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Die Welt des Orients

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BERND U. SCHIPPER UND DANIEL SCHWEMER

The Construction of Identity in the Ancient World

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Royal literary identity under the Sargonids and the Epic of Gilgameš

Johannes Bach

Abstract

The high density of intertexts lifted from the epic of Gilgameš in the corpus of Sargonid royal narrative texts is unprecedented in Assyrian literary history. Following Kenneth Gergen's works on narrativity and identity building, this paper understands these programmatic innovations as deliberate attempts by the Sargonids to reformulate royal identity. By employing a concise methodology for intertext analysis based on the works of Gérard Genette, this paper shows how two prominent Sargonid texts, the king's report "Sargon's Eight Campaign" (TCL 3) and the inscription Esh. 1, have used allusion to the Gilgameš epic to inscribe the figure of the Assyrian king into a literary world similar that of the legendary king of Uruk. This process peaks in a literary emulation of Assyrian kingship with the kingship of Gilgameš under Esarhaddon. The paper closes with a short survey on other Gilgameš-related elements in Sargonid Assyria and some concluding thoughts on the "expansion of the narrative borders" of Assyrian royal identity.

1. Introduction

When reading Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, one gets quickly jaded by the bombastic, yet ever so repetitious literary representation of the Assyrian monarch. The king, while highly pious and reverent, is usually enormously successful in conquering all his enemies. He, the beloved one of the gods, is by their endless grace always victorious on any battlefield, slaughtering immense masses of opposing fighters, destroying cities and sending back home huge amounts of booty and captives. And since the Assyrian king does everything under the command and the protection of the gods, failure and misfortune is something that happens only to his enemies.

Of course, this is just an exaggerated summary. Actually, the history of Assyrian royal narrative texts is more interesting and diverse than first sight would suggest, as it fluctuates between periods of poetic stagnation and phases richer in innovation and change. What always remained stable throughout the times was a rigid architextual (= generic) framework that guided the royal scribes when producing new texts (see below). A pool of set expressions and obligatory narrative elements provided the tools for the creation of a textual scaffolding that offered only limited chances for the addition of a respective king's personal notes. It is beyond any doubt that the Assyrian royal narrative texts' generic descriptions of historic events teach us much more about the propagated values

and norms of the office of kingship than about the character and the individuality of any holder of that office. However, one must assume that there were at least some interdependencies between a king and his literary representation.

2. A structural approach to narrative identity building

The question arises if specific reigns produced specific literary images of a ruling monarch. Particularly interesting are aspects of identity-building: the more dynamic periods of the literary history of Assyrian royal narrative texts all feature various (at least temporary) additions to the way their protagonist could be portrayed, some of which should be directly connected to the persona of a specific monarch. Such is the case with Tukulti-Ninurta I (1233–1197 BCE),¹ the namesake of the longest Assyrian royal epic. In the *Tukulti-Ninurta Epic*, the king is represented in a bold new way that sought to connect him with the mythology of the god Ninurta by alluding to relevant mytho-epics, especially to *Lugal-e*.² A comparable case is the Sargonids' attempt to stylize their monarchs in literary proximity to Gilgameš, which is discussed in this study. Both Middle Assyrian and Sargonid scribes used highly elaborated intertextual techniques to achieve their goals. A new literary identity, it seems, was in part rather a matter of textual import than of invention.

According to Kenneth Gergen, identity and narrativity are two closely intertwined discourses. Gergen noted in 1998 [2005] that any person's identity is embedded in (and conditioned by) a broader societal frame of personality narratives.³ Constitution or, better, construction of individuality and identity as well as their perception are bound to a society's commonly-accepted types of narrative event digestion, that is, the various ways (textual or otherwise) of narratively processing historic events.⁴ Consequentially, Gergen stated in his extension of Wittgenstein's most famous quote: "The borders of our narrative traditions are the borders of identities,"⁵ and likewise: "[...] Heroes and villains are such by virtue of their narrative encasing. [...] By one's narratives, then, one's moral status is negotiated, and the result is one to which the person can subsequently be held responsible."⁶ Narratives create, develop and reify literary identities, or identity types, while individuals perceived as bearing certain characteristic traits

1 All dates follow Frahm 2017.

2 On the Assyrian kings' relationship with Ninurta see, most recently, Pongratz-Leisten 2015; also cf. Annus 2002: 39–47 and 92–108.

3 Gergen 1998: 189 [Gergen 2005: 111].

4 Gergen 1998: 181ff [Gergen 2005: 106 ff.] and 195–196 [114–115].

5 Gergen 1998: 190 [Gergen 2005: 111].

6 Gergen 1998: 195 [Gergen 2005: 114].

known from a corresponding narrative discourse may be identified as or even held responsible for being a ‘real life’ exemplar of that specific character class.⁷

One of our main sources for the study of the literary representation of Assyrian kingship are royal narrative texts. Assyrian royal narrative texts, here loosely defined as textualized narrations whose protagonist is a ruler or king of Aššur, have a complex and enthralling history. They offer a unique chance to investigate the diachronic development of a genre from its very humble beginnings (late 3rd millennium BCE to early 2nd millennium BCE) until its demise at the end of the Neo-Assyrian period (609 BCE). Following structuralist theories of Gérard Genette and Tzvetan Todorov, we can understand Assyrian royal narrative texts as being realized through a genre-defining thesaurus of tropes, set expressions, and narrative elements as well as by the continuous reproduction of a specific constellation of three overlapping narratological fields, which are form, mode, and content.⁸ Such defining properties are called a genre’s “architext”. The architextual subcategory “content” corresponds well with Gergen’s approach to identity building as it essentially forms the major part of a genre’s “borders of narrative tradition”. With Gergen, narratives hold a potential to influence constructions of identities, which means that *vice versa* one must also consider that, although some narrative traits can be left unaltered for long periods, their corresponding architexts usually stay dynamic in some form. They are altered regularly by additions or emissions of content elements, e. g. story lines, *dramatis personae*, or set descriptions and other topoi. Therefore, a study of the historical development of both style and content of Assyrian royal texts enables us best to track and analyse changes in the extent of their “borders of narrative tradition.”

3. The literary historical background of Assyrian royal narrative texts

To adopt a quote by the German philologist Karlheinz Stierle, Assyrian royal texts are “situating [them]selves within a universe of texts”,⁹ that is, within the rich literary traditions of Sumerian, Old Akkadian and Old Babylonian royal inscriptions and hymns (mid-late 3rd millennium BCE to mid-2nd millennium BCE). Elaborate building reports, hymnic praise of monarchs and accounts of warfare are already attested in Old Sumerian and Old Akkadian texts. However, aside from a basic influence on structure and content, the Assyrian royal narrative texts seem to have taken only little inspiration from them and have developed their very own characteristics. The oldest known inscriptions of rulers of the city state of Aššur are short dedicatory texts that date back

7 Cf. the various contributions in Straub 1998 [Straub 2005] with further readings. Also note Frahm 2014’s study on the psychohistory of Sennacherib.

8 Genette 1992; Genette 1997: 4–5 and 110 ff. Section follows Genette 1992, *passim*, also see Todorov ³1995, 17–21 and *passim*.

9 Stierle ²1996: 139.

to the Old Akkadian period (Ititi 01/A.0.1001 and Azuzu 01/A.0.1002).¹⁰ A few cylinder seal legends as well as some further dedication texts and simple building inscriptions stem from the beginning of the Old Assyrian period (roughly 20th–18th century BCE). The first detailed building report was written under Erišum I (Erišum I 01/A.0.33.1; date of reign ca. 1974–1935). Military and political events other than building activities were only rarely (and sparsely) narrated or alluded to in pre-Middle Assyrian times (only in Ilu-šumma 01/A.0.32.1, date of reign unknown; Šamši-Adad I 2001/A.0.39.2001, date of reign ca. 1808–1776; Puzur-Sin 1001/A.0.40.1001, date of reign unknown/debated). The earliest accounts of war are only to be found with Enlil-nārārī (A.0.78.1001 = Chronicle 11, date of reign ca. 1317–1308)¹¹ respectively Arik-dēn-ili (A.0.75.8 = Chronicle 12, date of reign ca. 1307–1296).¹² Before the Middle Assyrian period the “borders of narrative traditions” of royal narrative texts were comparatively tight. Thus, most of the Old Assyrian inscriptions are quite stereotypical, and the genre remained comparatively stagnant in general.¹³ The literary image of their protagonist can be described as that of a ‘pious’ builder.

4. Overview of the literary history of pre-Sargonid Assyrian royal narrative texts

Turning to the history of Middle and Neo-Assyrian royal narrative texts, we can discern three periods that are clearly characterized by extensions of Gergen’s “borders of narrative traditions”; that is extensions of the content subcategory of the architext. Roughly put, the first phase stretches from the beginning of the Middle Assyrian period (roughly ca. 1350 BCE) to Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 BCE), the second phase comprises the regnal periods of Aššurnāširpal II (883–859 BCE) and Shalmaneser III (858–824 BCE), and the third is the dynasty of the Sargonids (721–609 BCE). The last of these three phases is of special interest for this study. The reign of Sargon II (721–705 BCE) brought about two significant changes in the poetics of royal narrative texts.¹⁴ Firstly, inter- and hyper-textual utilization of mytho-epics was re-activated for the first time since the

10 A royal name combined with a number designates the corresponding entry in one of the ORACC databases (RIAo/RINAP) while A-numbers refer to the editions of the RIMA series.

11 Numbering according to Glassner 2004; for Chr. 11 see *ibid.*, 184. The attribution of A.0.74.1001/Chr. 11 is debated, it might as well belong to Adad-nārārī I (cf. Grayson 1987, 119).

12 Glassner 2004: 184–186.

13 This statement does not account for other fields of Old Assyrian literary text production. On the Sargon text from Kültepe see Dercksen 2005; on Old Assyrian tradition, literacy and literature see Barjamovic 2015; Livingstone 2017: 359–360.

14 On the poetics of Neo-Assyrian royal literature see in general Tadmor 1997; Fales 1981, Fales 1982; cf. various studies by Barbato 2010; Frahm 1997; Frahm 1998; Frahm *in press*; Fuchs 2010; Gerardi 1989; Galter 1998; Galter 2002–2004; Pongratz-Leisten 2001; Pongratz-Leisten 2015; Greenwood 2010; Lauinger 2015.

Middle Assyrian Period. Secondly, in the texts of Sargon II, we can witness the beginnings of a practice of connecting the literary image of the Assyrian king with the archetypical hero king Gilgameš of Uruk. Such connections were established by employing various intertextual techniques for creating allusions. This trend was followed by Esarhaddon (680–669 BCE) and Aššurbanipal (668–631? BCE), but not by Sennacherib (704–681 BCE).

We will discuss the development under the Sargonids in detail below, using the texts “Sargon’s Eighth Campaign” and Esarhaddon 001/RINAP 4.1 as case studies. Yet before doing so, the next section gives a bird’s eye view on the developments of the first two phases in order to highlight pre-Sargonid literary developments and customs.¹⁵ By presenting a schematic portrayal of the literary history of the Assyrian royal narrative texts, I do not intend to lend support to a romanticizing idea of ‘inspired’ vs. ‘uninspired’ periods of production. Quantity and quality of literary productivity are clearly dependent on and conditioned by the historic situation a ruler finds oneself in – and, of course, by the means of literary production a ruler has at his disposal.

The first highly ‘active’ phase is the timespan from Arik-dēn-ili (ca. 1307–1296 BCE) to Tiglath-pileser I. (ca. 1233–1197 BCE).¹⁶ This is essentially the period when the major part of the architext of Assyrian royal narrative texts was developed. Although a few pre-Middle Assyrian rulers like Erišum I (1905–1866 BCE) and Puzur-Sîn (date of reign debated) related historic events other than building activities, the proper recording and narrative digestion of military actions only started in the second half of the 2nd millennium BCE. The oldest known relevant text is a fragment of a chronicle from the times of Arik-dēn-ili (1307–1296 BCE). Since the reign of Adad-nārārī I (1295–1264 BCE), the literary representation of the Assyrian king as a noble hero-shepherd, huntsman, and land developer was realized in a progressively more complex manner.¹⁷ A new idiolect¹⁸ with a prominent use of agricultural and animal husbandry related terminology and motives was quickly built up and established. Contrary to Old Assyrian customs, the royal literary protagonist is now deliberately portrayed as being in proximity to the gods.¹⁹

Besides the rapid stylistic evolution of royal inscriptions, we can witness the genesis of Assyrian royal epics during this period.²⁰ This innovative poetic pro-

15 This schematic outline is based on the corpus we know today, and thereby limited by the accidental nature of archaeological discoveries. On the role of chance in the field of ancient studies see Millard 2005.

16 See Borger 1961; Foster ³2005: 204–210. On the poetics of both annals and summary texts of Tiglath-pileser I cf. De Odorico 1994.

17 Cf. Pongratz-Leisten 2001: 224ff; Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 219 ff.

18 The term “idiolect” is used here as a poetological term indicating genre-defining speech patterns, following Genette 1997.

19 This literary elevation of the figure of the Assyrian monarch did not imply a proper divinization of the king, who was still considered a human actor, cf. Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 225–228.

20 On the dual focus pattern of Assyrian epics see Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 296–299.

gram entailed the adaption of new inter- and hypertextual techniques, which quickly grew in importance and diversity. In their shaping of the literary representation of the monarch, Middle Assyrian scribes often made use of the idiolect of mytho-epics, for example when attributing formerly exclusively divine epithets to the king.²¹ Furthermore, they frequently alluded to mythical texts belonging to the “Ninurta cycle”, especially to *lugal-e*, and, to a lesser extent, to *angimdimma*. The *Epic of Tukulti-Ninurta I*²² offers impressive proof of these developments. The literary image of the monarch created in the Middle Assyrian period was reproduced until the end of the Assyrian empire, though, after Tiglath-pileser I, it was realized by using by-then established idiolects and descriptive elements rather than by new allusions to mytho-epics. Proper intertextual utilization of mytho-epical pre-texts ceased to be a poetic device until the reign of Sargon II.

The next ‘active’ phase in the literary history of the Assyrian royal narrative texts are the reigns of Aššur-naširpal II and Shalmaneser III. Although the innovations made by these two kings, especially by Aššur-naširpal II, are quite intriguing, they were only short-lived. This new style included an increase in the number of narratological “scenes” (where the time of the narration nears or overlaps with the time of the story)²³ as well as (short) alterations regarding the narrator, such as temporary changes from the usually autodiegetic (1st person) into a heterodiegetic (3rd person) perspective.²⁴ Additionally, and for the first time during the 1st millennium BCE, there are non-inscriptional narrative royal texts dating to the reigns of Aššur-naširpal II and Shalmaneser III. We know of at least one royal epic (SAA 3, 17)²⁵ and one royal song or hymn (LKA 64),²⁶ and it seems reasonable to assume that there were more of each.²⁷

21 Such instances of “epithetism” (Genette 1997: 77) are first attested under Adad-nārārī I (Adad-narari I 01/A.0.76.1, 2 *etellu* “prince, lord”; ANE KAR 260, obv. 5 *nāqidu* “shepherd”) and Shalmaneser I (Shalmaneser I 01/A.0.77.1, 7 BÜR.GAL [= *ušumgal*] *tabrāti* “astonishing *ušumgallu*-beast/-dragon”; *ibid.*, 7–9 *rē’ū puḫur dadmē* “shepherd of all inhabited regions”, *ibid.*, 14–15 *kīma gišpar mūti lā pādē tebū kakkū-šu* “whose weapons attack like a merciless death-trap”; Shalmaneser I 04/A.0.77.4, 3 *utul abrāti* “(chief) shepherd of mankind”, *ibid.*, 5 *ušumgallu* “*ušumgal-lu*-beast/-dragon”, *ibid.*, 7 *kašūšu* “kašūšu-weapon”). Cf. on Assyrian royal titles and epithets Cifola 1995, Cifola 2004 and Sazonov 2016.

22 Machinist 1978; Foster ³2005: 211–230. Chang 1981.

23 On the definition of “scene” cf. Genette 1980, 94–95.

24 Cf. Genette 1980, 243–262.

25 Lambert 1961 attributes this text to Shalmaneser III, yet Reade 1989 suggests caution, as it might be possible that it could belong to the reign of Aššur-naširpal II.

26 The attribution of LKA 62, a heroic poem commonly dubbed “The Hunter”, is still debated (cf. Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 252 and 468–475 (“late Middle Assyrian”); Edzard 2004 (“Neo-Assyrian parody”); Hurowitz/Westenholtz 1990: 46–49 (drawing attention to similarities between LKA 62 and LKA 63, a heroic poem from the reign of Tiglath-pileser I). See Bach forthcoming for an edition of LKA 64.

27 See in general Schramm 1973; cf. various studies by Liverani 1982; Cifarelli 1995; Karlsson 2016; Dewar 2017; Livingstone 2017: 360–361; Baruchi-Unna 2014.

After Shalmaneser III (858–824 BCE), the archtext of royal narrative texts remained relatively stagnant until the reign of Sargon II (721–705 BCE). We see little innovation in the royal inscriptions,²⁸ yet one should note the development of a new subgenre, the complex of the literary communication between the king and the god Aššur, which was realized in so-called “king’s reports” and “letters from gods”.²⁹ Some of the innovative poetic means employed by the Sargonid scribes for connecting the literary image of the Assyrian king with the epic of Gilgameš will be discussed in the next section. The texts TCL 3, “Sargon’s Eighth Campaign”³⁰ and Esh.1, also known as “Esarhaddon’s Apology” or Niniveh A,³¹ will serve as case studies. All translations largely follow George 2003 for Gilgameš, Foster ³2005 for TCL 3 and Leichty 2011 for Esh. 1.

5. Transtextual methodology

To understand the transtextual poetics of the studied texts I will apply a five-step methodology for their structural analysis that I have developed in a study on transtextuality in Assyrian royal narrative texts (Bach, forthcoming). This analytical model rests on the works of Gérard Genette. Genette, together with Michel Riffaterre, is one of the founders of the structuralist school of transtextual analysis, as opposed to the earlier, more text-ontological approaches offered by Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes. With Genette 1997, we call a citing or alluding text the hypertext, and the text cited or alluded to the hypotext. Genette defines a citation as the complete congruence of hypertext and hypotext, whereas an allusion is created by means of either transforming or mimicking an earlier text.³² For any subsequent analysis of allusions one can use Genette’s meticulous study of transtextual operations of transformation.³³ For reasons of scope, I am detailing only the initial three steps of the analytical model, since they are of immediate relevance for this paper:

1. Recognition of transtextualities: Any recognition of a transtextual phenomenon relies heavily on the literary knowledge of the recipient.³⁴ In general, one should turn to lexica and registers of poetic tropes and figures of specific genres like Michael Streck’s compendium of the pictorial language of Mesopotamian epics as a first recourse.³⁵ Transtextual research requires one to

28 On the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III see Yamada 2014.

29 Pongratz-Leisten 1999: 210–276; Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 323–334.

30 Thureau-Dangin 1912; Fales 1991; Chamaza 1992; Kravitz 2003; Mayer 2013; Foster ³2005: 790–813; on the historic background see Elayi 2017: 115–176 and Melville 2016: 77–140.

31 RINAP 4, Nr. 1; Eph’al/Tadmor 2006; Hurowitz 2009; Frahm 2009; Eph’al 2014; Knapp 2015, 301–335; Knapp 2016.

32 Genette 1997: 7–10.

33 Genette 1997: 31 ff.

34 Cf. Genette 1988: 135–154.

35 Streck 1999.

constantly re-read Mesopotamian literature of all genres and types besides the texts one is researching. Regarding Assyrian Royal Narrative Texts, a steady knowledge of mytho-epics will be quite helpful. Additionally, one should occasionally also expand into what is commonly dubbed “scientific” Mesopotamian literature like lists or medical texts as well as into religious pieces, especially hymns and prayers.

2. **Architextual analysis:** The initial assessment of a text with expected transtextual potential is followed by an investigation into its architextual framework. The main objective of this step is to assess whether textual peculiarities are mere products of genre perimeters, e. g. simple reproductions of an established idiolect, or if there is more to them. With this, one mainly aims at preventing the misinterpretation of generic elements that are specific to the text-class as allusions or, even worse, as citations. If the architextual investigation can eliminate every suspicion of transtextuality, there is no need to continue further. However, if any peculiarities remain, one proceeds to the next step.
3. **Inter-/Hypertextual Analysis:** The third step is an evaluation of the degrees of inter- or hypertextual selectivity in the hypertext. This requires a case-by-case assessment of the relevant text passages. If there is a complete congruence between hypo- and hypertext, the passage qualifies as a citation. If, on the other hand, one can determine a suspicious passage as being an allusion rather than a citation, the transformations made to the hypotext need to be described precisely. In doing so, one should use either Genette’s terminology or comparable descriptive terminologies. Of course, Genette’s repertoire needs some tweaking here and there depending on the object of research, but it is important to stress the need for a coherent and transparent set of analytical terms for transtextual research.

6. Sargonid royal narrative texts and the epic of *Gilgameš*

The innovative intertextual utilization of the 12-tablet edition of the *Gilgameš Epic* in royal narrative texts must be ascribed to the scribes of Sargon II, especially to his congenial master scribe and personal *ummânu* Nabû-šallim-šunu,³⁶ the author of our first case study, “Sargon’s Eighth Campaign” (AO 5372 = TCL 3 + VAT 8634, 8698 and 8749). Nabû-šallim-šunu was very cautious in his literary stylization of Sargon II. Thus, the first allusion to the *Gilgameš Epic* in TCL 3, lines 18–19 does not only serve the pronounced elevation of the protagonist, but also models the narrative landscape in close similarity to an important place mentioned in the *Gilgameš Epic* IX, 37 and 40–41. The hypotext reads:³⁷

36 On Nabû-šallim-šunu see Baker 2001: 870; May 2012: 453–454; Pongratz-Leisten 2013: 300–301; May 2015: 100–101.

37 Edition and translation based on George 2003: 668–669.

Gilgameš IX, 37 + 40–41

³⁷ *ša ša-di-i še-mu-šú ma-š[u-(um)-ma]*

[...]

⁴⁰ *e-lu<-ú>-šu-nu³⁸ šu-pu-uk AN-e i[n-da²-a²]*

⁴¹ *šap-liš a-ra-le-e i-rat-su-nu³⁷ kaš-da-át⁷*

³⁷ The mountains name was “tw[in]”

[...]

⁴⁰ Their upper parts are leaning against the base of heaven,

⁴¹ Below their breast reaches the netherworld.

“Sargon’s Eighth campaign” alludes to this passage by transforming it into:³⁹

TCL 3, 18–19

¹⁸ *KUR¹⁸ si-mir-ri-a ŠU.SI KUR-i GAL-tu ša ki-ma še-lu-ut šu-kúr-ri zaq-pat-ma UGU ħur-šá-a-ni šú-bat⁴ be-let-DINGIR^{MES} ša-qa-at re-e-ši*

¹⁹ *ša e-liš re-ša-a-ša ša-ma-mi en-da-ma šap-la-nu šur-šú-ša šuk-šud-du qe-reb a-ra-al-li*

¹⁸ Simirria is a great mountain peak that thrusts up like a spear-blade and raising the (= its) head above the mountain ranges, the seat of Bēlet-ili

¹⁹ whose two heads are leaning against the skies above, and whose root is reaching the netherworld down below.

There is not only an impressive structural correspondence between Gilg. IX, 40–41 and TCL 3, 19, but also a chiasitic rearrangement of the structure of the last section of the hypotext’s sentence, including both a reduction and an extension of it. While the hypotext gives a sequence “fundaments of heaven” (*šupuk šamē*), then “netherworld” (*arallú*), the hypertext partially inverts the structure of this description to just “heavens” (*šamāmī*), but then “middle of the netherworld” (*qereb arallī*). This stage-setting narrative move inscribes Sargon II as well as his army and entourage into a scene of clearly mytho-epic proportions. Nabû-šallim-šunu probably intended to create an atmosphere of heroism that differs significantly from everyday life experience and surpasses the more down-to-earth scenery of previous royal inscriptions, e. g., of Tiglath-pileser III, where almost no strategies of mythologization besides the usage of traditional idiolect elements were employed.

The next allusion to Gilgameš in *Sargon’s Eighth Campaign* can be found in lines 127 and 129. Here, Nabû-šallim-šunu cleverly utilized the hypotext Gilgameš-epic with a twofold effect. Hypo- and hypertext read:

38 It is necessary yet justified to emend Gilg. IX, 40 from *e-lu(-)šu-nu* to *e-lu-ú* SAG_{II} (= *rēšā*)-*šu-nu*. There are a couple of reasons to do so: Firstly, there is only one witness to the discussed line, a Neo-Assyrian manuscript from Nineveh that exhibits some further elisions of signs and other scribal errors. Secondly, although *e-lu* could be read as *elu* “upper side, topside”, an understanding of emended *e-lu-ú* as *elū* “above” (adj. *eli* + locative *-u*) is more widely attested and fits the context better. Thus, we do not need to deal with a rather disturbing motivic and idiolectal incoherence in an otherwise well-attested, traditional meristic trope. This emendation was accepted by Andrew George in 2018 (oral communication).

39 For a more poetic translation cf. Foster ³2005: 792.

Gilg. I, 9⁴⁰

⁹ [u]r-*ḥa ru-uq-ta il-li-kam-ma a-ni-iḥ u šup-šu-uḥ*

⁹ He came a distant road and was weary but granted rest.

TCL 3, 127 + 129

¹²⁷ *um-ma-na-at ḏa-šur dal-pa-a-te ša ḥar-ra-an ru-uq-ti il-li-ka-nim-ma šu-nu-ḥa ù mu-uq-qa*
[...]

¹²⁹ *an-ḥu-us-si-in ul ú-šap-ši-iḥ-ma* [...]

¹²⁷ The tired troops of Aššur who, having come such a distant (march)road, were exhausted and weary, [...]

¹²⁹ (yet) I gave no respite to their fatigue [...].

The parallelism between hypertext and hypotext is evident. Intertextual strategies employed are substitutions (e. g., *harrān rūqti* instead of *urḥa rūqta*), hypotypotic, that is: thematically stressing additions (e. g., the addition of *dalpāte*) and intramodal transformations, the latter meaning mainly grammatical changes or modifications (e. g., 3rd sg. stative Š-stem *šupšuh* > 1st sg. preterit D-Stem *ušapših*). The Assyrian army is described in similar terms as Gilgameš at the very opening of the epic: Like the mytho-epical hero they came a long way, and whereas the hypotext describes its protagonist Gilgameš as “being tired” (*aniḥ*), the hypertext substitutes the Assyrian army into that role. Where Gilgameš finds rest and relief (*šupšuh*), king Sargon is pressing on, expressed by the intramodally transformed and, most importantly, negatively extended use of *pšḥ* Š-stem. Thus, Sargon is portrayed as the leader of a company of heroes.

There is one instance in TCL 3 where the actions of the royal protagonist are described in terms almost literally corresponding to the wording of passages in the epic of Gilgameš. In TCL 3, line 133, the king’s attack on his enemies is narrated as follows:

TCL 3, 133

¹³³ *ki-i* ^{GIŠ}*šil-ta-ḥi ez-zi i-na lib-bi-šu-<nu> am-qut-ma* [...]

¹³³ Like a furious arrow I fell amongst their midst [...]

This line clearly alludes to Gilgameš’s battle with the lions as described in Gilgameš IX, 17 and X, 96:

Gilg IX, 17⁴¹

^{IX, 17} *ki-ma šil-t[a-ḥi a-na b]i-ri-šú-nu im-qut*

^{IX, 17} Like an ar[ow] he fell [amo]ng them.

40 George 2003: 538–539.

41 George 2003: 668–669.

Gilg. X, 96⁴²

^{x,96} GIM *šil-taḥ ana bi-ri-šú-nu [im]-qut*

^{x,96} Like an arrow [he] fell among them.

The allusion was created by a substitution (*ina libbišunu* for *ana birišunu*), a hypotypotic amplification (addition of *ezzu* “angry, furious”) and an adjustment of the verbal form (from 3rd sg. preterit *imqut* to 1st sg. preterit *amqut*). This served a twofold aim: to dehumanize the enemies by equating them with lions,⁴³ and to elevate the figure of the Assyrian king to a similar level as Gilgameš.

These examples highlight the intricacy and skilfulness with which the allusions to the epic of Gilgameš were arranged in *Sargon’s Eighth Campaign*. They not only serve to elevate the main protagonist, but also transfer the whole narrative setting onto a mythicized plane. Just a single Gilgameš allusion is aimed directly at the royal protagonist.⁴⁴ Another helps to create a heroic literary landscape, and a third one cleverly portrays both Sargon and his army as well as their interaction after the model of the legendary king of Uruk.

We move on to the second case study, Esh. 1/RINAP 4.1, also known as the “Esarhaddon’s Apology”. It should be mentioned that Sennacherib’s texts are largely devoid of allusions to the epic of Gilgameš, yet intertextual poetics continued to play an important role.⁴⁵ It was Sennacherib’s son, Esarhaddon, who revived the intertextual usage of the Gilgameš epic. In Esh. 1 we find two allusions to Gilgameš. The first occurs in the fifth column of Esh.1. Here, the

42 George 2003: 684–685.

43 Lions were portrayed as the prime hunting prey of Assyrian kings since the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser I, cf. Tiglath-pileser I 01/A.0.87.1, vi 76–84. On Assyrian royal hunts and their connection to the mythology of Ninurta see Annus 2002: 102–108 and 168–171; Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 244–258.

44 Because of a shared motive of set(ting of) silence (*qūla šakānu*) there is a certain possibility that TCL 3, 157–158 refers to Gilg. XI, 134. After Sargon avenged Ullusunu and was victorious over Rūsa, he declares in a short summary to have poured out deadly silence (*šahrartu*, here possibly drawing on Anzū ob I, 3/lb I, ii 84 [cf. Annus 2001: 4, 20]) over the mountains (TCL, 157), and that he has imposed “silence (*qūlu*) and mourning (*dimmatu*)” onto their hostile population (TCL 3, 158). This might connect to the eleventh tablet of the Gilgameš epic where *qūlu* “silence” is the main feature of the world when Ūta-napištim catches a first glimpse of it (Gilg. XI, 134) after the rage of the deluge (*abūbu*) has died down (Gilg. XI, 128–133). The Assyrian king regularly is coupled with or likened to the deluge (*abūbu*) since Middle Assyrian times. In Sargon’s texts the protagonist is described as a “deluge” (*abūbu*) in TCL 3, 90 and 183, and in the Khorsabad annals, 289 (Fuchs 1993: 149 and 330). Should the scenario just described be correct, one must consider that this would be a comparatively loose allusion since the only textual connection would be the shared expression *qūla šakānu*. It would fully unfold only to a reader who knew this exact line of Gilgameš and at the same time was aware of the image of the Assyrian king as “deluge”.

45 Besides the often-debated intertextual utilization of the *Enūma eliš* (Weissert 1997; Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 306–321), one should note some innovative transtextual approaches under Sennacherib like implementing the stone list *abnu šikin-šu* into the royal inscriptions (Seri 2014: 90–93) as well as a few allusions to epics other than Gilgameš (Frahm 1997: 278–280; Frahm, in press).

following summary description of the fate of the Levantine rulers' fallen fighters is given:

Esh. 1 v, 6

^{v,6} *pa-gar qu-ra-di-šú-un ina la qe-bé-ri ú-šá-kil zi-i-bu*

^{v,6} Without burial, I let vultures devour the bodies of their warriors.

This line can be identified as alluding to the threat uttered by Humbaba against Gilgameš in Gilg. V, 94 (also V, 178):⁴⁶

Gilg V, 94

^{v,94} *lu-šá-k[il š]īri(UZU)^{ME}-šú i[š-š]ur šar-ša-ri na-'i-ri a-re-e u zi-i-bi*

^{v,94} I will make thundering forest-birds, eagles and vultures devour his flesh.

Gilg. V, 178

^{v,178} *lu-ú ú-šá-kil šir(UZU)-ka iš-šur šar-ša-ri na-'i-ri a-re-e u zi-i-b[i]*

^{v,178} [...] had I only made thundering forest-birds, eagles and vultures devour your flesh.

The first and the last word of the hypotext's sentence were fused together to form the last section of the hypertext. Furthermore, intramodal transformation, hypotypotic addition, elision, and substitution are at play: the verbal form used to describe the act of making an animal devour someone's flesh was both intramodally transformed (Esh. 1 drops the assertive particle *lū*) and hypotypotically extended by the addition of the specification "without burial" (*ina lā qebēri*). The hypotext's object "his/your flesh" (*šīri-šu/šir-ka*) was substituted by the phrase "the bodies of his enemies" (*paḡar qurādī-šun*). This intertextual connection portrays the protagonist of Esh. 1 not as an avatar of Gilgameš, but surprisingly as a new and contemporary Humbaba – after all, the epical giant's actions are clearly ascribed to the Assyrian king here. One can only conclude that this must be a region-dependent, in the true sense of the word, sarcastic twist: the Levantine rulers are punished by the Assyrian king in the same manner as the epical would-be protector of their forests had threatened against Gilgameš, the superb proponent of Mesopotamian kingship.⁴⁷ This fits very well with the orders given by Esarhaddon to the Levantine kings (Esh. 1, v 54ff): they are told to send "large beams, tall columns (and) very long planks of cedar (and) cypress, grown on Mount Sirāra and Mount Lebanon" – exactly

46 Cf. a freer translation ("I will feed his flesh to ..." / "Had I only fed your flesh to ...") in George 2003: 606–607 and 610–611.

47 Aššurbanipal, too, invokes Gilg. V 94/178 (Asb. 11 [Prism A], iv 74–76; cf. Borger 1996: 44 and 235 and the RINAP 5 page on ORACC), yet here, although extended significantly, for example by adding more flesh-devouring animals like pigs, the allusion lacks the sarcasm of Esh. 1 since it is applied to "inhabitants of Akkad" respectively of "Babylon, Kutha and Sippar" who had incited Šamaš-šumu-ukīn to revolt (iv 53 ff. and iv 77 ff.).

the two mountain ranges into which the cedar forest was split asunder during Gilgameš's and Enkidu's fight with Ĥumbaba in Gilg V, 133–134.

The last example, Esh. 1, v 21–23 and Gilg. I, 45–46, is an unconcealed likening of an Assyrian king to Gilgameš – or at least a likening of their respective kingships. The hypotext reads:⁴⁸

Gilg. I, 45–46

^{1,45} *man-nu <šá>⁴⁹ it-ti-šu iš-šá-an-na-nu a-na LUGAL-ti ⁴⁶ ù ki-i ʾd ʾ GIŠ-gím-maš i-qab-bu-ú a-na-ku-ma LUGAL*

^{1,45} Who is there that can be compared to him in kingly status, ⁴⁶ and can say like Gilgameš: 'It is I am the king'?

The hypertext has this transformed to:

Esh. 1, v 21–23

^{v,21} *i-na qí-bit ^daš-šur EN-ia man-nu šá it-ti-ia iš-šá-an-na-nu ²² a-na LUGAL-u-ti ù ina LUGAL^{MES}-ni AD^{MES}-ia ²³ ša ki-ma ia-a-ti-ma šur-ba-ta be-lu-su*

^{v,21} At the command of the god Aššur, my lord, who is there that can be compared to me ²² in kingly status,⁵⁰ and amongst the kings, my forefathers, ²³ whose rulership was a great as mine?

The first half of this twofold allusion was created by means of a single intramodal transformation: Only the possessive suffix was substituted. While it is 3rd person sg. -šu in the hypotext, the hypertext has this adjusted to 1st person sg. -ya. This happened most likely due to the hypertext's own architect, which demands an autodiegetic narrator, i. e. a narratorial instance that coincides with the view of the text's protagonist. More complicated transformation techniques were applied to the next section of the hypotext. Both hypotext and hypertext pose a rhetorical question about the greatness of the corresponding protagonist's kingship. The hypotext's indirected question for just "someone" (*mannu*) is carried over into the hypertext, yet is then specified by an addition, clarifying that this someone belongs to the realm of Esarhaddon's royal ancestors. The hypotext's object of comparison, Gilgameš, is substituted by the protagonist of the hypertext, Esarhaddon. Furthermore, the hypertext transforms the mimetic speech of the hypotext (^{1,46} *anākūma šarru* "It is I am king") into a semantically equivalent sentence by means of substitution. With this allusion Esarhaddon reinterprets Assyrian monarchy, and more specifically his own kingship, as essentially being of the same quality as that of Gilgameš. Sargon II's texts never make such an explicit political claim. By indicating that none of his forefathers

48 George 2003: 540–541.

49 See George 2003: 784.

50 Cf. the translation by Leichty in RINAP 4, S. 22: "At the command of the god Aššur, my lord, who can rival me in kingship?"

(which implicitly includes both Sargon II and Sennacherib) were able to match his greatness, Esarhaddon implicitly fulfils another line from Gilgameš (I, 29): He is indeed *šūtur eli šarri* “surpassing all kings”.⁵¹

The given examples provide an insight into the poetic innovations made under Assyria’s last dynasty. They also highlight the versatility and scholarly competence of the scribes of the Sargonid royal narrative texts in making inter-textual usage of the epic of Gilgameš. The motivation for the use of these inter-textual associations is more difficult to assess. In the case of *Sargon’s Eight Campaign*, Nabû-šallim-šunu may have known exactly for which audience he was writing. Probably he designed the text’s humble representation of Sargon as a king in the tradition of Gilgameš as a deliberate, conciliatory gesture and message of modesty for the priests of the Aššur temple.⁵² The relationship between Sargon and the Aššur priesthood is still not fully understood, but it seems that Sargon inherited a bad relationship with the Aššur temple from Shalmaneser V, which he subsequently tried to improve.⁵³ Beate Pongratz-Leisten showed that “Sargon’s Eighth Campaign” was part of a royal purification, specifically an entrance ritual that lasted seven days and took place in the Aššur temple. Both Pongratz-Leisten and May also convincingly argued for the possibility of Nabû-šallim-šunu participating in said rite on Sargon II’s behalf.⁵⁴ The priests were certainly the part of the population most apt to identify and also enjoy the complex transtextualities of *Sargon’s Eight Campaign*.⁵⁵ It is worth noting that the contemporary *zabbar-dabbu*-priest of the Aššur-temple, a certain Bābu-šumu-ibni,⁵⁶ was the owner (founder?) of the private (!) library N4 in Aššur, where TCL 3 was found.⁵⁷ There is a high probability that the Aššur temple was

51 George 2003: 22 and 538–539. Note that this line was the beginning of the Old Babylonian Gilgameš, as indicated by the colophon on the Old Babylonian Pennsylvania tablet (George 2003: 172–173).

52 The entire text of Sargon’s Eighth Campaign transpires an air of humbleness: Sargon’s first and foremost duty is his cultic service. Cf. Sargon’s titles and epithets as well as his actions before the battle at Mount Wauš: Sargon is a “holy/pure priest” *šangû ellu* (TCL 3: 5), who calls upon the gods before attempting to achieve his campaign goals (TCL 3: 9). Fully supported by the major gods (TCL 3: 13, 23) he is on a mission of protection, aiming at unifying and avenging the small client kingdoms of the north-eastern Zagros (TCL 3: 55–57). It is only when the confrontation with Rūsa of Urartu draws near that Sargon calls himself the “righteous king” *šarru kīnu* (TCL 3:112–114), as if to stress that he is now also assuming his other duties, adding those of a “king” to that of a high priest. On the polar constructions of the figures of Rūsa and Sargon, see Fales 1991; Hurowitz 2008; van de Mieroop 2010; van de Mieroop 2016.

53 Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 332–333; Melville 2016: 59; Elyai 2017: 26–27.

54 Pongratz-Leisten 2013: 300–301; Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 329–330; May 2010: 453 and May 2015: 100.

55 Cf. Pongratz-Leisten 2010: 139–140; Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 464; also see Hurowitz 2008: 105–110.

56 On Bābu-šumu-ibni see Radner 1999. Bābu-šumu-ibni also bore the titles of *mašmas bīt Aššur* and *mašmas bīt kiššūti*, on which cf. Maul 2010: 202 fn. 44, 203 with fn. 46–48 and 205.

57 Cf. Pedersén 1986: 41–76. According to Maul 2010: 205–206 with fn. 58 library N4 contained two more texts from the reign of Sargon II (KAR 252, a ritual and LKA 53, a royal prayer of Sargon II) that probably also date to the times of Bābu-šumu-ibni.

the contact zone that allowed for an encounter between Nabû-šallim-šunu and Bābu-šumu-ibni, and it is a reasonable assumption that from there the text of Sargon's Eighth Campaign found its way into Bābu-šumu-ibni's private home, where they used it as a school text.⁵⁸ This scenario could very well have been the starting point for a poetic program of intertextually utilizing the Gilgameš epic.

7. Conclusions and final thoughts

The examples of intertextuality discussed above show that the Sargonids embraced their status of belonging to a special sphere. They subsequently took advantage of this construction and shaped royal ideology according to their own ideas by narratively representing the royal sphere as being essentially the same as the one of Gilgameš.⁵⁹ The examples from the texts of Sargon II and Esarhaddon show us how "borders of narrative traditions" could be expanded, and how these added contents could even be used to formulate a new legitimation of kingship. It is possible that Sargon's knowledge of and admiration for Uruk's mythical king stem from the time of his princely education.⁶⁰ Later, when Sargon was king, he clearly expressed his connection to and, supposedly, admiration of Gilgameš also in sculptural art, for example with the installation of two colossal relief-statues of the latter and Enkidu in his throne room. As shown by Amar Annus, a relief-statue representing Gilgameš, once installed in Sargon's throne room, but today housed in the Louvre, has the exact same measurements as given for Gilgameš in the epic (5.52 m).⁶¹ This further underlines Sargon II's personal fable for Gilgameš, which may suggest that Sargon

58 It seems likely that TCL 3 is not the "original" text, but rather a pupil's exercise, at least judging from the numerous spelling errors present. These writing errors were recently studied by Worthington 2012 (see *ibid.* 351 for an indexed of discussed passages and *cf.* correspondingly), who, nonetheless, still assumes that TCL 3 was written by Bābu-šumu-ibni himself (*cf. ibid.* 60 and 90). A comparison of the hands of TCL 3 and KAL 4, 36 (Maul/Strauß 2011: 83–85 and *pl.* 36 [205]), an apotropaic ritual that, according to its colophon, was indeed written by Bābu-šumu-ibni, does not support such an assumption. Other scholars considered TCL 3 to have been loaned to Bābu-šumu-ibni for private, literary, or pedagogic reasons, e. g. Hurowitz 2008: 110; Mayer 2013: 9; Pongratz-Leisten 2013: 302; Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 331; Maul 1994: 159.

59 Older scholarship contended that the "Myth about the Creation of the King" likewise puts the king, who was fashioned, like Gilgameš, by Bēlet-ili, into a primordial intermediate position between humans and gods (Cancik-Kirschbaum 2005; Mayer 1987). This view has recently been challenged by Jiménez (2013), who points out that the myth narrates only the creation of the king and his subsequent divine investiture but offers no proof that it also "features a separate creation of man and king" (*ibid.*, 246).

60 Tiglath-pileser III did not designate the younger Sargon, but rather Sargon's older (half-?) brother Shalmaneser V as crown prince of Assyria (Fuchs 2011: 1240; Melville 2016: 56–60; *cf.* the overview in Elayi 2017: 11–44). Nonetheless, both Sargon and his second (full) brother Sin-aḥu-ušur are supposed to have received a similar high-quality education as the crown prince, including training in various scribal arts, *cf.* Elayi 2017: 23; on the education of Neo-Assyrian princes see Zamzalová 2011.

61 Annus 2012.

himself encouraged the intertextual utilization of the *Gilgameš* epic. Besides artisans, one of the most important groups of people who were required to support and reproduce that very notion of proximity between king and *Gilgameš* was that of the royal scholars. Their affirmative role is highlighted not only by the example of Nabû-šallim-šunu, but also by Nabû-zuqup-kēnu, another high ranking royal scribe, who, according to Eckart Frahm, copied the 12th tablet of the epic of *Gilgameš* as soon as he had learned about Sargon's death on the battlefield in 705 BCE⁶²

All of this suggests, with all due caution, that the extension of the “borders of narrative traditions” of royal narrative texts under Sargon II was intended to establish a new way of propagating a royal identity remodelled along the lines of *Gilgameš*. Based on the evidence from *Sargon's Eighth Campaign*, I would like to suggest the beginning of a program of literary stylization during Sargon's reign. Although Sargon's son Sennacherib made no explicit allusions to the epic of *Gilgameš* in his texts, the connection remained prominent. Eckart Frahm has drawn attention to an inscription (K 6109) that suggests that Sennacherib had a painted wall relief made for a palace in Nineveh that depicted his sons in the company of mytho-epic heroes, namely *Gilgameš*, Humbaba and presumably Enkidu.⁶³ This also indicates that an individual ruler indeed had some influence over how and in which medium a specific identity construct were pronounced.

The fact that Esarhaddon resumed the use of textual allusions to the *Gilgameš Epic* and their continuation under Aššurbanipal (Asb. 11) is an indication of the importance of the pertaining ideological program. This finally brings us back to the questions of if and how the rulers of the third and fourth dynastic generation, Esarhaddon and Aššurbanipal, were influenced in their personal developments. Their princely education certainly exposed them to the propagated ideological connection between their progenitor Sargon II and *Gilgameš*, but since we lack substantial information on the private lives especially of the early Sargonids, we can only speculate. Still, we ask once more with Gergen: were the royal princes “held responsible” for being born into a dynasty that stylized itself as belonging to the sphere of mytho-epical heroes? Did they accept their ascribed roles, and, if they did, did they try to live up to it? Sennacherib's Nineveh mural mentioned above, but also the specific way in which Esarhaddon described his punishment of the Levantine rulers and, even more so, how he legitimized his own kingship by intertextually connecting it to that of *Gilgameš* might indicate that the answers to those questions could be positive.

62 Frahm 1999; Frahm 2005; Melville 2016: 187–192.

63 Frahm 2014: 193–194 and 218; Frahm 2002: 1115.

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