ON STANDARDISATION AND VARIATION IN THE INTRODUCTORY FORMULAE OF NEO-ASSYRIAN LETTERS

By MIKKO LUUKKO

The introductory formulae of Neo-Assyrian letters sent to the king or a superior official during the eighth century B.C. attest to a highly standardised form of letter writing (especially in the address), proving scribal sensitivity to an established letter writing etiquette. The introductory formula reflects the office of the sender; exactly the same formula (including the greeting) may be used by successive officeholders. Yet these formulae are by no means entirely uniform. In particular, the presence or absence of a blessing may tell us about the sender’s relationship with the Assyrian king.

1. Introduction

After a period of relative weakness, Assyria’s fortunes rose with the rule of Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 B.C.). His expansionist policy marked a turning point for the Assyrian empire; this was the beginning of a new era, with brighter prospects for the ever-growing ranks of ambitious administrators in the Assyrian capital and in the recently conquered provinces alike. As the vast geographical expansion posed new challenges for the administration, including written correspondence, the best response was to develop standards. At this time a degree of standardisation of administrative methods is evident, something that is also reflected in the introductory formulae of letters. Although the introductory formulae may appear insignificant, they are in fact meaningful and touch upon many different issues that are not limited to their linguistic characteristics. They display patterns that reflect, for example, the social hierarchy and cultic practices of the Assyrian empire.

One of the pioneering studies of Assyro-Babylonian introductory formulae is that of Erkki Salonen (1967), in which the author treated all the first millennium evidence together, without distinguishing between different sub-corpora (Neo-Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian, Late Babylonian). As we shall see, such a distinction is necessary, since these sub-corpora display different patterns. Salonen recorded a large number of variants that derived in the main from priestly and scholarly letters of the seventh century B.C. Since that time, with the flow of new tablets being published and many older tablets being reinterpreted and better understood, together with the arrival of more developed theories and especially the systematic use of computers, it has been possible to produce more nuanced studies such as those by Cancik-Kirschbaum on Middle Assyrian (1996), Sallaberger on Old Babylonian (1999) and Mynářová on Amarna-Akkadian (2007).

The whole picture regarding eighth and seventh century introductory formulae is too complicated to permit exhaustive examination here. This study therefore concentrates mainly on the evidence from the eighth century, the earliest Neo-Assyrian letters available. It also focuses on letters sent by subordinates to superiors; in practice, most of the extant Neo-Assyrian letters from the period automatically fall into this category, as the king of Assyria is the most frequent addressee. It should be emphasised at the outset that most subordinates who corresponded with the Assyrian king were

1 This is a revised version of a paper presented at the 57th RAI in Rome on the 8th July 2011. It is based on research carried out as part of the project “Mechanisms of Communication in an Ancient Empire”, led by Professor Karen Radner (University College London) and funded by the British Arts and Humanities Research Council. I should like to thank Greta Van Buylaere, Martin Worthington and Silvie Zamazalová for reading and commenting on a draft of this paper.

2 An introductory formula is to be defined as the opening of a letter that consists usually of an address (by which is meant not a street address, but rather an invocation with a profession or title, such as “king”, or a personal name) plus greeting/salutation—especially when writing to a superior—after which a blessing (or blessings) may follow.


4 The majority of these letters have been published in SAA 10 and SAA 13.

5 For the Neo-Assyrian period, the following studies should also be mentioned: Parpola (1971: 28–45) and (1983: 437–46) and Reynolds (2003: xvi–xxi).

6 This paper nevertheless offers some hypotheses to better understand the wider picture.
no lesser figures than provincial governors, who themselves controlled vast areas and were thus local potentates and dignitaries of the Assyrian empire.

It is a well-known and oft stressed fact that the extant Neo-Assyrian letters from the eighth and seventh centuries follow different patterns in their introductory formulae. This is because of the different geographical and social circumstances as well as, presumably, the different educational backgrounds of the senders. For while the majority of the Assyrian eighth century letters were sent from the provinces to the capital, the extant seventh century letters were often written in the capital, even in the same palace complex where the king himself resided. This dichotomy is exaggerated by the fact that we know very little about the eighth century scribes. At any rate, their letters were less elaborate than those dispatched from the scholars of the capital, who were versed in many genres. Compared to the eighth century scribes, these learned writers of the seventh century letters augmented the basic introductory formulae extensively; in seeking royal favour they competed fiercely with one another and wrote long blessings in the hope that the writer would acquire or continue his employment at the royal court at Nineveh: the stakes were high at the time. Here is a fine example of an introductory formula from a seventh century letter:

\[\text{To the king, my lord: your servant Aššur-dur-paniya. Good health to the king my lord! A thousand (times) good health to the king, my lord. May Aššur, Sîn, Šamaš, Bel, and [Nabû] bless the king, my lord!} \]

\[\text{SAA 13 80: 1–10}\]

Here, in comparison, is a typical example of an introductory formula from an eighth century letter:

\[\text{To the king, my lord: your servant Aššur-dur-paniya. Good health to the king my lord!} \]

\[\text{SAA 5 52: 1–3}\]

On the other hand, it should be pointed out that the differences described are only partly substantive, since some atypical eighth century letters are preserved. Consider, for example, the introductory formula of the following letter from a certain Hunnî, which is unusually florid for the period:

\[\text{To the very best of health to the king, my lord! May Aššur, Šamaš, Bel, Nabû, Sin and Nergal bless the king, my lord!} \]

\[\text{SAA 1 133: 1–13}\]

7 Their education and origin are not treated in the available sources. In the late eighth century, it must occasionally have been challenging for the central government to find competent scribes for outlying provinces. Therefore, I would not rule out the possibility that some of these scribes, especially those serving in the northern, eastern and western fringes of the Assyrian empire, may have been young apprentices or of Babylonian (writing in Assyrian) or local, non-Assyrian, origin; for example, this concerns the scribes of vassal kings such as Hu-Tešub of Šubria (cf. section 5, below). The following letters or passages provide some information about the eighth century scribes and the problems of employing them: SAA 1 171 s. 1–3, 204; SAA 5 250 r. 24 f.; SAA 15 17.

\[\text{8 Note that in this article the slash signifies the end of a line and not, for example, the beginning of a phrase or clause in quoted Akkadian.}\]

8 All the translations follow those of the SAA editions unless otherwise stated.

9 Alternatively, restore perhaps ammnu ša or simply ša.
2. Eighth century forms of address

The standard Neo-Assyrian address for a letter sent to the King of Assyria, or to any other superior at the palace, reads: *ana šarri (or another superior) bēlīya urdaka PN* “To the king/(vizier/palace herald/chief eunuch/palace scribe...), my lord, your servant PN.”

Generally speaking, every Neo-Assyrian letter sent to the king of Assyria contains this basic formula. All the elements in the Neo-Assyrian address to the king form a hierarchical pyramid, from top to bottom:

King  
My lord  
Your servant  
Sender’s personal name

The equivalent address from the Middle Assyrian period differs from this in the use of the word *tuppi* and the later position of “your servant”: *ana PN₁ (recipient) bēlīya tuppi PN₂ (sender) urdaka “To PN₁, my lord, a tablet of PN₂, your servant*.” It is clear that there was a strictly-obeyed hierarchical order in Assyria. This Middle Assyrian formula, employed in the latter part of the second millennium, is infrequently attested because thus far the extant letter corpus remains relatively small, although it contains a good mixture of letters sent to subordinates, equals and superiors. Following the address may come a devotion formula and a greeting, but not a blessing.

The standard form of a contemporary Neo-Babylonian address to the king, meanwhile, is very different: *aradka PN ana dinān šarri bēlīya lullik* “Your servant PN: I would gladly go as the king, my lord’s substitute!” (i.e., “I would be prepared to die for the king, my lord”). The typical address to a subordinate or an equal ran as follows: *tuppi PN₁ (sender) ana PN₂ (recipient) “A tablet of PN₁ to PN₂”*. There is thus a marked difference in the order in which the active parties to written communication are presented in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian. Interestingly, however, in letters sent to a subordinate or an equal, the Neo-Assyrian formula employs the same order as Neo-Babylonian: *tuppi PN₁, ana tupšar ēkalli “A tablet of PN₁, to the palace scribe” SAA 19 56*.

Another Neo-Assyrian address to a superior was also in use at the same time: *ana PN₁ (recipient) tuppi PN₂ (sender) “To PN₁, a tablet of PN₂”* (e.g. SAA 1 215, 220). It should be stressed that this is rarely used and still differs from the order of words in a typical Neo-Babylonian address. In addition, this address is not always sufficient indication that the letter was sent to a superior, and thus may be supplemented by a term denoting his rank: *bēlīsābēlīya “His/my lord”. Alternatively, a greeting (including the term of rank) may be added to confirm the relationship between sender and recipient: *lā šulmu ana bēlīya “Good health to my lord!”*. When the word for king is added to this model, have the standard greeting of Neo-Assyrian letters sent to the King of Assyria: *lā šulmu ana šarri bēlīya “Good health to the king, my lord!”* As only a limited number of letters without a greeting is addressed to a subordinate or an equal, the Neo-Assyrian formula employs the same order as Neo-Babylonian: *tuppi PN₁, ana tupšar ēkalli “A tablet of PN₁, to the palace scribe” SAA 19 56*.

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“extremely” is often added to the greeting. Contrary to the other elements in the Neo-Assyrian introductory formulae, the place of adanniš is rather free; this is not the case with, e.g., lù subnu “Let there be health” that regularly takes the initial position in Neo-Assyrian, but occurs in the final position in both Middle Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian letters.

3. Similarity and variation in the letters of successive office-holders

The introductory formulae reflect the office of the sender; exactly the same formula may be used by successive officeholders.19 On the other hand, the introductory formulae are by no means entirely uniform, even those by the same sender. One of many possible examples of the same formula being used by successive officeholders is provided here from two governors of Arrapha20, Aššuš-šallimanni (governor during the reign of Tīglat-pîleser III) and Issar-dušuri (governor during the reign of Sargon II):

a-na LUGAL be-li-ia / ARAD-ka mšt-šar-di-a-ni / lu-u di-mu a-na LUGAL be-li-ia

To the king, my lord: your servant Aššuš-šallimanni. Good health to the king, my lord!

SAA 19 83: 1–3

[a-na] LUGAL be-li-[ia] / ARAD-ka =15-BAD / lu-u di-mu a-na LUGAL EN-iā

[To] the king, [my] lord: your servant Issar-dušuri. Good health to the king, my lord!

SAA 15 8: 1–3

The words of Aššuš-šallimanni are clearly echoed by those of Issar-dušuri, but this comparison is too simplistic. Both the address and the greeting in their letters are generic, used by most governors, notwithstanding the location of their posts. Therefore, it makes better sense to turn to more complex examples, such as that of Nabû-bel-ska’’in and Mannu-ki-Nınua, successive governors of Karšarruken (Harhar):


To the king, my lord: your servant Nabû-bel-ska’’in. Good health to the king, my lord! The land [of] the king my lord is well. The Medes around us are peaceful.

SAA 15 85: 1–5


To the king, my lord: your servant Mannu-ki-Nınua. Good health to the king, my lord! The land of the king my lord is well. The Medes around us are peaceful, and we are doing our work.

SAA 15 100: 1–7

Here, however, the almost perfect match between the introductory formulae of the successive officeholders can be explained by employment of the same scribe;22 this explains more generally the use of identical wording or a close orthographic match between formulae.23 The influence of the scribe is also evident in variation between letters of a given official. The Nimrud Letters (SAA 19 and CTN 5) contain many cases in which a high official has clearly employed more than one scribe, each of whom has used a slightly different formula. Consider, for example, the letters of “Qurdi-Aššu-lamur”.

19 See also the letter(s) of Aššuš-nirka-da’’in in section 7.
20 Our sources are usually not explicit on the issue of succession in high provincial posts. There may have been another governor of Arrapha between Aššuš-šallimanni (eponym of the year 735) and Issar-dušuri (eponym of the year 714). However, this is not significant for the present comparison. For Aššuš-šallimanni’s letters, see SAA 19 80–88. For Issar-dušuri’s letters, see SAA 14 15–115.
22 See note 23 below.
23 According to Parpola 1981: 128 n. 12 the same scribe was employed by the following successive officeholders: Alūpaš and Ša-Aššu-dubba (see note 31); Adda-hatī (SAA 1 175–76) and Bel-ǔqbi (SAA 1 177–82: his name is only preserved in no. 177); Šamaš-bel-ušur (SAA 15 111–28) and Nabû-duru-ušur (SAA 15 129–35: his name is fully preserved only in no. 131); Mannu-ki-Nınua and Nabû-bel-ska’’in (see note 21, above).
versus those of “Qurdi-Aššur”. It is generally assumed that we are dealing with a single high official whose two scribes use different formulae; the one employs the standard greeting Ṽu šulmu ana šarri bēlīya, while the other (unusually) omits it:

\[ a-na \ LUGAL \ be-li-ia / ARAD-ka \ ”qur-di-âš-sur / lu di-mu a-na \ LUGAL \ be-li-ia \]

To the king, my lord: your servant Qurdi-Aššur. Good health to the king, my lord!

\[ SAA \ 19 \ 29: \ 1–3 \]

\[ a-na \ LUGAL \ EN-en-a / ARAD-ka \ ”qur-di-âš-sur–IGI / TA* UGU \ uru-ŠUR–a-a \ ša \ LUGAL \ iq-hu-u-ni / ma-a : \ DUG, \]

To the king, my lord: your servant Qurdi-Aššur-lamur. Concerning the Tyrean (king) about whom the king said: ‘Speak kindly with him!’

\[ SAA \ 19 \ 22: \ 1–4 \]

The variation between the introductory formulae of the crown princes’ letters in the late eighth and early seventh centuries is a highly interesting feature that may suggest subtle or even drastic changes in their position.\(^ {24} \) We can compare the formula of Ululayu (the future King Shalmaneser V) to that of Sennacherib. Ululayu’s introductory formula is exactly the same as Sennacherib’s, except that the latter consistently uses “good health” instead of “the best of health”.\(^ {25} \) Sennacherib’s letters employ adanniš only in the phrase libbu ša šarri bēlīya, adanniš li ūabilidad “The king, my lord, can be glad indeed”.

\[ a-na \ LUGAL \ be-li-ia / ARAD-ka \ ”TITI.\( \text{KIN}–a-a / \text{lu} \ di-mu a-na \ LUGAL \ be-\( \text{I} \)-iā / a–danniš di-mu a-na \ KUR–\( \text{aš-sur} \) / di-mu a-na \ E.KUR.MEŠ / di-mu a-na \ HAL.ŠU.MEŠ ša LUGAL \ gab-bu / ŠA–bu ša \ LUGAL \ be-li-ia a–danniš li DUG,GA \]

To the king, my lord: your servant Ululayu. The best of health to the king, my lord! Assyria is well, the temples are well, all the king’s forts are well. The king, my lord, can be glad indeed!

\[ SAA \ 19 \ 9: \ 1–7 \]

\[ a-na \ LUGAL \ be-li-ia / ARAD-ka \ ”SAA\( \text{MEŠ}–SI / \text{lu} \ šul-mu a-na \ LUGAL \ be-li-ia / šul-mu a-na \ KUR–aš-sur. \] \( \text{KI} / \text{šul-mu a-na} \ E.KUR.MEŠ / \text{šul-mu a-na} \ URU.BI-RAT ša LUGAL \ gab-bu / ŠA–bu ša \ LUGAL \ EN-en-a a–danniš li DUG,GA \]

To the king, my lord: your servant Sin-ahhe-rība. Good health to the king, my lord! Assyria is well, the temples are well, all the king’s forts are well. The king, my lord, can be glad indeed!

\[ SAA \ 1 \ 31: \ 1–7 \]

It should be stressed that there must be truth in what is said by the sender, since, for example, only the crown prince of Assyria can proclaim that “all the king’s forts are well”, implicitly referring to all the forts of the empire.

In contrast, around 670 B.C. both Assurbanipal and Šamaš-šumu-ukin employed a formula typical of governors of the late eighth century (but for the blessings, see section 7, below):\(^ {26} \)

\[ a-na \ LUGAL \ be-li-ia / ARAD-ka \ ”aš-sur–DU–A / lu di a-na \ LUGAL \ be-li-ia / aš-sur 4EN 4PA a-na MAN \ EN-ia / li-kri-bu \]

To the king, my lord: your servant Assurbanipal. Good health to the king, my lord! May Aššur, Bel and Nabû bless the king, my lord!\(^ {27} \)

\[ SAA \ 16 \ 17: \ 1–5 \]

\(^ {24} \) For Ululayu see S.AA 19 8–11; for Sennacherib see S.AA 1 29, 31–38; S.AA 5 281; S.AA 19 158.\(^ {25} \) For a comparison of Ululayu’s and Sennacherib’s introductory formulae, see the critical apparatus of S.AA 19 158.\(^ {26} \) The same formula is also employed in the letters from prince Šamaš-metu-uballi (S.AA 16 25–27), a brother of Assurbanipal and Šamaš-šumu-ukin, with the exception that he or his scribe has added adanniš adanniš to the formula immediately before likrubu, “…bless …, very greatly” (nos. 26–27).\(^ {27} \) Assurbanipal also often used this ideologically loaded sequence of Aššur, Bel and Nabû in his royal inscriptions; the gods rarely occur in this order in the eighth century sources, but see S.AA 1 134: 8 (probably by Hunni); S.AA 5 146 r.6 (by Urzanâ of Musaṣur); S.AA 17 2: 11; 3: 13, r. 8, 12 (four times by Sargon II); 68 r.19 (by Ana-Nabû-taklak).
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To the king, my lord: your servant Šamaš-šumu-ukin. Good health to the king, my lord! May Nabû (and) Marduk bless the king, my lord!

Moreover, the above examples show that both Ululayu and Sennacherib use the same extended account of prevailing circumstances in the greeting section, but write no blessing to the king, as do both Assurbanipal and Šamaš-šumu-ukin.  

4. Circumstantial factors and exceptional cases

Circumstantial factors may sometimes play a role in Neo-Assyrian introductory formulae. In the case of at least one official, Duri-Aššur (governor of Tušhan and eponym of the year 728), the chronological narrative of his achievements in the province may be exposed by comparing the introductory formulae in his letters:

To the king, my lord: your servant Duri-Aššur. As to the work about which the king, my lord, wrote to me, the (protective) wall is finished.

SAA 19 60: 1–4

To the king, my lord: your servant Duri-Aššur. The very best of health to the king, my lord!

SAA 19 62: 1–5

To the king, my lord: your servant Duri-Aššur. The best of health to the king, my lord! The forts and the land of the king, my lord, are well. The king, my lord, can be glad indeed!

SAA 19 63: 1–8

Duri-Aššur’s first and most detailed letter (SAA 19 60) is without a greeting and concerns the building of a fort; 29 he cannot use his later standard phrase, “The forts and the land of the king, my lord, are well” as he is obviously building his main stronghold at the time. In his second letter (SAA 19 62), Duri-Aššur greets the king and adds to his third (SAA 19 61) and fourth (SAA 19 63) letters the clauses about “the king’s forts” and that the king “can be glad”. Moreover, in Duri-Aššur’s fourth letter his introductory formula is more complete than in his third letter as it also contains the phrase about “the land of the king” and the standard greeting (and the final clause) in its amplified form: “The best of health to the king, my lord!” Alternatively, we may interpret these letters from Duri-Aššur as the result of his scribe using a variable introductory formula; 30 even a single scribe

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Note also Aššur-šallimanni’s circumstantial remark, DI-mu a-na ma-d[a]-k[t]e ša LUGAL “The [king’s] camp is well” as part of his greeting in SAA 19 86: 2 to the king when campaigning in Babylonia.

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may not always employ exactly the same formula. Such cases are, however, exceptional. An illustration of the general regularity of formulae may be seen in the shared introductory formulae of letters from Ašipā and Sa-Âšur-dubbū, two of Duri-Âššur’s successors as provincial governor of Tušhan (written by the same scribe).\footnote{The restoration \([\text{S}a \text{ ša lugal} \ \text{en-ia lu dug}].\text{ga}, \ “\text{The king my lord can be} \text{glad}”, \ with many parallels, makes good sense in \text{SAA 5 35: 6. However, because of the following broken context, and especially as this is not attested in Sa-Âšur-dubbū’s other letters, this restoration is uncertain. Note also the shorter introductory formula that does not mention the “forts and the land of the king” in \text{SAA 5 38: 1–3. For Ašipā’s letters, see \text{SAA 5 21–30}, and for the letters from Sa-Âšur-dubbū, eponym of the year 707, see \text{SAA 5 31–39. See also note 23 above.}\text{.}}}{31} a-na lugal en-îa / arad-ka \text{md}30– \text{mr} / \text{mu} du-mu a-na lugal / \text{en-ia a-dan-niš} / \text{mu} mu a-na urub-bi / a-na na kur \text{lu} lugal en-îa

To the king, my lord: your servant Ašipā/Ša-Âšur-dubbū. The best of health to the king, my lord! The forts and the land of the king, my lord, are well.

\text{SAA 5 28/32: 1–6}

5. The spread and status of the standard introductory formula

Three extraordinary cases may illustrate that the Neo-Assyrian introductory formula was deeply ingrained in the minds of scribes and high officials who formed a substantial part of the Assyrian elite. The first example is a letter authored personally by a high-ranking official who is requesting a scribe:\footnote{This letter is edited and commented on in detail in Parpola 1997.}{32} a-na lugal be-\text{\texttt{ TP[3]}} / arad-ka \text{mr}30– \text{mr} / \text{mu} du-mu a-na lugal / \text{be-\text{\texttt{ TP[3]}}} / a-na be-et / lugal is-pu-ra-\text{\texttt{ TP[3]}} / lu* aš-šur-\text{\texttt{ TP[3]}} / SAA 5 38: 1–6

To the king, my lord: your servant Ašipâ/Ša-Âšur-dubbū. The best of health to the king, my lord! Your servant Ašipâ/Ša-Âšur-dubbū. The best of health to the king, my lord! The forts and the land of the king, my lord, are well.

\text{SAA 5 28/32: 1–6}

Despite the outright mistakes and somewhat unusual orthographic conventions in the letter, this simple piece of writing is remarkable since it attests to a certain level of literacy, including the knowledge of the standard address and greeting of Neo-Assyrian letters, among the high officials who were not scribes.

The second example comes from the Šubrian ruler Hu-Tešub,\footnote{Almost certainly Issar-duri (cf. above). On his governorship of Arrapha, see Fachs and Parpola (2001: xxxviii–xxxix, xliii). The letter is to be dated to 710, see ibid. p. xliii.}{34} a vassal king of Assyria: a-na lugal en-îa a-dan-niš a-dan-niš / lu-u du-mu arad-ka \text{hu-\text{\texttt{ TP[3]}}} “The very best of health to the king, my lord! Your servant Hu-Tešub” \text{SAA 5 45: 1–2}.\footnote{Almost certainly Issar-duri (cf. above). On his governorship of Arrapha, see Fachs and Parpola (2001: xxxviii–xxxix, xliii). The letter is to be dated to 710, see ibid. p. xliii.}{34} Hu-Tešub’s scribe may even be considered innovative as there are no parallels for beginning a letter with the word order in which \text{hu-\text{\texttt{ TP[3]}} aš-šur–du-bu} is immediately followed by \text{u-\text{\texttt{ TP[3]}}}. On the other hand, this use may be characterised rather as an idiosyncracy. His “vassal” letters (\text{SAA 5 44–45}, \text{SAA 19 184}), although fragmentary, seem to show that the scribe had quite a good command of Assyrian. Hence this idiosyncrasy may be deemed a permissible variant, suggesting the flexibility of letter writing conventions. Apart from this marked word order in the greeting, it is worth stressing that the scribe is not floundering in the introductory formulae or making any grave errors in the extant parts of these letters.

The third example is quite extraordinary, as we have a letter whose introductory formula is in Neo-Assyrian, but which is otherwise written in an unknown language, considered Urartian by Postgate.\footnote{For Hu-Tešub’s letters, see \text{SAA 5 44–45}; cf. also \text{SAA 5 31 and 52} (by Aššur-dur-pašiya), possibly also \text{SAA 19 76–77, 186–87} concern him. He may have employed a native scribe, educated in Assyria. In \text{SAA 19 184}, the introductory formula is otherwise exactly the same as in his other two letters, but here the scribe has omitted \text{adan-niš adan-niš} between \text{be-lí-ia} and \text{lu-\text{\texttt{ TP[3]}}}.

\text{SAA 5 44: 1–2.}\footnote{No. 1, Rylands Box 22 P28: 1–4. For a discussion of the letter, see Postgate (1973b: 35–36).}{35} The letter opens with: \text{\texttt{ TP[3]}} kú-nu-a-me / nana aš-šur–a–aš / di a–a–ši / di a–na en-i “A tablet from \text{Kamamu} to Aššur-aplu-iddina; I am well, <may> my lord be well(!)”. After this the letter becomes incomprehensible to those who are not familiar with the language in question. The fact that

\text{SAA 15 17}

\text{SAA 15 17}
the letter uses the Neo-Assyrian introductory formula, or at least tries to imitate it, suggests the status Neo-Assyrian enjoyed at the time of the Assyrian supremacy in the Near East.  

These three examples together show that foreign rulers and officials, including some Assyrian officers who were not professional scribes or did not have them at their disposal, could still take part in high-level correspondence. Despite errors in their writing, they were able to make themselves understood, and their letters show how widespread awareness of etiquette was.

6. Some trends and diagnostic features

Statistically, it is easy to show how important greetings were considered in Neo-Assyrian letters of the eighth century. Out of the 621 available introductory formulae in Neo-Assyrian letters from subordinates to superiors, only 48 letters from 32 senders lack one (for details, see Table I of the Appendix, below); that figure represents a mere 7.7 per cent of the corpus. Interestingly, many of these letters without a greeting were sent from the west and the east or north-east of the empire. The lack of a greeting may be explained either as ignorance of the importance of this feature on the part of some scribes or, perhaps more likely, as the decision of senders or their scribes to omit it intentionally for one reason or another. In fact, several Nimrud Letters separate the address (not followed by a greeting) by the use of a horizontal ruling, after which the body of the letter usually begins. It is also worth pointing out that if a letter lacked a greeting, a blessing was only rarely added to it.

The Assyrian type of greeting was not a typical feature in Neo-Babylonian letters. However, the Assyrian type of address and/or greeting does appear in at least 58 Neo-Babylonian letters by 23 senders (presented in Table II of the Appendix, below). This represents a relatively high figure of 32.6 per cent of the 178 available introductory formulae from Neo-Babylonian letters to the king of Assyria, his high-ranking officials and the governors of Nippur. At least two explanations may be given for this: some of these letters seem to reflect the interaction between an Assyrian official and his Babylonian scribe, whereas others originate with Babylonians whose high position may have depended on the Assyrian king.

7. Blessings and inferences to be drawn from them

Blessings are relatively rare in Neo-Assyrian letters of the eighth century. This is because so many were sent by governors and other high-ranking officials. With only a few prominent exceptions from major Assyrian cult centres, governors did not send a blessing; for example, there is not a single letter with a blessing in SAA 15, in which are edited the letters sent to Sargon II from Babylonia and the eastern provinces of the Assyrian empire. No blessings to the king are invoked in the letters of the treasurer, Tab-sar-Aššur (SAA 1 41–74, cf. SAA 5 282–90); the chief cupbearer, Na’di-ilu (SAA 5 62–73) or Gabbu-ana-Aššur (SAA 5 113–25), presumably the palace herald. However, since the seven highest-ranking officials of the Assyrian empire (after the king and crown prince) also belong to the group of palace officials close to the king, they may make exceptions. In contrast, the seventh century corpus (SAA 10, 13, 16, 18), containing numerous letters from scholars and priests, is replete with blessings. We can infer from the evidence that those who themselves wielded great personal power, including provincial governors and magnates, usually did not write blessings, whereas palace officials, scholars, relatives of the king and others who were physically close to the king or to those actively seeking his favour employed them profusely.

Two standard blessings are known, invoking the national gods of Babylonia and Assyria, respectively: Nabû Mardak ana šarri bêliya likrubu “May Nabû (and) Marduk bless the king, my lord” (passim); Aššur Šamaš ana šarri bêliya likrubu “May Aššur (and) Šamaš bless the king, my
lord.”

The former invocation of Nabû and Marduk completely overshadows the latter in the available sources. Many contributory factors should be taken into account. Instead of interpreting the divine pairs Aššur and Šamaš and Nabû and Marduk simply as national or state gods one should probably consider their individual characteristics too. Outside the religious centre of the Assyrian empire, Aššur may never really have been the people’s god. The invocation of the powerful duo Aššur and Šamaš that appears frequently in Assyrian royal inscriptions and is invoked as prosecutors against those who break contracts (Frame 1999: 18) may have been “intimidating”, although they are invoked in the blessing of some seventh century letters, especially from the Sealand (southern Babylonia). Nabû was the god of writing, and thus patron god of the scribes who wrote these letters. His character may have appealed to the urban elites; Nabû was the most popular god in personal names, perhaps reflecting literacy levels at the time. This could explain the Assyrian habit of invoking Nabû before his father, Marduk. The order Nabû - Marduk is first attested in a Kassite kudurru from the thirteenth century b.c. (cf. Pomponio 1998: 18a). Somewhat surprisingly, the choice of the gods and their order is the same in letters from eighth century Nippur, at the expense of Enlil, Ninurta and Nusku. Accordingly, the choice of the gods to be invoked is likely to have been politically motivated. By the eighth century b.c., Marduk had been revered in Assyria for centuries, obviously ever since the fourteenth century (see Frame 1999: 13–16, 19), and one can hazard an educated guess that some of the cult personnel may have been of Babylonian origin. In addition, syncretism or even intentional ambiguity may explain the frequent use of the logogram EN = Bel in related situations. Generally, it stood for Marduk, but may refer to Enlil (Ilili in Neo-Assyrian) or as an appellative “lord”, referring to any god or a human superior. It is difficult to determine whether Adad-nerari III’s oft-quoted credo to “trust in Nabû: trust in no other god!” (e.g., Pomponio 1998: 19, Porter 1997: 254) had a decisive impact on the god’s status in Assyria as a catalyst or whether it only confirms the growing momentum of Nabû’s unstoppable cult-following in the country. Porter (1997: 260) even suggested that “Nabû’s importance in Babylonia in the late period may have been due to the influence of Babylonia’s earlier Assyrian rulers, for whom Nabû was an important Assyrian god.” In Frame’s (1999: 17) words: “Nabû developed such a following in Assyria that it is quite possible that at times Marduk was invoked simply through association with his son, rather than the other way around.”

A blessing is attested in 63 Neo-Assyrian letters by around 20 different senders (also provided in Table III of the Appendix, below, with more details) and these letters originate from:

Assur: 28 letters;
Babylonia (by Assyrian officials): 8 letters;
Dur-Šarrukēn: 8 letters;[5]

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[1] Thus far only attested in SAA 1 133, SAA 19 68 and GPA 1 (80); should we have Neo-Assyrian letters sent to superiors from the ninth and early eighth centuries b.c. at our disposal (note that none of the letters from Tell Halaf, see Weidner, Ungnad and Meyer in Friedrich et al. 1940, were sent to superiors), it would be interesting to see whether which, if any, gods were invoked in these letters.

[2] On Aššur, see e.g. Frame 1999: 7–9, 12 f., 18 f. See also ibid. p. 7 f. for Marduk.


[6] See Cole 1996a: 61. These three gods, however, are invoked in the blessing of the letters from the governor of Nippur to the king(s) of Assyria; see SAA 17 89, 91 and SAA 19 139.


[8] For the syncretism between Enlil and Marduk, see e.g. Frame 1999: 7–9, 12 f., 18 f. See also ibid. p. 7 f. for Marduk.


[11] See Cole 1996a: 61. These three gods, however, are invoked in the blessing of the letters from the governor of Nippur to the king(s) of Assyria; see SAA 17 89, 91 and SAA 19 139.


[13] For the syncretism between Enlil and Marduk, see e.g. Frame 1999: 7–9, 12 f., 18 f. See also ibid. p. 7 f. for Marduk.

[14] On Aššur, see e.g. Frame 1999: 7–9, 12 f., 18 f. See also ibid. p. 7 f. for Marduk.


[18] See Cole 1996a: 61. These three gods, however, are invoked in the blessing of the letters from the governor of Nippur to the king(s) of Assyria; see SAA 17 89, 91 and SAA 19 139.


[20] For the syncretism between Enlil and Marduk, see e.g. Frame 1999: 7–9, 12 f., 18 f. See also ibid. p. 7 f. for Marduk.


[22] See Cole 1996a: 61. These three gods, however, are invoked in the blessing of the letters from the governor of Nippur to the king(s) of Assyria; see SAA 17 89, 91 and SAA 19 139.


[24] For the syncretism between Enlil and Marduk, see e.g. Frame 1999: 7–9, 12 f., 18 f. See also ibid. p. 7 f. for Marduk.


[26] See Cole 1996a: 61. These three gods, however, are invoked in the blessing of the letters from the governor of Nippur to the king(s) of Assyria; see SAA 17 89, 91 and SAA 19 139.

[27] Babylonians were taken to Assyria in the thirteenth century, cf. Pomponio 1998: 19.

[28] For the syncretism between Enlil and Marduk, see e.g. Frame 1999: 7–9, 12 f., 18 f. See also ibid. p. 7 f. for Marduk.
Harran: 12 letters; 56
Hindanu: 2 letters; 57
Kalhu: 2 letters; 58

The province of the chief cupbearer (rab šagē): 1 letter; 59
Uncertain location 5 letters. 60

It can be seen that blessings are present in letters from Assyrian capitals, Kalhu (modern Nimrud) and Dur-Šarruken, the former capital Assur, and other cult centres such as Harran, as well as in letters from Babylonia. Some of these letters originate from what may be considered high palace officials and others may attest to a desire to imitate Babylonian custom. 61 We should also note the two letters sent from Hindanu, whose cultic importance should probably not be underestimated. 62 We may see an emphasis on the sender’s institutional role rather than on his private person. The most conspicuous absentees from the list are Arbelâ 63 and Nineveh. There are hardly any letters sent from Nineveh in the eighth century; the letters of Mahdê (SAA 5 74–76, SAA 19 162), governor of Nineveh and eponym of the year 725, are not necessarily sent from Nineveh. 64 Usually the gods invoked in these blessings corresponded quite strictly to those of the main temple of a city or a town (cf. Table III, below), especially if it was the main cult-centre of a god. The exception to this is that the national gods Nabû and Marduk appear in letters from cities or towns that were not considered the centres of the cult of some other gods, i.e., these localities only housed the secondary temples of these deities.

In the late eighth century, blessings are also attested in 55 contemporary Neo-Babylonian letters by 32 different senders. 65 These figures are proportionally much higher than those of the Neo-Assyrian corpus 66, although the extant Neo-Babylonian letter corpus is much smaller. However, it is worth emphasising that most of the letters were sent to the king of Assyria from the main cult centres such as Babylon, Borsippa, Cutha, Der, Nippur and Uruk. It is this that probably explains the unusual number of blessings.

Aššur-nirka-da”in, from whom we have only two extant letters, can be identified as governor of Assur because of his introductory formula and the fact that he is mentioned in the eponym list as eponym of the year 720. 67 Although a governor, he blesses the king in his introductory formula. The former capital remained the main place for the cult of Aššur until the end of the Assyrian empire, and the king himself was a regular visitor there because of his cultic duties. It is therefore an understandable exception that the influential governor of Assur blesses the king in his introductory formula.

\begin{verbatim}
Aššur, the king, my lord: your servant Aššur-nirka-da”in. Good health to the king, my lord! May Aššur (and) Mulissu bless the king, my lord!

SAA 19 164: 1–5
\end{verbatim}

Unsurprisingly, Tab-sill-Ešarra, 68 the successor to Aššur-nirka-da”in as governor of Assur, and eponym of the year 716 69, began his letters in exactly the same way:

\begin{verbatim}
Aššur, the king, my lord: your servant Tab-sill-Ešarra,”in. Good health to the king, my lord! May Aššur (and) Mulissu bless the king, my lord!

SAA 19 170: 1–5
\end{verbatim}

The unusually high number of blessings in letters from Nineveh (cf. Table III, below) is worth emphasising that most of the letters were sent to the king of Assyria from the main cult centre of Aššur until the end of the Assyrian empire, and the king himself was a regular visitor there because of his cultic duties. It is therefore an understandable exception that the influential governor of Assur blesses the king in his introductory formula.

\begin{verbatim}
Aššur, the king, my lord: your servant Tab-sill-Ešarra,”in. Good health to the king, my lord! May Aššur (and) Mulissu bless the king, my lord!

SAA 19 170: 1–5
\end{verbatim}

65  These figures are proportionally much higher than those of the Neo-Assyrian corpus, although the extant Neo-Babylonian letter corpus is much smaller. However, it is worth emphasising that most of the letters were sent to the king of Assyria from the main cult centres such as Babylon, Borsippa, Cutha, Der, Nippur and Uruk. It is this that probably explains the unusual number of blessings.

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\begin{verbatim}
Aššur, the king, my lord: your servant Tab-sill-Ešarra,”in. Good health to the king, my lord! May Aššur (and) Mulissu bless the king, my lord!

SAA 19 170: 1–5
\end{verbatim}
To the king, my lord: your servant Tab-sîl-Ešarra. Good health to the king, my lord! May Aššur and Mullissu bless the king, my lord!

_SAA_ 1 77: 1–4

In some cases where a letter includes a blessing, a personal relationship between the king and the sender may be assumed, even if not proven. It may be recalled that some of the highest-ranking palace officials were probably able to meet him regularly. Nabû-nammir in his letters to the king, for example, always invokes the gods Nabû and Marduk:

\[\text{a-na LU GAL be-li-ia / ARAD-ka } \text{mas-pa} / \text{R} \text{ZALAG3-ir} / \text{4PA} / \text{AMAR.U[TU]} / \text{a-na LU GAL be-} \text{R} \text{I3-ia} / \text{lik-ru-bu}\]

To the king, my lord: your servant Nabû-nammir. May Nabû (and) Marduk bless the king, my lord!

_SAA_ 19 105: 1–6

This blessing would be easily explicable were Nabû-nammir a high official at the court of the Assyrian capital, Kalhu. In fact, one Nimrud Letter addressed to Nabû-nammir, i.e., found in Kalhu, seems to prove that Nabû-nammir was just such a high-ranking palace official:

\[[\text{I}M \text{maššur-giš-ka-KALAG-in} / \text{a-na mas} / \text{R} \text{PA3-} \text{na-mir} \text{šE[S]-} \text{ja} / \text{R} \text{I3-a DI-m[a]} / \text{R} \text{a1-} \text{[m]a šEš-} \text{[a]} \text{a1} \text{[a-d]an-}\text{nīs}\]

A tablet of Aššur-nirka-da’i70 to my brother Nabû-nammir. The best of health to my brother!

_SAA_ 19 165: 1–3 (cf. _SAA_ 19 164: 1–4, above)

Considering Nabû-nammir’s prominent role in Babylonia during the late reign of Tiglath-pileser III, he may have been _sukkallu_ “vizier” at that time.71

Among the Nimrud Letters, Nabû-nammir is not the only high-ranking official whose palace connection may be detected. For example, Ašipâ,72 who takes care of the barley transport on boats in northern Babylonia, may be identified with a high palace (or temple) official as well:

\[\text{a-na LU GAL EN-i}a / \text{ARAD-ka } \text{maššur-giš-ka-KALAG-in} / \text{a-na mas} / \text{R} \text{PA3-} \text{na-mir} \text{šE[S]-} \text{ja} / \text{R} \text{I3-a DI-m[a]} / \text{R} \text{a1-} \text{[m]a šEš-} \text{[a]} \text{a1} \text{[a-d]an-}\text{nīs}\]

To the king, my lord: your servant Ašipâ. Good health to the king, my lord! The baker of the harem manageress came and told me: ‘A scepter, a chest, an iron brazier and a copper kettle have been stolen from the Palace and sold for money.’ I am herewith sending the informer to the king, my lord. Let the king, my lord question him.

_SAA_ 19 114

Curiously, out of seven Nimrud Letters attributable to Ašipâ, only the introductory formula of _SAA_ 19 113: 1–5 contains a blessing, invoking the gods Nabû and Marduk. At any rate, one case is stronger than none when pondering his identification as a palace official, supported by the clear palace context of _SAA_ 19 114.74

The importance of analysing introductory formulae is not limited to what precisely is said in them, but together with other features from the same letters, they often help us to restore sender’s names.75 It is therefore helpful to classify the details of introductory formulae to identify the senders, since the sender’s name is often broken away or so badly damaged that it has become illegible.76

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70 For whom cf. p. 106 above.
71 For more on Nabû-nammir, see _SAA_ 19.
72 For Ašipâ’s letters, see _SAA_ 19 108–14. He may be the same person as the governor of Tušhan who also sent letters to the king (cf. note 31, above); see Parker (2009).
73 Alternatively, by translating “of/belonging to the Palace have been stolen” one can stress the ownership of these valuables.
74 See also Sallaberger’s observation regarding greetings (note 18, above) and consider that perhaps in a similar way “No blessings are employed in cases of distant relationship” which need not refer to the physical distance at the time of sending a letter but to the imagined or real (personal) relationship between a sender and a recipient.
75 See, e.g., _SAA_ 1 32, 34; _SAA_ 4 5 11, 14; _SAA_ 17 40, 76, 127, etc.
76 The sender’s name regularly appears in line 2 in Neo-Assyrian letters.
8. Enlarging the picture

In the Neo-Assyrian royal correspondence of the late eighth century, both the address and the greeting of letters sent to superiors are highly standardised. There is hardly any variation in the address, while the presence or absence of a greeting in a given letter creates variation. Otherwise the variation in the greeting merely attests to the choice between using its simplest (lā šulmu ana ...) or more extended\textsuperscript{77} forms. As for the blessings, it seems that we have to postulate two different sets of rules depending on whether we are dealing with palace officials, scholars, relatives and others close to the king or with provincial governors and some other influential figures who wielded considerable personal power, often far away from the Assyrian capital. This division partly explains the difference between the eighth and seventh century letters, which is of course also based on the circumstantial nature of textual finds.

While there is a risk of reading too much into the introductory formulae of Neo-Assyrian letters, it should be stressed that what may at first sight look like meaningless or empty words to us held great significance to the ancients. The distribution of blessings in Neo-Assyrian letters may indicate Babylonian influence,\textsuperscript{78} and the eighth century evidence from the Nimrud Letters and the Sargon correspondence seems to support this assumption. However, the letters from Babylonia itself are often topically and stylistically different from the other eighth century letters. As for some of the attested variation, in the eighth century many of the highest-ranking Assyrian officials were highly mobile and employed more than one scribe. Scribes may also have found the writing of blessings to be creative and innovative, and they duly availed themselves of the possibilities of this ceremonious rhetorical display. As a result, well-formulated greetings and blessings may have become widespread, both in private/family letters and in literary media, representing a higher form of art than day-to-day letter writing.

An obvious example of letter writing transferred into a higher sphere is Sargon’s account of his by now legendary eighth campaign. The beginning of this composition, an introductory formula of letter writing.

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Finally, it is important to be aware of the fact that introductory formulae are the product of a combination of factors: physical distance is certainly one of them, both in terms of geography and

\textsuperscript{77} Even the extended variants regularly use only a limited set of elements: adamniš “very”, adamniš adamniš “extremely”, and may include a statement that “fort(s)”, “horses”, “land”, “servant(s)” and/or “temple(s) are well” and often end in the phrase “The king, my lord, can be glad”.

\textsuperscript{78} Cole (1996) contains 31 contemporary, eighth century Neo-Babylonian letters sent to superiors, the governors of Nippur (nos. 5–6, 13, 16, 21, 23, 27, 29, 38, 41, 44, 46, 53, 56–60, 62, 72, 80, 83, 93–94, 97–8, 101–03, 110–11). Of these, 17 include a blessing (nos. 27, 38, 41, 44, 46, 53, 56–8, 60, 72, 83, 93–94, 97–98, 110), and all save one (no. 72 with Anu and Ištar) invoke the main gods, Nabû and Marduk. Cole’s claim (p. 182): “The greeting ‘May Nabû and Marduk bless my lord’ occurs in practically every letter of this archive which is addressed from servant to lord” should be modified accordingly. The blessing is deliberately omitted, in my opinion, from 13 letters (nos. 5–6, 13, 16, 21, 29, 59, 62, 80, 101–03, 111); no. 23 is a special case. A common trait among these letters might be that they originate with some of the tribal chieftains whose role can be interpreted as being less institutional than that of many other correspondents of the Nippur letter corpus. \textsuperscript{79} Alternatively, the sense of this clause, with a singular participle, may be better understood collectively, “to the Palace (and) those who dwell in it” as it cannot refer to Sargon II, who is the subject of the following sentence and the sender of this royal “letter” to the god Aššur.
status, and a close personal relationship with the king must provide some explanation in a number of cases. Naturally, the standardisation of introductory formulae is part of a deeper ideological indoctrination that took many different forms.

Abbreviations

BATSH 4 see Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996; CTN 5 see Saggs 2001; GPA see Postgate 1973; KAJ see Ebeling 1927; MARV 1 see Freydank 1976; MARV 2 see Freydank 1982; MARV 4 see Freydank 2001; MARV 5 see Freydank and Feller 2004; PNA see Radner and Baker 1998–2011; RIMA 3 see Grayson 1996; SAA 1 see Parpola 1987; SAA 5 see Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990; SAA 6 see Kwasman and Parpola; SAA 10 see Parpola 1993; SAA 13 see Cole and Machinist 1998; SAA 15 see Fuchs and Parpola 2001; SAA 16 see Luukko and Van Buylaere; SAA 17 see Dietrich 2003; SAA 18 see Reynolds 2003; SAA 19 see Luukko 2012.

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Table I: Eighth century Neo-Assyrian letters to superiors without a greeting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sender</th>
<th>Publication No.</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(12)²⁰ Aššur-le’i (SAA 19 71–74)</td>
<td>SAA 19 71 and SAA 19 74</td>
<td>Letters from the North. SAA 19 71 and 73: name is partly restored; no. 72 contains a gr.: the sender’s name is fully restored</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(24) Aššur-šimanni (SAA 19 15–16)</td>
<td>SAA 19 15–16</td>
<td>Governor of Kilizi and eponym of the year 724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(35) Aššur-šittu-usur</td>
<td>SAA 19 51</td>
<td>A letter from the East (Arzuhina) to the governor of Kalhu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(46) Aššur-taklak</td>
<td>GPA 196</td>
<td>Sender’s location is unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(57) Aššur-[…]</td>
<td>SAA 1 148</td>
<td>Governor of Damascus whose name is restored in SAA 1 172–72, SAA 19 172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(69) Bel-duri (SAA 1 171–72)</td>
<td>SAA 1 171–72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(710) Bel-le’i</td>
<td>SAA 1 15 16</td>
<td>Letter from the East (Arrapha mentioned)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(811) City rulers</td>
<td>SAA 1 14 7</td>
<td>Letter from the East: city rulers working in Milqia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(920) Gabbu-ana-Aššur (SAA 5 113–15, 117–21, 125)</td>
<td>Palace herald from Kurbail whose name is restored in nos. 115, 117, 125; the attribution of no. 122 to G-a-A is uncertain since the letter seems to contain a broken gr. The beginning is broken away in nos. 116, 122–24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10/22) Ilu-iqbi (SAA 1 140–44)</td>
<td>SAA 1 140, 142</td>
<td>Letters from central Assyria, sender’s name is partly restored in no. 142. The beginning is broken away in nos. 141, 143–44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11/23) Inurta-ila’i</td>
<td>GPA 193</td>
<td>A letter apparently from Kalhu; it is uncertain whether the sender is the same as in n. 15 above: to the governor of Kalhu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12/24) Issar-šumu-qiša</td>
<td>SAA 5 169</td>
<td>Letter from the North-east</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(13/25) Mannu-ki-Nergal</td>
<td>SAA 1 16 3</td>
<td>Probably a letter from Kalhu. Note that the letter ends in “The royal (signet) ring and the land are well” clause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(14/26) Mar-Issar</td>
<td>GPA 197</td>
<td>Possibly a mayor of Kalhu (cf. SAA 6 31 r. 13) to the governor of Kalhu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15/27) Nadūr[…]</td>
<td>SAA 1 15 290</td>
<td>To the palace scribe (ana ṭupšar ēkalli bēliya urdaka PN₁) from Babylonia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16/28) Nahāši</td>
<td>SAA 1 123</td>
<td>Letter from Huzirina (Sultantepe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(17/29) Nergal-ibni</td>
<td>SAA 1 179</td>
<td>To the governor of Kalhu: ana pāhiti ṭuppi ka-pānēkalli. No “my lord” is mentioned since even if sent to a superior the relation between the two high officials is somewhat “vague”: obviously they were located in different palaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(18/30) Palace supervisor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(20/36) Šamaš-abu-usur</td>
<td>SAA 1 15 186</td>
<td>The sender is active in northern Babylonia. A letter to the governor (ana pāhiti bēliya ṭuppi PN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(21/37) Šamaš-ahu-iddina</td>
<td>SAA 1 19 37</td>
<td>Probably governor of Šapat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(22/38) Sarru-emuranni</td>
<td>SAA 1 39</td>
<td>To the governor of Kalhu: ana pāhiti ṭuppi ka-pānēkalli. No “my lord” is mentioned since even if sent to a superior the relation between the two high officials is somewhat “vague”: obviously they were located in different palaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(23/39) Sarra- […]</td>
<td>SAA 1 178</td>
<td>A letter from the West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(24/40) Urdu-Śiṅ</td>
<td>SAA 5 145</td>
<td>A letter from the North-east to the palace herald (ana nāgir ēkalli bēliya urdaka PN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(25/41) [NN]</td>
<td>SAA 5 265</td>
<td>Sender’s location is unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(26/42) [NN]</td>
<td>SAA 5 266</td>
<td>Sender’s location is unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(27/43) [NN]</td>
<td>SAA 5 268</td>
<td>Sender’s location is unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(28/44) [NN]</td>
<td>SAA 1 15 377</td>
<td>Sender’s location is unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(29/45) [NN]</td>
<td>SAA 1 19 21</td>
<td>Sender’s location (Turmuna) is uncertain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(30/46) [NN]</td>
<td>SAA 1 19 44</td>
<td>A letter from the West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(31/47) [NN]</td>
<td>SAA 1 19 50</td>
<td>A letter possibly from the West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(32/48) [NN]</td>
<td>SAA 1 19 224</td>
<td>Sender’s location is unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

²⁰ The first number is sequential and refers to the number of senders who use the same feature, whereas the second gives a progressive total of letters in which the studied feature is attested. Note also the abbreviations bl. (blessing) and gr. (greeting).
### TABLE II: The Assyrian type of address and/or greeting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sender</th>
<th>Publication No.</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1/2) Abī-yaqiya (Tubliās)</td>
<td>SAA 17 149, 152</td>
<td>No. 149: lines 1f contain the standard NB formula but (lullik) is supplied at the end; line 3 reads lā šulmu ana šarrukēn bēliya. No. 152: ana šarr biēlim aradānīka PNs + a bl.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2/3) Ahi-nuri (location uncertain)</td>
<td>SAA 17 156</td>
<td>To the treasurer: [ana] maṇēna (sic) bēliya [aradaka] PN lā šulmu...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3/5) Ana- Nabū-taklak (Borsippa)</td>
<td>SAA 17 64, 66</td>
<td>“Assyrianized” greeting to the vizier: toppi PN, ana sukkallī bēlišu lā šulmu ana bēliya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4/21) Aqar-Bel-lumur (Gambulu)</td>
<td>SAA 17 103–09, 111–18, 120</td>
<td>No. 103 to the “chamberlain”: ana ša-muhhi-bētānu bēliya lā šulmu ...; nos. 104, 106–09, 112–14 (nos. 115–8, 120 with Nabū-šumu-līšir): ana šarr bēliyalānī aradkaladārānika PN/PNs lā šulmu ana šarr bēliyalāni; no. 105 toppi PN, ana PN, [bēlišu] lā šulmu ana [bēliya] ana šarr bēliya aradaka PN lā šulmu ana šarr bēliya (no. 101 with an extension)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5/23) Badā (Gambulu)</td>
<td>SAA 17 101–02</td>
<td>No. 52 ana šarr bēliya aradaka PN, followed by the standard NB introductory formula and a bl.; no. 53 ana raš-rašēti bēliya (to the chief eunuch) + a bl.; nos. 55 and 57 are partly restored but no. 55 follows the model of no. 52 and no. 57 that of no. 53 ana šarr bēliya aradaka PN, followed by the standard NB introductory formula (ana dinān ... lullik) and a bl. ana šarrukēn šar kišiṣati aradaka PN] + a bl. ana šarr bēliya] amatka PNI lā šulmu ana ša'[rī bēliya]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6/24) Balassu (Borsippa)</td>
<td>SAA 17 74</td>
<td>No. 56 ana šarr bēliya aradaka PN, followed by the standard NB introductory formula (ana dinān ... lullik) and a bl. ana šarrukēn šar kišiṣati aradaka PN] + a bl. ana šarr bēliya] amatka PNI lā šulmu ana ša'[rī bēliya]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7/25) Barsipitu (Borsippa)</td>
<td>SAA 17 73</td>
<td>No. 52 ana šarr bēliya aradaka PN, followed by the standard NB introductory formula and a bl.; no. 53 ana raš-rašēti bēliya (to the chief eunuch) + a bl.; nos. 55 and 57 are partly restored but no. 55 follows the model of no. 52 and no. 57 that of no. 53 ana šarr bēliya aradaka PN, followed by the standard NB introductory formula (ana dinān ... lullik) and a bl. ana šarrukēn šar kišiṣati aradaka PN] + a bl. ana šarr bēliya] amatka PNI lā šulmu ana ša'[rī bēliya]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8/29) Bel-ilbni (Babylon)</td>
<td>SAA 17 52–53, 55 and 57 (attribution uncertain)</td>
<td>No. 52 ana šarr bēliya aradaka PN, followed by the standard NB introductory formula and a bl.; no. 53 ana raš-rašēti bēliya (to the chief eunuch) + a bl.; nos. 55 and 57 are partly restored but no. 55 follows the model of no. 52 and no. 57 that of no. 53 ana šarr bēliya aradaka PN, followed by the standard NB introductory formula (ana dinān ... lullik) and a bl. ana šarrukēn šar kišiṣati aradaka PN] + a bl. ana šarr bēliya] amatka PNI lā šulmu ana ša'[rī bēliya]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9/30) Bel-iddina (Babylon)</td>
<td>SAA 17 43</td>
<td>No. 52 ana šarr bēliya aradaka PN, followed by the standard NB introductory formula and a bl.; no. 53 ana raš-rašēti bēliya (to the chief eunuch) + a bl.; nos. 55 and 57 are partly restored but no. 55 follows the model of no. 52 and no. 57 that of no. 53 ana šarr bēliya aradaka PN, followed by the standard NB introductory formula (ana dinān ... lullik) and a bl. ana šarrukēn šar kišiṣati aradaka PN] + a bl. ana šarr bēliya] amatka PNI lā šulmu ana ša'[rī bēliya]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10/32) Hai-il-il and Zabdi-il (Šabhanu)</td>
<td>SAA 17 59–60</td>
<td>No. 52 ana šarr bēliya aradaka PN, followed by the standard NB introductory formula and a bl.; no. 53 ana raš-rašēti bēliya (to the chief eunuch) + a bl.; nos. 55 and 57 are partly restored but no. 55 follows the model of no. 52 and no. 57 that of no. 53 ana šarr bēliya aradaka PN, followed by the standard NB introductory formula (ana dinān ... lullik) and a bl. ana šarrukēn šar kišiṣati aradaka PN] + a bl. ana šarr bēliya] amatka PNI lā šulmu ana ša'[rī bēliya]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11/34) Kalbi-Ukū (Gambulu)</td>
<td>SAA 17 127–28</td>
<td>Lines 1f have the standard NB formula, followed by lā šulmu ana šarr bēliya. Sender’s name is restored in no. 127 ana šarr bēliya aradaka PN lā šulmu ana šarr bēliya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12/39) Lanē (Gambulu)</td>
<td>SAA 17 92–94, 96, 100</td>
<td>ana šarr bēliya aradaka PN lā šulmu ana šarr bēliya. Presumably an Assyrian official has employed a Babylonian scribe ana šarr bēliyalānī aradkaladārānika PN/PNs lā šulmu ana šarr bēliyalāni. His gr. is expanded with “the city and the guard of the king”, but sender’s name is broken away from no. 8; the first three lines of no. 9 may be restored from no. 7 toppi PN, [un PN.] ana šarrūššu, followed by a partly restored Assyrianized gr. lā šulmu ana šarr bēliya. Lines 1, 5/4f read ana šarr bēliya aradaka PN ... lā šulmu ana šarr bēliya ana šarr [jākēn šar [nāṭāti bēliya] aradaka PN, followed by the standard NB introductory formula (ana dinān ... lullik) and a bl.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(13/40) Mannu-ki-Āṣūr (location uncertain)</td>
<td>SAA 19 143</td>
<td>[ana] šarr bēliya [aradaka] PN lā šulmu ana šarr bēliya. Presumably an Assyrian official has employed a Babylonian scribe ana šarr bēliyalānī aradkaladārānika PN/PNs lā šulmu ana šarr bēliyalāni. His gr. is expanded with “the city and the guard of the king”, but sender’s name is broken away from no. 8; the first three lines of no. 9 may be restored from no. 7 toppi PN, [un PN.] ana šarrūššu, followed by a partly restored Assyrianized gr. lā šulmu ana šarr bēliya. Lines 1, 5/4f read ana šarr bēliya aradaka PN ... lā šulmu ana šarr bēliya ana šarr bēliya aradaka PN ... lā šulmu ana šarr bēliya ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE II: (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sender</th>
<th>Publication No.</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(18/51) Nabû-šumu-lišir (Gambulu) and Ešetu (Babylon)</td>
<td>SAA 17 122–26</td>
<td>ana šarri bêliya aradka PN lâ šulmu ana šarri bêliya (for Nabû-šumu-lišir, cf. also Aqar-Bel-lumur)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(19/52) Nabû-šumu-lišir (Gambulu)</td>
<td>SAA 17 36</td>
<td>[ana šar]ri [matâri bêliîî arâdîîn]a PN[v]u PN[v]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(20/54) Sama’gunu (Tubliâš)</td>
<td>SAA 17 153–54</td>
<td>No. 153 ana šarri bêlišâyâ aradka PN lâ šulmu ana šarri bêliya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(21/56) šandabakku (governor of Nippur)</td>
<td>SAA 17 89–90</td>
<td>Variable introductory formula (cf. no. 91 and SAA 19 139 with the standard NB formula); no. 90 [nappî šandabakki ana] šarri bêliûtu lâ šulmu ana šarri bêliya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(22/57) Sheikhs of Tubliâš</td>
<td>SAA 17 151</td>
<td>Assyrianized address to the magnates of the king of Assyria: ana rabûti ša šar mât Aššûr šar kiššati bêliîî qîbînâ ummu nasîkârî ša GN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(23/58) [NN] (cohort commander)</td>
<td>SAA 17 168</td>
<td>Of course the restoration is not entirely certain: [ana šarri bêliya aradka PN] rab-Kî[šir]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE III: Blessings in Neo-Assyrian letters of the eighth century

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sender</th>
<th>Publication No.</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(12) Ahu-lurši (Babylonian priest in Dur-Sarruken)</td>
<td>SAA 1 131–32</td>
<td>(no gr.) Nabû and Marduk are invoked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2/3) Ašipâ (SAA 19 108–14; high-ranking official active in Babylon)</td>
<td>SAA 19 113</td>
<td>(gr. +) Nabû and Marduk (neither a gr. nor a bl. in no. 109; only a gr. in nos. 108, 110, 111, 112, 114)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3/5) Aššur-belu-u’d’u’ an (governor)</td>
<td>SAA 5 126–27</td>
<td>(gr. +) Nabû and Marduk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4/6) Aššur-nirka-da’n in (governor of Assur)</td>
<td>SAA 19 164</td>
<td>(gr. +) Aššur and Mullissu. No. 165 to Nabû-nam-mir (an equal): tuppî PN[v]u PN[v], ahiy’â lî šulmu ana ahiy’â adamûnî</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5/7) Aššur-šumu-ka’n in (official active in Dur-Sarruken)</td>
<td>SAA 1 150</td>
<td>(gr. +) Aššur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6/8) Hunanu (official active in Kalhu)</td>
<td>GPA 180(^{82})</td>
<td>(no gr.) Aššur and Šamaš</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7/9) Hunnî (possibly a priest or scholar from Kalhu or Nineveh)</td>
<td>SAA 1 133–34</td>
<td>(attribution of no. 134 uncertain) No. 133: (gr. +) Aššur, Šamaš, Bel, Nabû, Šin, and Nergal; no. 134: (gr. +) Nabû and [Marduk]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8/11) Ina-šar-Bel-allak (treasurer of Dur-Sarruken)</td>
<td>SAA 1 128, 130</td>
<td>(gr. +) Nabû and Marduk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9/12) Marduk-remanni (governor of Kalhu)</td>
<td>SAA 1 110</td>
<td>(gr. +) Nabû and Marduk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10/13) Nabû-êtiîmînî (chief cupbearer)</td>
<td>SAA 19 65</td>
<td>(gr. +) Nabû and Marduk; no. 66 is also sent by him, but it breaks off after a gr.; no. 67 only a gr.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{82}\) GPA, p. 181: “This is the only letter addressed to the king, and as it is written very well on fine clay, it should possibly be kept separate from the rest of the archive."
A note on statistics

The extant introductory formulae of 168 (SAA 1), 169 (SAA 5), 147 (SAA 15), 128 (SAA 17), 143 (SAA 19), 13 (GPA) and 31 (Cole 1996) eighth century letters were studied for this article; these make a total of 799 introductory formulae of which 621 are Neo-Assyrian and 178 Neo-Babylonian. The following letters were included in the study:

TABLE III: (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sender</th>
<th>Publication No.</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(11/18) Nabû-nammir (vizier, Babylonian/Kalhu; cf. Aššûr-nirka-da’i or above, and Šamaš-bunaya, below)</td>
<td>SAA 19 103–07</td>
<td>(no gr. in nos. 103, 105) Nabû and Marduk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12/29) Nabû-pašîr (governor of Harran)</td>
<td>SAA 1 188–92, 195–96, 198, 200–02, 210</td>
<td>(gr. +) Sin and Nikkal (no. 198 is heavily restored; in no. 201 also Adad and Buru: sender’s name is restored); no. 202: Nabû and Marduk. No. 191 was sent to the vizier; in no. 210 as the main sender (with Nabû-dur-makî)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(13/30) Nabû-ušabbî and Iglî (possibly scholars working at Dur-Sarruken)</td>
<td>SAA 5 293</td>
<td>(gr. +) Nabû and Marduk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(14/31) [Nabû]-zer-kettî-êšîr (official active at Dur-Sarruken)</td>
<td>SAA 1 152</td>
<td>(gr. +) [Nabû] and Marduk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15/32) Šamaš-bunaya (Assyrian prefect in Babylonia)</td>
<td>SAA 19 98 (SAA 19 99 in NB: attribution uncertain)</td>
<td>(gr. +) Nabû and Marduk (no. 98 with Nabû-nammir, possibly also no. 99); nos. 100 and 102: neither a gr. nor a bl.; no. 101 only a gr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16/33) Šamaš-ilâ’i (governor)</td>
<td>SAA 19 68</td>
<td>(gr. +) Aššûr and Šamaš</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(17/59) Tab-sîl-Earra (governor of Assur)</td>
<td>SAA 1 75–78, 80, 82–85, 87–91, 93–94, 96–97, 100–04, 106–07, 109</td>
<td>(gr. +) Aššûr and Mullissu (no. 98 with Na’di-ilu, incl. a gr., but no gods are invoked: probably written by Na’di-ilu’s scribe; no. 99 no bl. but an extended gr.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(18/61) [NN] (Hindanu)</td>
<td>SAA 1 208–09</td>
<td>(gr. +) Adad and Buru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(19/62) [NN] (official active in the North-east)</td>
<td>SAA 5 148</td>
<td>(gr. +) Aššûr. Bel, [Nabû ūmâsî arkiṭa] liddûnânikka: exceptional since not with karâbû</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(20/63) [NN] (Dur-Sarruken)</td>
<td>SAA 5 295</td>
<td>(gr. +) [Nabû and Marduk] (Iglî mentioned, cf. Nabû-ušabbî, above)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

83 All 128 of SAA 17, 17 from SAA 19 (nos. 99, 122, 124, 131, 134–43, 147, 149, 201), GPA 201–02 and 31 from Cole 1996 (see n. 78, above).
ON STANDARDISATION AND VARIATION IN THE INTRODUCTORY FORMULAE


Note that the beginning of GPA 200, 207, 209–10 is broken away, but GPA 180, 191–99, 201–02 and 205 are included in this study.\(^{84}\)

The employed introductory formulae of 111 out of 114 letters, published in Cole 1996, can be studied; this is an extremely high proportion, proving that these tablets are in good condition (but see ibid. p. 14). The beginning is completely broken away only in nos. 88, 112–13 while the restorations appear certain enough in nos. 7 and 98. In total, 31 of these letters were sent to superiors (see n. 78, above), whereas the majority of the letters in this corpus were sent to equals (“brothers”): nos. 1–4, 7, 10–12, 14–15, 17–20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30–37, 39–40, 42–43, 45, 47–52, 54–55, 61, 63–70, 73–78, 81–82, 84–92, 95–96, 99–100, 104–09, 112. Moreover, five letters were sent to subordinates (often “sons”): nos. 8 (by the “king”), 9, 152–53 (royal letters), 157, 159, 161, 170–71, 173–74, 189–91 were previously edited in SAA 1, SAA 5 and SAA 15 and that SAA 5 214 is the envelope of SAA 5 213 and SAA 15 289 that of SAA 15 288. Furthermore, joins were excluded: SAA 1 28 forms a part of SAA 10 216; SAA 5 282 is joined to SAA 1 70; SAA 5 55 and 61 are rejoined (Van Buylaere 2007); SAA 15 335 forms a part of SAA 5 251 (lines 13–r.5). For anonymously sent letters, see n. 13 (above).

On the other hand, the beginning of many letters is too broken to be used in the statistics. Apart from these — basically all the letters that are not enumerated above — the following letters or fragments do not appear in the statistics: SAA 1 1–27, SAA 5 277–80 (fragments), SAA 15 274–79 (fragments), SAA 17 1–6, SAA 19 1–7, 152–56 and GPA 181–7, 203 and possibly also GPA 206 are all royal letters and SAA 19 56 and GPA 190 were also sent to subordinates. In addition, the following letters were sent to equals (or subordinates) and thus ignored: SAA 4 81, 147; SAA 15 371; SAA 17 63, 84, 133 (to an equal or subordinate), 139 (to an equal or subordinate), 147–48, 150, 155; SAA 19 132–33, 144, 160, 165, 202, 208 and GPA 188–89. Note also that SAA 19 152–53 (royal letters), 157, 159, 161, 170–71, 173–74, 189–91 were previously edited in SAA 1, SAA 5 and SAA 15 and that SAA 5 214 is the envelope of SAA 5 213 and SAA 15 289 that of SAA 15 288. Furthermore, joins were excluded: SAA 1 28 forms a part of SAA 10 216; SAA 5 282 is joined to SAA 1 70; SAA 5 55 and 61 are rejoined (Van Buylaere 2007); SAA 15 335 forms a part of SAA 5 251 (lines 13–r.5). For anonymously sent letters, see n. 13 (above).

Mikko Luukko
Universität Würzburg
Institut für Altertumswissenschaften
Altorientalische Philologie
Residenzplatz 2, Tor A
97070 Würzburg
Germany
mikko.luukko@uni-wuerzburg.de

\(^{84}\) Other GPA letters were published in SAA 1 and SAA 5 (cf. Luukko 2004: 204).