



Prayer and Curse in the Assyrians with Political Aspects

Politik Yönleriyle Asurlularda Dua ve Lânet

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PRAYER AND CURSE IN THE ASSYRIANS WITH POLITICAL ASPECTS

ABSTRACT

Human beings are prone to appeal to the gods and seek refuge in them when they feel helpless. Issues that cannot be resolved by human effort are often entrusted to divine intervention, turning to the gods who are regarded as the most powerful beings. Every society actively employs the practices of prayer and curses within the framework of their own beliefs. Semitic societies, in particular, stand out compared to other societies for their frequent recourse to these practices in almost every aspect of life. Beyond their daily lives, oaths and curses also hold significant importance in their political affairs. The Assyrian State, one of the most prominent states established by Semitic societies in history, is perhaps the most notable in this regard. Assyrian kings combined the practices of prayer and curses in all their activities, from construction projects to military campaigns, and from correspondence to treaty texts. In this study, based on information obtained from Assyrian cuneiform texts, we will explore the situations, methods, and purposes for which prayer and curses were employed by the political authorities.

Keywords: Semitics, Assyrians, Religion, Prayer, Curse.



POLİTİK YÖNLERİYLE ASURLULARDA DUA VE LÂNET

ÖZ

İnsan, kendisini çaresiz hissettiği durumlarda tanrılara yakarışlarda bulunmaya ve onlara sığınmaya eğilimli bir canlıdır. Zira insani gayretle çözüme kavuşturulamayan hususlar en kudretli varlık olarak kabul edilen tanrılara başvurarak ilahî yöntemle çözülmek istenir. Her toplum kendi inançları çerçevesinde dua ve lânet olgularını aktif olarak kullanmaktadır. Sami toplumlar ise neredeyse hayata dair her hususta bu olgulara başvurmaları açısından diğer toplumlara kıyasla ön plana çıkmaktadırlar. Söz konusu toplumun gündelik yaşamının yanı sıra siyasal hayatında da yemin ve lânet olguları önemli bir yer tutmaktadır. Sami toplumların tarihte kurmuş oldukları en önemli devletlerden biri olan Asur Devleti belki de bu açıdan en belirgin olanıdır. Asur kralları yürütmüş oldukları inşa faaliyetlerinden askeri seferlere, mektuplaşmalarından anlaşma metinlerine kadar her faaliyette dua ve lânet olgularını bir arada kullanmışlardır. Bu çalışmada, Asurlulara ait çivi yazılı metinlerden elde edilen bilgilerden hareketle dua ve lânet ol-

gularının siyasal erk tarafından hangi durumlarda, nasıl ve ne amaçla kullanılmış oldukları sorularının cevapları aranacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimer: Sami Toplumlar, Asurlular, Din, Dua, Lânet.



INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, people have embraced various beliefs and religious views. It is evident that the act of praying has held great importance in religious practices since ancient times. The primary purpose of prayer is typically to seek help from God, who is believed to have ultimate power, in situations beyond human control, and to overcome these challenges with divine support.^[1] It is observed that when human beings convey their requests to God through prayer, they experience psychological relief. In fact, by attributing the positive or negative outcome of the prayer to God's will, a person may maintain better mental health in either case.^[2] In this sense, prayer can be interpreted as having a certain importance for stress relief and psychological healing.^[3]

When we consider the importance of prayer for ancient people, it becomes evident that they placed great significance on the act of prayer due to the lack of technology and the more challenging living conditions compared to today.^[4] The presence of prayer among the Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Hittites, and Ancient Greeks further highlights its importance for these ancient civilizations.^[5]

When we examine the role of cursing in human history, it is evident that this concept has been a significant part of people's lives since ancient times. In fact,

[1] Hamdi Kızıler, "Dinlerde Dua, Sunu ve Sunaklar (Fiziki Âlemden Sanal Âleme)", *İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi* 4/4 (December 2015), 1049.

[2] Ayşegül Turgut, *İlk Yetişkinlerde Dua Tutumları-Psikolojik İyi Olma İlişkisi* (Isparta: Süleyman Demirel University, Institute of Social Sciences, MA Thesis, 2017), 2.

[3] Mahmut Dündar, "Farklı Yaş Gruplarında Dua ve Din Eğitimi", *Şırnak Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 9/20 (August 2018), 456.

[4] Sercan Coşgun, *Asurlularda Yemin, Dua ve Lanet* (Samsun: Ondokuz Mayıs University, Institute of Graduate Studies, MA Thesis, 2024), 6.

[5] Abdullah Altuncu, "Sümerlerde Tanrı Anlayışı ve Tanrılar Panteonu", *Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 4/7 (June 2014), 126; Mehmet Yılmaz, "Üniversite Gençliğinde Dua ve Umutsuzluk İlişkisi (Bayburt Üniversitesi Örneği) (Rize: Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University, Institute of Social Sciences, MA Thesis, 2019), 24; İlknur Yılmaz, *Yahudilik'te Dua* (Sivas: Sivas Cumhuriyet University, Institute of Social Sciences, MA Thesis, 2013), 7; Özlem Uysal, *Hittit Duaları* (Denizli: Pamukkale University, Institute of Social Sciences, MA Thesis, 2022), 31; Abdullah Alakuş, "Eski Yunan'da Din ve Şifa İlişkisi Üzerine Bir Araştırma", *Erciyes Akademi* 35 (Special Issue) (September 2021), 567-570; Okay Pekşen – Yasin Topaloğlu, "A Theocratic Approach to Governance in Ancient Times: Assyrians", *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 24/1 (March 2024), 18.

certain stereotyped curse expressions have been passed down from generation to generation, from the past to the present.^[6] When we consider what a person aims to achieve by cursing, it becomes clear that this action is typically performed in response to a situation where the person feels wronged or is in a difficult position. In such cases, the person expresses harmful wishes toward those who have wronged them, hoping that these wishes will be fulfilled by a divine power.^[7] From this perspective, it is evident that people resort to various expressions of curses, driven by the anger that arises when they feel wronged and believe that this injustice will not be rectified by any other means. Through cursing, they hope that justice will be served by God's severe punishment of those who have committed the wrong or evil against them.^[8]

Additionally, there are instances where people issue curses as part of a will, threatening those who fail to fulfill the terms of the will. The purpose of this is to intimidate future individuals and deter them from opposing the wishes of the person who made the will.^[9]

1. PRAYER IN THE OLD ASSYRIAN STATE

When analyzing the practice of prayer in Assyria, it is evident that praying was a common practice throughout Assyrian history. For instance, examining the prayer texts from the Old Assyrian period reveals that they were recorded by two kings of that time. These kings are Irişum I^[10], who ruled from 1974 to 1935 BC, and Şamşı-Adad I, who began his reign in Ekallatum before ascending the Assyrian throne in 1808 BC and ruling until 1776 BC, though the details of his early years are less clear.^[11] In examining the prayer text recorded during the reign of Irişum I, one of these rulers, we find that he begins by stating that he had built a house. The text then describes how Irişum I completed the act of praying and invoking the name of the god, and placed tablets made of silver, gold, bronze, and lead in the house he constructed. This suggests that, after finishing the construction, Irişum I

[6] Erdem Alkın, "Kargışların (Beddualar/Kötü Dilekler) "Dikotomi", "Anti-Yapı", "Hedef-Yapı" ve "Araçsal Sebep" Kavramları Açısından Değerlendirilmesi", *Anemon Muş Alparslan Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 9/6 (December 2021), 1572.

[7] Yeliz Saygılı Savaş - Muhammet Yasin Çakır, "Dua (Alkış) ve Beddualardaki (Kargış) Yönelim Metaforları Üzerine Bir İnceleme", *Motif Akademi Halkbilimi Dergisi* 14/35 (September 2021), 853.

[8] Coşgun, *Asurlularda Yemin, Dua ve Lanet*, 7.

[9] Coşgun, *Asurlularda Yemin, Dua ve Lanet*, 7.

[10] Hasan Ali Şahin, "Eski Asur Toplumunda Baştanrı Aşşur Kültü", *Mezopotamya'nın Eski Çağlarında İnanç Olgusu ve Yönetim Anlayışı*, ed. Lütfi Gürkan Gökçek et al. (İstanbul: Değişim Press, 2019), 350; Hasan Ali Şahin, "Eski Asur Devleti ve I. Şamşı-Adad", *Eski Mezopotamya'nın Siyasi Tarihi*, ed. Lütfi Gürkan Gökçek et al. (İstanbul: Değişim Press, 2020), 115.

[11] Marc Van de Mieroop, *Eski Yakındoğu Tarihi (MÖ 3000-323)*, trans. Sinem Gül, (İstanbul: Homer Press, 2018), 96; Şahin, "Eski Asur Devleti ve I. Şamşı-Adad", 120.

likely conducted a ceremony, which can be interpreted as a prayer ceremony, and subsequently placed his inscriptions in the house. This indicates that the ruler may have had an inauguration prayer akin to the inauguration ceremonies performed today.^[12]

In examining the prayer texts from the reign of Šamšī-Adad I, we find that the ruler first acknowledges that the god Itūr-Mēr granted him control over the land of Mari and the settlements along the Euphrates River. Šamšī-Adad I attributes this favor to the fact that the god heard and answered his prayers. This suggests that Šamšī-Adad I had previously prayed to this god regarding this matter. By claiming that his prayers were favorably answered, the ruler aimed to portray himself as favored by the god and as possessing divine legitimacy. Furthermore, the text reveals that Šamšī-Adad I built a throne and presented it to the god Itūr-Mēr as a reward for granting his prayers. This indicates that the ruler offered this gift as a gesture of gratitude for the divine favor he received. Additionally, another record shows that Šamšī-Adad I described the goddess Ištar-šarratum as a deity who responds positively to prayers.^[13]

1.1. Prayer in the Assyrian Trade Colonies Period

In examining the prayer texts from the Assyrian Trade Colonies Period, we encounter two different texts related to this subject, both sharing a common feature: they are essentially blessings. The first text is found in the archive of Šalim-Aššur's family. In this document, a person named Idnaya writes to Ali-ahum, the son of Šalim-Aššur, and to Adida'ya, who is known to have a close relationship with him. The letter reveals that Idnaya is to receive silver from these two individuals and requests an additional 5 shekels of silver from one of them, though it is not specified which. The letter further indicates that Idnaya will pray to the goddess Ištar if he receives the additional silver. Although the specific content of the prayer is not detailed, it can be inferred that Idnaya intends to offer prayers in gratitude to the person who provides the additional silver, seeking to honor them or request further favors.^[14]

The second prayer text from this period is found in the archive of Elamma's son Iddin-Suen and his family. This text shows that a person named Kasubeli sent a letter to Aršiahšu and Peruwa. In the letter, Kasubeli mentions that he has sent silver and copper with a person named Bēlum-bāni. He then requests that Aršiahšu and Peruwa use the silver and copper to purchase cleaned wool on his behalf. Ka-

[12] ARAB I, no: 33.

[13] RIMA I, A.0.39.5, 4-17; A.0.39.6, 1-5.

[14] Mogens Trolle Larsen, *Kültepe Tabletleri VI-c* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Press, 2014), 18-19, 21, 35.

subeli concludes the letter by stating that he will pray for them in the presence of the god Aššur. Similar to the previous text, this indicates that Kasubeli intends to offer prayers of gratitude to the god in return for the favor he requests. Thus, Kasubeli informs his correspondents that he will provide a spiritual favor in exchange for their assistance. There is, however, no detailed information about the identity of Aršiahšu and Peruwa beyond their mention in the text.^[15]

2. PRAYER IN THE MIDDLE ASSYRIAN STATE

In examining the practice of prayer during the Middle Assyrian period, we find a stereotyped style that continued into the Neo-Assyrian period. Analysis reveals that when Assyrian kings constructed new temples or palaces, or restored existing ones, they would place their monumental inscriptions within these structures. The kings also requested that future rulers restore these buildings if they became dilapidated and ensure that the monumental inscriptions were preserved and reinstated. In return, the records state that the gods would hear the prayers of these future kings. The primary purpose behind this practice was to safeguard the monumental inscriptions and ensure that the kings' names would be remembered in the future.

Puzur-Aššur III is the first ruler of the Middle Assyrian State known to use this style. While the exact duration of his reign is not precisely documented, it is known that he ruled during the first half of the 15th century BC.^[16] A record from his reign reveals that he renovated the wall of the Step Gate^[17], which had become worn out, and placed a clay cone there as his inscription. In the text, Puzur-Aššur III requests that a future ruler repair the worn-out wall and restore the clay cone to its original condition. He also states that the gods Aššur and Adad will listen to the prayers of the ruler who undertakes these actions.^[18]

Similar to the prayer text from the reign of Puzur-Aššur III, several other prayer texts from the Middle Assyrian period follow the same style. These include texts from the reigns of Enlil-nāšir I (1477-1499 BC)^[19], Aššur-bēl-nišešu (1407-

[15] Klaas R. Veenhof, *Kültepe Tabletleri VIII* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Press, 2017), 365.

[16] Yusuf Kılıç - Cemal Yılmaz, "Amarna Çağı ve Asur'un Yükselişi (Orta Asur Dönemi: MÖ 1500-1000)", *Eski Mezopotamya'nın Siyasi Tarihi*, ed. Lütfi Gürkan Gökçek et al. (İstanbul: Değişim Press, 2020), 153-154.

[17] It is understood from different texts that the mentioned Step Gate is a temple gate. See RIMA 1, A.0.76.7, 35-44.

[18] RIMA 1, A.0.61.1, 5-10, 11-15.

[19] RIMA 1, A.0.62.1001, 1'-6', 7'-11'; Kılıç - Yılmaz, "Amarna Çağı ve Asur'un Yükselişi (Orta Asur Dönemi: MÖ 1500-1000)", 155; Christian Eder, "Asur Zaman Aralığı ve Önasya'nın Kesin Kronolojisi", trans. Atıla Türker, *Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi* 24/1 (June 2009), 213.

1399 BC)^[20], Aššur-rēm-nišēšu (1398-1391 BC)^[21], Erība-Adad I, who lived during the Amarna Period^[22], Aššur-uballit I (1365-1330 BC)^[23], Enlil-nārārī (1329-1320 BC)^[24], Arik-dīn-ili (1319-1308 BC)^[25], Adad-nārārī I (1307-1275 BC)^[26], Shalmaneser I (1272-1244 BC)^[27], Tukultī-Ninurta I (1244-1208 BC)^[28], Aššur-nādin-apli (1207-1204 BC)^[29], Aššur-rēša-iši I (1132-1115 BC)^[30], Tiglath-pileser I (1114-1076 BC)^[31], and Aššur-bēl-kāla (1073-1056 BC)^[32]. These texts were written in the same style as those from Puzur-Aššur III's reign, aiming to protect the monumental inscriptions placed after construction. This suggests that the Assyrian kings used the concept of prayer within their belief system to achieve their personal goals and safeguard their monumental inscriptions.

In addition to the previously mentioned texts, we also find personal prayers from Shalmaneser I and Tiglath-pileser I during the Middle Assyrian State. These prayers exhibit a structure similar to contemporary prayer practices. For example, Shalmaneser I's prayer requests that the god Aššur accept his prayers and hear his supplications following the repair of his worn-out temple.^[33] Similarly, the prayer text from Tiglath-pileser I details his reconstruction of the decrepit temple of the god Adad, which he then dedicated as the abode of the gods Anu and Adad. In his

[20] RIMA 1, A.0.69.1, 4-10, 11-15; Kılıç - Yılmaz, "Amarna Çağı ve Asur'un Yükselişi (Orta Asur Dönemi: MÖ 1500-1000)", 153.

[21] RIMA 1, A.0.70.1, 5-11, 12-17; Kılıç - Yılmaz, "Amarna Çağı ve Asur'un Yükselişi (Orta Asur Dönemi: MÖ 1500-1000)", 153.

[22] RIMA 1, A.0.72.1, rev. 1', rev. 2'-11'; Kılıç - Yılmaz, "Amarna Çağı ve Asur'un Yükselişi (Orta Asur Dönemi: MÖ 1500-1000)", 153.

[23] RIMA 1, A.0.73.1, 13-23, 24-29; A.0.73.2, 13-22, 23-27; A.0.73.4, rev.1-8, rev. 9-14; Lütfi Gürkan Gökçek, *Asurlular* (Ankara: Bilgin Kültür Sanat Press, 2020), 81.

[24] RIMA 1, A.0.74.1, 2-6, 7-11; Gökçek, *Asurlular*, 84.

[25] RIMA 1, A.0.75.1, 14-48, 49-65; Lütfi Gürkan Gökçek, *Asurlular*, s. 84.

[26] RIMA 1, A.0.76.4, 37-41, 42-45; A.0.76.7, 35-44, 45-50; A.0.76.8, 24-31, 32-36; A.0.76.14, 4-17, 18-25; A.0.76.15, 5-32, 33-37; A.0.76.16, 33-41, 42-45; A.0.76.19, 4b'-16', 17'-20'; A.0.76.22, 55-60, 61-65; A.0.76.17, 4-12, 13-18; Gökçek, *Asurlular*, 84.

[27] RIMA 1, A.0.77.1, 129-148, 149-155, 156-157, 158-162, A.0.77.3, 5-38, 39-41; A.0.77.4, 27-38, 43-49; A.0.77.6, 5-20, 21; A.0.77.9, 5-17, 18-23; A.0.77.10, 5-15, 16-21; A.0.77.17, 6-9, 10-11.

[28] RIMA 1, A.0.78.1, iv 40-61, iv 62-v 4; A.0.78.2, 39-45, 46-53; A.0.78.6, 27-35, 36-38; A.0.78.19, 3-7,8; A.0.78.1003, 1'-2', 3'-5'; A.0.78.11, 15-57, 58-73; A.0.78.14, 9-27, 28-37; A.0.78.17, 5-29, 30-35; A.0.78.18, 29-35, 36-39; A.0.78.22, 39-51, 52-54, 55-58; A.0.78.23, 109-118, 119-124; Kemalettin Köroğlu, *Eski Mezopotamya Tarihi (Başlangıcından Perslere Kadar)* (İstanbul: İletişim Press, 2021), 135-137.

[29] RIMA 1, A.0.79.1, 28-32, 33-36; Gökçek, *Asurlular*, 105.

[30] RIMA 1, A.0.86.1, 8-10, 11-12; Kılıç - Yılmaz, "Amarna Çağı ve Asur'un Yükselişi (Orta Asur Dönemi: MÖ 1500-1000)", 154.

[31] RIMA 2, A.0.87.3, 36-44, 45-49; A.0.87.4, 77-89, 90-93a, 93b; A.0.87.10, 71-88, 89-93; Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum, *Asurlular (Tarih, Toplum, Kültür)*, trans. Firuzan Gürbüz Gerhold (İstanbul: Alfa Press, 2020), 79.

[32] RIMA 2, A.0.89.3, 1'-9', 10'-11', 12'-13'a; Kılıç - Yılmaz, "Amarna Çağı ve Asur'un Yükselişi (Orta Asur Dönemi: MÖ 1500-1000)", 154.

[33] RIMA 1, A.0.77.1, 129-148, 149-155.

prayer, Tiglath-pileser I asks the gods Anu and Adad to have mercy on him, to favor his prayers, to listen to his requests, and to grant him abundant rain, prosperity, and guidance in war. He also requests that the gods subjugate rebellious mountainous regions, hostile rulers, and adversarial nations, and bless him and his descendants. Additionally, Tiglath-pileser I seeks the gods' support in consolidating his priesthood in the presence of the god Aššur.^[34]

In addition to the previously mentioned information, the Middle Assyrian Period features prayer texts that include the practice of raising hands, a ritual observed during the reign of Shalmaneser I and later seen frequently in the Neo-Assyrian Period. Assyrian rulers often declared that they raised their hands during prayer. For instance, in the prayer text from Shalmaneser I's reign, the ruler begins by noting that the country of Uruatri had rebelled against them. He then states that he raised his hands in prayer to the god Aššur and the great gods, following which he claims to have conquered Uruatri within three days. In another text, Shalmaneser I recounts organizing an expedition to the regions along the Euphrates River, where he faced the GUTI/KUTI people in battle. In response to this situation, he mentions raising his hands in prayer to the god Aššur and the great gods.^[35] Shalmaneser I uses the phrase "They faithfully promised me their good faith"^[36] in his prayer, indicating that he perceived his enemies as unreliable and untrustworthy, and he appeals to the gods about their broken promises. This expression suggests that Shalmaneser I aimed to demonstrate his righteousness in the conflict to the gods, seeking their support. At the end of the war, Shalmaneser I reports that he defeated his opponents.^[37] When evaluating this information, it can be observed that Shalmaneser I's prayers bear similarities in form to the prayers found in contemporary Islam, Christianity, and Judaism.

3. PRAYER IN THE NEO-ASSYRIAN STATE

In analyzing the prayer texts of the Neo-Assyrian period, it is evident that Assyrian kings continued the practice of placing their monumental inscriptions in newly constructed or restored buildings, similar to the Middle Assyrian period. Following these construction and restoration activities, the kings would request future rulers to restore these inscriptions if the buildings were damaged or destroyed. In return, it was believed that the gods would listen to the prayers of those who undertook these restorations. The first examples of such records from the Neo-Assyrian period are found during the reign of Aššur-dān II^[38], who ruled from

^[34] RIMA 2, A.0.87.1, viii 1-10, viii 17-38.

^[35] ARAB I, no: 114; no: 116-117.

^[36] ARAB I, no: 117.

^[37] ARAB I. no: 117.

^[38] Hanım Hande Duymuş, *Asur Devletinin Dış Politikası (Yeni Asur Devri)* (Ankara: Gazi University, Institute of Social Sciences, PhD Thesis, 2011), 29.

934 to 912 BC and is recognized as the first ruler of this period. In examining the texts from Aššur-dān II's reign, we first find that this ruler rebuilt the New Palace of Assyria, which had fallen into disrepair, and placed monumental inscriptions there. He then requests that a future king, among his sons, renovate the palace and restore its inscriptions to their original position. According to the text, if this request is fulfilled, the god Aššur will listen to the prayers of the king who undertakes this task. In another text, Aššur-dān II describes the renovation of the Craftsman's Gate, which had also become obsolete. He similarly requests that a future ruler restore the gate and its inscription. In return, Aššur-dān II states that the gods Aššur, Adad, Sîn/Suen, Šamaš, and Ištar will listen to the prayers of the ruler who performs these actions.^[39]

Following Aššur-dān II, prayer texts in the Neo-Assyrian period are found from the reigns of Adad-narārī II (911-891 BC)^[40], Tukulti-Ninurta II (891-884 BC)^[41], Asurnasirpal II (883-859 BC)^[42], Shalmaneser III (859-824 BC)^[43], Shalmaneser IV (782-773 BC)^[44], Tiglath-pileser III (744-727 BC)^[45], Sargon II (722-705 BC)^[46], Sennacherib (705-681 BC)^[47], Esarhaddon (680-669 BC)^[48], Ashurbanipal

^[39] RIMA 2, A.0.98.1, 73-81a, 81b-83; A.0.98.3, 5-14a, 14b-19.

^[40] RIMA 2, A.0.99.1, rev. 10'-16'a, rev. 16'b-18'; A.0.99.2, 128-131a, 131b-132a; Amelie Kuhrt, *Eski Çağ'da Yakundoğu II (M.Ö. 3000-330)*, trans. Dilek Şendil (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Press, 2010), 2/132; Sercaan Coşgun - Okay Pekşen, "Yeni Asur Devleti'nin Askeri Seferlerinde Ganimet Alınan Hayvanlar ve Bölgeleri", *Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli Üniversitesi SBE Dergisi* 12/4 (December 2022), 2585.

^[41] RIMA 2, A.0.100.2, rev. 1'-11'; A.0.100.3, rev. 7'-13'a, rev. 13'b-15'a; Faruk Akyüz - Koray Toptaş, "Yeni Asur İmparatorluğu: Savaşın Kralları", *Eski Mezopotamya'nın Siyasi Tarihi*, ed. Lütfi Gürkan Gökçek et al. (İstanbul: Değişim Press, 2020), 200; Eckart Frahm, "The Neo-Assyrian Period (ca 1000-609 BCE)", *A Companion to Assyria*, ed. Eckart Frahm (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell Publishing, 2017), 168.

^[42] RIMA 2, A.0.101.17, v 1-24a, v 24b-v 30; A.0.101.36, 1'-4'a; A.0.101.38, 18b-28a, 28b-38; A.0.101.56, 14b-17a, 17b-18a; A.0.101.70, 7-9, 10-12a; İsmail Coşkun, *Geç Hitit, Yeni Asur ve Urartu Uygarlıklarında Ziyafet/Yemek Sahneleri* (Van: Van Yüzüncü Yıl University, Institute of Social Sciences, PhD Thesis, 2018), 18.

^[43] RIMA 3, A.0.102.10, 40b-3a, 3b-1a; A.0.102.39, 6b-10, 11-14; A.0.102.43, 4-8, 9-12; A.0.102.46, 5-11a, 11b-16a; Fatma Bircelikli, *Yeni Asur Devleti Siyasi Tarihi ve Kültürü* (Ankara: Gazi University, Institute of Social Sciences, MA Thesis, 2010), 25.

^[44] RIMA 3, A.0.105.2, 9-14, 15-16, 17-20, 23b-28; Gökçek, *Asurlular*, 154.

^[45] RINAP 1, no: 35, iii 24-iii 30, iii 31-iii 35, iii 6'; no: 37, 35-42, 45b-46, 51b; Don Nardo, *Ancient Mesopotamia (Greenhaven Encyclopedia)* (Newyork: Greenhaven Press, 2007), 290.

^[46] RINAP 2, no: 2, 472b-476, 506b-509; no: 45, 19-44, 44b-48; Ekrem Memiş - Nuri Köstüklü, *Tarih Boyunca Ortadoğu-Anadolu İlişkileri* (Konya: Selçuk University Printing House, 1992), 31.

^[47] RINAP 3, no: 1, 91-92, 93-94; no: 4, 91-92, 93-94; no: 230, 115-119, 120b-121, 122-125; no: 10, 20-22, 23-26; Mehmet Kurt, "Que Ülkesi ve Yeni Asur Devleti'nin Anadolu Politikası Bakımından Önemi", *Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 10/3 (December 2008), 127.

^[48] RINAP 4, no: 134, 11-15, 16-19, 20-21; no: 135, 11-15, 16-19, 20-21; no: 57, v 29-v 43, vi 1-vi 14, vi 15-27, vii 35-3, viii 4-15; no: 77, 45-55, 56-57, 58-60; no: 78, 37-39, 40-41, 42; no: 93, 22-30, 31, 32-33, 34, 35-39; no: 106, vi 1-21, vi 22-39; no: 113, 20-23, 24b-27, 28b-34, 35-37; no: 128, 15-16, 17, 18-19; no: 129, 29-32, 33-34, 35-37; Koray Toptaş, *Asarhaddon Asur Kralı, Babil Yöneticisi, Mısır Fatihisi* (Ankara: Berikan Press, 2021), 4.

(668-627 BC)^[49], and Sîn-šarru-iškun (623-612 BC)^[50]. These texts reflect a continued tradition of dictating prayers to protect the inscriptions associated with construction and renovation, following the style established earlier.

In addition to the prayer texts dedicated to protecting monumental inscriptions placed after construction and renovation, some rulers used this style for different purposes. These rulers include Adad-narārī III (810-783 BC)^[51], Ashurbanipal, and Aššur-etel-ilāni (627-623 BC)^[52]. For example, during Adad-narārī III's reign, there is a record of a decree issued for expenditures related to ceremonies held at the Aššur temple. At the end of this decree, he instructs his future descendants not to discard the contents of this decree. It is further stated that the prayers of those who adhere to this advice will be heard by the god Aššur.^[53]

The texts from Ashurbanipal's reign reveal that he exempted his servant Baltaya, his eunuchs, and the eunuch chief Nabû-šarru-uşur from land taxes. At the end of these three different texts, Ashurbanipal instructs future monarchs not to discard the contents recorded on these tablets. Following this advice, it is stated that the gods Aššur, Adad, Bēl, Enlil of Assyria, and Ištar of Assyria will hear the prayers of these rulers.^[54] Similarly, during Aššur-etel-ilāni's reign, two texts record exemptions from taxation granted to a person named Ṭab-šar-papahi and a cohort commander. At the end of these texts, Aššur-etel-ilāni advises future kings not to alter the inscriptions on these tablets. It is further stated that adhering to this advice will ensure that the great gods listen to their prayers.^[55]

In addition to this information, many records from the Neo-Assyrian period reveal the personal prayers of the kings to the gods in various situations. For example, Tiglath-pileser III mentions that he built the city of Hadattu and installed basalt bulls at its gates.^[56] The reason for placing these bulls is explained as follows: "I set them up in a place to be seen in the city Ḫadattu for (the preservation of) my

[49] RINAP 5/1, no: 246, 65b-66, 76b-81; no: 254, 33-36, 49-62; no: 262, 16-17, 22b-25; no: 263, 22b-23, 28-29; Koray Toptaş, *Filolojik ve Arkeolojik Belgeler Işığında Asurbanipal ve İraatları* (Ankara: Ankara University, Institute of Social Sciences, MA Thesis, 2020), 8; Koray Toptaş, *Yeni Asur İmparatorluğu'nda İdeoloji, Propaganda ve İsanlar* (Ankara: Gazi University, Institute of Social Sciences, PhD Thesis, 2018), 206.

[50] RINAP 5/1, no: 19, 30-37, 42-44; Akyüz - Toptaş, "Yeni Asur İmparatorluğu: Savaşın Kralları", 232.

[51] Cemre Aslan, *Yeni Asur Dönemi'nde Asur Devleti'nin Batı Yayılımı* (Samsun: Ondokuz Mayıs University, Institute of Social Sciences, MA Thesis, 2019), 37; Gamze Sezen, *M.Ö. I.Bin'de Anadolu'da Geç Asur ve Geç Babil Mühürleri* (Ankara: Ankara University, Institute of Social Sciences, MA Thesis, 2015), 11.

[52] Akyüz - Toptaş, "Yeni Asur İmparatorluğu: Savaşın Kralları", 232.

[53] SAA 12, no: 069, r 28-r 30.

[54] SAA 12, no: 025, 11-20, 21-29, 30-r 8, r 32-r 38; no: 026, r 32-r 38, no: 029, r 35-r 38.

[55] SAA 12, no: 035, r 28-r 32; no: 036, r 31-r 35.

[56] RINAP 1, no: 53, 18b-20.

life, the acceptance of my prayers, the prolongation of my reign, [the well-being of] my seed, the securing of the throne of my priestly office, (and in order) not to become ill, (and) for success at harvest time in [As]syria (and) [the well-being of] Assyria.”^[57]

During the reign of Sargon II, several records reveal his personal prayers and rituals. One such text records him praying in Babylon: “Happily, I entered Babylo[n, the c]ity of the En[lil of the gods (Marduk); I prayed] to the gods [who dwelt in Esagil (and) Ezida, (and)] offered [pure vol]u[ntary offerings bef]ore them. ...”^[58] In another text, Sargon II recounts that, to defeat Marduk-apla-iddina II (His name in the Bible is Merodach-Baladan), he offered numerous gifts to the gods Bēl Marduk, Zarpanītu, Nabū, Tašmētu, and those residing in the cult centers of Sumer and Akkad, and prayed to them.^[59] A different record describes Sargon II praying while kneeling: “... whi[te honey, pr]oducts of the pure mountains, that I had conquered, which the pro[genit]or of the gods, the god Aššur, had added to [my royal] l[ot], (along) with [pur]e [voluntary sacrific]es, splendid [incense offerings], (and) in[nu]merable libations. Reverently, I knelt (and) [prayed before him] that he preser[ve (my)] lif[e, give (me) a] l[ong] life, [and fir]mly est[ablish] my [reign].”^[60] Another text records Sargon II offering sacrifices to the gods Nergal, Adad, and Ištar, as well as to the deities of the sky, underworld, and Assyria, after a victorious campaign. He humbly prayed before these gods and praised their divinity.^[61] In yet another record, Sargon II notes that he rebuilt the temple of Eanna for the goddess Ištar.^[62] The text includes the following statements made during the groundbreaking: “With entreaties, prayers, and expressions of humility he (Sargon) laid its foundations (anew) and he made its foundation as secure as a mountain on the breast of the netherworld.”^[63] This direct account suggests that a prayer ceremony was likely held during the re-founding of the temple.

During the reign of Sennacherib, several prayer texts reveal his appeals to the gods and his self-praise. In one record, Sennacherib mentions praying to the gods Aššur, Sîn, Šamaš, Bēl, Nabû, Nergal, Ištar of Nineveh, and Ištar of Arbela for support before his campaign in the city of Ḫalulê on the Tigris. He states that these gods responded to his prayers and came to his aid.^[64] Another text includes a detailed prayer from Sennacherib:

^[57] RINAP 1, no: 53, 26b-28.

^[58] RINAP 2, no: 1, 374b-377.

^[59] RINAP 2, no: 2, 364b-371.

^[60] RINAP 2, no: 2, 485-489.

^[61] RINAP 2, no: 65, 156-161.

^[62] RINAP 2, no: 125, i 30-37.

^[63] RINAP 2, no: 125, i 37-i 40.

^[64] RINAP 3, no: 18, v 1'-5, v 6'-10.

“[O Aššur, fat]her of heaven, king of the gods, the one who decrees f[at] es, [on]ly you hold the Tabl[et of] Destinies of the gods in your h[and]s. Look after the reign of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, and determine as my fate a [go]od destiny, a destiny of good health, (and) kingship. Lift up my head among al[l] who sit on (royal) daises, so that the foundation of my [th]rone will be as secure as a mountain until the di[stant] future. For me, the one who provides for you, make [all of the land]s from ea[st to] we[st] sub[mit] to my yoke (so that) [the peo]ple, the black-headed, pray to [you (and so that) my sons], my [gran]dsons, [my] dynasty, (and) [my progeny] end[ure for]ever with the black-headed (people).”^[65]

In another text^[66], Sennacherib praises himself, referring to himself as the “...prayerful shepherd (ruler)...”^[67]

During the reign of Esarhaddon, several records reveal his personal prayers and appeals to the gods. One record describes how Esarhaddon recounts the jealousy of his brothers, who spoke disparagingly of him to their father to hinder his ascension to the throne. In this difficult situation, Esarhaddon prayed fervently to the gods Aššur and Marduk. He claims that his prayers were answered, and the gods protected him from his brothers’ schemes. Another text shows Esarhaddon praying to Aššur, Šin, Šamaš, Bēl, Nabû, Nergal, Ištar of Nineveh, and Ištar of Arbela to secure victory over his brothers in his struggle for the throne. Esarhaddon acknowledges that these gods accepted his prayers and aided him. In a separate text, Esarhaddon speaks of his efforts to rebuild and repair the *cella* of the goddess Ištar in the temple of Eanna. He addresses Ištar, asking her to bless him with good words and wishes while he enjoys happiness in her *cella*. He petitions Ištar for a long life, prosperity in old age, health, and happiness. Furthermore, Esarhaddon beseeches Ištar to aid him in times of war, asserting that with her support, he could defeat his enemies effortlessly.^[68] In addition to this information, a long text of Esarhaddon’s prayer is as follows:

“May the Enlil of the gods, the god Marduk, and the goddess Zarpanītu, the queen, look with joy upon the work of my good deeds and order the prolongation of my days, (and) discuss my years to be many; may they decree as my fate the protection of my offspring, the increase of my progeny, the expansion of my family so that they branch out widely; like a father and mother, may they come over to my side in battle and warfare; may they come to my aid; (and) may they make my weapons rise up (and) kill my enemies. Let me attain whatever my heart desires (and) may they allow me to stand in victory (and) triumph over my enemies;

^[65] RINAP 3, no: 158, 19'-r 11.

^[66] ARAB II. no: 256.

^[67] ARAB II. no: 256.

^[68] RINAP 4, no: 1, i 23-i 31, i 32-i 44, i 53-i 62; no: 134, 11-15, 16-19.

let me squash all of my enemies like ants; let him (the god Marduk) make the foundation of the throne of my priestly office be as secure as a great mountain; (and) let my reign endure as long as the foundations of Esagil and Babylon. May all of the great gods who sit on daises in Babylon bless my kingship until far-off days (and) may they order security for my reign forever.”^[69]

When we look at the records of Ashurbanipal’s reign, the following text appears first: “... one who reveres the deities Aššur, Mullissu, [Sîn, Šamaš, Adad, Marduk, Zarpanītu, Nabû, Tašmē[*tu*, Ištar of Nineveh], Ištar of Bīt-Kidmuri, [Ištar of Arb]ela, Ninurta, Nergal, (and) Nusku; who constantly followed them from [his] childhood until he became an adult] and who continu[ally] re[vered] their [divinity. [I] cons[tantly knelt do]wn at their feet in supplication and prayer. ...”^[70] In another record from the reign of Ashurbanipal, the goddess Antu is referred to as “...(the goddess) [A]ntu, the merciful one, the one who accepts supplications (and) he[ar]s prayers, the one who [p]rotects life (and) gran[ts good health], the one who goes at the side of [the king]...”^[71] Another record shows Ashurbanipal praying before his expedition against the Mannaeans; “Now, O great Aššur, by [your] comman[d ...], the honored one of the gods, the grea[t] lady, [...] regarding the conquering of this enemy [...] I have appealed to your great divinity, O king of the go[ds ...]. Listen to my supplications, accept [my] prayers, [...]”^[72] In a record from the reign of Ashurbanipal, it is noted that the king renovated the platforms and pulpits at the temple of Esagil. In his prayer related to this renovation, Ashurbanipal prays not only for himself but also for his brother Šamaš-šuma-ukīn.^[73] The text in question includes the following statements: “On account of this, may the god Marduk, the great lord, look upon my good deeds with pleasure and determine as my fate a long life, fullness of old age, good health, and happiness! Moreover, with regard to Šamaš-šuma-ukīn, king of Babylon, my favorite brother, may his days be long and may he be fully satisfied with (his) good fortune!”^[74] In another text with a blank space at the top, Ashurbanipal is prayer to “[... m]e, Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria, the servant (who is) the favorite of your heart, [...] ... (and) the just shepherdship that you bestow at your command, [...] the preservation of (my) life ... [...] a [b]right spirit ... Grant ... as a gift, ... come to my aid and always stand in for me, kill m[y] enemy, (and) make the foundation of my royal throne as secure as a mountain for eternity.”^[75] In another text, Ashurbanipal is reported to have said to god Nabû: “Assurbanipal is on his knees, praying in-

[69] RINAP 4, no: 106, iv 48-v 26, v 27-v 52.

[70] RINAP 5/1, no: 13, i 15-i 25.

[71] RINAP 5/1, no: 23, 11-12.

[72] RINAP 5/1, no: 195, r 15-r 20.

[73] RINAP 5/1, no: 242, 7b-17, 18-19.

[74] RINAP 5/1, no: 242, 20b-25.

[75] RINAP 5/1, no: 264, 2'-r 4.

cessantly to Nabû, his lord: Please, Nabû, do not abandon me! My life is written before you, my soul is deposited in the lap of Mullissu. Please, powerful Nabû, do not abandon me among those who wish me ill!”^[76]

During the reign of Sîn-šarru-iškun, it is recorded that this ruler renovated the decrepit temple of Nabû in the city of Kalḫu.^[77] In the rest of the text, it is seen that this ruler uses the following prayer expressions:

“O Nabû, power[ful] heir, I[ook] with [pl]easeure [upon ... a]nd may it be acceptable to y[ou ...]. Prolong m[y] days, in[creas]e my [year]s, (and) ma[ke] my progeny [firm for eternity]. Bless [my] kingship (and) make fi[rm for me happiness, good health], (and) a bright spirit forever. [Kill] my enemies (and) make [the neck of those insubm]issive to me bow down at my feet.”^[78]

In addition to this information, during the Neo-Assyrian period, records of prayers made with raised hands are prevalent. The first such record appears during the reign of Sargon II. In the context of his battle against Bag-dāti, the ruler of the country of Uišdiš, Sargon II is documented using the following expressions in his prayer:

“[I]n my] si[xth regnal year, Ursâ (Rusâ), the Urarṭian, sent his mounted messenger with a mendacious message to Bag-dāti of the land Uišdiš (and) KAR...] of the land Zikirtu, governors of the land Mannea. He ma[de them hostile to (me), Sar]gon, (and) to A[zâ, the son] of their (former) lord, [and made them side with him (Rusâ)]. Th[ey brought about the rou]lt of the Manneans [on Mount Uauš, a rugged mountain], and [threw down] the corpse of Azâ, [their lord, (there)]. I raised my hand(s) (in prayer) to the god Aššur, my lord, in order to avenge the Manneans (and) to make (that area part of) the territory of Assyria. Then, on Mount] Uau[š, the mountain where they had] t[hrown down the c]orpse of Azâ, [I flayed the skin from Bag-dāti and (then) showed (it) to the Manneans].”^[79]

^[76] SAA 3, no: 013, 19-21, 22.

^[77] RINAP 5/1, no: 19, 30-37.

^[78] RINAP 5/1, no: 19, 38-41.

^[79] RINAP 2, no: 2, 70b-74.

In a campaign against the Urartian king Rusa II, Sargon II is seen praying as follows:

“... I raised my hand (in prayer to the god Aššur) to bring about his (Rusâ’s) overthrow in battle, to turn his insolent utterances against him, and to make (him) bear his punishment.”^[80] In another text of Sargon II we come across the following prayer of the king: “[...] I raised my hands (in supplication)] to the god Sîn, king of the gods (and) lord of the lands, [...] who vanquishes] (my) enemies (and) destroys (my) foes, my lord, [and] I prayed (to him) [in order to be able to conquer] the land Hamath, overthrow [Iaû-bi’ dî, (and) ... the] wide [land] Amurru. [...]”^[81]

During the reign of Sennacherib, we come across a significant prayer text where he reflects on the death of his father, Sargon II. Sennacherib believes that his father’s death in enemy territory and the inability to bury his body in their homeland might be due to a sin committed by Sargon II. In response, Sennacherib engages in rituals to uncover and eliminate this perceived sin. In his prayer, Sennacherib raises his hands in supplication, expressing deep humility and earnestness. Notably, he not only raises his hands but also opens them as part of his ritual. This act signifies a profound plea for divine intervention and forgiveness, showcasing a personal and ceremonial aspect of his prayer practice.^[82]

When examining the period of Esarhaddon, we see that this ruler also prays by raising his hands, as recorded in a text where he praises himself. In the text, Esarhaddon states that he prays to the deities Aššur and Marduk with humble expressions, raising his hands in reverence.^[83] During the period of Ashurbanipal, it is noted that this ruler raised his hands and prayed to the god Aššur and the goddess Ištar of Assyria before his campaign against Egypt and the Kingdom of Kush.^[84] In addition to this information, it is observed that in some contexts, prayers made with raised hands are also conducted in ceremonial forms. One such instance involves a text featuring Bel-le’i, an exorcist, who makes observations about the stars. In this text, Bel-le’i suggests that the god Adad should perform a rain-making ritual to bring rain when it is scarce in Akkad. He also recommends that all “raising hands” prayers be performed in conjunction with this ritual.^[85] In another text, we encounter a letter sent to the king by Marduk-šakin-šumi, the chief exorcist. In this letter, Marduk-šakin-šumi informs the king that he can send a letter to Kalah to have the people there perform a “hand-raising” prayer in the presence of the moon god, followed by rituals to protect the crown prince and the Babylonian

^[80] RINAP 2, no: 65, 123-125.

^[81] RINAP 2, no: 81, 16b-20.

^[82] SAA 3, no: 033, 7-9, 10-12, 21-24.

^[83] RINAP 4, no: 48, 61b-65.

^[84] ARAB II, no: 770.

^[85] SAA 8, no: 461, 7-10, r 5, r 6.

prince from misfortune. In a different record, an unidentified ruler seeks the help of an exorcist named Nabû-nadin-šumi to find a cure for his illness. The exorcist advises the king to stay in a reed hut for seven days and to organize purification rituals there. Among these rituals, the exorcist recommends performing “hand-raising” prayers in the presence of the night gods and conducting rituals to ward off evil. Additionally, an exorcist named Nabû-naşir sends a letter to the king, explaining that they have cast spells against diseases. The text notes that these spells were performed multiple times to drive away plagues, malaria, and epidemics from a person’s home. The exorcist also mentions that “hand-raising” prayers were practiced as part of the rituals to combat evil magic, malaria, and plague.^[86]

In addition to this information, it is observed that many letters sent to the kings during the Neo-Assyrian period contain prayers for the king and sometimes for members of the dynasty. These prayers, which will be discussed below, were written in a political style, reflecting courtesy towards the king. The first example is a letter written to the king by a person named Aha-lurši^[87], who appears to have been an administrator. In this letter, Aha-lurši states that he prays daily to the gods Nabû and Marduk for the king’s life and subsequently asks these gods to bless the king^[88]. In addition to Aha-lurši’s letter, various other individuals prayed for the king and his family. An astrologer named Aplaya prayed for the king and his mother, while an unknown person named Nashiru prayed for a crown prince. Exorcists named Urad-Gula and Nabû-naşir, as well as a person named Urad-Ea^[89], also prayed for the king. Similarly, Raşil and Şuma-iddin from Babylon prayed for the king, with Şuma-iddin also praying for Esarhaddon^[90]. In connection with the Sasi conspiracy^[91], Nabû-rehtu-uşur prayed for Esarhaddon^[92], Belşunu from Babylon prayed for the king, Ina-teşi-eṭir from Babylon prayed for the king^[93], Nabû-zera-ukin from Babylon prayed for the king^[94], and Bel-iqişa from Babylon prayed for the king and his vizier. Nabû-şuma-işkun from Babylon prayed for Sargon II^[95], Aşaredu from Kutha prayed for the king and his mother, and Nabû-nadin-šumi, the exorcist mentioned earlier, prayed for the king and his daughter. Nabû-nadin-šumi from Nippur also prayed for Sargon II, while Dummuqâ from Nippur and Ahheša-

[86] SAA 10, no: 240, r 9-r 13; no: 277, 1-5, 6-8, 9-10, r 1-r 8; no: 296, 1-4, 10-r 2.

[87] This person is thought to have lived during the time of Sargon II. see, Hanım Hande Duymuş Florioti, “Yeni Asur Metinlerinde Geçen Ay İsimleri”, *Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi* 27/2 (December 2012), 361.

[88] SAA 1, no: 131, 1, 2-5; no:132, 1, 2-4.

[89] SAA 10, no: 154, 5-r 2; no: 180, 1-7; no: 294, 1-5, 6-12; no: 307, 1-2, 8-12; no: 343, 1-8, r 6-r 9.

[90] SAA 13, no: 174, r 1-r 11; no: 178, r 21-r.e. 28.

[91] For detailed information on this subject see, İsmail Coşkun, “Yeni Asur Kralı Esarhaddon’un Kaygı Bozuklukları”, *Van İnsani Ve Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi-ViSBiD* 4 (December 2022), 66-67.

[92] SAA 16, no: 060, 1-4.

[93] SAA 17, no: 020, 1-6, r 5-r 16; no: 033, 4-8.

[94] SAA 18, no: 163, 1-8.

[95] SAA 17, no: 021, 1-4, 5-15; no: 046, 1-6, 7-12.

ya from Uruk prayed for the king^[96]. The identities of the kings who are not named in these texts remain unknown.

4. CURSE IN THE OLD ASSYRIAN STATE

It is observed that a general style related to curses is present throughout the Old, Middle, and Neo-Assyrian periods. This style involves the kings recording curse texts immediately after the prayer texts in their monumental inscriptions. These curses were placed to protect the inscriptions from being destroyed. The purpose of these curse texts appears to be to instill fear in future rulers, thereby discouraging them from defacing or removing the monumental inscriptions. This approach was intended to ensure the preservation of these inscriptions over time.^[97]

The earliest recorded example of curse texts from the Old Assyrian State dates back to the reign of Irišum I. In examining the text from this period, it is evident that Irišum I begins by stating that he built a temple in honor of the god Adad. The text goes on to mention that the king placed a written tablet within this temple. Irišum I then calls upon the gods Aššur, Adad, and Bēl to destroy his lineage should anyone remove the tablet in the future.^[98]

Examining the records from the reign of Šamšī-Adad I, we first find that this king built a temple in honor of the god Enlil in the city of Assyria.^[99] Following this, Šamšī-Adad I included the following curse expressions in his inscriptions:

“When the temple becomes dilapidated: may whoever among the kings, my sons, renovates the temple anoint my clay inscriptions and my monumental inscriptions with oil, make a sacrifice, and return them to their places. Who(ever) does not anoint my clay inscriptions and my monumental inscriptions with oil, does not make a sacrifice, does not return them to their places, (but) instead alters my monumental inscriptions, removes my name and writes his (own) name (or) buries (the monumental inscriptions) in the earth (or) throws (them) into the water: may the gods Šamaš, Enlil, Adad, and Šarru-mātim pluck the offspring of that king; may he and his army not prevail in the face of a king who opposes him; may the god Nergal take away by force his treasure and the treasure of his land; may the goddess Ištar, mistress of battle, break his weapon and the weapons of his army; may the god Šin, ‘god of my head’, be an evil demon to him forever.”^[100]

[96] SAA 18, no: 010, 1-6, 7-r 1, r 2-r 7; no: 055, 1-8; no: 075, 1-8; no: 079, 1-7.

[97] Coşgun, *Asurlularda Yemin, Dua ve Lanet*, 75.

[98] RIMA 1, A.0.33.14, 14-26, 27-31.

[99] RIMA 1, A.0.39.1, 59-72; Ercüment Yıldırım, *Eskiçağ Mezopotamya'sında Liderler Krallar Kahramanlar* (İstanbul: Arkeoloji ve Sanat Press, 2017), 57.

[100] RIMA 1, A.0.39.1, 88-98, 99-135.

In another record, Šamši-Adad I notes that Maništūšu, the son of the Akkadian king Sargon, had the temple of the goddess Ištar rebuilt in Nineveh. Maništūšu also restored the inscriptions of the goddess and placed them alongside the inscriptions he had commissioned for himself. The temple was named Ekituškuga, meaning “Her Treasure House.”^[101] The text continues with the following statements:

“In the future when the temple becomes old, when Ekituškuga which I built has become dilapidated, and the king whom the god Enlil appoints restores (it): May he not remove my monumental inscriptions and clay inscriptions but restore them to their places as I did not remove the monumental inscriptions and clay inscriptions of Man-ištūšu. If, (however), that king discontinues (that custom) and discards my monumental inscriptions and clay inscriptions, (if) he does not restore them to their places but deposits his monumental inscriptions and clay inscriptions (in their place): That king shall have done what is offensive to gods and kings. May the god Šamaš, the great judge of heaven and underworld, hand him over to a king who is his enemy as one who gives up a murderer. May the goddess Istar, mistress of Nineveh, take away his sovereignty and term of rule and [give] (them) to another.”^[102]

5. CURSE IN THE MIDDLE ASSYRIAN STATE

The first recorded curse text from the Middle Assyrian period is found during the reign of Arik-ḏin-ili. Analysis of this record reveals that the ruler first rebuilt the temple of the god Šamaš and placed monumental inscriptions within it. He then requests that the god Šamaš overthrow the reign of any future king who removes these inscriptions and bring famine to their land.^[103]

Similar curse texts were recorded during the reigns of Adad-nārārī I, Shalmaneser I, Tukulti-Ninurta I, Aššur-nādin-apli, Aššur-rēša-iši I^[104], Tiglath-pileser I, Aššur-bēl-kala^[105], and Aššur-rēša-iši II^[106]. These texts, like the one from the Arik-ḏin-ili period, were included after construction and renovation activities to protect the monumental inscriptions.

[101] RIMA 1, A.0.39.2, i 7-25, ii 1-20, ii 21-iii 10.

[102] RIMA 1, A.0.39.2, iii 11-iv 1, iv 2-25.

[103] RIMA 1, A.0.75.1, 14-48, 49-65, 66-77.

[104] RIMA 1, A.0.76.2, 36-47, 48-62; A.0.76.4, 37-41, 46-53; A.0.76.9, 5-14, 23-33; A.0.76.17, 4-12, 19-29; A.0.77.1, 129-148, 163-167; A.0.77.4, 27-38, 39-42, 50-55; A.0.77.6, 5-20, 22-31; A.0.77.9, 5-17, 24-26; A.0.77.10, 5-15, 22-27; A.0.78.5, 70-83, 94-126; A.0.78.6, 27-35, 39-42; A.0.78.19, 3-7, 9-10; A.0.78.18, 29-35, 40-43; A.0.78.13, 24-50, 56-65; A.0.78.22, 52-54, 59-67; A.0.78.23, 109-118, 125-146; A.0.79.1, 28-32, 37-40; A.0.86.1, 8-10, 13; A.0.86.4, 4-6, 9-10.

[105] RIMA 2, A.0.87.1, viii 1-10, viii 63-73, viii 74-88; A.0.89.3, 10'-11', 13'b-14'; ARAB I, no: 340.

[106] Gökçek, *Asurlular*, 120; RIMA 2, A.0.96.2001, 15-23, 24-28.

6. CURSE IN THE NEO-ASSYRIAN STATE

When analyzing the curse texts from the Neo-Assyrian period, it is found that the earliest example belongs to the reign of Aššur-dān II. In this record, the ruler first states that he rebuilt the New Palace in the ruined Assyrian city. He then includes a curse directed at any future king who might attempt to remove the inscriptions he placed there, asking the god Aššur to look upon that king with anger and bring hunger, poverty, and famine to his country if they replace his inscription with their own.^[107]

During the reign of Adad-nārārī III, it is noted that after his expedition to Damascus, this ruler had a statue erected in Zabanni, upon which he inscribed his heroism and victories^[108]. The text continues with the following statements:

“A later prince who takes this statue from its place; whoever either covers (it) with earth or puts (it) in a Taboo House or erases the name of the king, my lord, and my name and writes his own name: may Assur, the father of the gods, curse him and destroy his seed (and) his name from the land. May the god Marduk [...] overthrow his sovereignty (and) give him up to be bound by the hands (and) over the eyes. May the god Šamaš, judge of heaven and underworld, cause there to be darkness in his land so that people cannot see each other. May the god Adad, canal-inspector of heaven (and) underworld, tear out (his) name (and) attack like an onslaught of locusts so that his land collapses.”^[109]

In other texts, similar to the curse texts mentioned above, curse expressions were used to protect the inscriptions and stelae placed after the construction of buildings, renovations, and the erection of stelae for the rulers themselves. Examples of this practice are found in many texts recorded during the reigns of Shalmaneser IV^[110], Sargon II^[111], Sennacherib^[112], Esarhaddon^[113], Ashurbanipal, and Sîn-šarru-iškun^[114].

^[107] RIMA 2, A.0.98.1, 73-81a, 84-86a.

^[108] RIMA 3, A.0.104.6, 21-22.

^[109] RIMA 3, A.0.104.6, 26-33.

^[110] RIMA 3, A.0.105.2, 9-14, 29-30;

^[111] RINAP 2, no: 103, iv 43-iv 57, iv 63-iv 74; no: 10, 117, ii 70b-ii 71, ii 73b-ii 75.

^[112] RINAP 3, no: 10, 18-19, 23-26, 27-29.

^[113] RINAP 4, no: 98, r 50b-r 52, r 53b-r 57; no: 105, vi 5-vi 28, ix 2-ix 36, x 16-x 33; no: 129, 29-32, 38b-41.

^[114] RINAP 5/1, no: 3, viii 56-viii 64, viii 65-viii 69, viii 70-viii 77, viii 87-viii 92; no:4, viii 58-viii 69, viii 70-viii 74, viii 75-viii 80, viii 81-viii 93; no: 5, iv 9-iv 27, v 3-v 12, v 13-v 26, v 27-v 34; no: 10, v 33-v 42, v 43-v 49, vi 28-vi 43, vi 44-vi 51; no: 12, viii 1'-viii 5', viii 6b'-viii 13'; no: 23, 162-165, 177b-179, 180-183; no: 207, r 43-r 47, r 48-r 50, r 82b-r 83; no: 223, iv 11'-iv 19', iv 25'-iv 29'; no: 1030, 22-25, 29b-36; no: 6, r 1'-r 5', r 6'-r 12'; no: 19, 30-37, 45-47.

In addition to this information, we encounter a curse text recorded during the reign of Aššur-etel-ilāni concerning the relocation of a grave. In this text, King Aššur-etel-ilāni states that he moved the grave of Šamaš-ibni, a person from Bīt-Dakkūri, from Assyria to Bīt-Dakkūri^[115]. The text continues with the following statements:

“(But) if that prince or governor or commandant or judge or governor who appears in the land harms this tomb or (its) bone(s), (or) changes its position, taking (it) to another place, or (if) another person incites him to plan wicked things (against this tomb) and he listens (to him), may the god Marduk, the great lord, make his name, his descendant(s), his offspring, and his seed disappear from (mention by) the mouth(s) of the people! May the god Nabû, who makes opposing forces agree, cut short the number of his days (lit. “the number of his long days”)! May the god Nergal not spare his life from malaria, plague, or slaughter!”^[116]

During the Neo-Assyrian period, some kings included curse texts at the end of treaties they made with other rulers. The primary purpose of these curses was to instill fear in the other party and ensure their loyalty to the treaty. One of the earliest rulers of the Neo-Assyrian State to include such a curse in a treaty was Tukulti-Ninurta II, who ruled between 890–884 BC. In his treaty with Amme-Ba’li, the king of the Bit-Zamani State, which was located near present-day Diyarbakır, Tukulti-Ninurta II sought to prevent actions that might harm Assyrian interests by stating, “...If you give horses to my enemies (and) foes, may the god Adad [strike your] land with terrible lightning...”^[117] When analyzing the texts from the reign of Šamšī-Adad V^[118], who ruled between 823–811 BC, it is evident that he concluded an agreement with the Babylonian king Marduk-zākir-šumi. In the event of a breach of this agreement, the following curses were recorded for the offending party:

“[Whoever] sins [against this treaty and does] not [carry out] his duty, May Marduk, the great lord whose commands take precedence, [by his unalterable word] order his decay and the dispersion of his people [...]; may he pour out his life like water, [may he destroy] his country, strike down his people [through hunger] and famine, and lead him [to captivity ...]. May Nabû, the august heir [who] evil demons, not spare his life. [May Anu, father] of the gods, break his sceptre; may lord Illil, decreer of fates [whose command is un]alterable, decree him a reign of exhaustion, scarce days and years of famine. May Mulliltu, the great mother whose utterance [carries weight] in [Ekur], not intercede for him before Illil at the site of judgment and decision. May Ea, the sage of the gods

^[115] RINAP 5/1, no: 6, 1-3.

^[116] RINAP 5/1, no: 6, 11-20.

^[117] RIMA 2, A.O. 100.15, 25.

^[118] Suzan Akkuş Mutlu, “Asur Devleti’nin Anadolu Politikasında Hıbuşkia Ülkesinin Rolü”, *Akademik Tarih Ve Düşünce Dergisi* 5/17 (December 2018), 143.

who knows everything, dam his rivers [in their sources]. May Šamaš, the great judge of heaven and earth w[ho provides justice for all living beings, the source of con]fidence, reject his kingship and not [judge] his case. [May Sin, the lord of heaven, whose] punishment is renowned among the gods, [inflict upon him] a severe puni[shment] which is not to be removed from his body; may he [make the days, months and years] of his reign [end] in sighing and [moaning]. [May Adad, the canal inspector of heaven and earth, deprive him of rain] from the heaven, and of seasonal flooding from the underground water; may he destroy [his land through famine, roar fiercely at his city], and turn his [land into ruins by means of a flood].”^[119]

In addition to this information, similar curse texts can be found in other treaty texts from the reign of Šamši-Adad V. Examples include the border treaty of Adad-nārārī III between Zakur of Ḫamat and Ataršumki^[120], the treaty of allegiance between Aššur-nārārī V (754–745 BC) and Mati’-ilu^[121], king of Arpad, and Esarhaddon’s treaties with Baal, king of Tyre (Sur), and Humbares^[122], ruler of Nahšimarti. Other examples are found in Ashurbanipal’s treaty of allegiance with his Babylonian allies^[123] and Sîn-šarru-iškun’s treaty^[124] with the Babylonian rulers Nabû-apla-iddina, Kanunayu, and Aqri.

CONCLUSION

Historical sources indicate that the Assyrians, who existed for approximately 1400 years, possessed a rich and complex belief system. Within this context, prayer held a significant place in the religious life of the Assyrians. The examination of Assyrian cuneiform texts reveals that their kings frequently employed religious concepts to legitimize certain political objectives. Analyzing this practice, it becomes evident that Assyrian rulers advised future kings to protect the monumental inscriptions they had placed after construction and renovation, aiming to preserve these inscriptions for posterity and keep their names alive. It was emphasized that if future rulers adhered to this advice, the gods would listen to their prayers. This suggests that Assyrian monarchs placed responsibility on their successors for

[119] SAA 2, no: 001, 15, 16-19’, r 1-r 2, r 3-r 4, r 5- r 6, r 7, r 8-r 9, r 10- r 12, r 13-r 15.

[120] RIMA 3, A.O.104.2, 4-8a, 13b-16, 17-19.

[121] SAA 2, no: 002, i 1-i 9, i 10-i 20, i 21-i 28, i 29-i 35, iv 1-iv 3, iv 4-iv 7, iv 8-iv 16, iv 17-iv 26, iv 29-iv 30, v 1-v 7, v 8-v 15, v 16, vi 1-vi 5; Mario Liverani, *The Ancient Near East History: History, Society and Economy*, trans. Soraia Tabatabai (New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2014), 482; Cemre Aslan - Okay Pekşen, “Yeni Asur Dönemi’nde Asur Devleti’nin Batı Seferlerinin İktisadi Kazanımları ve Bu Kazanımların Korunmasına Yönelik Faaliyetler”, *Near East Historical Review* 11/1 (January 2021), 4.

[122] SAA 2, no: 005, iv 1, iv 2, iv 3-iv 4, iv 5, iv 6-iv 7, iv 8-iv 9, iv 10-iv 13, iv 14-r.e. 17, r.e. 18-r.e. 19; no: 006, 1-10, 11-12, 397-661.

[123] SAA 2, no: 009, 3-5, 6-r 25’.

[124] SAA 2, no: 011, 1-6, r 5-r 6, r 7-r 9, r 10-r 12, r 13-r 14.

ensuring that their prayers would be accepted by the gods. In this context, where faith was shaped by personal ambitions and utilized for self-serving purposes, it is clear that the primary goal of the Assyrian rulers was to protect their legacy and carry their names into the future. Indeed, an analysis of the cuneiform texts suggests that these kings were successful in achieving this objective.

In addition to this information, it is observed that Assyrian kings also used prayer to make requests to the gods, similar to modern practices. This represents a basic form of prayer. Assyrian rulers often prayed to the gods during challenging situations, such as wars, and for matters related to health and long life. These prayers reveal the human vulnerability of the Assyrian kings. Examining the content of the prayers made by Assyrian kings while raising their hands, it becomes clear that these prayers were primarily intended to request favors from the gods. Occasionally, such prayers were also part of collective ritual practices.

In letters addressed to Assyrian rulers by various rulers, astrologers, and exorcists from different regions, it is common to find prayers and good wishes directed at the king and, occasionally, his family members. Upon analyzing these texts, it appears that such prayers are more a political gesture than a reflection of genuine sentiment. The primary aim of these prayers seems to be to earn the king's favor and appreciation. Thus, it can be said that the main purpose of these prayers is to gain sympathy and support from the king.

When examining the use of curses by the Assyrians, it becomes clear that these expressions were employed to protect monumental inscriptions placed after the construction or repair of buildings. Assyrian kings communicated to future rulers the negative consequences they would face if they failed to protect these inscriptions. The primary goal of this practice was to ensure that the inscriptions would endure through time, similar to the objectives associated with their prayers. To achieve this, Assyrian kings first linked the acceptance of their prayers to the protection of the inscriptions. They then incorporated curse expressions into these texts to instill additional fear. The main purpose behind using such curses was to create a psychological impact on future rulers by exploiting the fearsome nature of these expressions. By fostering a state of fear, Assyrian rulers sought to advance their personal agendas. Thus, it can be interpreted that Assyrian rulers manipulated their belief system to serve their own objectives, as seen in both their prayers and curse texts.

Additionally, during the Neo-Assyrian State, it is observed that Assyrians included curse texts in treaty agreements with other states. This strategy aimed to deter the other party from breaking the agreement. Assyrian rulers preferred to embed religious conditions within treaty texts as a means of protecting the treaty before resorting to costly and disruptive military campaigns. By using curse expressions they deemed most effective for instilling fear, they sought to enforce compliance.

However, when treaties were violated, Neo-Assyrian kings often resorted to military expeditions to punish the transgressors and reassert control over the region. By invoking the gods as witnesses to oaths and curses, these expeditions gained religious legitimacy and helped secure mass support from their subjects.

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