

**44) Observations on the Name and Age of Sargon II and on Some Patterns of Assyrian Royal Onomastics\***  
 – In a review, published in *BiOr* 62 (2005), 82-86, of M. Dietrich's edition of the Babylonian correspondence of Sargon II and Sennacherib (SAA 17), J. R. Novotny presents some new ideas about the name and the date of birth of the Assyrian king Sargon II, who ruled from 722-705. According to Novotny, Sargon's name should be normalized as *Šarru-ukīn*, not as *Šarru-kēn(u)*, and should be regarded not as a throne name, as is frequently assumed, but as a birth name, with the meaning "The king (i.e., Tiglath-pileser) has established stability/justice." Novotny suggests that Sargon was born shortly after his father Tiglath-pileser III<sup>1</sup> had assumed power on Ayyaru 13, 745, and that he received his name in celebration of the new era of law and order that his father was determined to introduce. If Novotny is right, Sargon would have been only 23 years old when he ascended the throne, and 40 when he died.

It is true that the available evidence favors reading the king's name as *Šarru-ukīn* instead of *Šarru-kēn(u)*.<sup>2</sup> The normal spellings of the name, <sup>1</sup>lugal-gi.na and <sup>1</sup>lugal-gin,<sup>3</sup> are logographic and do not settle the question. But among the syllabic renderings, the spellings <sup>1</sup>20-ú-ki-in on an enamel knob from Aššur (*Afo* 9 [1933], 79), *lugal-ú-kin* in a (Sumerian) brick inscription from the same city (KAH 1, no. 38 :2) and a cylinder

inscription from Uruk (YOS 1, no. 38 :26), [lugal]-ú-kin in a Babylonian letter (SAA 17, no. 46 :1), and lugal-ú-kin in several Assyrian letters and other documents,<sup>4</sup> clearly outweigh the one, albeit significant, case of a spelling [lugal-ke]-e-nu, attested in a threshold inscription from Khorsabad (Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons aus Khorsabad*, 255 :1, var.). While Šarru-ukīn seems to be attested so far only as a name of Sargon II, the name Šarru-kēnu was also born by an Assyrian official from the reign of Assurbanipal.<sup>5</sup> The spelling 𐎶𐎵𐎶 found in a seal inscription from Khorsabad, and the Biblical spelling of Sargon's name, 𐤍𐤁𐤏𐤍, which is attested in Isa. 20 :1 and forms the basis for its modern conventional rendering, indicate that Sargon's name may have been pronounced *Sar(ru)gīn* in Assyria, following the rule that a voiceless stop in Assyrian may become voiced between vowels or immediately beside a voiced consonant like [r].<sup>6</sup>

It is indeed possible that Šarru-ukīn, as suggested by Novotny, means "The king has established stability,"<sup>7</sup> but it should be noted that the name is typologically rather unusual. Names ending in *ukīn* normally begin with a theophoric element (or the word "king"), which is followed by a direct object, such as in Šamaš-šumu-ukīn or Šarru-šumu-ukīn "Šamaš/The king has established an heir."<sup>8</sup> The lack of an object in Šarru-ukīn is problematic and leaves some doubt that this is the correct interpretation of the name.

Highly unlikely is Novotny's idea that Sargon was born in 745 and received his name in honor of the new era his father was about to inaugurate. We know that Sargon's son and successor Sennacherib, who ruled from 705 to 681, had a son of his own, Aššur-nadin-šumi, who became king of Babylon in 700.<sup>9</sup> Aššur-nadin-šumi was probably at least 20 years old when he was chosen to hold this challenging position; thus, he must have been born around 720 at the latest. The average age when Assyrian men married seems to have been relatively high; according to M. Roth,<sup>10</sup> they normally became husbands when they were between 26 and 32 years old. Although it is quite possible that members of the royal family married and had children significantly earlier since they did not have to wait for their fathers to die in order to, found their own household, they were probably not much younger than 20 when they did so. If we take into account that Sennacherib's name (which means "Šin has replaced the brothers") indicates that he had not been Sargon's first child—at least two older brothers of him must have died before his birth—it seems reasonable to assume that Sennacherib was born around 745. Sargon, correspondingly, must have come into the world not much later than around 765; he can hardly have been born in 745.<sup>11</sup>

Whether Šarru-ukīn is a birth name, a throne name, a profession-related name ("Beamtenname")<sup>12</sup> or something else remains a thorny issue. Semantically, a name meaning "The king has established stability" could certainly be a birth name or a "Beamtenname," the "king" invoked in the name being not its bearer but the ruler who was in office when the name was given. It should be noted that the very existence of Assyrian throne names has been questioned by several scholars. Edzard has recently written :

« Ebenso wenig wie bei den sum. Herrschern gibt es bei den akkadischen deutliche Hinweise darauf, daß mit der Thronbesteigung auch eine Neubenennung einhergegangen wäre. Die akk. Königsnamen sind wie die sum. allgemein gängige Namen. Eine Ausnahme bilden nur Königsnamen, die in eine höhere Sphäre entwichen waren und nicht mehr gebraucht wurden. Wenn ein König sich viele Jahrhunderte nach Sargon von Akkad dennoch wieder Šarru-kīn (I. und II. von Assyrien) oder *Narām-Šin* . . . nannte, so ist denkbar, daß dies nicht die ursprünglichen Namen der jeweiligen Herrscher waren. »<sup>13</sup>

But the matter is more complex. It seems, in fact, that the reign of Sargon is the turning point between two very different patterns of royal name giving. Of the twenty kings who preceded Sargon, starting with Eriba-Adad II (1056-1054) and ending with Shalmaneser V (727-722), nineteen had names that had already been carried by rulers from the Middle Assyrian period.<sup>14</sup> This indicates that their names were meant to be ostentatiously royal,<sup>15</sup> although they do not necessarily have to be "throne names"—the kings who bore them might have been given them at birth, in the understanding that they would one day become rulers; they might have received them at the moment when they were formally nominated to the office of crown prince sometime later in their lives; or they might indeed have adopted them when they eventually ascended the throne. Some of the names in question were very likely not birth names. Shalmaneser IV, Aššur-dan III, Aššur-nerari V, and Tiglath-pileser III, all bearing names of earlier kings, were all sons of Adad-nerari III,<sup>16</sup> and since it is unlikely that their father knew, when they were born, that each of them would follow him on the throne one day, it is probable that at least some of the four men received their ultimate names later in their lives. Tiglath-pileser's birth name may have been Pulu, a name attested for him in later Babylonian sources, the "Ptolemaic Canon," and the Bible, while his son and successor Shalmaneser V was probably called Ululayu at his birth.<sup>17</sup>

A very different pattern of royal onomastics is detectable in the names of the successors of Sargon II. Of the eight kings who followed him, only one, Assyria's unfortunate last ruler Aššur-uballiṣ II (612-609), bore the name of an earlier Assyrian king; all the others carried new royal names. This shift may reflect an awareness on the part of the Late Assyrian rulers that they had entered a new political age. Earlier Neo-Assyrian kings like Tukulti-Ninurta II or Adad-nerari II were engaged in an attempt to reconquer the territories ruled by the great Middle Assyrian kings; those rulers were their models, and they proudly bore their names. But when

Assyria became a true empire under the iron hand of Tiglath-pileser III, a state larger than any that had ever existed in Mesopotamia before, the greatness of this achievement required that the Assyrian kings adopted new names, names never used by any of their predecessors.

Whether they received these names at their birth or later in their life is clear in only one case. We know that Esarhaddon, who became crown prince in a surprise move of his father Sennacherib in 683, obtained the name Aššur-etel-ilani-mukin-apli on this occasion, although he decided to use his birth name instead of the solemn new one when he eventually became king.<sup>18</sup> Typologically, a name like Sennacherib seems to be a birth name, while a name like Assurbanipal, carried by a son who was not the firstborn, appears to have been adopted later.<sup>19</sup>

In spite of not being traditional royal names any more, the names of the Late Assyrian rulers were still special. They were only rarely born by commoners,<sup>20</sup> and a legal document, possibly from about 670, seems to imply that it was considered a grave crime in Assyria to give the name of Assurbanipal or Sennacherib to one's own child.<sup>21</sup> The fact that none of the names of the Sargonic kings was adopted again by a later monarch may be evidence for the strong desire of the Late Assyrian rulers to stress their individual qualities, a desire that appears also in their annals and their reliefs.<sup>22</sup>

The reign of Sargon II thus marks the transition between two very different patterns of royal onomastics. Whether Sargon himself received his name at his birth, when probably nobody could anticipate that he would be king one day, or at some later moment in his life, possibly on the occasion of his much contested accession to the throne,<sup>23</sup> can, however, still not be established with certainty. Sargon himself had his own way to account for this name: He claimed that it came from the gods. In his Cylinder Inscription from Khorsabad, written in 713, he boasts:

« In accordance with the name that the great gods have given me, to maintain righteousness (*kittu*, derived from \**kūn*) and justice (*mīšaru*), to give guidance to the weak, and to protect the feeble from mistreatment, I paid back to their owners ... the price of the fields of this town (i.e. Magganubba, the site of Sargon's new city, Dur-Šarrūkin). »<sup>24</sup>

And a little later in the text, Sargon uses his name to provide a famous early example of Mesopotamian gematria. He writes:

« I made the circumference (lit., measure) of its (the city's) wall 16,283 cubits, (corresponding to) my name (*nībīt šumīya*), and established the foundation platform upon the bedrock of the high mountain. »<sup>25</sup>

The riddle presented here, which is meant to provide an esoteric explanation why Sargon's new city bears the name *Dūr-Šarru-ukīn*, lit., "Wall of Sargon," remains essentially unsolved. So far, no consensus has been reached about how to correlate Sargon's name and the number of cubits mentioned in the text. Von Soden has suggested that the number represents the number of days Sargon had lived before the measurements of the city wall were finally fixed,<sup>26</sup> which would provide us with a date of about 758 for Sargon's birth and elegantly settle the issues raised by Novotny. But von Soden's hypothesis, like others that have been brought forward, is highly speculative and, in my view, rather unlikely.<sup>27</sup> Another sign system Sargon used to encrypt his name were the "Assyrian hieroglyphs" that have been discovered recently. Large images of a lion and a bird depicted on three glazed-brick panels in Sargon's palace in Khorsabad, which precede other images representing the title "king of Assyria," may be a pictographic writing of *Šarru-ukīn/kēn(u)*.<sup>28</sup>

Whether he adopted it when he became king or had received it earlier,<sup>29</sup> Sargon II was clearly convinced that his name reflected his royal role—and he most probably believed that it provided a link with his famous namesake—or almost namesake—Sargon of Akkad, the imperial king *par excellence*.<sup>30</sup> Sargon's name seems to have intrigued even his successor: if H. Tadmor is right, Sennacherib characterized himself as a "keeper of righteousness (*kittu*, derived from \**kūn*), lover of justice (*mīšaru*), one who does charity, who comes to the aid of the destitute, who turns to acts of kindness" because he wanted to stress that his ethical values were not only nominal, as in the case of his father, but real.<sup>31</sup>

\* I am indebted to Andreas Fuchs, Tübingen, for reading an earlier version of this note and making a number of valuable suggestions.

1. For evidence that Sargon was a son of Tiglath-pileser see F. Thomas, "Sargon II, der Sohn Tiglat-pileasers III.," in: M. Dietrich—O. Loretz (eds.), *Mesopotamica—Ugaritica—Biblica*, FS Bergerhof, AOAT 232 (1993), 465-470. W. G. Lambert, in: G. Frame (ed.), *From the Upper to the Lower Sea*, FS A. K. Grayson (Leiden 2004), 202 has recently suggested that Sargon was the offspring of a Babylonian slave, a claim made in a Late Babylonian copy of a royal letter, but as long as no corroborating evidence for such a scenario is found, his assumption must be regarded as unlikely.

2. Most scholars take it for granted that the name should be read as *Šarru-kēn(u)*; see, most recently, D. O. Edzard, "Name, Namengebung. B," § 5.1. "Thronnamen?," *RIA* 9, 109, and H. Tadmor, "Sennacherib, King of Justice," in: C. Cohen et al. (eds.), *Sefer Moshe: The Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume* (Winona Lake 2004), 386.

3. See Tallqvist, APN, 217f.; A. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad* (Göttingen 1994), 414f.; F. Thomas, *loc. cit.* (n. 1), 466.

4. For example in SAA 13, no. 134 :10'. For other attestations, see K. Tallqvist, APN, 218.
5. SAA 4, no. 305, r6. This name, understood as "The king is righteous," may be profession-related. The name of the Old Assyrian king Sargon I is spelled <sup>1</sup>lugal-ke-enki-in in later Assyrian king lists (A. K. Grayson, RIA 6, 105, §9, 116, I 6).
6. See A. R. Millard, "Assyrian Royal Names in Biblical Hebrew," JSS 21 (1976), 8; M. Luukko, SAAS 16 (2004), 69-71.
7. This has already been suggested by G. W. V. Chamaza, "Sargon II's Ascent to the Throne: The Political Situation," SAAB 6 (1992), 30, and by myself in *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften, AfO Beih.* 26 (1997), 2.
8. The name *Šarru-šumu-ukīn* is attested in SAA 14, no. 32, r5 (<sup>1</sup>20-mu-gin, post-canonical, the chariot driver of the crown prince) and in SAA 14, no. 155, r11 (<sup>1</sup>20-mu-gin-in, post-canonical, a witness). The editor reads in both cases *Šarru-šumu-ka*"in, but *Šarru-šumu-ukīn* is an equally probable normalization. A third attestation of the name (SAA 6, no. 297 :3) offers <sup>1</sup>lugal-mu-ki-in (a slave-owner, 671). The correct Assyrian form of the 3rd pers. sg. pret. D. of *kānu* would be *uka*"in, but Assyrian names regularly show certain Standard Babylonian features.
9. For Sennacherib's family background, see my entry on *Sīn-ahhē-erība* in H. Baker (ed.), PNA 3/1, 1113-15 (with references).
10. M. Roth, "Age at Marriage and the Household: A Study of Neo-Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian Forms," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29 (1987), 715-747, especially 737. See also K. Radner, SAAS 6 (1997), 157.
11. This chronology has already been established by S. Parpola, LASEA 2, 231, n. 390.
12. That Sargon II's name is a "Beamtenname" was suggested by W. Mayer, *Politik und Kriegskunst der Assyrer* (Münster 1995), 319. Mayer normalizes the name as *Šarru-kēn*.
13. Edzard, loc. cit. (n. 2). See also M.-J. Seux, "Königtum. B," § 30. "Nom de trône," RIA 6, 149f., who remarks "Toute cette question de noms de trône demande une nouvelle étude." Mayer, *Politik und Kriegskunst*, 318, states: "Es gibt ... keinen Anhaltspunkt dafür, daß assyrische Könige ... Thronnamen angenommen hätten."
14. The exception is Assurnasirpal I (1049-31), a king who claimed he was "born in the mountains" (*AfO* 25, 39 :22). Note that in contrast to the kings in power from 1056 to 722, only one of the eighteen Middle Assyrian kings who ruled from 1391 to 1056 had a name that had already been born by an earlier ruler: Aššur-nerari III (1202-1197). The more kings there have been, the more probable it becomes of course that their names appear again, but since the differences concern the name patterns of lengthy periods, this can hardly explain the shift.
15. Note also that only three of the names in question, those of *Eriša-Adad II*, *Aššur-reši-išši II*, and *Aššur-dan II/III*, were born by other people during the Neo-Assyrian period; see the respective entries in K. Radner (ed.), PNA 1.
16. They were possibly children of different royal wives. For arguments that Tiglath-pileser III, who came to the throne as a result of a coup d'état, was indeed a child of *Adad-nerari III*, in spite of an entry in the Assyrian King List that states he was the son of his predecessor *Aššur-nerari V*, see A. K. Grayson, *CAH III/2*, 73.
17. See J. Brinkman, *PHPKB*, 61f., 240, n. 1544; 243, n. 1560, for references and discussion. The *Ululayu* who sent five undated letters to Tiglath-pileser (H. W. F. Saggs, *CTN* 5, 182-84, 194, 195f., 200f., 204f., and K. Radner, *AfO* 50, 95-101) is almost certainly identical with the later king *Shalmaneser V*. The salutation he uses in the letters makes it probable that he was already crown prince when they were written, which raises some problems. Tiglath-pileser III seems to refer to his son (although this is not certain) as *Salmānu-ašarēd* in a badly damaged inscription written before 734 (H. Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III* [Jerusalem 1994], 152f. : 28), and it stands to reason that he had given him this name when he formally declared him crown prince. Perhaps we have to assume that *Shalmaneser* did in fact receive his new name on the occasion of his official designation as royal successor, but started to use it actively only after he had become king.
18. For references, see K. Radner, PNA 1/1, 184 sub *Aššur-etel-ilāni-mukīn-apli*.
19. Note, however, that E. Weissert, PNA 1/1, 161 has recently invalidated the conjecture that *Assurbanipal* was called *Sin-nadin-apli* at his birth.
20. The names *Aššur-aḫu-iddina*, *Aššur-etel-ilāni*, and *Aššur-uballiṭ* are attested for commoners in Neo-Assyrian texts, but not in texts from the time after the respective kings had ascended the throne; for references, see PNA 1/1 and H. D. Baker, "Approaches to Akkadian Name-Giving in First-Millennium BC Mesopotamia," in: C. Wunsch (ed.), *Mining the Archives*, FS C. Walker (Dresden 2002), 6f.
21. L. Kataja, "A Neo-Assyrian Document on Two Cases of River Ordeal," SAAB 1 (1987), 65-68.
22. For some remarks on individual relief styles during the Late Assyrian period, see J. M. Russell, "Bulls for the Palace and Order in the Empire," *The Art Bulletin* 69 (1987), 520-539.
23. It is commonly assumed that Sargon became king in a somewhat irregular fashion. This has however been questioned by G. W. V. Chamaza, SAAB 6 (1992), 21-33, who regards the story of Sargon's illegitimate status as a modern historiographic myth. Chamaza is right that the matter is not completely clear, but there is strong circumstantial evidence that Sargon's accession was indeed not smooth, and there is no doubt that he regarded his predecessor *Shalmaneser V* as a man unfit to be Assyria's ruler; see my *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 1f., for discussion. No texts are available so far that elucidate the role Sargon played under Tiglath-pileser III and *Shalmaneser V*. He may have belonged to a junior branch of the royal house.
24. *kīma zikīr šumīya ša ana našār kitti u māšari šutēšur lā lē'f lā ḫabāl enši imbū'inni ilāni rabūti kasap eqlēt āli sāšu ... ana bēlūšunu utārma* (Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad*, 39f. :50f. ; 293). Sargon uses the same language in the royal decree SAA 12, no. 19 :5'f., which deals with *Magganubba* as well: [*šar*]ru kīnu [x x x] ša ana lā ḫabāl enše šūšur lā lē'f [i] *Ninmena[ina]* (x x x) u[šāteru bēlūssu "The just king [...] whose lordship the goddess *Ninmena[ina]* ("Lady of the Crown of Heaven") has magnified, to protect the feeble from mistreatment and to give guidance to the weak"; *šarru kīnu* is an epithet here, but clearly one that refers to Sargon's name. See also Sargon's self-predication as *šarru* [*k*]ayyān[u] in the "Aššur Charter" (*Iraq* 37, 14 :34, reading uncertain), and as *šarru kīnu* in his letter to Aššur (TCL 3, 20 :114). In Sargon's annals from Nineveh, the title *rubū kēnu* follows immediately after the royal name, written <sup>1</sup>lugal-gi-na (Fuchs, SAAS 8, 46 :33). Fuchs believes that reading the name *Šarru-kēnu* in this case provides a better wordplay, but it should be noted that *Assurbanipal* makes a pun based on the similarity between the verbal form *ukīn* and the adjective *kēnu* when he calls his faithless brother *Šamaš-šumu-ukīn aḫu lā kēnu* in several of his inscriptions (e. g., R. Borger, *BIWA* 109, B vū 7f.).

25. šár šár šár šár gēs+u gēs+u gēs+u 1 UŠ 3 qa-ni 2 ammati(kūš) nibit šumīya mišīḫti dūrīšu aškunma eli aban šadē zaqri ušaršida temmēnšu (Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad*, 42 :65 ; 294f.).

26. W. v. Soden, *Aus Sprache, Geschichte und Religion Babyloniers*, ed. L. Cagni and H. P. Müller (Naples 1989), 334f., n. 33.

27. For literature on Sargon's "Zahlenrätsel," see L. Pearce, "The Number-Syllabary Texts," JAOS 116 (1996), 462, and Fuchs, *op. cit.* (n. 25), 294, n. 88. My attempts to solve the riddle by employing the numerical values associated with cuneiform signs in the number-syllabaries published by Pearce have been unsuccessful. Fuchs has observed that the writing of the number 16,283 is unusually complicated, and that Sargon's bull inscriptions contain the passage about the circumference of the city as well, but without the reference to Sargon's name, and with "1 1/2 ninda" instead of the numerically equivalent "3 qa-ni." This leads me to think that the solution of the riddle may be simply to associate the first šár in the numerical notation with Šarru- and the word qanī with the (phonetically similar) -ukīn/kēn(u) of Sargon's name—although this would be a disappointingly unsophisticated explanation.

28. See I. L. Finkel—J. E. Reade, "Assyrian hieroglyphs," ZA 86 (1996), 244-268 ; J. A. Scurlock, "Assyrian Hieroglyphs Enhanced," NABU 1997/92 ; M. Roaf—A. Zgoll, "Assyrian Astroglyphs," ZA 91 (2001) 264-295. Leaving the two figures of the king and the crown prince(?), which frame the central sequence of symbols, out of consideration, I would be inclined to read Sargon's "hieroglyphs" in ZA 86, 266, Abb. 1 as follows : Šarru(a lion as a symbol of the king)-ukīn(a bird whose outlines resemble the sign GI) šar(a bull as a symbol of the king) māti(a fig tree, whose relationship to the word "land" is not completely clear to me) Aššur(a seeder-plough looking similar to the sign groups an-šár and aš-šur). The two glazed-brick panels that omit both the bird and the bull may represent šar māti Aššur. Note that these readings are conjectural and differ in part from those suggested so far.

29. Sargon's almost obsessive interest in his own name might point to a scenario where he actually adopted it himself, but this remains uncertain. Fuchs suggests (oral communication) that Sargon's original name was Šarru-ukīn, and that he reinterpreted it as Šarru-kēn(u) when he became king. He points out to me that spellings that render the name as Šarru-ukīn are attested only in less important royal inscriptions and in letters and documents.

30. Sargon II never mentions the great Akkad king explicitly, but it should be noted that he was sometimes called Šarru-ukīn/kēn(u) arka "the later Sargon" (Hunger, BAK, no. 294, 297, 313), of which the name he bears in the Ptolemaic canon, Ἀρκακιός (RIA 6, 101), may be a late reflection. It is likely that the earlier Sargon he is implicitly related to here is Sargon of Akkad, and not the less significant Sargon I of Assyria. In literary texts from the Late Assyrian period, the name of Sargon of Akkad is written lugal-gin or lugal-gi.na, like Sargon II's name (see Tallqvist, APN, 217) ; whether it was still pronounced Šarru-kīn, as in the 3rd and 2nd millennia (see the spellings of the name in J. G. Westenholz, *Legends of the Kings of Akkade* [Winona Lake 1997], 34, 68, 76, 82, 144, 150), is unclear. The idea that Sargon II emulated Sargon of Akkad is an assumption that underlies attempts to date such famous text as the "Sargon Geography" and the "Sargon Legend" to the reign of Sargon II, and to explain Sargon II's political ideology in general ; see B. Lewis, *The Sargon Legend* (Cambridge, MA 1980), 97-107, W. Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (Winona Lake 1998), 92f., and M. van de Mieroop, "Literary and Political Discourse in Ancient Mesopotamia : Sargon II of Assyria and Sargon of Agade," in : B. Böck et al., *Munuscula Mesopotamica*, FS J. Renger, AOAT 267 (1999), 327-339.

31. Tadmor, *loc. cit.* (n. 2), 385-390.

Eckart FRAHM (15-07-2005)