šamaš u Marduk ikarrabuš indaqtu}
\]
\[
\text{ma bitka irappiš}
\]
\[
\text{enna ina šilli šarri beliya lirpiš}
\]

From your pure mouth which Šamaš and Marduk bless fell

3,QUOTE

Your house will increase.

Now let it increase under the shadow of the king my lord.

SAA 18 no. 60, rev. 11-right. edge. 18, Aqar-Bel-lumur to Esarhaddon

Here in a petition to the king, we have Aqar-Bel-lumur creating a parallelism between a previous
royal utterance and a future state of affairs. Unlike the letters discussed previously, where the
senders take pains to describe the communication diagram in great detail, Aqar-Bel-lumur instead
heaps praise on the source of the words he quotes themselves, the ‘pure mouth’ blessed by the gods.
The use of *indaqtu* ‘it fell’ sets up a poetic spatial relation: the speech descending upon
Aqar-Bel-lumur from the height of his superior. Aqar-Bel-lumur refrains from praising the content
of the words themselves—we might conjecture that it would be a bit too on the nose for him to do
so—and so indirectly adds heft to Esarhaddon’s words by valorising their source in the narrative
that frames them. Consequently, the following parallelism equating the past quotation with the
hoped-for future (*bitka irappiš → lirpiš* ‘your house will increase’ → ‘may it increase’) is relatively
unmarked; the phrase *ina šilli šarri* ‘in the shadow of the king’ is the only flourish and puts us in
mind of the ‘ideal’ descriptions of the Assyrian world we encountered in chapter 3.
Arguing over the King’s Words

Thus far, the examples we have seen of quoted speech, royal speech in particular, have straightforwardly engaged with the question of truth: the cited words are transparently taken to be accurate. Indeed, accepting the accuracy of these words not only gives them force, but recognises and reproduces royal authority through ‘authorizing acts’ that require the participation of the receiver (Kuipers 2013: 409). However, there are occasions in which the king’s word is disputed, and in which one party must be misrepresenting it.

In both contexts the disputes are to do with contention over power and authority. The first scenario concerns Esarhaddon’s programme to reestablish the city of Babylon after Sennacherib’s devastation of it. The author, Zakir, describes a dispute between the Babylonians and some Sealanders, both of whom marshal royal words for their own ends:

```
mare ša Eṭiru Mat-Tamti [x x x ...] šarru ittišunu ipteqiq [x x x ...] uṣṣabitu
umma amat šarri ši [x x x ...] ana abbekuša ša nisḫi iddinu binnannaši

Babilaya u Ubaru šakin ṭemī
umma ul amat šarri ši
umma šaddaqad ina Kalaḫ ana muḫši suddunu [ša] ḫubullu labiratu ša ina šalami ša Babili [šarru k]i
tamḫura šarru lihašiša ana muḫšišunu itešqa
[umma] ina Babili minu šakin
umma alu ḫepu [šu
umma] anaku ultešib u dararšu altakan
[umma] annitu amatu ša ina pi šar matati belini [imquta]
```

The king appointed [x x x ...] with him the sons of Eṭiru of the Sealand [x x x ...] they seized

 QUOT It is the word of the king [x x x] Give us [x x x] which was given to your fathers as a nisḫu-payment.

The Babylonians and Ubaru the establisher-of-temū

 QUOT That is not a word of the king.

 QUOT Last year in Kalḫu when you encountered the [king’s] concerning the giving [of] old debts of the wellbeing of Babylon, the king, his interior jumped concerning you

 [QUOT] What is established in Babylon?

 QUOT The city was broken

 [QUOT] it was I, I resettled it and established its freedom

 [QUOT] This was the word that [fell] from the mouth of the king of the lands our lord.

SAA 10 no. 169, obv. 1-12, Zakir to Esarhaddon

Once again in this letter we have a multiplicity of nested voices, distinguished primarily by indexicality, giving rise to multiply laminated voices. The section of the tablet which bore the signs representing the Sealanders’ speech is damaged, but it appears as if they do not quote the king when

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293 This recalls our exploration of ʾšmʾ-‘hearing, and also presages our exploration of ʾmgr ‘consent’ in chapter six.
they assert that it is the king’s word they are implementing: the imperative binnannaši ‘give to us’ terminates with a first person plural dative, suggesting it is not the king’s voice being directly quoted.

Consequently, it is all the more telling that in the speech attributed to Ubaru and the Babylonians, they specifically cite the king’s direct speech to back up their argument. The royal speech itself is ostensibly unaltered, but framed with šarru libbašu ana muḫḫikunu ilteštā ‘the king, his interior jumped concerning you,’ i.e. he was angry. This added commentary on the king’s delivery of his words further buttresses the speakers’ construction of authority: not only are they reproducing the king’s words, but by portraying him as angry they implicitly place Eṭiru and friends in an abject position, as targets of royal rage. Finally, to emphasise the accuracy of the quotation, the Babylonians cite the source of the words as ‘the mouth of the king of the lands, our lord.’

Similar contentions over royal speech are described in a letter we revisit from chapter two, that of Bel-ušezib describing power plays in the southern Mesopotamian city of Uruk. In our previous discussion we focused on the threat of an impermeable libbu,⁹⁰ which made it impossible to pin down the agitator Ḫinnumu’s intentions. However, Bel-ušezib, in describing all that he has seen and heard, is able to quote the speech of one of Ḫinnumu’s associates:

šarru beliya lu medi Ša-Nabu-[ša x x x] ša ittišu x ki uṣṣa’ ina pan Babiya[ya u ][Urukaya ] idabbo
umma      šarru ana Ḫinnumu iltapru
            umma      la ta[plā]|h] šakin temuti ša Uruk attuka paniya ana mamma šanam[ma x x] ul anamdin
            u ša ina muḫḫik lu idbu][bu gabbišanu ina qate[ša] ašakkan

u ana Ahhešaya maršu ša Nanaya-uṣallī iqt[ta]bi
umma      mimma mala šarru ittīka u itti Urukaya idabbūbu gabbi pirṣata

The king my lord, let him know that Ša-Nabu-šu, who is with [Ḫinnumu] is talking, out in the open, before the Babylonians and the Urukeans

The king has sent to Ḫinnumu

You do not [vplk]. The establishing-temu-post of Uruk is for you. I will not give it to anyone before me and everyone talking about you I shall place in [your] hands.

And to Ahhešaya, the son of Nanaya-uṣallī, he spok[ke]

Whatever the king has talked with you and with the Urukeans, all of it is a lie...

SAA 18 no. 125, obv. 4'-11', Bel-ušezib to Esarhaddon

⁹⁰ See p.99.
In this account, Ša-Nabu-šu has taken things one step further than the Sealanders in the previous letter: he presents the king's speech in a direct quotation (or rather, Bel-ušezib has him present Esarhaddon’s speech in a direct quotation). In contrast with Zakir’s description of the Babylonian’s attribution of the word of the king as directly witnessed in audience, derived from the royal mouth, here Ḥinnnumu is described as having had the king ‘send’ to him. In other words, Ḥinnnumu received a letter. Recall that though central to the operation of Assyrian rule, letters were considered untrustworthy for sensitive communication—the mouth of the king was the authoritative source for all utterances. Thus, the ‘word of the king’ being communicated in a letter, in this nested narrative, underplays the accuracy of that dialogue. In contrast, Bel-ušezib’s communication of Ša-Nabu-šu’s speech is to be trusted: that speech is being delivered out in the open for all to hear.

Moving to Ša-Nabu-šu’s words themselves, it is notable that Bel-ušezib does not break up the speech with a scaffolding of quotatives—the Babylonian umma particle here—unlike many other quotations we have come across. Rather, he sticks with one umma to introduce the passage and any nested speech within it. On the one hand this could be attributed to a stylistic quirk of Bel-ušezib’s idiolect. None of his other letters have quotations of direct speech of quite this length, so a firm conclusion cannot be reached. On the other hand, it could be that this withdrawal of quotative interpolation is an attempt to further distance himself from the seditious speech he is quoting, a marker of tension between needing to accurately reproduce the words in order to report them to the king without associating himself with them. Bel-ušezib continues to build his case against Ḥinnnumu by reaching to ever more distant past dialogues: he quotes a letter Ḥinnnumu sent to the king of Elam, and a dialogue between Ḥinnnumu and Sennacherib, ‘the king your father’. The dialogue here is relatively straightforward, with both

292 Besnier’s analysis of reported speech in the Nukulaelae language locates the expression of affect, and potentially parody, in certain patterns of pragmatic organisation of quoted discourse in oral interaction (1992: 174-5). He observes how the configuration of pragmatic quoting devices enables the ‘reporter’s voice to ‘leak’ onto the quote, and yields what Bakhtin… calls a parodic stylization of the quoted voice.’ (1992: 175). In this instance, the transmutability of the utterance into cuneiform provides a space for deferral and delay (Morris 2007: 377), which allows further transformation and development of the utterance as it is textualised. Joining these insights together, we could argue that the withdrawal of the ma quotative is an emphatic withdrawal of leakage, specifically because the animator of the utterance, when it is spoken before Esarhaddon, will not be Bel-ušezib at all—it will be a bel temi. This discontinuity between the principal, the quoted speech, and the animator could thus suggest an inverted model of pragmatic distribution of quotatives as a disclaimer of responsibility to that we find in an oral interaction.

293 Rev. 8-13.
Ḫinnumu and Sennacherib’s voices framed only by √qb’ ‘speak,’ a verb with stronger connotations of authoritative speech than √dbb. This dearth of commentary, devoid of explicit evidential statements, further serves to create a representational style where Bel-ušezib’s role is effaced and the dialogues he wants to present to Esarhaddon, as well as their speakers, are foregrounded.

The father of the king

The voice of ‘the father of the king’ was one that was deployed intermittently by correspondents as a particularly authoritative and trustworthy augment to their arguments. In Bel-ušezib’s letter, the voice of Sennacherib was presented without comment, speaking for himself. We can contrast this with two further deployments of the royal forefather. Firstly, the ašipu and scholarly advisor Adad-šumu-ušur quotes a letter of Assurbanipal:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ša šarru [beli] išpuranni} \\
\text{ma} & \text{ ina pi ša abiya asseme ki qinnu kentu attununi u anaku uma uda atamar} \\
\text{abuša ša šarri belya šalam Bel šu u šarra beli šalam Belma šu} \\
\text{ina pi ša z belenya ittuqa mannu uḫḫar ušanna mannu šannan} \\
\text{That which the king [my lord] sent to me} \\
\text{3.QUOT I have heard from the mouth of my father that you are a loyal family} \\
\text{and now I myself know and have seen.} \\
\text{The father of the king, my lord, he is the image of Bel, and the king my lord, he is too the image of Bel.} \\
\text{This has fallen from the mouth of my two lords. Who can later repeat it? Who can rival it?}
\end{align*}
\]

SAA 10 no. 228, obv. 14-22, Adad-šumu-ušur to Assurbanipal

Here, once again, this exchange is structured parallelistically, with the correspondent’s response mirroring that of the king’s speech he is quoting and replying to. However, unlike the examples cited previously, the parallelism here is not slavishly explicit, but rather draws on the royal speech quoted by Assurbanipal to create further analogies and relationships.

Firstly, Esarhaddon’s voice is strongly effaced in Assurbanipal’s speech: rather than his words being presented in direct speech (which would have been introduced with the quotative ma) we instead have an indirect description of what he said (introduced with ki ‘like, as, when, that’). In Assurbanipal’s speech itself, the king draws a relationship between what he has heard from his father’s mouth—an implicitly reliable source—and what he has seen and verified himself. Not only

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\[294\] For which see below, p.184.
does this echo the importance of first-hand experience, but it sets up a relation at least of equality between Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal (if not supercession). Adad-šumu-uṣur develops this theme in his response: both the father of the king and the king are images of the god Bel, and the words Assurbanipal says fell from both their mouths (and again we have the usage of ṣmqt ‘fall,’ emphasising a superior-inferior spatiality).

The voice of the father of the king shaded into the use of past voices more generally to construct arguments and establish authority. In another letter to Esarhaddon, Bel-ušezib first brings to mind the precedent of the king’s father, thus setting up the authoritative past in relation to a deficient present. Then he proceeds to cite the words attributed to Lugalkuršarri, a king styled with an antique Sumerian name, in an unfortunately damaged passage that deals with libbu and mouth, interior and exterior, in some way. This ancient precedent is even further compounded by citing the speech of the divine:

\[\text{ilani rabati ana Bel ṣqtabu} \]
\[\text{umma ṣuṣqu u šušpulu [ṣi] lu qatu ḫka} \]

\text{Marduk ša niši atta Bel aki šimati [x x x ta]šilatika iltem aki ša Bel maḫru [šarru bela li]puš:}
\text{šaqu šu pilli u šapiš [šišqi]}
\text{The great gods spoke to Bel}
\text{QUOT To raise high and bring low: [this] EMPH is in your hands.}

You are the Marduk of the people. Bel decreed as your destiny ... your glorius x x x]. As that equal to Bel, may [the king my lord act: Bring low the high and [raise up] the low.

\text{SAA 10 no. 112, rev. 29-33, Bel-ušezib to Esarhaddon}

Here, Bel-ušezib quotes from Enuma eliš, a Babylonian epic of creation which was undergoing renewed interest in Assyria at this time (Frame 2008: 27). The intertextuality here, between the account of the appointment of Marduk to divine kingship (Enuma eliš tablet IV l. 8), and Bel-ušezib’s exhortation to Esarhaddon to do the same, is explicit: aki ša Bel maḫru ‘as that equal to Bel.’ The

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295 P.21.
296 In a similar vein we have a letter to Assurbanipal where he was crown prince, where the correspondent Šumaya invokes ‘the king your father’ (i.e., Esarhaddon) having seen Šumaya’s work firsthand (SAA 16 no. 34, obv. 4). This again underlines how, even though it is described in language here, the importance of sight by the powerful and the royal, overriding the mere hearing of words. See also SAA 10, no. 173, where Marduk-šumu-uṣur cites the precedent of the father of the king to bolster his argument.
297 šarru abuka 10 šanati ina muḫši šandabakkutu utetiq enna ina šatti 3 šandabakki... ‘The king your father allowed the governorship of Nippur to continue for ten years—now in one year three governors...’ SAA 10 no. 112 rev. 9-10
298 Rev. 20-23.
king's role, as the 'Marduk of the people,' explicitly quotes that of Marduk. However, this quotation is incomplete, as Esarhaddon is being implored to raise the low and bring down the high. Thus, we have a quotation from past authority being used not only to supplement a case or argument, but being used to reinforce a certain ontological order—that of the Assyrian king corresponding to the king of the gods—as well as being used to bring it about. Quotations of past language, then, were integral towards unfolding the future, not only in the restricted fashion of mirroring the king's speech, but also in a creative vein: Bel-ušezib, by drawing on the historical and literary past, aims to shape the future through the use of quotation.

From Citationality to Metalanguage to Language Ideology

\textit{abutu ša šarri beliya ki šade šapšuqat}

The word of the king, my lord, is strait like the mountains\textsuperscript{299}

The Assyrian consciousness of the different ways of speaking, their different purposes, features and registers, is indicative of an implicit awareness of genre and the varieties of language. Of explicitly named categories, \textit{dibbi ūbatu} 'good words,' \textit{abat šarri} 'word of the king,' \textit{mamiṣu} 'oath,' \textit{ade} 'treaty' and \textit{qibitu} 'command' are all associated with the hierarchical process of the empire. In addition, the less deliberately theorised strains of language, such as quotations from the father of the king, contribute to an emergent 'metalanguage' that classified different genres of talk that could be mobilised for particular politicised ends.

The concept of different language registers was in evidence during the Old Babylonian period, where a text describes the \textit{lišanu} 'tongue, speech' 'of priest, shepherd, sailor and silversmith' (Veenhof 1987: 38). Though no such typology exists for the speech of the Neo-Assyrian letters, correspondents would build up polyphonic compositions not only from the quotidian utterances of other subjects, but other materials such as named scholarly compositions,\textsuperscript{300} collected scholarly

\textsuperscript{299} SAA 10 no. 294, rev. 7, Urad-Gula to Esarhaddon
\textsuperscript{300} E.g., SAA 8 no. 242, where the unassigned author cites a couple of omens before pre-empting the king's query about their source not being the series \textit{Šumma-izbu}. Although the text is damaged, this letter portrays an expected royal engagement with sources and citational authority. See also Lieberman 1990: 320; Veldhuis 2310: 83 ff.
sayings, proverbs, and even statistical records. There was a recognition of ‘verbal art’ as useful in the quotidian realm.

The most interesting implicit metalanguage emerges however in the differentiation drawn between √dbb and √qbʾ. Both these words are generally translated ‘to speak,’ however the contexts in which they are used are subtly different. We have already encountered √dbb used to describe an interior dialogue. In addition to this, √dbb is employed in contexts with various negative connotations:

\[
\text{ina muḥḥi Ḫargi puagi idabbub}
\]
He is talking concerning a takeover of the land of Ḫargu

SAA 5 no. 149, rev. 2-3, unassigned to Sargon

\[
\text{mar-šipriya ḫṭī[ṣi]}
\]

\[
\text{ma ata muḥḥi urdani ša šarri taddhabu}
\]

\[
\text{...}
\]

\[
\text{issu beti la usṣa muḥḥi daukiya idabbubu}
\]

He wrong[ed] my messenger

3.QUOT Why are you talking concerning the servants of the king?

... I cannot leave the house, he is talking about killing me.

SAA 5 no. 260, obv. 4'-6' + rev. 10'-11', unassigned to Sargon

\[
\text{ekalli gabbi ana muḥḥiya ultedbibu}
\]
They have caused the whole palace to talk concerning me.

SAA 13 no. 185, rev. 8, Rašil to Esarhaddon/Assurbanipal

The three quotations above are all taken from accounts of fairly dark dealings, death and disorder. As a result, for each of these the editors translate √dbb not as ‘speaking’ but as ‘plotting,’ and the causative form as ‘turning against’ or inciting. √qbʾ has no such connotations. This implicit division of work between the two verbs thus implies an untheorised hierarchy of speech, with some ‘talk’—√qbʾ—more valued and authoritative than the more general and potentially dangerous √dbb. This

\[
3\text{Indicated by ša pi ummani ‘according to the expert,’ e.g. SAA 13 no.9 rev. 2. See Worthington 2012: 11 ff. for discussion.}
\]

\[
3\text{Utterances assigned to the ‘people,’ known as teltu ‘saying, proverb.’ Teltu were not assigned to any named subject or source, though they were sometimes described as being ina pi niši šakin ‘set in the mouth of the people.’ Five are preserved in the currently published correspondence. See the extended discussion of Esarhaddon’s letter to the non-Babylonians on p.239; also SAA 17 no. 27, rev. 13-15, Bel-iqīṣa to Sargon; SAA 10 no. 353, rev. 10-15, Mar-Issar to Esarhaddon; SAA 10 no. 198, rev. 9-14, Adad-šumu-uṣur to Esarhaddon.}
\]

\[
3\text{See note 21 to on p.21.}
\]

\[
3\text{For example, SAA 5 no. 234, obv. 16-17 [ameta] taklu ummaru ša dibbi ila ‘uni a trustworthy and select [man], capable in words’ Šarru-emuranni to Sargon; SAA 15 no. 199 rev.2-5 kina issen issu libbišunu aki dibbi lammaduti ina libbi Darati etarbu ‘When one from within them enters within Darati by studied words...’; SAA 5 no. 217 obv. 18 bel lišani šu ‘he is a master of language.’}
\]

\[
3\text{For which see chapter two.}
\]
division is complemented by the distribution of these terms in the royal inscriptions: in their archaising and grandiloquent Standard Babylonian dialect, √dbb is used in infrequent and highly marked negative contexts, whereas √qbʾ is used as the common verb for speech. Consequently, when transposed to the everyday Assyrian of the letters, √qbʾ retains its portentous and authoritative aura; √dbb is extended to cover all speech, including negatively uttered words.

This general interpretation of √dbb as tending towards the negative and √qbʾ tending towards the authoritative thus enables us to understand a somewhat mysterious letter written by Esarhaddon’s chief scribe, where he comments on the quality of the royal utterance:

[ša šarru] beli išpuranni
    ma insu issu be[t ina] betiyya ispillurti ʾısšu ʿunu
    ma abite leʾiti
[ša] ki ša apkallu gamratuni [a]butu ina muḫḫi taqatabbi abutu ša ki pi šikniša ana nerakiša ina simatiša qabʾatuni
    aḫḫiš tapalluni tapṭirtaša Ṭbašši
    ana puluḫti la šaknata
    la annu ša leʾutu ša ūpšarruti ša ki anni uštballunu
    dababu lu naʾid

[Concerning that which the king] my lord wrote to me
3.QUOT Perhaps as they have install[ed] the Y-shaped cross in my house
3.QUOT] my word will be capable.

[Regarding] this you shall be √qbʾ-speaking a [w]ord as complete as [that of] a sage—a word that is √qbʾ-spoken, like its setting in the mouth, for its neraku, in its appropriateness, that answers another, does its refutation exist? Does it not establish √piḫ?
Is this not the capability of the scribal art that I am discussing in this way?
Should the √dbb-talk be praised?

SAA 10 no. 30, bottom e. 15-rev. 11, Issar-šumu-ereš, chief scribe, to Esarhaddon

Interpreting this letter as a commentary on the different qualities of speaking—the abutu, √dbb and √qbʾ—allows us to disentangle the rhetorical questions of the chief scribe. The first question strongly underlines the authority of √qbʾ as an uttering of the king’s abutu-words. Most importantly, whilst he sets it in a context of dialogue (aḫḫiš tapalluni ‘answering another’) the act of √qbʾ stops this dialogue: there is no counter that can be raised against it. The royal abutu, delivered through √qbʾ, naturally establishes √piḫ. The discipline of the scribes, ūpšarrutu, ontologically undergirds the authority of the royal utterance.

The final question brings up the act of √dbb. The extended vowel writing (plene writing) da-ba-bu-u indicates a question, thus Issar-šumu-ereš is not saying that √dbb should be praised. Rather, the
rhetorical question is posited in order to further demarcate the royal √qbʾ from that of general talk, √dbb. Though √dbb is available to all the people, and indeed performed by the king himself, the king’s special authority to establish ṭemū, by way of abutu √qbʾ, is what makes his speech acts special, central to the Assyrian imperium.

Consequently, this loose collection of linguistic categories and genres, culminating in a social differentiation between the regular verbum dicendi of √qbʾ and √dbb, leads us to a field of issues explored by linguistic anthropologists that they have dubbed ‘language ideology.’306 This loosely refers to a set of thoughts, or even pre-reflective dispositions, that influence and guide linguistic practices; depending on their focus, ethnologists have foregrounded the structural (Silverstein) or the social and relational aspects (Irvine) of this set (Woolard 1998: 4).307 Helpfully, Woolard emphasises the ‘piecemeal and internally contradictory’ potential ideology can take (1998: 6). For our purposes here, we can note that a discursively explicit Assyrian ‘language ideology’ was limited to Sargon’s message to an official of Ur:

minamma ina šipirti akkadattu la tašaṭṭarma la tušebbila
kittu šipirtu ša ina ībbi tašaṭṭaru ki pi agannitimma idat lu šaknat

Why would you not write and send Akkadian in your message? Truth—the message that you have written within it is just as these words—a regulation is EMPH established!

SAA 17 no. 2 obv. 17-22, Sargon to Sin-iddina

Despite the ostensibly linguistic focus of Sargon’s stricture, the emphasis here is on the union of language and script—the cuneiform king demands Akkadian, which must be written in the script the principles of which undergirded the imperial ontology.

The value relationships governing spoken language-in-use were more implicit and complicated, as were their interactions with the cuneifying elite. We are aware that during this period the Neo-Assyrian language substantially intermixed with the Aramaic language, but that the extent to this is lost to us due to the bias of the preserved cuneiform sources.308 We can but speculate whether

306 It might seem theoretically incoherent to reintroduce the loaded term ‘ideology’ after having cast it aside in the previous chapter, but I briefly retain it here as an established terminus technici.
307 We might reflect on how a linguistic ideology that corrals Akkadian words into specifically formatted dictionaries can serve to regularise, compress and destroy ambivalent, difficult-to-translate concepts, like ṭemū for instance.
308 See discussion on p.21.
Aššur and the other Assyrian divinities could ‘speak’ in Aramaic; concluding that a language ideology that indelibly associated the word of the gods with cuneiform Akkadian is hamstrung by the fact that Aramaic cannot speak for itself. Despite this caveat, we still observe in script and speech a temporal cyclicality inherent in authoritative utterances. Both the re-citation of cuneiform texts and the recitation of the authoritative utterance of past officials suggest a principle of establishing antecedent and consequent statements together in a cyclic temporality. The speech of the powerful prefigured and configured the utterances of subordinate subjects: the ability to have others repeat your words was thus a source of power. We need only recall Nabu-ušallim’s threat to the Sealanders: *ki... qibaya la taqabba* ‘if you do not speak my speech...’ (SAA 18 no. 86 rev.13-14). Dialogues reached cataphorically backwards into both previous utterances establishing antecedent authority in a cyclic temporality of constant reutterance.¹⁰⁹

Yet the cyclic temporality also faces towards the future, and it is here that we encounter the clearest social distribution of speaking strategies, and one where we find a clear differentiation of power undergirded by the principle of controlling ambiguity: the powerful, who speak the future in imperatives that foresee their own replication into culture; the subordinate, who speak in ambiguous, open precatives.

### 4.2 Transforming the Future

*saḫittu ša šarri bel[i]ya ina dababi ma’di tannammar*

The desire of the king, [my] lord, will be seen through much talking²⁰³

The communication network mediated by the letters projected a complex series of relationships across speakers and time. The importance of correspondence reporting past events, unfolded ṭemu, to Assyrian officers was paramount. Consequently, the deferred dialogues of written correspondence offered a field in which subjects could create and negotiate authority and status, through artful citation, commentary and representation of past words, speakers, and events. This relationship with the past was intertwined with an analogous relationship with the future. The letter form itself was predicated upon an imagined future dialogue, an interaction where the words...

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¹⁰⁹ To this we might also add the Standard Babylonian ‘dialect’ itself, the register in which scribes deliberately used archaising constructions evoking the Old Babylonian dialect of the second millennium to compose monumental texts such as the royal inscriptions.

²⁰³ SAA 16 no. 64, rev. 4-5, unassigned to Esarhaddon
inscribed upon the tablet would become effective in their intended future context. On a deeper level was the futurity embedded within the grammatical form of the language itself. A realm of political imaginary was brought into being by modal particles like *issuri* ‘perhaps’ or *mindema* ‘maybe’. The current social context was reinscribed into the future through the appropriate use of the imperative or precative moods, reproducing forces of authority and deference. At the same time, these future-facing verbal acts embedded images and intentions of that future transformed, manifesting the will of their utterer as well as a social graph of subjects and agents inhabiting the imagined future.

In this section, we will first explore the projected realm of the future enforced by the imperative utterance, a ‘closed’ verbal form that carried *ṭemu*, a word to be made fact. We then move to its counterpart, the precative form, and examine how the ‘open’ and uncertain futures that could be expressed by it interacted with the authoritative facture of the future implemented by the Assyrian state.

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31 The similarities between the traditional precative case and the imperative have been remarked upon by structural linguists. In his presentation of the Old Babylonian modal system, Cohen cites Huehnergard who subsumes both the precative and the imperative under the category of ‘suppletive injunctive paradigm’ (Cohen 2005: 77). Cohen himself calls the set of precatives, imperatives, volitives, cohortatives, prohibitives and vetitives as the ‘precative forms’, of which the individual paradigms are the ‘precative paradigms’ (Cohen 2005: 78). In this thesis, I continue to distinguish between imperative forms and precative (*lu- and *li- prefixed) forms to maintain the emphasis on their social differentiation.
Imperatives

anaku Aššur-āḫu-iddina šarru dannu ša qibitsu la innennu la uštamsaku amat rubutišu... kiam aqbišuma umma immatema talteme amat šarri danni adi šinišu u anaku šarru dandannu adi šalašišu aşpurakamma la tašma zikir šaptiya...

I, Esarhaddon, mighty king, whose speech is immutable, whose princely word cannot be cast down... I spoke thus to him 'Did you ever hear the word of a mighty king twice? Yet I am an almighty king and have sent to you thrice, and you did not listen to the speech of my lips...\(^\text{312}\)

The imperative was the principal linguistic device through which šemu was communicated throughout the imperial hierarchy. The letters from superiors to inferiors we have encountered thus far demonstrate that whenever an order was to be communicated, a superior would invariably select the imperative form above all others:

\[
\begin{align*}
šarru beli šemu issaknanni \\
ma & sisse kayyamanute muḫuru ana Dadi dini \\
ma & sissu ša šarri muḫuru
\end{align*}
\]

The king my lord established šemu

3.QUOT Receive regular horses and give them to Dadi
3.QUOT Receive the horse of the king

SAA 19 no. 91, obv. 9-11, Aššur-daʾʾinanni, governor of Mazamua to Tiglath-pileser

In this letter, reproduced from chapter one,\(^\text{313}\) the king is quoted as delivering his commands using imperative forms, demonstrating the overriding use of the imperative in the face to instruct all actions, whether passive or active. Though dini, ‘give,’ is straightforward as an activity, muḫuru ‘receive’ is an almost passive action: it is principally the case of the governor being acted upon by the giver of the horses. This hints at the strength of the imperative form, in that many verbal roots can be inflected this way, even ones that at first blush do not appear to require action. More importantly, built on this is a specific way of relating to the future practiced by the Assyrian ruling elite: as an active transformation by the elite speaker through their utterances, which cause the future state to become manifest.

\(^{312}\) RINAP 4 Esarhaddon no. 33, tablet 2 obv. I 25, 29-30

\(^{313}\) See p.47.
The above quotation is also illustrative of how ṭemu was formed of imperatives. There is no simple *verbum dicendi* framing the royal utterance; ṭemu √škn is the verbal description of the king's speech act itself, with additional information attached with the *ma* quotative. Thus, in Aššur-da’ʾinanni’s quotative. Thus, in Aššur-daʾʾinanni’s daily conception, ṭemu was commensurate with an imperative register of speech.

The imperative’s suitability as a vehicle for ṭemu becomes particularly visible when considering the temporalised, transformative qualities of both concepts. In his work on culture about culture (‘metaculture’), Greg Urban rehabilitates the grammatical imperative from its station as the ‘ugly duckling’ of logical positivism:

The imperative is recognized as “not a duckling”. But what kind of creature is it? ... It does not passively reflect a world that is already out there... it peers into the future, envisioning a possible world or state of affairs not yet in existence...

The utterance produced by [speaker] A has a meaning... B produces a copy of what A has already produced. However, it is a copy of a peculiar sort. B does not produce another utterance... B carries out a set of actions that results in a state of affairs... whose characteristics match those described by [speaker A’s utterance].

Imperatives are... conduits of a special sort, in which movement takes place via transubstantiation, the conversion of meaning into thing-in-the-world.

Urban 2001: 145-147

Urban’s discanardisation of the imperative reveals the protean, transcoding qualities that it shares with ṭemu. As we may recall from chapter one, ṭemu was a phenomenon that existed and was communicated through a variety of codes. Initially, divine ṭemu was communicated through ominous signs, either passively observed or actively solicited by the royal retinue of learned men. These scholars would then interpret these signs, transcoding the divine ṭemu into language.34 From this point on, ṭemu remained in language until the imperative was transubstantiated into a ‘thing-in-the-world.’ The ṭemu reports described in chapter one were but evidence of this transubstantiate sign-intent-language-fact process in its complete manifestation.

Consequently, the imperative shared an essential transubstantiating component with ṭemu itself, but although ṭemu was communicated through imperatives, ṭemu was not coterminous with imperative utterances, and imperative utterances did not have a monopoly on language that could ‘peer into the future.’

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34 This process of transcoding divine signs was tied up with the polyvalency of the cuneiform sign system itself (Bahrani 2008). See p.62.
Modals I—Clashing Chronotopes in the Sealanders versus Nabu-ušallim

Fuzzy Future
Throughout this thesis we have encountered ways of talking about the future that left it indeterminate. Let us return to the Elders of the Sealand from chapter 1:

\[ ki \, r\text{ubbu} \, s \, m \, a \, \text{tuni} \, a \, n \, \text{a} \, \text{na} \, \text{pan} \, \text{s} \, \text{a} \, \text{r} \, \text{m} \, \text{a} \, \text{t} \, \text{A} \text{š} \text{s} \text{u} \text{r} \text{r} \text{u} \text{s} \text{u} \text{m} \text{a} \, \text{ṣ} \text{u} \text{r} \text{u} \text{r} \text{u} \text{b} \text{b} \text{i} \text{š} \text{i} \text{n} \\text{a} \, \text{m} \, \text{a} \, \text{t} \, \text{i} \, \text{s} \, \text{tu} \, \text{n} \, \text{u} \, \text{a} \, \text{n} \, \text{a} \, \text{p} \, \text{a} \, \text{n} \, \text{š} \text{a} \text{r} \text{ru} \, \text{l} \text{u} \text{r} \text{a} \text{b} \text{b} \text{i} \text{s} \text{i} \]  
If his magnification in the land is your wish, send him to the presence of the king of Assyria, let the rejoicing king magnify him.

SAA i8 no. 86, obv. 17-21, Elders of the Sealand to Esarhaddon

\[ Nabu-u\text{šallim} \, \text{belikunu} \, \text{lipu\text{s}uma} \]  
[\text{ana}] \, \text{muh\text{šikunu}} \, \text{ina} \, \text{mati l\text{r}bi}  
\text{u} \, \text{m\text{indema} taqabb}  
\text{um\text{ma} Na\text{́}id-Marduk}  
Let Nabu-ušallim be made your lord,  
let him become magnified over you in the land.  
And maybe you will speak

\text{QUOT Na\text{́}id-Marduk}  

SAA i8 no. 87, obv. 17'-20', [Elders of the Sealand] to Esarhaddon

In both of these examples, the speaker—the past Elders of the Sealand in the first, the past Elamite messenger in the second—describes a future state of events. However, this is a future that has not yet been foreclosed: there is no assumption that the events described are actually going to be enacted. Furthermore, embedded within the verbal form is the speakers' attitude towards the future events described. Consequently, although in these quotations the speakers construct a future, they also recognise the limited ability of themselves (or others implicated in it) to effect such a future, thus embedding their present social circumstances in an unfolding and contingent narrative. This sets apart these utterances from the imperative relation to the future, in which speakers inherently assume the future is fixed according to their utterance.\(^{315}\)

\(^{315}\)This differentiation means that, though they are both ways of speaking about the future, subsuming both imperatives and precatives under the set of ‘precative forms’ as Cohen (2005) does completely collapses their social dimension. He addresses this by positing the notion of a ‘directive scale,’ which encompasses ‘extra-linguistic factors’ that determine the ‘strength of the directive.’ However, he also writes ‘there are no formal signals for the existence of this scale’ (2005: 91). This seems to me to be a flaw in his structural linguistic approach which, by divorcing grammatical forms from their social context, tends to leave translation to idiosyncratic taste. However, Cohen's study is concerned with an Old Babylonian language corpus, so his conclusions, though useful for seeing how the question of precativity has been addressed in Akkadian, are only indirectly applicable to the language as it stood one millennium later.
These examples also demonstrate the variety of attitudes that could be taken towards the imagined future, which could be multilayered, complex and ironic. Lambek’s description of two kinds of classical Greek irony is apposite here:

In both instances irony realizes the limitations and ambiguity of praxis. Thought and agency run up against constraints, external ones of fate and circumstance and internal ones of ignorance, confusion, and contradiction. External and internal constraints on knowledge force us to speak with an assurance we do not have. Irony is a recognition of this fact.

A peculiarly Assyrian irony lies not only in the ambiguous space created by the ontology of ūmu, but also the paradoxes and problems entailed by social, hierarchical circumstance. Despite the inexorable simultaneity of ūmu—a sign, a word that indexes the same future act and past fact—knowledge and interpretation ensured its indeterminacy. Analogously, the interior space of the subject ensured that human intentions were indeterminate too, as were the caprices of the gods. Recognition of this fundamental uncertainty provided a field for irony, and this field was richly ploughed in social interaction. Empires predicated on divine authorship faced actual competition in geopolitical space—Assyria, Urartu, Elam, Phrygia—and Assyria faced internal contradiction within its social structures itself.\textsuperscript{316} We see such uncertainty managed through various notional futures, stretching from a straightforwardly envisaged outcome through to implicit unrealities, impossible futures given participants’ knowledge.

The simplest attitude is that assigned to the voice of the Elamite messenger: Nabu-ušallim belikunu lipušuma [ana] muḫḫikunu ina mati lirbi ‘let Nabu-ušallim become your lord, let him become magnified over you in the land.’\textsuperscript{317} This clearly expresses the desired future of the Elamites, yet the messenger does not adopt an imperative mood of speaking, though this would have been possible. There are several valid explanations: the messenger was demonstrating that he recognised the agency of the Sealand Elders (though this was an autonomy that would only be recognised as effective if they made the correct choice to submit to the Elamites); the messenger was reluctant to use an imperative which would fail in this context, creating an uncomfortable space with loss of

\textsuperscript{316} Explored in chapter six.
\textsuperscript{317} SAA 18 no. 87, obv.17'-19'.
authority, the messenger was foregrounding the willing aspect of the speaker rather than a passive object. All three of these options require a complex map of present and future status positions and potential intentions, anticipating a fuzzy virtuality utterly at odds with a fixed imperative, unencumbered tema of an imperial order.

This fuzzy futurity could be pinned down not only through the use of preceptive verbal forms, but through the use of modal particles, as we see in the phrase mindema taqabba ‘perhaps you will speak.’ These modal particles—issuri and piqtatte in Assyrian, mindema in Babylonian—again presented a future that was not fixed, but did not carry any connotations of its desirability, unlike the preceptive. Rather, by presenting a narrative of the world introduced with one of these particles, the speaker was able to set themselves in that future and respond appropriately. This procedure, again requiring a complex apprehension of others’ minds, was able to perform useful social work for the speaker, augmenting their autonomy—it enabled them to ‘speak with the mouths of another’ without directly transgressing their autonomy. This speech strategy pervaded all the correspondence in this period: letters from subordinates to superiors, vice-versa, equal status or otherwise. Here, the Elamite messenger uses mindema to head off the Sealanders’ attempts at resisting him, granting himself the ability to deliver his response before the Sealanders are able to speak for themselves.

Unreality

By contrast, the quoted speech of the Sealanders in SAA 18 no. 86 combines the imperative and preceptive forms to further emphasise their rejection of Elamite suzerainty. They open with a conditional, ki rubbušu ina mati sibatunu ‘if his magnification in the land is your wish,’ which starts to project an implicitly unreal future from the Sealanders’ present knowledge. The Sealanders already know that the Elamites want Nabu-ušallim’s installation, so by placing this certain

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318 For more on the potentiality and actuality of a failed imperative, failed tema, and the requisite responses, see p.237.
319 By the first millennium, the differentiation in meaning between these particles appears to have been minimal, though still in force; mindema was exclusively preferred by Babylonian speakers, whereas issuri was almost universally preferred by Assyrian speakers. Piqtatte represents an interesting case in that it is occasionally used together with issuri in the same letter (SAA 15, nos. 25, 129), however this particle is only attested in seven letters in total, meaning it is difficult to make general conclusions about its usage. The various editors prefer to translate it as ‘surely’ in these contexts to differentiate it from issuri, though there is not enough data available to really commit to this interpretation. See p.198 later in this chapter for issuri and piqtatte in use.
320 As Tiglath-pileser does when he speaks to the Babylonians with the mouths of Šamaš-bunaya and Nabu-nammir above.
321 For more on his response, see p.41.
knowledge within a conditional they already begin to destabilise established certainties, undercutting the Elamites’ capacity for authoritative speech by ignoring the messengers’ capacity to pronounce on their own desires.

This subtle undercut is fully delivered in the subsequent clauses, where the Sealanders address the messengers with an imperative form, šupuraššuma ‘send him,’ whilst describing the imagined response of the king with a precative form, lurabbriš, ‘let him magnify.’ This imagined future once again builds on the assumptions of shared knowledge between the Sealanders and the Elamites, and a shared model of the intentionality of the Assyrian king, whilst also reinforcing a status hierarchy through the appropriate selection of verb inflections. To begin with, the Elamites are addressed with the imperative form, which here not only serves to negate the Elamite supremacy claims, but also immediately thrusts the conversation into a parodic realm. Both the Sealanders and the Elamites are aware that a future in which the Elamites would deign to send a messenger to the Assyrian king is tremendously unlikely, given that the Elamites’ intentions absolutely counter the Assyrian ūmu.

Thus, the Sealanders have deliberately uttered a ‘failed’ imperative, one that will not in fact result in its instantiation, as we would expect from a ūmu-utterance. However, this is not a ūmu-utterance: though šupurraššuma is a straightforward imperative in its outward grammatical form, its interior subtext completely destabilises its exterior meaning. Rather than an imperative ordering the Elamites to send Nabu-ušallim to Esarhaddon, to which they will certainly ‘not consent,’ this imperative, by foregrounding what no one expects the Elamites to do, creates a multilayered, ironic temporality. The ‘present’ future is an ironic corruption of imperative speech: the Elamites will not listen to the Sealanders’ order, and all parties know this, and so rather than demonstrating the failure of the Sealanders to assume authority over the Elamites, it parodies the hierarchical roles that are at stake. The dependent future—that is, the future predicated upon the accomplishment of the imperative—is thus shifted into a further state of implicit unreality. Thus, even in the initial stages of this utterance, the Sealanders have crafted a shifting and subversive terrain of roles, and a narrative deliberately stymied.

The second clause takes this implicit unreality and runs with it. The phrase ḫadu šarru lurabbriš ‘let the rejoicing king magnify him’ is another an unlikely outcome to the present Elamite-Assyrian hostilities. Despite the outlandishness of this unfolding unfuture, the precative case underlines the one constant that the Sealanders uphold in the present: the continuing authority of the Assyrian
king. For despite this future being one in which Nabu-ušallim might become the overlord of the Sealand, the desired outcome of the Elamites, it is a future granted by the open will of the Assyrian king. The Sealanders recognise the autonomy of the king's authority through employing the precative case as they normally would, the only unironic facet of this sentence.

Instead, the ironic force is supplied by the adjective ḫadu, 'rejoicing'. This adjective, and other forms derived from the root √ḥdʾ, is an atypical occurrence in the letters and thus its appearance here is highly marked. Its usage here serves to underline the royal authority in an extreme fashion, with only a couple of parallels in the corpus:

\[ ki šarru bela ḫadu lišpuramma \\
ša šubati lišmuduma \\
If the king my lord rejoices, let him send to me that they will weave the cloth... \]

SAA 17 no. 11, rev. 3-6, Nabu-bel-šumate to Sargon

\[ ana pi ša sukkallu belya ḫadu lipuš \\
Let him, rejoice, do according to the mouth of (following the instructions of) the sukkallu my lord \]

SAA 17 no. 142, rev. 8-9, Nabu-ušallim \[323\] to the sukkallu

The above quotations demonstrate that √ḥdʾ was not only a rarity in describing precative, open-ended action, but that its usage was not necessarily tied into high-stakes events. Consequently, its deployment here, whilst at the same time accentuating the autonomy of the Assyrian king in this unreal future, further serves to create a parodic affect.\[324\]

The final temporal complication in these letters is that the above, already complex imagined futures are set in yet another imagined future, that of the letter’s implicit re-utterance to Esarhaddon. This ultimate ‘intended audience’ for the utterance also shaped the Sealanders’ narrative: from the

\[322\] The majority of occurrences are blessings from scholars to Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal in response to various omens, for example SAA 8 no. 387 rev. 3, Rašil the Older to the king: šarra maʾdiš lu ḫadi ‘The king may very much rejoice.’ Cf. SAA 8 no. 435 rev. 2, 547 rev. 7; SAA 10 no. 112 obv. 18, 114 rev. 9, 121 rev. 3ʿ-4ʿ, 185 rev. 20.

\[323\] Note that this is likely not the same Nabu-ušallim as the one harassing the Sealanders.

\[324\] It is striking that in the following letter, the Sealanders quote the Elamite messenger as completely disregarding their autonomy with the phrase ina ḫudikunu u ina la ḫudikunu ‘in your joyousness or not in your joyousness’ (SAA 18 no. 87, obv. 24ʿ-25ʿ), which may very well be a response to the Sealanders’ turn of phrase. This would consequently be a creative allusion to past utterances, an allusion which takes √ḥdʾ from a context in which it represents the untrammeled authority of the Assyrian king existing even in an ironic future imagined to scorn the Elamites, and transposes it to obliterate the autonomy of the Sealanders.
‘routine’ features such as the opening greeting and letterhead through to the deeply nested characters and voices. The self-presentation of the Sealanders’ past utterance that they are ‘subjects of the king’ is not only a rejoinder to the Elamite messenger in the past, but also displays their loyalty to the king when it is narrated to him in the future. Similarly, the Sealanders’ disclaimer of responsibility for their affairs, directing the Elamites to send Nabu-ušallim to the Assyrian king, further serves this multiple function.

**Chronotope, Temporality, Ṭemuporality**

I have described the Sealanders’ versus the Elamites as a ‘clash of chronotopes,’ but what do I mean by this? What do we gain from thinking about this letter with such a tool?

Through this thesis so far we have encountered certain models of temporality and topography. At one extreme, the imperial ṭemu could be conceptualised as a loop. At the other, it was effectively a simultaneity, a paradox, where the future contained the past which contained the future in a sign signifying itself. In this temporality, biography is effaced: not for ṭemu are the life events of humans. Rather, the motions of the gods—never justified, never integrated into an ‘ethical’ system of belief—determine the procession of the world, at once capricious and understandable to those educated in ṭupšarruti.

This temporality was unified with a spatial, perceptible dimension on several levels. The most fundamental, and confusing, was that the events of the perceptible world were ṭemu: intention and the facted outcome of the intention were the same thing, described with the same word—this was the simultaneity of the gods, whose intents were inevitable and always inscribed in past and future. Ṭemu was also socially spatialised: distributed across humans in their multiple capacities for authoritative action.

Yet, other temporalities existed. The emotional world of those subject to the Assyrian ṭemu had a progression all of its own, acted upon by scripts which sought a linear endpoint. The imperial ṭemu, which not only anchored action solely in the gods and their vicegerent, the king, but also was simultaneously immanent amongst all matter and beings in the universe, did not accommodate
possibility, fiction, irony, indirection. It did not sit well with the contingencies of imperial administration.

Consequently, the temporality of ṭemu—its ṭemu-porality, if you will—existed alongside the open, the messy, the fuzzy. These temporalities were local and highly specific, bound to subjects, people, names and places. The conflict between the Sealanders and Nabu-ušallim is a case in point. The ṭemu-porality of Assyria exists in this episode, signalling the divinely timeless order, but it is itself parcelled up and situated in a distant world by the Sealanders' localised narrative. The Elamites have their own chronotopical narrative—the succession of son after father, Nabu-ušallim after Marduk-apla-iddina. The Assyrian palace cares little for such a narrative: the Adasi kings were of singular descent and fostered by the deities, and were a special case of succession; the eunuchs and magnates were tied to the throne of ṭemu, and thus the biographical succession was mostly effaced.

The mutual incompatibility of these chronotopes—the assignations of time, narrative and biography—opens up a parodic space. This space emerges in times of clash: when the fixed ṭemu of the Empire, its pronouncements of bread, beer and wellbeing, clashes with a reality of different script: warfare, dissent, familial separation, which we will encounter in the next two chapters.

**Modals II – Open Endedness and Hierarchy**

The complex deployment of precatives and imperatives in the Sealanders' dialogue with Nabu-ušallim's Elamite patrons is an exemplary instance of the sophisticated ways in which multiple futures could be imagined and marshalled to negotiate a difficult present. Having explored this, the majority of modal and precative speech in the Assyrian hierarchy fell into a more routinised, generic usage. Together with the imperative genre, there is a straightforward distribution of these modes of speech corresponding to relative social status: superiors would generally use direct forms, second-person address and the imperative when addressing their subordinates, and subordinates would use third-person indirection, precatives, and modal particles when addressing their superiors.

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325 That is, the particles issuri, mindema and piqtatte, and the precative case indexed by the lu- and li- verbal prefixes.
Not only was this distribution of registers a performance of social hierarchy, but it also served as a mechanism which controlled access to the future. The unfolding šemu of Aššur was to flow one-way, from the godhead through a chain of transcoding and communication into the enacted šemu perceptible in the world. The imperative was the vehicle through which the Assyrian state machine promulgated the šemu in language, and it would receive šemu as reports of past events, either signs solicited from the gods, or descriptions of šemus seen and heard. In this idealised representation, there was no space for šemu to flow backward, for a libbu or ramanu of an Assyrian subject to declare its own imperative intent in contradistinction to that of the god. Indeed, to do so was, as we have already seen, an abomination to the world order. The future belonged to Aššur, and no one else.

The indirected future envisioned through the precative and modal particles thus functioned in a contradictory position. These language strategies provided a space in which anyone could conceivably imagine any kind of future, one which they could disclaim responsibility for:

```
Bel u Nabu ana šarri beliya liddinuma ina Elamti ša-reška šukun
amat aga ul aqbi u ul ušeqbi
May Bel and Nabu give to the king my lord: place your eunuch in Elam
I have not spoken this word nor caused it to be spoken.
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SAA 18 no. 105, rev. 9-13, unassigned to Esarhaddon

This is yet another strongly marked example of future-imagination, consisting of a nested imperative within a precative future. The imagined future speech is extraordinarily direct—ša-reška šukun, a direct second-person suffix followed by the imperative—and is not introduced by the quotative particle umma. Instead, the only offset is the precative liddinuma, ‘may they give’.

The mere introduction of this kind of direct speech to the king is immediately and comprehensively disclaimed: the author emphasises that he has no responsibility for these words. In combination with the lack of umma indicating the quotative particle, and the verb √ndn ‘to give,’ this shifts the phrase ina Elamti ša-reška šukun away from the realm of speech, casting it as something with material properties, suitable to be described with √ndn. Further to this, a word that has not been said does not exist as speech. The immediate utterance of this disclaimer further underlines an

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326 Refer to chapter two for the problem of subjective autonomy, and chapter six for the outright disruption of šemu.
Assyrian hypercognition of the permeability of ‘participation frames.’ In Irvine’s comment on Hill’s description of a Mexicano woman uttering an insult, she notes that the woman immediately asks for God’s forgiveness after quoting the obscenity. This shows that ‘she does not see herself as morally neutral in this role... the danger of leakage seems, in this example, to be related to the obscenity of the quoted text’ (1996: 148). In much the same way, the phrase ša-reška šukun, though it is not an ‘obscenity’ as such, similarly carries with it a dangerous moral charge, so powerful it can leak out and cause the letter writer to be afflicted with responsibility for daring to speak to the king with an imperative. Thus, the extremely strong disclaimer following.

These disclaimers and modals set off possible futures and ensure they remain provisional. We have found them most often used by subordinates addressing superiors; superiors addressing subordinates speak in an imperative style, with its attendant replicative qualities and associations with temu. Though not prescriptive, these conventions point to a socially distributed array of futures, mediated by grammar and linked to social status. We can usefully compare this to the distribution of emotional styles observed by Irvine in Wolof society (1995: 254). There, high status nobles adopted a detached ‘sangfroid’ demeanour, hiring low status griots to indirectly express emotion on their behalf (1995: 256). The differences in speaking style were thus theorised as waxu géér ‘noble speech’ and waxu gewel ‘griot speech’ (1995: 255). Similarly, we observe a socially determined distribution of grammatical relations to the future within the Assyrian hierarchy. Though not explicitly theorised as different speech styles, these multiple relationships to the future provided a useful discursive space within the Assyrian hierarchy. Radner observes that the inherent ambiguity of divination ‘facilitated open dialogue that was far less restricted by hierarchy and court protocol’ (2011: 373). This can be generalised to speaking styles, where the precative and modal space, presenting possible futures and uttered by those in subordinate positions, did important imaginative work in a hierarchy where a superior’s authority was predicated upon the direct and unambiguous replication of divine temu through the transmutation of imperatives.

327 Though see discussion of √qeb and √dbb above.
4.3 Words to Wiggle With: Playing with Protocol

Permeating the correspondence we have encountered so far have been the normative strategies used for communicating with others. That is, a correspondent may want to communicate something (e.g., ‘Ḫinnumu is stirring up trouble in Uruk’), but in order to encode this in a letter for future recitation, the content must be formatted in an utterance conditioned by the social norms of status and communication. Correspondents needed to be acutely aware of their position in the social hierarchy, the position of their interlocutor, and the relationship between them, in order to ‘say’ things correctly in a letter.

The vast majority of the letters we have seen so far have been addressed to the king of Assyria, and possess commonalities in register that demarcate a way of speaking that combines citationality, modals and precatives to generate a safe indirection space.\(^\text{328}\) The distribution of the indirect ways of speaking—precatives and modal particles instead of the second-person and imperatives—was so ingrained in Neo-Assyrian that one Assyriologist has deduced the convention into a grammatical rule.\(^\text{329}\)

The dramatic contrast between the tone of letters between the Assyrian king and his officials, and the Assyrian king and his scholarly advisors, is readily apparent in translation, as Radner puts it:

> The diction of the officials’ letters... is straightforward... there is no place in their letters for the wheedling, coaxing and pleading which is commonplace in those passages of the scholars’ letters that do not concern their professional assessments.

2015: 67

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\(^\text{328}\) Examples of third person precations we have encountered so far include:
SAA 1 no. 124, Kišir-Aššur to Sargon, especially obv. 10-13
SAA 5 no. 227, Šamaš-belu-uṣur to Sargon, rev. 10-15
SAA 10 no. 198, Adad-šumu-uṣur to Esarhaddon
SAA 10 no. 290, Urad-Gula to Esarhaddon, rev. 1'-3'
SAA 15 no. 15, Issar-duri to Sargon: third person + precative case
SAA 18 no. 87, Elders of the Sealand to Esarhaddon
SAA 18 no. 88, Men of Na’id-Mardu to Esarhaddon + abika

Similarly, counterfactuals include,
SAA 1 no. 124 obv. 9, Kišir-Aššur to Sargon,
SAA 16 no. 78, obv. 6 - 7, Mannu-ki-Libbali to Esarhaddon

As most of the letters from Nineveh and Nimrud are from officials to Tiglath-pileser, Sargon and Sennacherib, and from scholars to Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, current understandings of the varieties of communication in relationship remains limited mostly to these categories. However, some preserved letters do represent correspondence between state officials directly, or even private individuals designated by name and kinship terminology rather than by office. In this final section of the chapter, we explore correspondence between state officials in light of the relationship-establishing language devices explored above, before moving on to explore relationships defined by kinship terminology in the next chapter.

The Indirect Third Person
Generating social structure throughout the body of a letter, the indexical configuration of an utterance implicitly encoded shared understandings of the statuses of self and other, as well as providing the means for subtle negotiations of status on this. One of the key locations in which the hierarchical relations of the empire were reproduced and negotiated was the greeting formula that formed the ‘letterhead’ of a piece of Assyrian correspondence. The blessing at the beginning of a letter is customary, but in itself is forward facing: it looks forward to the time that the letter is going to be read out, and it expresses the wish of the letters’ sender for the wellbeing of the other. It is a site where the relationship between self and other is immediately negotiated, and, through its formulaic dimensions, repeats and reinforces the ideals of the Empire. The simple status differentiation of the opening greeting in exchanges with the king has already received ample commentary (Radner 2015: 67); here, we concern ourselves with the ways the greeting was deployed in other official relationships. Though it was customary to open the Assyrian letter with a conventional greeting formula,331 this genre of speech expression also provided a site for creative renegotiation and expression of relationships.333

333 Luukko provides a detailed analysis of the variations in greeting formulae in the letters of state officials to their superiors (2012).
331 Duranti draws attention to how greetings can convey important propositional content through an examination of Samoan expressions (1997), emphasising how understanding greetings solely as speech acts of ‘recognition’ or ‘acknowledgements’ is arbitrarily limiting (1997: 89). See p.239 for an example of a particularly creative modification of the seemingly ‘formulaic’ royal greeting.
To demonstrate, we can observe the similarities and differences between greetings to a king from a subordinate, and greetings in analogous relationships. The below letterhead is typical of those from officials to the king:

\[\text{ana šarri beliya urdaka Šarru-emuranni lu šulmu ana šarri beliya} \]
\[\text{šulmu ana asappi ša šarri beliya šulmu ana urdani ša šarri beliya} \]

To the king my lord, your servant Šarru-emuranni. May wellbeing for the king my lord.
Wellbeing is for the pack-animals of the king my lord; wellbeing is for the servants of the king, my lord.

SAA 5 no. 47, obv. 1-7, Šarru-emuranni to Sargon

Here, Sargon is addressed by office (šarru) and relation to Šarru-emuranni (beliya ‘my lord’). Šarru-emuranni describes himself as urdaka ‘your servant,’ the only occurrence of the second-person in this passage, and the question arises as to why the second-person suffix is used here. On the one hand, the usage of the second-person eliminates all ambiguity arising from indirection and firmly expresses the relationship; on the other hand, greeting formulae were highly stereotyped and subject to minimal variation, and thus this usage may simply be generic and unremarkable. The form urdišu also appears in correspondence to the king, but like urdaka, appears mostly in generic phrases, indicating a certain amount of interchangeability. Letters from one official to another of higher rank also exhibited similar construction:

\[\text{ana ṭupšar ekalli beliya urdaka Bel-abu’a lu šulmu ana beliya} \]
\[\text{šulmu ina beti adanniš šulmu ina Libbi-ali} \]
\[\text{ina betika nussakil} \]

To the palace scribe, my lord, your servant Bel-abu’a. May wellbeing be for my lord.
Wellbeing is much in the house, wellbeing is for Libbali.
We have done feeding in your house.

SAA 19 no. 14, obv. 1-7, Bel-abu’a to the Palace Scribe

Here again we have reference to office and the overlord-servant relationship; we also have a disparity between third-person and some second-person address (urdaka and betika). Ultimately, these sparse indexical shifts, as well as those isolated throughout the rest of the corpus, seem not to mark anything. In contrast, sustained indexical shifts to the second-person, accompanied by a corresponding change in verb inflection, strongly suggest a change in tone towards one’s superior. We might cast our minds back to Ariḫu writing to Nabu-duri-uṣur demanding temu in chapter
one, where he shifted from third person forms to second person forms, including a shift from precative to imperative relations to the future.

On the part of the kings writing to their subordinates, we saw that they generally adopted a free, almost conversational register, marked by such features as direct second-person address and the use of imperative forms to issue orders. However, markedly heightened affectivity obtained in Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal’s letters to their expert entourage, especially their healers; by contrast, the letters of all five kings were generally businesslike when discussing the running of the empire, with the notable exceptions analysed previously.

Conversely, the letters of subordinates to the Assyrian kings were characterised by what we might call a respectful register, heavily marked by use of the third-person to refer to the king, and the use of the ‘fuzzy future’ forms we explored above, which maintained the king’s untrammelled scope of action. In certain instances, these norms were transgressed and the king addressed directly, but these exhortations and commands also failed to violate the king’s agency, generally being things that he would have done or be expected to do anyway.

The letters from Nabu-duri-uṣur to the governor of Der provides us an insight into the ways in which administrative, hierarchical power relationships reproduced the affective imperatives of the Assyrian empire. More importantly, they demonstrate the possibilities of difference and variance in such a relationship, in particular a close association manifesting in respect for the gods of one’s superior, colourful animal language and, more tellingly, the restriction of ṭemu to themselves only. There is no reason to assume that the relationship between Nabu-duri-uṣur and his governor was exceptional (except insofar as it has been archaeologically preserved). Such variance in interpersonal relationships must have been prevalent throughout the Assyrian hierarchy.

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332 P.49.
333 This includes features such as suffixed 2nd person pronouns (-ka) and 2nd person inflected verb forms (e.g., taspuranni ‘you sent to me’).
334 For example, SAA 1 no. 1, where Sargon seems to convey excitement about the friendly overtures of the Phrygian king Midas through the use of intensifiers tariš adanniš ‘it is extremely correct’ and a self-description of himself as happy.
335 E.g., SAA 10 no. 185, discussed p.221; see also SAA 1 no. 134, SAA 10 no. 112, SAA 13 no. 193.
Dossier—Protocol and Play: Nabu-duri-uṣur and the governor of Der

The four letters making up the correspondence of Nabu-duri-uṣur with his superior were excavated with the rest of the royal correspondence at Nineveh, despite not being directly addressed to a member of the resident court there. Fuchs and Parpola reconstruct the historical context in which these letters were written, namely a conflict between the Assyrians and their eastern neighbours the Elamites, centred on the border town of Der. We could assume therefore this state of affairs—an absent governor during a time of warfare—was a fairly unusual circumstance that permeated the affect and tone of these letters.

Though few, Nabu-duri-uṣur’s letters provide insights into how administrators negotiated the affective and interior aspects of their duties on the ground. The loose repertoire of Assyrian missions we saw in chapter three is replicated in Nabu-duri-uṣur’s correspondence: the maintenance of wellbeing in one’s bailiwick being tied up with the *libbu √t*b and the importance of *vṛṛṣ*. Correspondingly, the linguistic strategies generating hierarchy through distance, indirection and loose futurity saturate Nabu-duri-uṣur’s idiolect. However, this small group of letters also provides important correctives to these norms and models. Most importantly, we find a small but interesting manipulation of the *temu* feedback loop arcing through the network of imperial power. This is set within the context of some unique communicative features in Nabu-duri-uṣur’s relationship with his superior, pointing to uniquely strong affective links between the pair.

To begin with, the content of Nabu-duri-uṣur’s letters exhibit the typical characteristics of an imperial power relationship. His reports to the governor on the status of the province tie together the affective state of the official in charge with the wellbeing of the province:

\[ šulmu a[danniš] libbi Deri [adanniš] ūtab libbi [x x x] ša pahiti beliya lu ūtab \]

There is [much] wellbeing, the interior of Der is [very] good [x x x] the interior of the governor, my lord, EMPH be good.

SAA 15 no. 129, rev. 19-21, Nabu-duri-uṣur to Šamaš-belu-uṣur

This mirrors almost precisely the kinds of exhortations we see governors write to the king, and shows not only the delegation of political responsibility for the wellbeing of physical territory, but

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336 SAA 15 nos. 129-131, 133.
337 See p.148.
also the delegation of affective responsibility: the deputy governor informs the governor of the wellbeing of his province, thus providing the scope for the governor’s interior to be good; governors inform the king of the wellbeing of their provinces, thus providing the scope for the king’s interior to be good. In effect we can envisage this as a series of enclosing circles, with the √ʾṭʾb of the governor of Der directly tied to the wellbeing of his official responsibilities, and the wellbeing of the Assyrian king tied to the wellbeing of his official responsibilities, i.e., all Assyrian territory enclosing all provinces ensconced in a libbu √ʾṭʾb empire of situational affect. We can also envision this as a series of analogical relationships: the relationship of the governors and their province with the king is replicated at lower levels of responsibility.338

The mention of √ʾṛḫṣ also recalls our discussion of this emotion in chapter three, loosely translated ‘confident’ but having connotations over and above the similar libbu √ʾškn in that it promotes the capacity to act autonomously on behalf of Assyrian interests, particularly in a potentially violent military sphere. In a damaged passage from another letter, Nabu‑duri‑uṣur quotes his superior:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ša beli išpur[anni]} & \quad \text{adu [bet] nillakanni} \\
\text{ma} & \quad [\text{x x x lu}] \text{raḥṣaka issu pan [šarri lu palha]ka} \\
\text{ulaneka šamma adanniš} & \quad [la raḥṣakuni]
\end{align*}
\]

Concerning that which my lord sent [to me]
3.QUOT un[til] we come to you
3.QUOT [x x x EMPH] you be √ʾṛḫṣ [EMPH] you [be √ʾph of the king]
Your gods, if [I were not] very [√ʾṛḫṣ]

SAA 15 no. 129, rev. 5-8

Despite the breaks here, the word raḥṣaka is decipherable, and that it has a second-person suffix is evidence that it can be attributed to the quoted passage of the governor’s speech; Fuchs and Parpola reconstruct it being repeated in the first-person in the breakage in the subsequent line, a restoration that makes sense given what we know about the configuration of subordinates speech by the antecedent speech of their superiors. The exhortation to be √ʾṛḫṣ is until the arrival of the governor

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338 In Descola’s typology of ontologies, he uses the metaphor of a ‘trellis’ to indicate the analogical interlinking of nodes in an ‘analogical’ collective, with all its relationalities inhering within it (2013: 204).
himself, yet another example of how the movement of military units and powerful officials was used to elicit specific affective outcomes for certain Assyrian subjects.\textsuperscript{339}

Nabu-duri-ušur's register exhibits characteristics that are typical of that of subordinates corresponding with superiors in the status hierarchy, as discussed in chapter four: a fairly terse greeting formula,\textsuperscript{340} the use of third person address, the precative mood and modal devices like \textit{issuri} ‘perhaps,’ so as not to impinge on his superior directly:

\begin{quote}
\textit{uma annuriṣq ana beliya assapra minu [ša] pan beliya maḫiruni lepuš}
Now I am sending to my lord, may he do whatever that is before my lord.
\end{quote}

SAA 15 no. 131, rev. 3-6

The language here suggests an analogical replication of the relationship between the Assyrian king and his subordinates. Ponchia has argued that these kinds of formulae were not ‘empty’ but functioned as communicative signals regarding a (royal) ideology of decision making (1989: 116-117 ff.). Consequently, we might suggest that the relationship deputy governor $\rightarrow$ governor mirrors that of subordinate $\rightarrow$ king, with repeatedly delegated responsibilities descending throughout the chain of command, tied up with the distribution of Aššur’s \textit{ṭemu}.

Finally, the conventions governing the genre of Assyrian political letters shapes not only Nabu-duri-ušur’s register but the overall structure of his letters as well. Despite the damage to the tablet, the letter SAA 15 no. 129 is possibly the best demonstration of this pattern, consisting of repeated mentions of \textit{ša beli ışpuranni} ‘regarding what my lord sent to me,’ a quotation in the past tense, followed by a response in the present-future tense.

However, the difference between Nabu-duri-ušur’s responses to his superior, and those we typically find in letters to the king, is striking. As we saw earlier in this chapter, a prevalent characteristic in letters to the king was the parallelistic quotation of reported speech. An author’s response could almost entirely be in the quoted words of their interlocutor, transposed to the author’s own voice.\textsuperscript{341}

\textsuperscript{339} For \textit{vrḫš}, see p.127.
\textsuperscript{340} SAA 15 nos. 129, obv. 1-3 (damaged); 131, obv. 1-5; 133, obv. 1-3.
\textsuperscript{341} P.171.
Nabu-duri-uṣur however exhibits a confident latitude in his responses, uncharacteristic of those corresponding with the king:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{reš ešidita la ašši} \\
\text{muk} & \quad \text{ana beliya lušebila} \\
\text{piqtatti beli adu umati } & \quad 5\ 6 \ \text{beli šumma ana mat Aššur šumma ana mat nakir beli illak} \\
\text{I did not raise provisions} & \quad 1\text{QUOT} \\
\text{I may send (them) to my lord} & \quad \text{1QUOT} \\
\text{Maybe, my lord, until five, six days, my lord, my lord will go either to Assyria or to the land of the enemy.} & \quad \text{SAA 15 no. 129, rev. 12-15}
\end{align*}
\]

Though the prefatory quotation of the governors’ words is broken, the response here, with its self-quotation of internal dialogue indexed by \textit{muk}, is of a piece with the verbose and detailed discourse of the scholars: indeed, this kind of narrative openness is prevalent throughout Nabu-duri-usur’s correspondence with his superior.

This parallels descriptions of how inner thoughts were presented to the king by subordinates as justification for actions. However, we find further justification following the modal particle \textit{piqtatte}. If we are not to attribute the repetitions of \textit{beli ‘my lord’} to scribal failure, then they may be construed as emphatic, furthering the ‘pleading’ aspect of this section.

Most curiously however, we find statements in a further military report which suggest that Nabu-duri-uṣur is sending reports both to his immediate superior, the governor, as well as the royal court, and that these reports could differ depending on circumstances:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ṭemu ša egertu ša issi Bel-emuranni ina ekalli ušebiluni u ša egerti anniti issen šu} \\
The \textit{ṭemu} of the letter that I sent with Bel-emuranni to the Palace and this letter, it is one. & \quad \text{SAA 15 no. 131 rev. 7-12}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{issurru beli iqabbi} \\
\text{ma} & \quad \text{aki annimma [ina ekalli] tassapra} \\
\text{ma} & \quad \text{issurru Bit-Ḥa’ir [nusa]ḥṣara} \\
\text{ma} & \quad \text{mannu ina libbi nipaqqidi} \\
[m\text{a}] & \quad x\ x\ x\ } \text{pur anaku ina libbi [x anni]tu} \\
[u\text{de}]\text{ša [ana]} & \quad \text{beliya assapra}
\end{align*}
\]

Perhaps my lord will say
\[
\begin{align*}
3\text{QUOT} & \quad \text{Did you write [to the palace] like this} \\
3\text{QUOT} & \quad \text{Perhaps we shall [ret]ake Bit-Ḥa’ir} \\
3\text{QUOT} & \quad \text{who should we appoint there?}
\end{align*}
\]

I wrote [on]ly to my lord. & \quad \text{right. edge 21-edge 4}
Here we see that a letter was sent to both the Palace and the governor, and that these had differing content:\textsuperscript{343} in part the report about past testimony is said to have been accurately transmitted to the Palace, whereas the \textit{petitio} to the governor requesting a decision regarding an appointment in Bit-Haʾir is claimed to be ‘for his eyes only.’ We can posit multiple reasons for this: firstly that the recapture of Assyrian territory is a hopeful outcome and thus Nabu-duri-uṣur surmises that Šamaš-belu-uṣur does not want the Palace to get its hopes up—or its expectations unduly raised. Additionally, it may be the case that such a decision is not for the Palace staff to decide: Šamaš-belu-uṣur and Nabu-duri-uṣur want to retain autonomy for that decision themselves. Thus questioning the Palace about it might mean that someone there would arrogate the choice for themselves, resulting in unwanted interference in provincial affairs. Now such a surmise is speculation, but consider the speech Nabu-duri-uṣur quotes himself as saying earlier in the letter:

\texttt{[\textit{muk} Bit]-Haʾir ša šarri [šatu]}

\texttt{Bit-Haʾir, it is of the king.}

\texttt{SAA 15 no. 131 bottom edge 22-rev. 23}

Whilst this is a relatively uncontroversial statement on Assyrian territorial integrity, with Nabu-duri-uṣur proclaiming Bit-Haʾir as a possession of the Assyrian king, it is interesting to contemplate this together with the reconstructed exhortation ‘√\textit{plh} the king’ voiced by Šamaš-belu-uṣur to his subordinate in the letter SAA 15 no. 129. It may be that these repeated proclamations regarding the king’s authority and the need to respect him offset this pair’s guarded, mutually loyal autonomy.

There are certain features of Nabu-duri-uṣur’s correspondence with Šamaš-belu-uṣur that provide hints as to the idiosyncratic working relationship specific to these two men, in contrast to the regularised, generic language that characterises most letters to the king. Most of our evidence for this comes from the sadly fragmentary SAA 15 no. 129, mentioned already, where Nabu-duri-uṣur is reporting on the movements of the enemy king of Elam. In that letter, Nabu-duri-uṣur makes a counterfactual statement about something ‘by the gods’ of his superior, which is both a highly marked emphasis as well as a possibly intimate one: he is not exhorting the gods of Assyria or the gods of the king, which other correspondents use to mark out their words as especially truthful.

\textsuperscript{343} I take Fuchs and Parpola’s reconstruction of \textit{ina ekalli} ‘to the Palace’ to be accurate considering the context.
Perhaps also explained by this camaraderie, we find some unusual or out of place language used to describe people in the letter SAA 15 no. 129. Firstly, Nabu-duri-uṣur describes an audience he had with a member of his staff:

[Aššur-reman]ni, chief of the cav[al]ry of the deputy, a servant of [my lord], a dog, came [into my presence]

Correspondents’ use of kalbu ‘dog’ to describe themselves to the king was a popular device to emphasise a dependent relationship.\(^{343}\) However, this is the only use of kalbu in the correspondence to describe a named third person. What this means we can only guess at, but it might be elucidated by a second unusual statement later in the text:

[xxxxx ana] ekalli beli šaappar ammar ina supuriya errabuni ana [bēliya addan]
My lord will send [xxxxx to] the Palace; [I will give to my lord] all who enter my claws.

This is again a unique instance in the Assyrian letter corpus of this terminology. Šupru in reference to humans usually means ‘fingernail,’ and appears frequently in reference to fingernail impressions as authenticatory marks in Assyrian contracts; otherwise, it appears in reference to work done on the claws on decorative animal or bird statues.\(^{344}\) Thus, the use of it in this context to refer to a first-person human is astonishing; it does not appear in any contemporary figurative or poetic language either.

What are we to make of these animal descriptions then? It appears that Nabu-duri-uṣur felt free to describe himself metonymically as an animal with claws, with its connotation of eagles and lions, and to liken a member of his staff to a dog, when communicating with Šamaš-belu-uṣur, and this, coupled with the other peculiar markers of this relationship, may bespeak to what sorts of register changes take place in less formal, but still official, relationships.

\(^{343}\) See p.242.

\(^{344}\) For example, SAA 1 no. 51, obv. 5.
Conclusion

In this chapter, we shifted our focus from using the correspondence to explore ontological concepts of interiority, temporality and physicality, and the attendant large-scale imperial strategies for dealing with them, to the utterances of the letters themselves. These complex projected utterances implicated teams of subjects—speaker, author, animator, scribe—in the propagation of an imperial temu. This place was one of the locations in which the imperial subject was reproduced, through the effacement of personal agency and creativity by citational practices that propagated power through quotation of the words of the powerful. Yet, the correspondence dialogues also offered a place in which these constraints could be navigated. Ultimately, this meant the correspondence evinced somewhat different temporalities to the looping-simultaneous temu-porality at the core of imperial ontology.

This temporality was effectively linear, to different degrees depending on the social status of the subject speaker. Subordinates—those who cited the words of the powerful, and spoke in precatives and modals—situated themselves particularly as subjects with a specific biography moving through time. The past was fixed through historical citation, from whence derived authority, but the future was a realm of open possibilities.

By contrast, those speaking from powerful positions found themselves more heavily influenced by a temu-polarity. Though they derived authority through citationality of the past in the same way as subordinates, the imperativity of their future facing utterances was both a locus of power and a potentially dangerous liability. The imperative foresaw its own replication as temu-fact. The possibility remained, however, that this would fail, a possibility that might lead to a crisis of authority; we will explore this in the final chapter.

We can thus conceptualise the social distribution of speaking styles as a social distribution of temporalities, of imagination, expressed in the multiple chronotopes found in letter narratives. These different temporalities existed alongside each other, and indeed a single speaking subject could inhabit different temporalities in different utterance frames. We might consider Ana-Nabu-taklak, an Assyrian official we meet in the next chapter, who writes letters typical of a
subordinate to Sargon and the sukallu, but adopts a more direct, ironic and affective register towards his ahu ‘brother’ Gadiya. We even find multiple chronotopic positions adopted in a single letter: lightly evinced in Ariḫu’s letter demanding temu, extremely so in the Sealand Elders’ letters. This multiplicity of temporalities, varying across context, status and occasion, is entirely quotidian and intuitive—such polytemporality is indeed cross-culturally universal (Irvine 2004: 107).

Ultimately, this demonstrates a sophisticated command of narrative and temporality from Assyrian correspondents ensconced within the imperial machine. Despite the strictures surrounding temu—a future-past loop demanding complete dedication of the interior, √ṭ’b and √plḥ subjects, plain speaking and true talking—speakers were able to devise complex narrative fields, laminated selves, carefully assigned responsibilities and citationally augmented authorities to further their agency in a communication system geared towards the implementation of the divine imperative. In the next chapter, we move even further away from the rigidity of a temu inflected correspondence, showing how kinship relationality afforded different subjectivities and chronotopes even within a cuneiform imperium.

345 SAA 17 nos. 64-72.
346 See p.222.
347 P.49.
5 Kingship Against Kinship: A Contrasting Scheme of Self and Relation

\[
\text{la mar’u bel ali ša [Qunbuna] anaku unzarḫu urdu ša šarri beliya anaku}
\]
\[
\text{šarru beli ina Qunbuna iptaqdanni minu ša ammaruni ša ašammuni ina pan šarri beliya aqabbi}
\]

I am not the son of the city lord [of Qunbuna]—I am the house-born slave, the servant of the king, my lord. The king my lord entrusted me in Qunbuna; whatever I see and hear, I speak it before the king, my lord.\(^\text{348}\)

In the previous chapters, we established an ontological principle foundational to Assyrian imperialism—\(\text{ṭemu}\)—and the terrains it traversed: interiors (\(\text{libbu}\)) terraformed by governmental, disciplinary practices. We then saw how the subjects making up the nodes in this network used linguistic strategies to negotiate with, reproduce and manipulate \(\text{ṭemu}\). The \(\text{ṭemu}\) of Aššur was total: it demanded the complete dedication of self (\(\text{libbu} \sqrt{\text{gmr}}\)), and integration into the hierarchical system that propagated it.

In this chapter and the next, we turn to relationships defined outside this hierarchical system. We begin with relationships defined by kinship terminology. The tyranny of the evidence is such that we do not possess very many letters that operate at the level of the family—fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters—from the eighth and seventh centuries; a symptom partially of the palatially dominated archives, and of the cuneiform-alphabetic divide. However, the limited, ambiguous evidence of the Assyrian letters suggests that the Assyrian concept of ‘family,’ or more specifically kinship, does not coincide with modern Western notions of family per se. A disparate collection of private letters, which for some reason ended up in the archives at Nineveh and Kalḫu, are addressed to \(\text{abu}\) or \(\text{aḫu}\); father or brother. Whilst these could refer to direct, ‘familial’ connections, they also indicated a wider conception of these kinship relations, either status-based or a more informal, affective kind of association.

\(^{348}\) SAA 5 no. 243, obv. 4-10, Šarru-emuranni to Sargon
We will explore the tension between empire and kinship in roughly two parts. In the first, we focus on the Adasi family, the royal family of Assyria from whence derived its kings. There, we see how intimacy and affective gesture are eclipsed by the generic communicative practices of officialdom over biographic time. We contrast this with two other overlaps between kinship and empire: an official in correspondence with his brother, and a mother yearning for her son, both ensconced within the privations of imperial society. In the second part, we explore letters that define relationships exclusively through kinship terminology. These provide an insight into a different structure of values and feelings than that inherent in the political correspondence: variant notions of ṭemū and the dedication of the self. This demonstrates that the picture we get of a totalising imperial value hierarchy—the total circulation and interpenetration of the ṭemū of Aššur—is partial; the Assyrian empire, despite its stated aims, failed to displace pre-existing modes of kinship relationality.

5.1 Family and Empire

šar Uri maršu šappabilišuma maru ḥabil abīšu Šamaš ikaššassuma ina kifulli abīšu imat mar-šarrī ana šarrutu la zakru kassa išabbat

The king of Ur: his son will wrong him; Šamaš will catch the son who wronged his father, and in the mourning-place of his father he will die. A son who has not been named for kingship will take the throne.

SAA 8 no. 4, obv. 5-7, Issar-šumu-ereš to Esarhaddon

ina mati kalama kitu itammu mar itti abīšu kitu itamme salim kiššati

In all lands they will speak the truth; the son will speak the truth with his father: peace in the universe

SAA 8 no. 40, obv. 2'-4', Nabu-ahhe-eriba to Esarhaddon

The epigraphs above, taken from the scholarly reports of astrologers to the king, are quotations of ancient omen predictions that has been transmitted across an intertextual replication chain for centuries. Their citation in the letters demonstrates the interpenetration of ancient valuations of kinship in a contemporary Assyrian context: readings of possible futures derived centuries before the letters themselves. They represent two extremes: parricide, fratricide and irregular succession versus universal peace, the son speaking the truth with his father. Both convey a dread of internecine strife.
This ‘voice of the past’ was only one of the authorities that commented on the values of kinship as they interacted with kingship, and consequently the new ‘imperial’ form the Assyrian state practiced. Set in the core of the empire was the royal family itself, membership of which enabled men to stake claims to the throne. This family, commensurate with the institution of the Assyrian kingship, practiced ways of relating to each other that reflected their identification with the Assyrian Empire itself.

In this section, we first examine the ways in which the communicative relations comprising the Assyrian royal family were transformed by the practices of imperial institutions. The highly official register belies an alternative discourse we find embedded in the correspondence between Esarhaddon and his scholars, which demonstrates a moving affect quite unlike the staid business of politics the interfamilial correspondence exhibits. Finally, we shift to two letters of potentially private provenance, which show kinship relations affected by contact with the Empire, showing the interpenetration of empire tropes into a domestic sphere.

The Royal Family
The one family for which we possess more than a handful of evidence about from the Assyrian period is, unsurprisingly, the family that produced the kings of Assyria. Since the seventeenth century, male members of the Adasi family were eligible for accession to the Assyrian throne (Frahm 2017c: 6); as no principle of primogeniture obtained, incumbent kings were free to select their own successors, which frequently led to bloody succession wars. Obviously, this family was exceptional in its makeup, being one of the richest and most powerful in the region, and consequently unlikely to be representative.349

By 672, the royal family was fairly extensive, as Figure 9 below shows. Although Esarhaddon had at least eighteen children, the correspondence of only three survives: Assurbanipal, Šamaš-šumu-ukin, and Šamaš-metu-uballit. The former pair had the highest positions in the land as the king’s nominated successors. In this role, both men theoretically co-managed the empire, though in reality

349 Data on kinship in other classes and sectors of society is patchy; Galil’s hefty analysis of the Ḫarran census and other administrative documents is the best synthesis of this information (2007).
much more power was delegated to Assurbanipal; conversely, it seems that Šamaš-meṭu-uballiṭ’s purview was exclusively limited to the inner world of the royal court as opposed to imperial politics (Luukko & van Buylaere 2002 p. xxvii-xxviii).

Figure 10 - The Assyrian Royal Family, from Radner 2017

The data for the Assyrian royal family shows one that has thoroughly assimilated with the relationship conventions of the imperial hierarchy. Though kinship terms are used, such as mar-šarri or ummi šarri, not only are they defined in relation to the king, the terms act as terms of office rather than indexing a personal relationship. There is no reciprocality of terminology, with the typical third-person indirection suffusing the communicative relationship. We can observe this most obviously in the letters sent to Esarhaddon by his three sons, Assurbanipal, Šamaš-šumu-ukin and Šamaš-metu-uballit. At first glance, the letters of all three are highly formalised, following established Assyrian letter writing practice. All three sons shared similar greetings with minor

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350 The data for previous father-son royal relationships is patchier but much the same. For example we have encountered several of Sennacherib’s letters to his father throughout the thesis, such as his temu compilation discussed in chapter 1. These letters differ in no way from the letters between of royal officials to the king: quotations of the royal speech show Sargon speaking in imperatives, as we would expect, e.g., SAA 19 158, obv. 10-11; SAA 1 no. 39, obv. 6’. When addressing his father, Sennacherib uses a precative register, e.g., SAA 1 no. 33, obv. 15ff; rev 2. ff. just as subordinates do with their superiors. Similarly, Ululayu (the future Shalmaneser V) communicates his desire to see have an audience with the king just as others subordinate officials do, which suggests that he received no special treatment within the administration just because of his filiation when it came to this procedure (SAA 19 no. 8 rev. 13ff.).

351 Standard devices and procedures are discussed in chapter four, especially from p.201.
variations. None of the three make direct mention of their filial connection: the only time it is referred to is when they are quoting others.\footnote{E.g., SAA 16 no. 21, rev. 8.} Despite this, there are hints in this formality as to a status hierarchy amongst the brothers. Though Assurbanipal’s letters never vary in their introductory formula, one broken letter of Šamaš-šumu-ukin contains an extended blessing,\footnote{SAA 16 no. 23, obv. 1-8.} and the blessings of Šamaš-meṭu-uballiṭ are occasionally intensified.\footnote{Compare Nabu u Marduk ana šarri beliya likrubu (SAA 16 no. 25 obv. 4-5) with Nabu u Marduk ana šarri beliya adanniš adanniš likrubu (SAA 16 no. 26, obv. 4-7), with the insertion of the duplicated intensifier adanniš ‘greatly.’ } Luukko suggests this could be due to the artistry of different scribes transcribing the dictation, but it is possible that such variation on the part of the two lesser princes is an attempt to increase the intensity of the blessing, whilst maintaining the decorum of generic convention: a generic convention structuring relationships between officials in an empire rather than members of a family.

That this status hierarchical schema was the prime lens through which the brothers linguistically practiced their correspondence relationship with their father is further emphasised by the topics of the letters themselves. These suggest that Esarhaddon’s three sons possessed differing amounts of power, and thus had different power relationships with the king.

Whilst Assurbanipal discusses threats to royal security, indicating he occupied an important position, his brother Šamaš-meṭu-uballiṭ needs to ask permission to get the wheel of his chariot repaired. Further to this, Šamaš-meṭu-uballiṭ’s requests follow the standard practice of adopting the precative:

\begin{quote}
\textit{uma šarri beliya ŭemu liškan dullu ina mûhhi lepušu}
Now may the king establish ŭemu that they might perform the work.
\end{quote}

SAA 16 no. 25, obv .12-rev.3, Šamaš-meṭu-uballiṭ to Esarhaddon

As we saw in chapter four, ways of speaking about the future were socially distributed. It is noticeable, therefore, that in the extant letters of Šamaš-šumu-ukin and Assurbanipal, there is no occasion for a precative to be employed. Indeed, Assurbanipal describes action he takes outright to reject an audience (SAA 16 no. 20), demonstrative of the authority and latitude he no doubt
exercised. Šamaš-metu-uballiṭ, on the other hand, needed to approach the king to have ţemu established: despite his filiation, as an official this prince’s authority was just as restricted and dependent upon the king as any other official. In addition, there appears to be an inverse correlation between the status of a son and the floridness of his blessings, and that this was also dependent on context: Assurbanipal provides a standard terse blessing, but Šamaš-metu-uballiṭ varies his, intensifying his address to the king when the life of a maid is at stake.

In contrast to this variability in the status of his sons is the status of Esarhaddon’s mother, Naqi’a, one of Sennacherib’s wives. We do not have any direct letters from her, however we have already seen that when she functions as a state official being addressed by members of the imperial hierarchy her gender is entirely effaced and she takes on the indexical position of beliya ‘my lord.’ This is indicative of a curious parallelism hinted at in a letter from Esarhaddon to his mother, the only one currently published:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Word of the king to the mother of the king, wellbeing is for me. EMPH wellbeing for the mother of the king.} \\
\text{Concerning the servant of Amos that you wrote to me about, as the mother of the king spoke, I spake accordingly.} \\
\text{It is very beautiful, as you spoke.}
\end{align*}
\]

SAA 16 no. 2, obv.1-rev.3, Esarhaddon to Naqi’a

In chapter four, we established that the accurate replication of words was an essential procedure for the propagation of imperial power.\(^{355}\) The utterances of subordinates were colonised by the words of their superiors, the autonomy of their subjects effaced in order to deliver the royal message. Yet here, we have Esarhaddon himself describing how he accurately replicated his mother’s utterance: the authoritative words spoken with √qbʾ.\(^{356}\) Though this is only a single data point, it serves to further puncture the ‘absolute will’ of the Assyrian king by showing him willingly take direction from other human beings.\(^{357}\) Situated in the various manipulations of the king’s speech

\(^{355}\) P.171.

\(^{356}\) Words from this semantic root tended to denote accurate or powerful speaking, see p.184.

\(^{357}\) Obviously, it was essential the king take direction from Aššur the god and the other deities.
available to subordinates through *issuri*-expressions,\textsuperscript{358} and the limitation of the king’s authority in the face of the magnates,\textsuperscript{359} a collaborative, quotative imperial hegemony seems to emerge.

**Royal Family Feeling**

*libbi mariš adanniš ša ina šešeriya anī libbi išpiluni ake nepuš*

My interior is very sick, how did we act that my interior has fallen for this, my little one?\textsuperscript{360}

The terseness of the communications between royal family members starkly contrasts with the letters the king receives from his scholars. These letters describe kinship relations charged with intimacy and feeling. The epigraph to this chapter is the strongest statement of feeling towards a royal family member we find in the corpus, cited by Adad-šumu-uṣur in a response to Esarhaddon. The king’s use of *šešeriya*, ‘my little one’,\textsuperscript{361} instead of a kinship term such as *maru* is a point of interest: the possessive suffix establishes an ownership and intimacy; *šeḫru* is potentially a term of endearment in this context, but we cannot be certain. The affective language Esarhaddon uses is obviously strong: the intensifier *adanniš* together with two profoundly negative descriptions of his interior state. This quoted utterance of the king is the only direct evidence we have of strong feeling expressed in the first person voice between royal family members (in contradistinction to those expressions between ‘private’ kin discussed at the end of this chapter).

Despite this, there are several descriptions of a royal family filled with feeling in the letters of various scholars to their imperial patron. Several of these are oblique elaborations on wishes for the long life of the patriarch, for example:

*ša piqitte ša Belet-parši šarru beli mar mar’išu ina burkešu lintuḫu paršumate ina ziqišunu lemuru*

May the king lift the son of the sons of the charge of (the goddess) Belet-parši into his lap, may he see grey hairs (lit. ‘old men’) in their beards

SAA 10 no. 301, rev. 1-9, Nabu-naṣir to Esarhaddon\textsuperscript{362}

\textsuperscript{358} See p.198.  
\textsuperscript{359} See p.258ff.  
\textsuperscript{360} SAA 10 no. 187, obv.7-10, Adad-šumu-uṣur to Esarhaddon  
\textsuperscript{361} *šeḫr* possessed a neutral connotation, as opposed to *qll*, which carried negative and potentially insulting aspects, p.248.  
\textsuperscript{362} See also SAA 10 no. 70, rev. 12-14: *mar mar’išu šarru beli ina burkišu lintuḫ* ‘May the king lift the son of his sons in his lap’ (Nabu-aḥhe-eriba to Esarhaddon).
The wish expressed in Nabu-naṣir’s statement is twofold: not only does it encode a wish for the king to live long enough to lift his great grandsons into his lap,\(^\text{363}\) but it also describes a familial scenario where close physical association with the bodies of kin is viewed in a positive light. This is a stark contrast to the formalised discourse we find between the mature family members who adopt the roles of mar-šarri or ummi šarri within the official hierarchy. Here, the envisaged scenario appears to be confined to a domestic sphere of unspecified location, most likely quarters within a palace, mostly invisible to the rest of the imperial hierarchy.\(^\text{364}\)

In contrast, the wishes Nabu-aḫḫe-eriba sends to Esarhaddon concerning the adult Šamaš-šumu-ukin, appointed mar-šarri Babili, are terse:

\begin{quote}
\begin{quote}
\text{\textit{nemalšu šarru beli lemur}}
\end{quote}
\end{quote}

May the king see his prosperity

\(^\text{SAA 10 no. 73 rev. 3-4, Nabu-aḫḫe-eriba to Esarhaddon}\)

This is, to us, much less tender, as befits a mature royal scion—one who cannot easily be lifted up into the royal lap, and who was unlikely to run around in Esarhaddon’s sweet shadow. Such statements regarding mature sons are much less frequent and effusive than those regarding the king’s kids; what explanation could be advanced for this? We turn to a final example of this kind of royal familial feeling—an extended panegyric from Adad-šumu-ǔṣur—which concerns the royal succession. Contrasting this with ideas of families set against each other, the dangers of internecine strife, it becomes apparent that the maturing of a royal man into the imperial system formed both potential successor and potential personal threat. A man, eligible for the kingship, if his murder of the reigning king and seizure of power was successful, was clearly marked out for this by the šemu of the gods.

\(^\text{363}\) The term \textit{piqittu ša} {Divine Name|Palace Name} specifically refers to a royal baby that has been deposited for care in a temple or a palace (Parpola 1971: 110).

\(^\text{364}\) In a similar fashion, Adad-šumu-ǔṣur writes of playful royal children to Esarhaddon in SAA 10 no. 207: 

\begin{quote}
\begin{quote}
\text{\textit{šunu leluni ina šili šiṭu danaq ša šarri beliya lidulu nemelšunu šarri beli lemur mar marʾešunu ki annimma ina pani šarri beliya lidulu}}
\end{quote}
\end{quote}

‘May they (the king’s sons Aššur-mukin-paley and Sin-пер’u-ukin) come up and may they run around in the good and beautiful shadow of the king my lord; let the king my lord see their prosperity, may the sons of their sons run around before the king just like this’ (rev. 2-8). The verb \textit{vidʾu}, used to describe children idyllically playing here, was considered in a negative sense when applied to mature men working within the Assyrian state; see p.242.
The Promotion of Assurbanipal in the Royal Family

Many pages ago, we found ourselves with Adad-šumu-usur in the year 672, caught up in the unprecedented dual succession arrangements of Esarhaddon’s sons, Assurbanipal to the Assyrian throne and Šamaš-šumu-ukin to the throne of Babylon.\(^{365}\) We were concerned with the establishment of the treaty regulation ‘do not conceal whatever you see and hear.’ Now, we turn to the domestic, emotional experience of this exceptional event.

\[
\text{mar’e Aššur etamru libbašunu iptšu}
\]
\[
\text{ma šarru belini ina šarrani mar’eka tahtu ana Aššur epuš}^{366}
\]
The sons of Assyria saw, and their interiors relaxed

3, QUOT The king our lord with the kings your sons has done a goodness for Assyria

\[
\text{mar’eka annute damqute dugul libbaka lu ḫaddi}
\]
See these beautiful sons of yours, may your interior rejoice.

\text{SAA 10 no. 185 rev. 13-16}

\text{SAA 10 no. 185 rev. 19-20}

The first unusual thing we can observe is that the first example uses an imperative form of the verb, \textit{dugul}, rather than the usual precative. We can assume that this is both due to the festive nature of the letter, which contains several imperatives addressed to the king throughout,\(^{367}\) and due to the fact that these are probably uncontroversial suggestions that do not jeopardise or contravene the power relationship between Adad-šumu-uṣur and Esarhaddon. By contrast, the second example returns to the suggestive precative, creating distance once more as the exorcist offers therapeutic advice to his king.

Distance is also created affectively, with both positivity (\textit{ḥd} ‘rejoice’) and negativity (\textit{la dunqi} ‘not good’) attributed to the \textit{libbu} of the king, rather than the king’s self directly. In several other examples in the letters \textit{ḥd} is used transitively with the king as agent,\(^{368}\) indicating that its use here combined with \textit{libbu} is probably a choice, conscious or not, to create separation between

\(^{365}\) P.34.

\(^{366}\) I differ from the editor by taking e-pu-uš as the 3\(^{rd}\) person preterite form instead of an imperative.

\(^{367}\) E.g., šukun ‘place’ (bottom edge 27); qarrīb ‘make close’ (rev. 1).

\(^{368}\) E.g., šarru nu ḫadi ‘The king may rejoice’ (SAA 10 no. 114, rev. 9); šarru ma’diš lu ḫadi ‘The king may be very happy’ (SAA 8 no. 387, rev. 3); ḫadiš šarri aki ša ile ‘u lipuš ‘The king may happily do as he is able’ (SAA 10 no. 11, rev. 26-28).
Esarhaddon and the attributed affect. This affect is further intensified using a D-stem form, so even though the suggestion is for intense happiness, this is hived off to the *libbu*, thus generating a careful distance.

Why then, in this letter, does Adad-šumu-ušur address the king so directly, with such florid talk about practically everybody's emotions? The subject matter is telling, namely that in his praise for Assurbanipal and Šamaš-šumu-ukin’s good treatment, Adad-šumu-ušur exhorts the king to treat his (the king’s) other sons the same way (obv. 22-rev. 1). The links between Adad-šumu-ušur’s family and the royal family were very old by this time, stretching back to the ninth century (Šašková 2010: 116). Therefore, the stability of the royal line must have been of great importance to the scholar in order to maintain his own family’s fortunes, and thus the decision about the succession must have raised his spirits.

Beer and Bread: Commensality and Citationality

Now, we turn to two letters set in the overlap between the imperial hierarchy and kinship-defined relationships, with both authors conceptualising relationships through commensality, a cross-cultural characteristic of kinship relationality (Carsten 2000: 22; Sahlins 2011: 4). Both correspondents are strikingly affected by their experience with the Empire: the first, a Babylonian who works as an official within the hierarchy, writes a note to his aḫu ‘brother’ where he evokes images of the ideal empire to express his unhappiness:

Tablet of Nabu-taklak to Gadiyaʾ his brother, EMPH wellbeing for my brother
As to that which my brother wrote
QUOT Your interior EMPH be good
How is my interior good? The enemy has pitched camp against us, day and night we [assemble] for combat, and from your presence none of you has come to my help
Whatever, my interior is not go[od]
Truth, yo[urs], your interior is good, you sit in the house of [your] lord, you eat bread and drink beer before goodness in [the house of your lord]

SAA 17 no. 63, obv. 1-rev. 5, Nabu-taklak to Gadiyaʾ
Nabu-taklak’s juxtaposition of the imperial ideal—eating bread, drinking beer in the house of your lord³⁶⁹—with the threatening situation he is ensconced in illustrates how this fixture was seen in an informally defined exchange. Notably, the eating bread, drinking beer, being good is not evoked in a cynical way, but rather in implicit desire. For Nabu-taklak, the promises and benefices of the empire, serene commensality under the aegis of an Assyrian superior, were conditions that truly resulted in a good interior—at least, as opposed to living in the shadow of an enemy’s weapons. Nevertheless, though Nabu-taklak regards the imperial ideal in a positive light, the actual distribution of roles here is one which gives him pause. He aggressively flings back the quoted speech of his brother, switching to second-person address hedged about with intensifying devices, *kitti, mimma* for example. This juxtaposition of two present realities is a powerful expression of non-lexical, situational affect, where the experience of being on the war-front, despite being part of the imperial project, is one deeply undesired by the author.

The influence of empire on kinship relations also comes into play in the following letter, though in far more ambivalent action. The unknown author writes a penitent epistle to her seemingly long-lost child, kindling pathos even twenty-five centuries later:

> *ina ti[l] ša pi niši [šakin umma]*
> From this day the mother raised, and the daughters

> *ina panati ṭaqabbī umma anaku idi ki baṭṭatī*
> Previously you spake

> *u enna šarri bela remanu šu ina panika ulṭešanni atta : tatamranni tidi : ki baṭtaku*
> And now the king my lord, he is merciful, he has caused me to go out into your presence, you have seen me, you know I am alive.

> *mina aklu ekatu la belešu*
> Why eat bread that is not of his masters?

> *u anaku umandi ki annakru attanakka*
> I myself recognise that I have become an enemy: I gave you away.

³⁶⁹ The phrase *{bit/bet} beli* has sometimes been rendered ‘government department,’ but Luukko and van Buylaere rightly critique this and instead favour an ‘informal,’ ‘intimate’ interpretation (Luukko & van Buylaere 2002 p.xli-xlii).
This evocative letter more clearly elucidates kinship-defined values than Nabu-taklak’s. In particular, the author emphasises commensality, asking after the recipient’s sustenance, requesting a meal together, and rhetorically critiquing non-kinship-defined relations through a bready frame. This exchange is, sadly, situated in a difficult domestic history. The king is specified as the direct cause of this exchange, enabling communication between mother and son through his mercy. However, the author also describes that she gave her son away, though no reason is provided. This suggests that, for whatever reason, the mother giving away her son was a socially recognised act, one which she appears in this letter to accept, but regret. There is thus a tension here between the social norm that decree it is right for a mother to raise her children (as voiced in the ūltu-proverb in the mouth of the people), the circumstances that caused and condoned the mother giving her child up, and the ‘mercy’ of the king now re-enabling communication between the two. Another letter describes a man selling his children, then secretly messaging them to run away and return to him, implying that parents who found themselves in financial distress might legitimately, but reluctantly sell off their human resources. The tension thus arises in that it is the very society presided over by the merciful king that necessitated this mother to be parted from her child in the first place, illustrating indirectly the damaging effect of the Empire on this particular kinship relation.

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370 SAA 15 no. 74.
371 We might imagine this financial stress to be caused by crushing debt, or less charitably by profligate spending or the like.
5.2 Ramru For Self and Kin: Evidence for Non-Imperial Relationships

As befits an archive of tablets excavated from the citadels of the Assyrian capital cities, the vast majority of the Assyrian state correspondence implicates members of the Assyrian ruling elite, whether as authors or recipients of the letters. The terms of address in the letters we have already seen were most frequently official positions, with those communicating to superiors being particularly self-effacing in the use of {urdaka|aradka} ‘your servant/slave.’ The ruling hierarchy of Assyria was thus produced and reinforced through these customary genre conventions, a politesse.

However, a number of letters within the correspondence define relationships through the use of kinship terminology: abu ‘father,’ ummu ‘mother,’ aḫu ‘brother,’ aḫatu ‘sister.’ Though sometimes office and kinship is intermingled,372 the letters examined in this section entirely exclude official markers. However, we do not yet know what an Assyrian kinship relation entailed. In the royal family at least, kinship was effaced in the political correspondence, with relationships defined almost as office. Though the evidence available to us from the palace archives is limited, we are fortunate to have preserved a number of letters where kinship terminology is exclusively used. Though sparse, these letters share commonalities which suggest that a relationship defined by kinship was more than just a matter of terminology.

We find a reciprocality, even transactionality, inherent in the various kinship relations. On the one hand, there is a certain amount of materiality: in a letter to his brother, a certain Kina refers to an ostrich egg he was tasked to acquire:

pel lurmi ša aḫuya išpura Bel u Nabu lu idu ki īna Nippur ibaššu
The ostrich egg that my brother wrote to me—Bel and Nabu EMPH know whether one exists in Nippur.

SAA 17 no. 147, rev. 4’-8’, Kina to his brother Nergal-naṣir

372 For example, see SAA 18 no.98 for a letter between a certain Šamaš-[x x] to his father the šakin-temi, or SAA 16 no. 1, where Esarhaddon refers to the king of Elam as aḫu ‘brother.’ The practice of naming ‘political’ relationships with kinship terms had long precedent in the ancient Middle East—see Podany 2010.
The language here is emphatic, rhetorically swearing by two Babylonian gods and thus counterfactually implying that, in fact, there are no ostrich eggs. We can conjecture that this kind of material exchange was one dimension of a kinship relationship. Here there appears to be no implication of benefit on the part of either Kina (who has failed to acquire the egg) or his brother—or, at least, in Kina’s indirect quotation of his brother’s words he does not supply any information as to what either of them would get out of the egg exchange. Being able to acquire goods and things seemed to be inherent in performing a kinship relation: thus, Kina’s emphatic invocation of Bel and Nabu.373

Keeping Up with the Kin
This imperative to exchange was not limited to physical goods, but seemed to be a foundational aspect of the communicative relationship. The importance of responsive communication is emphasised in these exhortations from the snubbed:

3. 4 šipreti ki ašpurakka gabaru ul amur
   Of the three, four messages that I have sent, I have not seen an answer
   SAA 18 no. 97, obv. 5-8, Bel-aḫa-iddin to his father Iddin-aḫi

   ana mimi mala aga umu mar-šiprika la amur
   For what have I not seen your messenger until now?
   SAA 19 no. 144, obv. 8-10, Data to her brother Šumu-iddina

   šulangu ḫussamma šupur
   Be mindful of your health and write
   SAA 17 no. 147, rev. 2'-3', Kina to his brother Nergal-naṣṣir

   la aḫaya atta
   minu ša ṭemuni aḫuwa lišpur
   Are you not my brother?
   Whatever is ṭemu, let my brother write.
   SAA 5 no. 81, rev. 3-5, Aššur-zeru-ibni to his brother Nergal-eṭṭir

373 This can be compared to the concept of abbutu which appeared in the official correspondence. This term, derived from abu ‘father’ and modified with the abstracting -ut- suffix, loosely denotes the qualities of fatherhood, and was most frequently associated with the sukallu, one of the king’s most senior officials. See SAA 17 no. 77, obv. 1-7, rev.8'-right edge. 19 for an example of the association between material exchange and abbutu. Cf. also the portrayal of the sukallu and his abbutu, p.255.
These quotations all stem from instances in which it appears the communicative relationship has been disrupted in some way. They put us in mind of the emotive pleas to the kings from petitioners and scholars, exhorting responses.\textsuperscript{374} Here there is no regular pattern to the demand: each of the four authors uses a different strategy to communicate their appraisal of their correspondent’s deficiency: Bel-aḥa-iddin, a simple statement; Data, a question; Kina, two imperatives; Aššur-zeru-ilni, a counterfactual question and a preceptive. The diversity of device hints at the specificity and idiosyncrasy of the relationships between these people, and helps us move away from conceptions of Assyrian letter-writing genre and ideology as highly conventional, monolithic and restricted.

The different priorities of a kinship relationship further throw into relief the specifically imperial aspects of the state correspondence, as they contrasted with ‘family values.’ These values passively conflicted with the overriding imperatives of Assyrian interiority described above. Most noticeable is the transposition of duties that would ideally be performed for Aššur instead being dedicated to kinship aims, best exemplified by this letter from a certain Bel-upaq to his father:

\begin{quote}
	\textit{ṭuppi Bel-upaq ana Kuna abišu}

	\textit{lu šulum ana abiya umussu Nabu u Nanaya ana balatši napšati ša abiya ušallı}

	\textit{u ilku ana Ezida ana muḫḫi abiya kunnak}

	\textit{Mar-Biti ana muḫḫika ki aš’alu adammu ša šulum adi ul.4.šam iššabta}

	\textit{ana mimma kalamu mala teppašu šulum ramanka ḫussu}
\end{quote}

A tablet of Bel-upaq to Kuna his father. EMPH wellbeing for my father. I daily pray to Nabu and Nanaya for the life and breath of my father, and I constantly do ḫilku for Ezida concerning my father.
When I asked Mar-Biti about you, he fixed the period of your wellbeing until the fourth day.
Be mindful of the wellbeing of your ṭištu concerning whatever, anything whatsoever that you do.

SAA 18 no. 64, obv. 1-rev. 6, Bel-upaq to his father Kuna

Of interest here are the opening and closing statements, concerning ḫilku and ṭištu. We have already encountered the onerous ḫilku, the labour imposed upon those subject to the Assyrian yoke—here it is the Ezida temple, dedicated to the god Nabu and located in the city of Borsippa. The ḫilku of Aššur, we may recall, was an emotive and contentious topic, grounds for ṭištu, and the

\textsuperscript{374} E.g. SAA 1 no. 154 rev. 5-8; 13 no. 83 rev. 9-10; 15 no. 288, obv. 8-10.
subject of keenly sought after exceptions. Here, however, Bel-upaq mentions ilku in the opening greeting, linking his performance of it together with the customary blessings and well-wishes towards an interlocutor. This inclusion, clarified with ana muhhi abiya ‘concerning my father,’ suggests that either Bel-upaq is performing the ilku duty originally allotted to his father Kuna, or that Bel-upaq’s performance of the ilku is implicated in his father’s wellbeing in some way. Ultimately, the ilku element, commented on not with √plḥ or complaint, suggests that the duty was borne with grace.

Indeed, the letter is entirely concerned with Kuna’s šulmu ‘wellbeing,’ a point underlined by Bel-upaq’s exhortation in closing: whatever you do, šulum ramanu ḫussu ‘be mindful of the wellbeing of your ramanu.’ The imperative immediately stands out here, moving us away from the indirect proprieties of deferential address and towards a straightforward direct register. In concert with the indirect address in the opening greeting, this imperative does not suggest a superior-subordinate relationship; rather, this fluctuating, loose register, shifting between direct and indirect address is characteristic of letters using kinship terminology, suggesting a less codified, more informal relationship.

The imperative, to be mindful of the šulmu of the ramanu, is striking in light of the assumptions embedded in the imperial correspondence. As we saw in chapter three, the exhortation lu šulmu was bound up with the smooth operation of empire, in close association with libbu √ṭb. Here, however, the responsibility for one’s own šulmu rests with oneself, hence the imperative invocation to ḫussu, ‘be mindful.’ We have seen this invocation in another kinship context, when Kina write to his brother šulumgu ḫussa-ma. It seems that, for the subjects encompassed by Aššur’s dominion, those who did not partake in the imperial hierarchy did not pay much heed to the šulmu-wellbeing it provided. Rather than mention the benefices of Aššur at any point, the imperative allocates responsibility to the individual, and Bel-upaq underlines this by saying šulum ramanka ‘the wellbeing of your self.’ In contrast with the imperial values that set the subject’s ramanu-self against the temu of the gods, we have an implicit ideology emphasising self-care and self-responsibility emerging in the routine language of informal interaction that these letters exemplify.

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375 For √plḥ of ilku see chapter three, discussion of SAA 1 no. 183; for reference to exceptions, see SAA 1 no. 99, rev. 2’ ff.
376 See p.148ff.
377 See p.131.
This dedication of the self to kin instead of country comes through most consistently in an unattributed letter from the reign of Tiglath-pileser:

\[ \text{[\text{Ša aḫuwa\textsuperscript{[a]} īšpura\textsuperscript{[b]}]} uumma ūmi ṭuppi tamuru [x x x] ana īrti šarri el a\textsuperscript{[c]}]] } \\
\text{ilaka} \\
ul ša qaṭiya gabbi ša qaṭi aḫiya šu} \\
matati gabbi idu ki ramma ana muḫḫi aḫiya} \\
amar ki aḫuwa ana daṇqiya u ana baṇitiya qepu} \\
\[\text{That which [m]y brother sent to me\textsuperscript{[1]}]} \\
\text{[QUOT]: The day you see my tablet [x x x] ascend to the side of the king.} \\
\text{Is he coming?} \\
\text{There is nothing that is of my hands that is of the hands of my brother.} \\
\text{All the lands know that my self is for my brother.} \\
\text{See that my brother is for my goodness and my beauty.} \\
\text{SAA 19 no. 202, obv. 5-13, unattributed to his brother, unattributed}\]

Though the opening of this letter (obv. 1-4) is broken, we can clearly see from this passage the author’s emphatic devotion to his brother. This is communicated not through expressions of emotional language but the language of exchange and material property: the counterfactual ‘nothing of my hands is of the hands of my brother,’ and the equation ramna is for my brother, my brother is for my dunqu and banitu. This reciprocality of exchange is further underlined by the next sentence, which focuses on exchange of communication in detail:

\[ \text{Nabu-leʾi išten umu adi paṇiya aḫuwa īšpuramma ittiṣa lubuḫma šema u dibḥaṭa liqamaš aṇa aḫiya liqbi} \\
turti amat ša aḫiya lišmema} \\
\text{One day let my brother send Nabu-leʾi before me, and may I talk with him, may he take my šema and my words and speak them to my brother.} \\
\text{Let me hear in response the word of my brother.} \\
\text{SAA 19 no. 202, obv. 13-rev. 2, unattributed to his brother, unattributed}\]

Here, just as in the royal correspondence, we have an emphasis on the exchange of words, with carefully delineated steps: a named messenger in audience, talking (\textit{√dbb}), the physical taking (\textit{√lq}) of dibbu-words (\textit{√dbb}) to be spoken (\textit{√qb}) to the brother, and words (\textit{amatu}) to be returned which will be listened to (\textit{√šm}). This attention towards the mechanisms and process of verbal exchange
is similar in some ways to the concerns expressed in imperial correspondence: a documented process of transmitting words, with named proxies and allocation of verbal responsibility.\(^{278}\)

However, in the political sphere emphasis was placed on primarily on the secure transmission of messages or royal speech; in this kinship-based context, the reciprocality of conversation is the salient point.

Most interestingly, at once of a piece with imperial values and at odds with it is the attendance of ṭemu here. Whilst we cannot really be sure whether the unknown author is part of the imperial hierarchy or not, his emphasis on his self-dedication to his brother throughout the letter is suggestive. The ṭemu here—ṭema 'my ṭemu'—is likely one that does not originate from Aššur and the gods, in descent throughout the imperial hierarchy, expressed as the Assyrian imperial form. Instead, it is the ṭemu of the self, one not necessarily opposed to the Assyrian order and which consequently must be disciplined through the instruments of imperial interiority management, but one that exists for its own interests. Instead of an intentional loop of an empire, we find an implicit model of ṭemu exchange between kinship relations. The divine ṭemu was a mighty thing, decreed by the great gods, immanent through all matter in the world and an imperative to be read and trasmuted by the Empire. The ṭemu of kin, on the other hand, was something communicated and shared—unlike the imperial ṭemu, it took possessive suffixes; it was not ṣškn, but an open thing, ‘whatever is ṭemu, let my brother write.’ This is a radically different conception of ṭemu than the imperial one, one occupying the same ambiguous space, but not the same vast scale.

This contrast between an imperial scale of ontology and a domestic scale is further exemplified by the dedication of self to those defined through the terms of kinship. And indeed, in our discussion of the desirability of communicative exchange in kinship above, we saw Aššur-zeru-ibni associate brotherhood with the communication of ṭemu.\(^{279}\) In both letters, the correspondents define their relationship through kinship terminology, yet both letters also exist in the shadow of the imperial machine. Aššur-zeru-ibni’s letter concerns a governor and the chief eunuch; the unattributed SAA 19 no. 202 mentions the king himself in a broken passage. The implication then is that this quasi-kinship ethical model—dedication of ramanu to kin, exchange of ṭemu—was able to coexist and

\(^{278}\) For more on this see p.173.

\(^{279}\) E.g. SAA 5 no. 81, rev. 3-5. See also SAA 18 no. 96, obv. 4 (damaged).
interact with that of the imperial hierarchy. The imperial ṭemu, with its pretensions towards absolute dominion over the selves and ṭemu of others, resolutely failed to obliterate other forms of relation.

Family Feeling

Three further letters describing kinship relationality are worth examining in detail here for their particular use of affective and ironic language, which reveals further correspondences and dissimilarities to an imperial register. We return to the letter of Bel-aḫa-iddin to Iddin-aḫi his father, which lightly touches on affective response to non-communication, as well as giving us an idea of what a kinship group might entail:

\[\text{ṭuppi Bel-\textit{aḫu-iddin} ana Iddin-aḫi abišu lu šulum ana abiya Šamaš bašaška ana umu šati liqbi} \]

\[3, 4 šipreti ki ašpurakkā gabaru ul amur\]

\[ki nakari [x x x] la-paniya [xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx] aši-[xxxxxxxxxx]\]

\[ki naqutti ana abiya alṭapra\]

\[Bel-aḫa-iddin šulim ša Šarra aḫatišu iša”al\]

\[Bel-aḫa-iddin šulim ša Bel-bulliṭ Nabu-na’id u Nergal-eṭir aḥḫešu iša”al\]

A tablet of Bel-aḫu-iddin to Iddin-aḫi his father

EMPH wellbeing for my father, may Šamaš speak your living until distant days.

Of the 3-4 messages that I have sent, I have not seen an answer...

I have written to my father from trembling.

Bel-aḫa-iddin asks the wellbeing of Šarra his sister.
Bel-aḫa-iddin asks about the wellbeing of Bel-bulliṭ, Nabu-na’id and Nergal-eṭir his brothers.

SAA 18 no. 97, obv. 1-right. edge 10, Bel-aḫa-iddin to Iddin-aḫi his father

We have already briefly encountered the noun nakuttu ‘throbbing’ back in chapter two, where it was deployed in a specific somatic description of subjective feeling.\(^{380}\) Here, it is embedded in a phrase that was a bit of a Babylonian language trope which justified letter writing: ki nakutti ana

PERSONAL NAME ṣpr ‘to write to PERSONAL NAME because of desperation.’ This appears across a range of letters, from temple prelates,\(^{386}\) officials,\(^{382}\) and here, family members. Here, Bel-aḫa-iddin expresses his nakuttu because his father does not appear to have satisfied the implicit need for continued familial communication as described above. Of further interest here is that the father appears to be a single node through which Bel-aḫa-iddin is able to inquire about the rest of his family: his sister

\(^{380}\) For more on nakuttu, see footnote 146 on p.92.

\(^{386}\) SAA 17 no. 22, rev. 20-21

\(^{382}\) SAA 17 no. 102, where Bada the official states he wrote to Sargon seven times because of nakuttu!
and three brothers. This evokes the ways in which officials were representative nodes able to report on the wellbeing of their provinces. Both relationships evince a collapse of subjectivities into the report of a single voice: the voices of the many subjects of Assyrian authority into the authoritative voice of the official situated over them; the voices of Iddin-aḫi’s children subsumed by the voice of their father.

Letter—Dancing Data and The Death of Lady Gaga

*ina nipiḫ lībbika la taklaka*

Do not trust in the blazing of your interior!

Even though the model of the self in kinship relation stood in juxtaposition with the model coursing through the imperial hierarchy, the values of self in kinship were not at all static, but shaped by microhistorical context, as the next letter shows. Of the correspondence preserved in the Assyrian citadels, this letter, sent by the woman Data, is special. As we have seen, female voices are exceedingly rare in the corpus—Barsipitu’s letter to Sargon, and a second kinship letter are the only other significant examples we have. As we have seen, Barsipitu’s letter shares the same register as letters from male officials. By contrast, Data’s letter is much more affectively charged, as we would expect—she reports on the death of a family member:

Table of Datā to Šumu-iddin his(!) brother

May Mullīltu and Ištar of Babylon speak the wellbeing of the land of my brother.
I pray daily to Mullīltu and Ištar of Babylon for the life and health of my brother.

Why have I not seen your messenger until this day? Now if you are alive, let me disregard your deficient idiosyncrasies and dance.
Gaga—she is dead and your brother is upset. Come and see him.
I have written to you due to desperation. Reach here quickly.

Mullīltu and Ištar of Babylon EMPH know that day after day is with my trouble.
Do not trust [in] the blazing of your interior. God!

---

*šuppi Datā ana Šumu-iddin aḫišu*
*Mullīltu u Ištar Šuḫum mati ša aḫiya liqba’*
*umussu Mullīltu u Ištar Šabili ana bašušaši ša aḫiya usallā*

Tablet of Datā to Šumu-iddin his(!) brother

May Mullīltu and Ištar of Babylon speak the wellbeing of the land of my brother.
I pray daily to Mullīltu and Ištar of Babylon for the life and health of my brother.

---

*ammini mala aga umu mar-šiprika la amur enna ki balṭatu idatika miteti luramma lurqud*
*Gaga mitat u aḫuka dalḫiḫ alkamma amurša*
*ki nakutti altagprakka ḫantiš kuldu*
*Mullīltu u Ištar Šabili lu ida’ ki umussu itti dulḫetiya*
*[ina] nipiḫ lībbika la taklaka īlu*

Why have I not seen your messenger until this day? Now if you are alive, let me disregard your deficient idiosyncrasies and dance.
Gaga—she is dead and your brother is upset. Come and see him.
I have written to you due to desperation. Reach here quickly.
Mullīltu and Ištar of Babylon EMPH know that day after day is with my trouble.
Do not trust [in] the blazing of your interior. God!

---
Šulluma šulum ša Šumu-iddina aḫšuš śa inundušša ʾal
Šulluma asks about the wellbeing of Šumu-iddin his brother.

SAA 19 no. 144, Data to her brother Šumu-iddin

This letter unifies a number of correspondence tropes we have seen throughout this thesis, whilst exhibiting some unique devices seen in neither the officials nor the scholars correspondence. Firstly, commentary on the communicative relationship is offered: criticism of the correspondent’s neglect in keeping in contact (‘why have I not seen your messenger until this day?’), and a justification for this particular missive—nakutto—offered above and beyond the family death. These phrases appear in more or less the same forms as the official correspondence.383 Taken together with other features that indicate unthinking adherence to the generic norms of letter writing,384 we can perhaps observe a ‘shadow dialogue’ between a distraught Data and a formal scribe.385 Though visible only in trace, this represents another interaction between social spheres, relations, cultures: a domestic, private world of enclosed families, and the cuneiform culture of the learned scribes, arrogated and monopolised by the Assyrian state.

Nevertheless, through the ‘scribal filter’ we can still hear Data’s voice, distinct from the dry tone of state correspondence, and the performed affect of the scholarly letters. Firstly, although there are a few instances where third-person indirection is used, Data generally speaks to Šumu-iddina in the direct second-person address, using imperatives, emphasising their equal status. Data reproaches Šumu-iddina with a question, before indirectly criticising his idati-ka. In his edition of the letter, Luukko considers this to ‘more likely’ be a plural form of ittu, a word meaning ‘ominous sign.’ This is again suggestive of a concept usually associated with the Empire—translating the temu of the gods from their encoding in ominous phenomena—but here transposed into an interpersonal, rather than international, relation. It is not entirely clear what Data means by this. However, a

383 Similarly, Data’s exhortation ūanitiš kuldu ‘reach here quickly’ corresponds to that written by the sheikhs of Tubliš in their letter to an Assyrian cohort commander: ūanitiš kuldanu kuldanu ‘reach here quickly, reach here’ SAA 17 no. 150, right edge 10-11.
384 Primarily, a typical opening blessing, and an opening letterhead with an incorrect 3rd person masculine possessive for the addressee: aḫuša ‘his brother’ as opposed to aḫuša ‘her brother.’
385 For more on the ‘shadow dialogue,’ see p.23.
physiognomic tradition that read human qualities from bodily characteristics in analogy with cuneiform signs existed in this period (Frahm 2010: 114 ff). We might imagine that this scholarly tradition was symptomatic of wider analogical understandings of character and appearance, an exterior-interior correspondence beyond what we developed in chapter two. However, firm evidence for that is not to be found here.

Nevertheless, Data moves on to precatively sees herself dancing in this released future—lurqad. This immediately brings to mind the old men dancing in Adad-šumu-usur’s fantasia of the ideal imperium. In his panegyric evocation, the ašipu’s vision is sustained and suffused by √plḥ, the emotional chains of an imperial subjective network. No such √plḥ is found with dancing Data.

Finally, we have the very unusual statement [ina] nipih libbika la taklaka ‘do not trust in the blaze of your interior,’ followed by the isolated interjection ilu, ‘god.’ This phrase is a colourful departure from the libbu language we have hitherto been used to. As we established previously, in this world of kinship relationality there is an increased emphasis on self-care and reciprocal dedication, indicated by ramanu, imperatives and the importance of kinship exchange (of words and goods). Here Data specifically exhorts her brother to not trust (√tkl) in the ‘blaze of his interior,’ suggesting that she would prefer him to √tkl in something else instead. This attitude towards libbu is evocative of that held by imperial officialdom towards ramanu, and potentially implies that, within kinship relationality, too much concern with self was just as bad as too much ramanu within an imperial hierarchy. As for nipih libbika, this colourful description recalls Nabu-duri-usur’s claws as a creative, unexpected description of a human body. Though it would be erroneous to infer that a ‘blazing interior’ might reflect something like a fiery, wayward spirit, we can at least conclude that these kinds of creative constructions were able to be used in less formal communicative relationships. Correspondingly, the selves presented in more official imperial letters were constrained by implicit decorum.

386 P.132.
Conclusion–Family, Irony and Internecine Struggle

mar abašu idak aḥu aḥašu idak
A son will kill his father, a brother will kill his brother³⁸⁷

In this chapter, we sought to move away from the imperially-determined facts, acts, intents and subjects of the first four chapters, through an examination of kinship values. These emergent priorities included the importance of mutual care, commensality and reciprocality in communication and gift. Relationships defined by these values were practiced in the same society, even by the same people, as the hierarchical relationships of the Assyrian empire. The interactions between these different roles led to some ominous syntheses.

On the one hand, the disjuncture between empire and domesticity could be bridged by affective expression. Nabu-taklak, envious of his aḥu Gadiya’, quotes the promises of comfort offered by the shadow of the king, ironically reflecting on his own dire situation. Data and the unnamed mother more straightforwardly express their grief. Such intensity also figured at larger scales of geopolitical import: Balassu, whom we encountered in chapter three, demands to be deported in lieu of becoming an enemy of his sister’s son;³⁸⁸ the people of Urarṭu ask one of their lords in horror ‘why have you done like [this]? You killed the sister of your brother and the son of [your] brother!’³⁸⁹ We need only recall how Nabu-ušallim desired the throne of the Sealand, in opposition to his brother Na’id-Marduk, to see how easily the temptations of power overrode the mutuality of care. Such internecine strife is amply captured in the menacing omens of the eclipse in the above epigraph.

On the other hand, subjects might throw their lot in with the rewards of imperial service, disdaining their old kin for a place in the hierarchy of power. We saw in the epigraph to this chapter how Šarru-emuranni effaced his kinship relation entirely: instead of deriving his position and authority as city-lord of Qunbuna from his kinship relation with his father, he outright denies this relation in order to valorise how he was appointed to the position by the king of Assyria. Though kinship relations endured throughout the Assyrian empire, it is apparent that the imperial form sought to efface this kind of relationship whenever it could potentially come into conflict with imperial aims.

³⁸⁷ SAA 8 no. 384, rev. 1, Rašil the older to Esarhaddon
³⁸⁸ SAA 19 no. 87, obv. 10’-bottom edge 14’.
³⁸⁹ SAA 5 no. 158, rev. 18-21.
This is best exemplified in the case of some of the highest officials in the Assyrian empire, the eunuchs. These men were severed both from their family and from the organs that enabled them to engender a family, and resituated within the imperial ‘household’ (N'Shea 2016: 219). These beings were thus able to serve the Assyrian royal family across gender contexts, whilst being divorced from any other kind of relationality. By concentrating power in these subjects, instead of fully fledged male family members who might become potential rivals for the throne, the Neo-Assyrian rulers theoretically secured the position of their dynasty against potentially dissenting magnates, who are discussed in the next chapter.\footnote{The ultimate effectiveness of this strategy was disputable: Tiglath-pileser himself took power in a coup, Tiglath-pileser’s successor was ousted in a coup, Sennacherib was murdered by his son leading to a succession war, and for all of Esarhaddon’s treaties and strictures, his sons Assurbanipal and Šamaš-šumu-ukin engaged in a war against each other anyway. The collapse of the Assyrian dynasty in light of this profound instability at the apex is not unsurprising.}
The propagation of the ṭemu of Aššur across the universe was ultimately predicated upon absolute dominion. This was a dominion physical and psychical: the divine plan of the gods needed to traverse imperial territory and interior territory, so both were required to be completely dedicated to the cause. The Assyrian elite had a repertoire of techniques to discipline and direct the interiorities of their subjects towards this end. Nevertheless, despite the totalising impulse propelling the imperial machine, subjects had strategies at their disposal for self-expression without transgression, allowing for some leeway.

To assume that this imperial ontology achieved its universal aims would be a mistake. In the previous chapter, we saw that imperial values stood in tension with relationship practices defined by kinship. Rather than valorising the Assyrian hierarchy and subjecting oneself to it, kinship relationality appeared to entail a more autonomous self engaged in affectively salient exchange. Though the priorities of kinship relationality were at odds with dedication to Aššur, the two value systems commingled and coexisted. In this chapter, we explore active contradictions and antagonisms occurring in the imperial inner theatre, tying together many of the themes of the previous chapters. Firstly, we examine how the Assyrian elite ontologically interpreted their enemies within day-to-day interaction: how procedures of dehumanisation, insult and denigration transformed and inverted the positive hierarchical relationships and speaking subjectivities that comprised the ideal empire. We then investigate accounts where Assyrian officials were confronted with active opposition, whether from their subjects, or from their own colleagues. Occupying the same ambiguous, interpretive space of slippage, irony and uncertainty, these encounters reveal the potential autonomy—the √mgr-consent—that existed within the subject, and the need for an empire to thus police and control this inner theatre.

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391 SAA 5 no. 118, rev. 3-7, Gabbu-ana-Aššur to Sargon
392 See chapter 4.
6.1 Dehumanisation

zer-ḫalgat šunu mamiti ša ili u ade ul idu

They are the “Seed-of-the-Lost”, who know not treaty nor oath by the god.393

Stripping subjects of the right to speak was the most straightforward device for deauthorising and dehumanising those who could or would not be integrated into the Assyrian order. This could be done in the most literal sense:

ša ana šarri bēliya īslumī īšanīsu issu ħarrūtīšu īšīdudumī
The one who lied to the king my lord—let them pull out his tongue from his throat
SAA 1 no. 205, obv. 9-11, Zeru-ibni to Sargon

However, it was more often the case that the inability to speak was considered an inherent attribute of those alien to the Assyrian order, rather than a literal state occasioned by physical punishment. The astrologer Bel-ušezib, in the epigraph to this section, explicitly associates alien characteristics with those who are unable to speak in responsible ways, which were such an essential component of Assyrian authority.394 The zer-ḫalgati, literally ‘Seed-of-the-Lost’ have been variously glossed as ‘nomads’395 or ‘barbarians.’396 By being fundamentally unable to speak the binding ade-treaty,397 which guaranteed a unity of interior and word marshalled towards Aššur, these beings could not fully participate in the Assyrian world-order.398 The subjectivity of these beings was thus constructed as incompatible, even in the context of Bel-ušezib’s claim where the ‘barbarian’ Cimmerians have spoken cooperatively with Assyrian forces. Thus, the disjuncture between their words and reality was rendered opaque—Bel-ušezib speculates whatever they say is piršatu, ‘lie’—transforming the meaning of ‘barbarian’ from its Greek origin. Though the speech may be rendered intelligible to Assyrian ears, the people uttering it cannot imbue the words with any recognisable authorial responsibility, they cannot speak whatever they see and hear,399 and thus cannot participate in any

393 SAA 10 no. 111, obv. 15-16, Bel-ušezib to Esarhaddon
394 Amply demonstrated by the complex speech strategies and detailed assignment of responsibility we explored in chapter four.
395 CDA s.v. ḫalqu(m) ’j/NB zēr ẖalgati’
396 Parpola’s translation.
397 For which see p.161.
398 The term zer-ḥalgati was effectively synonymous with the term Umman-manda, which denoted an enemy horde equated with the forces of chaos (Güterbock 1934: 73 note 4).
399 Which was an essential obligation of the Assyrian subject, as we saw in chapter one.
kind of ṭemu-defined relationship. It is at this conjuncture of speech, subjectivity and authority that we find antagonistic relations constructed and portrayed.

The Hand of Criminals: Dehumanising and Deauthorising

As we have seen, certain key characteristics make up the authority of the Assyrian state machine: the ṭemu-flow from god to king to hierarchy; the ability to speak this ṭemu correctly and truthfully; the appropriately configured topology of interior and exterior to transmit ṭemu back and forth without interference from other ṭemu-subjectivities, especially the self. However, this idealised image was situated in a historical world and the members of the Assyrian elite were forced to confront elements who did not subscribe to their priorities.

In a letter to a group of subjects described only as the ‘non-Babylonians’ (la Babilî), Esarhaddon confronts subjects who, according to him, have no place within his ontological scheme. His letter demonstrates how this incompatibility was reconciled:

\[
[a]mat šarri ana la Babilaya šulmu ayaši
\]
The word of the king to the non-Babylonians. Wellbeing is for me.

\[
in a telete ša pi niši šakin
\]
In a saying in the mouth of the people

\[
QUOT
\]
The potter’s dog, having entered the interior of the kiln, barks at the potter from within.

\[
en na attunu ki la pi ilima ramankunu ana Babilaya tutterra
\]
Now you have turned your ramanu into Babylonians, against the word of the god

\[
u dibbi la dibbi ša attunu u belkunu tetepuša ana maḥḥi ardeya šaknaturu
\]
and words that are not words, which you and your lord are confecting, you situate against my servants.

\[
in a telimma ša pi šakin
\]
In another saying in the mouth of the people

\[
QUOT
\]
A criminal woman, her mouth is stronger at the gate of the judge’s house than that of her husband.

\[
ṭuppu šarati u meḫanatikunu ša tašpurani ina kunukkiša ki utteru ultebilakkunuši
\]
The tablet of wind and blustering you sent to me, I am sending back to you in its seal.

\[
mindema taqabba
\]
Perhaps you will speak

\[
QUOT
\]
Why has he returned it to us?

\[
ulta Babilayu ardeya u ra’îmâniya išparuni ki aptu altaši enna ṭabati ina rete bele ḫḫiṭi ša ilu [x x x x x x x x] luṣi
\]
When the Babylonians, my servants and my lovers, wrote to me, I opened it and read it out. Now is it good that I should read from the hands of criminals that the god [x x x x x x x]

SAA 18 no. 1, obv. 1-rev. 4, Esarhaddon to the ‘non-Babylonians’
Esarhaddon’s strategies for derogating his enemies are mostly straightforward inversions of the principles underpinning the authority of Aššur, with some delightful idiosyncrasies. Opening the letter, the Assyrian king subverts the standard norms of politeness in his opening greeting: he modifies the otherwise generic royal greeting, dispensing with the customary *libbaka lu ṣabka* ‘your interior may be good,’ as a result of the Assyrian king’s wellness. Thus, even at the outset Esarhaddon divorces his interlocutors from the affective schema appropriate to legitimate inhabitants of the Assyrian realm; a primary locus for the reproduction of the Assyrian hierarchy through politeness is thus transformed into an opportunity for abuse.

The rest of the letter is composed of a commentary on authorised and unauthorised speaking. Following this creative greeting, Esarhaddon bolsters his authority with a move to a doubly voiced utterance, the quotation of a *telte*-saying attributed to an inchoate, timeless ‘people,’ but also being spoken by the king’s voice. This creates a kind of hypostasis between the king and his subjects: by quoting the words of the people, Esarhaddon imbues them with authority as an effect of using those words to buttress his own; this syncretic utterance thus defines a relation of the king and his people on the one side, and the ‘non-Babylonians’ on the other. Along similar lines Esarhaddon describes his communications with the Babylonians as demonstrating a typical relation, describing them as *ardeya* ‘my servants,’ in line with usual terminology. His further description of them as *ra’imaniya* is deeply unusual: √rʾm, ‘love,’ is rarely attested in the correspondence, especially so when describing a subject relation with the king and his administration.

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400 See p.148.
401 Indeed, Parkin singles out the greeting as being a powerful position from which to disrupt social norms precisely because of their routinised aspect, which supercharges the creativity involved in refashioning the meaning due to the “surprise element” (1980: 48).
402 We might also compare this to Irvine’s experience of being indirectly insulted during her fieldwork in Senegal (1992: 109-10). There, after she denied a request to borrow a radio, a local informant uttered ‘When somebody asks for trousers, their owner puts them on.’ This ‘epigrammatic… irreproachable’ quotation of ancient words has striking similarities with Esarhaddon’s impressionistic deployment of proverbs, which obliquely insult rather than making direct links.
403 This affect is infrequently attested in the corpus, even amongst the affectively flourishing letters of the scholars. It is most often used by royal interlocutors to describe the relationship between the king and his gods, e.g., *ina pika ellu șa Marduk u Zarpanitu iramu ateme* ‘I heard from your pure mouth that Marduk and Zarpanitu love’ (SAA 18 no. 61, obv. 5-7); SAA 13 nos. 56ff., the greeting formula of Urdu-Nabu. Apart from this instance, subjects displaying √rʾm for the king in the earthly realm are few: Adad-šumu-ṣur himself only indirectly alludes to the concept: *mumu bel ṣabti la iram* ‘Who does not love a (lit.) lord of goodness?’ (SAA 10 no. 198, rev. 10).
This sharply contrasts with the ways in which the speech and acts of the non-Babylonians are portrayed. Firstly, this group is defined as a negation, the *la Babili*. Though this term might refer to one of the many ‘tribal’ Aramaean or Chaldean groups ‘moving around Babylon’ during this period, and whom the Assyrian state alternately favoured or disdained (Fales 2011: 110). By defining his interlocutors exclusively with this negation Esarhaddon strips them of any positive identity. Indeed, it is likely that the construct *la Babili* is Esarhaddon quoting his interlocutors, whom he accuses of declaring themselves Babylonians: thus, he has taken the self-description of these people, quoted it in its negation and revoiced it in his authoritative voice.\(^\text{404}\)

An authoritative Assyrian voice set against *dibbi la dibbi*—‘words that are not words.’ This denigration is one that, in concert with stripping the non-Babylonians of a positive identity, strips them of the ability to communicate. In concert with this is Esarhaddon’s description of his interlocutors’ letter as *šarati u meḫanatikunu* ‘your wind and blustering,’ a trope used to describe meaningless vanity, usually in the face of righteous divine power (Finn 2017: 27 ff.). Underlining the theme of meaningless noise, we have the analogies introduced by the content of the telte-quotations: the non-Babylonians utterances are likened to the voice of a criminal woman and a dog barking (*kalbu... unambaḥ*). Not only are the non-Babylonians stripped of positive identity, but their voices are perceived as equivalent to a dog’s bark: a sound that cannot carry linguistic meaning, cannot carry *ṭemu*, cannot engage in the Assyrian universe as an intentional actor.

Finally, the wilful agency of the non-Babylonians is indirectly slated, as the king writes *attunu ki la pi ilima ramankunu ana Babilaya tutterr* ‘you have turned your *ramanu* into Babylonians against the mouth of the gods’. This once again taps into the idea of the *ramanu* as almost exclusively an inappropriate self-will,\(^\text{405}\) and once again sets it against a model of authoritative speech: the most authoritative of speech in fact, that of the gods.

\(^{404}\) We can think of this not only as appropriation, but as re-naming. The power to ‘name’ was cosmologically paramount (*šumu, nabu*); pre-existence was nameless, human beings were defined by their names (Radner 2005: 15-16). Esarhaddon thus appropriates to himself the power to name these people, stripping them of the ability to self-identify, and arrogating to himself the ability to define what a Babylonian is.

\(^{405}\) See p.101.
Animals, relationships and insults

*a*ki kalbi asabbu adu’alla
Like a dog, I wander and roam

In the previous discussion, we saw that Esarhaddon, in his invective against the ‘non-Babylonians’, juxtaposes their actions with that of a ‘dog, having entered the potter’s kiln’.

In this proverbial micronarrative, it is clear that the non-Babylonians are to be construed as the dog, though Esarhaddon leaves this only as indirect implication. The choice to insinuate rather than directly express is symptomatic of a complicated relationship between insults, animals and humans within the correspondence, and the field of insulting language more generally. The vast majority of insulting language directed at others takes the form of questioning their capability to speak; by contrast, self-abnegation takes the form of animal description and the ascription of other physical or mental characteristics. This difference serves to underscore the profound importance attached to communicativity: one could be a dog, drunkard, or dead body, but without the capability of speech, one could not enter into human relation.

As we saw in Esarhaddon’s letter, he stripped the non-Babylonians of their capacity for effective, intelligible speech through the devices of wind, storms and barking like a dog. More often than not, however, the canine metaphor was self-ascribed, indicating that the device possessed a more ambiguous role. Rather than describing a position of absolute abjection, to take the position of a dog seems to have alluded to a master-servant relationship. This is described in several letters:

*issu dababi anni u ikribi anmuti ša šarru beli ana kalbiša ana urdišu u paršume ša betišu ispuruni u ikrubuni*
From these speakings and these blessings which the king my lord sent and thus blessed for his dog, for his servant and the old man of his house...

*SAA 10 no. 218, obv. 11-bottom edge 17, Adad-šumu-šur ašipu to Esarhaddon or Assurbanipal*

*anaku Bel-ušezib aradka kalabka u palḫka*
I am Bel-ušezib, your servant, your dog and one who does *yplḥ* for you.

*SAA 10 no. 109, obv. 7’, Bel-ušezib astrologer to Esarhaddon*

*anaku uradsu kalbušu u palḥšu*

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406 SAA 18 no. 1, obv. 5-7 and see above
407 There is a certain amount of irony to the fact that adopting an animal role does not seem to have been a vector of ‘dehumanisation.’ This can be contrasted with the description of the Babylonians as *gallu*-demons in Sennacherib’s inscriptions. For more on this see Weissert 1997: 193.
408 SAA 1 no. 154, bottom edge. 9; SAA 16 no. 115 rev. 5, no. 34 obv. 9
409 See also SAA 18 no. 125 obv. 18’
I am his servant, his dog and one who does his √plḫ

SAA 16 no. 29 obv. 11, Mardi to Esarhaddon

The takeaway from these three doggy descriptions is that kalbu carries a pronominal suffix indexing the king, indicating that, as a dog, the speaker still has a relationship with the king. Ultimately, the letters are quiet with respect to what this would entail. The above quotations suggest that there was a close association with being a practitioner of √plḫ for the king; similarly, a letter from Adad-šumu-uṣur associates kalbu with √krb ‘bless, pray.’ Adad-šumu-uṣur’s scribal training likely meant he was aware of the paronomastic interplay between √krb and klr; this kind of analogical operation was an important construct in cuneiform epistemology (Van De Mieroop 2016b: 126) and thus its likely deliberate use here is further evidence for the emphasis on the relational aspects of the canine metaphor.

In addition, a passage from a damaged letter by the ašipu Nabu-naṣir situates the relationship of a dog and its shepherd within a context which includes a servant who practices libbu √gmr towards his superiors. All these examples thus associate subjective, interior-transforming practices (√plḫ, √krb, libbu √gmr) with the act of canine self-abjection, practices which condition the interior with respect to another being to whom that interior is in relation.

Combined with Esarhaddon’s description of the potter’s dog (despite that canine’s foolishness), we may speculate that a dog in relationship with a master was representative of loyalty and thus laudable. This is further buttressed by such a relationship being advertised in one of Sennacherib’s royal inscriptions, where he describes installing a certain Bel-ibni as client king in Babylon, condescendingly referring to him as having ‘grown up like a young puppy in my palace.’ This praiseworthy dimension of caninicity consequently provides an explanation as to why Esarhaddon did not simply fling the accusation that the non-Babylonians were ‘dogs’ to go along with his proverb: his letter was working to negate a relationship. Even a recognition of the non-Babylonians as dogs would serve to establish a relationship between master and servant, one which Esarhaddon, denying the subjectivity of the non-Babylonians, would not seek to emphasise.

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SAA 13 no. 198, obv. 10-11: anaku kalbu karib šarrī belišu ‘I am a dog, precant of the king my lord.’

SAA 10 no. 327, obv. 8-12.

Bel-ibni mar rab-bani perī Šuanna ša kima mirani šaḫrī qereb ekalliya irtu [ana šarrati mat Šumeri] u Akkadi aštakan elišun ‘Bel-ibni, son of a nobleman, scion of Šuanna, who grew up like a small puppy within my palace, I placed over them [for the kingship of the land of Sumer] and Akkad’ (RINAP 3/i Sennacherib 1 l.54); see also Frame 2008: 26 for historical background.
Despite this ostensibly positive dimension to taking up puppyry, there remained an important negative aspect to the canine station that served to render it an ambiguous, potentially abject position. There are a couple of instances where dogs are explicitly associated with negative outcomes:

\[ ki\; kalbi\; ina\; sinqi\; ina\; bubuti\; ša\; kusapi\; lu\; la\; amu’at \]
May I not die like a dog in thirst and hunger for scraps

SAA 16 no. 31 rev. 3'-5', Kudurru son of Šamaš-ibni to Esarhaddon

Both these examples are highly specific: the first is part of a fairly straightforward petition to the king; the second, a more complex petition to the sukallu. Despite their specificity, both of these examples imply canine association was not an enviable position.\(^{413}\) The first brings out the dependence of a dog on their master for their physical wellbeing and basic needs. More interestingly, the second, through its implication that being abandoned into ‘the hands of the dogs’ is a bad thing, implies that dogs are unsuited to a position of authority.\(^{414}\) This evokes an implicit principle of appropriate societal stations, bringing to mind Adad-šumu-uṣur’s disclaiming ĭemu in an administrative sphere.\(^{415}\)

Underlining this position is how the position of dogs is characterised in accordance with the purposeful ĭemu principle of directed action. In several letters and petitions, individuals liken their undesirable situation to the aimless wanderings of canines:

\[ ata\; ina\; bubuti\; ša\; kusapi\; amu’at\; aki\; kalbi\; asabbu\; adu’alla \]
Why am I dying in need of scraps? Like a dog, I wag my tail and wander about.

SAA 13 no. 190, rev. 19-rev. edge 24, Šamaš-šumu-lešir to Esarhaddon/Assurbanipal

\(^{413}\) This ambiguity is further befuddled by the fact that dogs were associated with the healing goddess Gula since ancient times. During the second millennium her temple in the city of Isin housed dogs and was known as the ‘House of Dog’ (Sum. e₂.ur.gi₇.ra); in the Neo-Assyrian period, canine healing imagery was found on cylinder seals and alluded to in ritual texts. See Chikako Watanabe 2017: 690-693 ff.

\(^{414}\) At least, of authority over the city of Babylon.

\(^{415}\) See p.57.
This letter, from an Assyrian official of unknown standing tasked with cultic duties, concludes his letter to the king with a particularly florid plea for a royal audience. Embedded in his petition is a telling simile, where he describes himself as a dog ‘wandering about’. By setting this in the situation of his royal summons, and noting that, although the king has summoned him he has not yet had an audience with him, he thus emphasises that he is disengaged and idle, at a loose end. Thus, he exploits the ambiguity of a canine-master relationship—he portrays himself as completely loyal, as being of inferior station to the king, and at the same time is able to critique the king for leaving him unattended. This portrayal, though encoded in a fairly unassuming simile, thus packs in a substantial meta-context regarding domestics, ethics, action and transaction. The relationship of servant with king is as dog to master, the dog uncritical and devoted; the dog is devoid of autonomous means of subsistence, and without his master will die from lack of food; without direction from his master, the dog is purposeless and acts without intention. And, as we saw in chapter one, to be without intention was to be without temu; to be without temu was undesirable at best⁴¹⁶ and a marker of senselessness at worst.⁴⁷ Crown this is the conclusion that, in return for this canine loyalty, the master must disburse his requisite patronal duties: scraps (kusapī) for the stomach and instruction (temu) for the mind. Being provided with direction and peaceably undertaking the work assigned was an ethical foundation of the Assyrian state, and deviation from this relation led to disaffection on both sides. We already saw this from the subordinate’s side with Ariḫu’s letter to Nabu-duri-ūṣur. There, Ariḫu expressed his disaffection through a shift from indirect to direct register, thus acting upon the relationship-making process directly, collapsing the social gulf between him and his superior. In the above example, a similar lack of direction is lamented, but through analogy and simile: by adopting the ambiguous relationship of the dog loyal to its master, Šamaš-šumu-lešir was able to critique the king through indirect means.

Finally, these pup portrayals could be composed together with other tropes of disorder, from the silent superior,⁴⁸ the la šmgr ‘dissenting’ deputy governor,⁴⁹ to overturned temu.⁵⁰ We will

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⁴¹⁶ P.49.
⁴⁷ P.70.
⁴⁸ E.g., SAA 15 no. 288 obv.4-6, Aššur-reṣuwa to a deputy governor
⁴⁹ Ibid. obv. 8-10.
⁵⁰ SAA 16 no. 32, rev. 5-12, see p.264.
encounter these increasingly serious straits in the course of this chapter, but for now we turn to a final example of abusive animalia.

This particularly marked example of animal insult is found juxtaposed with the rare deployment of direct, untranslated speech in a non-Akkadian language. In a letter to Sargon, the governor of Tušḫan presents several quotations of an exchange he had with an individual whom Lanfranchi and Parpola suggest is the king of Šubria\(^{421}\) (referred to as Šubriya\(^{421}\) ‘the Šubrian’). In these quotes we find evidence of what is possibly the Šubrian language:

\[
\text{assaparasiššu} \\
\text{[n]uk} \\
\text{I sent to him}
\]

\[\text{ata abašti muru ša Urartu[ya] issu pani la paliṣaka}\]

\[\text{Why are you not } vpl\text{ before the gods, } abašti\text{, calf of the Urartian?}\]

\text{SAA 5 no. 35 obv. 30-32, Ša-Ăššur-dubbo to Sargon}

\[
\text{egirtu ina muhhiya issapar} \\
\text{ma tebal ada} \\
\text{ma šabanikunu ašapphirekka}\]

\[\text{He sent a reply tablet to my presence}\]

\[\text{tebal ada}\]

\[\text{I will send you your men.}\]

\text{ibid. rev. 10-12}

Here we see both Ša-Ăššur-dubbo and the Šubrian king presented as speaking in what is believed to be the Ḫurrian language (Lanfranchi & Parpola 1990: 29; Radner 2012: 244). Now, we may wonder at this codeswitching: why is it that Ša-Ăššur-dubbo has quoted this Ḫurrian exchange in a letter to the king, who presumably had no interest in Ḫurrian, only the Assyrian précis? Does this change of language carry any ideological significance? Ša-Ăššur-dubbo’s message to the Šubrian, calling him a ‘calf of the Urartian’ (muru ša Urartaya), is almost certainly intended to belittle or insult. In several instances we find Assyrian kings being metaphorically described as muru; their patrons are, however, deities, speaking through oracular utterances.\(^{422}\) Thus the analogy thus seems to be one of dependency: Assyrian kings are dependent on the gods, whereas the Šubrian is only cared for by the

\(^{421}\) Šubria was one of the buffer states separating Assyria and Urartu, in the headwater region of the Tigris (Radner 2012: 260)

\(^{422}\) E.g. SAA 9 no. 1, obv. 29; no. 2 iv. 29'; no. 5, 3; no. 7 rev. 11
king of Urartu. A legitimate and desirable relationship is thus reconfigured to serve as a demeaning insult, one further emphasised by the cross-cultural frequency with which animal insults are to be found (Irvine 1992: 108). That this bovine insult is reported twice in this letter, once in Hurrian (abati) and once in Assyrian (muru), further marks this out. It may very well be that, with Ša-Aššur-dubbu speaking to the Šubrian in Hurrian whilst criticising him, that recording his response again in Hurrian further emphasises his baseness: linking Hurrian with insult in the letter, then having the king of Šubria speak in that language. By having this language inscribed into the letter for its projected future dictation to Sargon, Ša-Aššur-dubbu perhaps intended to transpose this baseness right into the royal presence, sonically evoking an abject realm on the Assyrian border and emphasising the differential in the implicit language ideologies.

To conclude, a key theme underlying this scornful menagerie was that, despite the abasement involved in identifying self or other in animal terms, these animals were all domesticated. In her study on Mesopotamian animal symbolism, Watanabe emphasises the importance of domestication processes to Mesopotamian narrative practices, associating them closely with Assyrian imperialism (2002: 153-4). This association carried with it notions of integration and control: thus, despite the abusive aspects of animal metaphor, humans who adopted it or regarded others with it did not necessarily exile the described from hierarchical society. This operation was reserved solely for the unspeaking.
Diminution

In contrast to animalistic speech as a derogatory strategy, diminutive descriptions were exclusively used in a negative sense, rather than occupying an ambiguous, relationally interpreted position. This was particularly associated with the root √qll, which contrasted with the more neutral √ṣhr which we encountered in royal family relationships. Illustrating this, we can return to Ša-Aššur-dubbu’s correspondence. There, we find a nice example of insult being directed at the Assyrians from without the empire, the Urartian governor of the city of Pulua, who condescends to his counterpart:

\[
pā ḫutu ša Pulua ša putawa issab
data-ansi-0-0 ma ata mar-šipri ša aḫiya qalli [la ilī]ka
data-ansi-1-0 ma ilu ina panišu erraba
\]

The governor of Pulua opposite me has written,

3.QUOT Why has the messenger of my lesser brother [not come]?
3.QUOT Is a god visiting him?

SAA 5 no. 33, right. edge 16-edge 1, Ša-Aššur-dubbu to Sargon

The use of kinship terms here is quite unusual. As we saw in the previous chapter, ahu ‘brother’ frequently appears, alone, to refer to an interlocutor of equal status. Here it is uniquely qualified by qallu, which Parpola here translates as ‘little’ but carries a more insulting connotation, having a secondary meaning of ‘slave.’ If we interpret this as a deliberate insult then, we get the impression that the Urartian governor has deliberately slighted his Assyrian counterpart (or at least, has been portrayed as doing so in this letter). Furthermore, by offering the suggestion in rhetorical question form that Ša-Aššur-dubbu has not attended the Urartian governor’s audience because of a divine visit, the Urartian governor has positioned himself as directly below the gods in a hierarchy of duties. Thus, he creates a mocking hierarchy, where he aggrandises himself and denigrates the Assyrian governor and, indirectly, the Assyrian king.

This is doubly interesting in light of the multiple layers of transmutation this utterance must have passed through to reach the Assyrian court in this form. The governor of Pulua is given an Assyrian title, paḫutta, and is quoted as speaking in the Assyrian language. We can surmise that at some point a translation process occurred from the Urartian language to Assyrian, possibly during the creation

\[423\] P. 219.
of the Urartian governor's message, if he maintained an Assyrian cuneiform scribe in his entourage specifically to compose messages in his name. Consequently we have a translation of insults in that the 'belittling' aspect in the Urartian governor's speech must have been interpreted, translated, adduced at some point.

From the geopolitical sphere to a domestic sphere, we have a certain Bel-iqiša writing to Esarhaddon about some issues provisioning horses but, in a grimly amusing contrast, the subtext of which is a murder plot against him, he mentions that a scribe 'established my √qll':

issi Nabu-[x x] tablet ša rab-betti addab[ub]
muk ki[ssutu pa]nitu ana sisse din qula[leya} issa[kan u iqabbia
ma anaku issu betanni apparaka
u issu bet šarru beli ina bet beleya iqiddan[m]ini ina muḫḫi memmeni ina bet beleya la šaltuk
u issi ṭupšarru ša qateya addububu ina muḫḫi du[a]kīya] idabbub bet beleya gabbī ikterik šapluš issa[kan šulmate
uzzazī idukanni

I talk with Nabu-[...] the scribe of the major-domo
1.QUOT Give the [pr]evious fodder to the horses
He has established my belittlement and speaks to me
3.QUOT I, I will cut you off from the inner quarters
And since the king my lord appointed me in the household of my lord, concerning whatever is in the household of my lord, I have no control
And I was talking with the scribe at my hand, he talks concerning [my] killing
— he has wrapped up the house of my lords and placed it under him, he divides up gifts for my killing.

SAA 16 no. 112, obv. 10-rev. 14, Bel-iqiša to Esarhaddon

Rendering people as √qll, unlike the threatening context of murder alluded to above, also appears to have been a fairly tame disciplinary procedure:

Urdu-Nabu egertu ana Bel-ēṭir ana Šamaš-zeru-iqiša issapra
ma masennu ša illikanni
ma ša la šarri ittalka
ma ina muḫḫi piya qallilaššu

Urdu-Nabu sent a letter to Bel-ēṭir and Šamaš-šumu-ukin
3.QUOT The treasurer that came here
3.QUOT that came without the king,
3.QUOT by my mouth, belittle him

SAA 16 no. 21, rev. 9-13, Šamaš-šumu-ukin mar-šarri Babili to Esarhaddon

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* Analogous to the duties of Babylonian scribes at the Assyrian court (Pirngruber 2014: 1).
At first glance, this seems to be a simple imperative from a senior scholar to berate a junior for acting without the authority of the king. However, it is set in the context of a report describing some serious sedition which undoes the *ṭemu* of the king, discussed in further detail below.
6.2 Sound, Silence, Speech

Storm and Winds, Bluster and Bloviation

itti šarru idabbu šulle u surrat išissu meḫu u panassu šaru

He who talks deceit and lies with the king—his foundation is a storm, his front is wind.

Utterly depriving entities of the ability to speak—and thus stripping them completely of their ability to become subjects in the Assyrian cosmic hierarchy—was an extreme form of antagonism and nonrecognition. A less extreme operation, which avoided the complete dehumanisation of the described being, was to describe their utterances as meaningless. This was accomplished with a variety of terms. As we saw in Esarhaddon’s letter to the non-Babylonians, he describes their letter as ụppu šarati u meḫanatikunu ‘your tablet of wind and bluster.’

This metaphorical move, transposing meaningful language into the field of sonic aimlessness, was a typical manoeuvre attested throughout cuneiform literature, as amply accounted for in Finn’s study (2017: 27 ff. and throughout). Furthermore, unlike the descriptive practices used to dehumanise or demean, these terms were applied to the acts and habits of speaking subjects enclosed within the Assyrian order. Unlike kalbu, however, these terms were mostly employed to describe the words of others:

dibbi ša nišiya pihat idī ki šarati isēṭtu mindema ana beliyu lu ana mimma ana muḫḫiya išapparu piḫatu la išapšumuti

The words of my people: the governor knows that they are spreading winds. Perhaps they might write to my lord about a thing that concerns me or about me—the governor must not believe them.

SAA 17 no. 164, rev. 1’-6’, Šuzubu to an unnamed pihatu-governor

enna mašennu ki ｉpturūṣ šaratišuma ul umaššar nisaḫu unassāḫu u ana šabe ipaššar

umma ṭema ana ekalli la ikaššadma

Now when the treasurer released him, he did not forsake his winds but continued to tax the tax and releasing for men

QUOT My ṭemu will not reach the palace

SAA 18 no. 102, rev. 5’-9’, unassigned to Naqi’a,

These examples demonstrate the two occasions where šaru is employed to denigrate the utterances of others. The first is attributed to a man who names himself Šuzubu—potentially to be equated

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425 SAA 10 no. 29, rev. 8-right edge. 11, Issar-šumu-ereš to Esarhaddon
426 SAA 18 no. 1, obv. 16.
with Mušezib-Marduk, who proclaimed himself king of Babylon in opposition to Sennacherib.\footnote{Frame 2008: 26. If the author of this letter is indeed to be identified with the Babylonian ruler, then this presents an interesting dynamic in that in this letter Šuzubu is denouncing his own people, and in Sennacherib’s royal inscription account of the battle of Ḥalule, he describes these same people as gallu demons (Weissert 1997: 193). It is in this same passage, furthermore, that these people ally with the Elamite king Ḫumban-menanu ša la išu ʾtemu u milki ‘who does not have ʾtemu or counsel’ (RINAP 3/1 Sennacherib 22 col v 33-34).} In his letter, he denigrates the unspecified utterances of his people, further qualifying it with the modal particle \textit{mindema},\footnote{See p.198.} which introduces an uncertain future containing further unspecified utterances, resulting in heavy indirection. We might again recall Esarhaddon’s attitude to the non-Babylonians šarati u meḫanati—he did not even have that letter recited to him. Thus, in both these instances we have the words of a collectively defined group not only being stripped of their meaning but immediately dismissed.

The second example above is consequently somewhat unusual in describing a single, named subject,\footnote{Presumably Aplaya son of Nadinu, mentioned in obv. 8 of the letter. He appears to be the only subject under discussion, though the damaged tablet means we cannot be certain the topic has not changed by rev. 6’.} though it does not report a specific utterance. Instead, the author chooses to quote words not framed by a \textit{verbum dicendi}, suggesting that they are private, even interior words. How the author came by these words is not revealed, but the subject is described as certain his ʾtemu will not reach the Palace. This again indicates that the ʾtemu of Aššur was not alone, and required the Assyrian hierarchy to manifest it in the world: a seditious, stormy being like Aplaya could tax illicit tax, and have his ʾtemu (underlined with an unusual possessive suffix) manifest without waylay.

\textbf{Unword Words}

Carrying a similar function to šaru u meḫu, but without that phrase’s intertextual echoes, was the simple description \textit{dibb}i la \textit{dibbi} ‘words that are not words’. Unlike wind and storms, ‘word that are not words’ are paradoxical: they have a capacity for being words in form, but something about them makes them ‘not words’; they are able to be uttered, by being associated with a verb such as √\textit{dbb}, but they lose their meaning.

The number of instances of words-not-words is only three. The first demonstrates the usage of the phrase in a decidedly non-official context: a land dispute within the family of a client ruler:
Seʾ‑lukidi mar aḫ abišu ša Gir‑[Dadi] [i]ttalka [iqtišia] ...
ma kum šarru issa Dur‑Yakini isahḫurani ušagalnaššini Giri‑Dadi dibbi la dibbi idubbubu nakuttu rašši
Seʾ‑lukidi, the son of the brother of the father of Giri‑[Dadi] has come, [he spoke to me] ...

SAA 1 no. 190, obv. 16-18 + rev. 4'-9', Nabu‑pašir to Sargon

Here, the description dibbi la dibbi is used by Seʾ‑lukidi to empty Giri‑Dadi’s words of meaning after they were uttered: in effect deauthorising those words after the fact. This revocation is a kind of disclaimer of responsibility—a ‘he didn’t mean it’ move—with Seʾ‑lukidi’s concerns about the effect of Giri‑Dadi’s words explicitly attested: he does not want to be deported.⁴³⁰

Finally, we have dibbi la dibbi being used as an attempt to negate words spoken to a ša‑qurbuti:

[ša‑qurbu]tu ša šarru bela iš[pura]
umma dinka lipuš
ana [x x x] ki illiku la dibbi ittišu iddabbu mimma mala bašu dina ul ipuš

The Close One that the king my lord sent to me,
QUOT Make your case
for [x x x] that he came, they spoke not-words with him, whatever exists, my case he did not do.

SAA 18 no. 9, rev. 2'-7', unassigned to Esarhaddon

We can compare this with a letter attributed to Šuma‑iddin, where another Close One is involved in ascertaining a case.⁴³¹ There, the speaker uses amat la amat (rev. 13') instead of dibbi la dibbi, and this is additionally associated with outright untruth (la kitti, rev. 7'). Unlike describing speech as šaru or meḫu then, it seems that describing speech as ‘words not words’ applied to utterances that were understood as meaningful language at some point. It would be inappropriate to describe Assyrian officials like the ša‑qurbuti as actively listening to blustering; instead, by emphasising the paradoxical words that appear as words, but are not in fact words, subjects who describe the utterances of others in this way do not inadvertently insult those who listened to these unword words—anyone might have been taken in by these noises that merely sounded meaningful.

⁴³⁰ Deportation, Vgl.; being a generally awful fate, for which see chapter three
⁴³¹ SAA 13 no. 179.
The Silent Subject

Mirroring the conceptions of meaningless, stormy noise is the concept of the silent subject. Unlike words described as meaningless noise, as šaru or meḫu, subjects described as √qʾl ‘silent’ are conceived of as lacking agency. In some contexts, this could be highly desirable, as when the Urartians are defeated by the Cimmerians:

\[
\begin{align*}
[inu muihī] \text{Urartya assaʾašū} \\
\text{ma} \quad \text{Urartya [rahiutušu ana] Ginir bet illikani} \\
[ma] \quad x \ x \ \text{issu pašri bēliya paliḫu addanniš} \\
[ma] \quad a\text{ki issati }\text{irušu }\text{iqullu} \\
[ma] \quad \text{ina} \text{ } \text{birat }\text{ša šari bēliya memenī [la }\text{x }\text{x }\text{x]} \\
\text{ma} \quad \text{šulmu addanniš}
\end{align*}
\]

I interrogated him concerning the Urartians

3.QUOT The Urartian [and his magnates were defeated] on their expedition [against] the Cimmerians
3.QUOT they are very √plḫ before the king my lord
3.QUOT they shake and are silent like women
3.QUOT nobody [x x x] the forts of the king my lord
3.QUOT there is very much wellbeing

SAA 1 no. 32, obv. 10-16, Sennacherib mar-šarrī to Sargon

Sennacherib reports a most desirable state of affairs for the Assyrians. The Urartians have suffered a defeat in battle, not against the Assyrians but another foe, with a result that now they have √plḫ towards the Assyrian king.⁴³² Yet, in addition to this, they are described with the somatic depiction of shaking (√rʾb), staying silent (√qʾl), like women. As we would expect, the state of √plḫ before the king is associated with wellbeing (šulmu), yet these additional glosses are illuminating. Rather than exhibiting the performative affect of those subjects counted as Assyrians—doing their work in libbu √tʾb as subjects of the king—they are instead rendered as transfixed. √rʾb, an ambiguous somatic description of shaking, requires further interpretation in context to translate it into something like ‘fear’ or ‘anger.’ There are instances of the king exhibiting √rʾb in contexts in which he cannot be associated with practicing √plḫ,⁴³³ there, the king is actively speaking, whereas here, the Urartians are silent and √plḫ. Though the relevant verb is not preserved, the allusion to nobody being able to act against the king’s forts further suggests that an ideal outcome for √plḫ is the powerlessness of

⁴³² Sennacherib pointedly omits any mention of the Urartian attitude towards the Cimmerians. We might expect that the Urartians would be fearful before the Cimmerians rather than spontaneously becoming √plḫ before the Assyrian king.

⁴³³ See for example SAA 16 nos. 71, 121.
\[ \sqrt{q'l}, \] of silence, such that the Urartians' recognised capacity to act intentionally is thoroughly negated. This is relational \( \sqrt{plh} \): for subjects of Assyria, \( \sqrt{plh} \) entailed song and dance;\(^{434} \) for the Urartians, powerless silence.

### Silence of the Assyrians

The idea of \( \sqrt{q'l} \)-silence as a sign of weakness or powerlessness was also one that found use by correspondents within the Assyrian state. An episode of aggression appears between two high officials within the empire, the governor Taklak-ana-Bel and the sukkallu. Despite the respectful language universally accorded to the sukkallu, which Taklak-ana-Bel appears to use, the governor switches to a direct register in which he embeds an accusation of \( \sqrt{q'l} \). Parpola reconstructs the greeting formula, before proceeding to a well-preserved narrative section, describing the murder of a certain Baḫianu by the criminal Bel-.lu-balaṭ. The letter concludes:

\[
\text{issu pan zakke gabbu issena alpani ittaḫar niše mati gabbu ina muḫḫi isset šepišunu izazzu} \\
\text{ata qalaka dababu anniu ina ekali šašme} \\
\text{adu atta ina muḫḫi [x x x] ana īšṭi la taš[a][kkar]ni illaka} \\
\text{adu taš[mun]i [be]li lībbateya [malla]}
\]

From before all the exempts he (Bel-.lu-balaṭ) has received oxen, one from each; all the people of the land stand upon a single foot.

Why are you silent? Make this talking heard in the Palace.

Whilst you concerning [x x x] you do not place me at fault.

Until you [make it heard], my lord will be [filled with] rage of me.

**SAA 1 no. 244, rev. 9-18, Taklak-ana-Bel, governor of Naṣibin, to the sukkallu**

This shift to second-person address is highly marked. For comparison, a letter sent to the sukkallu from a Babylonian administrator, Bel-iqiša, is less harsh in tone:

\[
\text{ammeni Babili iḫḫapi u beli sakit} \\
\text{Šamaš u Marduk ana abbut ša Aššur iltaknuša šarru šukpidma lilikamma Babili ana Marduk luzakkī šumkunu ana dara[ti] ina Esagil u Ezida [liškun]}
\]

Why is Babylon being destroyed, and my lord is silent? Šamaš and Marduk have placed you as a father of Assyria — make the king plan to come here and exempt Babylon for Marduk, [establish] your name for ever in Esagil and Ezida.

**SAA 17 no. 21, rev. 11-16, Bel-iqiša to the sukkallu**

\(^{434} \) P.132.
We can see that, despite both correspondents shifting to address the *sukkallu* directly in the second person, Taklak-ana-Bel's tone can be characterised as markedly more aggressive. Firstly, whilst both correspondents describe the *sukkallu* as silent, Bel-iqiša still uses the third-person to address him, and also uses the form *sakit*, whereas Taklak-ana-Bel refers to him directly with a second-person suffix, and uses √*qʾl*. Additionally, both use imperatives to address the *sukkallu*, šašme ‘make heard’ and šukpid ‘make plan.’ However, Taklak-ana-Bel continues to use second person address throughout, even using a prohibitive *la taš[a]kk[an]*, actively restricting the agency of the *sukkallu* by telling him what he must not do. Finally there is the mention of *libbatَا yَا* ‘rage at me.’ The use of *libbatَا* in the correspondence is limited, appearing only one other time in a damaged context.435 The context is damaged here as well—all we know is that the rage is being directed at Taklak-ana-Bel, as the agent has been lost.

This friction extended even to the highest reaches of the imperial hierarchy: a client king writes to Sennacherib *mar-šarri* directly accusing him of √*qʾl*.436 If we take these together with Ariḫu’s exasperation at his silent subordinates,437 we see that √*qʾl* within Assyria is indicative of hierarchical dysfunction. For again, despite the demands of smooth *ṭemَا*, ambiguity dissolved and subjectivities secure, problems and pushback permeated Assyria at all levels. In the next section, we explore this pushback within the hierarchy itself, before concluding with how the non-elite under the Assyrian yoke threw off the *ṭemَا* allotted to them.

435 See SAA 13 no. 182, obv. 9’. Generally, somatic descriptions are used to describe an anger response, such as the ‘jumping interior’ (*libbu √ššṭ*) or ‘shaking’ (*√rʾb*).
436 SAA 1 no. 29, rev. 12-17, Sennacherib *mar-šarri* to Sargon.
437 *bel piqittate qalu* ‘the officials are silent’ SAA 1 no. 220, rev. 1.
6.3 Dissent and Discontent in the Assyrian Hierarchy

The absolute denigration of extra-Assyrian elements, the denial of their ability to speak, to interface with the truth, and thus participate in the process of țemu-making—these techniques of delegitimization could not be applied wholesale and unmodified to those within the Assyrian hierarchy itself. As outlined in chapter one, this hierarchy justified itself as enacting the țemu of Aššur and the great gods, the gods of the king. The members of the political elite—the šarru-‘king,’ rabiutu-‘magnates,’ paḫutu-‘governors,’ šaknu-‘prefects,’ šakin-țemi-‘establishers of țemu’—all of them derived their authority in a hierarchical chain linking god, king, and subordinates. However, competition and antagonism between these men was rife, spanning succession wars at the apex of the empire to disputes over sheep. In a universe where all things were authored by the gods, the paradoxical nature of the imperial authority turned against itself presented both practical and ontological problems. For practically, men such as the rabiutu, in possession of their own armies and power bases, represented a real threat to the incumbent king, especially as royal family men were valid contenders for the throne. These men could not be easily ‘punished’—raising their ire might pose a threat to the current king, and exterminating them, as Esarhaddon did after the conspiracy against him, would deprive the Empire of a significant section of its ruling class and lead to disruption (Radner 2003: 174–5). Consequently, the strategies for dealing with dissent at high levels of the hierarchy were indirect, as we saw in chapter three; other times, disobedience was tolerated, as we are about to see.

438 Tīglāti-pīleser and Sargon themselves occupied high state roles before usurping the thrones of Aššur-nerari (V) and Shalmaneser (V) respectively.
439 P.143.
Magnates Do Whatever

ša šarru belini išpurannaši
ma ana rabiuti temu assakan
ma denkunu eppuša
nittitzi ina panišunu la immaggur denu ša bet belešunu la epuša

That which the king sent to us

3.QUOT I have established temu upon the magnates
3.QUOT they will render justice for you.

We have stood in their presence, but they have not consented to render a decision for the household of their lord.

SAA 16 no. 41, obv. 9-bottom edge 16, Nabu-tukulti, Nabu-šumu-lešir, Mutakkil-Adad to Esarhaddon

In the previous chapters we have seen how the nexus of concepts centred on temu—intention, speech, action, authority—was central to the unfolding of the Assyrian imperial project. Disruption to this was cause for distress, as witnessed by Ariḫu’s snippy, aggressive register shift.440 In that letter, Ariḫu bemoaned a lack of temu from his superiors—nonfeasance, rather than malfeasance as it were. Nevertheless, this alludes to a problem endemic to the Assyrian hierarchical system: instability, dispute, opposition and antagonism within the relationships of the individuals ensconced in the imperial mission itself. This low-level antagonism represented just as much a threat to the reliable unfolding of temu as the outright opposition faced by the Assyrian king in his wars, and was a dangerous undercurrent that could erupt into full rebellion from within the Assyrian hierarchy itself (amply documented in Radner 2016). In other words, rather than forming a monolithic machine, the visible actors of the Assyrian ruling elite were in almost constant competition with each other, for resources, favour and power.

The epigraph to this section, a damaged petition sent by three men of unknown standing, clearly shows that it was possible to conceive of the temu being unfulfilled by royal officials. The authors deploy a defective mirroring of the king’s speech, directly quoting Esarhaddon before describing the outcome in the negative: the rabiuti-magnates la immaggur ‘do not consent’ to instantiate the temu the king has imposed.

Though this description originates in a ‘petition’ letter to the king, in which the authors explicitly seek to have wrongs redressed, we find it mentioned that rabiuti-magnates also withheld their consent (√mgr) in letters not specifically appealing to the king about official misfeasance. A letter

440 P.49.
from Nabu-ahu-usur to Sargon again explicitly underlines how the king’s ṭemu is disregarded by the great ones serving under him:

ina bet šarru beli ina muḫḫi rabiiti išpurannini ammar šarru beli ṭemu iškunannini gabbu addubaššunu
The king my lord sent me to where the magnates are. Whatever ṭemu the king my lord established, I talked all of it to them.

SAA 5 no. 226, obv. 4-9, Nabu-ahu-usur to Sargon

ina muḫḫi rabiiti ša šarru beli iqabuni
ma 50 petḫallu ina panḫṣunu īkklu
ma ṭeḫe sissešunu ina muḫḫiya šallikuni
aqṭibaššunu la immagguru
ma ılluku ina šiddi ḫuli imuttu
ma issini ıllakuni
Concerning the magnates about whom the king spake
3.QUOT They may hold fifty riding horses in their presence
3.QUOT the remainder of the horses should come to me
I spake thus to them but they did not consent
3.QUOT They will go and die on the side of the road
3.QUOT they will come with us

rev. 12-17

The scenario depicted here punctures the image of the well-oiled Assyrian machine. We may recall the multiplicity of pleas to the king from individuals high and low hoping to secure the dispatch of a ša-qurbuti, ‘Close One’ of the king, in order for this envoy to be an avatar of the royal personage: the trusted eyes and ears of the Assyrian ruler.441 Here, we meet one such ša-qurbuti, Nabu-ahu-usur, who, in his account of his doings, specifically underlines how he replicates the ṭemu established by the king.

Yet the magnates do not √mgr, they do not consent to the ṭemu Sargon has established. The construction of this refusal is telling. The magnates are not at any point described as la √šm’, not hearing, which we find used to describe disobedience on the part of subordinates.442 Instead, active

441 For example, we find this situation turned on its head when an Assyrian official of unknown standing writes to Esarhaddon reporting that his orders were rejected:
aña muḫḫu ummanu ša-rešanu u šaḥe ḫalqutu ša Šamaš-ibni ša ina pan Nabu-ušallim ša šarru beli išpura ki aqbaššu ul ımangurma ul inamdana umma ša la unqu šarru ša ina šu qurbute ul anamdaška
‘Regarding the runaway scholars, eunuchs and troops of Šamaš-ibni who are in the presence of Nabu-ušallim, I spoke unto him as the king my lord sent to me but he did not consent, he did not give,
QUOT. I will not give them to you without a sealed document of the king and without a ša-qurbuti’ (SAA 18 no. 56 obv. 8-13, Ninurta-aha[... ] to Esarhaddon)
442 See p.267.
communication is emphasised, with Nabu-aḫu-恭敬usur pointedly replicating the king’s speech and the magnates replying in direct speech qualifying la immagguru. However, obviating the possibility of dangerous transgression and providing the scope for the magnates' lack of \( \sqrt{mgr} \) is Sargon’s quoted speech itself: his directions are couched in the precative mood, not the imperative.

This is extremely unusual: it is a stereotypical feature of the royal register that imperatives are used throughout to communicate the king’s will. Why then does he use precative constructions here? It could be argued that the precative is being used to signal permission rather than order: the magnates are permitted to retain fifty riding-horses, and the remainder are to be dispatched to Sargon. Furthermore, the sentence is phrased in such a way that there is no direct agent to whom an imperative command could be directed. However, the same desired state of affairs could easily have been communicated imperatively, and thus the indirection here, though unremarkable at first glance, is extraordinary when attributed to the mouth of the Assyrian ruler.

It seems then that Sargon’s use of the precative is what enabled this flexibility in acceding to \textit{ṭemu} to pass without disaster. The situation of the highest officials of Assyria directly disobeying a royal command would have been alarming,\textsuperscript{443} yet here they do not consent to follow Sargon’s directions. The question remains—why \textit{did} Sargon couch these orders precatively in the first place? Did he intend to permit the magnates the scope to make their own decisions here? Or did he anticipate that the magnates would disregard what he had to say, and thus phrased his words indirectly so as to save face on his part? The first possibility maintains a status quo interpretation of the word of the Assyrian king as all-powerful. The second scenario begets a far more interesting and subtle conception of imperial power dynamics. The ‘constructed’ nature of the absolute Assyrian kingship, perpetuated by elite ‘buy-in,’ has been an increasingly favoured historical interpretation (Lanfranchi 1997; Parker 2011), yet the degree to which this was recognised internally by the Assyrian elites themselves has been uncertain. The quietly antagonistic interplay of intentions here—the seemingly faulty \textit{ṭemu} \( \sqrt{škn} \), Sargon’s indirected precatives delivered through his \textit{ša-qurbūti}, the magnates’ \( la \sqrt{mgr} \)—portray a situation where all parties were aware of their agency, and were able

\textsuperscript{443} As Radner describes in her account of the uprising against Esarhaddon, men in powerful positions within the Assyrian hierarchy were significant assets to both the reigning king, and any contestants should they arise (2016: 53)
to use specific linguistic strategies to navigate through this social complexity without the event descending into outright ‘insubordination.’

\[\sqrt{grr}\]: Deterrence and the Aššur Temple

The Assyrian recognition of the actuality of disobedience and disorder within the ranks is something we have already encountered. In our discussion of disciplinary \(\sqrt{grr}\), we encountered two letters from Assyrian scholars recommending to the king that \(šiptu\) ‘judgement, punishment’ be exacted upon some scribes and subordinates to deter their superiors. The first, from Mar-Issar, Esarhaddon’s personal agent in Babylonia, advises the king to deter his governors from appropriating temple treasure:

\[
\text{amelu ša ana pahhiti usadbibuni šiptu ina libbišu liškunu [lu]di’i ligruru [ul’]a [makkuri] ša ekurrate gab[bu] paḫati upat[ṭaru]}
\]

The man that incited (lit. ‘caused to speak) the governor, a judgement should be established in his interior. Let them know, let them be \(\sqrt{grr}\) else the governors will dissipate all the [treasure] of the temples.

SAA 10 no. 369, rev. 12-17, Mar-Issar to Esarhaddon

The second letter, also dealing with malfeasant governors, is more interesting, as it demonstrates the ability to which the Assyrian magnates could actively resist one of their most important duties:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ma? šarrri lu ḫasis aki baṭulu ina muḥḥi ilanika [išak]kanuni} \\
\text{kima šiptu ina ṣuṭṣarrri issen šarri la iškun [reḫute] la igarruru} \\
\text{[x x x +x] anniu [kima] šaknu ḫanossu [la] naša ina bet ilanika [la] ידהינ rabiyti reḫute ina šašu idaggalšu baṭlu} \\
\text{išakkunu ina bet ilanika}
\end{align*}
\]

3.QUOT The king should remember that they have [imp]osed the stoppage

If the king does not establish a judgement for one scribe, [the rest] will not be \(\sqrt{grr}\)

[x x x +x] this [if] a prefect does [not] bring in the one-fifth tax and does [not] give it to your temple, the remaining magnates will see this, they will impose a stoppage on your temples.

SAA 13 no. 31, rev. 1-3, Iddin-Aššur to Esarhaddon/Assurbanipal

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444 There are other instances within the correspondence of the \(rabiyti\) being described as lax in following royal orders. In the letter SAA 1 no. 143, Ilu-iqbi writes to Sargon stating that the magnates have not acted on the king’s imperative order \(batqu dina\) ‘provide replacement’ (rev. 3-4): \(rabiyti la immaggurru la iddananasi\) ‘the magnates do not consent, they do not give to us’ (rev. 12-11). Regarding the sheep offerings of the Aššur Temple, Esarhaddon asks of Akkullanu \(manna ina rabiyti ša la immaggurseni la iddinuni\) ‘who of the magnates are there that do not consent and do not give’ (SAA 10 no. 96, obv. 6 8). The governors of Rasappa and Arzuḫina are included in the group of \(rabiyti\); in another letter, these provinces are described as having not consented to give the sheep offering for two years (\(immere maddatti la immaggur la iddunu\), SAA 13 no. 21, rev. 9-13, attr. Dadi to Esarhaddon).

445 P.140.
The provision of the Aššur temple was one of the central tenets of the Assyrian Empire and the foundation of the kingship, yet here we find that it was conceivable that the magnates could be induced to stop this crucial impost at the drop of a hat.\footnote{SAA 13 nos. 8-11 show that this essential provision did indeed stop on several occasions.} Taking the foregoing examples in mind, it seems clear that despite the apparent stability of the Assyrian hierarchical system and its divinely ordained imperative, wilfulness, resistance and disobedience was possible at all levels. Furthermore, when it came to the magnates and other extremely high ranking Assyrian officials, their acts were pointedly not described with the language of lies, rebellion, disorder as the invective we find for those outside the hierarchy. Finally, the tension between the different elite institutions—the royal Palace, the magnates, the temples—is resolved not through outright rebellion,\footnote{Though even this could be contested: Tiglath-pileser and Sargon took the throne in coups d’état, Sennacherib was murdered by a son passed over for the throne, a rebellion of the magnates occurred in Esarhaddon’s reign, leading to the extraordinary event of their extermination, and Assurbanipal fought a civil war with his elder brother who was appointed to throne of Babylon.} but through a punitive procedure that destroys the magnates’ resources: human resources. Thus, a potentially explosive political situation is defused by transferring punishment onto those with less prestige and power to threaten the king.

\textit{la Ṽmgr:} Dissent

\begin{quote}
\emph{anni} [mar’ɛ]\ text{mat }Aššurma la immaggur [šarru] beli la ipallu [mar’ɛ] mat nakiri ake [ana] šarri beliya illuku
These are [sons] of the land of Aššur, and they do not consent to \textit{špīl} the [king] my lord—how will [sons] of the foreign land go [for] the king my lord?
\end{quote}

SAA 13 no. 19, rev. 2-6, Dadi to Esarhaddon

To the catalogue of subjective attributes and relational attitudes beings had with Assyria we add yet another higher-order emotion, that of \textit{Ṽmgr}, usually translated ‘to agree’ or ‘to consent’. These English translations already embed some of the complexity of this state: ‘agree’ being derived from \textit{ad-} ‘to’ + \textit{gratus} ‘pleasing’ and ‘consent’ from \textit{con-} ‘together’ + \textit{sentire} ‘feel’.\footnote{OED s.v. ‘consent’} In other words, what we might consider to be deliberative, rational or individualised remains charged with implicit intersubjective meaning. In a recent examination of the concept, the philosopher John Kleinig distinguishes between the phenomenon’s ‘state of mind’ aspect and its communicative aspect, echoing previous scholars who dubbed it a performance of ‘moral magic’ (2010: 9-10).
Here, √mgr is clearly situated in a communicative context, existing within a dialogue of ṭemu and action; more often than not, a dialogue of ṭemu frustrated. The majority of appearances of √mgr constructions are negated, arising in contests about authority.

We have already encountered the ability of the rabiuti, the group of 'magnates' forming the highest echelons of the Assyrian leadership, to express their lack of √mgr through direct contravention of royal ṭemu or simply through inaction or noncompliance. This scope for dissent was not limited to the great ones of Assyria alone, but is found in reference to several governors in relation to royal orders. We will take three examples from narratives about the surfeit of disputes between governors regarding the implementation of royal orders. The first, taken from a letter attributed to the governor of Damascus, informs the king of problems raising food supplies:

šarru beli [temu issakan]
ma paḫati [gabbu] kusapi kissutu issu alani [madbar] issikunu intuḫu
ma Adad-isse’a Bel-lešir ana Abu-lešir lušakilu

la immaggur la išammi
ata innute
ma alani ina madbar ša paḫati gabbišunu alani ina libbi aḫšiš pa-nu-gu

The king my lord [established ṭemu]
3.QUOTE [All] governors should raise food and fodder from the villages [of the desert] with you
3.QUOTE Adad-isse’a and Bel-lešir should feed Abu-lešir

They do not consent, they do not listen,
Why our
3.QUOTE villages in the desert should all be of the governors? The towns are pa-nu-gu within each other.

SAA 1 no. 172, obv. 3-12, Bel-duri, governor of Damascus to Sargon

Though there are some uncertainties with this letter, the principal thrust is easily discernible: two governors do not √mgr instructions that Bel-duri has received from the king. It is noticeable that once again we meet the precative form of orders uttered in the king's voice, and a subsequent lack of √mgr, just as we saw with the magnates. In addition to this we have √mgr used in hendiadys with la išammi, ‘they do not hear,’ harking back to our discussion in chapter one about the importance of hearing—and in this case, the functionality of hearing as an active process from which one can

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449 temu issakan is reconstructed; pa-nu-gu is completely unknown, though Luukko suggests reading it šú-nu sal-mu³ ‘they are at peace’ (2013b: 6).
withdraw one’s participation. To resolve the situation, Bel-duri requests that Sargon send the words 
alanīšunu ša madbar lišṭuru ‘let them write down the desert villages.’ Though this is an 
advantageous strategy for Bel-duri, enabling him to palm off the responsibility for getting the other 
governors to obey to the king, it does present an interesting problem. According to the narrative in 
this letter, it was Sargon who imposed the [temu] in the first place, and now it is being suggested 
that, in light of this [temu] not being followed, he do little more than repeat it. Once again, this 
suggests a surprising lack of royal latitude in dealing with disobedience at the upper layers of the 
imperial hierarchy. Bel-duri does not suggest the king inculcate ṣgrr through any kind of 
disciplinary act, nor take any other action save for sending written instructions once more. On the 
one hand, this might simply be indicative of Bel-duri carefully not overstepping his bounds as to 
what he might suggest to the king. On the other hand, that scholars could suggest harsh disciplinary 
acts and Bel-duri the governor does not suggests a particularly interesting dynamic. Bel-duri does 
not suggest that Sargon enact disciplinary reprisal against Adad-issee’a and Abu-lešir because, in the 
end, they were all part of the same political elite, one that cooperated with the kingship but guarded 
itself autonomy. To suggest Sargon discipline the other governors directly would be to set a 
dangerous precedent for the royal authority, one that would have backfired on Bel-duri and his 
fellows. For the scholars, who often found themselves victims of gubernatorial caprice, asking for 
the king to enact reprisal on their social superiors was perfectly acceptable.

The Temu, Overturned
Continuing the theme of disputes between officials regarding royal orders, these next two letters 
draw together most of the threads of this thesis. The imperative to report all you see and hear, 
enshrined in the ade, the establishment of temu, the danger of ramanu, the authority of 
antecedent words, and the iniquity of unintentionality, all these intersect in these grim 
narratives.

451 Obv. 13-14
452 For Mar-Issar and Iddin-Âšur suggesting indirect, violent reprisal against governors and magnates, see p.261.
453 For example, SAA 10 nos. 163-4, 167, 173.
454 P.34.
455 P.34.
456 P.46.
457 P.101.
458 P.171.
459 P.242.

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The first is from Nabu-zer-ketti-lešir, who describes the acts of an uncertain, seemingly powerful operative, whom he describes in no uncertain terms:

*dababu ša šarru la ṭšme eni ša paḥati idaggal
anina šarru beli denu ša abišu epuššušu temu iškanunum uma annurig ussabalkitu
u anaku issu lišbi bet abiya gabbu ki kalbi asabbu’*

He does not hear the talking of the king, he sees the eyes of the governors.
Now, king my lord, the decision your father made, the *temu* he established, now, now they have overturned it, and I, out of all the house of my father, am bounding about like a dog.

SAA 16 no.32, rev. 5-12, Nabu-zer-ketti-lešir to Esarhaddon

Much of this is familiar to us as the language of dissent—not hearing the talking of the king being equivalent to disobedience. Of interest is the emphasis placed on the governors and their eyes, suggesting that the overarching power of the king is being ignored in favour of local magnates instead. Overriding this all is the forceful description of the *temu* overturned, decried with *uma annurig,* ‘now, now,’ dragging the timeless temporality of *temu* and the antecedent authority of Assyrian ancestors into a corrupt and disordered present moment.

In similar fashion, a letter from Šamaš-šumu-ukin *mar-šarri* of Babylon quotes some residents of Babylon and Borsippa. Horrifyingly, they report that illicit astrology and haruspicy is taking place, in cooperation with Elamite collaborators:

*[PNs] egertu issapruni
ma ade šarru ina maḫḫika isseni issakan
ma mini ša tašammu ana belikunu taqabbi’u
ma uma Bel-eṭir Šamaš-zeru-iqiša ğuššu ša šarru iškanušanunum urtamm’u ša rananišunu eppuš*

[SAA 16 no. 21, obv. 8-15, Šamaš-šumu-ukin *mar-šarri Babili* to Esarhaddon]

Here, instead of ‘overturned,’ the informants describe the *temu* as ‘untied, loosened.’ This language inverts terms used by more ancient covenants, such as the *riksu-*‘bond’ (Lauinger 2013: 100), and evokes the binding together of universe by means of cosmic cables, *(markas|rikis) šame u erṣeti ‘bond of heaven and earth’ or *rikis matati ‘bond of the lands*’ (George 1986: 138-9). These cosmic
bonds were associated with control over the universe—the Tablet of Destinies, as well as being the connection that allowed communication between the divine and earthly realms (Noegel 2010: 144). The loosening of ūmu here, then, linked with the unauthorised divinations of traitorous ṭupšarrus, is thus a potentially catastrophic loss of control. The order to tell ‘whatever you see and hear’ was thus not some idle dystopian intelligence state, but a constant vigilance against the dissolution of ūmu itself.
6.4 They do not consent, they do not listen! Popular Unrest

Docile Servants or Rebellious Riffraff? The People of Assyria

As we saw in chapter three, the Assyrian elite were only really concerned with the majority of the subordinate population as a docile workforce—’do your work and be glad, you are servants of the king’. The voice of these people in their own right is generally invisible in the historical record for a number of reasons: archaeological excavations have tended to focus on palatial mounds rather than the lower town where the majority of the population lived; cuneiform scribes were themselves part of an intellectual elite, and producing a document would necessarily entail interacting with them; most of the population spoke the Aramaic language, and thus if this were recorded it would have been on biodegradable parchment in ink, now lost to us. Consequently, we can only detect these people through the traces left through the eyes of their Assyrian overlords.

Nevertheless, as the evidence of this chapter so far has revealed, the idealised image of the docile mass of subjects overseen by the delegates of the king, the king the delegate of the gods, enacting their ʿtemu through a completely devoted interior and self-negated ʿramantu—the reality was a roiling, violent and precarious land of Assyria tied together by the weakest bonds of √mgr-consent amongst the elite and √plḥ as a whole. Just as the magnates and the governors could conceivably withdraw √mgr and act against the gods of the king, so too there was a space for the silent majority to rise up and assert themselves.459

Communication Breakdown: la √šmʾ
The effectiveness of Assyrian administration was underwritten by the power of language. The importance of speech, abat šarri ‘the king’s word,’ and trustworthy, accurate statements suffuses the correspondence; the tablets of the correspondence being vehicles for transmitting the desires and intents of the ruling elite. Implicit in this model is the cooperation of the ruled masses: they are required to listen to the words in order to obey: to √šmʾ. This becomes explicit in failed cases, where Assyrian authority falls on deaf ears:

---

459 I refrain from using ‘class’ as it implies a specific economic relationship and sociopolitical context which remains ambiguous in the correspondence—see Galil 2007: 1-3 for more.
annurig anaku ana Ḫinzani allak taḫumu ša ukallamušanuni urammu ettiqu ussatappulu iḫabbuṭu
ana rab-dayaliya ša apaqqiduni laššu la išamme’u

Now then I myself will go to the land of Ḫinzanu; they (the Arabs) will leave over the border I showed them, proceed downstream and plunder; to the chief scout which I appointed, there is not—they do not listen.

SAA 1 no. 82, rev. 1-8, Ṭab-šill-Ešarra to Sargon

In this letter, a group of Arabs in the Ḫindanu region are plundering nearby towns for food, despite Sargon’s attempts to provide suitable grazing ground for them; the governor of the Aššur province describes how his attempts to communicate with them have failed. A certain frustration is evident in both the chain of third-person verbs (urammu, ettiqu, ussatappulu, iḫabbuṭu) and particularly in the consecutive negative particles laššu la. We might recall Ariḫu’s complaints to Nabu-duri-uṣur regarding his disobedient staff, and the change in register which seemed to communicate frustration there. Clearly, Assyrian magnates were neither used to disobedience, nor well equipped to express their emotions directly.

This conception of a failure of authority as a breakdown in communication, in which responsibility is laid on those receiving the orders rather than those giving it, is amusingly illustrated in a letter to the king from Taklak-ana-Bel. He reports on his attempts to communicate with some infantry, who resist the Assyrian draft by repeatedly running away:

Lapsia iqabbuniššu ina šepe šadu ina libbi attalak rab beti ina muḫḫišunu assapra
nuk alkanı lašarkunu ina libbi ummi lušeridkunu tillı laddinakkunu
laššu la išme’u la ilikuni ana šaknišunu iḫtas’u

Now I sent their prefect to them
1.QUOT Come, let me review you, let me take you down into the mother, let me give you equipment
It was not, they did not listen, they did not come, they assaulted their prefect.

Lapsiya they call it, at the foot of the mountain, I went there and sent the major-domo to them
1.QUOT Come, let me speak with you

460 Ariḫu shifts from the indirect third person to uttering imperatives at his superior, a sure sign of a collapse in social distance. See p.49.
They got up and they fled, he did not reach anyone there
I spoke before the king in Nineveh

It was not, they do not listen, they do not give the troops

SAA 1 no. 240 obv. 4’-rev. 1, Taklak-ana-Bel to Sargon

As with Ṭab-šill-Ešarra’s letter, there is a certain artfulness in this frustrated response to disobedience. First, he sends words through their šaknu-‘prefect,’ words introduced with the first person quotative denoting that Taklak-ana-Bel owns these utterances. This first utterance describes what is probably a normal summons. This is stymied by the violent response of these people: they exhibit the standard negation of obedience, la ššmʾ; and they assault the Assyrian šaknu.⁴⁶¹ Second, he sends word again, this time via a higher official, the rab-biti, who conveys that Taklak-ana-Bel just wants to talk. Happily for him, he is not assaulted, because there is no one there to assault him. His putative audience have employed a common strategy of resistance to imperial interference, šhlq—they have run away.

Did you ever hear the word of a mighty king twice?⁴⁶² Though only a mighty king’s representative, Taklak-ana-Bel presages the words of Assyria’s future ruler, in that after this second attempt he no longer pursues communication with these fugitives; now he goes straight to the presence of the king. Thus, this third speech event creates a chain of escalating frames, culminating in the royal audience and a request for his personal intervention (via ša-qurbuti).

Both Ṭab-šill-Ešarra and Taklak-ana-Bel respond to their discomfitures with a certain amount of grace, communicating frustration either through a well structured narrative or through short swift chains of verbal forms. The unnamed correspondent of the below letter describes the personal consequences of disobedience succinctly:

*ana ayaṣi uttannišuni [in]a muḫḫi ša qaḫšunu la imagguru la išammuni*
They have caused weakness for me; with regards whatever is said to them, they do not agree, they do not listen to me.

SAA 1 no. 260, rev. 13-17

⁴⁶¹ That this is not subject to explicit reprisal hints at the possibility that low-level officials were routinely subject to violence, as were all the Assyrians who were not the crème-de-la-crème, as we shall see subsequently. That this šaknu was a low-level official is suggested by the suffix -šunu, associating him with this specific group of people and thus placing him in a highly localised and thus restricted context.

⁴⁶² P.193.
The typical markers of disobedience—\(\sqrt{mgr} \ la \ \sqrt{sm}'\)—result in the correspondent's weakness. Weakness, \(\sqrt{nš}\), makes only infrequent appearances in the correspondence corpus, which makes its appearance all the more remarkable here. It is noticeable that the correspondent does not describe himself as weak, nor does he describe the disobedient individuals as weakening him directly. Rather, the construct mirrors that of the standard royal greeting—\(šulmu \ ayasi\), ‘wellbeing is for me’.

Hostility and Skull Crushers

\[\textit{kayamanu girutu ina muḫḫi maṣṣarti [x] la aššuṣaṭa}\]

There is constant hostility but I do not neglect the guard. In the previous chapter, we observed the perseverance of kinship relationality, despite the totalising \(tēmu\) of the Assyrian imperial scheme. This demonstrates that enacting the \(tēmu\) of the gods of the king was a duty not universally salient for most people. This was fine, for the most part, as long as the people were peaceful and did their work. Nevertheless, the relationship between the rulers and the ruled was never one of affection, and we find instances of simmering tensions. Three examples across varying societal context suggest the kinds of conflicts that could arise:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{u[ra]si ša} & \ aḫišunu ina muḫḫi dullī iškūn[uni a]na z ume idabbubu \\
[m]a & \ dullet anniu ina pan Bel maḫḫir adanniš \\
ma & \ umati ša šarrī irrikū \\
ḫadīu adanniš & \\
nuk & \ qibani minu šu \\
la iammagaru la iqabbuni
\end{align*}
\]

The brick masons who set their arms to work on the second day were talking

\begin{itemize}
\item 3.\textsc{quot} This work is very acceptable before Bel
\item 3.\textsc{quot} The days of the king will be long
\item They were very happy
\item 1.\textsc{quot} Speak to me—what is it?
\item They did not consent, they did not speak to me.
\end{itemize}

SAA 5 no. 294, obv. 1'-8', unassigned to Sargon

Illustrating resistance once again is \(\sqrt{lima} \ gur\), but here the context is quite peculiar. On the surface, the description of the brick-masons’ speech seems to represent state that, at least, does not conflict with the subjectivity expected of an Assyrian worker: they laud their work and the long life of the

---

\(\text{\textsuperscript{60}}\) SAA 1 no. 176, rev. 40 - rev. edge 42, Adda-ḫati, governor of Hamath, to Sargon
king, and they are √ḫdʾ. However, their lack of consent when the letter's speaker (clearly a member of the Assyrian elite) asks them what is going on indicates that this is not something that can be interpreted quite so straightforwardly. I would argue that the depiction here, of the workers being √ḫdʾ, is an unexpected excess. At most, the people are exhorted to be good of interior (libbu ʾḥṭʾ) when subjected to the Assyrian order; compounding the irony is that they are √ḫdʾ whilst performing dullu, translated ‘work’ but with a synonymous meaning of ‘misery, hardship’. Furthermore, if we recall Nabu-taklak, who wrote to his brother aklu takkal u šikari... tašatti ‘you eat bread and drink beer,’ we see that quoting the words of imperial ideology to convey irony was certainly possible. Thus, here, we can take the nominally ideological statements uttered by the workers in an ironic fashion, which would explain their lack of consent in telling their elite supervisor, and alludes to a wider scope for ironic and parodic interpretation of the earnest values of the Assyrian kingship.464

Stepping up the hostility is the governor of Nineveh, who voices an unusually violent threat to some donkey sellers:

raʾyi atanati ina pan ekalli ina pan neribi izzazzuni ḫalluputi iddanuni
uma la immagguru la izzazzu
ma paḫatu ina pan Ninua iqṭibannaši
ma ina libbi ekalli atamarkunu gulqullatku nun umarraqa
ma ša-qurbuti ina muḫḫini littika [ x ] labilannaši
ma šumma laššu la nilak

The donkey-mare herders used to stand before the palace, at the entrance, selling covered donkeys. Now they do not consent, they do not stand.

The governor spoke to us in front of Nineveh
I see you inside the palace—I will crush your skulls
Let a Close One come [x] let him bring us there
If it is not, we will not go

SAA 16 no. 88, obv. 7-18, Nabu-zeru-uṣur to Esarhaddon

464 In another sense, both these ideological statements can be construed as intertextual borrowings from the generic repertoire of the Assyrian imperial ideology. In their original context, their replication and repetition effaces the ‘intertextual gap,’ to draw on (1992: 149). The agents of empire, the administrators and scholars, own the words as if they were their own inventions, word set in their interior. Here, however, the intertextual borrowings are re-‘keyed’ (Briggs & Bauman 1992: 152): the ‘intertextual gap’ is foregrounded, mirroring the gap of a social gulf, and the gap between the surface and underlying meanings of the recontextualised utterance.
This small vignette of city life in the capital alludes to the potentiality of violence permeating Assyrian society in general. The governor of Nineveh, though a royal appointee deriving his authority from the king and the king's gods, appears to remain free to exercise arbitrary violence within his domain. Countering this is the cohort of officials who directly report to the king, the ša-qurbuti 'Close Ones.' As we have seen, these subjects functioned as the eyes, ears, and direct delegates of the royal personage, and were often deployed in situations of uncertain ṭemu or misuses of the royal authority granted to state officials. The donkey-mare herders here, upon being threatened with violence, consequently seek to mobilise their access to royal authority and withdraw their consent (la √mgr) to set up shop in front of the palace if this is not granted to them.

Thus, we find a complicated set of intentionalities playing off against each other, despite the apparently straightforward power relations. The governor of Nineveh exercises his authority, derived from the king, through violent threat; the mare sellers exercise their ability to speak a request for a ša-qurbuti to resist the governor's authority through the agency of another superior. Yet the ša-qurbuti's authority also derives from the king. Thus, we have two agents of the king being played off against one another by seemingly powerless individuals who the governor feels free to threaten death to without consequence. This has two essential implications for the nature of the Assyrian state. First, this serves to underline the latent tension between its different parts. As we saw above, a ša-qurbuti, as envoy of the king, could be powerless to change the actions of the rabiutu, and consequently asserted the royal authority only in an indirect, precative way to save the royal face. The imagery of the unfolding ṭemu, the smoothly proceeding intents of the gods being manifested by the Assyrian state machine, falls apart in the minor details. Ṭemu is fractured and opposed by ramanus, withdrawn √mgr, and Assyrian divine authority turned against itself. This thus provided a space, in the constant conflict within the Assyrian system, for the majority of the subordinate population to exist and direct the course of their lives within the interstices of ṭemu's failure.

Secondly, the fault-lines and latent tensions between different parts of the Assyrian state may have in fact provided it with much needed slack, through the operation of indirect violence that diffused responsibility for coercive acts and potentially rendered it hard to single out specific officials as perpetrators of cruelty. The 'right of appeal' to the Assyrian king necessarily implied that he was an
upholder of justice. Coupled with the fact that he would have been exceedingly remote to the vast majority of the population, with instead his visible delegates enacting his orders, and we get a situation where blame for injustice would end up being apportioned locally, instead of being directed at royal orders—the *temu* škn. Consequently, by setting up these internal contradictions, this phenomenon ended up buttressing the Assyrian kingship directly, by reinforcing the image of the just king.

This final example of conflict explicitly demarcates a hostile division between state officials, benefices of imperial patronage, and the population more generally. As described in chapter three, the ideal state of the empire was one where all beings enacted their socially appropriate work assignments (*dullu*) in the goodness of their interior (*libbu* šʾb). Furthermore, these duties were socially distributed: certain men were lucky enough to simply have to eat and drink under the protection of the king, whereas others were exhorted to do work in house and field.

This distribution of tasks hints at a proto-structure of ‘classes’, groups of subjects defined primarily by their economic station. This is underscored by the so-called ‘tax exemptions,’ variously *zakutu* ‘purity,’ *anduraru*, or *kidinnutu*. These prized privileges were earnestly fought for, and represented a withdrawal of the universal impositions of the Assyrian imperium. In the below letter from the astrologer Nabu-iqiša, he and his compatriots have been exempted from physical labour so that they can pursue scholarly labour on behalf of the king. However, the townspeople have other ideas:

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465 We find this exact situation, complaints against taxes being directed at local officials instead of the king who imposed them, in Mar-İssar’s letter discussed below.

466 The concept of a distant king who cared for his people but had corrupt staff is also found in the context of the French Revolution. It was only Louis XVI’s attempted flight abroad that revealed his true anti-popular sentiments. I am grateful to Mr. Edwin Clifford-Coupe for pointing out this parallel and suggesting the advantages of attributing violence to delegates for keeping a clean royal image (pers. comm.).

467 See e.g., SAA 16 no. 96; 17 nos. 21, 23, 145; 18 no. 124.

468 Information regarding *zakutu*-status itself provided a locus for certain kinds of resistance. In SAA 19 no. 39, obv. 10-13, rev. 19 Šarru-emuranni, deputy governor of Isana, describes a situation where various fieldowners argue they are šzk’ and thus not subject to corn tax: they consequently do not consent (*la immaggur*) to give the tax. Šarru-emuranni requests those who claim they are šzk’ produce the relevant authentication from the king; meanwhile, he has installed Itu’eans in that location. We may recall the Itu’eans from chapter three, where they caused the Sidonites to be šgr.

469 This is invariably one of the reasons why membership of the royal entourage was so desirable: the ‘ease’ of intellectual labour, fulfilling one’s training, was preferable to the default station of being subject to imperial callup and hard labour, the *dullu*-misery.

470 The town is uncertain. Though Nabu-iqiša identified himself as ‘of Borsippa,’ he probably was not based there. A Review Palace (*ekal mašarti*) was being built in his present town, thus it was potentially one of the Assyrian capitals, possibly Nineveh or Kalḫu.
šarru zakutani iltakan enna adu itti ahḥeyu ina ekal mašarti bit-qati eppuš
u mare ali ša anaku ittišunu šarru ušaššitanni ikkara ilduku
u yašš usammu'inni
umma itti alik
itti ahḥeyu dullu eppuš

The king established our exemption, now, I am building a storeroom (lit. ‘House of Hands’) with my brothers in the Review Palace
and the sons of the town that I with them the king made me take, they killed my farmers
and they harass me

QUOT Go for ilku with us
With my brothers I would do work...

SAA 8 no. 296, obv. 7-rev. 5, Nabu-iqiša to Esarhaddon

A universe of coercion is inscribed here. There is hostility between the mare ali and the astrologers assigned to the king. Yet these townspeople are themselves coerced by the imperial obligation to undertake corvée work. As vulnerable participants in the imperial framework, without soldiers or armies to command, the astrologers resident in this town potentially represented an 'easy target.'

Yet, just as with the imperial √grr techniques described in chapter three, the violence here is indirected: just as the magnates' underlings were to be punished, here it is the farmers assigned to the scholars who have been slaughtered. The status of the farmers assigned to Nabu-iqiša is not clear from this letter alone; in his exhaustive analysis of Assyrian contracts and administrative data, Galil suggests that people bound to land were potentially tenants instead of slaves (2007: 343-344), but either way it was likely that as a result of being assigned to the exempt scholars the farmers too were exempted from the ilku. This would certainly not endear them to the townspeople. So, instead of attacking a prestigious target, members of the royal entourage, the murderers instead attack the farmers, with whom they seem to have no relation of solidarity. The parallels with imperial √grr discipline are clear; underlying them both is an 'indirected violence' designed to coerce a third party through display, with the direct targets of the violence little more than bodies.

471 For a similar scenario see SAA 10 no. 143, where the scribes of Kilizi write to the king stating they cannot keep the maṣṣartu of the king because they are required to go to the ilku. Unlike Nabu-iqiša’s letter however, the scribes make no mention of an exemption, which seems to be the particular cause for violence here.
Resisting the *ilku*

The interrelations between √ กรร, √ ปลห, *ilku* and violence are underscored by a letter from the Assyrian administrator of the recently conquered city of Carchemish:

> uma niše ilak šarrī belišu[nu] ıptalhu [iddubbu]
> ma     ata arhu ana arhi u[kaškada]našī

Now the people √ ปลห the *ilku*-duty of the king, their lord [and said]

> Why, month after month, do they [persecute] us?

One by [one] they keep escaping and settle in the region of Arpad beyond the River, as if the king my lord were seeking (to settle) this [land].

SAA 1 no. 183, obv. 12’-18’, unassigned to Sargon

This account demonstrates an alternative response to the *ilku* from those on the periphery of the still-swelling Assyrian empire. Upon the integration of Carchemish into the Assyrian order, the inhabitants of that territory were counted 'as Assyrians'—they were subject to conscription and labour as servants of the Assyrian king (Liverani 2017: 187). With respect to that the citizens of Carchemish evince the correct subjective attitude, √ ปลห, but then the narrative takes a sharp turn; they are in fact fleeing their newly imposed obligations. Such resistance to the demands of the Assyrian elite was in fact endemic: many letters describe the loss of subjects, 472 who either escape into the interstices of the imperial network, or seek refuge in territories outside direct imperial rule. 473 The reported speech within this letter is one of the very few examples we have of Assyrian subjects protesting against the operation of imperial biopower upon them. 474 The tablet is sadly damaged right in the middle of this quotation so we cannot be sure about the verb, which Parpola reconstructs as a form of √ กษด and translates 'persecute'. Furthermore, we must be aware of the 'scribal filter' which overlays this partial utterance: the inhabitants of Carchemish probably spoke

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472 For example, in SAA 19 no. 171 Bel-duri describes two losses, both of whom were 'caused to flee' (usahaanšqu, the Š causative form of √ หล iq) by members of their kalzu 'community.' One of these servants was provided by the king, the other serving for the debt of his wife's previous husband. See also SAA 1 no. 179 rev. 14-18, where workers flee from dullu; SAA 5 no. 48 obv.12, no. 52; SAA 15 no. 223; SAA 17 no. 29; SAA 18 no. 6, for further examples.

473 SAA 5 no. 52 is another example of this, reporting how Ḫu-Tešub, king of Šubria, grants fields and houses to those issu pan dulli šarrī ıḫalliquni 'who flee the work of the king' (rev. 3-4). These lost workers are recorded upon a clay tablet for delivery to the king.

474 A second is described in Mar-Issar's letter which we explore below; a third is potentially described in Gabbu-ana-Aššur's letter below, but with caveats.
Aramaic, which was translated into Neo-Assyrian for inscription. The voice of the people then remains distorted through an elite prism.

Nevertheless, we can squeeze some further understandings of popular resistance from this letter. There is a repetitious rhythm to the √ḫlq: the quoted voice of the people utters urḫu anu urḫi ‘month after month’; the voice of the official parallels this with issen anu [issen] ‘one after another.’ Though we cannot be sure whose speech is influencing whose, an ironic reciprocity seems to arise from these utterances, where the frustrated official’s narrative and the tired plaint of the subjects indirectly quote each other, echoing the citationality explored earlier. The irony is only further emphasised by the official’s simile, comparing the fugitives’ acts to the dispatch of advance scouts of the king ‘seeking to (settle) this [land].’

The people running away from the duties allotted to them by the temu of Aššur, though continual, was problematic and thus provoked a response from the state machine. Documents on clay tablets and wooden writing boards catalogued and enumerated the available labouring subjects. This permitted easier control of the human resources managed by the imperial elite, but some extreme situations could still arise:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ḫalzi-atbaraya } & \text{ gabbitunu } ma\text{’a } \text{Ḫalq } ina \text{ libbi matati gabbit } \text{šunu} \\
\text{ša-bet-kudin } & \text{ daliḥ} \\
\text{ma } & \text{ḫulu karin} \\
\text{The Ūlziatabeans, all of them, many have run away, they are within all the lands.} \\
\text{The mule stable attendant is troubled} \\
\text{3_QUOT} & \text{The path is blocked}
\end{align*}
\]

SAA 5 no. 79 obv. 9-15, Aššur-belu-daʾin to Sargon

Here, an official, probably the governor of the province of Ūlziatbar, describes the response of the mule stable attendant to the loss of his workforce: daliḥ ‘he is troubled.’ The governor himself seems to be mostly unfazed, and simply requests that the king issues relevant orders for replacement labourers. Thus, we might wonder why the mule stable attendant was so mixed up. Based on what we know already about the penalties for disobedient magnates and governors—the infliction of šiptu punishment on their underlings to inspire √grr on their superiors—I would propose that the

\footnote{475 See p.170.}
\footnote{476 For documentation on clay tablets, see SAA 5 no. 52, already mentioned in note 473 above; see e.g. SAA 1 no. 128 obv. 18 for an example of writing boards.}
mule stable attendant is fully aware of the potential for indirecd violence to fall upon him. That
the threat of violent punishment was pervasive is clear from the letters of Sargon himself:

\[
\text{mannu ša immarkuni ana zaqipi qabsi betšu išakkunu}
\]
Whoever is late will be placed upon stakes within his house.

SAA 1 no. 22, rev. 10-12, Sargon to unassigned

Though Radner suggests that this be interpreted as merely a figure of speech (2015: 63), whether
figure or speech or actual threat, the image of violence and death is strongly conjured up here as a
consequence of failing to meet royal standards. The low officials of the empire are trapped in a vice:
clamped between the hostility and disobedience of their subjects, who resist the ilku and dullu
imposed on them by the imperial ṭemu, and the punishments of the king, who needs to keep his
magnates and governors in line.

Refusing the dullu
Summarising many of the issues we have just discussed is a letter from Gabbu-ana-Aššur, the palace
herald and thus a man of very high office.

\[
\text{ana šarri beliya urdaka Gabbu-ana-Aššur}
\]
\[
\text{askappati aladammu ina muḫḫiya karri niši mati memmeni la immaggur ana dulliya la u[ššuni]}
\]
\[
\text{ma šabani[ka] anine}
\]
\[
\text{la šamm[uni] anaku [x x]}
\]
\[
\text{annute minu ša ibaššuni ša laššuni ki aḫḫeʾiš laššu la išammuni}
\]

To the king my lord, your servant Gabbu-ana-Aššur.
Stone thresholds and bull colossi are laid upon me. The people of the country, whoever, they do not consent and
they do not g[o out] for my work:

\[
\text{3.QUOT Are we [your] men?}
\]

They do not lis[ten to me]—am I [...]? These—as to whatever there is that exists or that does not exist, from amongst them not a single one listens to me

SAA 5 no. 118, Gabbu-ana-Aššur to Sargon

As is usual for him, Gabbu-ana-Aššur opens his letter to Sargon quite tersely, omitting any sort of
customary blessing. He then describes the situation, laconically noting his work assignment, before
launching into a verbose report on his recalcitrant workers. This passage piques our interest for two
reasons. Firstly, the detail in Gabbu-ana-Aššur’s report is itself further evidence that disobedience
was something frustrating, worth complaining about: most of the letter body is devoted to it.
Emphatic language is used to underline his powerlessness: *minu ša ibaššuni ša laššuni* ‘whatever there is, whatever there isn’t,’ an unusually florid epistrophe, describes the scope of the people’s disobedience, an infinite scope.

Secondly, we have another instance of the voice of people expressing disobedience, this time specifically tied to *la immaggur* + verb with the *ma* quotative. Though the 2nd person suffix -*ka* is not legible on the tablet, if we take the editors’ suggestion at face value then we have a striking instance of direct address across power differentials being described: literally everyone there is disrespecting the Palace Herald! Due to his lofty office, Gabbu-ana-Aššur would have been untouchable by violent sanctions or the like for being unable to complete the *dullu* assigned to him; thus, he is able to give full vent to his own frustration without apology. Consequently, although he includes the direct speech of the people, this quotation was invariably highly selective— we unfortunately cannot conclude that these men were ‘giving lip’ to a servant of Aššur.

More specific instances of labour withdrawal appear to have been focused on soldiers refusing to fight for the Assyrians. This could be restricted to simply being reassigned to another commander, such as here, where it also shows the importance of commensality:

*ša šabani ša inqatuninni irtaksu la imma[ggur] kusapi ina paneya ana akali*

They have bound the men that fell to me, they do not consent to eat bread with me

SAA 15 no. 43, obv. 2'-bottom edge 6', Nabu-belu-kaʾʾin to Sargon⁴⁷⁷

This point is, finally, brought home by an interesting request from Taklak-ana-Bel, who actually asks the king to do some shaking at disobedient shepherds:

*[uma] annurig šarrı beliya [assapra šummu] ana ḫurı memme ni dull[um uramma] šarru beli ḫurıbašunu dull[um lepušu]*

Now then I am [writing to] the king my lord, [if ever after] anyone leaves their work the king my lord should shake at them so [they will do their wo]rk.

SAA 1 no. 235, rev. 1'-4', Taklak-ana-Bel to Sargon

⁴⁷⁷ See also SAA 1 no. 155, obv. 4-8.
Obviously in this situation we do not expect that anyone intended Sargon to literally go up to these shepherds and shake his body.\textsuperscript{478} Rather, the emotional expression of the king was a tool that could be invoked to punish disobedience, if a governor or other such ruling official simply could not muster the control. Considering that Sargon himself wrote in his letter to Mannu-ki-Ninua that he should say the Palace expressed √rʾb,\textsuperscript{479} it seems that simply the description of the king exhibiting anger was expected to incite terror, without it being necessarily the case that the king was shaking with fury. This in turn continues to underline the propensity of performative affect (as the scholars perform in their letters, so does the king) and a surprising fluidity in modulating inward-outward states in the service of the State.\textsuperscript{480}

**Mass Unrest: bartu and killu**

The foregoing instances of disobedience and dissent in the face of the Assyrian order, characterised by the withdrawal of √mgr and √šmʾ, all encompass ultimately small-scale, isolated acts of resistance. Whether the drip-drip of labourers fleeing one by one, or bands of townspeople taking flight, the conception of a corporate action does not seem to have figured into these scenarios, and the Assyrian elite consequently express frustration, if anything.

In stark contrast to this are two examples, from the north and south of empire, which allude to greater levels of popular unrest. The first is brief, and returns us to the account of Ša-Aššur-dubbu, the ‘inferior brother’ of the Urartian governor of Pulua. In his missive to Sargon, the slightly slighted official writes:

\begin{quote}
issurrı bartu memmenı maşartu utaʾana issu pan barti pališaka
Perhaps there will be some rebellion. I am strengthening the guard. I am √plḥ before rebellion.
\end{quote}

SAA 5 no. 33, rev. 13’-15’, Ša-Aššur-dubbu to Sargon

Unfortunately, there is no space to give bartu and the concept of ‘rebellion’ a proper treatment here,\textsuperscript{484} but Ša-Aššur-dubbu’s declaration that he is √plḥ before it is striking. As delineated back in

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Not everyone requested such strong royal intervention when dealing with la √mgr. See SAA 19 no. 221 obv.3-rev. 2’.}
\footnote{For which see note 289 to p.176.}
\footnote{We may recall Sargon requesting Raḥš-Dadi to make enquiries to Iyaze ina ramanka ‘according to your ramanu,’ despite the devaluation of ramanu action in the hierarchical community. See p.104.}
\footnote{Examples of bartu in the correspondence are few, however. A broken letter describes a failed rebellion (SAA 1 no.8 rev. 13) and another letter describes the association of bartu with the perils of interiority as described in chapter two: they will do bartu... ina libbi irtišįš ... ša ramušu (SAA 16 no. 63, CT 53 i7 obv. 8’-11’). The English term ‘rebellion’ itself}
\end{footnotes}
chapter three, √plḥ does not stand for any simple fear but a complex relation between subjects, actively practiced. Drawing on those conclusions, and noting that bartu itself derives from √bʾr, a semantic root meaning 'stir up revolt,' we can develop the notion that this declaration of √plḥ was in fact a positive relation to the potentiality of massed popular subjectivities that could act ina ramani against the Assyrian order. Integrating this with the idea of the ṭemu and the understanding that all events in the temporal sphere are fulfillments of the divine ṭemu, we can further extend our understanding to paradoxically incorporate the instrument of rebellion itself as an enactment of ṭemu, set against the authority of the Assyrian king and state which is invalidated by the very presence of it. Consequently, bartu here can potentially be construed not as a purely negative rebellion, but as a sort of ‘popular will,’ composed of the disparate subjectivities of the people, and authored by ṭemu. Ša-Aššur-dubbu’s √plḥ before it is thus an appropriate response to this potential risk, rather than a declaration of simple fear. These associations are further alluded to by the concept of the maṣṣartu ‘guard,’ which we have also seen in reference to scholarly activity on behalf of the king. Though we might conceive of it as military installation in the one sense, and cosmic monitoring in the other, we can try and push for a more unified understanding of cosmic and societal threat as expressions of the same ṭemu, and thus the maṣṣartu as a single sphere of action upholding the Assyrian order.

Finally, we turn to one sympathetic voice in support of the exploited. Mar-Issar, the personal envoy of Esarhaddon who supervised restoration works in Babylonia, writes a report to the king:

issurri šakin-ṭemu Babili ana šarri bellya ʾisappara
ma mar’e Babili ina kurbani ʾissé’uni
sîlate šina ina tekiti ša ana šakin-ṭemani ʾiqbani
ma reš muǧirrikunu ʾiṣṣa
ṣarpṭ mar’e muḫḥi ma mar’e Babili Barsip u Kute utusṣiku ittaḥru
mar’e Babili muškenute ša memmenišunu laššuni killu issaknu ibiti’u
Perhaps the establisher-of-ṭemu of Babylon writes to the king my lord
3.QUOT The sons of Babylon threw clods at me
This is a lie. In the unfairness of the establishers-of-ṭemu they said
3.QUOT Raise up your chariots
They assigned and received much silver-tax from the sons of Babylon, Borsippa and Cutha
The sons of Babylon, meschinos\textsuperscript{a}\textsuperscript{a} that have nothing, established a lament and wept

SAA 10 no. 348, bottom edge 23-rev.12

\textsuperscript{a}\textsuperscript{a} This Italian word for ‘wretch’ is in direct descent from the Akkadian muškenu so is particularly apposite to employ here.

derives from a notion of war redeclared, Latin re-\textit{bellum} (OED s.v. rebellion); bartu encodes no such meaning, though it does possess a verbal derivation from √bʾr, emphasising its nature as an activity, a thing done, as rebellion is.
Mar-Issar’s narrative here notably shifts responsibility for the documented disruption away from the people and onto the šakin-temis, members of the imperial hierarchy. At the same time, it offers up valuable evidence for popular unrest. On the first point, this seems to be the closest direct criticism of Assyrian policy from a member of the elite within the corpus: Mar-Issar lays the blame on the order the šakin-temi ineptly enacted, described with tekitu, ‘complaint, injustice.’ Such an order would have come from the šakin-temi’s superiors, the highest Assyrian elite, even Esarhaddon himself. By contrast, he describes the Babylonians as wretched people with no possessions, who weep and wail. Though we are in no doubt as to where the scholar’s sympathy lies, it is noticeable that the people are reduced to noise—they are not offered words or a space to speak for themselves. Despite his sympathy, Mar-Issar, as a member of the privileged cultural elite, still regards the population as little more than an emotio
nal mass of bodies to be managed. It is the failure of the šakin-temi to enact the king’s orders, to ensure the ideal lībbu √l’tb, and thence lying about it, that is the worst thing, not the powerlessness of the people.

Conclusion—From √mgr to Autonomy

Mar-Issar’s haughty pity towards the voiceless, wailing Babylonians brings us to the final question of this thesis: for all the devices and dehumanisations, the wiggling with words and the totality of temu, to what extent were those subjected to the Assyrian order able to exert autonomy against it? The majority of this section has turned on the question of disobedience towards the Assyrian order as represented through √mgr, a semantic domain which points to a concept loosely covered by subjectivity and affect. Inherent in √mgr was a concept of dialogue and response: something needed to be posited in order for a subject to express √mgr or its negation towards it. √mgr also carried aspects of will and autonomy, in that it could not be directly controlled by an imperial force: in this respect, it reflected the Assyrian relation to lībbu, though there were no techniques to elicit or inculcate √mgr directly.

What we do have, and what brings √mgr into relief, are the instances where it defines an autonomy of political will. The Succession Treaty of Esarhaddon, from which we have derived many strictures attempting to police the interiority of Assyrian subjects throughout this thesis, explicitly details the
ability to withdraw √mgr from a king of Assyria, in this case a king viewed by the treaty as an illegitimate usurper:

šumma memmeni ina muḫḫi Aššur-ahu-iddina šar Aššur šīḫu bartešaš ina kussie šarrutišu ittušib
šumma ana šarrutišu taḫaddišani la tašabbatanisšišuši la tadakaššuni
šumma ammar šabatišu duakšu la mašakunu ana šarrutišu tamaggurani
tamitu ša urdanuti tantalmanisšuni
ina muḫḫišu la taḫbalkatani
ina gammarti libbikunu qarabu issišu la tappašani

If:
someone were to incite rebellion and revolt against Assurbanipal and sit on the throne of his kingship
if:
you rejoice in his kingship, and do not seize him and do not kill him
if:
you are able to seize him and kill him, but consent to his kingship, utter an oath of servitude, and do not overturn him, and do not perform battle with him in the completeness of your interior...

SAA 2 no. 6, obv. 302-311

We might wonder whether Aššur-nerari and Shalmaneser (V) would have benefited from this commandment when they were usurped by Tiglath-pileser and Sargon respectively. As we know, Tiglath-pileser and Sargon managed to establish themselves successfully, despite stealing their thrones from their 'legitimate' occupants.483 As we know, the imperial ontology of ṭemu meant that whatever came to pass, even if resulted in calamity for Assyria, was explicable as the decree of the gods, and thus, by dint of their success, Tiglath-pileser and Sargon were in fact the legitimate occupants of the throne all along. Yet in Esarhaddon’s treaty we find a safeguard against such coups, a safeguard that turns particularly on how these subjects of Assyria respond to these new rulers: šarrutišu √mgr ‘consent to his kingship’ and šarrutišu ṭhiš ‘rejoice in his kingship.’

There is a tension here that a cuneiform ontology struggles to reconcile: all subjects possess an inaccessible interiority and a wilful ramanu that needs to be dedicated fully for Assyria, demonstrating that subjects in isolation or en masse might go against ‘Assyrian interests.’ However, this going against Assyrian interests, if effective, needs to be explained as acting for Assyrian interests, as in the coups of Tiglath-pileser and Sargon. Acting against the god’s ṭemu, and the ṭemu of Aššur, is also acting in accord with the divine decree. Consequently, for a reigning Assyrian king, to win the libbus and ramanus of one’s empowered subjects was paramount in order to not have ṭemu potentially turn against you. It is in this lacuna, this ambiguity space, this inner theatre of

483 Sargon’s throne name has been interpreted as the overcompensatory Šarru-kenu ‘True King,’ though Šarru-uki ‘the king established truth’ is also valid. See Chamaza 1992: 31 for further discussion and bibliography.
empire, that the potential for self-direction against the imposition of āmu, the duty of dullu, and libbu √gmr was possible.
Conclusions

In this dissertation, I have attempted to explore the inner theatre of operations of the Assyrian Empire: the ways in which this ancient polity recognised, conceptualised and commandeered the hearts and minds of those it encompassed. We began by deconstructing the word ṭemu, revealing it to be an ontological concept, a junction between exterior Empire and interior Intentionality, between future and past, and human and divine. Its mundane, frequent use throughout the correspondence underlined the contemporary currency of this concept, suggesting that ṭemu and the concepts implicated in it were a critical component of Assyrian imperialism.

Following the thread of this thesis, we then explored the Assyrian interior itself, the libbu, which formed part of the Assyrian subject, together with the named self, and the ramanu. This partially permeable, tripartite subject was a salient model in imperial Assyrian society, as shown in the subsequent chapter which showed how many Assyrian acts were geared towards cultivating an ideal interiority. This ideal interiority was relational—founded on chains of √plḥ, the respectful, positive ‘fear’ binding subjects together in a kind of exchange relationship—and situational, with subjects carrying out tasks appropriate to their status, being content in the shadow of the king. We then paused to consider how an imperial ontology predicated on ṭemu might have resulted in such a biopolitically inclined state avant la lettre. By considering the simultaneity of ṭemu together with the polyvalence of the cuneiform sign, a key principle of Mesopotamian epistemology, I suggested that a unifying theme of ṭemu and interiority was ambiguity. Divining the ṭemu of the gods was always subject to interpretation, people’s interiors were not accessible and were potential threats to the Assyrian supremacy. This ambiguity needed to be resolved to annul the danger to the Assyrian king, resulting in the Palace’s monopoly on divination, extensive ṭemu-fact gathering, and biopolitical repertoire. Drawing these themes together, we saw the ṭuppi ade, ‘treaty tablet’ of Esarhaddon, sealed with the seal of Aššur ‘not to be changed,’ demanding true words, words completely of the interior. This concern with the interior, but also the ambiguity of language, was the jumping off point for the next chapter, on the spoken language of the Assyrians as captured in the correspondence.
There, we took up the thread of ṭemu, temporality, and the speaking subject. For, despite the looping, even simultaneous ṭemu-porality, speaking subjects still situated themselves in a linear, dialogical space. This was socially variable. Though all subjects had recourse to citing the authoritative words of the powerful, uttered in past dialogues, self-presentation and relation to the future were governed by one’s status role in the official hierarchy. Those who took the superior role in a dialogue used unambiguous language—direct linguistic devices: second-person address, and imperative statements—paralleling the ṭemu-poral looping-simultaneity. Subordination entailed ambiguity, openness, imagination—third-person indirect address was preferred, and the future was left uncertain, marked out by precative verbal forms and modal particles—mirroring the interpretive openness of the (cuneiform or ominous) sign. Most importantly, a single subject could switch between these two roles, according to their different relationships, or even within a single utterance. This shows, even within the rigidly defined imperial hierarchy, a lability of subject position, where ambiguity could be exploited: effaced to exert authority, or ratcheted up to create ironic and unstable images imagining a parodic unreality.

The closing chapters show the ṭemu-imperial complex—with its ambiguity controlling procedures in divination, action, interior subjects and speech—was only one ontological assemblage in the Middle East of the first millennium. Though detectable only in trace encounters with the Assyrian elite’s cuneiform-power machine, kinship relationships evinced a somewhat different evaluation of the subject, fortified by mutual concern with each others’ ramanu and ṭemu, as well as a different patterning of affects in which the critical √plḥ was completely absent. Finally, we explored the ways in which the Assyrian elite conceptualised and coped with challenges to the ṭemu-order. Dehumanisation strategies focused on depriving subjects of meaningful speech, either through silence or through hearing their vocalisations as the sound of storming, blustering, or dibbi la dibbi ‘words not words.’ More overt opposition was characterised in terms of la ʾšm ‘not hearing.’ This was often found in concert with la ʾmgr, ‘not consenting,’ which implied an active, even emotional process of assent-building was required between the elite and their subjects. Together, these discourses captured and classified the autonomous, ambiguous wilfulness of subjects of all statuses in the Assyrian universe, from the meanest peon to the mightiest magnate. This allowed the Assyrian elites to express and tolerate the contradictions and failures in the ṭemu established by the
king and his gods, suggesting that the absolute power of the king was recognised to be contingent, on indeed allowing a measure of latitude and ambiguity despite the desire for centralised control.

This investigation into an empire’s inner theatre has shown that, by attempting to divest ourselves of a philologically informed language ideology and opening ourselves up to the unintuitive and the strange, we can create new concepts and categories for understanding world making processes above the level of states and nations. The Assyrian Empire, having tended to fall under the radar of comparative historians, is becoming increasingly visible as a worthy ‘case study’ into imperialism (Liverani 2017: 8-9). Here, I have attempted to go further. Imperialism, empire, and other ‘-isms’ and ‘-logies’ are analytical tools predicated upon a European academic and ontological tradition, presupposing political, economic or religious rationalities, categories and distributions. Though this thesis served as only an initial attempt to move away from our historically conditioned concepts in our analysis of an ancient empire, the attempt to use ephemeral correspondence to reconstruct terms by which the Assyrian elites understood their own world has created new knowledge about what human society might be. It enables us to posit the higher-order comparative question as to what ways of existing in the world give rise to things like power and thoughts of domination in the first place.

The reconstitution of temporality (temu-porality) and ‘thingness’ articulates with a number of debates in wider fields. Temu’s ontological affordances, the looping, even simultaneous assignment of future and past, even its union of temporal process with physical matter, echo ideas posited centuries later. Take Deleuze’s understanding of ‘virtuality,’ a thick present expressing the past, pregnant with the future (May 2005: 70), or the ontological uncertainty entailed by quantum-level indeterminacy in Western physics. Bakhtin’s ‘chronotope’ itself was inspired by Einstein’s bleeding-edge interpretation of time as a fourth dimension integrated with space (Bakhtin 1981: 84). By associating the everyday exigencies of Assyrian rule with contemporary concepts of time and subjectivity, we re-establish the importance of implicit ontologies in the practice of culture-power.

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484 Exemplified by Heisenberg’s ‘Uncertainty Principle,’ which eliminates the possibility of a detached observer. The problematisation of ‘exact science’ reflects well the different ontological underpinnings that informed the cuneiform sciences’ interpretive ambiguity (Rochberg 2016: 278).
It is not necessarily a given that a ‘state’ should follow a linear, teleological temporality, or be concerned only with the economic potential of its subjects.

The advantages of an anthropological approach to Assyrian material are clear. Remaining open about basic schemata such as temporality and intentionality enabled us to develop temu, šḫ and ṯmgr concepts, to name a few. Furthermore, the close concern of linguistic anthropologists with the non-lexical encoding of meaning and affect helped us to reveal the complex maps of quotation and responsibility, the non-lexical encoding of affect, and the subtle changes in grammatical stance that signalled deference, uncertainty and assertiveness in places we wouldn't expect in a rigidly defined hierarchical system.

To conclude, the ideas advanced in this thesis offer new directions in the study of the Assyrian empire, historical and ethnographic theory and methodologies more generally. Firstly, throughout this thesis I have alluded to the importance of cuneiform epistemology and theories of the sign which are strongly implicated in practice of Assyrian imperial government, but did not explore these links systematically. Rochberg’s complementary work (2016) mobilising the ontological turn in Mesopotamian science illustrates not only how the research questions taken up in this thesis can apply to other genres of cuneiform texts, but also how similar conclusions can be reached independently, demonstrating the strength of this approach. A strengthening and synthesis of the dialogue between everyday and specialised ontologies presents a valuable avenue for research.

In a similar vein, in this thesis I have chosen to focus primarily on the correspondence excavated from the royal palaces at Nineveh and Kalḫu. Notwithstanding the continually unfolding publication of new letters, space considerations meant omitting other fascinating and thematically relevant texts such as the oracle queries (‘will he who can see it, see it? will he who can hear it, hear it?’), the prophecies (‘mankind is deceitful!’), the royal inscriptions (already very well studied, but not with this theoretical approach) or even cuneiform contracts (the shift in legal terminology from ownership of people to subjects šḫ their owners suggests a historical development of šḫ beyond the monopoly of the imperial hierarchy). A further necessary omission occurs especially in chapter two, where a detailed examination of affective lexical terminology beyond šḫ, šknu škn or šb would further enhance our understanding of the historical idiosyncrasy of the Assyrian subject.
Finally, by showing how linguistic anthropological approaches can be usefully integrated with historical sources, this thesis reaffirms the methodological techniques honed in the ethnography of speaking and demonstrates how they can be applied to a radically different set of ‘transcripts.’ Consequently, not only does the thesis open up an entire historical period to a discipline previously distant from it, but also demonstrates that historical documents can be used to partially reconstruct interactive practice despite the impossibility of participant observation. Through this successful integration of linguistic methods with historical sources, we have uncovered valuable new insights which advance our historical understanding of the Middle East, superstate processes, time, and the human subject’s place in the world, underlining the importance of attending to an empire’s inner theatre.
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Appendices
Place Names

The geographical information used in this list and in figure 1 was derived from the websites Assyrian Empire Builders (Assyrian Empire Builders n.d.) and Knowledge and Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire (Knowledge and Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire n.d.). Figure 1 was created using ArcGIS® software by Esri. ArcGIS® and ArcMap™ are the intellectual property of Esri and are used herein under licence. Copyright © Esri. All rights reserved. For more information about Esri® software please visit www.esri.com. The Keyhole Markup Language files which contain the placemark data used to construct Figure 1 are assyrian-empire-builders.kmz n.d. from Assyrian Empire Builders n.d. and k_and_p.kmz n.d. from Knowledge and Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire n.d.

Amedi Modern Diyarbakır; Upper Tigris province. Governed by Nashīr-Bel in the eighth century.

Arbela Modern Erbil; one of the principal cities of Assyria.

Arpad Probably modern Tell Rifat; site of multiple battles between Assyrian and Urartian forces, and finally annexed by Tiglath-pileser in 740 (Frahm 2017: 177), becoming an Assyrian province.

Arrapḫa Modern Kirkuk; governed by Issar-duri during Sargon’s rule.

Arzuḫina Town and province on the Lower Zab. Governed by Šamaš-bel-uṣur in 710, before he transferred to Der.

Assur Modern Qalaat Sherqat; also known as Libbali (var. Libbi-ali) the ‘Inner City’ of Assyria. Location of the temple of the god Aššur, the Ešarra ‘House of the Universe.’ As a result the residence of many cultic officials. An Ezida temple dedicated to the god Nabu was also located here, of the same name as the temple in Borsippa.

Babylon Modern Hillah. Ancient and highly prestigious city, occasionally subject to Assyrian suzerainty, though never ruled as an imperial province. The peculiar strategies adopted by the Assyrian rulers towards this city have been dubbed the ‘Babylonian Problem’ (Frame 2008; Machinist 1984).

Barḫalza Assyrian province. During the reign of Esarhaddon, its governor fails to provide the requisite offerings for the Aššur Temple, and is also caught up in legal proceedings.

Birat City of unknown location

Borsippa Modern Birs Nimrud. Babylonian city in which an Ezida temple dedicated to the god Nabu was located.

Carchemish Extremely rich city annexed by Sargon in 717. Its inhabitants, tired of the ilku, fled to Arpad.

Cutha Modern Tell Ibrahim; city in Babylonia that was overtaxed by the šakin-temis under Esarhaddon.

Damascus City conquered by Tiglath-pileser in 732.

Darati Town in Babylonia

Der Modern Tell Aqar; City located in Babylonia, near Elam. Šamaš-bel-uṣur and Nabu-du-ri-uṣur governed this city.

Dur-Šarruken Modern Khorsabad; Royal foundation of Sargon built as his new capital and governed by
Kišir-Aššur. After Sargon’s death on the battlefield in 725, the city was abandoned as the royal capital, though it retained provincial status.

Dur-Atanate Town in Mazamua, precise location unknown

Dur-Šarrukku Town and province in northeastern Babylonia not to be confused with Dur-Šarruken. Governed by Il-yada’ in the eighth century.

Elam Kingdom in Iran which vied with Assyria for supremacy in Babylonia. Its agents attempted to install Nabu-ú sshallim on the throne of the Sealand, displacing the Assyrian candidate Na’id-Marduk.

Ellipi Mountain kingdom north of Elam, ruled by Daltâ

Esagil Temple of Marduk in Babylon

Ešarra See Assur

Hamath Modern Hama; client kingdom under Tiglath-pileser that subsequently rebelled at Sargon’s accession and was annexed in 723. Governed by Adda-ḫaṭi, who complained of ‘constant hostility.’

Ḫalziathar Modern Jabal Jabisah; Assyrian province located in modern Syria; governed by Aššur-belu-da”in in Sargon’s reign.

Ḫargu Zagros mountain state. The deputy of the Palace Herald under Sargon is reported to have talked about acquiring it, eliciting complaint from its ruler

Ḫarran Modern Harran, classical Carrhae; important Assyrian city in the west, site of an important temple to Sin. Governed by Nabu-pašir in Sargon’s reign.

Ḫindanu City and province on the middle Euphrates.

Inner City See Assur

Itu’u Modern Hit; town and province on the middle Euphrates, origin of the Itu’eans who were experts in ṣgrr

Kalḫu Modern Nimrud; royal capital of Assyria beginning with Assurnasirpal II, before Sargon established his city of Dur-Šarruken. It remained an important city.

Kar-Šarrukin Also known as Ḫarḫar, possibly near modern Malayer; city in the Zagros, governed by Nabu-belu-ka”in until he was succeeded by Mannu-ki-Ninua in 708

Kilizi Modern Qasr Shamamok; town where a contingent of scribes was based during Esarhaddon’s reign.

Ḫlarran Modern Qasr Shamamok; town where a contingent of scribes was based during Esarhaddon’s reign.

Ḫurra Modern Qasr Shamamok; town where a contingent of scribes was based during Esarhaddon’s reign.

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Ḫurra Modern Qasr Shamamok; town where a contingent of scribes was based during Esarhaddon’s reign.
Laqê Province located on the river Ḫabur

Libbali See Assur

Malak Modern location unknown; town on the border of Elam, near Der


Naṣibin Modern Nusaybin; city and province. Governed by Taklak-ana-Bel in Sargon's reign.

Nemed-Laguda Town in Babylonia, location not known.

Nineveh Modern Mosul; ancient and important city that became the royal capital of Assyria under Sennacherib. Location of the palace archives in which the royal correspondence was discovered. Destroyed in 612.

Nippur Modern Nuffar; city in Babylonia, associated with an ancient head of the gods, Enlil. Its governors took the title of šandabakku.

Phrygia Assyrian Muški, kingdom located in modern Turkey. Its capital of Gordion is located at the modern site of Yasshiyiük. During Sargon's reign, its king, Midas, was initially hostile but then sought rapprochement.

Pulua Modern Palu; city in Uraṛtu, its governor insulted Ša-Aššur-dubbu

Šubria Buffer kingdom located at the source of the Tigris. Ruled by Ḫu-Tešub, a client of Sargon.

Raṣappa Assyrian province between the Tigris and Euphrates; governed by Zeru-ibni during Sargon's reign

Samaria Province and city of the same name; conquered by Shalmaneser V in 722. Arīḫu complains that without ṭēmu, the corn tax cannot be raised.

Sealand Marshy region at the head of the Gulf

Sidon Phoenician trading city, a client state under Tiglath-pileser, supervised by Qurdi-Aššur-lamur. Eventually annexed by Esarhaddon in 677.

Šupat Assyrian province in southern Syria

Til-Barsip Modern Tell Ahmar; Assyrian provincial capital.

Til-turi City in northern Syria

Turbliaš Modern Nahr eṭ-Ṭib; region in Babylonia. The sheikhs of this area write to Sargon concerning the land's possible fall to the Elamites

Turmuna Location unknown. Its roofs were plastered in the reign of Tiglath-pileser.

Tyre Modern Šur; Phoenician trading city that fell under the Assyrian sphere of influence and was under the supervision of Qurdi-Aššur-lamur during Tiglath-pileser's reign
Țurușpa Capital of Urartu.

Ur Modern Tell Muqayyar; ancient southern Babylonian city.

Urartu Known as Bianili to its inhabitants, this kingdom was a rival to Assyria during the eighth century, though direct warfare was difficult due to the mountainous terrain between the two states. Faced threats from Cimmerian riders.

Uruk Modern Warka; first attested city. During the Neo-Assyrian period, the site of power plays by the agitator Hînnumu.
Prosopographical Index

This brief index of names is intended only as a guide to where these people appear within the body of the thesis, as well as providing etymologies and normalised vowel lengths. For additional background, the reader is advised to consult the Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire entry indicated, supplemented by online updates. Names followed by a number indicate that name's entry in the PNA index.

Abbreviations

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Abi-yaqar 'The father is esteemed'; Puqudian sheikh who acts according to his ramanu, plotting revenge in the time of Sargon.

See p.123

Appears SAA 17 no.152, rev. 1, 11-12, 14

PNA 1/I s.v. Abi-yaqar 1, p.13

Abi-yaqiya West Semitic, possibly Aramaic 'The father is guarding'; An Assyrian client, sheikh in the Tubliaš region during the reign of Sargon. Writes to the king from his house, where he is √khs-crushed, reporting on the ramanu-seeking behaviour of Abi-yaqar. He emphasises his words are true, out of his interior.

See p.123, p.124

Letter SAA 17 no. 152

PNA 1/I s.v. Abi-iaqia 1, p.11

Abu-lešir 'May the father prosper'; man of unknown status active around Hamath during the reign of Sargon, mentioned in a letter where he is to be fed by the king's orders.

See p. 263

Appears SAA 1 no. 172, obv. 8, rev. 26

PNA 1/I s.v. Abu-lešir 3, p.18

Adad-isše'a 'Adad is with me'; name shared by at least two men. In this thesis, Adad-isše'a appears once, acting as an official in western Assyria. He is mentioned in a letter by Bel-duri where he does not obey royal orders. This name is also shared by a governor of Mazamua during the reign of Sargon; this governor was potentially also governor of Til-Barsip, and consequently may be the same Adad-isše'a mentioned in Bel-duri's letter.

See p. 263

Appears SAA 1 no. 172, obv. 7

PNA 1/I s.v. Adad-isše’a 3, p.26

307
Adad-šumu-ūṣur ‘Adad, protect the name’; King’s exorcist in the reign of Esarhaddon, father of Urad-Gula, brother of Nabu-zeru-šešir. Frequent correspondent of Esarhaddon who personally dealt with the physical and spiritual health of the king. In his letters to the king he exhibits particularly florid praise, and employs self-abnegatory devices such as declaring a lack of ṭēmu and describing himself as a dog—both devices that serve to reinscribe power hierarchies whilst not really being excessively self abusive.

He offers encouragement to the king upon the royal appointment of Assurbanipal and Šamaš-šumu-ukin as crown princes of Assyria and Babylonia respectively. In this letter, he advises Esarhaddon to banish negative internal dialogues.

See p. 31, p. 34, pp.57-58, p.79ff., p.97, pp.132-133, p.182, p.219, p.221ff., p.242-244
Letters SAA 10 no. 185, no. 197, no. 191, no. 198, no. 218
PNA 1/l s.v. Adad-sumu-usur 5, p.38

Adda-ḫati Canaanite ‘Adda is a smiter’; Governor of Hamath in the reign of Sargon. Surrounded by constant hostility.

See note 463 to p.270
Letter SAA 1 no. 176
PNA 1/l s.v. Adda-ḫāti 2, p.45

Ahu-duur-enši ‘The brother is a protective wall for the weak’; rab-kiṣir ‘cohort commander’ during the reign of Esarhaddon. The king orders a letter to be sent via the mule express, couriered by Ahu-duur-enši.

See p.172
Appears SAA 16 no. 148, rev. 14
PNA 1/l, s.v. Ahu-dūr-enši 1, p.72

Akkullānu Meaning unknown; priest of the Aššur Temple, astrologer in the service of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal. Emphasises that his words are true, derived from his lībbu, asks questions according to his ramanu, and advises Esarhaddon not to place incorrect omens in the royal lībbu.

See note 106 to p.68, p.84, p.86, p.90, p.134, note 444 to p.261
Letters SAA 8 no. 101 SAA 10 no. 90, no. 97, no. 99
PNA 1/l s.v. Akkullānu 1, p.95

Ana-Nabu-taklāk ‘In Nabu I trust’; Assyrian official of uncertain status active in Babylonia during Sargon’s reign. Writes a letter under the name Nabu-taklāk to his aḫu ‘brother’ Gadiyaʾ about how he is unwell on the battlefront whilst Gadiyaʾ drinks beer in the house of his lord. Mentioned in a letter of Barsipitu about the collective happiness of Babylonia.

See p.150, 222
Letter SAA 17 no.63
Appears SAA 17 no. 73, obv. 6
PNA 1/l, s.v. Ana-Nabû-taklāk, p.113; PNA 2/II s.v. Nabû-taklāk 4, p.893, PNAo 1/l, s.v. Ana-Nabû-taklāk

Aplaya hypocoristic from aplu ‘son’ or Apil-Ea ‘Son of Ea’; Mentioned in an unassigned letter where he is denigrated as a pahšuzu ‘liar’ and šaršaranu ‘traitor.’ The letter is damaged, but continues to describe a man who continues to speak hot air and believes his ṭemu won’t reach the Palace.

See p.251-2
Appears SAA 18 no. 102, obv. 8’
PNA 1/l s.v. Aplāia or Apil-Aia 34, p.118

Aqar-Bel-lumur ‘May I see the preciousness of Bel’; Name shared by two men who are likely not the same. The first was a military official active in Babylonia during the eighth century. He performs important duties for the Assyrians, such as talking dibbi ṭabuti ‘good words,’ establishing ṭemu, and making people vṛhs. Co-authors a letter to Sennacherib with Nabu-šuma-lišir, where they report the lībbu of the people is good.
See p.127, p.145, p.15ff., note 99 to p.61
Letters SAA 17 no. 135, no. 111 with Nabu-šuma-lišir SAA 17 no. 120

PNA 1/1 s.v. Aqār-Bēl-lūmur 1, p. 121

Babylonian active during Esarhaddon’s reign. Writes a message to the king asking for his sponsorship, quoting a previous promise that fell from the king’s pure mouth. He is √\textit{plḫ} because he received no reply to any of his previous letters.

See p. 178, note 237 to p.145
Letter SAA 18 no. 60
PNA 1/I s.v. Aqār-Bēl-lūmur 3, p. 122

\textbf{Argišti} Meaning unknown; Argisti II was king of Uraḫtu, reigning contemporaneously with Sargon. In a report from Aššur-reşuwa to Sargon, an informant describes this king’s speech reassuring the Kummeans that he isn’t going to destroy them.

See p.137
Appears SAA 5 no. 95 (unnamed)
PNA 1/1 s.v. Argišti 2, p. 130

\textbf{Ariḫu} Meaning unknown; Official stationed in Laqê during Sargon’s reign. Gets annoyed that his superior doesn’t provide any \textit{ṭēmu}, making his subordinates indolent and quiet.

See p.49ff.
Letter SAA 1 no. 220
PNA 1/1 s.v. Ariḫu 1, p. 131

\textbf{Ariye} Meaning unknown; king of Kumme during the reign of Sargon. Sends \textit{ṭēmu} to Sennacherib.

See p.46
Letter SAA 1 no. 29, obv. 22.
PNA 1/1 s.v. Ariye, p.131

Aššur-reşuwa Intelligence agent based in Kumme during Sargon’s reign. Reports on Argišti directly to Sargon, and also reports to Sennacherib \textit{mar-šarrī}.
See p.30, p.137, note 418 to p.245
Letter SAA 5 no.95
Appears SAA 1 no. 29 obv. 23, rev. 11
PNA 1/1 s.v. Aššur-reşuwa 2, p. 212

Aššur-belu-da’ in ‘Aššur, strengthen the lord’; possibly the governor of Ḫalziathbar in the reign of Sargon. He reports on the Ḫalziathbaraens running away under him, causing the mule stable attendant to be disturbed.

See p.276
Letter SAA 15 no. 79
PNA 1/1 s.v. Aššur-belu-da’in, p.172

Aššur-belu-taqquin ‘Aššur, safeguard the lord’; perhaps a governor of a region near Babylonia during Sargon’s reign. Is √\textit{plḫ} of Sargon’s šiṣtu-judgement should he lose any bodies from a shipment of people to the king.

See p.144-5
Letter SAA 15 no. 181
PNA 1/1 s.v. Aššur-belu-taqquin 7, p.173

Aššur-belu-uṣur ‘Aššur, protect the lord’; Assyrian official, perhaps a governor, active in the Diyala during the reign of Sargon. Establishes \textit{ṭēmu} for Assyria.

See note 72 to p.47
Letter SAA 15 no. 60
PNA 1/1 s.v. Aššur-belu-uṣur 10, p.174

Aššur-da’i inanni ‘Aššur, strengthen me’; eunuch and governor of Mazamua during Tiglath-pileser’s reign. The king established \textit{ṭēmu} on him to provide horses to Dadi

See p.47-8, p.190-1
Letters SAA 19 no. 91
PNA 1/1 s.v. Aššur-da’i inanni 4, p.177
Aššur-ilaʾī ‘Aššur is my god’; Military official active in the eighth century. Writes to Tiglath-pileser requesting ṭēmu.

See note 75 to p.48
Letter SAA 19 no. 49
PNA 1/1 s.v. Aššûr ilaʾī 3, p.188

Aššur-šallimanni ‘Aššur, keep me safe’; governor of Arrapḫa during Tiglath-pileser’s reign. He writes about the dibbi ṭabutu he spoke to Balassu, and requests the king dispatch troops to make him ṣrḫṣ.

See p.126
Letter SAA 19 87

Aššur-šarru-ibni ‘Aššur has created the king’; Construction manager who complains to the king that the governor of Arbela ṣmgr ‘does not consent’ to grant him the subjects needed to do his work. Unable to act because he is ṣlḫ before the king.

See p.146
Letter SAA 1 no. 149
PNA 1/1 s.v. Aššûr šarru-ibni 1, p.218

Aššur-šarru-uṣur ‘Aššur, protect the king’; Governor of Que in the reign of Sargon. The king writes a letter to him, preserved in draft form, dealing with a bundle of interiority management topics.

See p.122ff.
Appears SAA 1 no.1
PNA 1/1 s.v. Aššûr šarru-uṣur

Aššur-uṣallim ‘Aššur has kept safe’; Royal agent operating in the reign of Esarhaddon. Sends a letter to the king and quotes twenty-seven lines of a royal message in his letter. In this quotation, Esarhaddon emphasises the importance of secure transmission of letters.

See p.172, note 19 to p.21
Letter SAA 16 no. 148
PNA 1/1 s.v. Aššûr uṣallim

Aššur-zeru-ibni ‘Aššur has created offspring’; High official of uncertain status active in northern Assyria during the reign of Sargon. Writes to Nergal-ēṭir concerning a case against the governor of Ḥalziatbar, requesting his ahu ‘brother’s temu

See p.30, p.226, p.230
Letter SAA 5 no. 81

Bahljanu Aramaic ‘The Desired One’; Witness to the depredations of Bel-lu-balat, and killed by him on the hill of Kawkab. Taklak-ana-Bel writes to the sukallu angrily stating he had no fault in the matter.

See p.255
Appears SAA 1 no. 244, obv. 4, 7, 11.
PNA 1/II s.v. Bahljanu 3, p.252

Balasi Meaning unknown. Åkerman and Radner in PNA suggest it is a hypocoristic of balāṭu ‘life’ or a hypocoristic of Aramaic bīl ‘search’; astrologer and ummānu ‘expert’ of Assurbanipal active during Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal’s reigns. Jointly authors a letter with Nabu-āḫḫē-eriba to Esarhaddon, concerned about the king’s ramānu after the royal mouth did not eat and was short of mood.

See p.75
Letter with Nabu-āḫḫē-eriba SAA 10 no. 43
PNA 1/II s.v. Balasi 3, p.254

Balassu ‘His life’; Leader of the Bit-Dakkuri tribe during the eighth century. Allies with Assyria but would rather be deported than become an enemy to a family member. Potentially appears in a letter of Sargon’s to his governor in Que. The reconstruction is uncertain, but if the proposal that SAA 1 rev. 28 DUMU.ŠU—SU[M] is to be read as Apla-iddina, thence interpreted as a variant of Marduk-apla-iddina (Luukko 2013: 3), then that section of the letter would have a consistent Babylonian theme and thus the identification of that Balassu with the leader of Bit-Dakkuri would be possible.

See p.113-5, p.148, p.235
Appears SAA 1 no. 1, rev. 19, SAA 19 no. 87 obv. 10’
PNA 1/II s.v. Balassu 1, 7, p.256
Barsipitu ‘The woman from Borsippa’; Babylonian lady of high station who writes directly to Sargon describing her safe and joyous return to Bit-Dakkuri

See p.149-150
Letter SAA 17 no. 73
PNA 1/II s.v. Barsipitu 1, p.271

Bel-abu’a ‘Bel is my father’; Official active in the eighth century who goes shopping for belts for the Palace Scribe.

See p.99, p.203
Letter SAA 19 no. 14
PNA 1/II s.v. Bēl-abu’a, p.279
PNAo B s.v. Bēl-abu’a

Bel-aḫa-iddin ‘Bel has given a brother’; Babylonian active in the seventh century. Write to his father Iddin-aḫi requesting a response to this letters.

See p.226ff.
Letter SAA 18 no. 97
PNA 1/II s.v. Bēl-aḫu-iddina 20, p.283

Bel-duri ‘Bel is my wall’; governor of Damascus during Sargon’s reign. Complains that Adad-isse’a and Bel-lešir la ṣmr ‘do not consent’ and la šmʾ ‘do not listen’ to the royal ōtemu. A favourite of Sargon’s holding huge estates.

See p.263-4
Letter SAA 1 no. 172

Bel-ibni ‘Bel has created’; name shared by at least two men, who may potentially be the same person, though PNA states it is ‘impossible’ to know. A man by this name receives a letter from Aqar-Bel-lumur, reporting on the state of Šula the diviner’s beard. This man may be identical with the Bel-ibni appointed king of Babylon by Sennacherib, a ‘puppet king’ who grew up like a puppy in the Assyrian palace; his reign lasted 702-700.

See p.145, note 412 to p.243

Bel-iddina ‘Bel has given’; Does not appear directly in the letters, but his son causes problems for Nabu-ḥamatu’a, governor of Mazamaa in Sargon’s reign. This son is described as a liar and criminal mastermind.

See p.116, p.125
Appears SAA 5 no. 213, obv. 11, 15
PNA 1/II s.v. Bel-iddina 6, p.311

Bel-iqiša ‘Bel has granted’; Name shared by at least three men. The first appears in the reign of Sargon, occupying the prelate’s office of the Esagil and Ezida temples. A letter to the sukkallu petitioning for the king to come to Babylon is assigned to Bel-iqiša due to similarities in style, ductus and greeting formula (Dietrich 2003 p.xxiii). In this letter, Bel-iqiša notes the sukkallu’s duty of abbatu ‘fatherhood,’ and pleads that Babylon not go into the hands of the dogs.

See p.244, p.255-6
Letter SAA 17 no. 21
PNA 1/II s.v. Bēl-iqiša 3, p.315

Bel-lešir ‘Bel has given’; la ṣmr ‘do not consent’ and la šmʾ ‘do not listen’ to the royal ōtemu. A favourite of Sargon’s holding huge estates. Leader of the Gambulu during the seventh century. Esarhaddon proudly mentions in his inscriptions that this man paid tribute to him according to his own ōtemu.

See p.53
Appears RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 1 col. iii 71
PNA 1/II s.v. Bēl-iqiša 7, p.315
Bel-lešir ‘Bel, may he prosper’; Governor of a western province under Sargon. He crushes people and the interior of the land, but refuses to share food with Bel-duri. See p.123, p.263. Letter SAA 19 no. 176. Appears SAA 1 no. 172, obv. 7.

PNA 1/II s.v. Bel-lešir 5, p.321

Bel-liqbi ‘May Bel command’; Governor of Ṣupat in the reign of Sargon. When accused of being a profiteer, he emphasises his loyalty by stating he’s installed mākisu ‘tax collectors’ who cause the local Arabs to be √grr.

See p.101, p.141. Letters SAA 1 no. 179. PNA I/1 s.v. Bēl-liqbi, p.322

Bel-lu-balaṭ ‘May the lord live’; Criminal official pursued by Taklak-ana-Bel in Sargon’s reign. Taklak-ana-Bel reports to the sukallu this scoundrel murdered a certain Baḫianu, summoned to the sukallu’s presence as a witness to Bel-lu-balaṭ’s crimes. In other crimes, he taxed the tax exempt.

See p.255. Appears SAA 1 no. 244 obv. 5, 21, rev. 4. PNA 1/II s.v. Bēl-lu-balaṭ 5, p.335

Bel-upaq Abbreviation of Ana-Bel-upaq ‘For Bel I wait’; Borsippean active during Esarhaddon’s reign. He writes well wishes to his father Kuna, and advises him to care for his ramanu.

See p. 74, p.227-8. Letter SAA 18 no. 64. PNA 1/II s.v. Bēl-upāq p.336

Bel-ušezib ‘Bel has saved’; Nippurean scholar working in Nineveh during Sennacherib and Esarhaddon’s reigns. During Sennacherib’s reign, he was around the city of Uruk during the tenure of Ḫinnumu as śakin-temi there. Consequently, in Esarhaddon’s reign, he reports on the extensive seditious activities occurring there. Advocating for his home city, he writes to Esarhaddon saying the temu of the gods changed and that the king should consequently implement beneficent tax policies. In other foreign policy advice, he suggests that the Cimmerians cannot swear the ade treaty, as they are the ‘Seed-of-the-Lost’.


Dadi Semitic ‘My favourite’; Name of two men featuring in the Assyrian correspondence. The first is briefly mentioned in a quoted royal order of Tiglath-pileser in a letter from Aššur-da’inanni.

See p.48, p.190. Appears SAA 19 no. 91, obv. 11. PNAo D s.v. Dādi

High official based in the Aššur Temple during the reign of Esarhaddon. Writes to the king reporting on shepherds who do not √plḫ the king, asking, if these citizens of Assyria do not √plḥ, how will enemies behave?


Dalta Meaning and origin unknown; King of the land of Ellipi during the eighth century, attested 737-713. Mentioned in a report by Nabu-belu-kaʾʾin to Sargon as having his ramanu swear an oath for the king, but burning five towns instead.

See p.132. Appears SAA 19 no. 192, obv. 8. PNA 1/II s.v. Dalṭā p.373

Data Meaning unknown, though Luukko proposes reading Šuttā, hypocoristic from šuttu ‘dream’; Writes a letter to her brother Šumu-iddin concerning a death in the family.

See p.232ff. Letter SAA 19 no. 144. PNA 1/II s.v. Datā p.381
Gabbu-ana-Aššur ‘All belongs to Aššur’; high official, the palace herald, during the reign of Sargon. Despite his lofty status, the people of the country disrespect and don’t listen to him. Exasperated, he writes a letter to Sargon.

See p.277
Letter SAA 5 no. 118

PNA 1/1 s.v. Gabbu-ana-Aššur 1, p.413

Gadiya’ West Semitic hypocoristic from Gadd ‘Good fortune’; Receives a letter from Ana-Nabu-taklak where the latter upbraids him for asking after his wellbeing when he is sitting in the shadow of the enemy’s sword. By contrast, the lucky Gadiya’ is relaxing, eating bread and drinking beer.

See p.222ff.
Appears SAA 17 no. 63, obv. 2

PNA 1/II s.v. Gaddî, p.417

Gagâ Meaning unknown, possibly derived from gagu ‘necklace’; Babylonian woman. Her death upsets the brother of Daša and Šumu-iddin.

See p.232
Appears SAA 19 no. 144, obv. 13.

PNA 1/II s.v. Gagâ, p.418

Giri-Dadi Canaanite ‘Client of Dadi’; Quarrels with his cousin Sê-lukidi, accused of speaking unword words. The governor of Ḫarran during the reign of Sargon bundles the disputants and ships them to the Palace to be dealt with.

See p.252-3
Appears SAA 1 no. 190 obv. 12, rev.‘7’, 13’

PNA 1/II s.v. Gir-Dâdi, p.425

Ḫinnumu Akkadian name of unknown meaning; sâkin-tômi of Uruk during Sennacherib’s reign. Bel-ūsezb reports on this man’s intrigues to gain power in Uruk during Esarhaddon’s rule. Ḫinnumu’s impermeable interior represents a threatening mystery, as no one knows what his motives are.

See p.131, p.183-181

PNA 2/1 s.v. Ḫinnumu, p.473

Ḫu-Tešub Ḫurrian name containing the divine element Tešub; ruler of Šubria during the reign of Sargon. Appears in a letter of Ša-Aššur-dubbu’s as the ‘Šubrian.’ The Assyrian governor insults him in the Ḫurrian language, calling him an abati-calf who doesn’t fear the gods. Also appears in a letter of Aššur-dur-paniya, who describes him harbouring fugitive workers from Assyria who are subsequently apprehended and delivered up to the king.

See p.246-7, note 467 to p.275
Appears SAA 5 no. 35, obv. 17; no. 52 obv. 14, rev. 9.

PNA 2/1 s.v. Ḫu-Teššub, p.483

Iddin-Aššur ‘Aššur has given’; Official of uncertain status probably stationed at the city of Aššur during the seventh century. Suggests a šiptu-judgement be imposed on a scribe in retribution for the province of Barḫalza failing to supply offerings for the Aššur temple.

See p.140, p.261
Letter SAA 13 no. 31

PNA 2/1 s.v. Iddin-Aššur 6, p.504

Iddin-Ea ‘Ea has given’; Priest at the Ninurta temple in Kalḫu during the seventh century. Writes a letter to the king accusing Urdu-Nabu, priest in the temple of Nabu next door, of appropriating fields for his own ramanu.

See p.131
Letter SAA 13 126

PNA 2/1 s.v. Iddināia or Iddin-Aia 8, p.503

Il-yadaʾ Aramaic ‘God has known’; Assyrian official, governor of Der in 724 and possibly governor of Dur-Šarrukku at a later date in the eighth century. He requests Sargon talk dibbi šubuti with a potential ally such that vēʾš will virally spread throughout the country.

See p.127-9
Letter SAA 15 no. 159

PNA 2/1 s.v. Il-iadaʾ 1, p.515

See note 72 to p.47
Letter SAA 19 no. 33

PNA 2/1 s.v. Inûrta-belusur 5, p.548

Issar-duri ‘Ištar is my wall’; Governor of Arrapḫa during Sargon’s reign. Caught up in an appeal against his temu, Issar-duri requests the king to see the truth.

See p.43, note 99 to p.61
Letters SAA 15 no. 1, no.15

PNA 2/1 s.v. Issār-dūrī 9, p.569

Issar-šumu-ereš ‘Ištar has desired a name’; rab ṭupšarrī ‘chief scribe’ during Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal’s reigns. Succeeded his father, Nabu-zeru-lešir. Of the many letters and reports he wrote to the king, two appear in thesis: in an astrological report he advises the king not to talk with his interior about a sickness. Then, he opines about the quality of language in a letter to Esarhaddon.

See p.87, p.186
Letters SAA 8 no. 1, SAA 10 no. 39

PNA 2/1 s.v. Issār-šumu-ēreš 3, p.577

Kišir-Aššur ‘Host of Aššur’; Governor of Dur-Šarruken during Sargon’s reign. Sargon accuses him of stealing houses. Kišir-Aššur denies this and asks the king to send a eunuch to witness the truth and report it to the king.

See p.37ff.
Letter SAA 1 no. 124

PNA 2/1 s.v. Kišir-Aššūr 7, p.621

Kudurru ‘Son, heir’; Man of uncertain status who does not want to die like a dog.

See p.244
Letter SAA 16 no. 31

PNA 2/1 s.v. Kudurru 12, p.633

Kuna Hypocoristic based on kʾn, ‘true, firm’; father of Bel-upaq. Seemingly too ill to perform ilku for Ezida, his son performs it in his stead, and wishes wellbeing for his father’s ramanu.

See p.227
Appears SAA 18 no. 64, obv. 2

PNA 2/1 s.v. Kunā 5, p.637

Mannu-ki-Adad ‘Who is like Adad?; high official of uncertain status active during Sargon’s reign. The king accuses him of building up a private army, and wonders whether he ever talked with his interior about what he would do when he was eventually found out.

See p.85, note 172 to p.102
Appears SAA 1 no. 11, obv. 1

PNA 2/II s.v. Mannu-ki-Adad 7, p.681
Mannu-ki-Libbali ‘Who is like the Inner City?'; Official of uncertain status active during Esarhaddon’s reign. The king orders him to tell the truth, to which he asks how he could possibly speak dishonestly?

See pp.37-9
Letter SAA 16 no. 78
PNA 2/II s.v. Mannu-ki-Libbali 2, p.693

Mannu-ki-Ninua ‘Who is like Nineveh?’ Governor of Kar-Šarrukin from 708. Responds to a letter of Sargon’s where the king tells him to describe a shaking, angry Palace to a local ruler.

See note 289 to p.176
Letter SAA 15 no. 100
PNA 2/II s.v. Mannu-ki-Ninua 2, p.695

Mardi ‘My successor’; A dog who is āšipu of crown prince Assurbanipal. Appeals to Esarhaddon to have the governor of Barḥalza return his property.

See p.243
Letter SAA 16 no. 29
PNA 2/II s.v. Mardi 10, p.704

Marduk-apla-iddina ‘Marduk has given an heir’, Biblical ‘Merodach-baladan’; eighth-century King of the Sealand, erstwhile King of Babylon in the years 721-710 and 703, and perennial thorn in the Assyrian side. Though we do not encounter him directly in this thesis, his sons Naʾid-Marduk and Nabu-ušallim contend for supremacy in their father’s land during Esarhaddon’s reign.

PNA 2/II s.v. Marduk-apla-iddina, p.705

Marduk-šakin-šumi ‘Marduk is the establisher of the name’; prestigious scholar of the seventh century who rose to the position of chief āšipu in Assurbanipal’s reign, attested from 673-660. He talks with his interior concerning a lunar observation. In another letter, he emphasises the ūnu of the king was preserved safely on a tablet, written by the āšipu himself.

See p.88, p.177
Letters SAA 10 no. 243, no. 245
PNA 2/II s.v. Marduk-šakin-šumi 2, p.722

Mar-Issar ‘Son of Ištar’; Scholar and ‘special agent’ of Esarhaddon who oversaw the restoration of Babylonia. As part of his business in Babylonia, he reports on riots that occurred there due to some ‘unfair’ orders causing the local šakin-temi to levy excessive taxes. He sympathises with the wretched Babylonians. In another letter, he assuredly does not sympathise with the governor of Dur-Šarrukku, who takes provisions from a temple, parenthetically advising the king to punish one of the governor’s underlings to inspire vērri.

See p.143, p.261, p.283ff., note 185 to p.115, note 302 to p.185
Letters SAA 10 no. 348, no. 369
PNA 2/II s.v. Mar-Issar 18, p.739

Midas Phrygian name of unknown meaning; powerful Anatolian king who was in indirect conflict with Sargon from 718 to 709. Makes peace and sends tribute to Sargon in 709. Mentioned in a draft letter of Sargon’s to Aššur-šarru-uṣur, where the king describes himself as rejoicing because of Midas’ conciliatory approach.

See p.34, pp.112-3, p.120
Appears SAA 1 no. 1, obv. 3, 24; as Muškaya ‘the Phrygian’ obv. 4, 9, 12-13, 37-38, rev.4
PNA 2/II s.v. Mitā 1, p.755

Milki-nuri ‘The king is my light’; Eunuch of the queen during the seventh century. Involved in a conspiracy against Esarhaddon which was crushed, with many of the high officials involved executed. He appears in a letter of Assurbanipal to king Esarhaddon his father, vērri about losing his office.

See pp.138-9
Appears SAA 16 20, rev. 2’
PNA 2/II s.v. Milki-nūri 1, p.752

Mutakkil-Adad ‘The one who inspires trust is Adad’; ‘Nabu is my trust’; Man of uncertain status who co-authors a petition to Esarhaddon with Nabu-tukulti and Nabu-šumu-lešir describing the magnates not
consenting to render justice despite a *tenu* of the king directing them to do so.

See p.258

*Letter SAA 16 no. 41*

PNA 2/II s.v. Mutakkil-Adad 1, p.782

Nabu-abu-da”in ‘Nabu, strengthen the father’; Cook from Nineveh working in a temple during the seventh century. Is beaten to death after confessing the theft of a golden statue of the god Erra.

See p.36ff.

*Appears SAA 13 no. 157, b.e 24, rev. 5*

PNA 2/II s.v. Nabû-abu-da”in, p.792

Nabu-abḫe-eriba ‘Nabu has replaced the brothers’; astrologer working in Nineveh during the reigns of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal. Wrote a letter to Esarhaddon explaining that Adad’s lightning strike was because the local farmers did not *ṣpīṭ* that god. Jointly authors a letter with Balasi to Esarhaddon, concerned about the king’s rāmanu after the royal mouth did not eat and was short of mood.

See p.75, p.87, p.134, p.214

*Letters SAA 8 no. 43, SAA 10 no. 69, no. 70, no.73 with*  
*Balasil SAA 10 no. 43*

PNA 2/II s.v. Nabû-abḫe-eriba 6, p.794

Nabu-ašared ‘Nabu is foremost’; Aesthetically inclined priest at the Aššur Temple during the reign of Esarhaddon, who complained of some bad statue design choices and dissented to have anything to do with them.

See p.133

*Letter SAA 13 no. 34*

PNA 2/II s.v. Nabû-ašarēd 5, p.806

Nabu-beluka”in ‘Nabu, establish the lord’; High official during the reign of Sargon. First attested working in the Diyala region until 710, when he became governor of the city of Kar-Šarrukin until 708.

During his tenure in the Diyala, he writes to Sargon about military movements around Der, which were motivated by a soldier whose *lābbu* spoke to him. In another letter, he writes a seriously affected letter to the king, who accuses him of *la ʾšīm*.

As governor of Kar-Šarrukin, he reports on the client ruler Daltā and his ramanu. He further reports on various *la ʾigmr* intransigencies, where some men fail to break bread with him. More seriously, an Assyrian sponsored installation of a client ruler fails when the locals assert their autonomy and dissent to be ruled by the Assyrian candidate.

See pp.86-7, p.132, p.278, note 146 to p.92

*Letters from the Diyala SAA 15 no. 30, no. 37, no. 43*  
*Letters as governor of Kar-Šarrukin SAA 15 no. 85, SAA 19 no. 192*

PNA 2/II, s.v. Nabû-bel-ka”in 1, p.815

Nabu-bel-šumate ‘Nabu is the lord of names’, official of uncertain status active in Babylonia. Writes to the king using a rare precative future construction ‘if the king rejoices...’. In this imagined future, the king is rejoicing due to cloth weaving.

See p.196

*Letter SAA 17 no. 11*

PNA 2/II, s.v. Nabû-bēl-šumāti 3, p.819
Nabu-bel-šumati ‘Nabu is the lord of names’; qepu
delegate of the city of Birat who surprised
Ṭab-šill-Ešarra when he turned up in Aššur after
receiving a vyplh-inducing letter from Sargon

See p.144
Appears SAA 1 no.84 obv. 6

PNA 2/II, s.v. Nabû-bēl-šumāti 1, p.810

Nabu-duri-ṣur ‘Nabu, protect the wall’; Name shared
by two officials, or possibly the same official, though
PNA keeps the two separate. Nabu-duri-ṣur 1 worked
on the northern frontier of Assyria, and received a
grumpy letter from Arīḫu who had been requesting
temu for two years.

See p.49
Appears SAA 1 no. 220 obv. 1

PNA 2/II s.v. Nabû-dūru-ṣur 1, p.823

Nabu-duri-ṣur 2 (who may have been identical with
Nabu-duri-ṣur one at a later stage in his career) was
the deputy governor of Der, and corresponded with his
direct superior Šamaš-bel-ṣur when the senior
governor was away from his province.

See p.204, p.235ff.
Letters SAA 15 129, 131

PNA 2/II s.v. Nabû-dūru-ṣur 2, p.824

Nabu-ḫamatu’a ‘Nabu is my rescue’; Deputy governor
of Mazamua during the reign of Sargon. Writes a letter
to the king where he talks of speaking dibhi ṣabuti
leading to libbu ṣihn, and describes a tenet of Assyrian
ideology: work and be glad, you are servants of the king.

See p.116, p.125, p.148
Letter SAA 5 no. 210

PNA 2/II, s.v. Nabû-ḫamātū’a 1, p.833

Nabu-qiši ‘Nabu has granted’; astrologer identifying
himself as from Borsippa who worked in an unspecified
location during the reign of Esarhaddon. Gets caught up in some ‘class warfare’ when the local
townspeople kill his farmers and try to enlist him into
corvée work.

See pp.273-4
Letter SAA 8 no. 296

Nabu-nammir ‘Nabu, make bright’; Official of
unknown standing operating in Babylonia during
Tiglath-pileser’s reign. Co-authors a letter with
Šamaš-bunaya about failed negotiations with the
Babylonians. Tiglath-pileser wanted to use his mouth
to speak to the Babylonians directly, but the
Babylonian’s weren’t convinced.

See p.173ff.,
Letter SAA 19 no. 98

PNA 2/II, s.v. Nabû-nammir 2, p.855

Nabu-naṣir ‘Nabu is the protector’; āšipu working in
Nineveh as part of Esarhaddon’s entourage. Wrote
letters to Esarhaddon where he told the truth about a
royal baby, reported on somebody being vgrr about
their flesh, and was a dog whose libbu is vgmr.

See p.38, p.139, p.243
Letters SAA 10 302, 304, 307

PNA 2/II, s.v. Nabû-nāṣir 16, p.856

Nabu-paṣir ‘Nabu is the one who releases’; Probably
the governor of Ḥarran during the reign of Sargon.
Reports on a dispute between Seʾ-šukidi and Giri-Dadi,
the city lord of Til-turi, where Seʾ-šukidi describes his
cousin’s words that are not words.

See p.253
Letter SAA 1 no. 190

PNA 2/II, s.v. Nabû-pāṣir 1, p.858
Nabu-šallim-ahhe 'Nabu, keep safe the brothers'; Temple official of unknown standing active during the seventh century. Investigates the theft of a golden statue, aggressively interrogating Nabu-zer-ketti-lešir.

See p.36
Appears SAA 13 no. 157 obv. 4', 7', 17'-18'
PNA 2/II s.v. Nabû-šallim-ahhe 7, p.869

Nabu-šuma-lišir 'Nabu, may the name prosper'; Official of uncertain status working in Babylonia during Sargon’s reign. Wrote letters with Aqar-Bel-lumur, one of which stated the tēmu of the land was well, before contradicting themselves by saying the people were disobedient.

See pp.151-2
Letter SAA 17 no. 120
PNA 2/II s.v. Nabû-šumu-lišir 3, p.890

Nabu-šumu-iddina 'Nabu has given the name'; rab birti 'fortress chief' in the province of Laḫiru during the reign of Sargon. Reports on the extreme, emphatic joy experienced by the province upon the appointment of an Assyrian official.

See p.149
Letter SAA 15 no. 136
PNA 2/II s.v. Nabû-šumu-iddina 7, p.884

Nabu-šumu-lešir 'Nabu, may the name prosper'; Man of uncertain status who co-authors a petition to Esarhaddon with Nabu-šumu-lešir and Mutakkil-Adad describing the magnates not consenting to render justice despite a tēmu of the king directing them to do so.

See p.258
Letter SAA 16 no. 41
PNA 2/II s.v. Nabû-šumu-lešir 8, p.891

Nabu-tabni-uṣur 'Nabu, you have created—protect'; Scholar active in the seventh century who laments to the king about his broken interior.

See p.97
Letter SAA 10 no. 334
PNA 2/II, s.v. Nabû-tabni-uṣur 2, p.893

Nabu-tukulti 'Nabu is my trust'; Man of uncertain status who co-authors a petition to Esarhaddon with Nabu-šumu-lešir and Mutakkil-Adad describing the magnates not consenting to render justice despite a tēmu of the king directing them to do so.

See p.258
Letter SAA 16 no. 41
PNA 2/II s.v. Nabû-tukulti 2, p.898

Nabu-ušallim 'Nabu has kept in good health'; name shared by three men. The first, active during the reign of Sennacherib, was a Babylonian who wrote letters to the king and sukallu. He asks Sennacherib to tear out some Aramaeans from Babylonia so the land’s libbu lū√ṭʾb. Dietrich suggests that SAA 17 no. 142 is to be attributed to him, joined to no. 141; in no. 142, the author uses ḫdʾ to refer to the sukallu’s autonomous scope of action.

See p.125, p.196
Letter SAA 17 no. 140, no. 142
PNA 2/II s.v. Nabû-ušallim 4, p.993

The second Nabu-ušallim, the son of Marduk-apla-iddina, was a perennial thorn in the side of the Sealanders, who accepted Assyrian suzerainty under Naʾid-Marduk. Though he did not send any letters himself, he is mentioned as threatening to destroy the Sealanders' land and houses if they do not speak for him.

See p.41ff., p.192ff.
Appears SAA 18 no. 87, obv.10', 17', 25', rev. 3
PNA 2/II s.v. Nabû-ušallim 13, p.903

The third is mentioned in a footnote in this paper. The son of Balassu, Esarhaddon installs him as ruler of Bit-Dakkuri. He refuses to listen to the orders of the
king without a sealed document and ša-qurbuti 'Close One' to authenticate them.

See note 441 to p.259
Appears SAA 18 no. 36, obv. 10
PNA 2/II s.v. Nabû-ušallim 11, p.903

Nabu-zeru-lešîr 'Nabu, let the seed prosper'; rab ṭupšarrî 'chief scribe' during the reign of Esarhaddon, brother of Adad-šumu-ûṣur and father of his successor Issar-šumu-erêš. Writes a letter to the rab ekallî 'Palace Chief' which was basically just a list of data.

See note 21 to p.21
Letter SAA 16 no. 50

PNA 2/II, s.v. Nabû-zeru-ûṣur 3, p.912

Nabu-zeru-ûṣur 'Nabu, protect the seed'; scribe of the ša-pân-ékallî 'Palace Supervisor' during the reign of Esarhaddon. Reports on the governor of Nineveh threatening to crush the skulls of some donkey sellers.

See p.271
Letter SAA 16 no. 88

PNA 2/II, s.v. Nabû-zeru-ûṣur 4, p.996

Nabu-zer-ketti-lešîr 4, ša-muhhi-ḫulubbi 'overseer of write frit' writes a letter to Esarhaddon lamenting overturned šemu and canine lamentation.

See p.21, p.265
Letter SAA 16 no. 32
PNA 2/II, s.v. Nabû-zer-ketti-lešîr 4, p.996

Nabu-zer-ketti-lešîr 5, worked in a temple at Nineveh and was accused by Nabu-šallim-ahhe of stealing a golden statue and lying about it, the ultimate consequence of this crime being 'dying in untruth.'

See p.36
Appears SAA 13 no. 157 obv. 16
PNA 2/II, s.v. Nabû-zer-ketti-lešîr 4, p.996

Nadin-Aššur See Iddin-Aššur

Naqi’ā Aramaic 'Pure'; queen (lit. 'Palace Woman') of Sennacherib, mother of Esarhaddon. Rendered into Akkadian as Zakutu. Attested 712-669. During Esarhaddon's reign referred to with the title ummi šarrī 'mother of the king.'

See p.132, p.218, p.251
Appears SAA 13 no. 76, obv. 1, 3, 13, rev. 9; no. 102 (restored)

PNA 2/II, s.v. Naqi’ā, p.929

Nasḥir-Bel Turn [to me] Bel or 'Favourable attention of Bel'; Governor of Amedi during the reign of Sargon. Reports on his interactions with a powerful Urartian.

See p.176
Letter SAA 5 no. 2
PNA 2/II, s.v. Nasḥir-Bel or Nasḥur-Bel 3, p. 932

Na’di-ilu 'Exalted is the god'; Name shared by two high ranking men in the Assyrian hierarchy during the eighth century:

Na’di-ilu 2, ša-qurbuti 'Close One' during the reign of Tiglath-pileser. Writes to the king about the Babylonians experiencing ṣīgrr and ṣīplīṭ.

See p.138
Appears SAA 19 no. 1, obv. 16
PNA 2/II, s.v. Na’di-ilu, Na’id-ilu 2, p.946

Na’di-ilu 5, rab šaque 'Chief Cupbearer' during the reign of Sargon. Co-authors a letter with Ṭab-ṣill-Ešarra quoting a royal letter establishing šemu.

See p.49
Letter with Ṭab-ṣill-Ešarra SAA 1 no. 98
PNA 2/II, s.v. Na’di-ilu, Na’id-ilu 5, p.946

Na’id-Marduk 'Marduk is praised'; Son of Marduk-apla-iddina, Assyrian sponsored ruler of the Sealand potentially from 683-673. Whilst he does not appear directly in this thesis, the Elders of the Sealand
were deeply loyal to him, as were his men. His brother, Nabu-usallim, was sponsored by the Elamites, and together they menaced the Sealand with invasion, threats and tēmu.

His men write a letter to Esarhaddon, suggesting that Sennacherib was thinking or not thinking of Naʿid-Marduk when he declared he wanted for nothing in all of the lands.

See p.41ff., p.77ff., p.128
Appears SAA 18 no.86, obv. 15; no. 87, obv. 13', 20'-23'; no. 88, obv. 3, rev 17'-18'
PNA 2/II, s.v. Naʿdi-Marduk, Naʿid-Marduk 2, p.918

Nergal-eṭir ‘Nergal has saved’; Official of uncertain status who was active on the eastern frontier of Assyria during the reign of Sargon. Receives a letter from his aḫu ‘brother’ Aššur-zeru-ibni about a case against the governor of Halziatbar.

See p.30, p.226
Appears SAA 5 no. 81, obv. 2

Nergal-naṣir ‘Nergal protects’; Asks his brother Kinā for an ostrich egg, but didn’t get one.

See p.225
Appears SAA 17 no. 147 obv. 2
PNA 2/II, s.v. Nergal-nāṣir 5, p.951

Nergal-šarrani ‘Nergal is our king’; priest appointed to the Nabu temple in Kalḫu during the reign of Esarhaddon. He writes to Naqiʾa blessing her and describing how she is ṣplḥ of the goddess Tašmetu.

See p.132
Letter SAA 13 no.76
PNA 2/II, s.v. Nergal-šarrāni 3, p.953

Nurea Hypocoristic from Nūru ‘Light’ or Nūr-Aia ‘Light of Ea’; Babylonian who sends silver to the sukcalla in the reign of Esarhaddon

See p.171
Letter SAA 18 no. 21
PNA 2/II, s.v. Nūrāia or Nūr-Aia 12, p.968

Pulu ‘Cornerstone’; lamentation priest appointed to the Nabu temple in Kalḫu. Accused of acting according to his interior in an unassigned letter.

See p.100
Appears SAA 13 no. 134, obv. 5’

Qurdi-Ăšur-lāmur ‘May I see the heroism of Aššur’; Governor of Šimirra during the reign of Tiglath-pileser, and additionally rab-kari ‘quay master’ (Yamada 2008: 310). He reports on the Phoenician cities: Tyre is good, acting according to their interior; the Sidonites expel the Assyrian tax collector and Itu’eans are sent in to establish ṣgr.

See p.99, p.142
Letter SAA 19 no. 22
PNA 3/I, s.v. Qurdi-Ăšur-lāmur, p.1021

Rašil ‘He has a god’; Name of at least two Babylonian scholars, one who refers to himself as Raši-il the ‘older,’ the other as Rašīl son of Nurzanu. Prosopographers have found it difficult to disambiguate between the two; Rašil the older fully identifies himself in reports, but the letters cannot be disambiguated. In a report, Rašil the older requests the king to guard the guard of the ramānu.

One of the two expresses ṣrḥs and ṣtkl towards Esarhaddon/Assurbanipal, in the face of slanderous smelly words and talking in the Palace.

Reynolds attributes a letter with damaged greeting to one of these Rašils (2003: 112), where he writes of the king’s words penetrating his interior twice, thrice.

See p.74, p.129, p.185
Report SAA 8 no. 387
Letters SAA 13 no. 174, no. 185; SAA 18 no. 142
PNA 3/I, s.v. Raši-ili 2, 3, 2–3, p.1034
Seʾ-lukidi West Semitic ‘Seʾ conquers’; Quarrels with his cousin Giri-Dadi, whom he describes as uttering unword words. The governor of Ḥarran bundles the disputants and ships them to the Palace to be dealt with.

See pp.253
Appears SAA 1 no. 190 obv. 16, rev. 11’
PNA 3/1 s.v. Seʾ-lukidi, p.1102

Sin-iddina ‘Sin has given’; Official of uncertain status stationed in the city of Ur. Is shot down by Sargon when he asks to be permitted to write letters in Aramaic.

See p.187
Letter SAA 17 no. 2
PNA 3/I, s.v. Sīn-iddina 5, p.1134

Šamaš-abu-Usu r ‘Šamaš, protect the father’; Reports on the movements of Marduk-apla-iddina to an Assyrian governor. Transgresses communication conventions by addressing his superior with an imperative, ordering him to return his ţe mu to the palace.

See note 78 to p.50
Letter SAA 15 no. 186
PNA 3/II, s.v. Šamaš-abu-Usu 3, p.1189

Šamaš-belu-Usur ‘Šamaš, protect the lord’; Governor of Arzuḫina in 710 and later appointed governor of Der. During his tenure at Arzuḫina, he writes to Sargon asking him to ţe mu šišn regarding the organisation of the mule express. At Der, reports to Sargon about the Elamites attacking the town of Malak, with ţgrr refugees fleeing to Der. When away from Der, engages in correspondence with his deputy, Nabu-duri-Usur.

Letters SAA 5 no. 227, SAA 15 no. 118
Appears SAA 15 nos. 129-131, 133
PNA 3/II, s.v. Šamaš-belu-Usur 4, p.1193

Šamaš-bunaya Hypocoristic ‘Šamaš—My features’; Official of unknown standing operating in Babylonia during Tigrat-pileser’s reign. Co-authors a letter with Nabu-nammir about failed negotiations with the Babylonians. Tigrat-pileser wanted to use his mouth to speak to the Babylonians directly, but the Babylonian’s weren’t convinced.

See p.173ff.
Letter SAA 19 no. 98
PNA 3/II, s.v. Šamaš-būnāʾi 1, p.1195

Šamaš-šumu-lešir ‘Šamaš, may the name prosper’; Official of unknown status active in the province of the rab-šaqe during the reign of Esarhaddon or Assurbanipal. Writes a florid letter to the king where he laments wandering about like a dog.

See p.244
Letter SAA 13 no. 190
PNA 3/II, s.v. Šamaš-šumu-lešir, p.1214

Šarru-emuranni ‘The king has chosen me’; Governor of Mazama during the reign of Sargon. Asks Sargon to do something (not extant) which will result in ţgrr of deportation being exhibited by some Babylonians.

See p.141, p.203, note 304 to p.185
Letters SAA 5 no. 47, no. 203, no. 204
PNA 3/II, s.v. Šarru-ēmuranni 4, p.1234

City lord of Qunbuna during Sargon’s reign. Denigrates his kinship ties as a source of authority, instead emphasising his relationship to the king.

See p.213
Letter SAA 5 no. 243
PNA 3/II, s.v. Šarru-ēmuranni 7, p.1236

Ša-Aššur-dubbu ‘Speak of Aššur’; Governor of Tušḫan during the reign of Sargon. Accuses the client king of Šubria of not being ţplḥ before Sargon, and instead being a ‘calf of the Urartian’. He is ţplḥ before barṭu-rebellion in his province.

See p.246, p.248ff., p.279ff.
Letters SAA 5 no. 33, no. 35
PNA 3/II, s.v. Ša-Aššūr-dubbu 1, p.1179
Ša-Nabu-šu ‘To Nabu he belongs’; Babylonian mentioned in a report by Bel-ušezib to Esarhaddon. In it, he is described as talking publicly about Ḫinnumu’s promotion to šakin-temi and claiming Esarhaddon talks lies. See p.180ff. Appears SAA 18 no. 125, obv. 4’

Shumaya Hypocoristic of Šumu ‘Name’ or Šumu-Ea ‘Name of Ea’; Babylonian of uncertain official status acting in the Gambulu region during Esarhaddon’s reign. Asks Esarhaddon to send a messenger to ēḫṣ the city and libbu ṟṭʾb škn for himself. See p.121, p.183 Letter SAA 18 no. 113

Šuma-iddin ‘He has given a name’; šatammu temple administrator or high prelate of the Esagil during Esarhaddon’s reign. Informs the king of Chaldean who does not ṣplḥ the king and acts according to his ramanu. An additional letter concerning temple affairs is attributed to him where he reports on amat la amat ‘words that are not words’ being uttered during the investigation of a case by a ša-qurbati. See p.104, p.253 Letters SAA 13 no. 178, no. 179, no. 181

Šumu-iddin ‘He has given a name’; Brother of Data, and receives a letter from her informing him of the death of a certain Lady Gaga. Luukko suggests he was an official active in Kallu during the reign of Tiglath-pilesar. See p.232ff. Appears SAA 19 no. 144 obv. 2

Šuzubu Hypocoristic of Mušezib-Marduk ‘The one who saves is Marduk’; Dietrich suggests the author of SAA 17 no. 164 is to be equated with Mušezib-Marduk (Dietrich 2003: 145). Leader of Bit-Dakkuri and briefly loyal to the Assyrian governor of Laḫiru before rebelling in 700 and becoming king of Babylon in 692 and coming into conflict with Sennacherib. See p.251 Letter SAA 17 no. 164

Taklak-ana-Bel ‘I trust in Bel’; Governor of Naṣibin during Sargon’s reign. Writes a letter to the sukkallu after the ambush and murder of a criminal witness. Taklak-ana-Bel accuses the sukkallu of ṣqlʾ and shifts to second person address. See p.255, p.268, p.278 Letter SAA 1 nos. 235, 240, 244

Teumman Hypocoristic of Tepti-Ḫumban-Insušinak ‘Lord Ḫumban is Insušinak’; brother of several Elamite kings. During Esarhaddon’s reign, menaced the Sealand Elders by attempting to install Nabu-ušallim over them. Becomes king of Elam during Assurbanipal’s reign. See p.41 Appears SAA 18 no. 86, obv. 8

Ṭab-šill-Ešarra ‘Good is the protection of Ešarra’; Governor of Aššur. Writes a letter to the king, complaining about Arabs who are la všm’. Co-authors a letter with Naʾdi-ilu 5 quoting a royal letter establishing ṭēmu, and reports on Nabu-bel-šumati arriving at Aššur. See p.49, p.143, p.269 Letters SAA 1 no.82, no. 84, no.98

Ubaru ‘Client’; šakin-temi of Babylon during Esarhaddon’s reign. Writes a letter to Esarhaddon describing the ṣšmʾ-positivity of ‘all the lands’ under
the king’s aegis. Appears in a letter of Zakir’s, where the astrologer describes Ubaru’s argument with some unlawful tax extractors.

See p.179, note 200 to p.124
Letter SAA 18 no. 14
Appears SAA 10 no. 169 obv. 5
PNA 3/II, s.v. Ubāru, p.1356

Upaq-Šamaš ‘I am attentive to Šamaš’; official on the northern frontier during Sargon’s reign who reports [te]mu he has heard to the king.
See p. 49
Letter SAA 5 no. 162
PNA 3/II, Upāq(a)-ana)-Šamaš, p.1389

Urad-Ea ‘Servant of Ea’; Chief lamentation priest of Sin of Ḫarran and Esarhaddon. Co-authors a letter with Adad-šumu-usur establishing a temu for a ritual performance.
See note 72 to p.47
Letter SAA 13 no. 212
PNA 3/II, Urad-Aia, Urd-Ea 5, p.1396

Urad-Gula ‘Servant of Gula’; ašipu in the reign of Esarhaddon, son of Adad-šumu-usur. Asks the king to temu vškn regarding some rites which do not occasion him talking with his interior. Later falls into disgrace with the king and is the subject of several petitions from his father to the king on his behalf. Writes an affectively heavy letter where he likens a letter from the king to an only son, heaps up the sickness of his interior, and complains he has taught ṯplh of the palace to imperial servants and got nothing for it.

See p.25, p.48, p.97, p.132, p.146
Letters SAA 10 no. 290, no. 294
PNA 3/II, Urd-Gula 6, p.1402

Urad-Nanaya ‘Servant of Nanaya’; Chief physician for Esarhaddon from 671. Writes a letter to Esarhaddon responding to the king’s question about the physician’s concern with his ramānu.

See p.105
Letter SAA 10 no. 320
PNA 3/II s.v. Urd-Nanāia 2, p.1411

Urdu-ahhešu ‘Servant of his brothers’; High official of unknown office operating in Babylonia c.669-667. Reports on the sheep sales of shepherds, who claim the sheep they sacrifice is of their ramānu.
See note 171 to p.102
Letter SAA 13 no. 172
PNA 3/II s.v. Urdu-ahhešu 7, p.1395

Urdu-Nabu ‘Servant of Nabu’; Priest of the Nabu temple at Kallu during Esarhaddon’s reign. Writes to the king because he is sick, quoting advice to revivify his ramānu. Accused by Iddin-Ea, priest in the temple of Ninurta next door, of appropriating fields for his own ramānu.
See p.75, p.131, note 403 to p.240
Letter SAA 13 no. 66
Appears SAA 13 126 rev. 7
PNA 3/II s.v. Urdu-Nabû 5, p.1408

Zakir ‘Name-giver’; Babylonian astrologer who wrote reports and letters to Esarhaddon. Embroiled in a dispute with the agitator Šillaya, whom he accuses of taking his property away and threatening him with death. Writes a letter to Esarhaddon describing unlawful taxation of Babylon, featuring multiply nested speech frames and citational devices.

See p.179, note 159 to p.97
Letter SAA 10 no. 169
PNA 3/II s.v. Zākiru 4, p.1431

Zeru-ibni ‘He has created the seed’; governor of Raṣappa during Sargon’s reign. Suggests Sargon pull out the tongue of a man who lied to the king.

See p.238
Letter SAA 1 no. 205
PNA 3/II s.v. Zēru-ibni 3, p.1443

Zineni Elamite official who sends a messenger to the Sealand Elders seeking the installation of Nabu-usallim.

See p.41
Appears SAA 18 no. 86 obv.9
PNA 3/II s.v. Zinēni, p.144