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Jacob Jan de Ridder

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Preface and Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Terminology

§ 1 Akkadian is the oldest attested Semitic language and the first to split from the Semitic family tree; together with Eblaite, it formed the Eastern Semitic (ES) branch. As ES split from the other Semitic languages, Akkadian contains a number of innovations and archaisms unknown in the other Semitic languages. Akkadian itself is attested from 2600 BCE until the first century CE, a long period, which, in terms of length, is third only after the other Middle Eastern languages, Egyptian/Coptic (about 3000 BCE and from about 1700 CE onwards as a literary language) and Aramaic (about 1000 BCE to the present time). Like Aramaic, the large geographical area in which Akkadian was spoken or written caused the development of a number of vernaculars that may be called independent languages, instead of dialects. The contrast between North and South Akkadian is well known in the Assyrian and Babylonian languages. Moreover, different vernaculars of Akkadian existed in peripheral cities, written by scribes with a different linguistic background. Despite these linguistic differences, official languages were developed in Standard Babylonian (SB) and the hymnic-epic dialect to be used for official and monumental inscriptions, and religious and literary texts. The situation resembles the Arabic world, where the written language is dominated by the official Modern Standard Arabic, but where dialectal forms often appear. This is the situation in the Late Bronze Age (1550–1200 BCE), where Akkadian reached its highest geographical extent, and Akkadian cuneiform was written from Kabnak (Elam) in the east to Amarna (Egypt) and Ḫattuša (ancient Anatolia, modern Turkey) in the west. The situation of North-West Mesopotamia is of particular interest, where Akkadian was the main scribal language in the kingdoms of the Hittites, Mittani and Aššur. Akkadian archives were mainly found in the cities of Emar, Nuzi, Alalaḫ, Ugarit, Ḫattuša, Amarna and Aššur.[1] In this study, we will refer to this group as "Western Peripheral Akkadian" (WPA), as the different vernaculars that can be found in each city have a lot in common in terms of scribal traditions (see § 61).[2] The Akkadian of Aššur differs in one important respect from the rest of WPA, that is, it was written by scribes with an Akkadian linguistic background, as opposed to other WPA dialects where the native language was Hurrian, Hittite or a variant of North-West Semitic (NWS). In this

1 For smaller find spots, see the overview in Pedersén (1998). Note that our main sources for the cuneiform of Mittani are the diplomatic letters were found in Amarna (Egypt).

2 Some confusion seems to exist about the exact extent of the term WPA (Izre'el 1992, 172). For this reason, it is best to give our own definition of the term here, which will be retained during the rest of the study. WPA includes all non-Babylonian native dialects written west of Babylonia. This excludes the Canaanite-Amarna dialects found, for instance, in the Byblos correspondence. This is due to the large extent of local North-West Semitic influences in these letters, as opposed to AmAkk and UgAkk, which makes these letters less suitable for comparison. MA is sometimes included here, since it has a scribal tradition borrowed from Babylonia, in common with all other WPA dialects.

situation, we find the Middle Assyrian (MA) corpus. While the royal inscriptions and literary compositions, such as the Tukultī-Ninurta epic, were written in SB, while texts with a more practical use, such as laws, letters and contracts, were written in the language of the people, albeit often with a number of Babylonianisms. Nowadays, there is some dissension as to when the Old Assyrian (OA) period ended and when the MA period started (cf. Veenhof/Eidem 2008, 23–24 § 1.2; Miglus 2011, 221). In our study, there can be no misconception: the MA period started, as determined by the oldest dated tablet (KAJ 177), with the reign of Aššur-nērārī II.[3] Disregarding royal inscriptions, MA texts are attested from the reign of Aššur-nērārī II (1424–1418/1414–1408) until the reign of Aššur-bēl-kala (1073–1056).[4] The obscure period between the end of level 1b archives in Kültepe and this first MA legal text has to be regarded as an intermediate period. Anything else belongs to the field of social and political historical studies, and is of little interest to our grammatical research.

§ 2 The map presented below attempts to approach the linguistic landscape in the late second millennium prior to the Assyrian conquest in a very global fashion. It should not be taken as gospel, especially as it does not take the overlap of different languages into account and omits the possibility of bilingual communities. Even nowadays, language distribution is very erratic, especially in the more elevated areas that contain small pockets of linguistic enclaves, which continue to thrive due to their remoteness. As for the late second millennium period, we can state that we know relatively little about the ethnic and linguistic composition of Northern Mesopotamia in this period. Most of our material comes from the aforementioned cities, such as Alalaḫ, Emar and Nuzi, where scribes did not write in their native languages. As such, we must mostly rely on PNs to approach the distribution of different ethnic groups. It seems that Hurrian and related groups were mostly centred around the northern part of the Tigris River and the Ḫabur Triangle, where the main cities of the Mittani Empire were centred. NWS groups, such as the Suteans, were found along the Mediterranean coast and the Euphrates River (cf. Kärger/Minx 2012, 367). As a nomadic

3 It appears that the marriage contract TIM 4 45 is actually the oldest MA text, but its eponym Urad-Šerūʾa cannot be dated, while the origin of the text itself is of unknown origin. It has some features not known from later MA, such as the values <áb> used in OA and <lib> (LUL). The particle *-mi* (§ 418ff) is also atypical for MA. Note also the absence of VA in l. 10 *aš-*[*š*]*a-ti-mi*. Another indication of an early date of the texts is the use of ZU and ZA for assimilated pronominal suffixes (§ 225) in l. 5 *mu-sà* and l. 6 *aš-ša-sú*. In terms of palaeography, Saporetti (1968) notes the uncommon PNs, with the palaeography being closer to Nuzi than MA. Again, in EMA (108f), Saporetti suggests an early dating to before EAd–Aub. Freydank gives a broader estimate and dates the eponym Urad-Šerūʾa to the reign of Aššrnīr II–Aub (BMCG, 177), based on its occurrence in KAM 10 20. However, there is no reason to assume that there could only be one eponym of the name Urad-Šerūʾa in Assyrian history, for instance, there were two eponyms during the reign of TN by the name Abattu. It seems, therefore, quite possible to date the said text to the period before Aššrnīr II, based on the Nuzi-like palaeography, unknown PNs and the odd sign values. Donbaz (2001) attempted to connect this Urad-Šerūʾa to two post OA tablets with the said eponym; however, these texts are clearly very close to the OA period, and therefore Donbaz' claim cannot be accepted. See also Veenhof (1982, 363 n4). KAM 10 25 is another possible early Middle Assyrian tablet.

4 Aššur-nērārī is mentioned in KAJ 177:10. The Giricano texts have been dated to the reign of Aššur-bēl-kala; see Giricano, 52 § III.2. At least three texts from the M 7 archive date to the reign of the king; see ALCA 1, 70–71; MARV 10, 1.

group, their geographical distribution overlapped to a great extent with Hurrians. Akkadian distribution continued from the south up until Aššur, but probably not north of it. The population of such places as Tell Ar-Rimāḥ (cf. Sasson 1979) and Nineveh (cf. Veenhof 1999) was most probably ethnic Hurrian. If there was a dialect continuum with Babylonian, direct contact was only possible through the area of the Euphrates River as the Zab area was home to the Hurrian kingdom of Arrapḫa.[5] We cannot be certain to what extent the Assyrian destruction of Ḫanigalbat changed the linguistic landscape. It is probably safe to say that Assyrian spread to cities such as Nineveh and Arbail. But, despite the colonization of Ḫanigalbat, the presence of Assyrian in Ḫanigalbat was less permanent and, if anything, seems to have opened up the possibility of the rise of Aramaean tribes. The settlement of these nomadic people probably ended the linguistic expansion of Assyrian over this area.

Figure 2: Map of the linguistic landscape.[6]

§ 3 The Assyrian language is usually regarded as a dialectal form of Akkadian.[7] The terminology of dialect has, until the present day, has been viewed negatively. It is usually seen as a corrupted form of the standard language, while many unjustly claim that their own

5 This does not mean that Akkadian-speaking communities were not present in this area. In fact, the influence of Assyrian Akkadian in the Nuzi corpus is well known (e.g., Wilhelm 1970, 35–38) and Assyrian people are certainly attested in Nuzi as having participated in Nuzi society (e.g., Maidman 2010, 15).

6 This map is a view of the linguistic landscape surrounding the Assyrian enclave, prior to the fall of Mittani. A possible Akkadian dialect continuum boundary is indicated by the black line. The map does not account for language overlapping.

7 For a discussion of the terminology of 'dialect', see Finegan (2008, 14–18).

speech is free of dialect (see Finegan 2008, 15). Such claims are unjustified, as dialects usually develop independently from the standard language, although they do share a common origin. Moreover, to a degree, every person speaks in dialect, which is regionally motivated; differences between social classes exist as well. One well-known example is the difference between Jewish and Christian Aramaic (NENA), spoken in the same region (Khan 2011, 709). At the same time, mutual intelligibility is known to have existed between different languages or is absent within one language because people do not want to communicate with people of another group (cf. Chamber/Trudgill 2004, 3–4). For Akkadian, the latter situation remains difficult to detect, but regional differences are quite apparent. Certainly, we will see that the Assyrian dialect of this study is sometimes more archaic than Standard Akkadian. This does not mean that there cannot be a corrupted form of a language. A famous example is the Canaanite-Akkadian language in some of the Amarna letters (Rainey 1996), but this did not reflect a spoken language, meaning that the terminology of "dialect" can be somewhat misleading. It should also be noted that there are no firm rules to establish the difference between a language and a dialect. This is mostly political or even religiously dictated, e.g., one can hardly claim that vernacular Moroccan and Egyptian are dialects of the same language (Arabic), as they are certainly not intelligible to each other. Moroccan Arabic is especially distant from Modern Standard Arabic and, in its daily use, is full of code-switching between Moroccan Arabic and non-Semitic languages, such as French, Berber and even Spanish in some areas.[8] Based on political and religious motives, the different Arabic dialects are usually not officially recognized or only partly. This brings us to another possible criterion of dialect: it is usually not written. If we applied this definition, Assyrian would not be regarded as dialect because it is often written. Moreover, the Assyrian texts are rather uniform and hardly betray any variety between speakers, be it regionally or socially motivated. This is actually a problem in most Akkadian dialects. An attempt by Goetze (1945) to prove different regional dialects based on sign values was accepted by some (e.g., Oppenheim 1964, 55), while Kraus (1973a, 32–34) rightfully pointed out that these dialectal differences are no more than orthographic variation. In addition, despite the structural differences between Assyrian and Babylonian it has been pointed out that both dialects had a remarkably parallel development, e.g., in MA/Middle Babylonian (MB), we have the loss of mimation, sound change /št/ > /lt/, the increased use of the perfectum over the preterite, and the loss of the t-stems. It could be argued that these changes were caused by the mutual intelligibility between the two dialects, where grammatical changes could easily spread over the different vernaculars (Parpola 1988c, 294). Moreover, the lexicon between the vernaculars did not show remarkably large differences (Kogan 2006; Streck 2007, 67ff). This has led to the conclusion that both dialects were mutually intelligible by some (Kouwenberg 2010, 12). Although Geller (2002, 563) compared the difference with Dutch and German, when referring to Neo-Assyrian (NA), he pointed out that both languages are only mutually intelligible when written. As a Dutch native, I must confess that I (and most other Dutch people) had to learn German in order to understand it. I therefore doubt whether this comparison is valid for Akkadian and question the extent of mutual intelligibility between Dutch and German. Blau

8 Code-switching is not an alien phenomenon to Akkadian. The royal archive of Qatna contains a number of instances where an Akkadian sentence is suddenly followed by a Hurrian verb; see Richter/Lange (2012).

(2012, 19ff) applied the wave model (Wellentheorie) to the Canaanite languages. According to this model, different languages, which separated at different moments in time from a proto-language, could later become more similar to each other because of long periods of intensive contact and geographic proximity. Thus, applying this model to Akkadian languages, Assyrian and Babylonian may originally have been quite different, but grew much closer to each other in the course of the second millennium BCE because of the intensive cultural contact. This has some merit when we compare OA and Old Babylonian (OB) with the smaller differences in MB and MA.

1.2 Historical setting

§ 4 After the OA period had come to a political climax with the reign of Šamšī-Adad I, the city of Aššur lost its political importance and fell into obscurity for centuries, together with most of Mesopotamia. The end of the OA period could have been formally marked with the deposition of Šamšī-Adad's dynasty, as well as the short intercession of usurper Puzur-Suen, a king who was erased from the Assyrian King List.[9] Around this period, the last OA texts were found.[10] During the following "Dark Age" (1759–1350) (see Cifola 1995, 17ff; Yamada 2017), the Hurrian people rose to prominence and several Hurrian states, such as Arrapḫa (modern Kirkuk) appeared, which were dependent on the Mittani Empire. A historical reference in the treaty, between the Mittani king Šattiwaza and Suppiluliuma of the Hittites, mentions that Šauštatar, one of Šattiwaza's predecessors, had carried away the two doors from Aššur to his own palace in Waššukanni.[11] This essentially meant the end of the political independence of Aššur, but the continuity of the Assyrian King List suggests that the royal dynasty continued as vassals of their Mittani overlords. A short interim period lacking any Assyrian royal inscription is believed by some to be related to the Hurrian dominion.[12] However, during the reign of Šuttarna II, the doors were returned, which signalled the renewed independence of Aššur and possibly even supremacy over Mittani.

§ 5 The details of Assyria's independence are unclear, but, under Aššur-nērārī II, the oldest known MA text (KAJ 177) was written. Less than a century later, Aššur-uballiṭ I wrote to the Egyptian court (letter EA 15 and EA 16) referring to himself as great king (LUGAL GAL in EA 16:1). The early MA texts from Aššur refer to the monarch as king for the first time (e.g., KAJ 162:10) since Šamšī-Adad I, instead of the traditional ÉNSI (*iššiʾakku*) "steward". However, the title "great king" equalled that of the contemporary kings of Hatti, Babylonia and Egypt. This caused the Babylonian king, Burnaburiaš II, to complain to the pharaoh as he regarded the Assyrians to be his vassals (EA 9). Nonetheless, Aššur-uballiṭ was also militarily successful as he boasts in his inscriptions to have conquered Muṣru and other Hurrian territory (RIMA 1 A.0.76.1). The city of Tell Ar-Rimāḥ is believed to have

9 See Grayson (1985); RIMA 1 A.0.40; Reade (2001, 5–8). The Puzur-Suen inscription featured a typical OA palaeography, orthography and language, which were used before the time of Šamšī-Adad I.

10 See Gelb/Sollberger (1957); Donbaz (2001). Many of the OA tablets from Aššur appear to be slightly younger than the material of Kültepe; for a more complete list, see Michel (2003, 121ff § 2.1).

11 See Weidner (1923, 38–57 no. 2); Beckman (1999, 42–54 no. 6A–B).

12 See Yamada (1994, 30f); Lion (2011, 155).