

LOTS OF EPONYMS

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O Ashur, great lord! O Adad, great lord! The lot of Yahalu, the great *masennu* of Shalmaneser, King of Ashur; Governor of Kipshuni, Qumeni, Mehrani, Uqi, the cedar mountain; Minister of Trade. In his eponymate, his lot, may the crops of Assyria prosper and flourish! In front of Ashur and Adad may his lot fall!

Millard (1994: frontispiece, pp. 8–9) has recently published new photographs and an annotated edition of YBC 7058, a terracotta cube with an inscription relating to the eponymate of Yahalu under Shalmaneser III. Much ink has already been spilled on account of this cube, most usefully by Hallo (1983), but certain points require emphasis or clarification.

The object, *pūru*, is a “lot”, not a “die”. Nonetheless the shape of the object inevitably suggests the idea of a true six-sided die, and perhaps implies that selections of this kind were originally made using numbered dice, with one number for each of six candidates. If so, it is possible that individual lots were introduced when more than six candidates began to be eligible for the post of *limmu*. The use of the word *pūru* as a synonym for *limmu* in some texts, including this one, must indicate that eponyms were in some way regarded as having been chosen by lot.

Lots can of course be drawn in a multitude of ways. Published suggestions favour the proposal that lots were placed in a narrow-necked bottle and shaken out one by one, an idea that seems to have originated with W. von Soden (see Hallo 1983: 21). The new photograph shows clearly that the last line reads, not *li-l[i]-a*, as given by Millard, but *li-d[a]-a*, i.e. *liddā*, “fall”, as proposed by Hallo.

According to Millard (loc. cit.), “we assume that such dice were prepared for the next two or three men in line for the office, shaken together in a jug and one thrown out, perhaps by a priest. The choice was probably made a year in advance, perhaps at the New Year ceremonies. The result of the draw may have settled the order for more than one year, according to the sequence of the lots.” Yet any assumption that the overall order of eponyms in the ninth–eighth centuries B.C. was genuinely decided by lot must be questionable. The evidence is distorted by Millard’s chart of the regnal year (*palū*) in which senior officials held the eponymate, as some of the entries relating to the second cycle of Shalmaneser III eponyms, and to the eponyms of Shamshi-Adad V, Shalmaneser V, and Sargon II are inaccurate or misleading.

Before Adad-nirari II (911–891), kings were taking the eponymate in regnal year 1; thereafter, probably, and certainly from Ashur-nasir-pal II (883–859), until Ashur-nirari V (754–745), they took the eponymate in regnal year 2 (Tadmor 1958: 28–9). Shalmaneser III (858–824) was also eponym in his year 32, during a second eponym cycle. Tiglath-pileser III (744–727) took the eponymate in 743, which for the purposes of this paper we shall regard as his regnal year 2; the annals count 743 as his year 3, and he may have claimed the throne before actually gaining control of Ashur in 745 (Tadmor 1958: 30), but this question need not detain us here. Shalmaneser V (726–722) took the eponymate in 723, his regnal year 4 (possibly because he had been abroad, at the three-year siege of Samaria, during the New Year festivals of 725 and 724). Sargon II (721–705), probably also much abroad after his troubled accession, took the eponymate in 719, his regnal year 3. With Sennacherib (704–681) the system evolved further. The reasons for the changes are arguable, but it is clear that, during the period under review, the king was entitled to take the eponymate near the start of his reign, without anything approaching a genuine lottery.

Up to the reign of Shalmaneser III, eponyms other than the king could perhaps have been chosen by lottery; the evidence for the order in which different officials held the eponymate is defective. Under Shalmaneser III there seems to have been a growth in the power and status of officials who, besides having their own provinces where they may or may not have been regularly resident, held particular court titles (*turtānu*, *rab šāqē*, *nāgir ekalli*, *masennu*). Yahalu is an outstanding example of this class. It was in this reign, apparently, that historical marginalia were introduced into eponym lists (Reade 1981: 155–9). With these developments, if not before, came a rationalization in the way in which some of the eponyms were chosen.

Through seven consecutive reigns, from Shalmaneser III to Tiglath-pileser III, the *turtānu* was

eponym in regnal year 3, immediately after the king. We cannot say what was intended under Shalmaneser V, since the title of the eponym following the king is unknown, but a man of the same name had been governor of Nisibin a few years previously and could perhaps have been promoted to *turtānu*. With Sargon the *turtānu* may have been dropped. The consistency with which the *turtānu* is eponym in regnal year 3 demonstrates that here too there can have been no genuine lottery for the position; the choice was predetermined. The eponyms of 853 and 814 also bore the title of *turtānu*, from which it has been deduced that someone newly appointed to high court office in the course of a reign was entitled to take the next available eponymate; the evidence for this practice is restricted to the reigns of Shalmaneser III and Shamshi-Adad V.

Yahalu exemplifies this process. He himself was eponym three times, in 833, 824 and 821. The eponym-list gives his title as *masennu* in 833. If we leave 824 aside for the moment, Yahalu's title for 821, year 3 of Shamshi-Adad V, is missing from the eponym-list, but he was unquestionably *turtānu*, as already surmised by Hallo (1983: 20). This is demonstrated by the text VAT 9897 (Schroeder 1920: no. 75), dated in the eponymate of Bel-dan, *nāgir ekalli*, which specifically names Yahalu as *turtānu*. Although Bel-dan himself as *nāgir ekalli* was eponym twice, in 820 and 807, on the second occasion he was immediately preceded as eponym by another *turtānu*, Nergal-ilaya. VAT 9897 must therefore date to Bel-dan's first eponymate in 820. Therefore Yahalu was *turtānu* in 821.

In 824, during his second eponymate, Yahalu could in theory have been still *masennu* or already *turtānu* or indeed holder of some other office. In practice, however, his 824 eponymate intervened between those held by men who are elsewhere attested as holding the offices of *rab šāqê* and *nāgir ekalli* under Shalmaneser III. Now, since it was customary for holders of these two latter offices to hold the eponymate consecutively (see below), the only sensible explanation for Yahalu's insertion between them is that he had recently been appointed to the higher office of *turtānu*, and therefore took the first available eponymate. Further, since such eponyms were determined in advance, Yahalu's tenure of the eponymate in 824 must mean that he had actually become *turtānu* in the course of 826 or 825. The year 826 was the one in which the previous *turtānu*, Dayyan-Ashur, who also happened to be eponym for the second time, conducted a long campaign into Iran, and the seven-year rebellion associated with the king's son Ashur-nadin-shumi commenced. It is entirely plausible that Dayyan-Ashur should have lost his office and perhaps his life at this time, necessitating a replacement.

From Shalmaneser III to Tiglath-pileser III, if we exclude the reigns of Shamshi-Adad V and Ashur-dan III (both discussed below), years 4 and 5 were in principle always reserved for the *rab šāqê* and *nāgir ekalli*. Under Shalmaneser III, in both the first and second of this king's eponym cycles, the *rab šāqê* preceded the *nāgir ekalli*, but there is no consistency thereafter. Obvious criteria for deciding precedence may have been seniority in post or royal favour, but lots could in theory have been thrown. A *nāgir ekalli*, presumably just appointed, also took the next available eponymate in 850. Both the *rab šāqê* and the *nāgir ekalli*, like the *turtānu*, are absent from the official eponym-lists under Sargon, though two of the three could have been eponyms in 721 and 720.

From Adad-nirari III (810–783) to Tiglath-pileser III, again with the Ashur-dan exception, regnal years 6, 7 and 8 were reserved for the *masennu*, the *šakin māti* (governor of Ashur), and the governor of Rasappa respectively. The *masennu* only emerges as an eponym with Yahalu in 833, a development which we can perhaps ascribe to his personal influence. His appearance as eponym is presumably yet another example of the practice whereby the new holder of a court post of appropriate status became eponym at once. It is with Adad-nirari III that the *šakin māti* and the governor of Rasappa emerge as the eponyms of years 7–8. The appearance of Rasappa so high in the eponym order in Adad-nirari III's reign probably reflects the powerful personality of its governor Nergal-eresh. The regularity with which these three posts subsequently occupy regnal years 6–8 ensures again there was no question of a lottery for them. Under Sargon, the *masennu* and *šakin māti* were eponyms in regnal years 5 and 6, with Zer-ibni, the governor of Rasappa between them and the king. In 798 a *rab ša rēši* became eponym, inserted like the *masennu* of 833 into a sequence of governors. It may have been intended that the *rab ša rēši* should subsequently become eponym early in each reign, like other court officials, but in the event this did not happen.

The reign of Shamshi-Adad V (823–811) is problematic because the evidence is defective. The

turtānu and *nāgir ekalli* were eponyms in regnal years 3 and 4 (821–820), as noted above in our discussion of VAT 9897. The titles of the eponyms in years 5–6 (819–817) are not preserved; the eponym of year 7 was a governor. The three could have been respectively *rab šāqê*, *masennu* and *šakin māti*, a sequence similar to that of later reigns. If so, however, Shalmaneser III's *rab šāqê*, Ashur-bunaya-usur, would have to have lost the job temporarily, since he reappears with the same title in year 8 (816).¹ Similarly Nergal-ilaya, eponym as governor of Isana in 830 and as *turtānu* in 808, would have had an intermediate post as *šakin māti* in year 9 (817). There are other possibilities, however, and there can be no certainty in the circumstances.

The list of eponyms given by Millard (1994: 57) for the years 826–816 can therefore be provisionally supplemented as follows:

- 826 Dayyan-Ashur, *turtānu*
- 825 Ashur-bunaya-usur, [*rab šāqê*]
- 824 Yahalu, [*turtānu*]
- 823 Bel-bunaya, [*nāgir ekalli*]
- 822 Shamshi-Adad (V), king of Assyria
- 821 Yahalu, *turtānu*
- 820 Bel-dan, *nāgir ekalli*
- 819 Ninurta-ubla, [*rab šāqê??*]
- 818 Shamash-ilaya, [*masennu??*]
- 817 Nergal-ilaya, *šakin* [*māti??*]
- 816 Ashur-bunaya-usur, *rab šāqê*

The eponym list for the reign of Ashur-dan III (772–755) is anomalous, as only the king himself and the *turtānu*, in regnal years 2 and 3, are inserted to break the sequence of provincial governors, who otherwise continue on from the reign of the preceding king. Perhaps this may be associated with the political situation of the time, when Shamshi-ilu as *turtānu* dominated the empire.

There is also, as first observed by Forrer (1920: chart facing p. 7), some degree of consistency in the sequences in which provincial governors generally are listed as holding the eponymate. The evidence for the reigns of Shalmaneser III and Shamshi-Adad V is defective, but there are five undamaged sequences, commencing in the reigns of Adad-nirari III, Shalmaneser IV, Ashur-nerari V, Tiglath-pileser III, and Sargon II; each of these runs on into the start of the following king's reign, while that of Shalmaneser IV (782–773) runs on yet further to the next reign but one. An updated version of the evidence is presented here as Table 1.

The sequence of the Adad-nirari III list diverges from the later ones, besides including the *rab ša rēši*, chief eunuch, for 798. In the remaining four lists the first provincial eponym after the governor of Rasappa was always the governor of Nisibin. The second eponym in the Shalmaneser IV list was governor of Raqmat, which thereafter disappears. The next two eponyms in all four lists were governors of Kalah and Arrapha; Kalah originally had precedence, but the two changed places in the sequence under Ashur-nerari V, presumably because the governor of Kalah was in rebellion at the start of 745 when he was due to become eponym; Arrapha retained precedence thereafter. The Ashur-nerari V list ends at this point, but the remaining three lists continue with the governor of Zamua/Mazamua. The Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II lists give next the governor of Simme, apparently a new province. All three lists proceed next with the governors of Ahi-zuhina, Tille, Habruri, Tushhan, Guzana, Amedi, Nineveh, and Kilizi in the same order. The Tiglath-pileser III list ends at this point. The remaining two proceed with Arbailu, after which the Sargon/Sennacherib list inserts Til-Barsip. Next, in both lists, come Isana and Kurba'il. The Shalmaneser IV list ends with Tamnunna, Shibhinish and Talmusi, while the Sargon/Sennacherib list proceeds with Halziatbar, Tamnunna and Talmusi.

It is tolerably certain, from these details, that the eponym sequence for provincial governors introduced by the Shalmaneser IV list was retained down to the reign of Sennacherib, with minor modifications only for practical reasons, though its authority as a precedent may only have been recognised in retrospect. What is not clear is how this and earlier sequences were determined.

¹ It has been suggested that Mutarris-Ashur, the general in command of the 820 campaign, was *rab šāqê*, but the man's title should be read, with Norris (I R 30. ii. 17), LÚ.GAL SAG.MEŠ, i.e. *rab ša rēši*.

Perhaps there was a relationship with whatever rules controlled precedence among Assyrian officials in the presence of the king.

The appearance of Nisibin, former capital of Hanigalbat, at the head of the list after Rasappa, presumably reflects political prominence: the governor of Nisibin had occupied the first place after the court officials under Shalmaneser III; further, if the reconstruction mooted above is correct, he had been first after the court officials and the *šakin māti* under Shamshi-Adad V; under Adad-nirari III he followed the governor of Ahi-zuhina (see below). Similarly Kalah, the capital, is near the head of the list, and less important places such as Talmusi are towards the end; under Shalmaneser III Kalah had immediately followed Nisibin. Just as Nergal-eresh seems to have promoted the status of Rasappa, personal influence may have been responsible for the appearance of Ninurta-ilaya, governor of Ahi-zuhina, high among Adad-nirari's provincial eponyms, preceded only by Rasappa and Arrapha; Ninurta-ilaya was a senior official, who had probably held this same post since his previous eponymate in 837. As a preceding governor of Ahi-zuhina had been eponym only two years before, in 839, it is possible that at this stage a newly appointed governor of suitable status could, like a court official, take the first available eponymate. Yet there is no obviously overriding logic in the order of some of the governors before 750.

Was there still an element of chance in the choice? Status and power certainly decided the identity of many eponyms, possibly all of them. The number of visible regularities in the sequence increases through different reigns from Shalmaneser III on. By the time of Tiglath-pileser III, it was possible to determine which official would probably be eponym many years in advance. The formal decision was presumably taken by the king, relying on precedent and other considerations. One practical advantage of advance planning was that scribes throughout the empire could date tablets correctly without having to use the *ša arki* expedient every year, with the old eponym's name, while waiting for news of the new eponym from Ashur; some such practice was assumed to lie behind the confusion surrounding the year 786 or 785, as tabulated most conveniently by Gurney (1953: 21), when an eponym designate may have died at the last moment, but the alternative explanation offered in Table 1 is simpler.

In other words preliminary procedures existed, for deciding who should be eponym, before the actual year of the eponymate began. We have to distinguish three stages. The first was a provisional decision; since kings themselves became eponyms in their second rather than first full regnal year, we know that the identity of an eponym could be provisionally decided more than one year in advance. Subsequently some kind of announcement must have been made, though it was possible to accommodate changes, as probably for the eponym of 745. The third stage in the process consisted of final divine ratification of the choice, most probably in a formal and ancient ceremony at or immediately preceding the start of the eponymate year itself. Such a ceremony, at the beginning of Shalmaneser III's second eponymate cycle, is mentioned on the Black Obelisk. There the king recalls the time *šanūtešu pūru ina pān Aššur Adad akruru*, "when I cast the lot for the second time in front of Ashur and Adad" (Michel 1956: 230). This is said to have happened in regnal year 31. The date at which it really happened is uncertain, since the Obelisk has the regnal years confused at this point (Reade 1978: 254), and the remainder of the entry refers to a campaign of regnal year 33 (826). Regnal year 31 is clearly possible for the casting of the lot, but the king actually became eponym in regnal year 32 (827). Though the word used is *pūru*, lot, the king obviously had no serious competition.

If we return now to the Yahalu cube, it would have been most suitable for this final ceremony. If its object was merely to identify the lot and select one out of a group of established candidates, there was no intrinsic need for the lengthy inscription found on it. All that was necessary was that each candidate's lot should be physically similar and readily identifiable. The inscription is an invocation suitable for recitation at the telling moment, just before the eponymate of Yahalu began. However the ceremony was contrived, it was certain by this stage that Yahalu was to be eponym for the year.

In conclusion, Yahalu's cube applies to his first eponymate in 833, when he was *masennu*, and only two explanations for the making of the cube are now feasible. In our view it was made as the one lot that could qualify in a formal election, distantly recalling an older genuine lottery. As such it would have been used in an appropriate ceremony, which demonstrated divine approbation of the

TABLE 1: Chart of eponym sequences from Ashur-nasir-pal II to Sennacherib. Uncertain entries: 866, 864 — eponyms bear same names as governors of Guzana and Kalah in this period; 849, 838 — assuming that Amedi was capital of the province of Nairi, and preferring Nairi on the 838 eponym's Ashur stela to Rasappa of the eponym list; 831 — eponym bears same name as 815 governor of Nisibin; 819–817, 722–720 — possibilities based on practice in other reigns; 785 — conflating Adad-uballit of Tamnunna with Balatu(?) of Shibaniba

	<i>AšNP</i>	<i>Šal3</i>	<i>ŠA5</i>	<i>AdN3</i>	<i>Šal4</i>	<i>AšD3</i>	<i>AšN5</i>	<i>TP3</i>	<i>Šal5</i>	<i>Sar</i>	<i>Senn</i>	
king	882	857	827	822	809	781	771	753	743	723	719	687
<i>turtānu</i>		856, 853	826, 824	821, 814	808	780	770	752	742	722		686
<i>rab šāqē</i>		855	825	819, 816	806	779		750	740		721	
<i>nāgir ekalli</i>		854, 850		823, 820	807	778		751	741		720	
<i>masennu</i>		833		818	805	777		749	739		717	
<i>rab ekalli</i>	873											
<i>rab ša rēši</i>					798							
Ashur				817	804	776		748	738		716	
Rasappa					803	775		747	737		718	
Nisibin		852, 831		815	800	782, 774		746	736		715	
Raqmat		836		812	795	773						
Kalah	864	851, 829			797		772		744, 734		713	
Arrapha		828		811	802		769	745	735		714	
Mazamua					810, 783		768		733		712	
Simme									732		711	
Ahi-zuhina		839, 837			801		767		731		710	
Tille					792		766		730		709	
Habruri		835		813	796		765		729		708	
Tushan	867				794		764		728		707	
Guzana	866				793		763		727		706	
Amedi		849, 838			799		762			726	705	
Nineveh		834			789		761			725		704
Kilizi		832			788		760			724		703
Arbailu					787		759					702
Til-Barsip												701
Isana		830			790		758					700
Kurbailu					784		757					699
Halziatbar												698
Tamnunna					785		756					697
Shibaniba					785							
Shibhinish					791		755					
Talmusi					786			754				696
Nimit-Ishtar		842										
Katmuhi												695
Damascus												694
Dur-Sharruken												693
Arpad												692
Carchemish												691
Samaria												690
Hatarikka												689
Simirra												688
Que												685
Kullania												684
Supite												683
Marash												682
Sam'al												681

predetermined choice. An alternative, which seems to us less satisfactory, was briefly suggested by Kessler (1980: 170): he proposed that it was a commemorative or votive object prepared after the election to record the candidate's successful appointment. In the latter case, the creation of such an elaborate piece might not have been a regular occurrence, but would have been particularly appropriate in the circumstances of Yahalu's first appointment, since this was apparently the first time that a *masennu* official was elected to the ancient and prestigious office of eponym.

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