

## 14. ROYAL INSCRIPTIONS WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE AGUM-KAKRIME INSCRIPTION<sup>927</sup>

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### Sources, Textual Evidence

General information on Sumerian and Akkadian royal inscriptions (their classification, style, typology, function, editions, and secondary literature) can be found in RENGER (1980–1983) 59–77. A study specifically on Assyrian royal inscriptions was presented by FALES (1999–2001) 115–144.

More information on the of royal inscriptions of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> millennia BC is to be found in BORGER, EAK,<sup>928</sup> GRAYSON, ARI I and RIM (= Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, consisting of RIME, RIMA and RIMB, a project directed by Grayson). On Middle Babylonian royal inscriptions see STEIN (2000).<sup>929</sup> The Kassite royal inscriptions were integrated to BRINKMAN, MSKH, but they have not been published by the RIM project.

### General Features and Historical Relevance

Royal inscriptions are among the most important sources for Mesopotamian history and chronology, since they relate events that took place during a king's reign<sup>930</sup> and often allow us to place these events in chronological order, especially in combination with eponyms.<sup>931</sup> The KIs help place the royal inscriptions into a larger a chronological context. Unfortunately Assyrian royal inscriptions for the time succeeding Šamši-Adad I, which could shed more light on the Dark Age, are scarce. The sources from Early

Kassite Babylonia do not help much.<sup>932</sup> EDER (2004) 214–221 used the **inscription of Gandaš** (BM 77438) for his chronological calculations; but the authenticity of that text is highly suspect. Gandaš, who ruled for 16 years, was claimed to be a contemporary of Samsuditana who conquered Babylon during the latter's reign: but the Kassite dynasty is believed to have begun already during Samsuiluna's reign. (→ **Babylonia**). Eder's arguments are based on his doubtful evaluation of the **Distanzangaben**, which according to him call for a very high chronology. Brinkman and others ignore Babylonian **Distanzangaben** altogether in chronological calculations because of the unreliability of those texts.

Only from the 14<sup>th</sup> cent. BC, especially beginning with Adad-nīrārī I (no. 76), do elaborate royal inscriptions appear, including accounts of political and military events.<sup>933</sup> Later, starting with Šalmaneser I, the contents of the royal inscriptions began to be arranged in chronological order (annals<sup>934</sup>). The inscriptions of Tukulti-Ninurta I are characterized by an especially elaborate style (WEIDNER, ITN). A brief period of decline can be observed before Tiglath-pileser I, in whose reign true annals appear for the first time (among which were the well-known prisms, which contain detailed accounts of his activities). Annals are a special type of commemorative inscription and normally included building inscriptions (→

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<sup>927</sup> On the **Puzur-Sin inscription** and its implications for the reconstruction of the early Assyrian rulers → **AKL**.

<sup>928</sup> Borger offered an extensive and very useful study on the compilation of the royal inscriptions of the second millennium BC, starting with the inscriptions of the Old Assyrian period and ending with Aššur-dān II.

<sup>929</sup> This study has been reviewed by SCHAUDIG, *WZKM* 91 (2001) 411–418 who discusses the term “royal inscription” and its types (formulary, etc.). *kudurrus* were not included in Stein's book. A study on *kudurrus* published by SLANSKI in 2000 was expanded into a monograph in 2003.

<sup>930</sup> Royal inscriptions are classified sub texts representing “history from above” by VAN DE MIEROOP (1999) 40ff., who also reviews the secondary literature on royal inscriptions and summarizes various related topics (see esp. pp. 52ff.).

<sup>931</sup> FREYDANK (1991) 51–52.

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<sup>932</sup> On the difficulties of their classification see BRINKMAN, MSKH 51. Another difficulty is that the inscriptions attributed to early Kassite kings are preserved in much younger copies (Gandaš [BM 77438], Agum I [?, K.3992], and Agum-kakrime [V R 33]). Note also the introductory remarks by STEIN (2000) 8–9. The Babylonian royal inscriptions dating to the Dark Age are listed on p. 185 of his study (Gandaš, Agum I, Agum II, Ulam-Buriaš).

<sup>933</sup> Traces of supplementary information can be found in inscriptions of Ilušuma and Šamši-Adad I or Iaḫdun-Lim and Zimri-Lim. On a joint origin of Assyrian and Hittite annals in Northern Syria see KLINGER, *StBoT* 45 (2001) 281–285 with further literature. Klinger denied any direct influence by the Hittite annalistic tradition on the Assyrian one.

<sup>934</sup> Dated annals are attested from Aššur-bēl-kala (1073–1056 BC) onwards.

**Distanzangaben**). From Adad-nīrārī I onwards the annals are structured by eponym years (*līmū*). Starting with Šalmaneser III events in royal inscriptions are organized by regnal years (*palū*).<sup>935</sup>

The main functions of royal inscriptions were to commemorate the kings' deeds, especially military exploits and building activities, to record his offerings and services to a god, and to indicate ownership. Many different types of texts were included in the genre inscriptions. Annals and display texts ("Prunkinschriften")<sup>936</sup> provide us with detailed information about historical events. GRAYSON (1980) considered the Babylonian royal inscriptions to be generally reliable as historical source material, though sometimes, especially when military enterprises are described, the terms are too general. As for the military activities one has to bear in mind that a distinction between the chronological and non-chronological arrangement has to be made. The Assyrian royal inscriptions are primarily used as a major source for information about the official religious cults. Furthermore, recensions have to be considered in the light of the process of selection and conflation of various sources. Often omissions are evident. Comprehensive studies on Assyrian royal inscriptions have been presented by GRAYSON (1980) 150–179 and FALES (1999–2001) 115–144.

Assyrian royal inscriptions most probably were among the sources used for the compilation of Assyrian chronographic texts, such as the Synchronistic History, the AKL, etc.<sup>937</sup> But this was a give-and-take,

because the chronicles then served as a source for royal inscriptions.<sup>938</sup> Nevertheless, the manner in which royal inscriptions were composed is still unknown, as GRAYSON (1980) 164–170 has shown. They were usually written on more durable material other than clay tablets, such as door-pivots, baked bricks, stone pavement slabs, steles, cones, metal tablets, baked clay prisms and cylinders.<sup>939</sup>

From the numerous royal inscriptions from the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium the most chronologically controversial is the Agum-kakrime inscription.

#### 14.1. Agum-kakrime Inscription (V R 33, K. 4149+)<sup>940</sup>

The copy of the Agum-kakrime inscription was discovered in the Aššurbanipal library and dates from the first millennium BC. It is an ancient forgery, partly damaged, consisting of eight columns. In the text the early Kassite ruler Agum-kakrime describes how he returned Marduk's statue from Ḫani (= the land of Ḫana) to Babylon and restored the cult of Marduk and his spouse Šarpanitum at Babylon (col. I, 44 – col. II, 17). **BKL A** and the **Synchronistic KL** preserved only a shortened name of this Kassite ruler, Agum. But this could be either Agum I, II or III. Contrary to earlier assumptions, Agum II is not mentioned in the Synchronistic KL (BRINKMAN, MSKH 11). Agum-kakrime has been identified with Agum II (8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> Kassite king?) or Agum III (13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> Kassite king).<sup>941</sup> Parallel with this inscription, the **Marduk prophecy** (K. 2158+)<sup>942</sup> reports that 24 years passed between the recovery of the Marduk statue in Ḫani

<sup>935</sup> See FALES (1999–2001) 123–124. FUCHS, SAAS 8 (1998) 81ff.

<sup>936</sup> On the distinction between annalistic texts and display texts (= commemorative texts without annalistic features) see GRAYSON (1980) 150.

<sup>937</sup> On the compilation of (especially Assyrian) royal inscriptions see GRAYSON (1980) 164–170 (Assyrian chronicles, booty and tribute lists, itineraries, diaries, letters to the god).

<sup>938</sup> On the relationship between year-names and royal inscriptions see HORSNELL (2003) 201–202.

<sup>939</sup> EDZARD and RENGEL in RIA 6 (1980–1983) 59ff. and 75f. See WILCKE (1982) 42–43 on the issue of why royal inscriptions were written on these monuments. Based on passages in Mari letters CHARPIN and ZIEGLER (2003) 20–22 have shown that the king picked out of several types of commemorative inscriptions, which he handed over to the artisan to create an inscription. It is suggested that the few clay tablets with such inscriptions were those which the artisan did not receive. The king decided where the inscription was to be erected or shown in a procession. Short inscriptions on bricks exist as well (reign of Zimri-Lim, see id., p. 10).

<sup>940</sup> See BRINKMAN, MSKH 11 (with the passage containing Agum's genealogy) and FOSTER (1996) 274 ff. The latest edition was presented by STEIN (2000) 150–165, whose

translation is based on his transliteration of a photograph of K. 4149+. Note also HECKER, TUAT N.F. 2 (2005) 50–53 with a German translation.

<sup>941</sup> See BRINKMAN, MSKH 267<sup>0</sup> and especially p. 13 on the Agum-kakrime inscription. LANDSBERGER (1954) 116 preferred the identification with Agum I. See STEIN (2000) 150 and SASSMANNSHAUSEN, MDAR 63, according to whom Agum-kakrime is to be identified with Agum II. This follows Brinkman (Agum III is to be identified with the son of Kaštiliašu III attested in the **King Chronicle** and perhaps with the Agum mentioned in the Qal'at Bahrain texts). In contrast GASCHE *et al.*, *Dating ...* 88–89 identified Agum-kakrime with Agum III, who followed Burna-Buriaš I (contemporary with Puzur-Aššur III), Kaštiliašu III and Ulam-Buriaš (contemporary with Ea-gāmil). → **Babylonia**

<sup>942</sup> GRAYSON and LAMBERT, *JCS* 18 (1964) 8, BORGER, *BiOr* 28 (1971) 3–24 (esp. p. 21–22), BRINKMAN, MSKH 97, LONGMAN (1991) 136ff. (reviewed by SCHRAMM, *BiOr* 52 [1995] 92–97), FOSTER (1996) 302. The text alludes to the abduction of the Marduk statue to Anatolia (Muršili I), Aššur (Tukulti-Ninurta I) and Elam (Kutir-Nahhunte) and the events before Nebuchadnezzar I.

and the abduction of the statue as booty in the course of Muršili's I raid on Babylon (→ **Distanzangaben**). This return of the Marduk statue is normally associated with Agum-kakrime, although the inscription's genuineness, due to its linguistic features and historical information, has been doubted.<sup>943</sup> The chronological usefulness of the information contained here is therefore very much in question (BRINKMAN, MSKH 97).

#### Value for Absolute Chronology

##### 14.2. The return of the Marduk statue

Agum-kakrime is said to have returned the Marduk statue to Babylon from the region of Ḫani<sup>944</sup> after the god had been exiled for 24 years following the Hittite raid against Babylon. However, the time period the Marduk statue remained at Ḫani, and the cause of its exile, can only be deduced from the **Marduk prophecy**. Problems arise not only with the authenticity of the Agum-kakrime inscription, but also with the identification of the Agum in the inscription, since there Agum is named the son of Uršigurumaš/Urzigurumaš (= Kassite king no. 6; Agum-kakrime then would be Agum II) and not of Kaštiliašu III (father of Agum III<sup>945</sup>). Thus it is hard to place the information of the inscription into the proper chronological and historical framework. As BRINKMAN, MSKH 13 pointed out, even given the identification of the fall of Babylon due to Muršili I with the Hittite theft of the Marduk statue and the end of the Babylon I dynasty, and 24 years for the return of this statue to Babylon, difficulties arise in attempting to “*fit all these elements into a coherent scheme*” and reconcile them with the fact that the **Synchronistic KL** does not even list Agum II. Generally this Distanzangabe is used by those favoring a LC for Mesopotamia.

A possible identification with Agum III was lately proposed by GASCHE *et al.*, *Dating ...* 88–89 linking the information with that taken from the **Tell Muḫammad** texts recognizing the difficulties of this text.<sup>946</sup> GASCHE *et al.* believed the Agum-kakrime inscription indicates that Agum-kakrime ruled after the Kassites occupied Babylon and consolidated their power over the south. Especially because of the continuity of the pottery,<sup>947</sup> GASCHE *et al.*, *Dating ...* concluded that the phase of instability and dislocation must have been short and that the fall of Babylon marked the end of a long slow breakdown and the beginning of a new era (→ **Babylonia**). The **Synchronistic History** informs us that in the intermediate aftermath of the collapse of the Babylon I dynasty Burna-Buriaš I fixed the northern border with Puzur-Aššur III, a phase that is marked by stable social conditions.<sup>948</sup> The possibility that the period of instability following the fall of Babylon was brief had been previously considered by VAN DIJK (1986) 159: “Wenn es damals nur den Einfall der Hethiter gegeben hat und die Restauration unter Agum-kakrime, dann kann dieses Zeitalter nicht so dunkel gewesen sein und nicht so lange gedauert haben. Wenn die Schriftquellen uns zeitweise im Stich lassen, so heisst das nicht, dass sie nicht dagewesen sind.”

According to GASCHE *et al.*, *Dating ...* 83–88 the texts from Tell Muḫammad, whose **year-names** record the period from 36 to 41 years after the resettlement of Babylon,<sup>949</sup> are to be dated after Agum. Therefore, the time span between the raid on Babylon and its resettlement is believed to have been very short.<sup>950</sup> SASSMANNSHAUSEN, MDAR 63 instead placed this group of texts at the very beginning of the Kassite period, but distrusted the authenticity of the inscriptions of Gandaš and Agum-kakrime due to such features as the epithets used. The argument of Gasche *et al.* is based mainly on the evolution of Old Babylo-

<sup>943</sup> LONGMAN (1991) 86 with further bibliographical notes and FOSTER (1996) 274. For the colophon, which says that this text belongs to “Geheimwissen”, see BORGER, RIA 3 (1957–1971) 188–189, RINGER (1996) 15–16 and STEIN (2000) 164.

<sup>944</sup> A scribal error for *Hatti* had been assumed: see LANDSBERGER (1954) 65<sup>160</sup>. This inscription might also indicate that Ḫana was flourishing during the reign of Agum II: see PODANY (2002) 59 on the Middle Ḫana period and the Dark Age.

<sup>945</sup> The **King Chronicle** says Agum III have led a campaign against the Sealand. It is questionable, however, that Agum III can be identified with the Agum mentioned in the *Qal'at Bahrain* texts. See SASSMANNSHAUSEN, MDAR 63, who is skeptical that one and the same person is referred to in these texts and the **King Chronicle**.

<sup>946</sup> According to GASCHE *et al.*, *Dating ...* 88, the scribe copied the inscription incorrectly by inserting an incorrect genealogy, that of Agum II.

<sup>947</sup> GASCHE *et al.*, *Dating ...* 26ff.

<sup>948</sup> The authors stressed that according to the archaeological evidence the time after the end of the Babylon I dynasty is not marked by instability.

<sup>949</sup> On the problematic historical attribution of the year-names documented in those texts see RICHARDSON (2002) 9. For the absolute date of the lunar eclipse attested in those date formulae → **Astronomical Data**.

<sup>950</sup> More on the rise of the Kassites and the consolidation of their power in this period is in the **Synchronistic History** and **King Chronicle**.

nian pottery; but their observations have not yet been commented on in the scholarly literature.

EDER (2004) 218–221 based his proposal for a very high chronology inter alia on the Agum-kakrime inscription, which according to him provides the five royal **generations**<sup>951</sup> from Agum I to Agum II (= Agum-kakrime) with five kings. The remaining nine Kassite kings mentioned in **BKL A** and the **Synchronistic KL** are, according to him, brothers of the rulers mentioned in the Agum-kakrime inscription (“*System der Bruderfolge*”). However the reading of the ruler’s name usually referred to as Ušše (fn. 81) may cause a problem for Eder’s interpretation and the weight he puts on the Agum-kakrime inscription. Note that based on the inscription of Gandaš the first Kassite ruler Gandaš is synchronized with the last ruler of the Babylon I dynasty, Samsuditana: Eder, however, did not believe that there was any overlap between the two dynasties. → **Babylonia**

The authenticity of the Agum-kakrime inscription has been often questioned.<sup>952</sup> Due to the lack of evidence confirming it, and the general dearth of information about the circumstances surrounding the fall of Babylon and the rise of the Kassites,<sup>953</sup> the Agum-kakrime inscription has been often left out of chronological discussions. GASCHÉ *et al.*, *Dating ...* 89 state that this inscription presents too many uncertainties to be securely evaluated or to be “*fitted within a coherent scheme*”. According to RÖLLIG (1965) 145, the material known for the Early Kassite period is inconclusive and each statement is based on indecisive data that usually can not be confirmed by any other source. The 24 years of Marduk’s exile seems to be the only precise chronological information available: it implies that the consolidation of Kassite power in Babylonia must have taken place shortly after the fall of Babylon. For this reason Röllig dated Agum’s reign ca. 23 years after the Hittite raid.

The Marduk statue is later reported to have been taken as booty by Tukultī-Ninurta I from Babylon to Aššur (→ **Historical Epic** sub **13.3.**), where it remained for about a century (→ **Distanzangaben** and **Chronicle P**).

Royal inscriptions are considered being historically reliable in so far as they report on building activities (which can often be archaeologically cross-checked) and military exploits. Concerning the latter, it is important to check if the narration is in chronological order, which kind of recension was used, and which variant one can be considered the most reliable (GRAYSON [1980] 170–171). Moreover, the propagandistic purpose of such texts needs to be kept in mind. Still, the synchronisms cited are usually correct. Besides information on historical events, other chronologically valuable material can often be drawn from royal inscriptions (as is demonstrated in the chapter on Distanzangaben). The Assyrian royal inscriptions obviously contained a chronologically fairly accurate account of building activities. Unfortunately there is a gap of documentation for the period between Šamši-Adad I and the beginning of the reign of Aššur-nīrārī II, who ruled in the last third of the 15<sup>th</sup> cent. POMPONIO (1996) 162–165 demonstrated that the royal inscriptions with their genealogical information prove that the AKL’s depiction of a linear royal succession during this period is incorrect (Aššur-nīrārī II [no. 68] and Aššur-rē’im-nīšēšu [no. 70]). This probably was a time of internal and external political instability.

#### Links

AKL, Astronomical Data, BKL, Babylon I Dynasty, Chronicles, Distanzangaben, Early Kassite period, King Chronicle, Synchronistic History, Synchronistic KL, Year-names

<sup>951</sup> He reckons up to 30 years per generation, which is usually considered too long.

<sup>952</sup> LONGMAN (1991) 86.

<sup>953</sup> As shown by RICHARDSON (2002) or VAN KOPPEN, MDAR 19–23. GASCHÉ *et al.*, *Dating ...* 89 are right that “... the fall of Babylon [did] not mark the onset of disorder, but signal[ed] the end of a long slow breakdown ...”