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**Speech Acts in Akkadian in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE  
Akty mowy w języku akadyjskim w pierwszym tysiącleciu p.n.e.**

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## Akty mowy w języku akadyjskim w I tys. p.n.e.

Celem poniższej pracy jest analiza aktów mowy w języku akadyjskim w pierwszym tysiącleciu p.n.e.

Akadyjski to język wschodniosemicki używany na terenie współczesnego Iraku i przyległych obszarów między trzecim tysiącleciem p.n.e. a początkami naszej ery (Kouwenberg 2011). Po prawie dwóch tysiącach lat zapomnienia, akadyjski został ponownie odczytany w połowie XIX wieku. Kolejne ekspedycje wydobyły na światło dzienne setki tysięcy glinianych tabliczek zapisanych pismem klinowym, zawierających najróżniejsze teksty administracyjne, gospodarcze, literackie a także korespondencję prywatną oraz tę pochodzącą z kancelarii władców poszczególnych miast, a potem również pierwszych imperiów (królestwo Hammurabiego ze stolicą w Babilonie, archiwa z pałacu Zimri-Lima w Mari, archiwa nowoasyryjskiej dynastii Sargonidów).

Tabliczki z pismem klinowym przedstawiają wyjątkowe trudności w interpretacji tekstu nie tylko ze względu na stosunkowo niedawne odczytanie pisma i języka, ale również dlatego, że pismo klinowe jest trójwymiarowe: znaki pisma klinowego wykonywano poprzez naciskanie stylusem na miękką i wilgotną powierzchnię gliny. Właściwe odczytanie znaków wymaga umiejętności, które można przyswoić sobie wyłącznie metodą prób i błędów. Samo trzymanie tabliczki pod właściwym kątem do źródła światła może przesądzić o tym, czy bystre oko filologa dostrzeże wszystkie kliny wyciśnięte w glinie, a także czy filolog właściwie oceni miejsca, w których zachowały się wyłącznie fragmenty znaków. Chociaż glina po wyschnięciu stanowi twardy i wytrzymały materiał, wiele spośród tabliczek uległo w ciągu stuleci częściowemu zniszczeniu. Uzupełnienia bazujące na stereotypowych zwrotach a także informacjach wynikających z innych tekstów stanowią zatem istotną część pracy, jaką trzeba wykonać, żeby we właściwy sposób odczytać i zrozumieć tabliczkę klinową.

Akty mowy są na potrzeby tej pracy zdefiniowane jako wypowiedzi, które pozwalają użytkownikom języka działać słowami. Takie podejście do aktów mowy (nie tylko *speech acts*, ale i *speech actions*), bliskie jest tradycjom etnograficznym oraz socjologicznym w językoznawstwie (Clark 1996), nie zaś filozofii języka (Austin 1962; Searle 1969, reprinted 1978; Searle 1976). Poszczególne akty mowy będą identyfikowane na podstawie ich pozycji w sekwencji aktów mowy, co jednocześnie pozwoli na uniknięcie problemów z identyfikacją i kategoryzacją pośrednich aktów mowy (Levinson 2017). Takie podejście bliskie jest analizie konwersacyjnej (Schegloff 2007; Schegloff 2017). Koncepcja sekwencji oraz ruchów (w analizie konwersacyjnej zwykle „turns”, tutaj: „moves”) to nie jedyne koncepcje, które zostaną zapożyczone na potrzeby tej pracy z analizy konwersacyjnej. Istotne są również tak zwane przyległe („adjacency pairs”), czyli dwa sąsiadujące ze sobą ruchy rozmówców, z których pierwszy stanowi reakcję na drugi (Schegloff 2007, 13). Chociaż natura dostępnych źródeł epistolograficznych powoduje, że w przeważającej większości przypadków mamy do czynienia wyłącznie z listami wysłanymi przez jedną stronę wymiany korespondencyjnej, nadawcy często cytują poprzednie fragmenty poprzednich listów swoich adresatów i z to zjawisko należy wykorzystać.

Zgromadzone, zidentyfikowane i ustawione w sekwencji akty mowy zostaną następnie przeanalizowane zgodnie z koncepcjami analizy dyskursu opracowanymi przez Verschuerena (2012). Nacechowany język, środki stylistyczne, aluzje i toposy literackie, implikacje wypowiedzi (listy należy uznać za szczególny rodzaj wypowiedzi, formę przedłużonego i przemyślanego ruchu, który częściowo antycypuje odpowiedź adresata), a także milczące (i nie tylko) oczekiwania mówiącego lub nadawcy listu zostaną uwzględnione by w maksymalny sposób umożliwić scharakteryzowanie zasad rządzących komunikacją w języku akademickim w pierwszym tysiącleciu przed naszą erą.

Zakładając, że nadawcy listów najchętniej zacytują swoich adresatów w sytuacjach krytycznych, skupiam się w poniższej pracy przede wszystkim na trzech aktach mowy wypowiedzianych przed sytuacją krytyczną (ostrzeżenia, obietnice, groźby), w momencie, gdy problem zostaje zidentyfikowany (skargi oraz towarzyszące im prośby oraz upomnienia), a także w sytuacji po identyfikacji problemu (przeprosiny, wymówki, a także wyrzuty i reakcje na wyrzut). W taki sam sposób zostały przeanalizowane akty mowy z partii dialogowych w utworach literackich.

Wykorzystane w poniższej pracy źródła tekstowe to:

1. Korespondencja z kancelarii królów nowoasyryjskich (Tiglat-pilezera III<sup>1</sup>, Salmanazara V<sup>2</sup>, Sargona II<sup>3</sup>, Sancheryba<sup>4</sup>, Asarhaddona<sup>5</sup>, Asurbanipala<sup>6</sup> oraz Sîn-šarru-iškuna<sup>7</sup>), wydana w serii *State Archives of Assyria* (Luukko 2012b; Parpola 2015; Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990; Fuchs and Parpola 2001; Parpola 1993; Cole and Machinist 1998; Luukko and van Buylaere 2002; Parpola 2018; Dietrich 2003; Reynolds 2003);
2. Korespondencja gubernatora Nippur z VIII wieku p.n.e. (Cole 1996);
3. Korespondencja ze świątyń babilońskich z VI wieku p.n.e. (Levavi 2018);
4. Prywatna korespondencja z archiwów późnobabilońskich między VI wiekiem p.n.e. a okresem rządów dynastii Achemenidów (Hackl et al. 2014);
5. Mīt o stworzeniu świata *enūma eliś* (Lambert 2013);
6. Mīt o bogu Erra (Cagni 1969);
7. Epos o Gilgamešu (George 2003);
8. Zejście Istar to podziemi (Lapinkivi 2010);
9. Mīt o Nergalu i Ereškigal (Ponchia and Luukko 2013).

Powyższa lista oznacza, że pochodzące z różnych okresów teksty różnią się od siebie znacząco zakresem tematyki oraz tłem społecznym nadawców. Podczas gdy z okresu panowania Tilgat-pilezara,

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<sup>1</sup> Akk. Tukultī-apil-Ešarra; 744-727 p.n.e.

<sup>2</sup> Akk. Salmānu-ašarēd; 727-722 p.n.e.

<sup>3</sup> Akk. Šarru-ukīn; 721-705 p.n.e.

<sup>4</sup> Akk. Sîn-aḫḫē-erība; 705-681 p.n.e.

<sup>5</sup> Akk. Aššūr-aḫu-iddina; 681-669 p.n.e.

<sup>6</sup> Akk. Aššūr-bāni-apli; 669-631 p.n.e.

<sup>7</sup> 627-612 p.n.e. Żadne listy nie mogą zostać z pewnością przypisane do krótkiego okresu panowania (631-627 p.n.e.) Aššūr-etel-ilāniego, brata i poprzednika Sîn-šarru-iškuna.

Salmanazara oraz Sargon pochodzi duża liczba listów administracyjnych, pisanych do króla przez najwyższych urzędników państwowych, w tym gubernatorów prowincji, listy z okresu panowania Asarhaddona oraz Asurbanipala pochodzą od uczonych, kapłanów oraz osób utrzymujących z królami stosunki dyplomatyczne. Praktycznie brak listów pisanych przez osoby prywatne (takich jak w korpusie późnobabilońskim) oraz tych wymienianych między urzędnikami średniego szczebla (jak te ze świątyń), co prawie całkowicie uniemożliwia jakiegokolwiek badania diachroniczne.

Akty mowy w szerokim rozumieniu tego słowa były w języku akadyjskim badane sporadycznie. Dość dużą uwagę poświęcono pozdrowieniom umieszczanym w „nagłówkach” listów. Salonen (1967) zgromadził formuły z błogosławieństwami i pozdrowieniami z wszystkich dostępnych mu w 1967 listów, podczas gdy Luukko (2012a) zbadał pozdrowienia i błogosławieństwa w korespondencji z VII wieku p.n.e., wyróżniając pozdrowienie „standardowe” i to typowe dla króla, zauważając przy tym, że niektóre formułki przypominające raport i następujące po pozdrowieniu, niemal stanowiąc jego część, w istocie są ściśle związane z działaniami przedsięwziętymi przez nadawcę listu.

Sallaberger (1999) zbadał komunikację w listach starobabilońskich, a więc starszych od analizowanych w poniższej pracy o około tysiąc lat. Zbadał sposoby zwracania się nadawców do adresatów – przeważały wśród nich terminy oparte na określeniach pokrewieństwa, takie jak „brat” albo „ojciec”. Jednocześnie wykazał, że prośby poprzedzane są przez sekwencje, w których nadawcy wykazują się inicjatywą, donosząc o wysłanych przez siebie towarach albo załatwionych sprawach, a dopiero następnie umieszczają w listach swoje własne prośby. Po prośbach może wystąpić obietnica modlitwy albo odwzajemnienia przysługi – rodzaj podziękowania z góry albo argumentu mającego na celu przekonanie adresata, że powinien spełnić prośbę nadawcy.

Analiza przeprowadzona w trzech częściach poniższej pracy wykazała następujące wnioski:

1. Obietnice występują w odpowiedzi na rozkazy pochodzące od króla oraz innych osób o wyższej pozycji w hierarchii. Między osobami o tym samym statusie występują jako metoda perswazji w celu ustalenia wzajemnie korzystnej współpracy. Obietnice wypowiedziane przez bogów i królów przyjmują formę rozkazów.
2. Ostrzeżenia rzadko spełniają swoją pierwotną funkcję i bardzo niewiele z nich faktycznie odnosi się do czyhających na rozmówców bądź adresatów niebezpieczeństw. Wyjątkiem jest ostrzeżenie o nadchodzącym potopie, ogłoszone do trzcinowego płotu i ceglanej ściany w eposie o Gilgamešu oraz ostrzeżenia zawarte w denuncjacjach – niektóre z nich napisane są w taki sposób, jakby faktycznie pochodziły od bogów i wykazują podobieństwa stylistyczne z asyryjskimi prorocztwami (SAA 16 59 oraz SAA 16 60). Większość ostrzeżeń zawarta jest w argumentach mających przekonać odbiorcę bądź adresata, że w przypadku niespełnienia prośby nadawcy/mówiącego, tego pierwszego czekają straszne konsekwencje.
3. Groźby są przywilejem królów, którzy bez trudu odwołują się do aktów przemocy, jeśli ich rozkazy nie zostaną spełnione dostatecznie szybko (SAA 1 22, groźba nadziana na pal i

zamordowania rodziny). Zdesperowani urzędnicy średniego szczebla, gdy ich prośby nie odnoszą żadnego skutku, powołują się na autorytet urzędników wyższego szczebla, by grozić przemocom swoim współpracownikom. Groźby bogiń zajmują niecodzienną pozycję, pokazując ich moc a jednocześnie bezsilność: chociaż boginie w „Zejściu Ištar do podziemi”, micie o Nergalu i Ereškigal oraz eposie o Gilgamešu grożą zburzeniem porządku wszechświata i sprowadzeniem zmarłych na ziemię, by stali się liczniejsi niż żywi, we wszystkich trzech sytuacjach boginie znajdują się w pozycji petentek. W eposie o Gilgamešu wypowiadającej groźbie bogini miłości Ištar przypisywać należy nawet pewnego rodzaju bezsilność – nie mogąc samodzielnie ukarać Gilgameša za rzucone na nią obelgi, bogini musi prosić o pomoc swojego ojca.

4. Skargi są nieodłącznie związane z prośbami, chociaż nie wymagają wyrażania prośby wprost. Skarga może stanowić jądro petycji do króla, ale dodatkowe, poboczne skargi dotyczące tragicznego położenia nadawcy listu oraz jego cierpienia mogą stanowić dodatkowy argument na rzecz spełnienia jego prośby. Nierzadkie są też oskarżenia pod adresem osób, które stanowią przyczynę wszystkich bądź tylko niektórych nieszczęść piszącego, a także całe denuncjacje, których celem jest uświadomienie królowi, że nazwane z imienia osoby stanowią zagrożenie dla asyryjskiego ładu oraz zdrowia i życia króla.
5. W kontekście skarg i prośb istotne jest rozważanie argumentów stosowanych przez piszących i mówiących. Zaskakująco częstym motywem jest argument z równego traktowania – jeśli osoby o tym samym statusie co nadawca coś otrzymały, nadawca powinien otrzymać to samo, zaś jeśli król wybaczył innym winowajcom, nadawca również nie powinien pozostawać w niełasce. Inny częsty argument dotyczy dawania złego przykładu – jeśli winni nie zostaną ukarani, inni mogą w przyszłości zrobić to samo. Za wieloma argumentami kryją się milczące oczekiwania dotyczące stosunków, jakie powinny panować między „braćmi” albo panem i jego sługą – jeśli uczony, którego pozycja jest kliencka (Radner 2015), wspomina o swojej przykładowej służbie i o tym, że nie zaniedbuje swoich obowiązków, to robi to dlatego, że oczekuje od króla nagrody za wierność. W innych przypadkach nadawcy listów sami kładą nacisk na to, że nadawca jest ich „ojcem”, „bratem” lub „synem” – a za wychowanie należy się wdzięczność. Nawet potwornej Tiāmat bogowie, jej dzieci, wyrzucają brak miłości.
6. Przeprosiny i wymówki realizowane są przede wszystkim jako prośby, by nie gniewać się na osobę mówiącą/nadawcę oraz jako komplementy sugerujące łaskawość osoby urażonej lub potencjalnie urażonej. Ich zasadniczym celem jest uniknięcie konsekwencji własnego występkę, chociaż nadawcy listów do króla nierzadko obiecują również kompensację. W reakcjach na wyrzuty stawiane przez króla – i nie tylko – widać jednak jasno, że w odpowiedzi na pytania o zakładaną przez pytającego winę, pytający nie oczekuje przeprosiny – albo przynajmniej nie tylko przeprosiny. Takie pytanie stawiane są przede wszystkim, aby uzyskać wytłumaczenie albo wymówkę, a niektóre z nich stanowią oskarżenia. Nadawcy

listów dostarczają więc wymówek lub sprostowań – zaprzeczają swojej własnej przewinie bądź kwestionują samo zajęcie.

W listach widać jednocześnie pomysłowość skrybów, którzy śmiało wykorzystują pochlebstwa (w tym porównując króla do boga – SAA 16 127 oraz SAA 18 181 (tutaj do samego Marduka), twórczo przekształcają teksty literackie, w tym modlitwy, tak by lepiej pasowały do próśb przez wzmiankę o życzliwym spojrzeniu boga bądź króla na proszącego zamiast wspomnienia o boskim gniewie (SAA 18 181). Jednocześnie sami piszący często cierpią „głód” lub „umierają” i czekają, żeby ich pan albo „ojciec” przywrócił ich do życia. Większość z tych wypowiedzi zawiera w sobie przesadę, ale należy pamiętać, że głód był dla wielu mieszkańców starożytnej Mezopotamii stałym towarzyszem (Oppenheim 1955; Richardson 2016), a brak tabuizacji koncepcji życia i śmierci wiązać należy z pewnością z poziomem przemocy w pierwszym tysiącleciu, również w kontekstach pozamilitarnych (Jursa 2014; Fuchs 2009; Roth 1987).

Normy rządzące komunikacją nakazują użytkownikom akadyjskiego w listach oraz w dialogach reprezentować emocje w zupełnie inny sposób niż ten, do jakiego przywykły nawet osoby zaznajomione z grecką i rzymską starożytnością. Szczególnie w korespondencji z władcą widoczny jest brak udawanego opanowania, wręcz przeciwnie, powtarzające się wzmianki o głodzie, pragnieniu i śmierci sugerują, że nadawcy nierzadko mogli przesadzać.

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## Speech Acts in Akkadian in the 1st millennium BCE

The aim of this work is to analyse speech acts in the Akkadian language in the first millennium BCE. Epistolographic and literary sources (dialogues) were used as the basis for the study.

The approach to speech actions chosen by this work follows the sociological (Goffman 1972; Clark 1996) tradition as well as the analytical tools developed by conversation analysis (Schegloff 2007; Schegloff 2017). Speech acts were identified and divided into sequences. Where possible, the reactions to speech actions were isolated in an attempt to discern adjacency pairs.

The special focus of the investigations were speech actions associated with situations of disruption and conflict, separated in three groups based on the relation to the situation of disruption. The first part included the state of things before the crisis, focussing on warnings, threats, and promises. The analysis in the second part dealt with complaints, as well as requests and arguments that are associated with them. In the third part, the focus was turned to the situation after the crisis, and the analysis of apologies, excuses, and reactions to reproaches.

Warnings in Akkadian in the first millennium BCE proved to be deployed above all as arguments. Threats appeared to be used by either the most powerful, or by the most desperate (female deities, officials of the middle rank). Promises, despite the absence of a dedicated grammatical form, were clearly taken seriously by the senders and speakers and recounted in complaints and reminders when not fulfilled.

Among the complaints, a complete lack of emotional restraint coupled with a good deal of directness was easily discernible. Realisations of individual complaints were often accompanied by reference to extreme situations of hunger and thirst, and included frequent imagery of death and revival – likely the result of constant food insecurity and ubiquitous violence in the first millennium Mesopotamia (Jursa 2014; Fuchs 2009; Roth 1987; Oppenheim 1955; Richardson 2016). The complaints were typically based on explicit and implicit references to the reciprocity of relationships between partners of equal and unequal rank, although some differences between the private and institutional context were discernible.

The main goal of apologies was that of averting the consequences of offense – the same pattern is also attested in prayers. Reactions to reproaches show clearly that when the offended party mentioned the offence, it was typically too late for only an apology. An excuse or an utter denial of offense had to follow.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this work is to examine the ways speech actions were expressed and used in sequences in Akkadian texts in the first millennium BCE. In many respects, this task is not unlike trying to ascertain the type of bread eaten during a feast on the basis of crumbs left on the tablecloth by hurriedly departing guests – the bulk of the once great language<sup>1</sup> is lost, and what remains – shattered into fragments. Akkadian is an East Semitic language used in Mesopotamia from about the middle of the second millennium BCE to the beginnings of the common era (Kouwenberg 2011). It was only rediscovered and deciphered in the relatively recent past: in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Despite almost two centuries of intense and laborious process of decipherment and the slow edition of the excavated cuneiform tablets, it is only in the recent years that many important texts were finally presented in a reliable form, making the following study possible.

Akkadian was written down in the syllabic-logographic cuneiform script with numerous polyvalent signs and non-standardised orthography. A single sign can have multiple syllabic and logographic readings, although it is true that some of them were limited to certain periods and contexts. The medium of cuneiform was most usually clay – though also other materials, such as stone, could also be inscribed, and even in the texts that will be discussed in the following chapters, numerous mentions of wooden writing boards covered with wax were made<sup>2</sup>. The wedges of which the cuneiform signs are composed were impressed in the clay when it was still soft and wet. Thus, the script itself is three-dimensional, which has far-reaching consequences for deciphering both the well-preserved and damaged passages. Simply mastering the signs is not the only prerequisite for dealing with cuneiform successfully: one must also know at what angle the tablet needs to be held so that the play of light and shadow reveals the signs to the eye of the philologist. Although clay, when it has dried, is a durable material, it is not indestructible. The task of grappling with damaged passages is made frustrating – but all the more rewarding – by the three-dimensional character of the remaining traces. A more experienced epigraphist can thus read much more than would appear to the less practiced eye – under their scrutiny, the meagre scratches and holes can turn into shadowy forms of the text written millennia before.

Language is used for doing things (Clark 1996, 3) – speech acts are phenomena of language that allow speakers to carry out actions by the means of words, with, under the right circumstances, real world consequences. Their use is embedded in often quite complex interrelations of internal and external

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<sup>1</sup> *Fragmente einer großen Sprache* is the title of the book by Alexa Bartelmus (2016) about the handful school tablets from the Kassite period that are the tattered remnants of what was a peaceful period of vibrant literary production and reproduction. However, when one discards the very numerous administrative and economic texts, the total number of letters and literary works is but a small percentage of the entire textual record. The situation of Akkadian is completely different than even that of Latin or ancient Greek.

<sup>2</sup> A comprehensible introduction to the clay tablet as a medium for writing, as well as the production and layouts of cuneiform tablets is provided by Taylor 2011.

context, presuppositions, common grounds, social roles and expectations, and always a joined enterprise, in which two or more partners participate jointly (Clark 1996; Verschueren 2012).

The analysis of speech acts and surrounding phenomena in a dead language presents unique challenges. In the first place, the sources available to the analyst are quite limited and often fragmentary. Instead of investigating the most basic setting of face-to-face conversation (Clark 1996, 8), one needs to find a method suitable for written sources only. In the case of Akkadian, there exist two types of sources in which one can expect an exchange between the minimum of two partners to take place: the literary texts with their dialogues, and letters in which the exchanges between epistolary partners are suspended in time. The senders of the letters may occasionally quote the previous messages from their addressees, providing important clues about the reactions to certain types of utterances. In other cases, they try to anticipate the reactions of the addressees to what they are writing themselves and forestall any doubts or reservations they might have.

Before the detailed description of the preserved first millennium texts in Akkadian and the possibilities they offer as well as the difficulties they may pose, it is necessary to establish what is meant on the following pages by speech actions and how it is proposed to investigate them. After the essential definitions, I will briefly present the ways in which speech acts can be identified in discourse with a special emphasis on how it can be done in the preserved sources. The theoretical section will conclude with a brief summary of the history of research into speech acts and communicative practices in Akkadian.

The second section will provide a description of the cuneiform tablets used in the analysis, with texts belonging to diverse genres and originating in different sociopragmatic contexts. An account of the dating of the texts and groups of texts will be given as well as a summary of the state of preservation of the text groups and the way this imposes limitations on the present study in several important regards. Finally, the chosen text editions will be introduced, with some of the problematic issues briefly mentioned.

The third part of the present work will focus on the case studies of individual speech acts and their sequences in chosen textual genres. The different addressees/readerships of those texts, their social contexts and participants (active or silent) will supply valuable comparanda, providing a broader picture of language use phenomena in first millennium Akkadian.

The aim of this work is to contribute to the understanding of communicative processes in Akkadian and the implicit rules that governed them, including a glimpse into the shared assumptions, presumptions and social norms that guided them. The broad selection of textual genres will illustrate a variety of phenomena exhibited in different contexts and influenced by a variety of factors.

## 1.1. Speech Acts

Speech are utterances that carry out actions by virtue of being spoken (Levinson 2017, 199). They were defined and described for the first time<sup>3</sup> by Austin (1962). Austin's theory of illocutionary (speech) acts was further developed and modified by Searle (1969, reprinted 1978). In trying to draw up a list of conditions that have to be fulfilled in order for a speech act to be carried out successfully, called the felicity conditions, both Austin and Searle were above all concerned with the universal rules underlying the processes of human communication.

A different approach was developed in an unpublished conference contribution by Grice (Levinson 2017, 201), who focused above all on speaker's and hearer's intentions as the decisive factor in the emergence of successful speech acts.

Another method of dealing with speech acts has been proposed in research paradigms concerned with language use and patterns of communication (Clark 1996; Schegloff 2007; Schegloff 2017). In Conversation Analysis and Clark's theory of language use, language as such is employed in the first place for doing things and everything that is done in the course of communicative processes, of which the most representative is the face-to-face conversation, constitutes an action. Actions can be joined, individual or coordinated, when conceived of as individual parts of a single joint action. Clark sees types of language use other than conversation, including written texts, as basically similar in character, if devoid of some of important markers of conversation, as shaped by the circumstances of the medium, the (intended) participants and potentially fictional nature.

The Conversation Analysis approach is above all concerned with the organisation of various forms of human interaction in their social contexts. The central focus is not only the linguistic phenomena that occur in human interaction, but also gestures, movement and other non-linguistic features of communication. Interactions are sequences of turns, each fulfilling a different function and contributing to the overall goal of the communicative event. This is precisely the insight shared by Conversation Analysis and Clark's paradigm: communicative exchanges are formed by actions occurring in a sequence. The correct order of the actions in a sequence is of utmost importance for the success of any communicative enterprise and is shaped and exploited variously by the participants in any given joint action (of a higher order) or communicative event.

Some speech act theorists see no need to separate the speech actions in the sense proposed by Conversation Analysis (Schegloff 2007; Schegloff 2017) and Clark (1996) from speech acts as described by philosophy of language (for instance Levinson 2017, 204). An argument for keeping apart

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<sup>3</sup> It must be noted, however, that Edwin Koschmieder, German slavist, preceded Austin by several years, describing the instances of coincidence or simultaneity of speech and action (called by him 'Koinzidenzfall') in an article from 1930. Koschmieder, however, didn't consider the extra-linguistic factors that have bearing on the carrying out of a speech act (Heimpel and Guidi 1969, 148).

performatives in the sense of explicit illocutionary acts and other actions is made by Searle (2001), although he does point out that statements also constitute performances. There are two basic observations at the bottom of this issue. The first one, defended by Searle, is that there is something special and still difficult to explain about the way performatives or explicit illocutionary acts are understood by speakers as action. The second one, as made by the theorists of Conversation Analysis and Clark, is that within the sequences of conversations speakers are performing different actions by means of expression(s) that often literally would mean something completely different than they do in these particular sequences and that expressions that appear at the first glance to have little to no function actually serve a well-defined, systematically observable purpose. Since the present study is concerned above all with language use, the remark that even statements are performances will *not* be trivial and therefore the term ‘speech actions’ will be used interchangeably with ‘speech acts’ on the following pages whenever the distinction between the philosophy of language and empirical study of the realisations of speech acts in communication is not for some other reason important.

Much has been written on speech act theory especially in the 1970s and 1980s. However, very few of the issues already apparent to Austin and Searle have been solved, many having been instead further complicated by the accretion of new facts and observations (Levinson 2017, 199, for earlier literature see Levinson 1983, 226). Some of the raised and remaining issues are vital to the theoretical underpinnings of the present study and shall be characterised in some detail on the following pages. The problems that any investigation of speech acts has to face are above all: typology, identification of speech actions and the issue of the so-called indirect speech acts.

The main aim of the present study is the identification of patterns of usage in the realisations of individual speech actions. Carrying out this task based on the data from a language whose written record is spotty at best creates numerous problems that need to be overcome in advance. The available sources are often damaged and fragmentary. The epistolographic corpus is almost always one-sided. The short history of research and the relatively recent decipherment mean that some expressions can still be not entirely understood – or understood only in the most general sense. The absence of living speakers means that one frequently has to make guesses – albeit educated ones – based on the situational context. All this makes the classification of speech actions in the Akkadian texts a very daunting task indeed.

The question of typology of speech acts was crucial to Austin (1962, 1) and Searle (1976) almost from the outset. They both allotted quite a lot of space to the discussion of how to categorise and define speech acts, which is only natural, considering they both focused on the felicity conditions<sup>4</sup> of illocutionary acts. Some classes of speech acts would share a significant enough number of requisite conditions that would make them fall under the same category. As a result, Austin produced a classification of speech acts encompassing behabitives, commissives, excercitives, expositives and verdictives, while Searle

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<sup>4</sup> One of Searle’s major contributions here was the focus on intentions and their categories.

originally ended up with assertives, commissives, declarations, directives, and expressives. This kind of approach is viable only as long as the lists of conditions are indeed enumerations of minimal sufficient conditions common to all the speech acts within the single category and independent of cultural context (Levinson 2017, 205).

However, this typology, although useful when attempting to delineate the universal tendencies in human thinking or even in languages as systems, easily becomes a hindrance when dealing with the raw data of individual languages and their sheer variety. The basic taxonomy of speech acts can drastically limit one's expectations, preventing one from finding that what one is not already looking for. While a certain amount of theory is necessary to see the patterns in the data and to bring them in order, an Austinian-Searlean typology is excessively restrictive in an investigation of the type that is proposed here.

This entire typology is a product of modern scholarship and has little to do with what the ancient thought of their use of language themselves. This is, however, inevitable, as almost nothing is stated about the norms of language use in the ancient sources<sup>5</sup>. No treatises similar to Aristotle's *Poetics* were written in Babylonia or Assyria. A letter from the Neo-Assyrian corpus answers a potential question of whether it is appropriate to write in Aramaic and on parchment to the king (the king commands that it is not, see SAA 17 2, obv. 17.-22.; Dietrich 2003, 5–6). The topic of another letter is the complaint of the sender who has no scribe – who should be carrying out the actual act of writing (the official if forced to write his letter himself and he clearly execute his task well enough – see the discussion by Parpola 1997b; the letter is edited as SAA 15 17<sup>6</sup> in Fuchs and Parpola 2001, 13). Multiple letters in the corpus thematise what kind of information should be passed on to the king (everything even marginally relevant to the rule of the king, see Baker and Groß 2015; Fales 2015; Radner 2015). The names, professions and the toponyms of the places in which the writers of the letters resided give some indication of who believed themselves to be allowed to write to the king at all, although in some cases that belief might not have been shared by the king, if one takes a look at the senders who mention that their previous messages on the same topic remained unanswered. The senders of both private and royal letters frequently mention their disappointment at not receiving letters from their correspondents. There are some indications in the literary works, such as the myth of Nergal and Ereškigal, that the need for a greeting under certain circumstances was compelling indeed. Nowhere, however, do we find explicit instructions on how one was supposed to write letters to the king, or indeed write letters at all. There are some fragmentary texts that are likely to be attributed to the school milieu, which either copy multiple letters or include letters together with lexical compositions, but no comprehensive analysis of these letters from the first

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<sup>5</sup> That is, except from the precious fragments that explicitly or implicitly deal with social norms of language use and manners, which I hope to extract and analyse in the following chapters.

<sup>6</sup> Parpola (1997b) claims that the letter is overall beautifully written. It is true that the signs are not the work of an unpractised hand, but the spaces between the signs and between lines are extremely large. There is also the minor misspelling of the toponym Arrapha as URU. *arrap-ra-ap-ḥa* instead of URU. *arrap-ḥa* in obv. 11.



millennium exists, and isolated examples are often too fragmentary to allow any sort of investigation in the first place<sup>7</sup>.

One learned to write – and also probably compose – by copying other texts.<sup>8</sup> This must have been accompanied by oral instruction, which is, however, completely lost. The only way to learn anything about the language use and the norms that guided it for the ancients is to study the patterns – and thus the implicit rules – in the texts themselves.

According to Levinson (2017, 203–204), there are four basic ways of identifying speech acts, two of them related. Firstly, one may rely on the natural metalanguage and the vernacular names it has for speech acts, as well as speech act verbs such as ‘to thank’, ‘to greet’ and so on. However, one only need to refer here again to the speech acts introduced by Conversation Analysis, for which no non-technical names exist. Additionally, Akkadian presents its own set of difficulties with regard to identifying speech acts by the verb that would ideally express them *and only them*, having multifunctional verbs such as *karābu* (‘to bless’) that can just as well be used to express blessings as thanks and greetings (Landsberger 1928-1929; Sallaberger 1999, 112–127; Salonen 1967). The common speech verb, *qabû*, (‘to speak’) can also mean ‘to command’, ‘to promise’ or ‘to complain’ – its meaning is simply very general.

The second method of identifying speech acts requires the compilation of lists of sufficient and exhaustive felicity conditions, that is conditions, linguistic and other, that have to be fulfilled in order for the speech act to be carried out successfully. This, however, has proven to be extremely problematic over time, and numerous studies have been devoted to the explanations why particular lists of felicity conditions are not sufficient, not exhaustive or too broad (Wunderlich 1976). Additionally, as Levinson notes, many speech acts can be subdivided into different sub-types, the felicity conditions of which would largely differ. Finally, the whole endeavour, if at all productive, would only be so for a language for which the manner in which the speech actions can be encoded are already perfectly clear or at least verifiable by living informants. It would hardly benefit an analysis of the type proposed here to start with potentially false preconceptions.

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<sup>7</sup> For the Late Babylonian attestations, see for instance Nos. 119 and 122, 124 and 125 in Gurney 1989 No. 119 is a fragment of the letter in the reverse, with an uncopied fragment of the third tablet of the thematic lexical list *ur<sub>3</sub>-ra = ħubullu* in the obverse (Gurney 1989, 12). Nos. 122 and 124 seem to copy two letters, and No. 125 copies a letter and a contract, with another fragment of the third tablet of the above-mentioned list not copied by Gurney (see page 13). No school exercises with letters are known from Assyria.

<sup>8</sup> To what extent learning to write meant also learning to compose is unclear. Sallaberger’s investigation of letters from the Old Babylonian period copied as school exercises, though, shows clearly that they differ greatly from the correspondence actually sent in daily life, in grammatical forms as well as in structure. The texts written as practice could not be, therefore, as one would expect, model letters (Sallaberger 1999, 151–152). Sallaberger postulates that the letters copied as a part of school curriculum belong to an earlier tradition, probably going back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century BCE, as they show considerable similarity to some of the earlier specimens from his corpus (1999, 153–154). Learning from texts with outdated expressions would not be unusual from the point of view of Mesopotamian (or indeed any) education. However, it is not impossible that the criteria of identification of school letter could also play a role here.

The third approach to identifying speech acts was introduced by Conversation Analysis and involves checking the reactions to utterances and patterns they exhibit. This method has the obvious advantage of correctly categorising the speech acts that are not literal (the so-called indirect speech acts, more on them below) under the correct rubric by checking how they are understood by interlocutors.

The fourth method of identifying speech acts is also connected to Conversation Analysis.<sup>9</sup> It is contextual and establishes the nature of a speech act based on its position in a sequence of utterances. For reasons that will become apparent in the section of this study dealing with sources, this approach is most suitable for investigating most of the Akkadian texts gathered here. Whenever the sources provide no reaction or answering gesture to the preceding speech acts, the fourth procedure would be used: most of the one-sided correspondence can be sequenced only in this way.

The next important theoretical issue is that of indirect speech acts – speech acts that are expressed by other speech acts and literally mean something else, such as requests formulated as questions about ability, common in most modern languages (‘Can you close the door?’). Although a major challenge for philosophers, they are unlikely to become a major concern in a work that defines speech acts according to the function they carry out in their particular context. Where the non-literal meaning of the speech act seems at first problematic, a systematic observation of their distribution in textual sequences should be sufficient to handle them adequately. Moreover, from a discourse analysis perspective, the indirect speech acts can become quite a blessing. The patterns in language use that emerge when one shows that certain speech actions are often expressed with other speech actions could provide many important insights about the cultural and social norms of communication.

In more practical terms, this will mean designating the smallest possible unit of analysis as a move: at least a single action carried out during a single turn (such as a single letter). A whole sequence of moves will be interdependent and can create a single whole. The basic underlying concept of the move as the unit of interaction was developed by Goffman (1972, 24). In his account, two moves, one for each of the two minimal participants in a conversation, form an interchange, which can be expanded further, with additional moves serving to provide a transition between individual interchanges<sup>10</sup>.

The last hurdle to clear is the right choice of texts. Since this issue is inextricably connected with the broader aims of this study, it will be described in detail in the following chapter.

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<sup>9</sup> Although the Conversation Analysis approach is followed throughout this work, it has to be mentioned already Wunderlich noticed the sequential character of speech acts in his essay on speech acts and discourse analysis (Wunderlich 1976: 300f.). He divided speech acts into initialising speech acts that appear at the opening of an (sequence of) interaction and reactive speech acts that close an interaction (interactional sequence) or belong in a specific locus in a progression of sequences.

<sup>10</sup> See Félix-Brasdefer (2014) for an account of sequencing speech actions in different approaches to discourse.

## 1.2. Speech acts and communication

After elucidating the nature of speech acts, it is necessary to consider what can be gained by studying them and their realisations in a dead language. Before that happens, however, one must briefly go back to the term *conversation* that has already been mentioned multiple times in the preceding sections. What exactly constitutes a *conversation* in a language that has no living speakers and why exactly are conversations so interesting for the study of speech acts?

Virtually no faithfully recorded conversations in Akkadian have been preserved, except for few court records, most of which are badly damaged (Sandowicz 2019). What remains are interactions depicted in literary works where the main concern is of course not realism of any kind – one has to admit, however, that it is usually much easier to tell what the main concern is not than what it is. The interactions in literary narratives are written in the same style as the rest of the work: exalted, filled with rare words and sophisticated expressions, allusions to other texts and intertextual elements. In numerous literary works, the main function of some spoken exchanges is to report on the current developments in the plot or cunningly include praise for a particular god – some passages in the myth of Erra certainly seem to play this latter role. Nonetheless, many of the conversations found in literary narratives include dialogues between gods and gods and humans, which makes their representations, such as they are, not unrealistic in themselves: a god, after all, is a peculiar kind of interlocutor: at the same time not exactly fictional but also never *really* heard, similar to humans, and yet intrinsically better. This is also evident in visual representations where humans (usually a king) and gods are shown next to each other: the god will be depicted as the figure bigger than the human. It stands to reason, then, that divine speech should also be represented in a sufficiently lofty manner – but can it really be separated from the overall exalted style of the entire literature?

The issue of realism or faithful representation is in any case not of much importance.<sup>11</sup> One could of course theorise about the possibility of finding expressions similar to daily speech in unofficial correspondence, and this is what has been generally assumed in Assyriology (Huehnergard 2011, 260; Huehnergard 2018, 692). According to Sallaberger (1999, 9–12), letters are written texts that can be considered to be composed in a style that is closer to everyday speech than for instance the style of literature. They are nonetheless undeniably shaped and influenced by their written character. Letters as a textual genre would of course develop their own typical set of expressions, partially based on the materiality of the medium of the writing: the top of a clay tablet, where the writing starts, is suitable for an introductory formula. The division of a tablet into obverse and a reverse has practical consequences for some letter-writers and the distribution of the text may not be accidental: the sender of SAA 13 174 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 144–145) begins the reverse of his petition with a blessing that is not unlike

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<sup>11</sup> This has also been the position in some of the more recent works in historical pragmatics, although traditionally it has been assumed that the textual genres that are most likely to represent spontaneous speech are courtroom records, witness testimonies and private correspondence (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2013, 13).

a blessing usually placed at the beginning of the letter, in the obverse. The last move attested in the obverse is a request, hence the presence of a blessing afterwards is not unusual. But it seems that the sender also planned the layout of the tablet in such a way that both sides begin with a blessing in the upper part (although cuneiform tablets were rotated along the horizontal axis). The presence of the addressee from whom the sender is separated spatially, turns a letter into something akin to a suspended speech bubble. This would likely force the writers of the letters to anticipate more: to plan for the reaction of the addressee in a systematic manner, to persuade them before they can say no – and the distance between the sender and the addressee typically means they literally *cannot* say ‘no’ yet, to preempt any reservations yet unvoiced – or not put to writing.

The similarities and differences between letters and spoken language could be analysed at several different levels of organisation. Firstly, one could consider the lexical variety: here the letters sent by private persons and businessmen could indeed be expected not to exceed the vocabulary typical of their usual language use, apart from the formulae and expressions necessitated by the written character of the letter. This far from certain – the levels of literacy (Veldhuis 2011) required to write own letters would be in certain periods arguably low, and the affluent elites who are for the most part the social group attested in cuneiform text were sure to take care of their offspring’s education, although not all would claim, as the king Assurbanipal did, to ‘have learnt the [l]ore of the sage Adapa, the hidden secret, the entirety of the scribal craft’<sup>12</sup>. On the other hand, the letters sent by scholars and priests could be presumed to contain more learned phrasings as well as allusions to scholarly, religious, and literary compositions.

The second level is that of structure: here however, the exigencies of written text should become more obvious. In spontaneous spoken language, functional units are divided into turns and embedded in concatenations of gestures and prosodic signals, which together serve to communicate the intended message. The lack of a variety of tools that help to disambiguate or imply meanings would likely cause writers to seek for a way to compensate, preferably by deploying a number of rules for the composition of the written text that would facilitate the correct decoding of the message, such as the placement of the address formula with the name of the recipient at the beginning of a letter and the introduction of other conventions in the layout and structure. One could expect a certain level of standardisation in the ordering of the individual functional units of the text, especially in an institutional setting, and it is indeed what Sallaberger finds in the Old Babylonian corpus (1999, 143). The higher-level functional units of Old Babylonian letters consist of firstly, a report on the status quo, secondly, an account of the goods or persons sent together with the letter, illustrating the sender’s initiative and readiness to

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<sup>12</sup> Inscription L, line <sup>13</sup>[š]i-pir ap-kal-li a-da-pa<sub>3</sub> a-ḫu-uz ni-šir-tu<sub>2</sub> ka-tim-tu<sub>2</sub> kul-lat tup-šar-ru-tu<sub>2</sub>. The interpretation of this passage, as well as the veracity of Assurbanipal’s claims and the education of the junior members of the royal family under Esarhaddon (including the intriguing letter from ‘the child’, *la[kû]*, CT 53, 140, now published as SAA 21 101, Parpola 2018, 86) is discussed by Livingstone 2007. On the use of gloss signs in the education of Assurbanipal, see Villard 1997.

cooperate, and finally a request or orders for the recipient. This ordering scheme remains strictly adhered to in the entire corpus, even when some parts can be expanded, and sometimes whole parts left out completely. On the other hand, while the sequencing of the letters might be quite different from that of conversations, the way in which particular actions are realised should remain more or less the same, after accounting for the typical embellishments and pre-emptive moves that are likely once the opportunity to write things down arises. If a request is formulated in a sufficiently different way in writing than it would be in speech, it ceases to be understandable as a request. One would then expect differences in the sequencing or ordering of functional units in a letter, but the functions themselves would most likely be realised in a manner similar to regular speech, with the exception of letters strongly embedded in the institutional procedures.<sup>13</sup>

The dialogic character of correspondence should not, however, be doubted. Apart from the so-called letter orders, lists of goods that were to be sent or otherwise provided, many letters seem almost to resemble suspended conversational turns, many of them anticipating the reactions of the recipient: in some Neo-Assyrian letters to the king, the projected royal doubts are conventionally introduced with a formula *issuri šarru bēlī iqabbi*, ‘perhaps the king, my lord, will say’ (some types of moves introduced in this way will be presented and analysed in the following chapters). Other examples from the royal correspondence have the writers trying to anticipate the next turn in the exchange and presenting several alternatives in preparation for the expected answer or, in less fortunate cases, accusation.<sup>14</sup> Those instances are especially interesting, as in the absence of answers they are one of the few sources of information about the sort of reaction a letter writer could assume likely, giving a rare insight into relations between the king and his officials and scholars. A similar opportunity to analyse the epistolographic version of adjacency pairs<sup>15</sup> is presented by the citations from previous letter from the addressee used as reminders before the reactions of the senders. An exchange between two people of similar status would of course differ greatly not only in the spectrum of foreseeable reactions but also in the gamut of persuasive strategies the writer could employ themselves.<sup>16</sup>

The situation should not be completely dissimilar in literary compositions. Despite the likely differences in the details of execution and much more florid language, requests in narrative works are still recognizable as requests. The disparate realisations of the usual speech actions can be caused in the first place by the medium, writing allowing for longer sentences and offering the author more time to think about what he wants to write/say, as well as, in the case of narrative works, by a completely different kind of interlocutors than those found in daily conversations between humans (putting aside, for the

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<sup>13</sup> See Sallaberger 1999, 153.

<sup>14</sup> This is especially evident in letters where a solution was proposed, or advice given.

<sup>15</sup> An adjacency pair is basically two turns spoken one after another in a conversation by two different speakers. The first of these turns is termed ‘the first pair part’, while the second includes a reaction made by the second speaker to the first pair part and is called ‘the second pair part’. Only certain kinds of first parts trigger certain kinds of second pair parts, such as an answer being the second pair part to a question (Schegloff 2007, 13–14).

<sup>16</sup> For the use of threats in the letters of Babylonian temple officials see Jursa and Hackl 2015.

moment, the potential differences in status). The slightly different function of dialogue in narrative works was already mentioned above. There is no principle of *mimesis* in the Mesopotamian literature. Far more often one can observe the conversations pushing the narrative forward, for instance by recounting the events to which the human or divine agents absent during a particular scene had no access because of the temporal or spatial distance.

The present study will therefore simply trace the patterns visible in written communication in the first millennium Akkadian (correspondence, for the purposes of the present work treated as a suspended conversational turn) and written representations of interaction (conversations in narrative works).

As already mentioned, speech acts are sequential and constitute joined actions. Much of what is said (or written) is uttered in response to an earlier action of an interlocutor or in anticipation of the future action(s). In order to establish the tendencies in the ordering of speech actions by language users, it is therefore most beneficial to examine entire sequences of them. When frequent enough, the patterns thus observed can be indicative of norms or at least tendencies. If those patterns prevail across different contexts, they can be considered the universal norm in Akkadian language use within the given timeframe. If they only show up in certain context, they must be surmised to be in operation only in certain genre or among specific types of interlocutors.

Speech acts occurring outside of conversation, in ritual, jurisprudence or in texts whose addressee remains silent and hidden (prayers, incantations) could also be a fascinating object of inquiry, but it is vital to first establish how speech acts are realised in less specialised contexts. Only after the investigation of less marked text groups is accomplished can one see the similarities and differences between those texts and the compositions used by religious or administrative professionals for very specific purposes.

The second reason why letters and dialogues in narrative works are the most interesting object of analysis for the present study is the sheer variety of topics they introduce. This is partially related to the diversity of situations in which conversations in narrative compositions or the exchange of letters become necessary, representing almost every issue conceivable, from homework<sup>17</sup> and feeding the horses<sup>18</sup> to immortality<sup>19</sup> and becoming the king of the gods.<sup>20</sup> It has been frequently pointed out that letters especially were sent to deal with irregular, atypical or unexpected situations (Jursa 2014b, 2).

Another type of variance is provided by the presence of different classes of participants in interactional exchanges, participants who require different communicative strategies and with whose expectations the speakers and writers have to reckon. As will become obvious from the discussion of the sources,

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<sup>17</sup> SAA 16 28 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 23).

<sup>18</sup> SAA 1 181 (Parpola 2015, 142–143).

<sup>19</sup> Tablet 11 of the Epic of Gilgamesh (George 2003).

<sup>20</sup> *enūma eliš* (Lambert 2013).

however, the fragmentary and isolated nature of the preserved material does not allow as many comparisons as one would wish to make.

The topical and sociopragmatic variety are not the only reasons for the preference in the present work for investigating speech acts in conversations or parts of conversations. Speech acts, such as threats and promises, orders and supplications, requests and expressions of gratitude, greetings and curses, are frequently the mainstays of all types of communicative events (Green 2017). As actions, however, they are intended to have a real-life effect, potentially entailing changes in heretofore experienced reality, often requiring cooperation or at least tacit disengagement from other persons involved, and possibly affecting third parties and their interests. This means that a broad range of strategies has to be deployed to make the actions socially acceptable in the appropriate given context. Illocutionary acts are therefore embedded in a network of conventions whose functions can be as diverse as re-production and re-affirmation of (in-group) identities<sup>21</sup>, maintenance of proper social distance, and giving adequate consideration to power relations between participants of a communicative event (Brown and Levinson 1987, 74–76). The different phenomena co-occurring with speech actions – while at the same mediating their form – make the latter the perfect focus of an enquiry concerned with instantiations and patterns of communication. This will be the major aim of the following work: not a catalogue of speech acts and their realisations in certain groups of first millennium texts, but an analysis of the patterns they form in their respective social contexts, in as much as those patterns can be discerned. In other words: the present investigation's main interest lies not only in forms that the speech acts take in Akkadian language use in the first millennium BCE but also in the reasons why the particular forms were chosen over other, also available, and whether the particular forms appear with any regularity in similar sequences of individual interactions, and if so, how this is influenced by factors such as the relative social positions of the participants in the interaction, the levels of education of the participants, the institutional or private context of the communicative event, the topic of the current exchange and the bearing the previous similar exchanges can have on the present one.

A similar approach is proposed by Verschueren (2012) in his book about ideology in discourse. For Verschueren 'discourse' means simply language use and ideology he defines as 'underlying patterns of meaning, frames of interpretation, world views, or forms of everyday thinking and explanation' (2012, 7–10). He also emphasizes the social situatedness and the intersubjective character of ideology. His book is an attempt to provide empirical studies with a methodologically sound procedure for investigating implicit meanings: in fact such a comprehensive procedure is given in the Appendix 1

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<sup>21</sup> Ide 2006, and numerous other scholars inspired by her, posit that politeness is not strategic and rational endeavour (Brown and Levinson 1987, 64–65) but in cultures oriented towards the needs of community it can actually serve as a proof of discernment on the part of the speaker (in Ide's terminology *wakimae*), the ability of the speaker to choose the forms deemed appropriate in a given situation by the community they belong to. However, discernment-type politeness could be still accommodated within the Brown-Levinson paradigm as fulfilling the positive face needs of the speaker who wants to feel that he or she is a part of his or her community (an important contribution arguing for the merging of the both approaches is Kádár and Mills 2013).

(Verschueren 2012, 200–204). It is far too comprehensive to be followed to the letter in any single study, but many of Verschueren's insights are of particular importance for the present work and as such need to be mentioned.

Verschueren pays special attention to the linguistic and extralinguistic context of discourse, including the intertextual connections that will also be problematised here wherever possible. He also underlines the importance of sequencing (2012, 113–115), an issue already discussed above, although the term becomes for him much broader than a simple reference to the sequence of speech actions or utterances in the context of a conversation (turns, adjacency pairs, repair, openings, closings). The sequences also play a role, if a slightly different one, in the written texts that, once issued, becomes immutable within the medium that carries it.<sup>22</sup> He points out that narrative sequences can frequently be synonymous with a temporal order of the described event(s) and argues that deviations from the expected order can be significant and should be accounted for. The particular realisations of situationally motivated language use, the individual expression, function within a social system with its underlying norms and assumptions, within the context of previous communication and knowledge shared by the participants in a particular communicative event. Participants have at their disposal a number of linguistic expressions. It is limited by various constraints, including the level of education of the participants and their relation to each other. Deviations from the norm, the absence of the expected elements, the silences and omissions can all be deemed significant. Language use should be observed in its totality, and here Verschueren also includes the materiality of written texts (2012, 103–105).

The overall point here is that almost every element of a text (or a group of texts) can be meaningful. The context, both external and internal, is of course of great importance, but at least as much information about the assumed and the inexplicit can be found in the ways the individual elements of a text are connected to each other, the ways they interact with each other, the way the following sequences are shaped by the previous ones – while at the same time the earlier sequences can prepare the ground for the following ones. Anything and everything should be expected to be potentially meaningful and informative. This includes also the silences and the omissions.

While Assyrians and Babylonians left no explicit, general accounts of the social (and other) norms as they perceived them, much implicit material can be found in different types of sources. This has been used with great success to study the royal and religious ideology of the Assyrian empire (for instance Pongratz-Leisten 1999; Pongratz-Leisten 2015). The implicit rules of communication can also be studied in this way. The only limitation here would be the fragmentary nature of the data that often do not provide the details of interpersonal relationships and shared histories, which could explain modes of

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<sup>22</sup> It has to be mentioned, however, that Verschueren only assumes the two extrema observable in modern cultures: that is a conversation shaped by following interactional contributions from the participants on the one hand and on the other hand a written text in which one or more authors implicitly interact with multiple anonymous readers. He thus omits the textual genres that would fall somewhere between those two categories, such as letters.



speech and writing that would otherwise seem unexpected.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, the conversations in narrative works above all required an exalted style. Not infrequently their participants are gods and the sociopragmatics of divine speech is at least equally interesting as the hidden rules in human correspondence, if so far a terra incognita Assyriology.

What could potentially be of use in the elucidation of cultural and social norms in communication is the textual sources for education of scribes and scholars from the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE. The schooling took place in private houses, usually in the context of family. The current state-of-the-art monograph on education in first millennium Babylonia is Gesche (2001). Some of the Neo-Assyrian school tablets are described by Veldhuis (2014, 353–391), while the complete corpus from Neo-Assyrian Assur is to be published in one of the forthcoming volume of *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur literarischen Inhalts*. It must be emphasised, however, that the Neo-Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian curriculum in its Assur version show many important discrepancies, although the size of the Assur corpus is perhaps insufficient to allow general conclusions about the state of Neo-Assyrian education in the seventh century BCE.

Gesche mentions that the cultural and social values would have to be internalised in the process of schooling (2001, 5–7), so that the curriculum used by the teachers would not expected to be purely practical. She identifies two main ideological clusters in two parts of the school curriculum. In the less advanced phase, the student would learn the basics of writing, practice the basic acrographic lists and the thematic list *ur<sub>5</sub>-ra = hubullu*, copy the lists of personal and divine names, mathematical and metrological lists, and lists of toponyms (2001, 61–146). Next, the student would hone his<sup>24</sup> skills in writing administrative texts and letters, sometimes by copying only excerpts from longer tablets (2001, 147–148). Finally, the students of the first phase would also practice by copying literary texts and proverbs (2001, 148–152). The literary texts studied during this phase depicted above all the mighty deeds of past kings, including Gilgameš. In the second phase the student would copy more advanced lists, incantations and literary texts related to the profession of the exorcist, *āšipu* (Gesche 2001, 149, 172–173).

The Assyrian school tablets from Assur are in some regards strikingly similar to the Babylonian corpus but present also startling differences. Some of the lists not attested in the Babylonian corpus at all are quite frequent on the Assur tablets (including the group vocabulary *erim-huš*) and for reasons that are as of yet unclear the myth of Erra, a composition without single excerpt identified in the large Babylonian corpus by Gesche is attested in several manuscripts from Assur (Veldhuis 2014, 369–371).

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<sup>23</sup> In the case of the private correspondence one can usually assume that the sender and the addressee knew each other. In the case of institutional correspondence, including the royal letters, it is sometimes difficult to be sure who knew each other, and what the degree of familiarity was.

<sup>24</sup> Most likely ‘his’. There is no evidence of women-scribes or indeed literate women from the Neo-Babylonian period, although it is quite probable that women from elite families would receive at least practical schooling.

However, the school texts present many difficulties. In the first place, they should be interpreted as something akin to partially solved exercise books of modern pupils, even if they sometimes, in the more advanced phases exhibit corrections made by teachers<sup>25</sup>. As Gesche correctly points out (2001, 168–169) the instruction, the equivalent of the modern teacher’s handbook, must have been carried out orally and is therefore forever lost. Moreover, as already evident from the description of the curriculum, a large part of schooling consisted of the copying of appropriate lexical lists whose relationship to more practical skills, such as letter writing, often remains nebulous. The letters copied as a part of the schooling process, meanwhile, are often difficult to differentiate from real private letters. The same applies to administrative texts, which can sometimes be miscategorized by modern scholars, as in the case of the Neo-Assyrian contract where the buyer is a *šēdu*-demon and several of the witnesses are birds<sup>26</sup>. Gesche’s interpretation of the two phases of the Babylonian curriculum, while convincing at first sight, is not without its issues, either, when one considers that a significant part of her material are votive tablets deposited by pupils in temples. In the end, it is uncertain what exactly can be learned about the cultural and social norms governing communication from the school tablet corpus, although a study of letters and administrative texts written as exercises could perhaps be an interesting enterprise in itself.

Another issue relevant to patterns of communication is that of intertextuality.<sup>27</sup> Intertextual motives in narrative works can underpin their basic structure or function to legitimise a type of ideological discourse favoured by the composition.<sup>28</sup> Such considerations will not be addressed here in detail. Some of the letters in the investigated corpus, especially the royal Neo-Assyrian correspondence with scholars, contain multiple allusions to literary works that serve specific discursive and persuasive purposes. Some of them are direct quotations, as the handful of proverbs collected by Lambert (1996, 281–282). Many others were identified by Parpola in his commentaries to the letters sent by the Neo-Assyrian scholars to the king (1983). Very often no text is quoted directly but merely a more or less common literary motive is accessed to lend authority to the argument developed by the letter writer, or a style of a royal inscription is cunningly exploited to flatter the king.<sup>29</sup> Since instances of intertextuality of this kind introduce into the correspondence words and expressions that in all likelihood would not otherwise appear in this genre of writing, they will be included in the broader discussion of communicative patterns.

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<sup>25</sup> Schwemer 2011, 422 reports the copy of the Exorcist’s Manual prepared by Kišir-Nabû for the family library. In rev. 41., there is a remark KUR<sub>2</sub> (the logogram can mean ‘other, enemy’) in the margin whose meaning should likely be interpreted as ‘wrong’. On the family and career of Kišir-Nabû, the member of the last attested generation of an important family of exorcists from late Neo-Assyrian Assur, see Maul 2010.

<sup>26</sup> SAA 6 288, the so-called Bird Text (Kwasman and Parpola 1991, 232–233). The editors, take the text seriously, unlike Osten-Sacken 2015, 344, n.1356 and Radner 1997, 45 (with a summary of the entire discussion). An important observation against the serious character of the text is that it is unsealed (and has no nail impressions), unlike a proper tablet documenting the sale of land.

<sup>27</sup> For previous treatments of intertextuality in Akkadian, see for instance Hallo 1990, Villard 1998, and Jiménez 2017, 79–89.

<sup>28</sup> Such is the case in the *enūma eliš* (Lambert 1986).

<sup>29</sup> For instance, SAA 13 132 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 101), in which the sender equates the royal gaze with that of the god alluding to a phrasing otherwise found in a royal inscription (Manasterska 2019, 98–102). Royal inscriptions themselves, in turn, were a frequent locus of literary allusions, analysed in detail by Bach (2020).

The present work will then gather and analyse illocutionary acts in the various forms they take in conversations and conversation-like exchanges carried out by different types of participants in the first millennium source in Akkadian. Special consideration will be given to the ways in which those forms are shaped by external and internal contexts and the way they function in the higher-level communicative processes.

Speech acts are utterances that do something, perform actions and at the very least are intended to do something. Nonetheless, the assessment of the success of a speaker's (writer's) communicative efforts, Austin's perlocutionary force, due to the nature of Akkadian source material can only be carried out to a very limited extent. The effects of a performed speech act will be easy to follow in a narrative composition, where a turn in a conversation is followed by another or a conversation is followed by temporally succeeding events. Not so in the case of letters. Although sometimes larger numbers of missives from a single sender to the same addressee were preserved, the extant text groups above all constitute only one side of the exchange. Some reactions or even concatenations of reactions can be reconstructed from the citations of the previous messages within the letters, but their number is very limited and heavily biased towards certain kinds of contexts – such as the royal subjects citing the royal command before reacting to it.

### 1.3. Speech acts in Assyriology

The history of research into the realisations of speech acts in Akkadian begins before the idea of speech acts themselves was in any way formalised. This should not be surprising: as already mentioned, speech actions underly a large part of human communication and for many early researchers of newly deciphered languages the polite (or impolite) formulae they routinely used themselves would become a natural object of interest.

Some basics can be already gleaned from the grammars (GAG § 81 a-d). In addition to the imperative mood, used for commands and requests, Akkadian possesses the precative that provides the possibility of a less direct and thus more polite request (this does not have to mean that the requests formed in the imperative mood are impolite – nothing suggests that in the Akkadian texts, in which imperative can be also the form used for wishes directed at gods).

One of the brilliant early pioneers was Benno Landsberger, who in his (1928-1929) article in Meissner's anniversary volume devoted over twenty pages to the Akkadian concept of 'das gute Wort' – blessings, thanks and well-wishing. Like many early works of this kind, it is predominantly lexical in nature, although this does not reduce its importance. Landsberger's starting point are the various names of benevolent (*karābu* = 'to pray', 'to bless', *damiqta qabû* = 'to speak well of', *egerra dummuqu* = 'to pronounce good faith') and malevolent speech (*lišānu lemuttu* = 'the evil tongue', *mamītu* = 'curse', *arratu* = 'curse'), from which he moves on to the discussion of the general meaning of *karābu* (1928-1929, 294–296). He notices that blessings are often included as greetings in correspondence (1928-1929,

300–301) and remarks that where one lacks the indications of how human interlocutors would converse with each other, one should look for relevant patterns in the interactions between the gods (1928-1929, 298). He separates the greeting with a blessing from the “secular” greeting, while astutely observing that asking about the health and well-being of an addressee was seen as a duty of a good friend or a faithful subject (1928-1929, 301). He then turns to the act of expressing one’s gratitude, making the crucially important observation that while there is no single word in Akkadian equivalent to the modern ‘thank you’, but the expression of gratitude can assume the form of a blessing. Landsberger differentiates here two basic ways of thanking: by promising to pray to the gods in case the writer’s – these considerations pertain above all to letters – request is fulfilled, and by immediately blessing<sup>30</sup> the partner in the interaction (1928-1929, 307). The former should be, obviously, rather interpreted as a part of request. He briefly considers the importance of intercession, afterward making an insightful observation about what he calls ‘Vertrauensformel’ (1928-1929, 308, n. 1), the formula expressing the faith the writer has in the addressee as his or her ‘father’ or ‘lord’.<sup>31</sup>

For the sake of intertextual considerations, however, it has to be noted that Landsberger observes that what is often asked for in prayers is not a blessing expressed with *karābu* but the benevolent gaze of the gods signified by the verb *nāplusu*. The benevolent gaze is, indeed, the prerogative of the gods, as Dicks (2012) convincingly shows, and as already mentioned, this association can be exploited in letter-writing.

Finally, Landsberger describes briefly the malevolent speech, the curse, the slander and the evil tongue, with a smattering of words referring to bodily functions and genitals, which in many languages form the basis of swear-words (Landsberger 1928-1929, 319–321). Landsberger does not, however, try to locate whether and if so, where those words could have been used as swear-words or insults. He deems it sufficient to stop at whether their use was considered a taboo in all textual genres in general.

Insults as such, however, are not a typical feature of correspondence. The Assyrian kings enjoyed dehumanising their enemies in their inscriptions. They could be referred to as *umman-manda* or equated with demons, as the Elamite king Tammarītu and Teumman are insulted by Assurbanipal as *tamšīl gallê* (‘a likeness of a *gallû*-demon’, Ashurbanipal 3 iv 78; Ashurbanipal 4 iv 37’; Ashurbanipal 6 v 94; Ashurbanipal 7 v 35 for Teumman; Ashurbanipal 172 o 2’ for Tammarītu, in this case likely written in plural), while Teumman is ‘a copy of the evil *gallû*-demons’, *ḫiriš gallê lem[nūti]* (Ashurbanipal 16 i’ 7’) (Adalı 2011)<sup>32</sup>. After the revolt of Šamaš-šumu-ukin in 652 BCE, Assurbanipal, the betrayed brother,

<sup>30</sup> This can also be a promise to bless.

<sup>31</sup> This formula can also be understood as an appeal to the addressee, reminding him of the duties he should not neglect with regard to the sender as the person with the higher position of the two and having certain obligations toward the person with the lower social position. This is the view usually followed in more recent literature. All things considered, this is simply an argument for (typically) complying with a request made by the sender. Whether the belief – or really, the expectation – of the sender is based on their true feelings or on a social convention is irrelevant.

<sup>32</sup> Comparing the enemies to the *gallû*-demons was by no means limited to Assurbanipal. Sennacherib also calls his long-term enemy, Marduk-aplu-iddina, *ḫiriš gallê* (‘a copy of a *gallû*-demon’, Sennacherib 1, 17; 213, 17), while Sargon II insults in the same way the Chaldeans (Sargon II 2, 370; 5, 2’; 7, 122).

enjoys referring to the rebel king as ‘no-brother’ (*lā-aḥu*, in letters: SAA 21 2, SAA 21 3, SAA 21 5, SAA 21 69) and ‘cripple’ (*ḥummuru*, in letters: SAA 21 21, SAA 21 37, SAA 21 58). Assurbanipal in particular is liberal with insults towards his enemies: Nabû-bēl-šumāti is called ‘the whore of Menānu’ (SAA 21 43, obv. <sup>8</sup>MUNUS.KAR.KID *ša<sub>2</sub> m.me-na-nu*). The irascible scholars occasionally insult their opponents in learned polemics – thus Balasî calls a rival who wrote to the king that the planet Venus is visible ‘an ignoramus’ who ‘wrote to the king in (complete) ignorance (SAA 10 51, obv. <sup>10</sup>*ša a-na LUGAL [EN-ia] <sup>11</sup>iš-pu-ra-[an-ni] <sup>12</sup>ina la mu-da-[nu-te] <sup>13</sup>šu-u* – ‘Who(ever) wrote to the king, [my lord], is in (complete) ignor[ance]’ and rev. <sup>10</sup>(...) LU<sub>2</sub>.<sup>1</sup>*sa<sup>2</sup>-[ku-ku] <sup>11</sup>man-nu šu-tu<sub>2</sub>* – ‘Who is this ig[noramus ...]’). Even more petulant is Nabû-aḥḥē-ēriba who in SAA 10 72 refers to the person who informed the king that the planet Venus is visible in the month of Adaru as ‘knave, ignoramus, liar’ (obv. <sup>9</sup>[LU<sub>2</sub>].*qal-lu-lu LU<sub>2</sub>.sa-ku-ku <sup>10</sup>[LU<sub>2</sub>].par-ri-šu :: šu-u<sub>2</sub>* – ‘He is [a] knave, an ignoramus, a liar!’).

Several studies presented below whose primary concern are not speech actions but letters are nonetheless of utmost importance for investigation of the former. They describe diachronically arranged groups of correspondence, focusing on the structure and frequently used expressions typical in the letters from chosen periods.

The first one, Salonen’s (1967) study of greetings and polite routines<sup>33</sup> is a diachronic analysis of Akkadian letter openings, which Salonen divides into the address or address term<sup>34</sup> and the greeting proper. The material is arranged chronologically, and briefly summed up for each period in the form of lists, with the most common form separated from the (usually more embellished) variants. Salonen strives to record the terms of address used to refer to the addressee (apart from official titles, the possibilities here include the – often metaphorical – kinship terminology and terms such as ‘my lord’) as well as the ones the sender uses to refer to himself or herself (‘your servant’, ‘your brother/sister’ and official titles). Some consideration is given to the order in which the names of the sender and addressee occur (the person of higher rank is usually introduced first, irrespective of their role as addressee or sender). The *Grußformeln*, or the greetings sensu stricto, are treated in much the same way, the overview starting with the most common, dominant formula or formulae, followed by the variants or the additional expression that could be appended after the main ones. Salonen also lists the names of the gods used in

<sup>33</sup> The title, *Die Gruss- und Höflichkeitsformeln in babylonisch-assyrischen Briefen*, can’t but sound misleading to a reader accustomed to the treatment politeness receives in contemporary publications. Salonen is interested almost exclusively in polite formulae in the letter openings. Few remarks here and there are devoted to routine expressions in the body of the letter (such as Salonen 1967, 55–56, where the *a-bi<sub>4</sub> a-ta* ‘you are my father’ formulas and variations thereof, called *Vertrauensformeln* by Landsberger, are mentioned in the Old Assyrian context).

<sup>34</sup> The terms used by Salonen are *Anredeformel* and *Grußformel*. Those differ slightly from the terminology normally used in the English literature, where the term ‘introductory formula’ or ‘opening formula’ (for instance Huehnergard 2011, 260) is normally used for both *Anredeformel* and *Grußformel* together. Regarding the address in the strict sense and the following greeting and blessing as parts of a single whole is perhaps more beneficial, especially since the blessings and greetings can sometimes be omitted.

the letters from every period, albeit with little commentary.<sup>35</sup> When he comments on the greetings and address formulae it is only to remark on their relative frequency and their probable dating. Nonetheless, his study remains a useful overview that highlights the numerous possibilities for further research.

The seminal study on the organisation and structural patterns found in letters from the Old Babylonian corpus is Sallaberger's work on daily correspondence (1999). This is the first study of this scope that simultaneously investigates the Akkadian letters and their typical communication patterns. It manages to synthesize, improve upon and greatly expand the scattered and fragmentary previous research, using the methods of modern pragmatics. Many of Sallaberger's conclusions are first of the kind and will necessarily be the starting point of any discussion dealing with a similar corpus.<sup>36</sup> His study therefore will have to be described with some detail.

Sallaberger discusses the introductory part of the letters and some of the ways in which different language strategies are deployed to build and maintain the relationship between the sender and recipient of the letter. The opening section of a letter is divided into *Briefkopf* (the heading of the letter), containing the names (and potentially titles) of addressee and sender and the *Grußformel* – greeting. Here Sallaberger is much more interested in establishing the underlying rules of epistolographic discourse: he considers the regional as well as sociolinguistic differences in the distribution of greetings, address terms and divine names. The close observation of the relationship between terms of address and the presence of greetings allows him to come to several important conclusions. Firstly, the presence of greetings depends as a rule on the relative status of the sender and recipient: it can be omitted entirely in letters sent by people of higher status (including kings) (1999, 30–31). The correspondence needs to be considered on a case-by-case basis, however, as evident from the letters exchanged between the same senders and recipients, in which a greeting can suddenly be omitted for no apparent reason. The second important conclusion is related to the terms of address used by the senders to refer to the recipients and the terms the senders use to refer to themselves. The most frequent group of terms of address are the kinship terms (1999, 38); additionally, greetings are also most frequently attested in letters addressed to recipients referred to with a kinship term, and much more rarely in letters whose recipient is a 'lord' – a larger social distance might discourage friendliness (1999, 40). In private and business letters, terms of address are only used to indicate a higher rank of the recipient: not a single letter was sent to 'a servant' (1999, 39). When the sender refers to himself or herself, he or she is much more likely to use an official title than a sender when addressing the recipient. It is also quite acceptable to call oneself somebody else's servant (1999, 44). In case the recipient is accorded a term of kinship as an appellative, the sender will typically refer to himself or herself with its appropriate counterpart (1999, 43).

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<sup>35</sup> The entire commentary for the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE correspondence is shorter than half a page (Salonen 1967, 82).

<sup>36</sup> One must emphasise, however, that the letters analysed in the present work are almost with no exception at least a thousand years younger.

The next part of his book, Sallaberger devotes to the relationship between the terms of address and the polite forms used in the body of the letter. The sender refers to himself or herself in the first person, while the recipient can be addressed in the second or indirectly and therefore more politely in the third person, depending on a range of factors. Sometimes there is a mixture of second and third person forms: in those letters the indirect forms of address can frequently occur in the part of the letter where the sender requests the recipient to do something (Sallaberger 1999, 50–51). A presence of the title can trigger the use of the second person, perhaps because those communicative situations where a title can be deployed trigger a more task-focused mode of speaking/writing, with little regard for the social niceties (1999, 65).

The next section is devoted to greetings. They typically encompass the wish for the sender to have a long life, be healthy and protected by gods, with the occasional reference of more mundane success, as evident from the formula *qaqqadam kubbutam*, ‘to make important’ (1999, 85). Briefly considering the occurrences of the phrase *ana šulmīya tašpuram* (‘you wished me well’)<sup>37</sup> and the reaction to it, *šalmāku, ana šulmīka ašpuram*, ‘I am well (and) I wish you well’, especially in letters whose main topic is illness or otherwise extremely troubling circumstances of the writers, Sallaberger comes to conclusion that the formulae were to a degree desemanticised, and referred to more general well-wishes, not necessarily to health (1999, 87–91).

In the next section, Sallaberger treats the correspondence as a dialogue, in which the maintenance of friendly relations was an important consideration, and the routine formulae that were frequently exploited to that end. Actions that are according to Sallaberger usually expressed in the Akkadian letters with the help of formulae include greetings, thanks and requests (1999, 94). The issue that is frequently associated with greetings is the worry or concern about the recipient of the letters, which he or she should allay with a swiftly reply. The mentions or worry are so prevalent that they seem routine in themselves (1999, 101–105). Another almost ritualistically repeated formula is the one expressing the writer’s discontentment with the lack of letters or their insufficient frequency (1999, 107–109). These complaints are occasionally met with explanations. Sallaberger also mentions apologies in this section, although he rightly points out that they are not part of the routine formulae that contribute to the overall structure of a letter and indeed occur very infrequently (1999, 108, n. 150). What is however not without significance is that apologies for the perceived wrongdoings are conceived of as appeals for the recipient not to be angry or not to take something for a fault. Finally, there is a brief discussion of the parts of dialogue mentioned in the correspondence that take place beyond it – and vice versa: letters often contain quotations about what was said or what could not be said during a previous round of oral communication (1999, 109–110). This serves to underscore the multifaceted relationship that letters have with speech.

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<sup>37</sup> Sallaberger discards the translations of the phrase that interpret it as wishing somebody good health or inquiring about somebody’s health.

Sallaberger considers the speech act of thanking as realised in the corpus of Old Babylonian letters. It typically appear right after the greeting (1999, 115). The help or favour rendered can be mentioned explicitly – as *usātum* or *gimillum*, ‘help’ and ‘favour’ respectively, or in a more circumspect manner. In Old-Babylonian Akkadian letters the act of thanking is carried out with the help of routine formulae expressing the grateful joy (1999, 116–117), the appreciation of the help or favour rendered articulated by naming it (1999, 117) or by metaphorically repaying with prayers and blessings (1999, 119–121). The prevalent formula seems to be here ‘may DN bless you’. Only in one letter, however, does the writer explain what that help or favour really entailed (1999, 115). The position of thanks in the letter means of course that when there is no acknowledgement of reason for gratitude, a thanks can be, for every reader who is not aware of the context, virtually indistinguishable from the blessing contained in the greeting. As an act inextricably connected to the exchange of gifts and favours, the role of thanking is to neutralise the debt and feeling of indebtedness between the participants (1999, 111). Interestingly enough, an act of thank-giving is never followed or preceded by the declarations of mutual aid in the future, as is the case with requests (1999, 119). A frequent ironic reference to the appreciative descriptions of a rendered favour as good or appropriate is evident in many reproaches, some of which are also formed as rhetorical questions (1999, 118).

Finally, Sallaberger analyses a longer and more stylistically developed thank you letter (1999, 123–125). He remarks that many polite forms in his corpus are directed at the addressee, while the sender is not trying to act with deliberate humility (1999, 124). This however might simply be an indirect result of the removal the royal letters from Sallaberger’s corpus. A small number of letters preserves what Sallaberger believes to be the emic description of an act of thanking: the verb *karābum* as well we the verbs of sending/writing accompanied by the verbal form *bunnû*. The hendiadys would then mean something like ‘to do something politely’ (1999, 126).

The third part of Sallaberger’s work revolves around functional units of the text, and the speech act treated here in some detail is the request. The formulae and textual routines, some of which described in the previous parts of the work, are almost meaningless without the context: they function when embedded in the whole text. Sallaberger underscores here the importance of sequences and their functional meaning – which can be frequently differ from the literal one, as when greetings are realised in the form of blessings (1999, 135). This is the same issue as the question of indirect speech acts or of the different levels of organisations of speech actions, already mentioned above. When Sallaberger does provide a sequence of actions usually followed in the letters, it is one of a higher order: an informative part (1999, 144–146), providing information about the main topic of the letter, is followed by the initiative part, in which the sender of the tablet gives an account of the action he or she intends to carry out or has already carried out in connection with sending the letter (1999, 146–147). Finally, the body of the letter is closed with a part in which the recipient of the letter is called upon to undertake other actions (1999, 147–148). This call to action is according to Sallaberger the main goal of the Old



Babylonian daily correspondence. It is often connected with routine formulae asking the addressee not to be neglectful or to act without delay.

The final section of the third part of his study is devoted to requests.<sup>38</sup> Sallaberger underscores the lack of word for ‘please’, although *apputtum* is quite often translated in this way (1999, 157). However, he notes that *apputtum* tends to occur near the end of the letter, often together with very strong admonitions not to delay further action, which occasionally sound not unlike threats. *apputtum* therefore cannot be used as a diagnostic criterion for ascertaining if a letter belongs to the category of polite letters of request (1999, 160–161). On the other hand, the nouns and verbs used to refer to asking and requesting are not very specific: they are simply speech verbs (1999, 158). Expressions whose distribution is complementary to *apputtum* and which seem to occur above all in polite contexts are two others appeals to be swift and efficient, *ahû lā nadû* (‘do not be idle’) and its related forms, as well as *lā tušta’ a* (‘do not neglect (it)!’).

Next, Sallaberger considers the elements that can be included in a request and establishes the structure and the order of the formulae that routinely appear as a part of it (1999, 168–169). They can be considered the most important diagnostic criteria of a polite letter of request. Before the core of the request, the request proper, one can expect formulae appealing to the relationship between the sender and recipient of the letter, relationship that entails certain mutual obligations between the partners. The appeal can be couched in the familiar kinship terms or rely upon the bonds between a patron and his client: the phrase *šumma ahī attā*, ‘if you are my brother’, and its permutations with different members of family inserted in place of *ahu*, is extremely widespread. Another way to thematise the relationship is an appeal to emotions. The person asking for help or favour can also refer to the rank of their partner, which again is meant to remind the more powerful partner in the exchange of his or her obligations. Finally, the request can be preceded by a positive assessment of the act that is to be carried out by the benefactor, usually with a permutation of the root *gml*, ‘to do a favour, to have mercy’.

The formulae that appear after the core request can also be quite varied. The act of helping or granting a favour can similarly be positively evaluated with the verb *gamālu*, the noun *gimillu* and other, synonymous expressions. The sender can explicitly note that granting the request will be considered proof of the amicable relationship between partners, for instance *ina annītim ahhūtkā lūmur*, ‘I will see your brotherhood in this’. Finally, the writer of the letter can give promises in exchange for the required favour: a promise of reciprocity, a more nebulous promise of aid in the future, a promise of thanking (by means of prayer and blessings) and the promise that for the favours rendered the sender will be forever in his or her benefactor’s debt – or, in idiomatic Akkadian, that he or she will be his servant (*ina*

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<sup>38</sup> The term that Sallaberger uses is ‘Aufforderung’. It must be noted that this term includes a wider set of linguistic phenomena than the natural language meaning of ‘request’ in English, encompassing every kind of situation in which a person is asked to do something, regardless of (im)politeness, distance, and relative social positions of the partners in the interaction. This is, incidentally, how I will define ‘request’ for the purpose of this work.

*annītim eṭranni-ma lū waradka ša dariātīm anāku*, ‘You have saved me in this (matter)! May I be your servant forever’; 1999, 201).

Apart from the formulae, further rhetorical means can be employed to emphasise the urgency of the sender: the request can be repeated, sometimes in double negation (do not *not* grant it). This can be further expanded with various stereotypical appeals not to delay necessary actions and not to be negligent (1999, 171). The polite strategies that can be put to use here include referring to the desired actions in the third person plural (‘let them do it!’), which avoids assigning the proposed actions to the partner in letter exchange (1999, 177), hedges and emphasis on the ability of the potential benefactor to do as they please (1999, 179). Despite these quite sophisticated negative politeness strategies, the requests are never phrased indirectly as questions or something else (1999, 180). The majority of requests in Sallaberger’s corpus is in fact quite direct (1999, 168).

In conclusion and after listing and commenting upon the attestations of individual formulae in the Old Babylonian corpus, Sallaberger points out that the mainstay of Old Babylonian politeness are the references of familial relationships and that granting a request creates an imbalance between the benefactor and recipient of his or her help: this debt has to be addressed verbally already in the request, and this is the function of promises of reciprocity and repayment.

In the final part of his work, Sallaberger treats the argumentative structures in Old Babylonian letters. His concern is the structure and typology of the arguments and not the place of particular types of arguments in a sequence of speech actions. When relevant, his findings will however be mentioned in the following parts of the present study.

Another important investigation of correspondence is Schmidl’s introduction to the edition of private Late Babylonian letters (2014). Schmidl relies on Sallaberger’s theoretical findings on the structure and communicative routines in the Akkadian letters: the ordering of report – sender’s initiative – call to further action is still the predominant schema in the Late Babylonian letters, over a thousand years later (2014, 28).

Similarities in structure across extremely long periods of time can also be observed in thanking: in the Late Babylonian period as well, it can be expressed with a positive assessment of the benefactor’s aid, with joy at the favour rendered or with blessing and other reciprocal actions (2014, 34). The terms of address include a wide range of kinship terms and some titles, as expected, although some surprising choices do appear in the corpus. A curious polite strategy gives women of higher standing the title of a ‘lord’, *bēlu*. Nos. 47 and 234 are addressed to a *bēltu*, ‘lady’, while No. 232 to a *ummu*, ‘mother’, but in all three cases, the women are called *bēlu* in the body of the letter. Further evidence for this type of usage is Schmidl (2017). Even when the verbs appear in the third person and the addressee is referred to as ‘lord’, the only possible personal pronoun is still *attā* (singular masculine ‘you’; Schmidl 2014, 19) – although in theory one could systematically use the title of ‘lord’ instead.

The most common greeting in the Late Babylonian corpus is the *šulmu*-formula. Two gods are called upon to bless the addressee with good health. According to Schmidl, 57% of all greetings contain this expression and the number only rises with time (2014, 11–12). The formula can of course be expanded as needed.

Schmidl also considers the topics routinely touched upon in letters: the complaints that the messages do not reach the writer frequently or swiftly enough (2014, 35–37) and the appeals to act without delay. The censure related to the lack of communication can also be stated in explicitly religious terms as in No. 22 (Hackl et al. 2014, 131–134): *ikkibu ša ilī mīnā tēnka lapānija irīq* (obv. be18.-rev. 1; ‘It is an outrage against the gods! Why is your message (kept) away from me?’). A very common idiom expressing desired briskness of action is *nubattu lā bātu*, literally ‘to not stay overnight’, meaning that no time should be wasted (Schmidl 2014, 38–39). Other verbs that thematise the efficient and swift behaviours are also used with negation – *šelû* and *šātu* (both verbs mean ‘to neglect’). Two frequent rhetorical strategies in Late Babylonian are questions, frequently ironic or rhetorical, often serving to express reproach (2014, 45–46) and oaths. Oaths are never used when a person of higher status wants to convince a person of lower status of the truthfulness of their words.

Among the stylistic means serving the writers of the messages Schmidl lists above all repetition, parallelism and hyperbole (2014, 48–49). Further ways of strengthening argumentation can be the mention of emotional states and appeals to interpersonal relationships, as already seen in the Old Babylonian corpus (2014, 50–51). Threats can be issued against those of lower status, as in the case of father threatening the members of his family, or against persons of higher status, who can be intimidated with mentions of the king or the judges (2014, 51–52).

Although Schmidl’s account of the rhetorical devices and frequent expressions in the Late Babylonian letters is quite exhaustive, it does not attempt to trace the sequences of low-level speech actions in individual texts. The material gathered by Schmidl will be therefore used in the following sections of this work discussing the speech actions, their sequences and the possible explanations of their forms.

Levavi (2018) is a study of Late Babylonian letters sent within an institutional framework, including royal correspondence. His remarks about the language of the letters largely follow those of Schmidl. Important additions are the more formal and elaborate additions to greetings necessitated by the larger power differential between partners at opposite ends of institutional hierarchy. An important stock phrase is *suddir* (2018, 63), ‘to take care of’.

The above are all the analyses of correspondence that will be referred to here. There are, however, other works that discuss smaller scale communicative issues in the corpora that will be the object of this study.

Ponchia (1989) examines the formulae relevant to exchange of information in the Neo-Assyrian corpus. Important reports and denunciations are introduced with *šarru lū uda* (‘may the king know’), the royal prerogative to make decisions is taken up in two formulae emphasizing the king’s unilateral power: *kī*

*ina pān šarri mahir* ('if it pleases the king...') and *kī ša ina pān šarri mahirūni lēpuš* ('may the king do as he pleases'). The power of the king to accomplish whatever he pleases is expressed with the formula *kī ša šarru ilā'ūni lēpuš*, 'may the king do what he can', which also marks appeals for royal intervention.

Luukko (2012a) considers the standardisation of greeting formulae in Neo-Assyrian letters from the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE. In some cases, as Luukko notes (2012a, 100), the strikingly identical greeting in letters from successive holders of the same office should be explained by the continued presence of the same scribe. He also notes the changes in the greeting formulae of crown princes writing to their royal father: such a change could perhaps be connected to a change in their status in the imperial hierarchy between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE (2012a, 101). The greeting formula of the crown prince in 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE reports the well-being of different locations in Assyria. The later formula, meanwhile, used by Assurbanibal and his brother, is not dissimilar to the one used by governors almost a century earlier. The earlier greeting is devoid of a blessing formula, while the later one does not assure the royal father of the peace and well-being of his land (2012a, 102).

Luukko discusses also the special cases of greetings: that of Sîn-na'di in SAA 15 17, who lacks a scribe and thus has to write his tablet himself (see also Parpola 1997b), as well as the letter written in a foreign language that might be Urartian, where only the greeting is written in Assyrian (2012a, 103–104). In both cases, as well as in a letter from a ruler of Šubria (SAA 5 45), the greeting seems strikingly similar, thus hinting at a high degree of standardisation.

Letters sent to superiors that omit a greeting were often written in the peripheries. The lack of greeting can thus be explained by the ignorance of the senders (2012a, 104). Of note is also a presence of a ruling between the address formula without a greeting by a horizontal line in some Nimrud letters: a leftover from the Middle Assyrian period, when such a practice was common.

Blessings appear in the letters from the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE only very infrequently. Luukko sees a reason for this in the social status of their senders, above all magnates and highest officials (2012a, 104). On the other hand, blessings are much more common in the contemporary letters written in the Babylonian dialect (2012a, 106). Sometimes a blessing for the king can perhaps be explained as a proof of a personal relationship an official or magnate had with the king (2012a, 107).

While considering several important factors, Luukko however does not attempt to examine how the choice of a greeting might be related to the contents of the letter.

Finally, Groß and Hackl (2013) provide one of the very few investigations of speech acts in a strict sense, attempting to arrive at the meaning of the idiom *ana appi šūšû*, literally 'to make come out of the nose'. They argue convincingly that the presence of the idiom in the context of requests and thanks allows only one meaning: 'to behave extremely well towards somebody, to multiply favours'.

Multiple other works explain or comment upon the social, institutional and cultural realities involving the background of the letters and literary narratives and the events described within them. They sometimes thematise speech acts, but as their central concern is something else, they will only be quoted when relevant in the following chapters.

#### 1.4 The procedure chosen for the present study

The following study of speech acts in the Akkadian texts from first millennium BCE will adhere to a simple set of guidelines.

Instead of the basic and *a priori* categories of speech acts of the kind proposed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1976), a lower-level classification will be chosen throughout. It will be based above all on the roles and functions of the investigated expressions of speech acts in the communicative events within which they are uttered and/or written.

They will be identified at the level of communicative function in a sequence of communicative actions on the basis of internal and external context. An important caveat here is that some more detailed distinctions will not be possible. There are three main reasons for this: first, the fragmentary nature of the material – in the literal sense, as many tablets are quite badly damaged, and also because of the uneven distribution of sources. Moreover, despite the great progress made in the decipherment of the texts, some of them are still comprehended only imperfectly. This is caused by the difficulty some of them pose as well as by the ambiguity inherent in all natural languages.

As already mentioned above, the criterion of identification will be the place of a speech act in a sequence and, when possible, the reaction of partners in the communicative exchange. The reactions are especially valuable, as they show how a native speaker (including fictional native speakers) would understand and evaluate a speech act. However, not many of the Akkadian sources provide both the speech act and the reaction to it. The large part of the corpus of correspondence is only preserved one-sidedly. Nonetheless, wherever possible, such a procedure will be attempted.

The issue of identifying speech act is also closely connected to the corpus chosen for the present study: it was selected precisely to allow both ways of categorisation of speech acts to be employed. The texts under consideration here will include letters written and sent in the first millennium BCE and narrative compositions dated to the Late Period by Foster (2007). Speech acts in correspondence will be identified by their place within a speech act sequence, while in the narrative works, they will be categorised by the reaction of the speaker – although their place within a sequence remains equally important. Some of the reactions will be wordless, consisting of gesture or silent compliance with previously spoken order and this dimension of communication will also be included in the analysis. This does not mean that all late literary works can be used equally. It is after all of paramount importance to know who the speaker is. The unfortunate consequence of this is that very little can be used of the truly 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE composition – the Epic of Erra (Cagni 1969). Not only is this text very fragmentary, but also in multiple

sections one cannot be entirely sure who speaks to whom<sup>39</sup> – such passages can only be investigated after one has a certain clarity about the polite and acceptable forms between different classes of persons.

The categories of speech acts will be named after the roles they play in the sources: some of the names will be the natural language terms such as request, command or apology. However, as apparent from the studies carried out within the Conversation Analysis paradigm, not all speech acts have natural language names, such as pre-invitations or pre-requests ( Levinson 2017, 203; Schegloff 2007). Some types of speech acts that will be identified in the Akkadian sources will also probably belong to that category. On the other hand, for the sake of clarity, I will refer to the pre- and post-request using the more specific labels for the speech actions by means of which they are realised, or by stating that they include arguments.

An important distinction needs to be made before moving on to the next issue, that of levels of organisation. An entire communicative event can be subsumed under the heading of a ‘complaint’ when the complaint is the main purpose of the letter and all or most of the speech actions within the letter are preparing the ground for the actual complaint or its more or less oblique realisation. The higher-level action of ‘complaint’ will then be formed from a sequence of lower-level actions, entire moves, with their corresponding names (Clark 1996, 36). It must be noted here that although the lower-level action that would be considered the core of the complaint or even the only part of the sequence that actually is a complaint, it is often impossible without the sequence of actions leading to it: hence the higher-level category ‘complaint’ should still be preserved. The distinction will be maintained throughout this work, especially since it is above all concerned with establishing the patterns of higher-level actions composed of particular chains of lower-level ones.<sup>40</sup>

The object of this study are speech actions and their realisations. The aim is not only to establish patterns of normal and routine use – within the specified parameters, since obviously the rules and tendencies are mitigated by sociolinguistic considerations – but also to explain the unusual forms. One can predict that under certain circumstances some speech acts will be expressed in a more elaborate manner or, indeed, will be omitted entirely, although otherwise present in a particular type of sequence. Possible explanations here include the attention given to the suitably polite or impolite forms, use of persuasion strategies intended to benefit the speaker, situational considerations apparent from the structure of a sequence, and (in correspondence) external context that may or may not be mentioned explicitly in the text. All these factors will be accounted for in the following analysis, which will, therefore, be focused on the norm and routine as much as on the marginal and special cases.

Although the terms used throughout this work will be etic and modern, and while explicit mentions of rules of communication are almost completely absent in the ancient text, it is also worthwhile to see

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<sup>39</sup> This does not mean that proposals have been made – see Müller 1995.

<sup>40</sup> Sallaberger (1999, 134–135) solves this issue in a similar manner, although relying on a strictly philological paradigm: some illocutionary acts can be subordinate to higher-level speech acts.

how particular speech acts are named in the texts. Not many attestations are to be expected and it is obvious that in most cases the terms used will be very general, meaning no more than ‘word’ or ‘utterance’. Nonetheless, some indirect conclusions can perhaps be also gained here.

Finally, one should now address the question of analysing speech acts in fragmentarily preserved sources written in a dead language that was only deciphered after centuries of being consigned to oblivion. Many previous studies of illocutionary acts in dead or corpus languages relied on automatic extraction of expressions that were to be investigated from large electronic corpora. This is not a procedure that will be followed here, for several reasons. In the first place, many Akkadian texts are still imperfectly deciphered and imperfectly understood. One need only to compare different editions of an admittedly very sophisticated literary composition, *enūma eliš*, the great Akkadian creation myth, to surmise that certain lines are given quite disparate interpretations by different editors<sup>41</sup>. To complicate matters further, numerous texts are not completely preserved and exhibit various degrees of damage, making the already arduous task of decipherment even more challenging. Reliance on any kind of automatic extraction would be under those circumstances become a severe hindrance to sufficient accuracy and any benefits that could be gained by saving time would be wasted.

A sequential reading of all the texts under investigation will therefore be of utmost importance, allowing to formulate a completely bottom-up approach to the data (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2013, 43). This method will be an attempt to compensate as much as possible for the lacunae and fragmentary preservation of texts, but in many instances will require some additional tweaking to arrive at sound conclusions. Ideally, however, each analysed text will be read in its entirety and divided into speech act sequences, and each speech act considered in the context of at least the preceding and the following speech act (in a sequence) and starting-point situation and reaction to the speech act (in cases where ascertaining the reaction is possible). Sequences that are too fragmentary and speech acts without the preceding and following actions in the sequence will be, as a rule, discarded from the analysis, but sometimes quoted when the patterns apparent in the less damaged sequences suggest or confirm the probable reconstruction.

Although giving equal attention to all speech actions would be a fascinating enterprise, it is hardly feasible. To ensure that as many reactions as possible can be gathered and analysed, I will focus on the loci of conflict and trouble. The present work will thus comprise the following parts:

1. preceding conflict and trouble: warning, threats, and promises;
2. the locus of trouble: complaints;
3. after the conflict and trouble: apologies, excuses, and reactions to reproaches.

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<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, certainly not the majority of the lines.

This will hopefully maximise the potential for the senders of the letters to quote their addressees' preceding missives.

The focus on disruptions does not mean omitting the other speech actions completely. I will also consider the requests, admonitions, and commands when coupled with all the above types of speech actions, and note the arguments used by the speakers and senders in association with them.

## 1.5 Sources

The following work sets out to analyse speech acts Akkadian and Akkadian only: the bilingual sources developed as translations from Sumerian will not be included here.

Cuneiform tablets written in Akkadian from the first millennium BCE are quite numerous. The problem they pose is not that of dearth, however. The ostensive textual abundance is largely restricted to legal and administrative contexts.<sup>42</sup> Tablets belonging to this type are usually characterised by rigid, stereotypical phrasing and speech acts of the extremely formulaic kind, and more importantly, they do not usually record conversations. They will not be analysed here: this would require a different type of approach, less linguistic and pragmatic, but more focused on the legal practices and sociohistorical realities of government, business practice and administration.

Much less numerous are the texts representing speech or conversations. Both dialogues and monologues occur frequently in literary narratives, while letters are typically structured in a manner similar enough to one side of or a whole conversation (see the discussion above). I will first introduce the sources I will use, and then briefly discuss the problems involved in analysing them.

The Neo-Assyrian letters have been edited in the series *State Archives of Assyria* (SAA). The correspondence, found in the capitals of the Assyrian empire, belongs accordingly to the royal archives from the reigns of the following kings:

Tiglath-pileser III (akk. Tukultī-apil-Ešarra; 744-727 BCE)

Salmanassar V (akk. Salmānu-ašarēd; 727-722 BCE)

Sargon II (akk. Šarru-ukīn<sup>43</sup>; 721-705 BCE)

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<sup>42</sup> Jursa (2005, 1) counts 20 500 published or unpublished of legal and administrative collected for the Vienna Economic History of Babylonia project only from the period post (early) 7<sup>th</sup> century. The archive of the Ebabbar temple alone comprises as many as 35 000 tablets (2005, 2). Meanwhile, out of approximately 25 000 Kuyunjik tablets (approximate number after 5 351 joins, Reade 1998-2001, 421), only about 2,800 are letters (Radner 2015, 61; Robson 2020, 21 gives the total number of administrative texts together with correspondence as 'about 5 500'), 5 000-10 000 are scholarly (Robson 2020, 22), and approximately 1 000 are building inscriptions (Reade 1998-2001: 421), putting a putative number of literary text manuscripts between 13 500 and 8 500. Despite the relatively small number of both letters and literary texts, the Niniveh archives remain one of the largest sources for both literary tablets and correspondence in the first millennium.

<sup>43</sup> For the discussion of the reading of the name, see Fuchs 2009-2011, 51-53.



Sennacherib (akk. Sîn-aḫḫē-erība; 705-681 BCE)

Esarhaddon (akk. Aššūr-aḫu-iddina; 681-669 BCE)

Assurbanipal (akk. Aššūr-bāni-apli; 669-631 BCE)

Sîn-šarru-iškun<sup>44</sup> (627-612 BCE)

These letters are divided among the State Archives of Assyria volumes as follows:

SAA 19: 229 letters (Luukko 2012b): numbers 3-151 dated to the reign of Tiglath-pileser III

numbers 1-2 doubtful<sup>45</sup>

numbers 152-229 dated to the reign of Sargon II

SAA 1: 265 letters (Parpola 2015) all dated to the reign of Sargon II

SAA 5: 300 letters (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990) all dated to the reign of Sargon II

SAA 15: 391 letters (Fuchs and Parpola 2001) all dated to the reign of Sargon II

SAA 10: 389 letters (Parpola 1993) numbers 1-26; 37; 39-45; 47-53; 55-56; 62; 66-74; 81; 84; 109-121; 128-130; 136-142; 148-149; 152; 154; 159-160; 165-169; 176-179; 182; 185-223; 229-274; 281; 289-310; 313-334; 338-344; 347-370; 375; 377; 379; 380 dated to the reign of Esarhaddon

numbers 28; 31-36; 38; 46; 54; 58-61; 65; 79-80; 82-83; 85-87; 92-93; 95; 97-99; 102-103; 106-108; 122-127; 143-147; 150-151; 155-158; 161; 170-172; 175; 180-181; 183-184; 275; 277-288; 311-312; 335-337; 371-374; 376; 378; 382-398 are doubtful

numbers 19; 27; 29-30; 57; 63-64; 75-78; 88-91; 94; 96; 100-101; 104-105; 131-135; 153; 162-164; 173-174; 224-228; 276; 345-346; 381 are dated to the reign of Assurbanipal

SAA 13: 211 letters (Cole and Machinist 1998) no attempt was made to differentiate between the reigns of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal

SAA 16: 246 letters (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002) all letters are dated to the reign of Esarhaddon

SAA 21: 161 letters (Parpola 2018) all letters dated to the reign of Esarhaddon

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<sup>44</sup> As far as can be determined, no letters are datable to the very brief (631-627 BCE) reign of Aššūr-etel-ilāni, the brother and predecessor of Sîn-šarru-iškun.

<sup>45</sup> In this as well as in the following cases, ‘doubtful’ means that it is impossible to ascertain which of the two rulers is meant.

SAA 17: 207 letters (Dietrich 2003) numbers 1-3; 5; 7-31; 39-51; 58-80; 82-91; 101-102; 129-133; 137-139; 145-163; 165-167; 169; 171-176; 181; 183-184; 186-187; 191; 195; 197-199; 201-202; 205-206 are dated to the reign of Sargon II

numbers 134-135; 168; 178-180; 182; 185; 189; 194; 196; 200; 203-204; 207 are doubtful

numbers 4; 6; 32-38; 52-57; 81; 92-100; 103-128; 136; 140-144; 164; 170; 177; 188; 190; 192-193 are dated to the reign of Sennacherib

SAA 18: 204 letters (Reynolds 2003) numbers 1-142 are dated to the reign of Esarhaddon

numbers 143-162; 164-186; 188-204 are dated to the reign of Assurbanipal

numbers 163 and 187 are dated to the reign of Šîn-šarru-iškun

The dates, however, are not all. Most of the letters in SAA 1, 5, 10, 13, 15, 16, and 21 are written in the Neo-Assyrian dialect. The letters edited in SAA 17 and SAA 18 are written exclusively in the Neo-Babylonian dialect. The chronology and the dialectal differences, however, do not exhaust the issues with the royal correspondence of the Neo-Assyrian empire fully. The individual volumes of State Archives of Assyria not only sort the letters chronologically and by dialect, but also by topic. Thus the earlier letters, edited in SAA 19, SAA 1, SAA 5, and SAA 15 are with few exceptions administrative in nature<sup>46</sup>. They are also sent by the highest officials of the empire, especially the governors of the provinces (explicitly noted by Luukko 2012b, xv but the issues of governors and provinces are discussed in the three other volumes as well). The later correspondence in SAA 16 is diplomatic and political, as is the correspondence in SAA 21. The letters edited in SAA 10 and SAA 13, which are also later, were written to the kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal by priests and scholars. Not only are the topics discussed by the scholars completely different from the military campaigns mentioned by the governors. The position of the priests and scholars is also not the same as that of the magnates and highest officials. They were the clients of the kings to whom they addressed their letters, depending on their patronage. The position of the scholars was likely even more precarious than that of the priests, who at least had their temple to rely on, at least in theory. But it is exactly in the letters from the priests that one can observe how much the smooth functioning of the temple economy depended, again, on the royal patronage.

In effect, the letters from the Neo-Assyrian chanceries are not evenly distributed either chronologically, nor dialectally, nor with regard to their topic and the social position of the senders. There are also the geographical considerations: the correspondence of Sargon II in SAA 1, 5, and 15 is divided by region,

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<sup>46</sup> The military matters discussed in SAA 5 are after all administration: the letters edited there are reports for the use of the internal government network and do not have a diplomatic character.

and in most volumes the letters are divided into chapters based on the physical location of their authors. It is therefore often hard to compare the patterns that occur in all the different classes of letters, as they may be caused by a multitude of factors (and not necessarily one factor only, either). For instance, the more elaborately polite forms used by the scholars will not be the result of, say, the rapid development of courtly language under the Sargonids, but rather of the different sociolinguistic realities that the scholarly families were faced with and the different level of education their members enjoyed. The various circumstances of the senders will thus have to be often mentioned explicitly – I will try to do this by including also the information about the senders provided by the Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire<sup>47</sup>.

The Babylonian correspondence that will be discussed here, apart from the two volumes from the Assyrian archives already noted above, belongs to the three basic groups:

The archive of the governor of Nippur (with 113 letters and fragments), dated by the editor (based on the prosopographic information, as not one of the letters is dated) to the years between 755 and 732 BCE (Cole 1996b, 1–6), thus to a period at least potentially earlier than the earliest of the Neo-Assyrian letters;

217 institutional letters from the Neo-Babylonian temples (Eanna in Uruk, Ezida in Borsippa, and Ebabbar in Sippar), edited by Levavi (2018). Unlike the previous groups of letters, this one includes letters from completely different archives. They are to be dated to the early reign of Nabopolassar (akk. Nabû-aplu-ušur; 625-605 BCE) during the so-called long sixth century;

The predominantly private letters from the Late Babylonian period, edited by Hackl et al. (2014). These letters again can be attributed to multiple archives, often only on the basis of museum archaeology and prosopographic context. They are to be dated to the reigns of Neriglissar (akk. Nergal-šarru-ušur, 560-556 BCE), Nabonid (akk. Nabû-na'id, 556-539 BCE), and the later Persian kings (Jursa 2014a, 84–86).

Again, one encounters the same situation. The subcorpora of correspondence are not really comparable: they are not contemporaneous, come from different social milieus, and have a completely different geographical scope. Moreover, while most of the letters from the Assyrian royal archives were either written to the king or by the king, the Babylonian correspondence presents a rather different picture, with social relations more balanced, and thus more letters exchanged between 'brothers'. One can easily imagine how this will encumber the process of analysis. Where social equals will try to preserve the impression of equality by, as one could predict, balancing their relationship in such a way that favours are mutual and neither of both sides of an exchange is imposed upon unduly, the senders who are subordinate, especially in communication with the king, will likely assume completely different and much more submissive strategies. In the end, the patterns of acceptable conduct will either have to be

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<sup>47</sup> The individual items are introduced in the bibliography with the names of the contributors.

traced very broadly indeed, or one will have to think about different patterns for every social group – and, if one is fortunate enough, to seek the common patterns across all of them.

There remains the question of the authorship of the letters, which in the first millennium were written by scribes on behalf of the senders. It is hard to ascertain to what extent the scribes could influence the contents of the letter: would they, for instance, improve on the polite formulas? The Neo-Assyrian scholars obviously wrote their letters themselves, and with no lack of creativity, either. SAA 15 17, written by an official without a scribe, was already discussed above. Clearly the elite at least was educated enough to be able to read and write – although it is hard to predict under what circumstances they would actually do this. For the purpose of this study, I will ignore the scribes. It is certain that in many cases they served as intermediaries between the author and the message, but the scope of their influence is at present impossible to determine.

There is of course the question of which letters were actually letters and which were drafts, copies, or other kind of notes. The letters from the archive of the Nippur governor belonged obviously to the incoming correspondence, while the status Neo- and Late Babylonian from the institutional and private context will have to remain unclear – their findspots are for the most part unknown, and they have been attributed to particular archives on the basis of prosopographic and other contextual clues. However, the letters from the Assyrian kings, found in the archives in the royal capitals, are obvious candidates for drafts or archival copies. If they remained in the residences of the senders until the archaeologist's trowel removed them from the soil, it is because they were not sent in the first place. On the other hand, one would automatically consider the letters addressed to the king and discovered in the royal residence to form a part of the clearly incoming corpus. This is, however, far from certain. As Ito (2019, 248–250) convincingly argues, some letters possessed additional archival copies – as in the case of SAA 21 107 and SAA 21 106. The former is written in the Neo-Babylonian script, while the latter in Assyrian, additionally containing a number of Assyrianisms. Since the ductus in both letters is so dissimilar, Ito suggests that they were written by different scribes, although this might not necessarily be the case. Nonetheless, it would make little sense for the sender of both letters (whose name is broken away) to prepare an Assyrian and a Babylonian copy for the king, whose scribes could certainly read both script in an equally proficient manner. Ito's suggestion that the Assyrian version of the letter is an archival copy of the letter is most likely correct. Another similar example is ABL 751 + CT 54 429 from Nabû-ušabši, the governor of Uruk, in Neo-Babylonian script and its Assyrian counterpart, ABL 268 (some Babylonian expressions are removed). In this case, as Ito notes, the letters appear to be written on a clay of different quality.

There are also more complicated cases, such as letters written in the Neo-Babylonian dialect but Neo-Assyrian script (2019, 250–251) – ABL 269 (also from the above-mentioned governor of Uruk) even includes what is likely a scribal remark *e-gir-tu<sub>2</sub> an-ni-tu uš-ri*, 'preserve this letter!'. Other letters of this type are SAA 21 109 and SAA 21 117.

Based on the format of the letters, some of them might also not be the final versions but rather drafts. An example cited by Ito (2019, 251) is SAA 10 183, written in the landscape format (*u'iltu*) of the scholarly report, and not in the oblong *egirtu*-format of a letter<sup>48</sup>. The letter is written in the Neo-Assyrian dialect but in Neo-Babylonian script, and the spacing between the lines in the first and in the second part of the letter seems to be different. Again, an argument for categorising the tablet as a draft seems to be convincing.

The letters from the Assyrian kings seem of course to be more likely to be archival copies or drafts than something returned to sender. Villard (2006, 25–26) suggests that SAA 1 1, a letter from Sargon II on the Phrygian question, is a draft – based on the way in which the consecutive topics are introduced (first with full citations, then only with the names of the persons involved, which could indicate that the letter was not finished – the scribe would likely note down the responses to each issue raised in the letter from the governor).

Some other marks of potential drafts include larger numbers of abbreviations and simpler signs (eg. SAA 21 25). The same letter in various stages of the editorial process is also attested as SAA 21 22, SAA 21 23, and SAA 21 24 – according to Ito (2019, 253), they appear to be in different scribal hands. A similar case might be SAA 21 8 and SAA 21 9 – a letter in the Neo-Babylonian dialect but in the Neo-Assyrian script. Ito supposes that SAA 21 8 was the draft, and SAA 21 9 the revised, more concise version.

There is of course the *minū aḥḥūr minū aḥḥur* in SAA 21 18 (rev. 12.), written to Enlil-bāni and the citizens of Nippur (see also Ito 2013). The repeated ‘what else, what else’ gives the distinct impression that the scribe was simply writing down everything that the king was saying.

Additionally, Ito points to the presence of erasures among the royal correspondence, which could indicate that the texts were still undergoing an editorial process. More unequivocally, perhaps, some letters include scribal remarks that are likely archival notes (Ito 2019, 254–256). This includes SAA 19 1, SAA 21 3, and SAA 21 33 (all three notes include a date).

Even though the majority of the royal letters were either copies or drafts, this does not preclude them from being analysed here. In the worst case, they could be abridged (although according to Ito, the shorter versions of the letter appear to be more polished and therefore perhaps final), but they still existed well within the range of the acceptable royal speech. The arguments were such as the king would make – even if, for instance, because of sudden political change the letters had to be discarded.

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<sup>48</sup> It has to be noted, however, that this is hardly the only letter written in this format. SAA 16 28, the well-known message from the sister of Assurbanipal to his wife, dealing with unfinished homework, is also one of a number of letters written in the landscape format.

I will not be indicating the status of the letter as a copy or a draft in the following part of the present investigation. One need to bear in mind, however, that not all of the discussed letters were originals, and that some of the royal letters especially might be drafts.

The literary text from which the speech actions will be sourced are the following:

The creation epic *enūma eliš* (Lambert 2013)

The epic of Erra (Cagni 1969)

The myth of Ištar's descent to the underworld (Lapinkivi 2010)

The myth of Nergal and Ereškigal (Ponchia and Luukko 2013)

The Epic of Gilgameš (George 2003)

Since it is absolutely necessary to know who the speaker in the dialogue is, and since incomplete dialogues would hardly be the basis for establishing common patterns, a lot of this relatively rich material will have to be discarded. I nonetheless hope to collect enough tokens to show at least the similarities and differences between the literature and daily communication.

## 1.6 The details

Even a dead language was an organic matter at some point, and I tried to give it justice by not translating everything like a machine and rendering every occurrence of a word in the same manner. The obvious exception were the titles of the officials, which I translated uniformly. Sometimes, to avoid repetitions, especially in the case of various titles for a 'governor' where the reader could receive the impression that the same official is mentioned two or times in the same list (*šandabakku*, the governor of Nippur; *šākin tēmi*; *bēl paḥete*), I used Akkadian terms interchangeably.

The titles of the officials, both in the palace and in the temple, were translated as follows:

*šākin tēmi* = governor in the Babylonian texts, commandant in the Assyrian texts

*bēl paḥete* = governor

*šandabakku* = (when not left as *šandabakku* in the text) governor of Nippur

*turtānu* = commander-in-chief

*šaknu* = prefect

*rab-kišri* = cohort-commander

*ḥazannu* = mayor

*ša-pān-ekalli* = palace overseer

*šanû* = deputy

*ša-qurbûti* = royal companion or companion of the king<sup>49</sup>

*šîru* = envoy

*šatammu* = temple administrator

*qîpu* = (royal) agent

*sartennu* = chief judge

*sukkallu* = vizier

*mašennu* = treasurer

*šāqû* = cupbearer

The prefix *rab-* in the names of the offices was translated as ‘chief’.

Regarding the degree of literality: I sometimes used the more literal translation as a device for emphasizing certain parts of the text. Lawrence Venuti (2009) is certainly right in his pronouncement that too idiomatic a translation can often make the reader insensible to the more alien elements of the text. If the literal translation was potentially incomprehensible to a non-specialist, I added a footnote, and if the literal translation appeared too absurd in English, I banished it to the realm of the footnotes.

Some terms I avoided almost religiously – if I may be forgiven the terrible pun. This refers above all the word ‘sin’ and ‘to sin’ as the equivalent of the noun *ḥîtu* and the verb *ḥâtu*. Throughout this work, I used every possible term (fault, crime, wrongdoing, misdeed, offence) but this one. In European languages the word ‘sin’ has such an overwhelmingly strong religious connotations that they are absolutely impossible to avoid. While the origins of the modern conceptions of ‘sin’ are certainly to be sought in the Ancient Near East, this does not mean that the concepts should be understood as equivalent already before the later one has come into being. In some letters to the king, he is addressed almost like divine agent with a unique insight into his subjects’ fault – here the translation as ‘sin’ would not be misleading. Nonetheless, I chose to use a different translation and to address the issue head-on, when it cropped up.

The idioms used by the writers of the Babylonian and Assyrian letters were translated in a manner as close to their original meaning as possible. There are some clear exceptions, for instance the phrase *ḥarrānu ana GIR<sub>3</sub> šakānu* (literally ‘send somebody on their way’, for the less literary meaning ‘to

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<sup>49</sup> The text editions in SAA traditionally render *ša-qurbûti* as ‘royal bodyguard’. Nevertheless, it should be noted that when one considers his role in the administration, the translation that fits it better is something like ‘agent’ or ‘royal agent’ (Groß 2020, 201). On the other hand, in order to preserve something of the original wording of *ša-qurbûti* that has to do with closeness, and also to avoid using the translation that was already reserved for *qîpu*, I decided to follow the translation preferred by Radner 2018, 137.

prepare’ see Kienast 1988). The frequent references to ‘dying’ and ‘living’ were as far as possible translated literally – even if they are not to be understood in such a way.

I used the neutral pronoun ‘they’ when the gender of the persons spoken about was irrelevant. The gendered pronouns ‘he’ and ‘she’, however, are used deliberately in specific cases in which they appropriate.

Names in the letters edited in the State Archives of Assyria series were normalized according to the transcriptions used in the Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire – although I cited the individual items by author’s name. The only exceptions are the names of the gods – I used Enlil instead of Illil, Ištar instead of Issār and Ninurta instead of Inūrta. The names from the Babylonian corpora were transcribed according to the conventions used by the Prosobab (Waerzeggers and Groß 2019) – again with the exception that I wrote Šumāia instead of Šumāya for the sake of graphic unity. This had some unfortunate results, such as the name IR<sub>3</sub>-Gula being transcribed as Urdu-Gula in the (broadly understood) Assyrian texts and Arad-Gula in the Babylonian texts. No conventions are after all ideal.

The readings of the signs follow the Mesopotamisches Zeichenlexikon (MZL, Borger 2003). Whenever more than one reading was given, I chose the shorter one, thus IR<sub>3</sub> instead of ARAD and U<sub>4</sub> instead of UD. The only exception are the readings of the logograms that stand for the divine names. I chose to use d.PA instead of d.MUATI for the god *Nabû* and d.IM instead of d.IŠKUR for the god *Adad*. Another exception is my use of H in the Sumerian readings instead of Ĥ. Although I can understand that this can be done in order to show that the sign is identical in the Sumerian and Akkadian readings of parallel lines, I believe that in a script with polyvalent signs the point is moot anyway: a *ḥa* can be at the same time *ha* – and even a *gir*<sub>14</sub>. All signs whose value is ideographic, including the determinatives of personal names f. and m., are written without cursive, regardless of the nature of the name that follows. Foreign words in Akkadian texts, as long as they are not Sumerian, are also written in cursive. For the sake of legibility, I also used logograms even in cases when the reading of the sign could be syllabic, such as ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bi* being preferred over *lib*<sub>3</sub>-*bi*.

The guiding principle for the visual structuring of the transliterations was above all legibility. For this reason, the logograms are always written in capital letters (the only exceptions are the determinatives of personal names m. and f.). In order not to make the flow of reading too cluttered, the determinatives and the MEŠ sign for the plural are treated as logograms and not moved to the upper index – they are also bound to the preceding or following word by means of a full stop. The phonetic complements are not placed into the upper index.

The words in which more than one logogram/more than one logogram with a following Akkadian word create a word with a new meaning, I connected the logogram with the rest of the new word with a hyphen (thus LU<sub>2</sub>.DUMU-KIN and *not* LU<sub>2</sub>.DUMU KIN or LU<sub>2</sub>.DUMU.KIN).



The lines of the tablets are counted from the beginning of the obverse and then again from the beginning of the reverse, even if the original editors started the count only once, which again, is done above all for the sake of orientation and legibility. The lines of the literary compositions are counted according to the composite texts provided by the editions I used.

While this might be a controversial decision, I chose to remove the symbols for collated signs entirely. This work presumes the trust in the editors, and the information is not really necessary for an analysis of the semantic and pragmatic contents of the first millennium correspondence and other texts. The presence of the many additional symbols in the upper corner of every line makes the texts far less legible.

## Abbreviations and symbols

The following symbols were used in the transliterations:

[ ] – for restorations

⸀ – for partially damaged signs

{ } – for unnecessary signs

< > – for emendations

(eras.) – for erasures

The following abbreviations were used throughout the present work:

**AhW** Soden, Wolfram von (ed.), 1965/1972/1981. *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch 1-3*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

**CAD** Oppenheim, A. L., Erica Reiner, and et al. (eds.), 1956ff. *The Assyrian Dictionary of the University of Chicago*. Chicago, Glückstadt: Oriental Institute.

**GAG** Soden, Wolfram von, 1995. *Grundriss der akkadischen Grammatik*. 3rd ed. Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico.

**RIA** Reallexikon der Assyriologie

## **PART I: CLOUDS BEFORE THE STORM**

## THREATS AND WARNINGS

If one follows Searle's analysis (Searle 1969, reprinted 1978, 70), one of the main differences between a threat is that it would be pledge to do something *to* the interlocutor and not *for* the interlocutor and indeed, there seems to be a long tradition in literature of considering threats and promises as opposites. There certainly seems to be a different vector of meaning: in a threat, it is the interests of the speaker and their in-group that are represented, and in a promise the question of interests seems to be completely absent: a speaker trying to maintain that a threat is a promise would be either taunting the person he speaks to or trying to conceal what their interests are. On the other hand, threats, promises and warnings all refer to future actions and thus will be presented here as three distinct if related actions. In any case, depending on what the interlocutors perceive as their interests and their intended actions, the promise and the threat, and even a warning, might prove somewhat ambiguous.

Warnings are uttered in order inform the listener about an imminent, undesirable event or action. The information is meant to cause the listener to act in such a way as to completely foreclose something undesirable from happening. If the event or action are inevitable, the warning should allow the listener to prepare themselves to handle the event or action in such a way as to guarantee the best possible outcome. It is the external circumstances that can or cannot be controlled by the interlocutors that make the difference. If the action or event warned about can be averted, I will call the relevant speech action, simply 'warning', and if the action or event cannot be averted, and the listener can only prepare themselves and react, I will call the relevant speech action 'caution'.

From the structural point of view, warnings can refer to the action that the addressee needs to undertake and to the event or action that needs to be averted or prepared for. The action or event that is to be undertaken by the addressee can be encoded with a future-present tense (durative) or occur in a conditional clause. In first millennium Akkadian, it can also be supplanted by an imperative or precative clause followed in the Babylonian dialect by *iānû* – or simply by *iānû*, '(if) not', introducing the apodosis with the negative prediction. The Assyrian equivalent is *ûla*. The object of the warning can, however, be completely omitted and left unsaid – an imperative clause such as 'save your life!' is, after all, also a warning. In theory, both parts of the warning can be omitted.

A threat is something done to the listener – and in this sense it could perhaps be considered a subtype of warning. A threat warns that the utterer of the threat (or group to which they belong) will be responsible for undesirable actions performed upon the listener (or the group to which they belong). The threat may be uttered with the intention of attaining a concrete singular result by forcing the listener to carry out or avoid certain actions if they want to avoid the things that they are threatened with. The goal

of a threat, however, might also be much less specified and involve exerting control over the interlocutor by means of intimidation.

However, with the above definition, the fundamental difference between a threat and a warning does not seem to be sufficiently appreciated. There is something more to a threat than the question of being or not being the agent. The issue of whose interests are being furthered by the speech action seems, from the functional standpoint, to determine whether the action is a warning to a threat. In case of warning the interests of the listener are at least nominally given precedence – this accounts for the possible misunderstandings, if the interlocutors have different ideas about what in fact constitutes their interests. In case of a threat, the speaker acts in their own interests, although the option to ironically formulate a threat as advice or indeed a promise can be available.

Nonetheless, this attempt at a definition might rely too much on the mutual perception of individual interests and not enough on the conventions. Most modern languages have fixed expressions associated with both speech actions, such as the English ‘or else’, which clearly points at a threat. In a conversation, this would play an important role for both interlocutors. However, it is precisely these conventions (or absence thereof) that I seek to establish here. For the moment, therefore, they will not be considered as a defining factor.

Another issue, of course, is the perception of one’s own interests. If the undesirable action with which the listener is threatened is not an act of violence but an appeal to higher authority within a hierarchic structure, can it still be considered a threat? If both the speaker and the listener belong to or work for the same institution, they should both theoretically be invested in making sure that all vital processes run smoothly. On the other hand, interlocutors do not abandon their own completely private interests when they acquire a membership in an institution, and these private interests may collide with the interests of the institution. It is also not impossible that different parts of the same institution come into conflict. At the very least, the institutional background brings a third party with its own interests into the play.

Defining threats brings into play the questions of fear and power. This has perhaps more to do with Searle’s felicity conditions – but if a threat is not to be taken for a joke, the person who utters it has to be powerful enough or borrow the power of somebody or something powerful enough for it to be realised.

If the consequences of the lack of compliance with whatever actions the speaker wants to force on the listener are carried out in an institutional context by a higher authority – such as a just punishment – it is difficult to say if the speech action would be uniformly understood to be a threat. One would like to associate threats with something unreasonable, but this is perhaps the outcome the modern moral standards, according to which threats are often considered criminal practices. On the other hand, the assessment whether something is reasonable or not can vary greatly, even given shared cultural values. Clearly, especially in the context of institutional structures, there would be variability based on the different experiences one has with particular tasks and structures. But perhaps it is not necessary to

delineate the differences so starkly. Natural languages, after all, tend to be ambiguous, even more so to the ear of the modern researcher after more than two millennia of silence. It also stands to reason that some speech actions are more prototypical than others, although it would serve well to have an even preliminary categorisation.

In the end, however, the crucial component of a threat seems to be its fear-grounded character. As soon as somebody tries to fulfil their goals by means of intimidation, even if the goals are absolutely legitimate within the given framework, an utterance has at the very least the potential to be threatening – even if an individual addressee of the threat could assess it otherwise. It is not that there is no fear involved in warnings – a person told to ‘save their life’ would have every reason to be afraid – but the fear caused by a threat would be directed at the utterer (or his institution, or his social group).

For all the above reasons, I will consider a threat issued as a tactic of intimidation a straightforward threat, regardless of its degree of violence and the legitimacy of both the threat and the violence (the king, one could expect, it free to threaten violence and likely also carry the threats out), and the status of power of the speaker (that is, whether it needs to be borrowed or not).

Promise is the creation of an obligation to perform certain actions in the future. As Ambroise 2013 convincingly argues, a promise is something more than simply expressing an intention to do something that creates certain expectations in the listener(s). For this reason, a promise needs something more than intentions of the speaker to work: it needs to be a social institution, with the obligations created by the promises potentially enforceable with the help of external social pressure. Since there are no obvious formal distinguishing criteria for promises in Akkadian, such as there is for oaths – or such as there is for promises in most modern languages (a speech act verb with the meaning ‘to promise’), it remains to be seen whether the texts show that the obligation created by a promise is strong enough for the promise to constitute something more than a loose expression of intentions.

There is also another matter. In his conditions for defining promises, Searle (1969, reprinted 1978, 59–60) points out that an utterance can only be a promise if it is clear to both the hearer and the speaker that the action referred to would not be carried out under usual circumstances. This is certainly correct but also makes the assessment of speech actions as potential promises all the more difficult. Is a promise possible if an official is writing to his superior about his duties? On the other hand, cannot a promise be more casual?

The present study of promises will be therefore out of necessity limited. Since the only indications that something is a promise is a position of the potential promise within discourse or the negative reactions of the correspondents/interlocutors that indicate that they took the obligation of the addressee seriously, it is not unlikely that I will identify less promises that a speaker of Akkadian would have. I believe, however, that in this case it is better to err on the side of caution. Principally, I will be leaving out all

the utterances in which the senders/speakers report on their progress and affirm their plans before their superior.

A small collection of threats is assembled by Mayer 2013, 268–271. The majority of attestations in his work are gathered from earlier periods of Akkadian, but the insights to be gained are nonetheless valuable. Mayer divides the threats in 12 categories, based on the contents of the threats, but if one step further is taken in the direction of abstraction, the categories 1 (‘I will not speak to you anymore’) and 2 (‘You will be my son/my brother no more’) are threats with the cessation of a relationship, categories 5 (‘I will take you to account’), 9 (‘You will lose your property’)<sup>50</sup>, 10 (‘I will have you detained’), and 12 (‘Based on legal speech’) refer to legal, political and administrative consequences, while category 11 (‘I will beat you up, I will kill you’) predictably include the more violent results of lack of compliance with the wishes of the sender, although something similar might be suggested – but left for imagination of the addressee – under the category 4 (‘You will see what I will do to you!’). Attestations from category 3 (‘I will expose you in public’) all seem to be dated to the Old Assyrian period, while those from category 6 (‘I will show no forbearance’) are dated to the Middle or Old-Babylonian period<sup>51</sup>. Both of these categories are based more on the expression used than on the topic attested in the protasis. Unfortunately, Mayer does not always include the reason for the threat and even when he does, it is only the directly preceding move, so that no patterns can be recognised in the usage. Nonetheless, the list is a fascinating point of departure.

### Neo-Assyrian royal correspondence

Only two threats could be located in the earliest group of this correspondence, dated to the reign of Tiglath-pileser III.

SAA 19 6 (Luukko 2012b, 8–9) is a royal order pertaining to the care of the captives. The exact commands are not entirely clear, but the captives are to be provided for and brought to the other side of the river. The lower part of the obverse is damaged, and when the letter resumes in the reverse, the king repeats or summarises his command, which he follows with an admonition and a threat:

rev.    <sup>2'</sup>(...) <sup>1</sup>a<sup>1</sup>-na LU<sub>2</sub>.*ḫu-ub<sup>1</sup>-ti* <sup>3'</sup>[LU<sub>2</sub>.NAM<sup>?</sup>]-ka TA ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi <sup>4'</sup>[GU<sub>4</sub><sup>?</sup>.ME]Š-ka UDU.MEŠ-ka  
<sup>5'</sup>[at]-<sup>1</sup>ta<sup>1</sup> ta-da-an <sup>6'</sup>a<sup>1</sup>-na LU<sub>2</sub>.*ḫu-ub-ti* ša-aš-bu-ti <sup>7'</sup>a-di 7-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>1</sup>la<sup>1</sup> ta-ši-a-ṭa <sup>8'</sup>ina UGU-*ḫi*  
*ta-mu-at*

command:    rev. <sup>2'·5'</sup> Give to the captives of your [province (?)] from you [oxe]n and your sheep.

admonition:   rev. <sup>6'·7'</sup> Do not neglect the captives (to be) provisioned time and time again<sup>52</sup>!

<sup>50</sup> Category 7 (‘I will stop your rations (of raw materials)’) should be a subtype of 8.

<sup>51</sup> Same in CAD A, 18-19. The idiom *pānu abalu* is there translated as ‘to forgive’ or, in other contexts, as ‘to show preference, to favour’.

<sup>52</sup> Literally: seven times.

threat: rev. <sup>8</sup>·You (sg.) will die because of it.

If rev. 3' correctly restores [LU<sub>2</sub>.NAM<sup>7</sup>]-ka ('(people of) your province'), this threat would be directed at a governor – Aššūr-rēmāni is indeed attested as a governor under Tiglath-pileser III (Luukko 2012b, xvii).

The second threat is much less violent and directed by Qurdi-Aššūr-lāmur, the governor of Simirra at the Sidonites to ensure their obedience in SAA 19 22 (Luukko 2012b, 28–29):

obv. <sup>24</sup>.nu-uk GIŠ.MEŠ še-ri-da-ni <sup>25</sup>.dul-la-ku-nu ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi e-pe-ša<sub>2</sub> <sup>be26</sup>.a-na KUR.mu-šur-a-a a-na <sup>be27</sup>.KUR.pa-la-aš<sub>2</sub>-ta-a-a la ta-da-na

rev. <sup>1</sup>.u<sub>2</sub>-la-ma-a la u<sub>2</sub>-ra-ma-ku-nu <sup>2</sup>.a-na KUR-e la te-li-a

command: obv. <sup>24</sup>·<sup>25</sup>·(I told them) as follows: 'Bring down the wood and do your work.'

prohibition: obv. <sup>be26</sup>·<sup>be27</sup>·(But) do not sell (the wood) to the Egyptians (and) the Philistines'

threat: rev. <sup>1</sup>·<sup>2</sup>·'or I will not allow you to climb up the mountain.'

Although Qurdi-Aššūr-lāmur immediately changes topic, presumably he would have reported any issues that would arise while he endeavoured to implement his new policy. The threat was likely effective (at least so far).

SAA 19 119 (Luukko 2012b, 121–122) is a less clear-cut case. On the face of it, it includes a warning given to the sender by a third party, but the context is badly broken and seems to belong to something more like a denunciation. If the preceding passage refers to the same person who warns the sender, he is called a criminal (rev. 12'., LU<sub>2</sub>.*hi-tu-ma*):

rev. <sup>14</sup>·(...) ma-[a TA IGI] <sup>15</sup>·<sup>r</sup>URU.BAD<sub>3</sub>-ku-ri<sup>1</sup>-gal-zi [pa-ti-a-ka] <sup>16</sup>·<sup>r</sup>ma<sup>1</sup>-[a š]um-m[a<sup>7</sup>] <sup>r</sup>ta<sup>1</sup>-at-tal-ka id-d[u-ku-ka] <sup>17</sup>·a-b[u-t]u<sub>2</sub>-<sup>r</sup>ma ša aš<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-mu-u-ni <sup>r</sup>ša<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> a-ma-<sup>r</sup>ru<sup>1</sup>-[u-ni] <sup>18</sup>·a[q-ti-bi]

warning: rev. <sup>14</sup>·<sup>16</sup>·[Stay away from] Dur-Kurigalzu! If you go, they will k[ill you].'

denunciation (?): rev. <sup>17</sup>·<sup>18</sup>·I am [telling] (about) a matter which I have heard (and) which I have seen.

The following passage mentions the royal messenger who urged the sender to go to Dur-Kurigalzu with him:

rev. <sup>18</sup>·(...) LUGAL <sup>r</sup>LU<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>.A-KIN i-da-<sup>r</sup>tu<sup>1</sup>-u-a a-na <sup>r</sup>KASKAL.2<sup>1</sup> <sup>19</sup>·U[RU.l]a-<sup>h</sup>i-ri i-<sup>r</sup>sap<sup>1</sup>-ra ma-a al-ka <sup>20</sup>·[ina UR]U.<sup>r</sup>BAD<sub>3</sub>-ku-ri<sup>1</sup>-gal-zi lu-še-rib-ka <sup>21</sup>·[mar-ša-ku<sup>7</sup> l]a <sup>r</sup>a<sup>1</sup>-ma-gur <sup>r</sup>la<sup>1</sup> al-lak

introduction: rev. <sup>18</sup>·<sup>19</sup>·The king sent after me a messenger to the road of [L]ahiru, who said:

offer: rev. <sup>19</sup>·<sup>20</sup>·'Come! I will bring you [to] Dur-Kurigalzu.'



rejection: rev. <sup>21'</sup> (But) [I was ill (so)] I did not agree (and) did not go.

Considering the preceding passage with the warning, it would perhaps be more reasonable to restore [pal-ḫa-ku l]a ṛa<sup>1</sup>-ma-gur<sup>53</sup>.

A somewhat larger number of threats can be gathered from among the correspondence of Sargon II. There are 9 items in total, and the half can be attributed to the king.

The royal threats are included in the letters from the king himself (SAA 1 22, SAA 1 26) or can be quoted by the senders from previous royal correspondence (SAA 5 227, SAA 15 153).

The names of the persons at whom the royal letter in SAA 1 22 (Parpola 2015, 22–23) is directed are unfortunately broken away. The command of the king, together with the following threat, are remarkable enough to be here quoted in full:

obv. <sup>7</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.GAR-nu-ku-nu a-ṛdu KUR<sup>1</sup>.[RA].M[EŠ] <sup>8</sup>ša pi-ri BAD.HAL-ku-nu <sup>9</sup>ki-ir-ka-ni ar<sub>2</sub>-ḫiš  
<sup>10</sup>man-nu ša<sub>2</sub> i-mar-ku-ni <sup>11</sup>a-na za-qi<sub>2</sub>-pi qa-ab-si <sup>12</sup>ṛE<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-šu<sub>2</sub> i-ša<sub>2</sub>-ku-ṛnu<sup>1</sup>

rev. <sup>1</sup>ša a-na x[x x x]x <sup>2</sup>[ša] ṛURU u<sub>2</sub>-na-ka-ar<sub>2</sub>-u<sup>1</sup>-ni <sup>3</sup>ṛa-na ša<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-šu<sub>2</sub>-ma a-na za-qi<sub>2</sub>-pi <sup>4</sup>qa-[ab]-si  
E<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>5</sup>i-ša<sub>2</sub>-kun-šu<sub>2</sub> DUMU.MEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>6</sup>DUMU.MUNUS.MEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub> ina pi-i-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>7</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-ta-bu-ḫu

command: obv. <sup>7-9</sup>Gather your prefects together with the ho[rs]es of your cavalry corps. Quickly!

threat: obv. <sup>10-11</sup>Who(ever) is late will be impaled in the middle of his (own) house.

threat: rev. <sup>1-7</sup>And one who changes the [... of] the city will be impaled in the middle of his house. His sons and daughters will be slaughtered by his (own) order.

A similar urgency is felt in SAA 1 26 (Parpola 2015, 24), in which the command to bring certain amounts of straw and reed bundles is followed by the following threat:

rev. <sup>10</sup>1-en U<sub>4</sub>-m[u e-te]-ti-[i]q <sup>11</sup>ta-m[u-a]t

threat: rev. <sup>10-11</sup>(If even) one da[y pa]sses, you (sg.) will d[i]e.

While threats could be considered evidence of weakness – in a social system based on fear, if a threat needs to be verbalised, the person who does so has already admitted weakness – the ‘or else’, after all, does assume the possibility of non-compliance or disobedience – the obedience of the royal subject is still presumed. It is only the manner in which they carry out the royal commands that can be questioned.

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<sup>53</sup> Luukko 2012b, 122 in his commentary to rev. 21 lists line 6 of the obverse of the same letter and some other, in which illness is a reason for not visiting or not answering royal summons. However, fear also occurs in similar contexts (see the chapter on apologies and excuses), and if this passage is considered the follow-up of the passage with the warning, fear would certainly make more sense.

The efficacy of the royal threats can be to an extent verified based on the reactions other senders have to them. For the reign of Sargon II, only two such passages are preserved: in SAA 5 227 and SAA 15 181.

Šamaš-bēlu-ušur, the sender of SAA 5 227 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 164–165) is, admittedly, not threatened with death:

rev. <sup>22</sup>(...) *ma-a šum<sub>2</sub>-ma* LU<sub>2</sub>.LUL.MEŠ <sup>23</sup>*la tu-ša-bit ma-a lu tu-da* <sup>24</sup>*ki-i at-ta tu-šal-lum-ni*  
<sup>25</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.*pa-ri-šu-u-te* <sup>be26</sup>*ša* URU.*arrap-ḫa* <sup>be27</sup>*ša* E<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.ŠU<sub>2</sub>.NIMGIR<sub>2</sub>-E<sub>2</sub>.GAL

e. <sup>1</sup>*up-ta-at-ḫu-ru ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub> *i-za-qu-pu u<sub>2</sub>-ma-[a* LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIM.MEŠ] <sup>2</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-se-li i-na-šur šum<sub>2</sub>-ma u<sub>2</sub>-*  
*ša-bit-u-ni ina* IG[I LUGAL EN-*ia*] <sup>3</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-bal-u-ni-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu a-nu-rig* LU<sub>2</sub>.LUL.MEŠ-*te* *ša* E<sub>2</sub>  
 LU<sub>2</sub>.*[sar-tin-ni]* <sup>4</sup>*ša qa-an-ni* URU.*ur-zu-ḫi-na in-qut-u-ni ina* IGI LUGAL EN-*[ia u<sub>2</sub>-se-bi-la]*

threat: rev. <sup>22-24</sup>. ‘If you do not capture the criminals, be sure that you will pay (for this)!’

explanation (with an undertone of an excuse):

rev. <sup>25</sup>-e. <sup>1</sup>The criminals of Arrapha and those of the household of the palace herald have joined forces and are attacking there.

report (of compliance with the command):

e. <sup>1-2</sup>. I have now sent up [troops] to keep guard.

promise (to fulfil the command if possible):

e. <sup>2-3</sup>. If they capture (the criminals), I will send them befo[re the king, my lord].

partial redress (for not fulfilling the command completely):

e. <sup>3-4</sup>. (For) now, [I am sending] to the king, [my] lord, the criminals of the house of [the chief judge<sup>54</sup>] who fell (into my hands) in the vicinity of Arzuḫina.

The threat seems to have worked at least partially. The sender makes his excuses for not being able to fulfil the royal order completely, but he compensates somewhat for his inability by sending other criminals instead.

The royal threat is perhaps also effective in SAA 15 181 (Fuchs and Parpola 2001, 121). Here, the sender (Aššūr-bēlu-taqin, a possible governor or at least a high official, Whiting 1998) provides a list of people for verification purposes together with the mention that he is now sending them to the king. After a summary he includes the following remark:

<sup>54</sup> Although no trace of the actual signs for *sartennu*, the chief judge, remains on the tablet, this restoration is fairly probable. The lands or estate of the chief judge, as evident from other letters, were indeed located in the province of Arzuḫina (Mattila 2000, 81).

rev. <sup>7</sup>*a-na-ku* TA IGI *šip-tu ša* LUGAL <sup>8</sup>*be-li<sub>2</sub> iš-pur-an-ni ma-a 1-en* TA ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bi-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>9</sup>*e-te-li-ka lu-u tu-da-a ki-i* <sup>10</sup>*at-ta hi-tu ina* UGU-*hi-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu ta-na-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>11</sup>*ap-ta-laḥ<sub>3</sub> gab-bi u<sub>2</sub>-se-ši* <sup>12</sup>*at-ti-din*

report (of compliance with royal order, with a quoted royal threat)”

rev. <sup>7-12</sup>I became afraid of punishment of which the king wrote to me: ‘If you lose even (one) of them, be sure that you will shoulder the blame on their account!’. (So) I have brought them out and I am giving all of them away.

The royal threat of punishment is explicitly given as the reason for immediate obedience.

A fair number of threats is recounted in the letters from previous conversations or epistolographic exchanges of the senders. In the correspondence dated to the reign of Sargon II, these are SAA 1 179, SAA 5 31, SAA 5 46, SAA 5 104, and SAA 15 162. They are especially interesting since they include the reaction of the partners in the communicative exchange.

The threats are effective in SAA 1 179, SAA 5 104, and SAA 15 162. The threats in SAA 5 31 and SAA 5 46 include no reactions – although strictly speaking the fact of sending the letter is for the case in SAA 5 46 a reaction in itself. The sender of SAA 1 179 (Parpola 2015, 140–141) might have been influenced not solely by the threat of his interlocutor, but also by the fact that he does indeed seem to be in the wrong:

obv. <sup>8</sup>(...) LU<sub>2</sub>.ENGAR LU<sub>2</sub>.NU.GIŠ.KIRI<sub>6</sub> <sup>9</sup>[*ša m.a-mi*]-*li-i’-ti* DUMU *m.a-me-ri* <sup>10</sup>[TA ŠA<sub>3</sub> U]RU.MEŠ-*ia uk-ta-ši-di* <sup>11</sup>[*x-x-t*]*u<sub>2</sub> ši-i ša* UDU.MEŠ *ša ir-šip-u-ni* <sup>12</sup>*un-ta-gir<sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a šu-u<sub>2</sub> i-tal-ka* <sup>13</sup>*ma-a a-ta-a* LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub>.ME-*ia tu<sub>2</sub>-še-l[i]* <sup>14</sup>*ma-a ina* E<sub>2</sub>.GAL *a-ša<sub>2</sub>-pa-ra a-na-ku te-g[ir<sub>2</sub>-t]*u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>15</sup>*a-[sa-k]an m[u-k]u* LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ-*ka a-na* LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ<sup>1</sup>-*[i]a* <sup>16</sup>*i[h]-ta-sa-’u mu-ku* TA *ma-ši* LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub> <sup>17</sup>*ša* LUGAL *at-ta-ni mu-ku* A.ŠA<sub>3</sub>.[G]A GIŠ.KIRI<sub>6</sub> <sup>18</sup>*ina* KUR.*ia-su-bu-qi la-di-na-ka ša-bat* <sup>19</sup>*šum-ma ina* UGU LUGAL EN-*ia i-ša<sub>2</sub>-pa-ra* <sup>20</sup>LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub> lu-u-da**

introduction (with an admission):

obv. <sup>8-12</sup>I expelled the farmers (and) the gardeners [of Ammi-]lētī, son of Amiri [from] my [c]ities (and) torn down the [...] of sheep which he had built.

reproach (with an introduction):

obv. <sup>12-13</sup>Now he came, saying: ‘Why did you remove my servants?’

threat: obv. <sup>14</sup>‘I will write to the palace!’

follow-up (excuse):

obv. <sup>14-16</sup>I off[fe]red him a bar[ga]in (?), saying: ‘Your servants harassed my servants.’

follow-up (offer of a compromise):

obv. <sup>16.-18.</sup>‘Because you are a subject of the king, I will give you fields and gardens in the land of Iasūbu. Take (them)!’

protestations of innocence (as an explicit report):

obv. <sup>19.-20.</sup>If he writes about this, the king, my lord, should know.

Despite offering partial redress to the Ammi-lētī (see also the section on excuses), the sender is not entirely reassured that the intervention in the palace with which he was threatened will not take place and takes precautions by pre-emptively writing to the king about what happened.

In SAA 5 104 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 81–82) the sender is faced with the demands of ‘three powerful Kummeans’ (obv. 4.-5.) who want to be taken to the palace to speak to the king. They refuse to speak of anything to the sender or to the royal agent who is in his presence but threaten them instead:

rev. <sup>3.</sup>[m]a-a u<sub>2</sub>-la-a ina E<sub>2</sub>.GAL <sup>4.</sup>la<sup>1</sup> tu<sub>2</sub>-bi-la-na-a-ši <sup>5.</sup>ma-a ina ši-a-ri <sup>6.</sup>ina li-di-iš <sup>7.</sup>ina pa-an LUGAL ni-qa-bi <sup>8.</sup>ma-a pa-an LU<sub>2</sub>.EN.NAM <sup>9.</sup>pa-an LU<sub>2</sub>.qur-bu-ti <sup>10.</sup>ni-iq-ṭi<sub>2</sub>-bi ma-a la im-ma-gur<sub>2</sub> <sup>11.</sup>ina E<sub>2</sub>.GAL la-a u<sub>2</sub>-ba-lu-na-ši <sup>12.</sup>mi-i-nu ša LUGAL be-li <sup>13.</sup>i-qa-bu-ni

threat: rev. <sup>3.-11.</sup>Or if you do not take us to the palace, in the future we will tell the king: ‘We spoke before the governor (and) the royal agent, (but) they did not agree to take us to the palace.’

request for royal decision (with a question):

rev. <sup>12.-13.</sup>What does the king, my lord, say?

Although the threat is proven effective, the sender still has to ask the king to make the final decision about allowing the three Kummean nobles an audience.

A similar case is attested in SAA 15 162 (Fuchs and Parpola 2001, 110–111), where the threat is perhaps less serious. The Isuqaeans petitioning the sender demand an oath (rev. 3.) or else, if they are given over to the wrong party, they will take their ‘brothers’ and flee (rev. 4.-6.). Here again the sender affirms his readiness to take care of the demand if the king so commands (obv. rev. 7.-8.).

The threat in SAA 5 31 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 23–24) is badly broken – in lines 14’.-17’. the Urartian king threatens that he will demand the return of jewellery that his father and himself presented to the addressee if his demands are not met.

SAA 5 46 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 40–41) is a letter of complaint and the threat is listed together with other faults of the person complained about. It is, however, interesting, since the letter makes clear what was the speech action preceding the threat:

obv. <sup>12'</sup>*a-šab-bar muk a-le-e mi-li[k-ka]* <sup>13'</sup>*ṭe<sub>3</sub>-mu-ma la i-šak-kan* LU<sub>2</sub>.*kal-[la-bu]* <sup>14'</sup>*ša ina IGI-ia*  
LUGAL *ip-q[i-du]-ni* <sup>15'</sup>*3-šu<sub>2</sub> 4-šu<sub>2</sub> TA LU<sub>2</sub>.A.KIN-ia<sub>2</sub> [a-sa-bar]* <sup>16'</sup>*ba-ši-i' ṭe<sub>3</sub>-mu-ma la [i-š-*  
*kun]* <sup>17'</sup>*a-na LU<sub>2</sub>.A.KIN-ia<sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-ti-[ra]* <sup>be18'</sup>*ma a-ša-bat ina ŠA<sub>3</sub> si-<sup>r</sup>bar<sup>1</sup>-[ri]* <sup>be19'</sup>*e-si-ip-ka*

complaint: obv. <sup>12'.</sup><sup>be.18'</sup> I write to him: ‘Where is [your] sense?’ (and yet) he does not offer *explanation*. Three or four times [I have sent] the cavalrymen whom the king ap[ointed] to me together with my messenger (...) (but still) he did not explain himself (and only) returned my messenger, saying:

threat: obv. <sup>be18'</sup><sup>be19'</sup> ‘I will capture you and put in iron chains!’

This is the pattern that occasionally emerges in complaints: the attempt by the sender to resolve the issues they have with a third party results in further escalation of the conflict to the disadvantage of the sender – although one can hardly consider the reproach of ‘Where is [your] sense?’ a diplomatic attempt to handle the conflict in the first place.

Only 4 warnings are attested in the correspondence of Sargon II. In SAA 1 1 (Parpola 2015, 4–7) the warning comes from the addressee and the king reacts with a reassuring dismissal<sup>55</sup>:

rev. <sup>5</sup>(...) *ma-a m.ur-pala-a ina UG[U š]a URU.a-tu<sub>2</sub>-na-a-a* <sup>6</sup>URU.*is-tu-an-da-a-a il-lik-u<sub>2</sub>-ni*  
<sup>r</sup>URU<sup>1</sup>.MEŠ-*ni* <sup>7</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> E<sub>2</sub>.*m.pa-ru-ta i-pu-gu-<sup>r</sup>šu<sub>2</sub>-ni<sup>1</sup> [x]x x[x x x]* <sup>8</sup><sup>r</sup>TA UGU<sup>1</sup> LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia*  
[x x x] <sup>r</sup>di x<sup>1</sup> *an-nu-rig* <sup>9</sup>KUR.*m[us-ka-a]-<sup>r</sup>a is<sup>1</sup>-si-ni is-si-li[m i]k<sup>2</sup>-ti-ii-di* x <sup>10</sup>MAN.MEŠ-*ni* ša

warning: rev. <sup>5.</sup><sup>8.</sup> ‘Urpala’ [*may slip away* (?)] from the king, my lord, because the Atunnaneans and Istuandaneans went and took control of the cities of Bīt-Paruta away from him.’

dismissal (with reassurance):

rev. <sup>8.</sup><sup>11.</sup> Now, the Ph[rygian] has made peace with us (and) (...), [wh]at else can all the kings of Tabal do?

The king follows this dismissal with a more detailed explanation based on the strategic position of the addressee and mentions that the gods are on their side. On the other hand, the interpretation of this passage is entirely dependent on the restoration: although not unconvincing, it is by no means certain.

The second warning from this part of correspondence can be attributed to Ṭāb-šil-Ešarra, the governor of Assur, in SAA 1 106 (Parpola 2015, 88). The letter, although damaged, is without doubt a letter of complaint. The sender explains previous arrangements about certain land holdings, in the damaged part complains that he did not receive the arable land that he was promised, and ends with a request for royal intervention:

<sup>55</sup> As already mentioned in the introduction, this letter was likely a draft that ended up being discarded.

rev. <sup>3</sup>(...) LU<sub>2</sub>.A-šip-ri <sup>4</sup>LUGAL EN liš-pur A.ŠA <sup>5</sup>am-mar ina pa-ni-šu<sub>2</sub> re-ḫu-ni <sup>6</sup>[l]ib-tu-qu a-na <sup>7</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.A-šip-ri-ia li-din <sup>8</sup>la-šu-u-ma u<sub>2</sub>-sa-ne<sub>2</sub>-taq-a-ni <sup>9</sup>ŠE.NUMUN.MEŠ ša LUGAL EN-ia<sub>2</sub> <sup>10</sup>[ina] ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi la a-ra-aš<sub>2</sub>

request: rev. <sup>4-7</sup>May the king, my lord, send a messenger, so that he apportions whatever field he has left to me and gives it to my messenger.

warning: rev. <sup>8-10</sup>If not, he will keep sending me away with nothing. [Be]cause of this I won't cultivate the fields of the king, my lord.

The warning directly follows a request and, in this sense, serves more as an argument for the request. A similar case can be observed in SAA 5 126 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 98):

obv. <sup>10</sup>(...) ma-a a-l[ik<sup>2</sup>] <sup>11</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIM.MEŠ-ka pa-ṭi-ir : šu[m<sub>2</sub>-mu] <sup>12</sup>la il-li-ku ma-a LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIM.[MEŠ-ka] <sup>13</sup>ina bu-bu-te i-mut-tu<sub>2</sub> [x x x]

request: obv. <sup>10-11</sup>‘C[ome]! Release your troops!’

warning: obv. <sup>11-13</sup>‘[f] they do not go, [your] men will die of hunger!’

The warning is also uttered following a request, and the reaction of the sender is damaged, but it certainly cannot be compliance with the wishes of the royal agent. In the next relatively undamaged passage of the letter the sender states explicitly that the soldiers cannot be released (rev. <sup>4</sup>(...) TA IGI ku-[pe-e] <sup>5</sup>la i-lak-ka šu<sub>2</sub>-nu – ‘Because of the sn[ow] they cannot go.’).

In SAA 5 200 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 144–145), a warning also serves as an argument for a request – made in the context of a complaint:

rev. <sup>11</sup>(...) u<sub>2</sub>-la-a i-bal-ka-ta <sup>12</sup>i-ma-qu-ut ina UGU mur-ši e-<sup>1</sup>te<sup>1</sup>-ka <sup>13</sup>la-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu i-si-ia <sup>14</sup>la<sup>1</sup> [i-la-ka] <sup>14</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.TUR.MEŠ-ni-ma q[a-lu-te] <sup>15</sup>i-si-ia u<sub>2</sub>-še-ša [ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ SIG<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ] <sup>16</sup>i-ka-la

warning (as an argument):

rev. <sup>11'-16'</sup>If not, he will transgress, fall back, keep (his) guard in a foul mood<sup>56</sup> (?). He will not [come] with me indeed. (Instead), he will bring out yo[ung] boys with me (and) hold back [the best men].

These are the first cases in this corpus of a warning that is not exactly the prototypical case of a warning, but a warning nonetheless. The senders will frequently try to make arguments for the sake of their own requests based on what they think are the addressees' interests.

The picture that emerges from the corpus is, despite the dearth of evidence, quite clear. Threats are a matter of power and thus are made by the king but not *to* the king. They seem to be effective, in that the

<sup>56</sup> *ina murši* has to refer to the manner of alertness, but the translation is purely contextual.

senders explicitly mention them as a reason for their obedience. On the other hand, threats can motivate also to escalate conflicts to the higher instances of administrative hierarchy. Although it is perhaps too hasty to try to summarise warnings on the basis of four attestations, it is certainly worth noting that in two out of three instances they occur here as the argument for the preceding request.

There are, predictably, no threats among the scholarly letters edited in SAA 10. Some passages could be considered warnings, but often they appear in a very broken context, as SAA 10 38 (Parpola 1993, 26–27):

obv. <sup>7</sup>[ina š]i-a-r[i] <sup>8</sup>[a-na] <sup>9</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-še-e<sup>1</sup> <sup>9</sup>[la-a<sup>?</sup> t]a-a-b[a]

warning (?): obv. <sup>7-9</sup>[Tom]or[row] is [not g]ood [for] going out.

The interpretation of this move would depend on the following passage, which is unfortunately not sufficiently preserved. As it is, this could be a warning as well as advice.

What certainly is a warning serving as argument for a piece of advice, can be found in SAA 10 111<sup>57</sup> (Parpola 1993, 89–90):

obv. <sup>9</sup>ki-i LUGAL a-na e-mu-qi<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> il-tap-ru um-ma <sup>10</sup>a-na ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi KUR.man-na-a-a er-ba-a' e-mu-qa <sup>11</sup>gab-bi la er-ru-ub LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIM.ME ša<sub>2</sub>-pet<sub>2</sub>-ḫal-la-a-ti <sup>12</sup>u<sub>3</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.zuk-ku-u<sub>2</sub> li-ru-bu LU<sub>2</sub>.gi-mir-a-a <sup>13</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> iq-bu-u<sub>2</sub> um-ma KUR.man-na-a-a ina pa-ni-ku-nu <sup>14</sup>GIR<sub>3</sub>.2-a-ni ni-ip-ta-ra-su min<sub>3</sub>-de-e-ma <sup>15</sup>pi-ir-ša-ti ši-i NUMUN-LU<sub>2</sub>.ḫal-qa<sub>2</sub>-ti-i <sup>58</sup>šu-nu <sup>16</sup>[m]a-me-ti ša<sub>2</sub> DINGIR u<sub>3</sub> a-de-e ul i-du-u<sub>2</sub>

advice: obv. <sup>9-12</sup>If the king has written to his troops as follows: ‘Enter the land of Mannea!’, the entire force should not invade. May (only) the cavalry and the professional soldiers take part in the invasion.

argument: obv. <sup>12-15</sup>The Cimmerians who said: ‘The Mannians belong to you, we will keep away.’ – perhaps this was a lie.

warning: obv. <sup>15-16</sup>They are barbarians. They do not understand [o]aths nor treaties.

Bēl-ušēzib follows with more tactical advice (obv. 17.-rev. 4.), which illustrates that the scholars could involve themselves also in military matters. It is remarkable for the type of argumentation observed here – certainly widespread in the Neo-Assyrian period. The enemies of the empire are considered not entirely human and something suggestive of the netherworld (Adalı 2011, 85–88). The expression *zēr ḫalqātī*, here translated as ‘barbarians’ is an invective, with the literal meaning of ‘seed of the lost ones’, although for a sufficiently educated Assyrian or Babylonian reader likely also reminiscent of formulae used in curses (Westenholz 1997, 322-323, fn. 130). It constitutes a literary allusion to the standard

<sup>57</sup> The letter is written in the Neo-Babylonian dialect.

<sup>58</sup> I am transliterating the expression with /q/ after Adalı 2011, 87 and Westenholz 1997, 322-323, n. 130.

Babylonian recension of the Cuthean Legend of Narām-Sîn, associating the Cimmerians with the netherworldly appearance of the foes of Narām-Sîn.

A warning-like passage is also present in the badly damaged SAA 10 199 (Parpola 1993, 161–162). At first, the warnings goes unheeded, and the consequences are disastrous:

rev. <sup>6'</sup>[*ma-a*] DINGIR *iq-ṭe<sub>3</sub>-bi-ia* <sup>7'</sup>[*ma-a*] *šum-ma at-ta la taq-bi ta-mu-<sup>Γ</sup>at* <sup>8'</sup>[*ma-a*] *šum-ma a-na*  
LU<sub>2</sub>.*ma-za-si-pa-ni* <sup>9'</sup>[*ša*] LUGAL *taq-ṭe<sub>3</sub>-bi ina* E<sub>2</sub>.GAL <sup>10'</sup>*la u<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub>-aš<sub>2</sub>-me i-mu-<sup>Γ</sup>at* <sup>11'</sup>*ma-a*  
*um-mi šap-ra-at ta-ta-l[ak]* <sup>12'</sup>*la taq-bi ina* E<sub>2</sub>.GAL *ma-a pa-an m.bi-x[x x]* <sup>13'</sup>DAM-*šu<sub>2</sub> NIN-*  
*šu<sub>2</sub> taq-ṭe<sub>3</sub>-bi* <sup>14'</sup>*me-me-ni ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bi-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu la iq-bi* <sup>15'</sup>*ši-i TA am-mu-te-em-ma me<sub>2</sub>-e-tu<sub>2</sub>*

report (with a warning):

rev. <sup>6'-10'</sup>(He said as [follows]): ‘The god told me: “If you do not tell, you will die. (And) if you tell a courtier [of] the king (and) he will not inform the palace, he will die.”’

report (of consequences of unheeded warning):

rev. <sup>11'-15'</sup>‘My mother was sent, she went (and) did not tell (anything) in the palace. (But) she told (everything) before Bi[...], his wife (and) sister. None of them said (anything), (and) she and those others are dead.’

What the persons involved were supposed to say had certainly something to do with denouncing a plot against the king, as a passage from the *adê* is mentioned almost right after.

SAA 10 369 (Parpola 1993, 304–305) includes a warning as an argument for the punishment of the governor the sender complains about. The king is warned that not making an example out of one official could cause the others to think they can commit the same misconduct without any fear of punishment:

rev. <sup>12</sup>(...) LU<sub>2</sub> *ša a-na* <sup>13</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.EN.NAM *u<sub>2</sub>-šad-bi-bu-u-ni* <sup>14</sup>*ši-ip-tu ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bi-šu<sub>2</sub> liš-ku-nu* <sup>15</sup>[*lu*]-  
<sup>Γ</sup>*dī-i-u lig-ru-ru [u<sub>2</sub>-la]-a* <sup>16</sup>[NIG<sub>2</sub>.GA *š*]a E<sub>2</sub>.KUR.MEŠ *ga[b-bu]* <sup>17</sup>[LU<sub>2</sub>.NA]M.MEŠ *u<sub>2</sub>-pa-*  
*at<sub>2</sub>-[tu-ru]*

request: rev. <sup>12.-14</sup>The man who incited the governor – they should punish him!

argument (with a warning):

rev. <sup>15.-17</sup>May the others know and be afraid. [Other]wise, [the gover]nors will se[ll] the ent[ire property o]f the temples.

The situation with the priestly letters is similar. The only real threat, SAA 13 20 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 21–22) is quoted as a reason for a letter of complaint and a request for royal intervention:



rev. <sup>4</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a as-par-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>5</sup>*mu-uk a-ta-a* LUGAL <sup>6</sup>*la ta-pal-la-ḥa* <sup>7</sup>*10* LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIM.MEŠ *is-si-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>8</sup>KUŠ.til-li<sub>3</sub> *ta-lu-lu* <sup>9</sup>*i-du-lu ma-a man-nu* <sup>10</sup>*ša<sup>1</sup> ina* UGU-ḥi-ni *il-lak-ni* <sup>11</sup>*ina* GIŠ.PAN *ni-ka-ra-ar-šu<sub>2</sub>*

own attempt at conflict resolution (with a reproach):

rev. <sup>4-6</sup>Now, I wrote to them: ‘Why do you not fear the king?’

complaint (with a threat):

rev. <sup>7-11</sup>Ten men run around them armed to the teeth, saying: ‘Who(ever) comes against us, we will bring them down with our bows!’.

The sender follows this quoted threat with an explicit request to intervene on his behalf.

There is only one clear-cut case of a warning among the priestly letters: SAA 13 31 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 34–35). The sender, Nādin-Aššūr, lodges a complaint against the scribes of Barḥalza, who are in arrears with taxes, following it with a request. The warning is again utilised as an argument for the preceding request:

obv. <sup>11</sup>(...) LUGAL <sup>12</sup>*li-ša<sub>2</sub>-a[l]-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>13</sup>*ma-a a-ta-a ḥa-mu-su* <sup>14</sup>*a-na d.a-šur la ta-di-na* <sup>15</sup>*ma-a* LUGAL *lu-u ḥa-sis* <sup>16</sup>*a-ki ba-aṭ-lu* <sup>17</sup>*ina* UGU DINGIR.MEŠ-*ni-ka* <sup>18</sup>*[i-šak-k]a-nu-u-ni*

(one line broken away)

rev. <sup>1</sup>*[k]i-ma šip-ṭu ina* LU<sub>2</sub>.A.BA <sup>2</sup>*1<sup>1</sup>-en* LUGAL *la-a iš-kun* <sup>3</sup>*[re-ḥu-te] la i-ga-ru-ru* <sup>4</sup>*[x x x]x an-ni-u* <sup>5</sup>*[ki-ma LU<sub>2</sub>].GAR-nu ḥa-mu-su* <sup>6</sup>*[la-a] na-ša ina* E<sub>2</sub>-DINGIR.MEŠ-*ka* <sup>7</sup>*[la] i-din* LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL.MEŠ <sup>8</sup>*re-ḥu-u-te ina* *ša<sub>2</sub>-a-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>9</sup>*i-da-gul-šu<sub>2</sub>* *ba-aṭ-lu* <sup>10</sup>*i-šak-ku-nu ina* E<sub>2</sub>-DINGIR.MEŠ-*ni-ka*

request: obv. <sup>11-14</sup>May the king as[k] them: ‘Why did you not give the one-fifth (tax) to Aššūr?’

reminder: obv. <sup>15-17</sup>And may the king bear in mind that they have [cea]sed work at the expense of your gods.

warning: rev. <sup>1-3</sup>If the king does not punish one scribe, [the rest] will not be afraid.

argument (from analogy, with a warning-like structure):

rev. <sup>4-10</sup>[...] this: [If a] prefect does [not] bring the one-fifth tax and does [not] give it to the temple of your gods, the rest of the magnates will look at his example (lit. ‘at him’) (and also) cease their work in the houses of your gods.

Thus, the consequences of not punishing the wrongs done by a single person can be very far-reaching indeed. The way in which Nādin-Aššūr develops his argument, though, using analogical thinking of the underlying pattern of ‘if some does this or has this, I will also do this or have this’ is remarkable for how

widespread it is in the first millennium correspondence, both from the side of the person who was treated unfairly because they could not do or have what others have, as from the other side, as seen above.

In SAA 13 147 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 118), the sender is warning about disastrous consequences of royal inaction for himself – can this really be considered a warning? Perhaps so, since the mention of a divine punishment could implicitly communicate that the sender will not be the only person affected:

rev. <sup>2</sup>ANŠE.KUR.RA *ina* E<sub>2</sub>.GAL <sup>3</sup>liš-ši-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>4</sup>un-qu *ina* UGU LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL-da-ni-bat <sup>5</sup>lid-di-nu-u-ni  
<sup>6</sup>liḫ-mu lid-di-na <sup>7</sup>ku-im d.15 <sup>8</sup>ta-du-kan-ni-ni

request: rev. <sup>2-6</sup>They should take a horse from the palace (and) give a sealed command to the chief victualler so that he gives bread,

warning (as an argument): rev. <sup>7-8</sup>or Ištar will kill me instead!

The argument is made in the context of a slightly obscure complaint – it is the chief victualler who refuses to accept the horse from the sender (obv. 13.-16.).

Owing to the nature of the topics, a more generous number of threats and warnings is featured in SAA 16. Predictably, all the threats are cited from other exchanges.

SAA 16 86 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 80–81) is likely a letter of complaint, although almost nothing remains of the passages in which the sender vented his grievances. The royal threat occurs almost at the very beginning of the letter, in the introduction of the topic:

obv. <sup>7</sup>[*ina* UG]U ša LUGAL *be-li*<sub>2</sub> <sup>8</sup>[*a-na*] IR<sub>3</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> *ma-a-la* š*i-ne*<sub>2</sub>-*e-šu* <sup>9</sup>[*b*]ir-ti IGI.2.MEŠ ša IR<sub>3</sub>-i-  
šu <sup>10</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-*ma-di-du-u-ni* <sup>11</sup>*ma-a dul-lu* ša E<sub>2</sub> EN.MEŠ-*ka* <sup>12</sup>*ina* ŠU.2-i-*ka u<sub>2</sub>-ba-’a*

introduction (with a royal threat):

obv. <sup>7-12</sup>[As to wh]at the king, my lord, made clear [to] his slave once or twice: ‘I will take you to account for the work of the house of your lords!’

The following passage is completely broken, but the letter ends with a promise that the sender will finish the work ‘of the house of his lords’ early in the year.

SAA 16 63 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 58–62) is a denunciation with crimes of several persons listed<sup>59</sup>. The first of the threats can be attributed to the king and is conveyed in two documents assigning quotas to the shepherds:

obv. <sup>12</sup>(...) ša<sub>2</sub>-ni-u<sub>2</sub> ḫi-ṭa-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu AD-šu<sub>2</sub> ša MAN <sup>13</sup>EN-ia<sub>2</sub> KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR EŠ<sub>2</sub>.GAR<sub>3</sub> ša  
LU<sub>2</sub>.SIPA.MEŠ *ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi ni-ib-zi aš-šur-a-a <sup>14</sup>*ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi ni-ib-zi ar<sub>2</sub>-ma-a-a i-sa-ṭa-ru *ina*

<sup>59</sup> The letter has no greeting formula and it has been supposed that it must be the second tablet of an originally two-tablet long letter, see Fales 1980, 142, n. 7.

ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi UZU.GU<sub>2</sub> <sup>15</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> m.d.PA-ŠU.2-ša-bat LU<sub>2</sub>.IGI.DUB ša LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL-URU.MEŠ-te ša  
 LU<sub>2</sub>.A.BA <sup>16</sup>ni-bu ša KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi UZU.GU<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi un-qi <sup>17</sup>ik-ta-an-  
 ku ma-a šum-ma MU.AN.NA an-ni-tu<sub>2</sub> la i-di-nu <sup>18</sup>ma-a i-mu-tu<sub>2</sub>

introduction to a complaint (with explanation, with a royal threat):

obv. <sup>12.-18</sup>. Their second crime: (During the reign of) the father of the king, my lord, they wrote the silver quote of the shepherds on an Assyrian document (and) on an Aramaic document. They sealed the amount of silver with the seal of Nabû-qātī-šabat, the village manager, (and) the scribe; with their seals (and) with the (royal stamp) seal: ‘If you do not give (the silver) this year, you will die.’

Despite the presence of the threat, the seals are cut away by the criminals and the royal command likely ignored.

The second threat is lodged firmly within a challenge against the authority of the royal administration, within the following denunciation:

obv. <sup>21</sup>. [m.qur-d]i-i LU<sub>2</sub>.mu-kil-KUŠ.a-pa-a-ni ANŠE.KUR.RA.MEŠ na-kam-te <sup>22</sup>. [E<sub>2</sub>].GAL u<sub>2</sub>-ka-ba-as ina UGU bu-un-bu-ul-li <sup>23</sup>. [ša d.15<sup>9</sup>] A<sub>2</sub>.2-šu<sub>2</sub> i-sa-kan ma-a maḥ-ši-ni ne<sub>2</sub>-mur <sup>24</sup>. [ma-a GI]R<sub>2</sub>.TUR AN.BAR bi-la-a-ni la-ab-tu-qu ina qi-in-ni-te <sup>25</sup>. [ša LU<sub>2</sub>.E]N.NAM la-aš<sub>2</sub>-kun la mu-qa-a la-qa-bi <sup>26</sup>. [mi-nu] ša man-ni iq-bu-u-ni

denunciation (with a challenge and a threat):

obv. <sup>21.-26</sup>. [Qurd]î, the chariot driver of the horses of the treasury, is treading on the (authority of) the [pa]lace. He got his hands on the cone<sup>60</sup> [of Ištar (?)], saying: ‘Strike (fem. sg.) me! Let us (all) see (you do it)! Bring me an iron [kni]fe, so that I cut it (= the cone) (and) stick it in the [go]vernor[‘s] arsel!’ I am not able to say [what] he has said about others.

If this clause is classified as a threat, its aim is not to make the person threatened comply with a particular demand of the speaker, but to intimidate. Alternatively, this could simply not be a threat at all, but a kind of a boast: the speaker could be trying to persuade those who were listening that he is indeed capable of extremely bold actions – which, however, would also feed back into intimidation, hence the presence of the letter here. The reactions of the persons present are not recorded, and the sender

<sup>60</sup> Fales 1980, 143 offers a completely different interpretation – Qurdî does not trample the authority of the palace, but mistreats the horses, and *bunbullu* is also restored as [ša 1-en KUR<sup>9</sup>], ‘of one horse’ (obv. 23.). Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 60-61, n. 22 refer to the Aramaic *banbūl gelīdi* ‘icicle’ and translate the term as ‘cone’. Streck 2018, 44 notes also the remark by Jursa 2009, 164, n. 82 that *bunbullu* cannot be a ‘cone’ but rather a ‘tuber’. However, this is noted in the context of plant identification – the plant under discussion, *su’ādu*, to be identified with *Cyprus esculentus*, has no cones at all. The translation could still remain not completely off-the-mark, as the overall shape of a ‘tuber’ and a ‘cone’ is not dissimilar. The restoration of [ša d.15] instead of ‘one horse’ seems more probable in view of the feminine form of the imperative that follows. Taunting a horse would likely not be considered a reason enough to write to the king – unlike the act of sacrilege.

insinuated that Qurdî followed with even more impudent claims, such that cannot be repeated – ultimately, for the speaker, the only possible reaction was to write to the king.

In SAA 16 88 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 81–82) the threat from a governor is named by donkey herders as the reason for their keeping away from the palace:

obv. <sup>10</sup>.*u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a la i-ma-gu-ru la i-za-zu* <sup>11</sup>.*ma-a* LU<sub>2</sub>.EN.NAM *ina* IGI URU.NINA <sup>12</sup>.*[i]q-ṭi-ba-na-ši*  
*ma-a ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub> E<sub>2</sub>.GAL <sup>13</sup>.*a-ta-mar-ku-nu gul-gu-lat-ku-nu* <sup>14</sup>.*u<sub>2</sub>-mar-ra-qa ma-a* LU<sub>2</sub>.*qur-butu*  
<sup>15</sup>.*[ina] UGU-ḥi-ni lil-li-ka* <sup>16</sup>.*[I]u-bi-la-na-ši* <sup>17</sup>.*[m]a-a šum-ma la-aš-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>18</sup>.*[I]a ni-lak*

complaint (with a threat):

obv. <sup>10-14</sup>.Now, they do not agree to stand (there), saying: ‘The governor told us in front of Niniveh: “(If) I see you within the palace, I will crush your skulls!”.’

request: obv. <sup>14-16</sup>.‘A royal agent should come [to] us and take us (there).’

rejection: obv. <sup>17-18</sup>.‘And if not, we will [n]ot come’

The following passage is completely broken, so that is not possible to see what the sender proposed to do, but from the preceding passage it would seem that the presence of the donkey herders was for some reason desirable (that is, not for the governor).

The final threat from this part of the correspondence also occurs in a letter of complaint – SAA 16 112 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 99). Again, the complaint is formulated in the typical pattern of the sender failing to reach a resolution on his own:

obv. <sup>10</sup>(...) TA m.d.PA-[x x] <sup>11</sup>.LU<sub>2</sub>.A.BA ‘š<sup>a</sup> LU<sub>2</sub>.[GA]L-‘E<sub>2</sub> <sup>12</sup>.*ad-da-bu-[ub]* <sup>13</sup>.*mu-uk ki-[su-tu<sub>2</sub>*  
*pa]-ni-tu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>14</sup>.*a-na* ANŠE.KUR.RA.MEŠ *di-in* <sup>15</sup>.*qu-la-le-e-a* <sup>16</sup>.*is-sa-kan*

rev. <sup>1</sup>.*u<sub>3</sub> i-qab-bi-a* <sup>2</sup>.*ma-a a-na-ku* TA E<sub>2</sub>-*an-ni* <sup>3</sup>.*a-pa-ra-as-ka*

complaint (with a command rejected with a threat):

obv. <sup>10</sup>-rev. <sup>3</sup>.I talk[ed] to Nabû-..., the scribe of the [ma]jor domo, saying: ‘Give (as much) fod[der] (as) [be]fore!’. (However), he insulted me and said: ‘I will cut you off from the inner quarters!’

The sender follows with the complaint about having no power and others plotting against him. The indirect reaction to the threat is, again, the letter asking for the royal intervention.

The warnings from this part of the corpus are concentrated in a small number of letters and partially repetitive. Nabû-rēḫtu-ušur, the sender of SAA 16 59 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 52–53) informs the king about the conspiracy of Sāsî – which in itself is already a warning – and then repeats warnings in the course of his letter:

obv. <sup>9</sup>(...) ZI.MEŠ-ka ZI.MEŠ ša<sub>2</sub> qin-ni-ka [še-zib]

warning: obv. <sup>9</sup>[Save] your life and the life of your family!

A very similar warning is repeated at the end of the letter (e. 4.). Another advice-like passage could also be considered a warning:

obv. <sup>11</sup>ZI.MEŠ-ka la tu-ḫal-la-qa LUGAL-u-tu TA ŠU.2-k[a la tu-še-li]

warning (?): obv. <sup>11</sup>Do not destroy your life! Do not [let] the kingship [slip away] from yo[ur] hands!

These warnings are markedly different from the rest in the epistolographic corpus. They do not introduce the initial condition explicitly ('If you do not do this...'), but it is certainly implied. The resulting event that is to be avoided is also not stated, although it is presumed by the lexical choices made by the sender. The warnings are formulated in the imperative mood or with the prohibitive, which gives them the character of advice – but then 'save your life' is necessarily something more than just advice.

I would argue that the stylistic choice of warnings in the form of commands and prohibitions is meant to evoke a more literary character – and even to give the impression that the sender is repeating the words of the goddess, who is after all the source of the warning (obv. <sup>8</sup>a-ni-nu LUGAL be-li da-ba-bu ša<sub>2</sub> d.NIN.GAL u<sub>2</sub>-[da x x x x x] – 'Hearken, O king, my lord! I k[now] the words of Nikkal.'). An obvious parallel can be observed in the XI tablet of the Epic of Gilgameš (George 2003, 704–705):

<sup>21</sup>ki-ik-kiš ki-ik-kiš i-gar i-gar Reed fence, reed fence! Brick wall, brick wall!

<sup>22</sup>ki-ik-ki-šu ši-me-ma i-ga-ru ḫi-is-sa-as Listen, O reed fence! Pay heed, O brick wall!

<sup>23</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.šu-ru-up-pa-ku-u<sub>2</sub> DUMU m.UBARA-d.TU.TU O man of Šuruppak, son of Ubara-Tutu,

<sup>24</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-qur E<sub>2</sub> bi-ni GIŠ.MA<sub>2</sub> demolish the house, build a boat!

<sup>25</sup>muš-šir<sub>3</sub> NIG<sub>2</sub>.TUKU-ma še-'i-i ZI.MEŠ Abandon riches and seek survival!

<sup>26</sup>[m]a-ak-ku-ru ze-er-ma na-piš-ti bul-liṭ Spurn property and save life!<sup>61</sup>

Analogical warnings follow in SAA 16 60<sup>62</sup> (also from Nabû-rēḫtu-ušur, Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 54–56) – in rev. 10'. (ZI.MEŠ-ka še-zib – 'Save your life!'), rev. 15'.-16', rev. 18'.-re19', e. 2.-4. (and

<sup>61</sup> English translation after George 2003, 705.

<sup>62</sup> The tone of this letter, especially the calls for 'these people' to die are considered by Luukko 2018, 166 to resemble the passages in the anti-witchcraft rituals concerned with calls for destroying the figurines representing the male and female witch. Luukko does not cite which parts of the rituals he means exactly, but the calls upon the god Girra to burn the figurines hardly seem analogical. The lines 140.-141. of the anti-witchcraft series Maqlû are as follows: <sup>140</sup>d.BIL.GI qu-mi LU<sub>2</sub>.UŠ<sub>11</sub>.ZU u MUNUS.UŠ<sub>11</sub>.ZU <sup>141</sup>d.BIL.GI qu-li LU<sub>2</sub>.UŠ<sub>11</sub>.ZU u MUNUS.UŠ<sub>11</sub>.ZU – '140.Girra, burn the male and female witch! 141.Girra, scorch the male and female witch!' (Abusch 2015, 70). The vector of the imperatives is completely different. In this, as well as in the following lines, it is the god of fire who is called upon to destroy the figurines. In the letters of Nabû-rēḫtu-ušur, the imperatives are directed at the king, who is enjoined to save his own life – which is much more similar to the imperatives featured in the prophecies. The part of the letter that tries to persuade the king that the destruction of the people

potentially more, as the letter is badly broken). Perhaps especially interesting is the longer sequence in the reverse:

rev. <sup>13'</sup>ša<sub>2</sub>- 'a-al-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu UN.MEŠ a[m-mar x x]x-ti is-si-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu 'u<sub>2</sub>-du<sup>1</sup>-[u-ni] <sup>14'</sup>[l]iq-bu-nik-ka  
 'UN<sup>21</sup>. [MEŠ an-nu-t]i li-mu-tu<sub>2</sub> la ta-pa-laḥ<sub>3</sub> <sup>15'</sup>d.EN d.PA d.NIN.LIL<sub>2</sub> [is-si-ka] iz-za-zu ar<sub>2</sub>-  
 ḥiš UN.MEŠ <sup>16'</sup>li-mu-tu<sub>2</sub> ZI.MEŠ-k[a še-zib]

warning (with instructions):

rev. <sup>13'</sup>Interrogate them!

warning (with instructions):

rev. <sup>13'-.14'</sup>Let them tell you the [...] who conspire with them (and) may [these people] die!

reassurance: rev. <sup>14'-.15'</sup>Do not fear! Bēl, Nabû (and) Mulissu are standing [with you].

warning (with instructions):

rev. <sup>15'-.16'</sup>Quickly! Let those people die! [Save yo]ur life!

Not only the grammatical forms are reminiscent of the literary warning, but also the structure of the entire set of moves, in which instructions are interspersed with warnings, exactly like in the passage from Gilgameš. I do not think it is a matter of any conscious borrowing, but rather the conventions that certain literary texts are meant to follow – and perhaps conventions of divine speech. The warnings use second person masculine forms in reference to the king – which is, with some exceptions, unusual in the royal correspondence – but not unusual in the messages from the gods to the king. This could be considered a further indication that the sender is simply passing on the warnings that originate from the goddesses mentioned in the earlier passages of the letter (here Mulissu, Nikkal in SAA 16 59). The reassurances that come after this warning are also amply attested in the corpus of Assyrian prophecies. The gods are standing with the king in, for example, SAA 9 1.4, II lines 25'-.26'. (Parpola 1997a, 6), while the reassurance 'do not fear!' (*lā tapallaḥ*) occurs so often there is no point in listing all locations.

Towards the end of the letter, the tone becomes even more frantic, the result of short staccato clauses and repetitions:

e. <sup>2</sup>(...) [at-ta tu]-qu-nu a-'na<sup>1</sup> [d.EN sa-ri-ir ZI].MEŠ-ka lu-ur-rik ra-[man]-ka u<sub>2</sub>-'sur<sup>1</sup> KI.MIN  
 KI.MIN <sup>3</sup>ZI.MEŠ-'ka<sup>1</sup> [ZI.MEŠ ša<sub>2</sub>] 'qin<sup>1</sup>-ni-ka [še-zib x x LU<sub>2</sub>].SAG.MEŠ ZI.MEŠ-ka še-zib  
 [K]I.MIN KI.MIN <sup>4</sup>ŠA<sub>3</sub>-'ba<sup>1</sup>-k[a ša-ab-t]a 'x<sup>1</sup> ḥu un x[x x is-si-ka l]i-zi-zu ŠA<sub>3</sub>-ba-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu ga-  
 mur-'ak<sup>1</sup>-ka

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plotting against him is necessary does not feature imperatives at all (UN.MEŠ *li-mu-tu* in SAA 16 60, rev. 15' and 16'). The case is completely different for the Esarhaddon's treaty from Tell Tayinat – where the verbal form of *qalû*, burn, really is present (as a precative), although as Luukko himself admits, the context is a comparison with burnt offering (Luukko 2018, 181, n. 107 and 108).

instructions: e. <sup>2</sup>(...) [(As to) you, st]ay safe, (and) [pray to Bēl], so that he may prolong your [li]fe.  
 warning: e. <sup>2</sup>Guard yo[ur]self! Ditto, ditto<sup>63</sup>.  
 warning: e. <sup>3</sup>[Save] your life (and) [the life of] you family!  
 warning: e. <sup>3</sup>Save your life [from the hands (?)] of the eunuchs! Ditto, ditto.  
 warning: e. <sup>4</sup>[Brac]e yourself!  
 instructions: e. <sup>4</sup>[M]ay [...] stand [with you]!  
 argument (or reassurance?):

e. <sup>4</sup>Their hearts are wholly with you.

The diplomatic correspondence of Assurbanipal edited in SAA 21 is exactly that – diplomatic. Despite the manifold of royal letters, hardly any of them contain threats.

The pattern in dealing with external partners seems to be overreachingly to promise and reassure, and then to mention the consequences if the addressee does not comply with the wishes of the Assyrian king despite having been promised or having received so many favours already – but the order of promise and threat can also be reversed. This is evident in SAA 21 18 (Parpola 2018, 16–17):

obv. <sup>24</sup>*man-nu šu-u<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> A<sub>2</sub>.2.MEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub>*  
 rev. <sup>1</sup>*la-pa-ni-šu<sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-šaḥ-ḥa-sa na-an-nab-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>2</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-šel-li u iṣ-ṣab-bat-aš<sub>2</sub>-šum-ma <sup>3</sup>a-na pa-ni-ia ib-ba-kaš-šu<sub>2</sub> u ki-i <sup>4</sup>i-duk-ku-uš ki-i ša<sub>2</sub> AD-AD-ia<sub>2</sub> ina UGU <sup>5</sup>m.š<sub>u</sub>-zu-bu a-na m.d.IM-ba-rak-ka <sup>6</sup>ina GIŠ.zi-ba-ni-ti iṣ-kun-u<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>-ma <sup>7</sup>KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR ma-lu-uš-šu<sub>2</sub> i-ḥi-ṭu-ma id-da-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>8</sup>en-na ana-ku man-nu ša<sub>2</sub> iṣ-ṣab-bat-aš<sub>2</sub>-šum-ma <sup>9</sup>u ki-i i-duk-ku-uš ina ŠA<sub>3</sub> GIŠ.ERIN<sub>2</sub> <sup>10</sup>a-šak-kan-šu<sub>2</sub>-ma KU<sub>3</sub>.GI ma-lu-uš-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>11</sup>a-ḥa-ṭi-ma a-nam-da-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>*

threat: obv. <sup>24</sup>-rev. <sup>2</sup>Whoever keeps his hands away from him, I will erase his progeny.

promise: rev. <sup>2-11</sup>.(But) if one captures him and brings him to me, (even) if he should kill him – just like my grandfather placed Adda-barakka on scales on account of Šūzubu and weighed out and cast him his weight in silver – so now will I place whoever captures him – (even) if he kills him – on scales and weigh out and give him his weight in gold.

Another exception in SAA 21 65 (Parpola 2018, 59–60), a letter to the elders of Elam about the extradition of Nabû-bēl-šumāti. At first Assurbanipal tries more gentle persuasion, but after promises of peace and reconciliation, he ends on a more ominous note:

<sup>63</sup> The repetition signs stand for ‘let those people die quickly’.

rev. <sup>17'</sup>(...) *u<sub>2</sub>-la-a tu-rak* <sup>18'</sup>*la ta-aš<sub>2</sub>-me-a ina ŠA<sub>3</sub> aš-šur DINGIR.MEŠ-ia<sub>2</sub> at-ta-ma* <sup>19'</sup>*šum-ma ina*  
*GISSU ša<sub>2</sub> DINGIR.MEŠ ur-ki-u a-na pa-ni-i* <sup>20'</sup>*[I]a u<sub>2</sub>-sam-ma-ak-ak-ku-nu-ni*

threat (with an oath):

rev. <sup>17'-20'</sup>Or, (if) you persist (and) do not listen to me, I swear by Aššūr and my gods that with the help of my gods I will make the future even more *horrible* than the past for you<sup>64</sup>.

SAA 21 116 (Parpola 2018, 102–103) follows a request with a warning-like argument for the request:

rev. <sup>2</sup>*[ki-i] ḥa-an-ṭiš la tal-ta-par-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu-ti* <sup>3</sup>*LU<sub>2</sub>.par-šu-maš ul i-ta-qu-nu* <sup>4</sup>*ḥa-an-ṭiš šup-raš-š<sub>2</sub>-nu-ti* <sup>5</sup>*KUR.NIM.MA.KI u<sub>3</sub> KUR.aš-šur.KI* <sup>6</sup>*at-tu-ka*

argument (warning):

rev. <sup>2-3</sup>[If] you do not send them quickly, the Persians will not be put in order.

request (repeated):

rev. <sup>4</sup>Send them quickly!

argument (from future prospects, almost like a promise):

rev. <sup>5-6</sup>Elam and the land of Aššūr will belong to you.

Although this is technically a warning, in that it predicts negative consequences if the addressee does not undertake certain actions, and the negative consequences likely do not depend on the senders – thus disqualifying it as a threat – the strong argumentative character of this sequence seems to make the warning load of this particular move secondary.

The small number of threats and warnings in this part of the corpus is to be partially explained by the topics covered and partially by the nature of Assurbanipal's diplomacy. From this group of letters, at least, it is evident that his most usual strategy was to promise, reassure and cajole – and warn later.

## Neo-Babylonian letters in the Neo-Assyrian royal correspondence

Only one threat can be extracted from the Babylonian correspondence of Sennacherib. SAA 17 9 (Dietrich 2003, 9) again introduces the familiar picture in which a person soon to be denounced as a criminal either threatens or boasts of their malevolent schemes:

rev. <sup>1</sup>*m.d.AG-NI<sub>2</sub>.TUKU* <sup>2</sup>*LU<sub>2</sub>.TU-E<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> E<sub>2</sub>-DINGIR* <sup>3</sup>*šu-up-ta a-na* <sup>4</sup>*UGU-ḥi URU* <sup>5</sup>*i-ti-pu-uš*  
<sup>6</sup>*um-ma URU a-na* <sup>7</sup>*a-ba-ta lud-din*

<sup>64</sup> *samāku* D is translated by CAD S, 109 as 'to chase away, to remove'. SAA 21 65 is cited on the following page sub 3. with a different translation – which, however, must be wrong. It is evident from the context that Assurbanipal is swearing to make Elam suffer the consequences of their intractability.



denunciation (with a quoted challenge or threat):

rev.<sup>1-6</sup> Nabû-na'id, the temple-enterer, has planned an ambush against the city, saying: 'I will turn<sup>65</sup> the city into ruin!'.  
As already argued, even if this is only the boast or the verbalisation of a plot, the threatening factor remains present, even if slightly muted.

The number of warnings in the earliest parts of the Neo-Babylonian corpus in the Assyrian archives is larger, though still not very significant. SAA 17 22 (Dietrich 2003, 23–26), dated to the reign of Sargon II, includes a very long warning about the overall political situation<sup>66</sup>, followed by advice. It could be actually considered a report, but as it is introduced by the reproach that the king did not heed the previous messages from the sender, I feel the component of a warning is significant enough to be included here:

obv. <sup>7</sup>(...) *dib-bi maḥ-ru-ti* <sup>8</sup>*ma-la a-na* LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia ni-il-tap-ra* <sup>8</sup>LUGAL *ul iš-me en-na* LU<sub>2</sub>.TIL.LA.GID<sub>2</sub>.DA.MEŠ <sup>9</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> URU.E<sub>2</sub>-m.da-ku-ri a-na 1-en pi-i* <sup>10</sup>*ki-i i-tu-ra a-na* m.d.AMAR.UTU-DUMU.UŠ-SUM-na <sup>11</sup>*ki-i iš-pu-ru* LU<sub>2</sub>.GU<sub>2</sub>.EN.NA m.d.AG-A<sub>2</sub>.GAL<sub>2</sub> <sup>12</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.GAR-UMUŠ <sup>13</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> e-muq ša<sub>2</sub> E-m.ia-a-ki-ni* <sup>13</sup>*it-ti-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu a-di* UGU (KA<sub>2</sub>)-*bit-qa ki-i il-li-ku-ni* <sup>14</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.šak-nu LU<sub>2</sub>.ki-zu-u<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ <sup>15</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> URU.E<sub>2</sub>-m.da-ku-ri* <sup>15</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.a-ra-mu <sup>16</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> ERIM.MEŠ* <sup>16</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> URU.E<sub>2</sub>-m.da-ku-ri* <sup>16</sup>*a-na* UGU-*ḥi-šu<sub>2</sub> ki-i u<sub>2</sub>-tir-ru* <sup>17</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.qi<sub>2</sub>-pa-nu <sup>18</sup>*ki-i ip-la-ḥu is-sak-tu* <sup>18</sup>*ul-lu-ti ki-i iš-mu-u<sub>2</sub> a-na ku-tal-li* <sup>19</sup>*it-te-eḥ-su* <sup>19</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> a-du-u<sub>2</sub>* ERIM.MEŠ <sup>20</sup>*maḥ-ru-ti šu-nu-ma* <sup>21</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> KUR la u<sub>2</sub>-taq-qa-nu* <sup>21</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> dib-bi-šu-nu* LUGAL *iš-mu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>22</sup>*pi-i-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu ki-i u<sub>2</sub>-še-šu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>23</sup>*e-le-ni-it-ti il-tap-nap-pa-ru* <sup>24</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> URU.MEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu u<sub>2</sub>-dan-na-nu* <sup>25</sup>*pa-an šu-šu* LUGAL *la i-dag-gal*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*e-muq a-na* URU.KA<sub>2</sub>-*bit-qa lil-li-ku-ni*

reproach: obv. <sup>7-8</sup>The king, my lord, did not listen to all the messages I have sent (so far)!

report (with a strong undercurrent of a warning):

obv. <sup>8-19</sup>Now, after the agents of Bīt-Dakkūri had turned to agreement (and) written to Marduk-aplu-iddina, (and) the *šandabakku* together with Nabû-lē'i, the governor and the forces of Bīt-Iakīn had gone to Bāb-bitqa, (and) the commandant had turned the charioteers of Bīt-Dakkūri, the Arameans (and) the troops of Bīt-Dakkūri against him, the agents became afraid and kept their silence. The others, when they heard of this, have retreated.

warning (with an undercurrent of denunciation?)

<sup>65</sup> Literally 'give it over to'.

<sup>66</sup> The events referred to in this letter are summarised by Cole 1996a, 33, especially n. 74.

obv. <sup>20.-24</sup> The leading men who do not keep the land in order, and to whose words the king has listened, after they made their opinions known, they keep sending lies and fortify their cities.

advice (with an undercurrent of a warning):

obv. <sup>25</sup> The king should not wait for the outcome!

advice: rev. <sup>1</sup> Let the troops come to Bāb-bitqa.

It seems to me that the sender is trying to frame his request for help – and the full extent of his despair is evident in rev. 20.-24. – as a warning and as advice.

Slightly more condensed is the warning used as an argument for the request in SAA 17 150 (Dietrich 2003, 132–133), also dated to the reign of Sargon II, although not addressed to the king:

rev. <sup>2</sup> *e-mu-qu-ma* <sup>3</sup> *qe<sub>2</sub>-reb* *ḥa-an-ṭiš* <sup>4</sup> *lik-šu-du* *dib-bi* [*um-ma*] <sup>5</sup> *ma-a'-diš* *it-te-bu-u'*  
<sup>6</sup> LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL.MEŠ *šuk-pid<sub>2</sub>-ma* <sup>7</sup> U<sub>4</sub>-5-KAM<sub>2</sub> *kul-da-ni*

request: rev. <sup>2'.</sup> <sup>4'</sup> Bring the troops! They should come quickly!

argument (with a warning):

rev. <sup>4'.</sup> <sup>5'</sup> There is talk [that] many are rebelling!

request: rev. <sup>6'.</sup> <sup>7'</sup> Persuade the magnates and come in five days!

Hearsay is given as the source of the information contained in the warning, and again, the warning is used to emphasise the necessity to fulfil the request made by the sheikhs of Tubliaš. The following passage introduces an admonition and repeated requests, conveying the urgency of the senders:

rev. <sup>8'</sup> *ma-a-ti* *la-ŠU-k[u-n]* <sup>re9'</sup> *la te-el-li* <sup>re10'</sup> *ḥa-an-ṭiš* *kul-da-nu* <sup>re11'</sup> *kul-da-nu*

plea: rev. <sup>8'.</sup> <sup>re9'</sup> May the land not slip from y[ou]r (pl.) hands!

request: rev. <sup>re10'</sup> Come quickly!

request: rev. <sup>re11'</sup> Come!

A different warning is deployed in a similar manner in another letter from the sheikhs, this time addressed to the magnates of the king (obv. <sup>1</sup> *a-na* LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL.MEŠ *ša<sub>2</sub>* LUGAL KUR. *aš-šur*.KI <sup>2</sup> LUGAL *kiš-ša<sub>2</sub>-ti* – ‘To the magnates of the king of Assyria, king of the world’) – SAA 17 151 (Dietrich 2003, 133):

rev. <sup>3</sup> U<sub>4</sub>-5-KAM<sub>2</sub> *ša<sub>2</sub>* ITI.SIG<sub>4</sub> <sup>4</sup> *lik-šu-ud-an-na-š[i]* <sup>5</sup> *ia-a-nu-u<sub>2</sub>* *la-ŠU.2* LUGAL <sup>6</sup> *ni-il-li* *ḥa-an-ṭiš* <sup>7</sup> *ṭe<sub>3</sub>-en-gu-nu* *niš-mu*

request: rev. <sup>3'.</sup> <sup>4'</sup> May he reach us on the 5<sup>th</sup> of Simanu!

warning: rev. <sup>5'.</sup> <sup>6'</sup> If not, we will slip from the hands of the king!

request: rev. <sup>6'-.7'</sup> Let us hear your (pl.) message quickly!

*la-qāt elū* is a frequently used in this corpus, but usually in admonition- of plea-like passages, whose main function, however, also seems to lie in persuasion. The requests attested in this message all refer, broadly speaking, to the same matter of obtaining help and requiring immediate communication, and the concentration of short requests in relatively small space is, as already observed, meant to evoke the impression of urgency.

SAA 17 120 (Dietrich 2003, 106–107) is dated to the reign of Sennacherib. The warning is recounted as a part of a conversation:

obv. <sup>8</sup>ITI.GAN<sup>71</sup> U<sub>4</sub>-8-KAM<sub>2</sub> mu-šu<sub>2</sub> ša U<sub>4</sub>-<sup>91</sup>KAM<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.A-KIN <sup>9</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> m.d.UTU-EN-ŠEŠ  
LU<sub>2</sub>.qi<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-pi ša<sub>2</sub> BAD<sub>3</sub>.DINGIR.KI <sup>10</sup>i-na ANŠE.pet<sub>2</sub>-hal-li <sup>1</sup>du<sup>1</sup>-ban-nu-ti <sup>11</sup>ik-tal-da u<sub>3</sub>  
ERIM.M[EŠ ša<sub>2</sub>] m.zi-ta a-a-lu <sup>12</sup>il-tak-nu um-ma a-na dan-<sup>1</sup>na<sup>1</sup>-ti <sup>13</sup>e-la-a um-ma LUGAL  
KUR.NIM.MA.KI <sup>14</sup>a-na UGU-ḫi-ku-nu

introduction: obv. <sup>8.-11</sup>On the 8<sup>th</sup> of the month of Kislīmu, on the eve of the 9<sup>th</sup> day, the messenger of Šamaš-bēlu-ušur, the royal agent of Der, reached (us) on a passageway horse.

report (with a warning):

obv. <sup>11.-14</sup>As the troop[s of] Zitta were organising help, (he said) as follows: ‘Go up to the fortress! The king of Elam is (marching) against you!’

On the surface of it, this warning could theoretically be treated as an argument for the request, but the request is almost a part of the warning, as it (incidentally, as in SAA 16 59 and 60) refers to the actions the listeners are to undertake for the sake of their own safety.

Only one threat from the Neo-Babylonian correspondence can be securely dated to the reign of Esarhaddon. SAA 18 86 (Reynolds 2003, 69) recounts a conversation and the threat is deployed as a part of a rejection of an offer:

obv. <sup>7</sup>(...) 1-šu<sub>2</sub> 2-šu<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.A-KIN.M[EŠ] <sup>8</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> m.tu<sub>2</sub>-um-man ŠEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL  
KUR.NIM.MA.KI <sup>9</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.NIMGIR<sub>2</sub> u<sub>3</sub> m.zi-ne<sub>2</sub>-e-ni <sup>10</sup>a-na pa-ni-ni it-tal-ku-ni <sup>11</sup>um-ma al-ka-  
nim-ma <sup>12</sup>m.d.AG-SILIM-im DUMU be-li<sub>2</sub>-ku-nu <sup>13</sup>ḫi-iš-na-a-ma i-na pa-ni-ku-nu <sup>14</sup>lil-lik a-  
ni-ni ul ni-man-gur <sup>15</sup>um-ma m.na-id-d.AMAR.UTU be-li<sub>2</sub>-a-ni <sup>16</sup>ba-liṭ u<sub>3</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ ša<sub>2</sub>  
LUGAL KUR.aš-šur.KI <sup>17</sup>a-ni-ni ki-i ru-ub-bu-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>18</sup>i-na KUR ši-ba-tu-nu <sup>19</sup>a-na pa-ni  
LUGAL KUR.aš-šur.KI <sup>20</sup>šu-pur-ra-šu<sub>2</sub>-ma ḫa-du-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>21</sup>LUGAL lu-rab-bi-iš i-na E<sub>2</sub> <sup>22</sup>šu-tu-u<sub>2</sub>-  
nu<sup>67</sup> tal-tap-ra-niš-šu<sub>2</sub>

<sup>67</sup> Interestingly enough, this is an Assyrianism (already Reynolds 2003, 69, n. to line 22.).

rev. <sup>1</sup>*a-ni-ni ul ni-ḥe-ṭe-e-ma* <sup>2</sup>*i-na* UGU-*ḥi-i-ni ul i-rab-bu* <sup>3</sup>*i-na ṣi-bit*-ŠU.2 *a-na pa-an* <sup>4</sup>LUGAL KUR.*aš-šur*.KI *ni-šap-par-šu*<sub>2</sub>

report (with an offer):

obv. <sup>7-14</sup>(Already) once or twice have the messengers of Teumman, the brother of the king of Elam, (of) the herald and (of) Zinēni come to us, saying: ‘Come and embrace Nabû-ušallim, the son of your lord, and may he lead you!’

report (with the rejection of the offer, with a threat):

obv. <sup>14</sup>-rev. <sup>4</sup>We have not agreed, saying: ‘Na’id-Marduk, our lord, is still alive. Also, we are the servants of the king of Assur. If you wish that he (i.e. Nabû-ušallim) be elevated in the land, send him to the king of Assur and if he so pleases, he will elevate him. Wherever he may be, you will have sent him. We will not commit a crime and he will not stand above us. In fetters we shall send him to the king of Assur!’

The rejection includes several steps: correction that the position of the ruler is already occupied, declaration of loyalty to the king of Assur, a challenge – which seems to me to be a taunt, and a threat. The threat is an especially interesting case, as it would have been a threat to the Elamite messengers, but at the same time a promise to the Assyrian king, to whom, after all, the letter was addressed. In the following passages of the message, the threats of the elders of Sealand appear to be insufficient to stop the Elamite progression – and this time it is the messenger of Nabû-ušallim who comes bearing threats:

rev. <sup>8</sup>(...) *u*<sub>3</sub> *a-du-u*<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.A-KIN.MEŠ-*šu*<sub>2</sub> <sup>9</sup>*a-na pa-ni* LU<sub>2</sub>.*ši-bu-tu* *ša*<sub>2</sub> KUR.*tam-tim* <sup>10</sup>*it-tal-ku-nu um-ma a-na pa-ni-ia* <sup>11</sup>*e-la-nim-ma* A<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ *a-na* KUR.*tam-tim* <sup>12</sup>*ri-i-da* *u*<sub>3</sub> *ki-i a-na pa-ni-ia* <sup>13</sup>*la ta-te-la-a-nu qi*<sub>2</sub>-*ba-a* <sup>14</sup>*la ta-qab-ba-a al-la-kam*<sub>2</sub>-*ma* <sup>15</sup>KUR-*ku-nu* *u*<sub>3</sub> E<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ-*ku-ni a-ḥe-ep-pu* <sup>16</sup>*u*<sub>3</sub> *min*<sub>4</sub>-*de-e-ma ta-qab-ba-a* <sup>17</sup>*um-ma la-pa-an* LUGAL KUR.*aš-šur*.KI <sup>18</sup>*pal-ḥa-a-nu a-na-ku* <sup>1</sup>*pu*<sup>1</sup>-*u*<sub>2</sub>-<sup>1</sup>*tu*<sub>2</sub> <sup>19</sup>LUGAL KUR.*aš-šur*.KI *na-ša*<sub>2</sub>-*a-*<sup>1</sup>*ka*<sup>1</sup>

report (with a demand, a threat, and a promise):

rev. <sup>8-19</sup>And now his messengers have come before the elders of Sealand, saying: ‘Come up to me and lead (my) forces to the Sealand! And if you do not come up to me (and) do not say what I command, I will go and destroy your (pl.) land and your (pl.) houses! And perhaps you will say: “we are afraid of the king of Assur.” I will attend to the king of Assur.’

Again, from the point of view of the Assyrian addressee, the promise to take care of him for the Sealanders would be considered a threat. Both the cajoling and the intimidation strategies prove ineffective for the Elamites and Nabû-ušallim – as the present letter testifies, the elders of the Sealand hasten to inform the Assyrian king.



<sup>6</sup>[*an-n*]u-tu DINGIR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ *ig-ga-gu-ma ul ir-ru-bu a-na ki-iš-ši-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu i-ne<sub>2</sub>-ep-pi[š]*

<sup>7</sup>[LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>*] *liš-ša<sub>2</sub>-al u<sub>2</sub> tup-pi liš-šu-nim-ma ina pa-an LUGAL lil-su-<sup>r</sup>u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>*

warning (as an argument):

rev. <sup>3-6</sup>There is the tablet ‘The king does not h[eed] justice’<sup>69</sup>. [...] is said as follows: ‘Be it a king, be it a canal inspector, be it an overseer, be it [an administrator – who(ever)] imposes [the state service upon Sip]par, Nippur or Babylon and [put] the houses of the gods to the corvée work – [the]se great gods will become furious and will not enter their chapels.’ It will happen.

request (for additional verification):

rev. <sup>7</sup>May [the king, my lord], ask (about it) and may they bring the tablet and read it before the king!

The tablet with advice to the rulers cited by the sender is in fact the Advice to a Prince (Lambert 1996, 112–113), although the quotation is modified. In the original composition, the ruler is threatened with his country being turned over to the enemy (<sup>27</sup>KUR-su a-na LU<sub>2</sub>.KUR<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-saḥ-ḥar-ma). This likely sounded too treasonous to be directly quoted in full. The king is nonetheless request to consult the Advice on his own time.

In SAA 18 175 (Reynolds 2003, 145–146), dated to the reign of Assurbanipal, the warning is a part of an argument which is meant to ensure the royal intervention in persuading the magnates to set up camp elsewhere:

rev. <sup>8</sup>ina pi-i <sup>r</sup>ša<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL.MEŠ <sup>9</sup>al-te-me um-ma ma-dak-tu<sub>2</sub> <sup>10</sup>ina URU.dal-bat ni-šak-kan <sup>11</sup>ki<sup>r</sup>-i ma-d[a]k-ta ina URU.dal-bat <sup>12</sup>il-ta-kan-u<sup>r</sup> UN.MEŠ <sup>13</sup>i-be<sub>2</sub>-ru-u<sub>2</sub> u a-lak-ti <sup>14</sup>a-na pa-ni-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu ul tal-lak <sup>15</sup>u LU<sub>2</sub>.ḥi-a-lu-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu uš-ša-am-ma <sup>16</sup>a-lak-ta i-ḥab-bat <sup>17</sup>ina BAD<sub>3</sub> ma-dak-ta ša<sub>2</sub> TIN.TIR.KI <sup>18</sup>ša<sub>2</sub><sup>r</sup> <sup>1</sup>šad-da-qad<sub>3</sub> ma-dak-ta <sup>be19</sup>liš-ku-nu

introduction (with a plan of third parties):

rev. <sup>8-10</sup>I have heard from the magnates as follows: ‘Let us set up a camp in Dilbat!’

warning: rev. <sup>11-13</sup>If they set up a camp in Dilbat, the people will starve.

warning: rev. <sup>13-14</sup>And the caravans will not come to them.

warning: rev. <sup>15-16</sup>(In fact), their soldiers will come out and plunder the caravans.

alternative suggestion:

rev. <sup>17-be19</sup>Let them set up camp in the walls of the last year’s camp of Babylon.

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<sup>69</sup> The incipit of Advice to a Prince.

The data is scarce, but it seems that no significant differences between the Assyrian and the Babylonian part of the Neo-Assyrian royal corpus exists. The threats can be uttered by the social superiors or in situations of social conflict in which one or both sides (as in SAA 18 86) are vying for superiority – the presence of threats in this context is a demonstration of power to which both sides wish to have a claim. The warnings are frequently used in arguments – the negative consequences of particular conduct serve to induce the other party to choose a different course of action than initially planned. In other cases, the warnings simply declare the presence of a danger.

### Early Neo-Babylonian governor's archive from Nippur

Only one text in this part of the corpus includes what can be considered a threat. No. 110 (Cole 1996b, 222–223) includes a longer sequences in which the sender mentions that some third parties are speaking without the permission of his 'lord' – the words spoken are unfortunately too broken to be deciphered. The sender expresses his powerlessness (rev. 4'.-5'.) but at the same time emphasises that the third parties really said what they said (rev. 6'.-7'.). He insists that the matter should be investigated. A river ordeal is mentioned in rev. 11'. – which a certain person should undergo together with the rest of the guilty (?) parties. The sender urges 'his lord' not to neglect making a decision with regard to 'us' (there is nominally only one addressee) (rev. 17'.-18'.). Finally, the sender asks the addressee not to be angry, which might be an apology (rev. 19'.-20'.). Directly following this, he makes a threat that basically amounts to blackmail:

rev. <sup>21'</sup>*ul tal-<sup>r</sup>la<sup>1</sup>-kam<sub>2</sub>-ma* <sup>re22'</sup>*[a-n]a be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia* <sup>re23'</sup>*ul al-la-ka*

threat: rev. <sup>21'.</sup>-<sup>re23'</sup> (If)<sup>70</sup> you will not come (to my aid), I will not come [t]o my lord.

Although the sender used the 'my lord' and third person forms throughout the letter, in the threat he seems to suddenly switch to second person in the protasis. The difference in tone between the preceding move, in which the sender asks his 'lord' not to be angry, and the threat contained in which move, is also remarkable. One should bear in mind that seeing an incongruity of mood in passages like this is attempting to read the letters through a modern, western lens.

Only a few warnings appear among the early Neo-Babylonian correspondence, with only one true warning referring to a real danger, whereas the following three warnings are but arguments.

In No. 10 (Cole 1996b, 56–57) the sender makes demands of his 'brother', which sequence he ends by asking for a letter:

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<sup>70</sup> Already Cole 1996b, 223, n. to r, 21' makes the observation that the clause is atypical in that any conjunction is omitted and the dependent clause uses the negation *ul* instead of *lā*, as would have been usual for Babylonian forms. Nonetheless, no other solutions for the interpretation of this passage occur to me.

rev. <sup>5</sup>(...) *ḥa-an-ṭiš* GABA.RI <sup>6</sup>*ṭup-pi-ia lu-mur* <sup>7</sup>[a]-di IGI.2-ia *tam-mar* <sup>8</sup>*a-na e-kam<sub>2</sub>-ma la tal-lak* <sup>9</sup>ZI.MEŠ *ina* UGU-i-nu <sup>10</sup>*i-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> tal-lak-ma* <sup>11</sup>*ḥal-qa-a-ta man-nu* <sup>12</sup>*i-dab-bu-<sup>1</sup>ub<sup>1</sup>-ma u<sub>2</sub>-še-ša* BAD<sub>3</sub>

request: rev. <sup>5-6</sup>Quickly, may I see the answer to my tablet!

warning: rev. <sup>7-8</sup>Do not go anywhere [un]til you see me!

warning: rev. <sup>9-10</sup>There are rebels upon us!

warning: rev. <sup>10-11</sup>If you go, you will perish.

reassurance (?): rev. <sup>11-12</sup>Who(ever) complains, I throw (them) outside the wall.

The warning is made up of three parts. The first one contains the instructions about what the addressee is to in order to avoid danger, and the two following moves provide an explanation of circumstances (there are rebels) and the consequences if the addressee does not heed the warning (you will perish). Theoretically, one could see the first part of the warning as a simple request, but I think classifying it as a request does not exhaust its function – if anything, it is similar to the warnings of the save-your-life type, as seen in the literature and the passage from the Babylonian letter before.

The remaining warnings serve as arguments. In No. 75 the warning as argument appears after a long sequence in which the sender uses every possible means from his repertoire to persuade his ‘brother’ to follow his wishes. The final move in the letter is the argument that indirectly warns that lack of cooperation could have unpleasant consequences:

e. <sup>1</sup>*e-si-tu ina bi-rit-e-nu* <sup>2</sup>*la taš-ša<sub>2</sub>-kin ḥi-bil-ti ši-i* <sup>3</sup>*ḥab-la-a-nu*

warning: e. <sup>1-3</sup>Let no trouble arise between us! We would suffer for our own wrongdoing.

The tone of the sender remains friendly. The fault would not be alone with the addressee.

In No. 81 (Cole 1996b, 172–174), the warning appears after a long sequence in which the sender reports to his ‘brother’ that his slave has been kidnapped and might be sold to somebody else at any moment. Therefore, the ‘brother’ should hasten to send silver for the sender to ransom the slave. In the final sequence, the sender both blames the addressee for the slave fleeing in the first place and then warns him:

rev. <sup>10</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.a-me-lu-tu a-na <sup>11</sup>*ḥu-ul-lu-qu* <sup>12</sup>*na-tan-ta-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>13</sup>*u<sub>3</sub>* LU<sub>2</sub>.TUR.MEŠ <sup>14</sup>*ik-te-lu-šu<sub>2</sub>*  
<sup>re15</sup>*ki-i a-di* <sup>re16</sup>*qi<sub>2</sub>-it* ITI <sup>re17</sup>*an-ni-i*

e. <sup>1</sup>*la<sup>1</sup> ta-at-tal-ka ki-in-gu* <sup>2</sup>*ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> ia-a<sup>1</sup>-nu*



rebuke: rev. <sup>10-12</sup> You made the slave disappear<sup>71</sup>, and the agents detained him.

warning: rev. <sup>re15</sup>-e. <sup>2</sup> If you have not come until the end of the month, there will be no sealed tag because of this!

The only real warning in this part of the corpus is a good illustration of the unstable conditions that form the historical background of the correspondence. The single, relatively innocuous threat is also not surprising. In view of almost complete absence of drafts of letters in the archive of the *šandabakku*, it can only be natural that his subordinates or business partners would hardly ever dare to resort to threats.

## Neo-Babylonian institutional correspondence

There is a modest number of threats in the Neo-Babylonian institutional correspondence, with some striking features. A strikingly large proportion of threats is emitted by Ninurta-šarru-ušur, the royal agent in Eanna, whose communicative strategies are surmised by Levavi 2018, 137–139 as dramatic and tending to present himself as a victim<sup>72</sup>. I will discuss this in some detail.

The first of the threats could also be, theoretically, a promise, or a threat formulated as a promise. In No. 43 (Levavi 2018, 279–281) the governor of Sealand makes a request, which he follows with very interesting arguments, and finally a threat:

obv. <sup>15</sup>(...) ṣI x x NU<sup>1</sup> <sup>16</sup>ṣu<sub>3</sub> ṣu<sup>1</sup>-pa-ta ṬA<sup>2</sup> x NA<sup>1</sup> <sup>be17</sup>ḫi-ra<sup>1</sup>-a-ma pa-ni-ṛia<sup>2</sup> <sup>be18</sup>ṣu-du-gi<sup>1</sup>-il-la-[a<sup>1</sup>]

rev. <sup>1</sup>u ṛ15<sup>1</sup> MU.AN.NA.MEŠ <sup>2</sup>a-ga-a EN.NUN-ṛta-ku<sup>1</sup>-nu <sup>3</sup>at<sup>1</sup>-ta-ṣar<sup>1</sup> en-na <sup>4</sup>[a]t<sup>2</sup>-ṛtu<sup>2</sup>-nu su-ud-dir-ma <sup>5</sup>EN.NUN-ta-a ṛina si<sup>1</sup>-im-ma-nu-u <sup>6</sup>a-ṛga<sup>1</sup>-a ṛu<sup>2</sup>-ṣur-ra-<sup>7</sup>a <sup>7</sup>ul<sup>1</sup> KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR ṛul<sup>1</sup> KU<sub>3</sub>.GI <sup>8</sup>e-ri-iš-ka-aš<sub>2</sub>-ši-im<sup>2</sup>-[ma<sup>2</sup>] <sup>9</sup>[ina UGU l]a ṛta-šel-la<sup>1</sup>-<sup>10</sup>a <sup>10</sup>mam-[ma ša<sub>2</sub> EN.NUN]-ta-a <sup>11</sup>i-ṛnam-ṣar<sup>1</sup>-ru ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi <sup>12</sup>a-ga-a am-mar-ṣu<sub>2</sub>

request: obv. <sup>15-be18</sup> Prepare and bring me [...] and combed wool [...].

argument (from equal treatment and reciprocity):

rev. <sup>1-6</sup> And for those fifteen years, I have kept your watch. (So) now, you take care of my duties with regard to these (building) materials!

argument (from extreme case):

<sup>71</sup> The unusual verbal form for the putative *nadānu*/Aramaic NTN is explained by Cole 1996b, 174, n. to line 27. However, Cole also translates the entire phrase as ‘You allowed him to escape’, even though the form of the other verb is clearly *ḫulluqu* and not *šuhluqu* (‘to help escape’, see CAD H, 36). Considering the causative meaning of *ḫulluqu* with regards to escaping, I decided to interpret it as referring indirectly to the act of kidnapping, also mentioned before by the sender.

<sup>72</sup> In comparison to some of the Neo-Assyrian scholars, however, he would be a paragon of self-restraint. I am somewhat hesitant to apply modern cultural norms here to this extent.

rev. <sup>7-8</sup>I do not wish neither for silver, nor for gold.

admonition: rev. <sup>9</sup>Do not neglect [this]!

threat (or a promise?):

rev. <sup>10-12</sup>On this basis, I will see who (really) keeps of my [watch].

The interpretation of the last move as a threat or a promise depends entirely on the relationship between the governor of the Sealand and the addressees. Technically, it could be also a promise – but considering the large number of arguments and the admonition, I would tentatively interpret as a threat to recognise the ingrates and wrongdoers for who they really are<sup>73</sup>.

Another letter from the governor of Sealand is No. 48 (Levavi 2018, 285–286) is equally, if not more threatening, although the exact details of the situation elude me:

obv. <sup>4</sup>*i-na*<sup>74</sup> UGU-*hi* *dul-li*<sub>(lu)</sub>-<sup>1</sup>*ka*<sup>5</sup> *la ta-šel-la* <sup>6</sup>*a-na* 5 ERIM.MEŠ *dul-la*<sub>(lu)</sub>-*ka* <sup>7</sup>*ep*<sup>1</sup>-[<sup>2</sup>*ša*<sub>2</sub>] *ra-man-*  
*ka* <sup>8</sup>*ina* ŠU.2<sup>1</sup>?-*ia* *u<sub>2</sub>-šur* <sup>9</sup>*at-ta*<sup>1</sup> *ul ti-de*-<sup>1</sup>*e*<sup>10</sup> [*k*]*i* ZI.MEŠ

rev. <sup>1</sup>*ša*<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.URI.KI.MEŠ <sup>2</sup>IGI-<sup>1</sup>*ni*?-*ia*<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> <sup>3</sup>*ina* UG[U-*h*]*i* <sup>1</sup>*la*<sup>1</sup> *ta-šel-la*<sup>1</sup>

admonition: obv. <sup>4-5</sup>Do not neglect your (pl.) work!

request (or command):

obv. <sup>6-7</sup>D[o] your work with/for five men!

threat: obv. <sup>7-8</sup>Protect yourself (sg.) from me (?)!

threat: obv. <sup>9</sup>-rev. <sup>2</sup>Do you not now that I am responsible for the life of the Babylonians?

admonition: rev. <sup>3</sup>Do not neglect th[is]!

The second threat could be also interpreted as a reference to the five men mentioned in obv. 6. and thus not a threat at all (Levavi 2018, 286, n. 10ff.). It could also serve as an argument emphasising the urgency of performing the work.

More clear-cut are the threats in Nos. 49, 76, 172, 173 and 180. Nos. 49, 76, and 172 occur in the context of a complaint. The situation in the remaining letters might have been similar, with the complaints potentially abbreviated since the addressees must have known what the sender is referring to.

<sup>73</sup> It is in cases like this that translation can be very important. Levavi 2018, 280 renders the same passage as ‘I will notice (those) who will look after my [service]’. The use of the verb ‘notice’ suggests a more optimistic interpretation of noticing accomplishments, although in the commentary to lines 19ff. Levavi agrees that the tone of these lines is threatening.

<sup>74</sup> The copy of the text, YOS 21, 137 has here *ina*, not *i-na* (Frahm and Jursa 2011, No. 137).

The sender of No. 49 (Levavi 2018, 286–287) complains about the missing silver and demands that the addressee, the temple administrator, delivers it – or else he will not carry out his delivery of dates:

obv. <sup>7</sup>(...) d.EN u d.AG <sup>8</sup>ki-i KU<sub>3</sub>.GI ša<sub>2</sub> tu-še-bi-la <sup>9</sup>i-na šu-qul-ti ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL <sup>10</sup>2 GIN<sub>2</sub> la ma-ṭu-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>11</sup>KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR 20 GIN<sub>2</sub> la ma-ṭu-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>12</sup>ḥa-an-ṭiš KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR u KU<sub>3</sub>.GI <sup>13</sup>šu-bi-la lu-u<sub>2</sub>  
be<sup>14</sup>.ti-i-de

rev. <sup>1</sup>ia-a-nu-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>2</sup>40 GUR ZU<sub>2</sub>.LUM.MA <sup>3</sup>a-kil-li

complaint (with an oath):

obv. <sup>7-11</sup>By Bēl and Nabû! (I swear that) after you delivered the gold, two shekels of the gold according to the measure of the king and twenty shekels of silver were missing!

request: obv. <sup>12-13</sup>Quickly, bring the silver and the gold.

threat: obv. <sup>13</sup>-rev. <sup>3</sup>Know (that)! If you do not (do this), I will keep back the 40 kurrus of dates!

The complaint about missing silver and gold is executed with an assertory oath, making all the clearer that the sender is at the end of his tether. After demanding the delivery of missing precious metals, he effectively blackmails the addressee, threatening him with withholding the delivery on his part.

The sender of No. 76 (Levavi 2018, 318–319) seems to also have exhausted other means of ensuring the cooperation of his addressees and is now resorting to threatening them with royal intervention:

obv. <sup>6</sup>[L]U<sub>2</sub>.A-KIN al-tap-rak-ku-nu-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>7</sup>rum<sup>1</sup>-ma KUŠ.til-lu a-na <sup>8</sup>LUGAL šu-<sup>1</sup>bi<sup>1</sup>-la-nu <u>  
KUŠ.til-lu <sup>9</sup>a-na LUGAL <sup>1</sup>u<sup>1</sup> tu-še-bi-la-nu <sup>10</sup>ši-pir-ta-a <sup>11</sup>lu mu-kin-nu <sup>12</sup>ina<sup>1</sup> UGU-ḥi-ku-  
<sup>1</sup>nu<sup>1</sup> be<sup>13</sup>.ḥa-an-ṭiš

rev. <sup>1</sup>KUŠ<sup>1</sup>.til-<sup>1</sup>lu<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup>u <sup>1</sup>ki<sup>1</sup>-ṭi-ne<sub>2</sub>-e <sup>3</sup>[šu]-bi-la-nu <sup>4</sup>[i]a-nu-u<sub>2</sub> a-mat <sup>5</sup>LUGAL ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi <sup>6</sup>[ana  
UG]U-ḥi-<sup>1</sup>ku<sup>1</sup>-nu <sup>7</sup>[a]-qab<sub>2</sub>-bi

reminder: obv. <sup>6-8</sup>I (already) sent you a messenger, saying: ‘Send a quiver for the king!’

complaint: obv. <sup>8-9</sup>And yet, you have not brought a quiver for the king.

argument: obv. <sup>10-12</sup>May my letter be witness against you!

request: obv. be<sup>13</sup>-rev. <sup>3</sup>Quickly! Bring the quiver and cotton!

threat: rev. <sup>4-7</sup>[If] not, [I] will invoke the word of the king [aga]inst you!

It is evident here that the sender is threatening the addressees with royal authority only after he has already tried simply asking for the commodities he needed – although it is important to note that the commodities are not meant for himself.

The sender of No. 172 (Levavi 2018, 438–441) is the despairing royal agent, Ninurta-šarru-ušur. The letter is a lengthy complaint whose first part mentions several minor issues. The problem of ten minas of silver, which the sender immediately needs, is noted several times. The addressee is asked to write to the temple administrator and temple scribe, so that they may pay out the ten minas of silver, as well as give bitumen and barley for his work. The final part of the complaint is especially interesting, as the argument from unequal treatment makes another appearance:

rev. <sup>9</sup>*a-di 3-šu<sub>2</sub> dul-la ni-ip-pu-uš-ma* <sup>10</sup>*al-la šad-da-qad<sup>1</sup> u ša<sub>2</sub>-nu-u<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>2</sub>-nu-u<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>11</sup>*dul-la a-tar ni-ip-pu-uš* <sup>12</sup>*mi-nam-ma-ta* LU<sub>2</sub>.ŠA<sub>3</sub>.TAM <sup>13</sup>*a-kan-na i-šap-par-am-ma* <sup>14</sup>KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR *tu-še-bi-la-ni-iš-šu u a-na-ku* <sup>15</sup>*a-šap-par-am-ma* KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR *ul tu-še-bi-la-a-ni* <sup>16</sup>*en-na* 10 MA.NA KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR *ha-an-ṭiš* <sup>17</sup>*a-na 2* LU<sub>2</sub>.UMBISAG.MEŠ *lid-din-nu-u<sub>2</sub>-ma* <sup>18</sup>*a-[na] ʾIGI<sup>1</sup>-ia lil-lik-ku-u<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>19</sup>*ia-a-nu-u<sub>2</sub>?* LU<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>.A-KIN *ša<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.ša-IGI-E<sub>2</sub>.GAL* <sup>20</sup>*i<sup>1</sup>-la-kam<sub>2</sub>-ma ina* UGU-*hi ši-[bit-t]i* <sup>21</sup>*i-nad<sup>1</sup>-da-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu-u<sub>2</sub>-tu*

complaint: rev. <sup>9-11</sup>.We are doing three times the work, together with the extra work of two years ago and last year.

reproach (with an argument from equal treatment):

rev. <sup>12-15</sup>.Why (is it that when) the temple administrator writer to you here, you send the silver, and (when) I write, you do not send silver?

request: rev. <sup>16-18</sup>.Now, quickly, let them give ten minas of silver to two scribes, so that they come to me.

threat: rev. <sup>19-21</sup>.If not, the messenger of the palace overseer will come and bring them into captivity!

The changes in tone from a relatively harmless complaint about the amounts of work can in three simple moves devolve into threats. As so often evident, they seem to be the last resort of speakers and senders, even, as is typical in this subcorpus, they have to borrow the authority of the palace. While Ninurta-šarru-ušur does not mention a direct royal intervention, he nonetheless intends to escalate the matter to a higher instance and communicates this willingness to do so to the addressee.

The other letters from Ninurta-šarru-ušur are Nos. 85, 158, and 173. No. 173 (Levavi 2018, 441–443) is addressed to Balāssu, like No. 172. In addition to the threats, it also includes a warning, to be discussed below. The first passage of the letter right after the greeting includes an admonition, emphasised by a threat, and a similar threat to that in No. 172, although here formulated in a more indirect manner:

obv. <sup>4</sup>(...) *ki-i* LU[GAL *ina a*]-*ga-a* <sup>5</sup>*ta-nam-ʾša-ra u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-šur* <sup>6</sup>*u ia-a-n[u-u<sub>2</sub>] a-ʾna IGI<sup>1</sup>-ku-nu* <sup>7</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.A-KIN *l[il-lik-ma x] a-na ʾUGU<sup>1</sup>* <sup>8</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIM.MEŠ *[a-ša<sub>2</sub>-a]k-kan-n[a]-ʾa* <sup>9</sup>*ina ṭup-pi [ta-šap]-pa-ra* <sup>10</sup>d.EN *u d.PA lu-u<sub>2</sub> ʾi<sup>1</sup>-[du]-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>11</sup>*ki-i a-ʾdi<sup>1</sup>-i a-na ʾLU<sub>2</sub>.ša<sub>2</sub>-IGI-E<sub>2</sub>.GAL<sup>1</sup>* <sup>12</sup>*ina* UGU-*hi-ka a-qab-bu-u<sub>2</sub>*

admonition: obv. <sup>4-5</sup>.(Keep) serving the ki[ng] as you have served (him) so far!

threat: obv. <sup>6-8</sup>If n[ot], a messenger will c[ome] to you (pl.) (and) I will [appo]int him over the men!

request: obv. <sup>9</sup>[You will re]port to me in a tablet!

threat (with an oath):

obv. <sup>10-12</sup>Bēl and Nabû know indeed! I am speaking about you with the palace overseer.

While nothing concrete is mentioned in the moves preceding the threat, the addressee must have certainly known what kind of work Ninurta-šarru-ušur means.

In No. 158 (Levavi 2018, 421–423) the threat of denunciation is made against Ninurta-šarru-ušur, who spends the better part of the letter maintaining his innocence. Unfortunately, as the passage is broken, it is impossible to tell what exactly the topic of the denunciation is.

No. 85 (Levavi 2018, 329–330) is badly damaged, but two threats and a warning are easily discernible. What I believe is a warning could also be seen as a simple argument for fulfilling a request. However, I think the sender is implying the peril of breaking the oath if the addressee were not to comply with his request:

obv. <sup>5</sup>(...) *ki-i* <sup>6</sup>LUGAL *u a-de-e-šu* <sup>7</sup>*pal-ḥa-a-ṛta* <sup>1</sup>*di-ki* <sup>8</sup>*ša* <sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.ENGAR.MEŠ *de-kam-ma* <sup>9</sup>*šup-ra*

warning: obv. <sup>5-7</sup>If you (sg.) fear the king and his loyalty oath,

request: obv. <sup>7-9</sup>levy the ploughmen and send (them) here.

The ploughmen mentioned here are perhaps identical with the 20 of them mentioned in a previous letter from Ninurta-šarru-ušur to Nabû-aḥḥē-iddina, No. 84 (Levavi 2018, 327–329):

rev. <sup>4</sup>*ka-du* 20 LU<sub>2</sub>.ENGAR.MEŠ <sup>5</sup>*šup-ra*

request: rev. <sup>4-5</sup>Quickly, send 20 ploughmen!

The next threat in No. 85 follows a broken passage (rev. <sup>4</sup>*ia-a-nu-ṛu* <sup>1</sup>[(x x)] <sup>5</sup>LUGAL *a-na* <sup>1</sup>UGU<sup>1</sup>-[*ḥi*] <sup>6</sup>*i-šem-mu-u* – ‘If not [?], the king will hear about th[is]!’). This is followed by a request, after which there comes a reproach and the next threat:

rev. <sup>11</sup>*mi-nam-ma* ŠUK.HI.A <sup>12</sup>*ša* <sub>2</sub> ITI.ZIZ *a-di* UGU <sup>13</sup>*ša* <sub>2</sub> *en-na* <sup>1</sup>*ul* <sup>1</sup>*tak-šu-du* <sup>14</sup>*a-mat* LUGAL *ina* UGU-<sup>1</sup>*ḥi*-*ka* <sup>15</sup>{<sup>1</sup>*mim*<sup>?</sup>-*ma*} *mim-ma* <sup>re16</sup>*ma-la* <sup>re17</sup><sup>1</sup>*aš-pur*<sup>1</sup>-*rak-ka* <sup>re18</sup><sup>1</sup>*la ta-šel-li*<sup>1</sup>

e. <sup>1</sup>[*ka*]p-du *i-šam-ma* *šu-bi-la*

reproach: rev. <sup>11-13</sup>Why have the rations for the month of Šabātu not arrived yet?

threat (realised as a reminder):

rev. <sup>14</sup>.The work of the king is upon you!

admonition: rev. <sup>15.-re18</sup>.Do not neglect everything I write you about!

request: e. <sup>1</sup>.Quickly, take and deliver them (= the rations)!

The final threat in this group is in No. 180 (Levavi 2018, 451–452). The issue at hand is a royal command – with the mention that the imposts have not been delivered still. The sender demands an ox from his three addressees (royal agent, temple administrator, and the temple scribe, addressed with their titles and as ‘brothers’):

rev. <sup>8</sup>.LUGAL *il-tap-ra* <sup>9</sup>*um-ma ša<sub>2</sub> sad-da-qad* <sup>10</sup>*u ša<sub>2</sub>-lu-uš-ša<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>11</sup>*ina IGI-ka i-du-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>re12</sup>.*gam-ri šu<sup>1</sup>-pur-ma ZAG.‘LU’* <sup>re13</sup>.*[a]-na IGI-ka* <sup>re14</sup>.*la il-‘li’-ki’<sup>1</sup>* [GU<sub>4</sub>]

e. <sup>1</sup>*šup-ra u ki-i ia-a-nu-u a-mur’ a-na* <sup>2</sup>E<sub>2</sub>.GAL *a-šap-par*

introduction (with a command and a rebuke from the king):

rev. <sup>8.-re14</sup>.The king wrote to me: ‘Send (masc. sg.) all that was threshed in your (sg.) presence last year and two years ago! (Your) imposts have not come in.’

request: rev. <sup>re14</sup>.-e. <sup>1</sup>.Send [an ox]!

threat: e. <sup>1.-2</sup>.If not, see, I will write to the palace!

The number of warnings is not very high either and they always serve as arguments for the preceding requests, as in Nos. 127, 173, 177, 180.

The warning in No. 127 (Levavi 2018, 382–384) occurs in the context of a report of an issue, and is repeated in order to better communicate the immediate need to find a solution. The addressee is the temple administrator, referred to as a ‘lord’:

rev. <sup>11</sup>.(...) ŠUK.HI.A *ina IGI* <sup>12</sup>.ERIN<sub>2</sub>.ME *ša<sub>2</sub> E<sub>2</sub>-NIG<sub>2</sub>.GA* <sup>13</sup>.*ia-a-nu a-mur gab-bi* <sup>re14</sup>.*i-ḫal-liq-qu-nu* <sup>re15</sup>.‘LU<sub>2</sub>’<sup>1</sup>.A-KIN-ri *ša<sub>2</sub> EN-ia* <sup>re16</sup>.*a-na IGI m.ši-rik-tu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>re17</sup>.‘lil-li-ka’<sup>1</sup>

e. <sup>1-3</sup> GUR ‘ŠE’<sup>1</sup>.BAR *lid-di-nam-ma lud-da-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu-tu* <sup>2</sup>*kap-da ṭe<sub>3</sub>-me ša<sub>2</sub> EN-ia* *ina UGU* ERIN<sub>2</sub>.ME *a<sub>4</sub>* <sup>3</sup>*lu-uš-me a-mur gab-bi i-ḫal-li-‘qu’<sup>1</sup>*

report: rev. <sup>11.-13</sup>.There are not wages for the workers of the storehouse.

warning (as an argument):

rev. <sup>13.-re14</sup>.See, they will all flee!

request: rev. <sup>re15</sup>.-e. <sup>1</sup>.May the messenger of my lord go to Širiktu and give him three kurrus of grain, so that I may give it to them.

request :e. <sup>2.-3</sup>.Quickly! May I hear my lord’s instructions about these men!

warning (as argument, repeated):

e. <sup>3</sup>Look, they will all flee!

The warning in No. 163 (Levavi 2018, 428–429) could almost be a threat – the sender appears to be using the possibility of his own escape as leverage against the addressee in the context of a complaint about unjust treatment by an unspecified third party.

A more complicated case is No. 173 (Levavi 2018, 441–443). At the first glance, it could look like the blackmail discussed in No. 49, except here the sender (Ninurta-šarru-ušur) seems unwilling to carry out his threat:

rev. <sup>12</sup>5 MA.NA KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR *a-na i-di* MA<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ <sup>13</sup>*šu-bi-la-nu ia-a-nu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>14</sup>*ni-is-ḫi ša<sub>2</sub> pir-ki a-nam-ṛsiḫ<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-ḫa*

request: rev. <sup>12-13</sup>Bring me five minas of silver for the rent of the boats!

threat (or warning): <sup>13-14</sup>If you will not (do this), I will make a deduction I am not entitled too.

Ninurta-šarru-ušur readily admits that the deduction he might have to do in order to pay for the boats would be something he is principally not allowed to do. It is remarkable that he admits to his willingness to break rules<sup>75</sup>, but perhaps even more remarkable is the fact that he believes this admission might be sufficient to persuade the addressee to fulfil his request.

The matter discussed in No. 177 (Levavi 2018, 448–449) is the allocation of grain protested against by gardeners, whom the sender sends to the temple administrator and the temple scribe, apparently better suited to hear their complaint. The second, seemingly unrelated matter is the grain to be given to the ploughmen by the farmers (sharecroppers). It is unclear what bearing on the matter of the grain the protest of the gardeners has, but after the passage in which it is recounted, the sender warns that the grain for the ploughmen will be lost:

rev. <sup>7</sup>(...) *a-mur* <sup>8</sup>ŠE.BAR<sup>1</sup> *ša<sub>2</sub>* LU<sub>2</sub>.ENGAR.MEŠ <sup>9</sup>*it-ti<sup>1</sup>* <sup>9</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>* LU<sub>2</sub>.er-re-ṛše<sup>1</sup>-e *ta-ḫal-liq* <sup>10</sup>*te<sub>3</sub>-em<sub>4</sub> u šu-lum* *ša<sub>2</sub>* EN.MEŠ <sup>11</sup>*ina* ŠU.2 *m.na-din lu-uš-me* <sup>12</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> ina* UGU EN.MEŠ *ṭa-a-bi* <sup>13</sup>*lu-pu-uš* EN.MEŠ <sup>14</sup>*lu-u<sub>2</sub> i-du-u<sub>2</sub> ul i-šal-lim* <sup>15</sup>HA.LA-*ta-šu<sub>2</sub> ul ta-nam-ša<sub>2</sub>-’a*

warning: rev. <sup>7-9</sup>Look, the grain of the ploughmen which was with the sharecroppers will be lost!

<sup>75</sup> Kleber 2008, 121 translates this clause as ‘Schickt fünf Minen Silber für die Bootsmieten, andernfalls werde ich willkürlich Abzüge machen!’ – which reads more like a threat than the warning from Levavi’s 2018, 442 translation (‘Otherwise, I will have to make a deduction that I’m not entitled to’). Again, this emphasises the importance of translation. Since Ninurta-šarru-ušur admits that the deductions would be against the rules, I do not think his move here should be recognised as a threat. Unless the threat refers directly to violence against the body of the addressee, it makes no sense to mention that it is against the rules – it would only make the position of the person making the threat weaker.

request: rev. <sup>10-11</sup>May I hear (a message about) the orders and the well-being of my lords, carried by Nādin.

promise of compliance: rev. <sup>12-14</sup>I will do what is good in the eyes of my lords.

warning (with a complaint?): rev. <sup>14-15</sup>May my lords know! It is not good. You will not take its (= the temple's (?) share!

The first warning seems to be directly connected with the denial and perhaps also with the protest in the preceding part of the letter. The following request asks for instructions, and nowhere is a tone of complaint to be seen. The promise of compliance entrusts the decision making to the sender's lords (temple administrator and the temple scribe), emphasising his obedience. That he wishes an intervention is however clear from the following second warning. The first clause is translated by Levavi as 'if the (work) will not be completed', but the negation in the sentence is *ul*, indicating the main clause (Hackl 2007, 146–147). Jursa 2014c, 84 translates this line as 'It is not good', and this is the version I am choosing to follow here.

The sender seems to be very hesitant about asking for help – perhaps because he is not entirely certain that the addressees can be of any help at all (Jursa 2014c, 85).

The final warning from this part of the corpus is a clear case of warning-argument in No. 180 (Levavi 2018, 451–452) in the course of a complaint:

obv. <sup>11</sup>*mi-nam-ma* <sup>be12</sup>*GU<sub>4</sub>*<sup>1</sup>*.da-ṛ*<sup>1</sup>*ṣir-a*<sup>1</sup>*-[tu<sub>2</sub>]* <sup>be13</sup>*a-di* UGU x [x x]

rev. <sup>1</sup>*ul taš-pur-a-nu* <sup>2</sup>*en-na al-ṛ*<sup>1</sup>*tap-rak*<sup>1</sup>*-ku-nu-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>3</sup>*ḥa-an-ṭiṣ* *GU<sub>4</sub>.da-ṣir-a-tu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>4</sup>*lik-šu-da-in-ni* <sup>5</sup>*ki-i ia-a-nu-<u>* <sup>6</sup>ŠE.NUMUN *ša<sub>2</sub>* LUGAL <sup>7</sup>*in-n[a]k-kal*

reproach: obv. <sup>11</sup>-rev. <sup>1</sup>Why did you not send a *daširatu*-ox until (...)?

request: rev. <sup>2-4</sup>I am now writing to you. May the *daširatu*-ox arrive quickly!

warning: rev. <sup>5-7</sup>If not, the field of the king will be co[ns]umed!

On the whole, there are no great differences between these warnings and the ones observed in the older corpora. The slight overrepresentation of threats with royal authority or the authority of the palace has to do with the differing realities of work for the temple and the conflicts with taking care of the interests of the king in this context, especially in the case of Ninurta-šarru-ušur. For lack of comparison, it cannot even be said that he really is dramatic – perhaps his situation was indeed as dire as he claimed.

## Late Babylonian private correspondence

Several private letters include threats as well. The threat with royal authority does feature rather prominently, since some of the archive-owners were engaged in business and other matters directly related to the king. The king is the source of borrowed power in Nos. 61, 63, 89, 152, 197, and 231 –



Nos. 62 and 63 mention also the governor. Nos. 61, 62, and 63 all refer to military matters, and additionally Nos. 62 and 63 seem to refer to the same problem, the non-payment of a military tax.

The sender of No. 61 (Hackl et al. 2014, 175–177) complains about a certain Libluṭ taking away the soldiers that belong to the sender, while the addressee does not intervene. Finally, he explains where Libluṭ can be located and makes his demand:

obv. <sup>15</sup>*en-na* m.lib-lu-ṭu DUMU-LU<sub>2</sub>.si-si-<sup>1</sup>i<sup>1</sup> <sup>16</sup>*ina* SAG.DU GIŠ.MA<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ *ša*<sub>2</sub> i[l-li-ku] <sup>be17</sup>*a-na*  
URU.da-<sup>1</sup>ni-pi<sup>1</sup>-nu šu-p[ur]

rev. <sup>1</sup>*u*<sub>3</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.<sup>1</sup>DUMU.MEŠ-LU<sub>2</sub>.si-si-e<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.<sup>1</sup>taš-li-šu<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ<sup>1</sup> u <sup>1</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ<sup>1</sup> DUMU-DU<sub>3</sub>-  
<sup>1</sup>ia<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> <sup>3</sup>*ina* ŠU.2-šu<sub>2</sub> la tu-maš-šar pi-ir<sup>1</sup>-<sup>1</sup>ša-tu<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> <sup>4</sup>*a-na* LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL-BAD<sub>3</sub> it-ti LU<sub>2</sub>.<sup>1</sup>ERIN<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>.MEŠ-  
*ia* <sup>5</sup>*la* i-dab-bu-ub at-<sup>1</sup>ta<sup>1</sup> *a-na* <sup>6</sup>m.<sup>1</sup>at<sup>1</sup>-kal-a-na-DUMU-E<sub>2</sub>.SAG.GIL<sub>2</sub> *a-na* UGU-ḫi <sup>7</sup>qi<sub>2</sub>-<sup>1</sup>bi<sup>1</sup>  
LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ *ku-um* LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ *in-na-a*š<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>8</sup>*ba-ga-ni*-<sup>1</sup>i m.da-ri-a-muš LUGAL  
<sup>9</sup>*ina* UGU-ḫi-ka

information: obv. <sup>15-16</sup>Now Libluṭ the chariot driver is leading the boats that have already l[eft].

request: obv. <sup>be17</sup>-rev. <sup>5</sup>Write to the city of Danipinu: Do not release the chariot drivers, the chariot soldiers, and the citizen troops in his hands. He should not speak lies about my men to the fortress overseer.

request: rev. <sup>5-7</sup>Speak about this to Atkal-ana-mār-Esagila!

request: rev. <sup>7</sup>Give him troops instead of (my) troops!

threat: rev. <sup>8-9</sup>The majesty of Darius the king is upon you!

This threat with royal punishment is, as the editors rightly note, similar to the earlier one with *amat šarri* (Hackl et al. 2014, 268, n. 4'). It is interesting that the sender makes very detailed demands for righting the wrongs that were caused by the rogue chariot driver – this is obviously the focus of the letter, the threat being in comparison short and modest, almost like an afterthought.

A similar threat with the majesty of king Darius occurs in No. 152 (Hackl et al. 2014, 268–269). The letter belongs to the realm of temple and city administration, but because of the late date I included it in this section, nonetheless. The sender reports that he loaded 1640 kurrus of grain on boats, which should reach the addressees. There follows a break, in which the addressees likely are reprimanded or receive their orders. When the letter resumes, it begins with a threat:

rev. <sup>2</sup>*a-na* m.d.ba-ga-a[<sup>1</sup>] <sup>1</sup>a<sup>1</sup>-m[i-ri<sup>2</sup>] <sup>3</sup>*a-na* UGU-ḫi-ku-nu a-šap-par <sup>4</sup>*ba-ga-n*[i] m.da-ri-a-muš  
<sup>5</sup>LUGAL *ina* UGU-ḫi-ku-nu ki-i dul-lu <sup>6</sup>*ša*<sub>2</sub> LUGAL *ib-te-ṭil*

threat: rev. <sup>2</sup>.-<sup>3</sup> I will write about you to Bagavī[ra<sup>2</sup>]!

threat: rev. <sup>4</sup>.-<sup>5</sup> The majest[y] of Darius the king is upon you!

threat: rev. <sup>5'-6'</sup>The work of the king cannot be stopped!

An earlier letter from this part of the corpus, No. 197 (Hackl et al. 2014, 305–306), dated to the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II, does still include the earlier version of this threat. The letter has no greeting formula whatsoever and seems to remind the addressee about the debt of silver that still needs to pay. After the initial demand, the sender threatens:

rev. <sup>2</sup>(...) *a-mat* LUGAL <sup>3</sup>ina UGU-*ka ki-i* KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR *a-na* <sup>4</sup>m.d.50-MU-DU<sub>3</sub> *ta-at-tan-nu*  
<sup>5</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.*qal-la u man-da-at-ta-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>6</sup>*ta-tur-ru*

threat: <sup>2-3</sup>The word of the king is upon you!

demand: <sup>3-6</sup>(Even) if you pay the silver to Enlil-šumu-ibni, you will pay for the slave and his compensation.

The last line of the obverse includes a note *ša<sub>2</sub> IGI-tu<sub>2</sub>* (‘from before’) – which could indicate that this is not a letter as such, but a note made for unknown purposes, with the extract of the demands made to an unknown addressee – or perhaps a draft that ended up not being used?

No. 62 (Hackl et al. 2014, 177–178) begins with an explanation of the current situation with military taxes: they are to be paid and a third party, Širku, took care of them. The sender then follows with a reminder of this previous request, which has obviously not been fulfilled:

obv. <sup>10</sup>*a-mur al-tap-rak-ka* <sup>11</sup>*ri-kis* MURUB<sub>4</sub> *ma-la* <sup>12</sup>HA<sup>1</sup>.LA-*ka in-na-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>be13</sup>*u it-ti-šu<sub>2</sub>*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*i-ši-zi-iz-ma* <sup>2</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ *li-si-ir* <sup>3</sup>*la tu-še-ti-iq-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>4</sup>d.EN u d.AG *lu-u<sub>2</sub> i-du-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>5</sup>*ki-i a-di*  
*ia-a-nu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>6</sup>*a-na* LU<sub>2</sub>.EN.NAM *aq-bu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>7</sup>*ina iṣ-qa-a-tu<sub>4</sub> tal-la-ki-(eras.)-ma* <sup>8</sup>{*ina*} *a-kan<sup>1</sup>-na*  
*ta-rak-ka-su*

reminder or explicit demand:

obv. <sup>10</sup>-rev. <sup>2</sup>Look, I have written you! Give him your share of the military tax and work with him, so that he can levy the soldiers!

admonition: rev. <sup>3</sup>Do not let him leave him empty-handed!

threat (with an oath): rev. <sup>5-8</sup>Bēl und Nabû know indeed, if you do not (do this), I will tell the governor, (and) you will come in fetters and pay (your military tax) here!

The form *altaprakka* could be introducing a reminder, but the *umma* that should theoretically follow fails to appear, and perfective forms are also used to refer to the present letter that the sender is writing at the moment. Nonetheless, the emphasis on having written the letter does suggest impatience. Perhaps the sender is indeed suggesting that the request is not being formulated for the first time. After the instructions, the stereotypical formula is deployed in order to better convey a sense of urgency. The following threat is executed with an oath, which, while not exceptional in the corpus, is only used in the

most serious cases. The threat might originally have been longer, as the last few lines of the tablet are missing.

It seems, however, that the threat did not work. No. 63 (Hackl et al. 2014, 178) introduces the same matter again. This time, the entire request with the expressions of urgency (the letter includes an additional one, obv. <sup>13</sup>·<sup>r</sup>kap<sup>1</sup>-du KASKAL.2 a-na <sup>be14</sup>·<sup>r</sup>GIR<sub>3</sub>.2<sup>1</sup>-šu<sub>2</sub> šu-k[un] – ‘Quickly, prepare everything for him!’) is treated by the editors as a reminder – not unlikely, even in the face of the missing *umma*, especially considering the *lū tīde* in the final clause. This time, the threat with the authority of the governor is followed by the mention of the royal law<sup>76</sup>:

rev. <sup>1</sup>·<sup>r</sup>d.EN<sup>1</sup> u d.AG lu-u<sub>2</sub> i-<sup>r</sup>du<sup>1</sup>-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>2</sup>·ki-i a-di-i ia-a<sup>1</sup>-nu-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>3</sup>·a-na LU<sub>2</sub>.EN.NAM aq-bu-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>4</sup>·ina iṣ-qa-a-<sup>r</sup>ta<sup>1</sup> ab-bak-ka <sup>5</sup>·u a-kan-na ri-kis MURUB<sub>4</sub> <sup>6</sup>·ta-<sup>r</sup>nam<sup>1</sup>-din-nu u KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR <sup>7</sup>·<sup>r</sup>ŠA<sub>3</sub><sup>1</sup>-bu<sup>1</sup>-<sup>r</sup>u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> da-a-ta <sup>8</sup>·LUGAL am-ḥu-ru-ka

threat (with an oath): rev. <sup>1</sup>·<sup>8</sup>·May Bēl and Nabû know indeed! If you do not (do this), I will tell the governor (and) I will lead you away in fetters, and you will give your military tax here! And I will receive the silver from you according to the royal decree!

Although the main points of the threat remain the same, the governor using his authority to put the addressee in fetters and make him pay, the working differs slightly. In No. 62, the addressee will come in fetters (*alāku*, second person singular), in No. 63 the sender wants to lead him away personally (*abāku*, first person singular), clearly illustrating an escalation of the conflict.

The royal law is also mentioned in the threat in No. 89 (Hackl et al. 2014, 201–202). The threat is preceded by at least two complaints, the first one partially damaged (rev. 1’.-3’.) but likely referring to the rents of the 28 persons mentioned also in the threat, the second related to the rents not paid by the addressee (rev. 4’.-6’.) to the palace:

rev. <sup>6</sup>·(...) d.EN u d.AG <sup>7</sup>·<sup>v</sup>lu-u<sub>2</sub> i-du ki-i a-di <sup>8</sup>·a-na UGU-ḥi da-a-ta ša<sub>2</sub> <sup>1</sup>·LUGAL <sup>9</sup>·u<sub>2</sub>-qar-u<sub>2</sub>-ba-ka <sup>re10</sup>·GIŠ.BAN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ ša<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ a<sub>4</sub> <sup>re11</sup>·28 ul-tu E<sub>2</sub>-<sup>r</sup>ka<sup>1</sup> <sup>re12</sup>·a-maḥ-ra-u<sub>2</sub>-ka

threat (with an oath):

rev. <sup>6</sup>·<sup>re12</sup>·Bēl und Nabû know indeed, I will bring the royal law upon you!<sup>77</sup> I will receive the rents of those 28 people from your (own) house!

Since the rents were owed to the palace, perhaps the royal law was the first logical step, as both the sender and the addressee were officials of at least middle rank (Hackl et al. 2014, 201).

<sup>76</sup> For the translation of *dātu ša šarri* as ‘royal law’, see Kleber 2010.

<sup>77</sup> Literally, ‘I will bring the royal law unto you’.

A different kind of royal institution is mentioned in No. 231 (Hackl et al. 2014, 339–340). If the addressee does not send the needed silver quick enough, the sender threatens to take him to court in Babylon. But this is not the first threat in this letter:

obv. <sup>11</sup>(...) 8 GIN<sub>2</sub> *ina* ŠU.2 <sup>12</sup>*m.ag-gi-ia na-ša<sub>2</sub>-a-ka* <sup>13</sup>KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR *m.ag-gi-ia* <sup>14</sup>*e-ṭir ia-a-nu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>15</sup>*mi-nu-u<sub>2</sub> ki-i* ŠE.BAR-*a* <sup>16</sup>*m.ag-gi-ia i-kil-lu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>17</sup>*a-maḥ-ḥar-ka a-na-ku* <sup>18</sup>*a-kan-nu m.d.AG-NUMUN-SI.SA<sub>2</sub>* <sup>19</sup>*a-na UGU-ḥi* ŠE.BAR-*šu<sub>2</sub>*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub>-an-za-qa-an-ni* <sup>2</sup>10 GIN<sub>2</sub> KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR *kap-du* <sup>3</sup>*i-ša<sub>2</sub>-am-ma* *ina* ITI.ZIZ<sub>2</sub> <sup>4</sup>*šu-bi-lu d.EN u d.AG* <sup>5</sup>*ki-i* KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR *kap-du* <sup>6</sup>*ul tu-še-bi-lu* <sup>7</sup>*a-di-'i ana E<sub>2</sub> di-i-ni* <sup>8</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL TIN.TIR.KI* <sup>9</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-še-ri-bu-ka* <sup>10</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> ŠE.BAR UR<sub>5</sub>.RA-ṣu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>11</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> m.d.AG-NUMUN-SI.SA<sub>2</sub>* <sup>12</sup>*a-ma-aḥ-ru-ka* <sup>13</sup>*d.EN u d.AG lu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>14</sup>*i-du-u<sub>2</sub> ki-i* <sup>15</sup>1 GIN<sub>2</sub> KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR *ina* TIN.TIR.KI <sup>16</sup>*dag-la-ka* <sup>17</sup>*a-na EN da-ba-ba-ia* <sup>18</sup>*la ta-ta-bak*

report: obv. <sup>11-12</sup>I took 8 shekels of silver from Aggia.

request: obv. <sup>13-14</sup>Pay him back!

threat: obv. <sup>14-17</sup>If not, I will receive from you whatever of my grain that Aggia took from me.

report (of an issue): obv. <sup>17</sup>-rev. <sup>1</sup>Nabû-zēru-līšir is pestering me here about the grain.

request: rev. <sup>2-4</sup>Quickly, take 10 shekels of silver and bring them in the month of Šabātu!

threat: rev. <sup>4-12</sup>Bēl and Nabû know indeed, if you do not send the silver quickly, I will take you to the court of the king of Babylon and receive from you the grain that is the interest of Nabû-zēru-līšir.

argument (with an oath): rev. <sup>13-16</sup>By Bēl and Nabû, I do not (even) have a single shekel of silver in Babylon!

argument (from consequences): rev. <sup>17-18</sup>Do not heap up (grain) for my adversary in court!

In the first threat the sender states that he will recover his losses from the property of the addressee. In the second threat, the sender swears to take the addressee to court – interestingly the sums involved in both transactions are similar and not overly large, 8 and 10 shekels (although if the sender owed Nabû-zēru-līšir more money, the subsequent loss triggered by the missing 10 shekels might become more substantial). The second threat is followed by an assertion that the sender has absolutely no money and the plea not to give grain to the person who is his adversary. It is striking, but absolutely not surprising considering the direct language used in the letters on the whole, that the sender believes that these two arguments could still work despite having threatened the addressee with a court case two moves earlier. I would argue that what appears a dramatic tone from the modern point of view, is normal in the first millennium BCE Akkadian.

Finally, in No. 19 (Hackl et al. 2014, 128–129) the sender admonishes the addressee, his ‘brother’, not to neglect anything about the work of the oxen, because he sees everything (obv. <sup>9</sup>*gab-bi ina IGI-ia*). More detailed instructions for the work follow.

The most extreme threats in this part of the corpus are those in No. 224 (Hackl et al. 2014, 333–334), a letter presumably from the head of a household to its members, addressed only by name. Already after the greeting and the statement about the sender’s own well-being does the sender, Arad-Gula, escalate his admonition as far as he can:

obv. <sup>7</sup>*a-na ma-aš-šar-ti ša*<sub>2</sub> *E*<sub>2</sub> <sup>8</sup>*u*<sub>3</sub> *ERIN*<sub>2</sub>.*MEŠ la ta-šu-uṭ-ṭa*<sup>78</sup> <sup>9</sup>*ta-mut-ta-’a*

admonition (with a threat):      obv. <sup>7-9</sup>Do not neglect the watch of the house and the workers (or) you will die!

Arad-Gula immediately changes topic and accuses a certain Rēmūt of being a liar. The full extent of his lies, however, remains forever forgotten, as the following passage of the letter is damaged. When the text becomes legible again on the reverse, the Arad-Gula repeats the same admonition, with likely the same threat (it is partially restored, rev. 4’.-5’.). This is followed by instructions for work in the garden to be done, and then Arad-Gula strikes with the following reproach:

rev. <sup>8’</sup>*mi-nam-ma ul-tu* [*UGU-ḫi ša*<sub>2</sub>] <sup>9’</sup>*al-li-ka* <sup>10’</sup>[*1-e*]*n ṭe*<sub>3</sub>-*en-ku-nu ul aš*<sub>2</sub>-*me u*<sub>3</sub> *ši-pir-ta-ku-nu*  
<sup>re11’</sup>*ul a-mu-ur*

reproach:      rev. <sup>8’-re11’</sup>Why haven’t I heard a [sin]gle report of your and seen (a single) message of your ever [since] I went away?

For Jursa 2014a, 99, the threats are rhetorical, if extreme. But nonetheless, they represent a certain power structure within the family and a certain violence on the level of communication. Although the threat is indeed extreme, nothing suggests that Arad-Gula is especially angry – he does include the formula asking for messages from his family and/or household, and although somewhat stereotypical, the formula is not devoid of meaning. Also, the greeting is to an extent exceptional: the address formula is followed by obv. <sup>5</sup>*šu-lum ia-a-ši* <sup>6</sup>*lu-u*<sub>2</sub> *šu-lum a-na ka-šu*<sub>2</sub>-*nu* – ‘I am well. May you be well!’. The prototypical sender who mentions his wellbeing first is, after all, the Assyrian king. While this certainly mirrors the power relations within the household (also the term of address as ‘you’ only, and the usage of names only in the greeting), the sender still does follow the polite conventions and expresses care for the persons he threatens. Far more pleasant letters to the family do exist in the corpus (one need only look at the practice of addressing wives as ‘sisters’). Nonetheless, this likely suggests that the undercurrent of violence is much stronger in the Akkadian communication, just as it must have been in the daily life (for the accounts of violence in the texts from the Late Babylonian period, see Jursa 2014c).

<sup>78</sup> The presence of the verb *šēṭu* instead of the *šelû*, which is typical for the Late Babylonian letters, could be an argument for an earlier dating.

For the sender of No. 231, it made sense to express helplessness and ask the addressee to take his side after a threat, while for Arad-Gula it makes sense to ask for messages from his family (and/or) household staff after threatening them with the worst kind of violence – even if it was an exaggeration.

The warnings from this part of the corpus almost invariably serve as arguments. The sender of No. 139 (Hackl et al. 2014, 255–256) recounts the issues he has with the gardeners of the dates, who demand a promissory note before they will agree to handing over the fresh dates. Since their denials have already taken a violent turn, the sender asks the addressee:

rev. <sup>1</sup>*ki-i i-šal-li-[mu]* <sup>2</sup>*1-en U<sub>4</sub>-mu al-kam-[ma]* <sup>3</sup>*a-di ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi ni-il-li-<sup>r</sup>ki<sup>1</sup>* <sup>4</sup>*ia<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-a-nu-u<sub>2</sub>*  
ZU<sub>2</sub>.LUM.MA <sup>5</sup>*i-na-ak-ka-as-su-ma* <sup>6</sup>*ši-bu-<ut>-ka ul ta-ka-šad*

request: rev. <sup>1-3</sup>When he is recovered, come for a day, and we will go there.

warning: rev. <sup>4-6</sup>If not, they will cut the dates (secretly) and you will not reach your goals.

No. 161 (Hackl et al. 2014, 275) is a bit different, in that after his request the sender first makes a remark about his plans, which seem to be beneficial to the addressees. The warning also refers to their potential loss, which the sender wants them to avoid:

rev. <sup>3</sup>*ia<sub>2</sub>-<sup>r</sup>a<sup>1</sup>-nu-um-ma* <sup>4</sup>*mi-ṭi-<sup>r</sup>tu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>5</sup>*uš-ki-tu* <sup>6</sup>*ina UGU-ḫi-ku-nu* <sup>7</sup>*ta-dan-nin*

warning: rev. <sup>3-7</sup>If not, you will suffer a heavy loss.

In No. 182 (Hackl et al. 2014, 292) the warning is preceded by a request that seems almost like advice realised as a request. Nothing more is known about the background of this letter (if the sender had a vested interest in the slave girl not being claimed by the debtors, the interpretation of this passage would have to be different), but the warning serves as an argument for the advice or the request.

No. 169 (Hackl et al. 2014, 282) is quite exceptional, as the warning does not serve as an argument, but as a real warning. In the first place, the sender explains that a (named) third party has sold a field, but that it has not yet been completely paid off. As a consequence:

rev. <sup>4</sup>*a-na <sup>r</sup>E<sub>2</sub>-ka ul<sup>1</sup> i-šal-lim-<sup>r</sup>ma<sup>1</sup>* <sup>5</sup>*ul u<sub>2</sub>-pa-<sup>r</sup>qu<sup>1</sup> a-mur* <sup>6</sup>*a-<sup>r</sup>kan<sup>1</sup>-na šu-<sup>r</sup>u<sub>2</sub> ki<sup>1</sup>-i* <sup>re7</sup>*IGI-ka <sup>r</sup>maḫ-ri<sup>1</sup>*  
*al<sup>1</sup>-ka-ma*

e. <sup>1</sup>*<sup>r</sup>a<sup>1</sup>-kan-na* <sup>2</sup>*pu-qir*

warning: rev. <sup>4-5</sup>He will (therefore not be able to) pay your family, nor (to) take care (of the matter).

information: rev. <sup>5-6</sup>Look, he is here (now).

advice: rev. <sup>6-e</sup>. <sup>2</sup>If you like, come (and) raise your claim (against him) here.

No. 203 (Hackl et al. 2014, 312–313) is the final case of the warning playing the role of an argument. What is interesting here, is that what could be considered to be the request follows the warning and is realised by a stereotypical expression with a relatively low semantic load. In effect, the warning/argument at least partially takes over as an indirect request:

obv. <sup>10</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-il<sub>3</sub>-ti<sub>3</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> 2 ME 20 GUR* <sup>11</sup>*ina UGU-ḫi-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu e-le-tu<sub>4</sub>*  
 rev. <sup>1</sup>*ak-ta-la-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu-tu* <sup>2</sup>*um-ma a-ki-i* <sup>3</sup>*ši-pi-š-ti ša<sub>2</sub>* LU<sub>2</sub>.GU.EN.NA <sup>4</sup>KASKAL.2 *a-na* GIR<sub>3</sub>.<2>  
<sup>5</sup>*m.d.e<sub>2</sub>-a-MU* LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL *eš-ru-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>6</sup>*šu-kun-a* <sup>7</sup>*a-ki-i KA-ia* <sup>8</sup>*ul il-li-ku-’u* <sup>9</sup>*ki-i*  
 LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ *a’* <sup>8</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-il<sub>3</sub>-ti<sub>3</sub> ina UGU-ḫi-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu la te-el-li* <sup>9</sup>*a-na ri-ik-si* <sup>10</sup>*š<sub>2</sub> iš<sup>1</sup>-še-bi i-ta-ri*  
<sup>re11</sup>[KASKAL.2 *a-na*] GIR<sub>3</sub>.2-*šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>re12</sup>[*šuk-na*] LU<sub>2</sub>.DUMU-DU<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ NIG<sub>2</sub>.K[A<sub>9</sub>] <sup>re13</sup><*li-*  
*pu-šu*>

introduction (with an explanation):

obv. <sup>10</sup>-rev. <sup>6</sup>There is a promissory note to for their debt. I held them back (and said) as follows:  
 ‘Prepare everything for Ea-iddina, the farmer of the tithe-land, according to the message of the  
*šandabakku!*’

report of an issue (or a complaint):

rev. <sup>6-7</sup>(But) they did not do what I told them.

warning: rev. <sup>8-10</sup>If you do not write (another) promissory note with their debt, it will turn into  
 an (already) fulfilled contract.

request: rev. <sup>re11-re13</sup>[Prepare everything] for them! May the citizens <do> their accounts!

Although the letter is written to a ‘lord’, this term is used only once in the body of the letter, in the clause in obv. 8.-9. The requests and the warning are written in second person singular. I believe that this is supposed to represent a tone of friendly advice.

Only one real warning – referring to a real danger for its own sake – is present in this corpus. The remaining warnings serve as arguments for the requests. This has less to do with the fact that the warnings were not used in daily communication, and more with the fact that the urgency involved in warning somebody because of real danger – sending a message could require so much time that the warning would no longer serve its purpose. The period to which the above letters are dated, late Neo-Babylonian and Persian, was also a moment of relative stability.

## Literary Texts

There is a decent number of threats and warnings in the literary texts. The title of the most repeated threat certainly belongs to the one uttered by Ištar in the Ištar’s Descent to the Netherworld: (Lapinkivi 2010, 9–10):

14. LU<sub>2</sub>.I<sub>3</sub>.DU<sub>8</sub>-*me-e pi-ta-a ba-ab-ka*
15. *pi-ta-a ba-ab-ka-ma lu-ru-ba a-na-ku*
16. *šum-ma la ta-pat-ta-a ba-a-bu la er-ru-ba a-na-ku*
17. *a-mah-ḥa-aš dal-tum sik-ku-ru a-šab-bir*
18. *a-mah-ḥa-aš si-ip-pu-ma u<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub>-bal-kat<sub>3</sub> GIŠ.IG.MEŠ*
- 18a. *ʾa<sup>1</sup>-šab-bir giš-ri-na-am-ma a-ša-[ḥa-aṭ k]a-ar<sub>2</sub>-ra*
19. *u<sub>2</sub>-še-el-la-a mi-tu-ti ik-ka-lu bal-ṭu-ti*
20. UGU *bal-ṭu-ti i-ma-ʾi-du mi-tu-ti*

command: <sup>14.-15.</sup> ‘Gatekeeper, open your gate! Open your gate so that I can enter!’

threat: <sup>16.-20.</sup> ‘If you do not open the gate, if I do not enter – I will strike the door (and) shatter the bolt! I will strike the doorjamb (and) topple the door leaves! I will shatter the hinges<sup>79</sup> (and) cast off the handle! I will raise the dead to devour the living! The dead will become more numerous than the living!’

The Akkadian version of the myth seems to be secondary to the Sumerian one, perhaps abridged in the process of translation<sup>80</sup>. The threat is missing in the Sumerian version, though – instead of threatening, Inanna introduces herself, mentions that she is travelling to the East (as the planet Venus), and gives the reason for her journey (the husband of Ereškigal is dead; lines 80.-89., Black et al. 1998-2006, 1.4.1.). The threats seem therefore to be an Akkadian innovation.

Part of the same threat is also uttered by Ereškigal in the myth of Nergal and Ereškigal when the snubbed goddess demands that the one who slighted her be sent to the Underworld (Ponchia and Luukko, 19–20):

311. [DINGIR *ša<sub>2</sub>-a-šu<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>2</sub>*] *taš-[pu]-ra-na-šu<sub>2</sub>-ma ur-ta-ḥa-ni-ma li-ta-lil KI-ia<sub>2</sub>*
312. [DINGIR *ša<sub>2</sub>-a-šu<sub>2</sub> šup*]-*ra-na-šu<sub>2</sub>-ma lu ḥa-me-ri li-bit KI-ia<sub>2</sub>*
313. *mu-s[uk]-k[a-ku]-ma ul e-bek ul a-da-ni di-ni ša<sub>2</sub> DINGIR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ*
314. DINGIR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ *a-ši-bu-ut qe<sub>2</sub>-reb d.ir-kal-la*

<sup>79</sup> CAD G, 107 gives the meaning of *gišrinnu* as ‘balance (for weighing), part of a door’. The only part of the door that could be logically associated with scales are the stone hinges at the bottom of the door or the pole that functioned in effect as hinges. However, none of these elements seem to be called *gišrinnu* in other texts (the pole was called *šukû*, the hinges *sāḥiru* and *šagammu*, see Ambos 2014-2016, 156–157).

<sup>80</sup> In the Sumerian version, Inanna’s attempt to enter the Netherworld is only introduced after she has been shown gathering her divine powers, dressing herself and putting her make-up on, as well as giving instructions to Ninšubur (Black et al. 1998-2006, 1.4.1.).



315. *šum-[ma] DINGIR ša<sub>2</sub>-[a-šu<sub>2</sub> la tal]-tap-ra-šu*

316. *ki-[i par-ši d.ir-kal-l]a u KI-tim ra-bi-tu<sub>2</sub>*

317. *u<sub>2</sub>-[šel]-lam-ma UŠ<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ GU<sub>7</sub>.MEŠ bal-ṭu-ti*

318. *el bal-ṭu-ti u-šam-ad UŠ<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ*

command: <sup>311.-312.</sup>[That god whom] you s[e]nt us – he had intercourse with me – let him lie with me! [Se]nd [that god] to us! May he be my lover! May he spend the night with me!

complaint (?): <sup>313.-314.</sup>I am filthy, I am not pure, I cannot render judgements of the great gods, the great gods who (dwell) in Irkalla!

threat: <sup>315.-318.</sup>[If] [you do not] send th[at] god acc[ording to the ordinances of Irkall]a and the Great Land, I will r[ai]se the dead to devour the living! I will make the dead more numerous than the living!

Although the threat is preceded by a command, with the addition, however, of Ereškigal apparently trying to make herself look miserable in order to persuade Namtar all the more efficiently, the wording of the threat is not identical. Unlike Ištar, Ereškigal uses the verb *mādu* in the Š-stem. Interesting is also the mention of the cultic ordinances of the netherworld – apparently by raising the dead, Ereškigal would not be going against them.

Finally, a partially identical threat is issued again by Ištar in the epic of Gilgameš in Tablet VI, when she attempts to persuade her father, Anu, to give her the Bull of Heaven (George 2003, 624–625):

94. *a-bi a-la-a bi-nam-ma*

95. *d.GIŠ-<sup>1</sup>gim<sub>2</sub>-maš<sup>1</sup> lu-nir-r[u i]na šub-ti-šu<sub>2</sub>*

96. *šum-m[a] a-la-a l[a t]a-da-n[a]*

97. *a-maḥ-[ḥaṣ da]n-ni-<na><sup>2</sup> a-<sup>1</sup>di<sup>1</sup> KI.TUŠ-šu<sub>2</sub>*

98. *a-šak-[ka]n <sup>1</sup>sa<sup>2</sup>-p[a<sup>2</sup>-nam<sup>2</sup>] <sup>1</sup>a<sup>1</sup>-na šap-la-t[i]*

99. *u<sub>2</sub>-šel-lam-ma [UŠ<sub>2</sub>].MEŠ ik-ka-lu ba[l-ṭ]u-u<sub>2</sub>-ti*

100. *UGU bal-ṭu-ti u<sub>2</sub>-šam-[a-d]u UŠ<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ*

request: <sup>94.-95.</sup>Father, give the Bull of Heaven to me, so that I can sla[y] Gilgameš [i]n his dwelling!

threat: <sup>96.-100.</sup>If [y]ou do no[t] give me the Bull of Heaven, I will stri[ke the under]world (?) together with its dwelling place! I will r[aze to the ground (?)] the lower regi[ons]! I will raise the [de]ad to devour the li[v]ing! I will make the dead more nume[ro]us than the living!

All three threats appear in a slightly different context. Ištar opens her speech in the Descent with a command and immediately follows it with the threat, without waiting for the reaction of the doorkeeper. Ereškigal first complains – and when Namtar reports her message before the other gods, Ea pretends to comply with Ereškigal's request by allowing Namtar to enter the courtyard and search for Nergal – who at this point has already been disguised. Namtar's mission ultimately fails.

In the epic of Gilgameš, Ištar at first tries only to complain to her father (George 2003, 622–625):

84. *a-bi GIŠ-gim<sub>2</sub>-maš it-ta-a[z-za-r]a-an-ni*

85. *d.GIŠ-gim<sub>2</sub>-maš un-de-en-na-a pi-ša<sub>2</sub>-ti-ia*

86. *pi-ša<sub>2</sub>-ti-ia u er-r[e]-[ti<sup>1</sup>]-ia*

complaint: <sup>84.-86.</sup>Father! Gilgameš has been cu[r]sing me! He recites insults against me, insults and curses against me!

When Anu is not convinced and blames her for the altercation, Ištar finally resorts to more effective means of persuasion – but Anu does not agree unconditionally.

The reactions to all three threats should also be compared. Ištar in the Descent is in no uncertain terms told to wait, because the doorkeeper has to consult his queen, a higher authority (lines 23., 23a., and 24.). It seems that all she manages to accomplish is making her sister, Ereškigal, angry. In fact, it is not altogether clear whether the doorkeeper relays the threat at all: although orders and messages are often repeated verbatim, Ištar's threat in the Descent is not (see the doorkeeper's speech in lines 26.-27.). In the epic of Gilgameš the threat is successful: Ištar finally manages to convince Anu to gift the bull of heaven to her – but not without conditions. The efficacy of the threats made by Ereškigal was already discussed above.

The small number of examples makes it altogether impossible to ascertain whether threats were considered too impolite to repeat in some context (which seems here to be strikingly similar: both the relayed and not relayed threat is repeated by a lower-ranking god to a higher-ranking goddess or a group of higher-ranking gods) or whether some stylistic or narrative context were decisive in omitting the repeated threat in Ištar's Descent.

The part of the threat in which the raising of the dead is threatened is quite obviously a literary topos<sup>81</sup>. The remaining moves in these threats are slightly different: Ereškigal emphasises the ordinances of the Irkalla, while Ištar in both the Descent and the epic of Gilgameš, in addition to the raising of the dead, threatens violence and destruction. What all three threats have in common, however, is that they are

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<sup>81</sup> Ponchia and Luukko 2013, 60 consider the threat in Nergal and Ereškigal a quotation from the epic of Gilgameš. They are nearly identical, so this is not unlikely. The threat in the Descent of Ištar seems to be a slight variation of the same threat. It is hard to say which of the threats was written down first. The possibility that they have a different, common origin, cannot be entirely discounted.

uttered by goddesses and that the actions that are being threatened are not primarily directed at the gods who are the communicative partners in the present exchange but aim at disrupting the order of the world.

One has to wonder whether the form these threats assume as well as their vector might not be a gendered issue. It is evident from the same literary compositions that male gods do not act in the same way: when Apsû wants to kill the junior gods for being noisy, he does not need to ask his father for permission, but merely informs Tiāmat, his spouse, of his intentions. In two cases out of three the threats are also a sign of weakness: the goddesses resort to them only when other means of achieving the desired outcome fail. It is also tempting to suggest a strong emotional component in the threats: although Ištar's threat in the Descent seems disproportionate to the situation, the two threats in Nergal and Ereškigal and the epic of Gilgameš are clearly a result of frustration and are indeed accompanied by other emotional displays (weeping, complaints). The fact that goddesses also do not threaten to harm the person they speak to but rather to cause damage indirectly by upending the world order is perhaps not insignificant – their violence is indirect. This is especially striking in the case of Ištar. She can destroy the gate to the Netherworld and the Netherworld itself, if the restoration in the gap is correct, but at the same time she needs the Bull of Heaven to deal with Gilgameš. For some reason, she is unable to take care of him herself. If treated literally, the threats uttered by Ištar and Ereškigal might suggest that in some sense the power of the goddesses is not like this of their male counterparts.

A more aggressive threat is issued by Humbaba in Tablet V of the epic of Gilgameš, in a very interesting sequence (George 2003, 606–607):

86. *lim-tal-ku lil-lu d.GIŠ-gim<sub>2</sub>-maš nu-<sup>u</sup>-u<sub>2</sub> a-me-lu mi-na-a tal-l[i-ka] a-di 'IGI-ia'*

87. *al-ka d.en-ki-du<sub>3</sub> DUMU KU<sub>6</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> la i-du-u<sub>2</sub> AD-šu<sub>2</sub>*

88. *'a<sup>1</sup>-tam raq-qu u<sub>3</sub> NIG<sub>2</sub>.BUN<sub>2</sub>.NA.KU<sub>6</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> la i-ni-qu ši-zib AMA-šu<sub>2</sub>*

89. *'i<sup>1</sup>-na še-ḥe-ri-ka a-dag-gal-ka-ma ul a-qer-ru-bu-ka*

90. *[x x]x da-ku-ka-a ul-tab-ba-a ina kar-ši-ša*

91. *[am-me-ni lem-ni]š d.GIŠ-gim<sub>2</sub>-maš tu-šak-ši-du a-di maḥ-ri-ia*

92. *u 'a<sup>1</sup>-[ta ki]-'i<sup>1</sup> LU<sub>2</sub>.KUR<sub>2</sub> a-ḥi-i ta<sup>1</sup>-az-zi-zu*

93. *lu-u[k-kis ša<sub>2</sub>] 'd.GIŠ<sup>1</sup>-gim<sub>2</sub>-maš nap-ša<sub>2</sub>-ri u ki-ša<sub>2</sub>-du*

94. *lu-ša<sub>2</sub>-k[il U]ZU.ME-šu<sub>2</sub> i[š-š]ur šar-ša-ri na-<sup>i</sup>-ri a-re-e u zi-i-bi*

taunt: <sup>86-90</sup>Let a fool, Gilgameš, take advice of a simpleton. Why did you co[me] before me?

Go, Enkidu, you son of a fish who does not know his father, (you) hatchling of a turtle and a terrapin, who did not suck the milk of his mother! I observed you when you were young, but I did not approach you. [...] killing you (?) ... in my belly/mind!

reproach: <sup>91.-92.</sup>[Why] did you [decepti]vely bring Gilgameš before me? And (why) do yo[u] stand at my side [li]ke an enemy?

threat: <sup>93.-94.</sup>I will sl[it] the gullet and the neck of Gilgameš! Let me fe[ed] his [f]lesh to the locust-b[i]rd, the roaring(-bird), the eagle and vulture!

This is clearly a threat of a warrior. Gilgameš reacts to it with fright but is immediately taunted by Enkidu as a ‘weakling’ (<sup>100.</sup>*am-ni-ni ib-ri pi-is-nu-qiš!* [ta-qa]b-bi – ‘Why do [you s]peak like a weakling, my friend?’). Gilgameš is convinced, and Enkidu’s fate is sealed.

Going back shortly to the gendered component of threats – it is perhaps no coincidence that Humbaba threatens direct violence against his enemies, unlike the goddesses.

The only warning I was able to locate with any certainty is the one spoken to Ūta-napišti – or actually to the fence and the wall – about the coming of the deluge. As already discussed above, the warning is implicit, and includes only the actions that Ūta-napišti is to undertake, without however stating why. Ūta-napišti heeds the words of his god, without doubting any of it – and preserves his life.

## Conclusions

The threats in this corpus are only uttered by persons who have sufficient power at their disposal, such as kings and ‘lords’. When the king threatens with execution, it is rather meant as an emphasis of the urgency of his commands – and the position of a head of a Babylonian family is for all intents and purposes not so dissimilar. On the other hand, it seems that threats are often the opposite of a show of power. Officials threaten their epistolographic partners with denunciation to the king or some other superior when they are at the end of their rope, when their requests have been ignored multiple times and nothing else helps. The threats uttered by the goddesses might some way reveal their position as divine figures – but at the same time women.

Warnings, as attested in the letters, predominantly serve as arguments in complaints and requests. The epistolographic partner is urged to act before something that would displease them happens. In royal correspondence, the argument from making an example out of unruly officials comes up several times. Since ensuring the obedience of his subjects would be considered a perennial preoccupation of the king, it is not surprising that the senders would make use of it as an argument.

## PROMISES

### Neo-Assyrian royal correspondence

Of the promises that I believe are rather sure to be promises, a fair number belongs to the administrative correspondence attributed to the reign of Tiglath-pileser III.

SAA 19 2 (Luukko 2012b, 5) is dated to the reign of Tiglath-pileser or Sargon II. It seems to be a royal command that is formulated as a promise. This is, however, more due to the contents than the form. The king's words at the same time impose an obligation, but the circumstances of the command make it sound like a privilege, hence the 'promise':

obv. <sup>4</sup>[U<sub>4</sub>-mu] mu-šu<sub>2</sub> a-na U<sub>4</sub>-MEŠ-ia LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL-ia <sup>5</sup>[u] LU<sub>2</sub>.2-ia at-ta ku-mu-u-a <sup>6</sup>[EN.N]UN-ka  
a-na EN.NUN-ia <sup>7</sup>[la ta-š]i-aṭ EN.NUN u-šur

promise and command: <sup>4-5</sup>[Day] (and) night during my reign you will be my magnate (and) my representative. You will (stand) in my place.

admonition: <sup>5-7</sup>[Do not] be negligent! Keep (my) watch!

The following admonition makes the nature of this promise clear – while it obliges the king to reserve a certain position for the (unknown) addressee, it is also a command. The nature of this command as a promise, however, will become relevant in the letters written by scholars and priests.

Some promises in this part of the corpus are quoted from conversations or other messages. SAA 19 98 recounts the negotiations with the Babylonians. In their first move, the senders Šamaš-būnā'ī and Nabû-nammir report on their attempt to persuade the Babylonians to come out of the city and speak to them by quoting a message from the king with the following promise:

obv. <sup>11</sup>(...) a-ni-ni k[i] an-ni-i <sup>12</sup>a-na DUMU-TIN.TIR.KI.MEŠ ni-iq-ṭi<sub>2</sub>-bi <sup>13</sup>ma-a L[UG]AL ina  
UGU-ḫi-<sup>1</sup>ku<sup>1</sup>-nu i-s[a-ap]-ra-na-ši <sup>14</sup>ma-a i[na K]A-ku-nu TA DUM[U-TIN.TIR].<sup>1</sup>KI<sup>1</sup>.<sup>1</sup>[MEŠ]  
<sup>15</sup>ṛki<sup>1</sup> [an-ni-i la-ad-bu-ub] <sup>16</sup>ma<sup>1</sup>-a <sup>16</sup>[a]-na [du]-r[a-ri<sup>2</sup> š]a TIN.TIR<sup>1</sup>.KI <sup>17</sup>u<sub>3</sub><sup>1</sup> <sup>17</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.ki-di-nu-ut-  
ku-nu <sup>18</sup>la-aš<sub>2</sub>-ku<sup>1</sup>-un <sup>18</sup>a-na TIN.TIR.KI al-la-ka

report (with a royal promise):

obv. <sup>11-18</sup>We spoke with the Babylonians as follows: 'The king sent us to you (with the following message): "[Let me speak] through your mouths with the Ba[bylonians] as [follows]: I will establish the [am]nes[ty] of Babylon and your privileged status and come to Babylon!'".'

In the following passage, the senders note that about ten powerful Babylonians refuse to come out and instead taunt the Assyrians with their promise:

obv. <sup>22</sup>(...) a-ni-ni <sup>23</sup>ni-iq-ṭi<sub>2</sub>-ba-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu ma-a KA<sub>2</sub>.GAL pi-ti-a <sup>24</sup>a-na TIN.TIR.KI ne<sub>2</sub>-ru-ub la i-  
ma-gur<sub>2</sub> <sup>25</sup>ma-a a-na ka-na-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu a-na TIN.TIR.KI <sup>26</sup>nu-se-ri-ib-ku-nu ma-a ki-ma<sup>27</sup>LUGAL-  
ma <sup>1</sup>it<sup>1</sup>-tal-ka mi-i-nu <sup>28</sup>a-na <sup>1</sup>LUGAL<sup>1</sup> a-<sup>1</sup>qab-bi<sup>1</sup>

report (with a request):

obv. <sup>22-24</sup>We told them: 'Open the gate (so that) we can enter (the city)!'. (But) they did not agree:

rejection (quoted):

obv. <sup>25-28</sup>‘If we let you enter Babylon, what will we say to the king, when he comes?’

In the end, the Babylonians are reported to have promised to only open their gates when the king comes. Meanwhile, the Litamaeans prove far more obliging:

rev. <sup>9</sup>‘LU<sub>2</sub>.li<sup>1</sup>-ta-ma-a-a i-sa-ap-ru-na-ši <sup>10</sup>ma-a LU.IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ ša ‘LUGAL<sup>1</sup> a-ni-ni ma-a U<sub>4</sub>-30-KAM<sub>2</sub> <sup>11</sup>ni-il-la-ka ‘i-si<sup>1</sup>-ku-nu ni-dab-bu-ub <sup>12</sup>u<sub>3</sub> ‘SAG<sup>1</sup>.KAL.MEŠ-‘te<sup>1</sup>-ni ina UGU ‘LUGAL<sup>1</sup> il-lu-ku <sup>13</sup>ki-ma it-tal-ku-u-‘ni<sup>1</sup> pa-an LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia <sup>14</sup>‘nu-ub<sup>1</sup>-ba-‘la<sup>1</sup>-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu

report (with a declaration and a promise):

rev. <sup>9-12</sup>The Litamaeans wrote to us: ‘We are the servants of the ki[ng]. We will come on the 30<sup>th</sup> day and speak with you and our leaders will go to the king.’

promise: rev. <sup>13-14</sup>When they come, we will bring them to the king, my lord.

After the Litamaeans promise to come and their leaders promise to go to the king, the senders of the letter also make a promise to follow up with their tasks and deliver the Litamaean leaders to the king. In view of the hierarchic relationship between the senders and the king, this in itself is more than a simple declaration of the sender’s intentions or an offer. But is the obligation that is created here sufficient to consider this move a promise? While this cannot be entirely certain, some similar examples, discussed below, suggest that it might be.

SAA 19 105 (Luukko 2012b, 110–111) is sent by Nabû-nammir and sadly provides very little context. The sender reports that he has questioned and gathered the people and is now sending them to the king. This is followed by a promise uttered by an unknown man, in which he declares that he will give all his people to the king as long as he is asked:

rev. <sup>1</sup>a-na ‘pa<sup>2</sup>-ni<sup>2</sup>-ti<sup>2</sup> <sup>2</sup>ki-i an-ni-i <sup>3</sup>iq-ti<sub>2</sub>-bi-a ‘ma<sup>1</sup>-a <sup>4</sup>UN.MEŠ er-ri-‘ša-a<sup>1</sup> <sup>5</sup>am-mar ina pa-ni-‘ia-a<sup>1</sup>-ni <sup>6</sup>ma-a 1-en la a-‘kal<sup>1</sup>-la <sup>7</sup>ma-a gab-bu <sup>8</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-še-e-ša <sup>9</sup>a-na LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia <sup>10</sup>a-dan<sup>an</sup>

report (with a promise):

rev. <sup>1-10</sup>Before (?) he told me as follows: ‘If he wants the people, I will bring all of those that are with me, I will not hold back a single one, and give them all to the king, my lord.’

No reaction of the sender is included – but considering the preceding move and the questioning, perhaps this is meant to be an indirect complaint, in which the promise is quoted to indicate that the third party did not fulfil his obligations.

In SAA 19 125 (Luukko 2012b, 126–128), there is a conditional promise following a reproach, and likely a more modest request than its initial version (obv. 11’.-16’.). Since it was already discussed in the section concerned with reactions to reproaches, I will not repeat it here, but the request from the sender itself includes a promise as an argument for his request:

obv. <sup>9'</sup>(...) m.*ia-su-ba-a-a* <sup>10'</sup>*ina* <sup>1</sup>ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bi pet<sub>2</sub>-ḫal-<sup>1</sup>li* [*ina*] UGU-*šu<sub>2</sub>-nu a-sap-ra mu-uk*  
<sup>11'</sup>*a-<sup>1</sup>lak<sup>2</sup> qi<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-ba-[aš<sub>2</sub>]-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>1</sup>lu<sup>1</sup>-*u-šu-u<sub>2</sub>-ni mu-uk* <sup>12'</sup>*a-ta-[a]* *ina* E<sub>2</sub> [*k*]am-mu-sa-[*k*]u-nu mu-  
uk *šum<sub>2</sub>-ma* <sup>13'</sup>*ina* <sup>1</sup>ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bi m.GIN-NUMUN la tal-[l]a-ka mu-uk* <sup>14'</sup>*a-<sup>1</sup>di* URU.*ma-rad al-ka-*  
*ni mu-uk ana-ku* <sup>15'</sup>TA <sup>1</sup>an<sup>1</sup>-*na-ka lal-li-<sup>1</sup>ka* *ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bi-ku-nu* <sup>16'</sup>lu-<sup>1</sup>sa<sup>1</sup>-*me-eḫ*

report (of an attempt at persuasion):

obv. <sup>9'.</sup><sup>11'</sup> I sent Iasūbāiu with the cavalry [to] them. (I told him) thus: ‘Go (and) tell them that they should come out.’

reproach: obv. <sup>12'</sup>‘Wh[y] are you [st]aying at home?’

request: obv. <sup>12'.</sup><sup>14'</sup> If you do not go into (the territory?) of Mukīn-zēri, come as far as Marad!

promise: obv. <sup>14'.</sup><sup>16'</sup> I will go there from here (and) join you there.

Since the first legible refusal already refers to not coming out and in view of the conditional clause, it seems likely that the second request should be considered a concession on the part of the sender. It is additionally accompanied by a promise from the sender to join forces with his partners in negotiations – and although they answer that they will only come if the troops really arrive (obv. <sup>19'</sup>.-<sup>23'</sup>.), the sender already considers their reactions as rejection of his request (obv. <sup>17'</sup>(...) *la i-ma-gur<sub>2</sub>-u-ni la u<sub>2</sub>-šu-u-ni* – ‘They did not agree to come out.’).

In the remaining correspondence from the reign of Tiglath-pileser, two patterns likely indicative of promises can be observed. In the first place, there are the promises of obedience, usually triggered by a royal command. Such is SAA 19 17 (Luukko 2012b, 20), in which Aššūr-mātka-tēra swiftly answers the king:

obv. <sup>5'</sup>*ina* UGU LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ <sup>6</sup>KUR.*ar<sub>2</sub>-ma-a-a* <sup>7'</sup>ša LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>* <sup>8</sup>iš-pur-an-ni <sup>9</sup>ma-a *ša<sub>2</sub>-aš-*  
*bi-su-nu* <sup>10</sup>ma a-na KASKAL <sup>be11.</sup>*il-lu-ku* <sup>be12.</sup>*e-ši-di-su-nu*

rev. <sup>1</sup>TUG<sub>2</sub>.*sa-a-gu* <sup>2</sup>KUŠ.*ḫi-in-tu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>3</sup>KUŠ.E.SIR <sup>4</sup>I<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ *a-da-na-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu*

introduction (with a royal command):

obv. <sup>5'.</sup><sup>be11.</sup> As to the Aramean soldiers, about which the king wrote me: ‘Provision them! They are going on a campaign.’

promise: obv. <sup>be12.</sup>-rev. <sup>4</sup>I will give them their travel provisions, sackcloth, leather bags, sandals, and oil.

In a similar manner, the senders react to a royal command with a promise of compliance in SAA 19 22 (royal command in rev. 16.-18., promise in rev. 21.-22., excuse/argument for the delay in rev. 19.-21.), SAA 19 62 (royal command in obv. 7.-9., excuse/argument for delay in obv. 9.-12., promise in obv. 13.-14.), and likely SAA 19 82 (royal command very likely in rev. 1., promise in rev. 2.-3.).

In SAA 19 22 and SAA 19 62, the promise of obedience is in fact suspended. Making a promise appears to be an important step in negotiating with the king. The initial argument/excuse is in fact an indirect rejection of the command – but only temporary. The following promise serves to mitigate the damage and to reassure the addressee that the command will be followed. A closer look at will show exactly that SAA 19 22 (Luukko 2012b, 28–29):

rev. <sup>16</sup>(...) *ša* LUGAL *iq-bu-u-ni* <sup>17</sup>*ma-a* 10 E<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ KUR.*ia-su-ba-a-a* <sup>18</sup>*ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi URU.*kaš-pu-na* *še-rib* <sup>19</sup>A.MEŠ *ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi *dan-nu* UN.MEŠ *i-ma-ru-šu* <sup>20</sup>*ki-ma* TA A.MEŠ-*šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* *ina* URU.*im-mi-u* <sup>21</sup>*i-taš-ku-nu* *ina* PAD.<sup>†</sup>HI<sup>?</sup>.A<sup>?</sup> <sup>22</sup>*ina* URU.*kaš-pu-na* <sup>22</sup>*u-še-rab-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu*

introduction (with a royal command):

rev. <sup>16-18</sup>.As to what the king said: ‘Bring ten Iasūbāian households into the city of Kašpuna!’

rejection (temporary): rev. <sup>19</sup>.The water is strong<sup>82</sup> there. The people will be ill.

promise: rev. <sup>20-22</sup>.When they will have been settled with their water in (the town of Immiu), I will bring them with (?) their rations into (the town of) Kašpuna.

Despite the unclear remark about the water, it is absolutely certain that the sender wants to temporarily suspend the royal command based on his better knowledge of local water supply (?). Instead of directly saying that he rejects the command, he only states the reason why fulfilling it immediately would bring disastrous results. In order to compensate for the potential loss of face for the king caused by his, albeit temporary and well-meant, disobedience, he follows this indirect rejection with a promise of compliance. The king can rest assured that his commands prevail.

Another pattern is preceded by reports of uncompleted tasks: either the report itself is not as detailed as both the sender and the addressee might wish, or some issues arose during the performance of another task so that it could not be finished. The sender then hastens to reassure the addressee that the task will soon be finished. In this part of the correspondence, owing to the subject matter, the most common pattern is that of promising to communicate, as in SAA 19 8 (Luukko 2012b, 10–11) or SAA 19 82 (Luukko 2012b, 86–87). SAA 19 8 is sent by the crown prince Ulūlāiu to the king:

<sup>82</sup> Although the word *dannu* is clear to read, I am unsure how to connect this property of water (according to CAD D, 92, *dannu* as adjective can mean: ‘1. solid, strong, hard, heavy, thick, massive, fortified, steady, loud, 2. legitimate, binding, reliable, 3. strong, powerful, mighty, great, 4. fierce, savage, difficult, dangerous, serious, grave, obstinate, bad, tyrannical, harsh, pressing, urgent, essential, imperative’, although the form here would technically be the stative form of the verb *danānu*, as *mû*/water is plural) with sickness. Usually, *dannu* with reference to bodies of water refers to a strong current and/or the body of water being difficult to cross. *mû*, however, is simply ‘water’. Moreover, the following promise refers to a kind of water that can be transported into a place where the people are supposed to be settled – which means one should expect here something like water rations or water supply (wells?).



rev. <sup>7</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.MAH 2-*u*<sub>2</sub> <sup>1</sup>ša<sup>1</sup> KUR.<sup>1</sup>ku<sup>1</sup>-[*mu-h*]*a*-<sup>1</sup>a<sup>1</sup>-[*a*] <sup>8</sup>*e-gi-ra-a-ti ina* <sup>1</sup>ŠU.2<sup>1</sup>-š*u*<sub>2</sub> <sup>1</sup>*i-su-hur*<sup>1</sup> <sup>9</sup>*a-sa-par di-ib-bi*-[š*u*<sub>2</sub>]-<sup>1</sup>nu *i-sap*<sup>1</sup>-ru-ni <sup>10</sup>*e-<sup>1</sup>gi-ra<sup>1</sup>-ti* <sup>1</sup>x<sup>1</sup> [x x x] <sup>1</sup>x<sup>1</sup> [x] <sup>11</sup>*ki-ma na-šu-ni* [*a-na* LUGAL] <sup>12</sup>*be-li<sub>2</sub>-[i]a u<sub>2</sub>-še-<sup>1</sup>ba<sup>1</sup>-la*

report: rev. <sup>7-9</sup>The second emissary of Co[mma]gene went back with letters in his hands. I wrote them to send me [th]eir words.

promise: rev. <sup>10-12</sup>When they bring [...] the letters, I will send them [to the king], my lord.

The sender of SAA 19 82, Aššūr-šallimanni, sends over the news of the king of Elam, the situation in Dēr and finally refers to the letter exchange with the king:

rev. <sup>7</sup>(...) *e-gi*[*r-a-ti*] <sup>8</sup>ša LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-še-b*[*il-an-ni*] <sup>9</sup><sup>1</sup>m<sup>1</sup>.LU<sub>2</sub>-d.BE *it-tu-bil<sub>2</sub>* <sup>1</sup>u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-[*di-ni*] <sup>10</sup><sup>1</sup>la<sup>1</sup> *il-la-ka ki-ma* ∴ *it-t*[*al-ka*] <sup>11</sup>*mi-nu* ša *ṭe<sub>3</sub>-mu-un-ni* <sup>12</sup>*a-[na]* <sup>1</sup>LUGAL<sup>1</sup> *be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia<sub>2</sub> a-šap-pa-ra*

report: rev. <sup>7-10</sup>The lette[rs] that the king, my lord, had sen[t me] – Amēl-Enlil delivered them. He has not y[et] come back.

promise: rev. <sup>10-12</sup>(When) he comes [back], I will send t[o] the king, my lord, whatever news there is.

The object of the promise needs not to be a letter. A different kind of tablet is also possible, as in SAA 19 14 (Luukko 2012b, 17), a letter to the palace scribe, although the difference here is that the transfer of the tablet serves as a form of communication only in the broadest sense of the word:

rev. <sup>7</sup><sup>1</sup>ša<sup>1</sup> *ḥar-bi-te am-mi-te* <sup>8</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-di-ni* IM *da-na-ni* <sup>9</sup>*la-a ni-ša-bat* <sup>10</sup>m.<sup>1</sup>IR<sub>3</sub><sup>1</sup>-*al-la-a-a* <sup>11</sup>[*i-d*]*a-na-ka*

report: rev. <sup>7-9</sup>As to that waste land, we have been unable to get a hold of the official document (of purchase) yet.

promise: rev. <sup>10-11</sup>Urdu-Allāia will [g]ive it to you.

The communication does not have to take place on the tablets, either. The sender of SAA 19 123 (Luukko 2012b, 124–125), another letter to the palace scribe:

obv. <sup>7</sup>(...) *ina* UGU E<sub>2</sub>-SA.HI.A.ME <sup>8</sup>ša *be-li<sub>2</sub> iš-pur-ra-ni ma-a* <sup>9</sup>*ki-i* ša<sub>2</sub> *tal-tu-ku-ni* <sup>10</sup>*i-ta-nu-ni-ka-a* <sup>11</sup>SA.HI.A ša URU.*di-gi-ri-na* <sup>12</sup>*a-na-ku u<sub>2</sub>-se-rib* <sup>13</sup>*be<sub>2</sub>-et al-tu-ku-ni a-di-nu-ni* <sup>14</sup>*a-ki-i al-la-ka-ni* <sup>15</sup>*a-na be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia<sub>2</sub> a-qa-bi*

introduction (with a question from the addressee):

obv. <sup>7-10</sup>As to the box (?) of sinews about which my lord wrote to me as follows: ‘Did they (it) to you that what you had tested?’

report: obv. <sup>11-12</sup>I have brought in the sinews of Dirigina.

promise: obv. <sup>13-15</sup>I will tell my lord what I tested and sold when I have come.

SAA 19 108 (Luukko 2012b, 112) could also belong to this group, but the connection between the issues the sender reports on (unavailability of grain in Babylon, rev. 1.-2.) and the possible promise (rev. 10.-11.) to pile up the rations in Cutha seems slightly uncertain. The sender could be reporting on his plans.

SAA 19 57 and SAA 19 61 are promises of redress that were already discussed together with excuses.

More evidence is available from the correspondence of Sargon II. The most interesting examples are those in which the senders recount previous promises that remained unfulfilled. This constitutes the evidence that what is here identified as promises was indeed treated as an obligation on the part of the utterer.

SAA 1 159 (Parpola 2015, 125) is an interesting example. The royal command, which on the face of it is perhaps not a promise, is taken by the sender (whose name is partially broken) as an indirect promise and used as a basis for a complaint:

obv. <sup>4</sup>LUGAL EN *iq-ti<sub>2</sub>-[bi-a]* <sup>5</sup>*ma-a a-di dul-lu ša* URU.BA[D<sub>3</sub>-m.MAN-GIN] <sup>6</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-gam-ma-ru-u-*  
*[ni]* <sup>7</sup>*ma-a me-me-ni ḥa-bul-li-k[a]* <sup>8</sup>*la u<sub>2</sub>-šal-[lam]*

promise (not really, with an introduction):

obv. <sup>4-8</sup>The king, my lord, tol[d me] as follows: ‘Nobody will pay you [back yo[ur] loans until the work on Dū[r-Šarrukīn] is finished!’

The sender clearly takes the implication of this command to be ‘But they *will* pay you back once the work is finished’, as he follows this with the following complaint:

obv. <sup>9</sup>*ni-is-ḥu ša* TA URU.BAD<sub>3</sub>-[m.MAN-GIN] <sup>10</sup>*ra-ši-pu-u-[ni]* <sup>11</sup>*a-na* LU<sub>2</sub>.DAM.GAR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ *u<sub>2</sub>-*  
*s[a-li-mu]* <sup>12</sup>*me-me-ni ina* UGU-*ḥi-ia l[a u<sub>2</sub>-šaḥ-sis]* <sup>13.5</sup>*me 70* MA.NA KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR  
NA<sub>4</sub>.[KIŠIB-*ia*] <sup>14</sup>*ša* MU.AN.NA *an-n[i-ti]* <sup>15</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-di-ni la u<sub>2</sub>-ša[l-lu-mu]*

explanation: <sup>9-11</sup>They have pa[id back] the merchants (for) the section of Dur-Šarrukīn that has been erected.

complaint: <sup>12</sup>Nobody [has reminded] (the king?) about me.

complaint: <sup>13-15</sup>They have not rep[aid] me yet the 570 minas of silver (with) [my se]al (that are) due th[is] year.

In a cunning manner, the sender also saves the royal face by framing the still outstanding debt as the fault of unspecified subordinates who did not remind<sup>83</sup> the king about it.

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<sup>83</sup> That is, if the restoration is correct, which I find very likely.

Far more straightforward is SAA 1 229 (Parpola 2015, 178):

obv. <sup>4</sup>ina UGU GIŠ.šī-ib-ša<sub>2</sub>-te <sup>5</sup>ša LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> iš-pur-an-ni <sup>6</sup>ina E<sub>2</sub>.GAL ṛiq-ti<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-bu-u-ni <sup>7</sup>ma-a  
LU<sub>2</sub> i-si-ka <sup>8</sup>a-ša<sub>2</sub>-pa-ar ma-a il-lak <sup>9</sup>GIŠ.šī-ib-ša<sub>2</sub>-te e-mar <sup>10</sup>i-ba-ta-qa a-da-kan-ni-ma <sup>11</sup>la  
il-li-ka an-nu-rig <sup>12</sup>[ina pa-ni-šu] a-da-gul

report (with a promise):

obv. <sup>4-10</sup>As to the trunks about which the king, my lord, wrote to me – they told me in the palace:  
‘I will send a man with you. He will come, select the trunks (and) cut them.’

complaint (or report of an issue):

obv. <sup>10-12</sup>Up until now he has not come. Now I am (still) waiting [for him].

A similar case is presented by SAA 5 169 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 125). The sender extracted a promise from the Zikirtian but now his emissaries claim that they know about no such thing:

obv. <sup>8</sup>(...) ina UGU : KA <sup>9</sup>ša LU<sub>2</sub>.zi-gir<sub>2</sub>-ta-a-a kas-pu <sup>10</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-se-li : ina URU.dan-ni-te <sup>11</sup>a-sa-kan :  
ma-a : ana : KUR.pa-aš<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub>-te <sup>12</sup>ANŠE.KUR.RA.MEŠ SUM-ka <sup>13</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a : bir-ti IGI.2.MEŠ  
<sup>14</sup>ša LU<sub>2</sub>.MAH.MEŠ <sup>15</sup>lu-ma-di-du

rev. <sup>1</sup>ma-a<sup>1</sup>-da : LU<sub>2</sub>.MAH.MEŠ 2.KA-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu : u<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub>-bal-ku-tu<sub>2</sub> <sup>3</sup>ma-a TA UGU : ša : LU<sub>2</sub>.EN-ni  
<sup>4</sup>la ni-iš-me

explanation: <sup>8-12</sup>I brought up silver and deposited it in the fortress because of the word of the  
Zikirtian, (who said) as follows: ‘I will sell you horses to (the land of) Paššate.’

request: obv. <sup>13-15</sup>Now, may they make it very clear to (his) emissaries!

complaint: rev. <sup>1-4</sup>They are trying very hard to go against their word, saying: ‘We have not heard  
about this from our lord.’

The word used to refer to the promise (and indeed interpreted as ‘promise’ in rev. 3.-4. by the editors) is not literally ‘word’ but rather ‘mouth’<sup>84</sup>, though it means more or less the same, without the association with ‘giving one’s word’ that one might have in English – the Akkadian ‘word’ tends to have more to do with a command (see CAD P, 453, *pû* and 461–463 with entries in 2. and partially 3.). This promise, however, cannot at the same time be a command, if only for the obvious reason that it refers to the speaker’s own actions.

SAA 1 171 (Parpola 2015, 134) also cites a promise as grounds for extracting service in lieu of being repaid:

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<sup>84</sup> Although the sign KA could also be read *inim* = *amatu*, that is ‘word’, this would go against the Akkadian language use.

obv. <sup>14</sup>*a-ki* [*mu-t*]*a-nu* <sup>15</sup>*a-na-k*[*a-n*]*i* : m.<sup>1</sup>DINGIR<sup>1</sup>-*bi-i*’-*di* <sup>16</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL<sup>1</sup>-[*k*]*i-šir* : š[*u*]-<sup>17</sup>u<sub>2</sub><sup>17</sup>[š<sub>a2</sub>]  
ŠU.2-*ia*

rev. <sup>1</sup>[*a-na*] ANŠE.KUR.RA <sup>2</sup>*i-du-ka* <sup>3</sup>ANŠE.KUR.RA [*ina*] *ku-mu-šu*<sub>2</sub> <sup>4</sup>*ana-ku* *u<sub>2</sub>-sa-lim-me* <sup>5</sup>*ma-*  
*a* KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR SUM-*ka* <sup>6</sup>m.DINGIR-*bi-i*’-*di* : UŠ<sub>2</sub> <sup>7</sup>MUNUS-*šu*<sub>2</sub> LUGAL <sup>1</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-du* :  
DUMU :. QAL<sub>3</sub> <sup>8</sup>*ta-ta-ḥ*[*az*’ *ina* L]U<sub>2</sub>.<sup>1</sup>MUHALDIM<sup>1</sup>.MEŠ <sup>9</sup>LU<sub>2</sub> : <sup>1</sup>*is*<sup>1</sup>-*si-ia* : *i-du-la*

explanation (with a promise):

obv. <sup>14</sup>-rev. <sup>9</sup>When there was an [epi]demic he[re], Ilu-bi’dī – who is a [co]hort commander  
[under] me – killed a horse. I compensated for the horse [in] his stead, (and he said) as follows:  
‘I will pay you (back) the silver.’. (But) Ilu-bi’dī died. His woman, as the king knows, ma[rried]  
a young boy. This person has been serving me [among the] cooks.

This man, as well as a preceding one, escaped, and Bēl-dūrī (governor of Damascus) wants the servants  
back. It would seem that the promise to pay back equals a debt that is now to be repaid by the new  
husband of the debtor’s wife.

A promise used as a reminder, at the very least, seems to also feature in SAA 1 240 (Parpola 2015, 187–  
188). Following an explanation about the sender’s issues with the town of Lapsia, the sender recounts  
his conversation with the king:

obv. <sup>be16</sup>’(...) *ina* IGI LUGAL EN-*a* <sup>be17</sup>’*ina* URU.NINA *aq-ṭi<sub>2</sub>-bi nu-uk la-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*la i-ša<sub>2</sub>-mi-u<sub>2</sub>* LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ *la i-du-nu* <sup>2</sup>LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub> iq-ṭi<sub>2</sub>-bi-a ma-a bi-la* <sup>3</sup>2 3  
URU.MEŠ-*ni* TA ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bi-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>4</sup>*a-na* m.EN-BAD<sub>3</sub> *la-a-din ma-a ana-ku-ma ina ku-mi* <sup>5</sup>*a-da-*  
*nak-ka ana-ku aq-ṭi<sub>2</sub>-bi nu-uk al-lak* <sup>6</sup>*i-si-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu a-da-bu-ub šum<sub>2</sub>-mu la iš-mu-ni* <sup>7</sup>*ina* UGU  
LUGAL EN-*a a-šap-pa-ra* <sup>8</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a* LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.qur-bu-te* <sup>9</sup>*ina* UGU-*ḥi-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu liš-pu-*  
*ra ma-a* ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ-*ku-nu* <sup>10</sup>*ki-i ša ina ti-ma-a-li* 3-*še* U<sub>4</sub>-*me* <sup>11</sup>[*a*]-*na* m.d.U.GUR-PAP-*ir a-*  
*na* m.d.MAŠ-DINGIR-*a-a*

reminder (with a complaint from the sender and a promise from the king):

obv. <sup>be16</sup>’-rev. <sup>5</sup>I said to the king, my lord, in Niniveh: ‘No, they do not obey! They do not give  
the troops.’. The king told me: ‘Bring (them) to me! Let me give two or three of their towns to  
Bēl-dūrī, (and) I will give you (others) instead.’

reminder (with a proposal?):

rev. <sup>5-7</sup>I said as follows: ‘I will go and speak with them. If they do not listen to me, I will write  
to the king, my lord.’

request: rev. <sup>8.-11</sup>Now the king, my lord, should send a royal companion to them (with the following message): ‘Just as previously [you sent?] your troops to Nergal-nāšir and Ninurta-ilā’ī [...]’

The rest of the request is missing but the possibility that it could have been anything else is negligent. Again, a conversation is brought up in order ensure that what the sender now felt is the obligation of the king is honoured.

A number of promises also follows commands. The sender of SAA 1 131 (Parpola 2015, 105–106), Aḥu-lurši, very eagerly responds to the command from the king, who invites him to an audience:

rev. <sup>2</sup>·[ša LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub> iš-pur-a*]n-ni ma-<sup>1</sup>a<sup>1</sup> [ina ITI.BARAG] <sup>3</sup>·[ina pa-ni-ia] <sup>1</sup>a<sup>1</sup>l<sup>1</sup>-ka a-di [U<sub>4</sub>-x<sup>85</sup>-KAM<sub>2</sub>] <sup>4</sup>·[š]a <sup>1</sup>ITI.DIRI<sup>1</sup>.ŠE *du<sub>6</sub>-lu ug-da-[da-mar]* <sup>5</sup>·U<sub>4</sub>-4-KAM<sub>2</sub> ITI.DIRI.ŠE TA URU.BAD<sub>3</sub>-M[AN-GIN] <sup>6</sup>·u<sub>5</sub>-ša-a a-di la ITI.BARAG pa-an LU[GAL EN-ia a-na-ku]

royal command: rev. <sup>2</sup>·-<sup>3</sup>·[As to what the king, my lord, wrot]e me: ‘Come [to me in the month of Nisannu]<sup>86</sup>!’

prediction: rev. <sup>3</sup>·-<sup>4</sup>·The work will be fini[shed] by the x<sup>th</sup> day of the intercalary month [o]f Adaru.

promise: rev. <sup>5</sup>·-<sup>6</sup>·I will depart from Dūr-Ša[rrukīn] on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of the intercalary Adaru and [I will] be before the ki[ng, my lord] (even) before the month of Nisan.

SAA 5 32 includes a demand followed by a conditional promise from the king of Šubria, which was already discussed in the section on reproaches.

In SAA 5 152 (Fuchs and Parpola 2001, 115–116), the command is not quoted explicitly, but it is obvious from the context that preceded the letter:

obv. <sup>21</sup>·<sup>1</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-ma<sup>1</sup>-a <sup>1</sup>an<sup>?</sup>-nu<sup>?</sup>-ra<sup>1</sup> LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub> i-sa-ap-ra* <sup>22</sup>·[LU<sub>2</sub>].ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ LUGAL-ia GIŠ.GIGIR.MEŠ *pet<sub>2</sub>-ḫal-lum* <sup>23</sup>·[ki-i] <sup>1</sup>ša<sup>1</sup> LUGAL *iš-pur u<sub>2</sub>-sa-ak* <sup>24</sup>·[e-d]a-nu ša LUGAL *be-li iš-kun-an-ni* <sup>be25</sup>·[a-n]a-ku a-du ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ MAN-ia <sup>be26</sup>·[a]-du e-mu-qi-ia ina IGI-at <sup>be27</sup>·[LU]GAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia ina* <sup>1</sup>URU<sup>1</sup>.arba-il<sub>3</sub> a-na-ku

rev. <sup>1</sup>·[GIŠ.l]e-[<sup>1</sup>]u-<sup>1</sup>u<sub>2</sub> ša *dul-la<sup>1</sup>-a-ni* <sup>2</sup>·[ša] LUGAL *iš-pur-an-ni* <sup>1</sup>ma<sup>1</sup>-[a bi-la] <sup>3</sup>·[is-s]i-ia u<sub>2</sub>-ba-la <sup>1</sup>a-na<sup>1</sup> [LUGAL] <sup>4</sup>·EN-ia u<sub>2</sub>-ša-aš<sub>2</sub>-ma

promise: obv. <sup>21</sup>·-<sup>23</sup>·Now, I will assign the troops, chariots and cavalry [accor]ding to what the king wrote.

<sup>85</sup> The editor restores 4<sup>?</sup>. Considering that the sender means to depart from Dir-Šarrukin on the 4<sup>th</sup> day, this is not impossible, but just as well he might need extra time to prepare for the journey.

<sup>86</sup> While this restoration looks suspiciously elaborate, it is completely based on what is written in the following part of the letter and thus is not a conjecture.

promise: obv. <sup>24.-be27</sup>By the [dea]dline set by the king, my lord, I, my men and my soldiers will be before the [ki]ng, my lord, in Arbail.

promise: rev. <sup>1.-4</sup>The [wri]ting boards on my tasks [about which] the king, my lord, wrote me: [‘Bring (them) to me!’] – I will bring them [wi]th me and read the, to [the king], my lord.

A slightly more complicated arrangement is evident in SAA 5 257 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 184). The sender mentions the issues surrounding the grazing of sheep, and finally makes a promise:

rev. <sup>2</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a* LUGAL *iq-ti<sub>2</sub>-bi* <sup>3</sup>TA IGI *gab-bi-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>4</sup>*ni-maḥ-ḥar*

promise: rev. <sup>2.-4</sup>Now (that) the king has spoken, we will receive them from all of them.

An explicitly cited command, brought by a royal companion, is mentioned in SAA 15 123 (Fuchs and Parpola 2001, 85–86):

rev. <sup>1</sup>[LU<sub>2</sub>.*qur*]-*bu-te* <sup>2</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>1</sup>*i<sup>1</sup>-tal-k[a]* <sup>2</sup>[*ma-a*] <sup>4</sup>*me* GIŠ.ŠU<sub>2</sub>.A.MEŠ *mu-tu-ḥu* <sup>3</sup>*ma-a* NA<sub>4</sub>.I.DIB *u<sub>2</sub>-di-ka* <sup>4</sup>TA ŠA<sub>3</sub> KUR.*ia-su-pi* *šu-du* <sup>5</sup>*dul-lu* *ša* LUGAL *i-qa-bu-ni* <sup>6</sup>*le-pu-šu*

command (with an introduction):

rev. <sup>1.-4</sup>[The] second [ro]yal companion came, [saying]: ‘Raise 400 trunks (and) haul a threshold stone from the land of Iasubu on your own.’

promise: rev. <sup>5.-6</sup>I will do the work that the king commanded me (to do).

SAA 1 147 (Parpola 2015, 118–119) is a petition with the same attempt at negotiations that was already discussed above (see SAA 19 22 and SAA 19 62). However, here the parties attempting to negotiate with the king, the city rulers (obv. <sup>3</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.EN-URU.MEŠ) do not have even the fraction of the power held by the highest Assyrian officials and must frame their request as a petition:

obv. <sup>6</sup>*ša* LUGAL EN-*ni* <sup>7</sup>*iš-pu-ra-na-ši-ni* <sup>8</sup>*ma-a a-di ḥar-da-ni* <sup>9</sup>*ma-a ep-ša ga-me-ra* <sup>10</sup>*ša* LUGAL EN-*ni* <sup>11</sup>*iš-pu-ra-na-ši-ni* <sup>12</sup>*ne<sub>2</sub>-pa-aš<sub>2</sub> a-na* LUGAL <sup>13</sup>EN-*ni* : *ni-da-na* <sup>14</sup>*dul-lu ina* UGU-*ni* <sup>15</sup>*da-a-na : a-dan-niš*

introduction (to a complaint, with a royal command and a promise):

obv. <sup>6.-13</sup>As to what the king, our lord, wrote to us: ‘Finish your work as long as it is supervised (?)!’ – We will do what the king, our lord, wrote us (and) give it to the king, our lord.

complaint: obv. <sup>14.-15</sup>(But) our work is very hard.

The senders then proceed to ask to be released from their other tasks, so that they are free to do the work the king commands them to. This is interesting in view of the promise that follows, which serves as an additional argument for the request:

rev. <sup>6</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a* LUGAL EN-*ni* <sup>7</sup>*ni-taḥ-ra lu-ra-mu-na-ši* <sup>8</sup>*[d]ul-li* LUGAL <sup>9</sup>*[n]e<sub>2</sub>-pu-uš* <sup>10</sup>*ki-ma ina ma-ti-ni* <sup>11</sup>*ni-tal-lak* <sup>12</sup>*ḥa-bu-li-ni* <sup>13</sup>*nu-šal-li-me*

request (with an explicit introduction):

rev. <sup>6-9</sup>Now, we are petitioning the king, our lord! Let them release us so that we [ca]n do the [w]ork of the king.

promise: rev. <sup>10-13</sup>When we go to our land, we will repay our debt.

Other promises in which the senders declare their willingness to follow orders are SAA 5 227 (after a threat, already discussed in the chapter on threats) and SAA 15 100 (here the task is also partially in progress, as the sender reports on the part he already finished in rev. 5'.-6'.), and then promises to bring the people, if they come, or if not, to report to the king again, rev. 6'.-10'.).

Another group of letters includes promises of maintaining communication. In SAA 1 29, the letter from the crown prince Sennacherib to his father, this promise is made by messengers who bring news and promise to bring more (from Arije, the promise is obv. 20., from Aššūr-rēšūwa, the promises are obv. 35 and rev. 7.-10.). In SAA 1 210 (Parpola 2015, 163–164), the sender first reports on the progress he has already made, and then promises to write again once the next has been done (promise in obv. be17.-rev. 5.). In SAA 5 105 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 82–83), the promise to write a report follows an excuse or an attempt to defer a royal order (rev. 10.). The sender of SAA 5 204 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 147–148) is likely Šarru-ēmuranni: he reports about sending a trusted man as a messenger and follows this with a promise to send a report once the messenger is back (rev. 7.-10.) – the promise to send a letter thus also involves a half-finished task. A very similar pattern is to be found in SAA 15 45 (Fuchs and Parpola 2001, 30–31), obv. 6.-9. The sender of SAA 15 118 (Fuchs and Parpola 2001, 81–82) has to wait on the news before writing to the king (promise in rev. 11.-14.) about the movements of the troops, just as the sender of SAA 15 219 (Fuchs and Parpola 2001, 143), in obv. 11.-13., and the sender of SAA 19 183 (Luukko 2012b, 184–185) in rev. 20'.-22'. A promise to write is also evident in SAA 15 158 (Fuchs and Parpola 2001, 108–109), although its context is completely broken (rev. 5.-9.).

Two letters are interesting for the insight into the workings of the administration that they offer. SAA 1 56 (Parpola 2015, 52), written by Ṭāb-šār-Aššūr, documents the issues with the boats for transporting stone elements. The boatmen who were supposed to man them absolutely refuse to even come near (obv. 11.-12.), so Ṭāb-šār-Aššūr prepares a plan to transport stone steps and thresholds with two boats. In the following damaged passage, he mentions royal forgiveness and promises to bear responsibility for the previously unmentioned stone colossi:

rev. <sup>10</sup>*a-di* GIŠ.MA<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ *an-na-te* <sup>11</sup>*a-ga-mar-u-ni pu-tu-ḥu* <sup>12</sup>*[NA<sub>4</sub>].ṛd<sup>1</sup>.ALAD.d.LAMA.MEŠ an-nu-te* <sup>13</sup>*[ša ina] URU.a-di-a na-ša-ku*

promise: rev. <sup>10.-13.</sup>Until I have finished (preparing) these boats, I will guarantee for the [stone] colossi [which are] in the town of Adia.

In SAA 15 53 (Fuchs and Parpola 2001, 36), the sender, Nabû-rēmāni, reports on the issues with horses. A messenger from Parsua informs the sender that four Zalipaeans who fled to the town of Nikkur claim that the ruler of Mannea detained the horses they had brought (obv. 4.-rev. 5.). The sender requests that a royal companion be sent to listen to their story, and finally promises to cover for the deficit himself:

rev. <sup>12</sup>(...) a-[na-ku] <sup>re13</sup>[ba]t-qu ša LUGAL b[e-li<sub>2</sub>-ia] <sup>re14</sup>a-ka-šar

promise: rev. <sup>12.-re14</sup>I will take care of the deficit of the kind, [my] lo[rd].

SAA 15 136 (obv. 24.-be28.) and SAA 15 199 (obv. 5.-10.) seem to be promises serving as offers, as far as the context allows an interpretation.

The scholarly and priestly correspondence offers a very similar picture: where divergence occurs, it is above all due to the different subject matter and the function of the priests and scholars. Thus when the scholars promise to communicate, their promises are more likely to refer to explaining something to the king, such as providing omen interpretations.

The promise to write can occur in an attempt to defer the performance of one's duties. Nothing indicates that this sequence was triggered by a command and not for instance a question from the king, but in SAA 10 61 (Parpola 1993, 44–45) Balasî nonetheless feels that he has to provide his services later:

rev. <sup>2</sup>[ina U]GU ša LUGAL <sup>3</sup>[be]-li<sub>2</sub> iš-pur-an-ni <sup>4</sup>[U<sub>4</sub>-m]u an-ni-i-u <sup>5</sup>[I]a-mi<sub>3</sub>-i-ni <sup>6</sup>ina ši-a-ri <sup>7</sup>a-šap-pa-ra <sup>8</sup>di-ib-bi an-nu-tu <sup>9</sup>U<sub>4</sub>-mu an-ni-i-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>10</sup>a-na ḥa-sa-si <sup>11</sup>la ṭa-a-ba <sup>12</sup>ina ši-a-ri <sup>13</sup>a-šap-pa-ra

report (with an introduction):

rev. <sup>2.-5</sup>[As to wh]at the king, my [lo]rd wrote to me – [tod]ay is an [e]vil day.

promise: rev. <sup>6.-7</sup>I will write (about it) tomorrow.

explanation: rev. <sup>8.-11</sup>It is not good to think on these matters today.

promise: rev. <sup>12.-13</sup>I will write tomorrow.

As the writers of the administrative letters with their superior knowledge of the conditions in regions in which they were physically present, the scholars with their superior knowledge of the signs offered by the gods to the wise and the practiced, who are capable of averting the most ominous of these signs, can defer answering the royal questions or fulfilling the royal commands in order to wait for a more auspicious time.



In other cases the promise to explain is just a promise, as in SAA 10 60, also written by Balasî (Parpola 1993, 44), following a reassurance (?) that the omen series *šumma izbu* is difficult to interpret:

rev. <sup>3</sup>*a-na* 1-en U<sub>4</sub>-mu <sup>4</sup>*ki-ma*<sup>1</sup> ina IGI LUGAL EN-ia <sup>5</sup>*i-tar-ba* ina ŠA<sub>3</sub> *tup-pi* <sup>6</sup>*an-ni-i-e ša a-na*  
<sup>7</sup>LUGAL EN-ia *u<sub>2</sub>-še-bi-la-an-ni* <sup>8</sup>ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi *šu-nu* <sup>9</sup>*ki-i ša<sub>2</sub>-tir-u-ni* <sup>10</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-kal-lam ket-tu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>11</sup>[*ša*]  
*u<sub>2</sub>-ba-nu* ina *pa-na-tu-uš-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>12</sup>[*la*] *tal-li-ku-u-ni* <sup>13</sup>*la<sup>1</sup>-mu-qa-a-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>14</sup>*la i-ḥa-ak-kim*

promise: rev. <sup>3-10</sup>. On the day on which I will enter before the king, my lord, for the first time, I will show the king in this tablet that I have now sent how (the omen) is written.

reassurance (?): rev. <sup>10-14</sup>. Indeed, [one] who has [not] had it pointed out to him will not be able to understand.

The presence of a reassurance here is not very puzzling, since it is not a professional rival of Balasî who does not understand *šumma izbu*, but the king<sup>87</sup>.

In SAA 10 75 (Parpola 1993, 57), Nabû-aḥḥē-erība reports that the king is not in danger after an eclipse and promises to provide a more detailed report on the next day (rev. 3.-7.). A similar pattern occurs in SAA 10 84 (Parpola 1993, 64), in which Akkullānu promises to supply the phenomenon he observed with the pertinent interpretation if particular conditions are fulfilled (rev. 3.-5.).

In SAA 10 42 (Parpola 1993, 32), Balasî is only promising to write again – not to offer an explanation but in order to provide the king with information about when the intercalary month should be added (promise in rev. 14.-15.) – for now, more observation is needed. This is also the case in SAA 10 47 (Parpola 1993, 35–36) – Balasî and Nabû-aḥḥē-erība mention that they are watching the sky and will write to the king again (promise in rev. 5'.-6'). A similar promise is to be found in a broken context in SAA 10 57 (Parpola 1993, 41–42) – it refers, however, to Akkullānu, although the sender of the letter is Balasî. The preceding legible passage seems to comprise a blessing.

As in the previous group of Assyrian letters, there is also a complaint based on an unfulfilled promise. The unknown sender (his name is broken away) of SAA 10 171 (Parpola 1993, 131) is an astrologer, and the sequence of unmet expectations interesting enough to deserve a more detailed analysis<sup>88</sup>:

obv. <sup>4</sup>*šad-da-qad<sub>3</sub>* [x x x x x] <sup>5</sup>LUGAL SAG LU<sub>2</sub>. [*um-ma-ni-šu<sub>2</sub> i*] *š-šu<sub>2</sub>-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>6</sup>LUGAL *it-ti-š* [*u<sub>2</sub>-nu*  
*SAG-a ul i*] *š-ši* <sup>7</sup>*a-na* E<sub>2</sub>.GAL *ra<sup>1</sup>-tap-ra* <sup>8</sup>*um-ma* LU<sub>2</sub>.ŠAMAN<sub>2</sub>.MAL<sub>2</sub>.LA<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ <sup>9</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub>*  
*LUGAL ina pa-ni-ia<sub>2</sub> ip-qi<sub>2</sub>-du* <sup>10</sup>1 U<sub>4</sub> AN d.EN.LIL<sub>2</sub> *il-ta-an-du* <sup>11</sup>*um-ma mi-nu-u<sub>2</sub> ḥi-tu-u<sub>2</sub>-a*  
<sup>12</sup>LUGAL *it-ti* LU<sub>2</sub>.*um-ma-ni-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>13</sup>*SAG-a ul iš-ši* LUGAL *iq-ta-bi* <sup>14</sup>*um-ma la ta-pal-laḥ<sub>3</sub>*  
*um-ma* <sup>15</sup>*a-na-aš<sub>2</sub>-ši u la* ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi <sup>16</sup>*ki-i e-lu-u<sub>2</sub> a-di* UGU *en-na* <sup>17</sup>LUGAL *SAG-a ul iš-ši*

<sup>87</sup> Just what exactly it is that the king does not understand is written in an unfortunately damaged passage (obv. 7.-9.).

<sup>88</sup> The letter is written in the Babylonian dialect.

complaint (with argument from equal treatment):

obv. <sup>4.-6</sup> Last year [...] the king summo[ned his scholars]. The king [did not sum]mon [me] with th[em].

follow-up (complaint, with a report and a question):

obv. <sup>7.-13</sup> I wrote to the palace: ‘The apprentices that the king entrusted to me have learned *enūma Anu Enlil*. What is my fault that the king did not summon me with his scholars?’

reassurance: obv. <sup>13.-14</sup> The king said: ‘Do not fear!’

promise: obv. <sup>14.-15</sup> ‘I will summon you!’

complaint: obv. <sup>15.-17</sup> But after I departed from there, the king has not summoned me until now.

The argument from equal treatment is implied in the first complaint: if other scholars were summoned, the sender, who is also a scholar, should be summoned as well. This is already a reason to feel slighted, which the sender does. In answer, the king reassures him and promises him that he will be summoned. When this does not happen, the sender feels entitled to complain again – further indication that the promises were not treated lightly, also in cases of large power disparities. In his second complaint, after the broken promise, and having reminded the king of the original grievance, the sender starts his new complaint with what must have been an argument from equal treatment again. In lines 1.-5. of the reverse, although they are partially damaged, the sender clearly notes that although the king summoned all the scribes (rev. <sup>2</sup> *ra-bu-u<sub>2</sub> u še-eḫ-ruḫ*, ‘large and small’), he himself was not summoned with two groups whose identifications cannot be restored.

The promises of the scholars and priests can also be preceded by royal commands. This is the case in SAA 10 8 (Parpola 1993, 9–10), a letter from Ištar-šumu-ēreš:

rev. <sup>28</sup> *u<sub>3</sub> ša LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> iš-pur-an-ni* <sup>29</sup> *ma-a u<sub>2</sub>-šur a-na a-a-e-ša<sub>2</sub>* IS LIP *a-na-šar* <sup>30</sup> [*mi<sub>3</sub>*]-i-nu  
*ša<sub>2</sub> ši-ti-ni a-na LUGAL EN-ia* <sup>31</sup> *a-šap-pa-ra*

royal command (with an introduction):

rev. <sup>28.-29</sup> And as to the king, my lord, wrote to me: ‘Watch from where (...)!’

promise: rev. <sup>29.-31</sup> I will watch (and) write to the king, my lord, what it is.

A very similar pattern, albeit likely abridged, is present in SAA 10 122 (Parpola 1993, 104) in obv. 6.- rev. 1. and in an analogous version with a solar eclipse in SAA 10 347 (Parpola 1993, 282) – here the royal command is clearly referred to in rev. 7’. (the promise is located in rev. 7’.-11’.)

Slightly different is SAA 10 357 (Parpola 1993, 295), sent by Mār-Ištar. The king sends a command not to perform rituals in the month of Ulūlu, which is intercalary. Mār-Ištar reports on the initial state of the sacrifices and then on the change caused by the arrival of the royal order:

rev. <sup>6</sup>(...) *ki-i un-qu* <sup>7</sup>*ša* MAN EN-*ia*<sub>2</sub> *a-mur-u-ni* <sup>8</sup>*te<sub>3</sub>-e-mu a-sa-kan* <sup>9</sup>*re-eḥ-ti par-ši ša* ITI.KIN  
<sup>10</sup>ITI *ša e-ra-ban-ni* <sup>11</sup>*ki-i ša* MAN *be-li*<sub>2</sub> <sup>12</sup>*iš-pur-an-ni ep-pu-šu*<sub>2</sub>

report: rev. <sup>6-8</sup>When I saw the sealed order of the king, my lord, I issued an order.

promise: rev. <sup>9-12</sup>The remaining ceremonies of Ulūlu will be performed in the coming month,  
(just) as the king, my lord, wrote to me.

On the face of it, the final passage of SAA 13 187 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 158–159) could be considered a promise of obedience after a report of a partially accomplished task, following the royal command, but the command itself should not be interpreted as a command, and the whole letter is more of a thank-you note.

SAA 13 178 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 147–148) includes a report about a partially finished task and a promise to complete it after an unavoidable delay:

rev. <sup>16</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.SAG *ša*<sub>2</sub> LUGAL EN-*ia* *iš-pu-ra* <sup>17</sup>*aš-ša-bat-su a-du-u ina ŠU m.DUMU-d.15* <sup>18</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-šu-uz-za-ku ki-i ša<sub>2</sub> dul-la-ni* <sup>19</sup>*nu-uq-ta-at-tu-u<sub>2</sub> it-ti-ia* <sup>20</sup>*ab-ba-kaš-šu*

report (with reference to a question or command from the king):

rev. <sup>16-17</sup>As to the eunuch about which the king, my lord, wrote to me – I captured him.

explanation (or indirect rejection of an order?):

rev. <sup>17-18</sup>I am now working together with Mār-Ištar.

promise: rev. <sup>18-20</sup>When we have finished with our task, I will bring him with me.

The king can also make promises, as in SAA 13 1 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 4). The king makes a reference to having been informed (obv. <sup>12</sup>*tu-ša<sub>2</sub>-aš<sub>2</sub>-man-ni-i-ni*), so it seems he was not replying to a petition with a simple request but more to a letter describing some sort of irregularities:

obv. <sup>13</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a an-nu-ri* <sup>14</sup>*a-šap-pa-ra* <sup>15</sup>NA<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ *ut-ta-ri* <sup>16</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> taq-ba-a-ni* <sup>17</sup>*em-mu-ru* <sup>18</sup>*u am-mar ša a-na* <sup>19</sup>*dul-li na-da-a-nu* <sup>20</sup>DU<sub>10</sub>.GA-*u-ni*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*id-du-nu*

promise: obv. <sup>13</sup>-rev. <sup>1</sup>Now, I will write (and) they will inspect the surplus stones you told me about, and they will give you as many as are necessary for your work.

The ‘they will inspect’ (obv. <sup>17</sup>*em-mu-ru*) could also be translated as ‘select’ or ‘find’, but I chose the least specific option. The emphasis on inspecting/selecting the stones might suggest that the letter was written in response to a complaint or report of an issue that included a request to verify the true state of the things.

There is also a peculiar kind of promise in the scholarly letters, more amply attested here than elsewhere – the promises made by the gods.

In SAA 10 111<sup>89</sup> (Parpola 1993, 89–90) lists some very practical advice regarding the invasion of Mannea<sup>90</sup>, which the sender, Bēl-ušēzib, follows with reassurances based on religious imagery. I will introduce them shortly, as they foreshadow the divine promise that comes after them:

rev. <sup>4</sup>(...) d.EN *ḥa-pu-u<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> KUR.man-na-a-a* <sup>5</sup>[*iq-ta-bi*] *u<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub>-an-nu a-na ŠU.2 LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia*  
<sup>6</sup>[*i-man-ni*]

reassurance: rev. <sup>4-6</sup>Bēl [has ordered] the destruction of Mannea. For the second time, he is [handing it] over into the hands of the king, my lord.

rev. <sup>19</sup>LUGAL DINGIR.MEŠ d.AMAR.UTU *it-ti LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia sa-lim* <sup>20</sup>*mim-ma ma-la*  
LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>-a i-qab-bu-u<sub>2</sub> ip-pu-uš* <sup>21</sup>*ina GIŠ.GU.ZA-ka aš<sub>2</sub>-ba-a-ta LU<sub>2</sub>.KUR<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ-ka*  
<sup>22</sup>*ta-kam<sub>2</sub>-mu a-a-bi-ka ta-kaš-šad u<sub>3</sub> KUR KUR<sub>2</sub>-i-ka* <sup>23</sup>*ta-šal-lal*

reassurance: rev. <sup>19-23</sup>Marduk, the king of the gods, is reconciled with the king, my lord. Whatever the king, my lord, says, he will accomplish. (As) you sit on your throne, you will defeat your enemies, conquer your foes, and plunder the land of your adversary<sup>91</sup>.

Following these reassurances, Bēl-ušēzib fires the deadliest weapon in his arsenal. Bēl personally delivers his promise for the king:

rev. <sup>23</sup>(...) d.EN *iq-ta-bi um-ma a-ki-i* <sup>24</sup>m.d.AMAR.UTU-DUB-NUMUN m.AN.ŠAR-ŠEŠ-SUM-na  
LUGAL KUR.*aš-š[ur.KI]* <sup>25</sup>*ina GIŠ.GU.ZA u<sub>3</sub> ina ŠA<sub>3</sub> a-ši-ib u<sub>3</sub> KUR.[KUR]* <sup>re26</sup>*gab-bi a-na ŠU.2-šu<sub>2</sub> 'a<sup>1</sup>-man-ni*

promise (with an introduction):

rev. <sup>23.-re26</sup>Bēl spoke as follows: ‘Just as Marduk-šāpik-zēri – Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, (sits on his) throne. And (while) he is seated on (his throne), I will deliver all the lands into his hands!’

<sup>89</sup> This letter is written in the Babylonian dialect.

<sup>90</sup> In a fascinating and also very pragmatic passage, Bēl-ušēzib admits that he actually does not know that much about the land in term of its geographic conditions (?) (rev. <sup>9</sup>(...) *a-na-ku mu-šu-u<sub>2</sub> u e-re-bi* <sup>10</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> 'KUR' [u]l-li-ti ul idi* – ‘I do not know the exit nor the entrance of that land [yo]nder.’).

<sup>91</sup> Literally, the word *nakru* from rev. 21. reappears here for the second time.

It is very striking that while in rev. 21.-23., while Bēl-ušēzib speaks in his own name, he refers to the king in the second person (you sg. are sitting, your sg. throne, your sg. enemies, and so on), Bēl refers to the king in the third person singular – although this might be simply because Bēl is conceived as not speaking to the king directly. In other passages as well as in the Assyrian prophecies, the gods typically address the kings with the help of second-person forms.

A similar example is SAA 10 284 (Parpola 1993, 220–221), although here the promise is much more reminiscent of the Assyrian prophecies (reasonably so, as it is made by Ištār of Arba'il and Ištār of Niniveh). The letter is only fragmentary, and the main topic remains unknown, although based on the moves surrounding the promise, a denunciation is likely:

rev. <sup>4</sup>*u*<sub>3</sub> *ki-i ša d.15 ša*<sub>2</sub> N[INA.KI] <sup>5</sup>*d.15 ša*<sub>2</sub> *arba-il*<sub>3</sub> *iq-ba-a[n-ni]* <sup>6</sup>*ma-a ša*<sub>2</sub> TA LUGAL *be-li-n[i]*  
<sup>7</sup>*la ke-nu-ni ma-a* TA KUR.*aš-šur*.[KI] <sup>8</sup>*ni<sup>1</sup>-na-saḥ-šu*<sub>2</sub> ∴ *ket-tu-ma*<sup>1</sup> <sup>9</sup>TA KUR.*aš-šur*.KI *li-*  
*in-ni-s[iḥ<sub>2</sub>]*

argument (with a divine promise):

rev. <sup>4-8</sup>And as Ištār of N[iniveh] (and) Ištār of Arba'il have said: 'Whoever is not loyal to the king, ou[r] lord, we will eradicate him from Assyria!'

advice: rev. <sup>8-9</sup>Indeed! He should be expelled from Assyria!

In a similar tone, the gods also warn the kings of impending doom, as in the letters sent by Nabû-rēḫtu-ušur to Esarhaddon (SAA 16 59, SAA 60 60, SAA 16 61; see also the discussion of a promise from SAA 16 59 below).

In SAA 10 180 (Parpola 1993, 144), the royal command is clearly treated by the sender as a promise:

obv. <sup>10</sup>*5 U<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ a-ga-a* <sup>11</sup>LUGAL *iq-ta-bi* <sup>12</sup>*um-ma E<sub>2</sub> a-na* <sup>13</sup>*m.na-ši-ru* <sup>14</sup>*in-na-a* <sup>15</sup>*mam-ma E<sub>2</sub>*  
<sup>be16</sup>*ul id-di-na*

reminder (with a royal promise):

obv. <sup>10-14</sup>These five days ago, the king said: 'Give a house to Nāširu!'

complaint: obv. <sup>15-be16</sup>(But) nobody has given me a house.

A very similar case is attested in SAA 10 182 (Parpola 1993, 145–147). Although the passage is damaged, it should be clear enough that the promises, realised as royal commands, are treated by the exalted speaker himself as the evidence of his favour:

obv. <sup>23</sup>*a-<sup>1</sup>na-ku<sup>1</sup> a-na ur-di-ia ṭa-ab-tu [le-pu-uš]* <sup>24</sup>*[ma-a] 1-et : a-bu-tu<sub>2</sub> ša ṭa-ab-ti-i[a ši]-<sup>1</sup>i<sup>1</sup>* <sup>25</sup>*[re-*  
*d]u-tu ša um-ma-nu-ti [lap-qi-da-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>]* <sup>26</sup>*[2-tu<sub>2</sub> ṭa-a]b-te : a-di ina KUR.aš-šur.KI [šu-tu-ni]*  
<sup>27</sup>*[u<sup>2</sup> qur]-ba-an-ni is-s[e-niš]* <sup>28</sup>*ma-a ki-ma ṭa-ab-tu-uš la <sup>1</sup>e<sup>1</sup>-[pu-u]š* <sup>29</sup>*ma-a ina pa-an*  
DINGIR.MEŠ *ma-ḥe-e-<sup>1</sup>re<sup>1</sup>*

declaration of intent:

obv. <sup>23</sup>['Let me do] a favour to my servant!'

promise: obv. <sup>24</sup>['Th]is [my] first favour: [Let me assign him] to [the leader]ship of the scholars!'.]

promise: obv. <sup>26</sup>['The second fa]vour: As long as [he] is in Assyria, m[ay he be cl]ose to m[e]!'.]

argument: obv. <sup>28-29</sup>['If I d[id] not do him a favour, would that please the gods?'].

The entire letter is a lengthy and elaborate petition of the scholar who apparently lost favour with the crown prince. That he inserts the promise of the king before progressing to the actual complaint should illustrate how seriously he took it.

Similar passage is also attested in the letter of thanks written by Adad-šumu-ušur (SAA 10 227, rev. 15.-16.) . It is because of the power of the king that his commands create a promise of new reality for his subjects.

What is conspicuously missing from this group, are the promises following requests. This is only natural in view of the position of scholars and priests, who depended on the king. They had realistically nothing to offer apart from their loyalty and prayers – and since I excluded promises of loyalty, I will discuss them together with requests following denunciations and complaints.

Few promises of the types discussed above are present in the political correspondence of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal.

SAA 16 59 is a denunciation with warning about a conspiracy, sent by Nabû-rēhtu-ušur (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 52–53). It recounts a divine promise spoken through the mouth of a prophesising slave-girl:

rev. <sup>2'</sup>(...) GEME<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> m.EN-PAP-PAP ina q[a-n]i ša<sub>2</sub> 'URU'.K[ASKAL].2 ina U[GU x x x x]  
<sup>3'</sup>ma-a TA ŠA<sub>3</sub> ITI.SIG<sub>4</sub> sa-ar-ḫa-at ma-a da-ba-bu SIG<sub>5</sub> ina UGU-ḫi <sup>4'</sup>ta-da-bu-bu ma-a a-  
bat d.PA.TUG<sub>2</sub> šī-i ma-a LUGAL-u-tu a-na m.sa-si-i <sup>5'</sup>ma-a MU NUMUN ša<sub>2</sub> m.d.30-  
PAP.MEŠ-SU u<sub>2</sub>-ḫal-la-qa

denunciation (with a divine promise):

rev. <sup>2'.-5'</sup>A slave girl of Bēl-aḫu-ušur [...] in the ou[tski]rts of Ḫ[ar]rān upon [...]: 'Since the month of Simanu she has been in trance (?) and speaks nice words about (this/him): "This is the work of Nusku! The kingship belongs to Sāsī. I will destroy the name and the seed of Sennacherib!"'. '

The prophecy is of course very alarming – and the king is advised to question the participants and perform a ritual (*dullu* in rev. 7'.) on the account of the would-be prophetess.

SAA 16 86 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 80–81) is a badly damaged complaint or a denunciation. The issue at hand is the work of the house of ‘your lords’, about which the king threatens the sender, Nabû-šumu-iškun. Not much deterred, the sender likely proceeds to complain about others who stand in the way of the smooth performance of his duties, although the following passage is broken. When the letter is legible again, Nabû-šumu-iškun promises obedience:

rev. <sup>14'</sup>[x x x] *an-na-ka* <sup>15'</sup>[*re-e*]*h-te dul-li ša* E<sub>2</sub>-EN.MEŠ-*ia*<sub>2</sub> <sup>16'</sup>*e-pa-aš*<sub>2</sub> *ma-šar-tu* <sup>17'</sup>*ša* E<sub>2</sub>-EN.MEŠ-*ia*<sub>2</sub> *a-na-šar*

promise: rev. <sup>14'-17'</sup>[?] I will do the rest of the work of the house of my lords here. I will keep the watch of the house of my lords.

It is not unlikely that the promise is not complete.

A possible promise of compliance is located in rev. 5.-6. of SAA 16 140 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 124–125). The preceding move is in all likelihood an accusation (?) from the king.

The small number of promises from this part of the corpus is also easily explained. Considering the patterns observed so far, it is not unusual that they would be missing from the part of correspondence that is so fragmentary. At the same time, the reactions to royal commands also include reports of finished work and it seems here that they are the majority here. On the other hand, promises are less likely in denunciations, of which SAA 16 contains a fair number.

## Neo-Babylonian letters in the Neo-Assyrian royal correspondence

The most interesting promises among the Neo-Babylonian letters in the Assyrian corpus are of course the ones that appear tantalisingly in very damaged passages.

Two oldest promises are dated to the reign of Sargon II. SAA 17 47 (Dietrich 2003, 44) is a fragmentarily preserved petition from Rēmūtu:

rev. <sup>8'</sup>*ša*<sub>2</sub> LUGAL *iq-bu-u*<sub>2</sub> *um-ma hi-bil-tu*<sub>2</sub> <sup>9'</sup>*lu-šal-lim* ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ IGI.2-*šu*<sub>2</sub>-*nu a-da-ru* <sup>10'</sup>*hi-bil-tu mim-ma ul u*<sub>2</sub>-*šal-lim* <sup>11'</sup>LUGAL *liš-pu-ram-ma hi-bil-tu*<sub>2</sub> <sup>12'</sup>*lu-šal-lim*

reminder (with a royal promise):

rev. <sup>8'-9'</sup>Of which the king said: ‘I will compensate for the damage!’

complaint: rev. <sup>9'-10'</sup>(But) the eyes of the people have darkened, (because) nothing was compensated.

request: rev. <sup>11'-12'</sup>May the king send (word and) I will make it good (again)!

Rēmūtu is proposing to restore the damages on his own, despite the initial promise of the Assyrian king. The only preserved passage in the obverse refers to work on Esagila – it is not impossible that the fragment in the reverse still refers to the same topic.

Amēl-Nabû, the sender of SAA 17 48 (Dietrich 2003, 44–45) seems much more aggrieved:

obv. <sup>5</sup>LUGAL *iq-ta-ba-a um-ma a-lik* <sup>6</sup>*e-reš e-še-du ka-lak-ka-a-ti* <sup>7</sup>*mu-ul u<sub>3</sub> ina GISSU-ia a-kul*  
<sup>8</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.A-KIN *ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL lil-li-kam<sub>2</sub>-ma* <sup>9</sup>*li-mur qaq-qar ša<sub>2</sub> AD-ia ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL* <sup>10</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-tir-ram-*  
*ma id-din-a[n-ni]* <sup>11</sup>*ak-ka-a-a-i m.man-nu-ki-i-u[r-ba-il-lim]* <sup>12</sup>*ni-du-tu u<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub>-lik-šu<sub>2</sub>*

reminder (with a royal promise):

obv. <sup>5-7</sup>The king said to me: ‘Go, plant, fill (your) storehouses with harvest and eat under my protection!’

complaint (realised as a request):

obv. <sup>8-12</sup>May messenger of the king come and see how Mannu-kī-A[rba’il] turned the land of my father, which the king restored to me, (completely) barren!

The promise given by the king is technically a command – but it the privilege of the king to give commands that his subjects may consider promises. Amēl-Nabû then develops his complaint further by introducing concrete accusations against Mannu-kī-Arba’il in the next passage, but then he reminds the king about another of his promises:

obv. <sup>17</sup>*en-na LUGAL qaq-qar-a it-ta-[an-na]* <sup>18</sup>*um-ma mim-mu ul a-nam-s[i-iq]* <sup>19</sup>*a-du-u<sub>2</sub> ina la mi-*  
*ni a-m[a-ti x x]* <sup>20</sup>*a-na a-ka-li-ia u<sub>3</sub>* <sup>21</sup>*a-na ŠE.NUMUN-ia ŠE.BAR ia-a ’-n[u]*

reminder (with a royal promise):

obv. <sup>17-18</sup>Now, (when) the king gave the land [to me], (he said) as follows: ‘I will not choo[se] anything (from it).’

complaint: obv. <sup>19-21</sup>Now I am dy[ing] for lack of everything. [...] There is no grain for my nourishment (and) for my field (to seed).

The promise of the king serves here as an ironic counterpoint to the absolute destitution of the sender. The king promised not to choose anything from the possessions of Amēl-Nabû for himself, but the reality with which Amēl-Nabû has to cope is that there is absolutely nothing to choose, and not even his most basic needs are met. The broken promise is not only grounds for a complaint but can be repurposed as a powerful rhetoric device.

SAA 17 121 (Dietrich 2003, 108) is dated to the reign of Sennacherib and apparently addressed to the vizier (although the beginning is broken). Here the unfulfilled promise only triggers a request:



obv. <sup>9'</sup>[G]IR<sub>2</sub> KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR ša<sub>2</sub> a-na be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia<sub>2</sub> <sup>10'</sup>[a]q-bu-u<sub>2</sub> u be-li<sub>2</sub> <sup>11'</sup>[i]q-ba-a um-m[a] <sup>12'</sup>[i]p-pu-šu<sub>2</sub> GIR<sub>2</sub> KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR

rev. <sup>1'</sup>[bab-ba-n]u-u<sub>2</sub> be-li<sub>2</sub> <sup>2'</sup>li-pu-uš-ma <sup>3'</sup>li-ik-la

reminder (with a promise):

obv. <sup>9'.-12'</sup>The silver sword about which [I] spoke with my lord, and my lord [s]aid to me: ‘[I]t will be made.’ –

request: rev. <sup>12'</sup>-rev. <sup>3'</sup>May my lord make a [beauti]ful sword and keep (it for me).

It seems to me that the very mild character of this reminder is caused by the fact that the promise was only made after the sender specifically asked for the sword (as indicated by ‘about which I spoke to my lord’). Although the sender is very terse in his reminder, it seems that does not feel secure enough to make stronger demands, because he has imposed upon his ‘lord’.

SAA 18 60 (Reynolds 2003, 45–46) is dated to the reign of Esarhaddon. After a letter of complaint, in which the sender, Aqār-Bēl-lūmur, mentions that he is asking for help for the second time after being ignored once, he uses an apparently not very specific promise from the king as his final argument:

rev. <sup>11'</sup>ina pi-i-ka el-lu <sup>12'</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> d.UTU u d.AMAR.TU <sup>13'</sup>i-kar-ra-bu-uš <sup>14'</sup>in-da-aq-tu <sup>15'</sup>ma-a E<sub>2</sub>-ka  
<sup>re16'</sup>i-ra-ap-pi-iš <sup>re17'</sup>en-na ina GISSU LUGAL <sup>re18'</sup>be-<sup>1</sup>li<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-ia li-ir-pi-iš

reminder (with a promise):

rev. <sup>11.-re16'</sup>From your holy mouth, which is blessed by Šamaš and Marduk, fell (the words):  
‘Your household will increase.’

request: rev. <sup>re17.-re18'</sup>Now may it increase under the protection of the king, my lord.

The promise does not trigger a complaint but is used in the final passage of the letter as an argument. The switch between the second person form (in the compliment) and the third person form (in the request) is interesting. I do not think it was caused by the flattery – it is far more likely that the inalienable property of the body part triggered it.

A cited promise features in SAA 18 125 (Reynolds 2003, 102–104), also dated to the reign of Esarhaddon. It seems, however, that the sender considers the alleged royal promise to be a lie spread by political adversaries:

obv. <sup>4'</sup>(...) m.ša<sub>2</sub>-d.A[G-šu<sub>2</sub>-u x x x] <sup>5'</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> it-ti-š[u<sub>2</sub> x] ki-i u<sub>2</sub>-ša-a i-na pa-an LU<sub>2</sub>.TIN.TIR.KI.MEŠ  
u LU<sub>2</sub>.[UNUG.KI-a-a] <sup>6'</sup>i-dab-bu-ub um-ma LUGAL a-na m.ḫi-in-nu-mu il-tap-ru um-ma la  
t[a-pal-laḫ<sub>3</sub>] <sup>7'</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.GAR-UMUŠ-u<sub>2</sub>-ti ša<sub>2</sub> UNUG.KI at-tu-ka IGI-ia a-na mam-ma ša<sub>2</sub>-nam-[ma  
(x x)] <sup>8'</sup>ul a-nam-din u<sub>3</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> i-na UGU-ḫi-ka id-bu-bu-u<sub>2</sub> gab-bi-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu ina Š[U.2-ka] <sup>9'</sup>a-šak-  
kan

accusation (with a promise):

obv. <sup>4'.</sup><sup>9'</sup> Ša-Nabû-šû [...] who is with h[im] went out and spoke before the Babylonians and the [Urukians]: 'The king wrote to Hinnumu: "Do no[t fear!] The office of the governor of Uruk is yours! I will not give it to any other from my entourage. And those who speak against you – I will put them all in [your] han[ds]!"'.

SAA 18 5 (Reynolds 2003, 6–7) is a fragmentary letter from the king. It seems that it must have originally been an answer to a petition:

obv. <sup>1'</sup>*i-na* UGU DAM-ka <sup>2'</sup>*ša taš-pu-ra* <sup>3'</sup>*a-du-u<sub>2</sub> al-ta-par* <sup>4'</sup>*a-na* m.DINGIR-pi-i-ŠEŠ <sup>5'</sup>DAM-ka *u<sub>2</sub>-tar* <sup>6'</sup>*i-(eras.)-nam-dak-ka*

introduction: <sup>1'.</sup><sup>4'</sup> As to the wife about whom you wrote to me – I have now written to Ilu-pīja-ušur.

promise: <sup>5'.</sup><sup>6'</sup> He will return your wife to you.

As in the other parts of the corpus, promises are also used to express obedience.

The sender of SAA 17 43 (Dietrich 2003, 41–42), dated to the reign of Sargon II, reacts to a royal command (obv. 7.-10.) to send tablets:

obv. <sup>10</sup>(...) *en-na a-du-u<sub>2</sub> ul-tu* <sup>11</sup>UŠ-d.la-gu-du.KI *a-di* <sup>12</sup>*ša-sa-na-ku*.KI *a-ta-mar as-si-niq* <sup>13</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> ina* GIŠ.LE.U<sub>5</sub>.UM.MEŠ <sup>14</sup>*al-ta-tar ki-i ša<sub>2</sub>* LUGAL *iq-bu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>15</sup>*ina* ŠU.2 m.LUGAL-*a-mur-an-ni-im-ma* <sup>16</sup>*a-na* LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia u<sub>2</sub>-šeb-bi-la*

report: obv. <sup>10.</sup><sup>14</sup> Now, I have inspected (the temples) from Nēmed-Laguda to Šasanaku and have written the tablets.

promise: obv. <sup>14.</sup><sup>16</sup> As the king said, I will bring them to the king, my lord, in the hands of Šarru-ēmuranni.

A promise follows a royal command also in SAA 17 128<sup>92</sup> (Dietrich 2003, 111) – the promise in obv. 9.-11.

There promises to write when there is more to report are in SAA 17 115 (obv. 13.-16.), SAA 18 85 (Reynolds 2003, 68) – the promise in obv. 14.-15., SAA 18 111 (Reynolds 2003, 89–90) – the promise is located in e. 1.-2. In SAA 17 146 (obv. 11'.-rev. 1.) the messages are promised after the king has won, and likely refer to the promise of more information.

SAA 17 52 (Dietrich 2003, 48) and SAA 17 53 (Dietrich 2003, 49–50)<sup>93</sup> are duplicates of the same petition sent to the king (52) and to the chief eunuch (53). The apologetic passages in both letters were

<sup>92</sup> Dated to the reign of Sennacherib.

<sup>93</sup> Both dated to the reign of Sennacherib.

already discussed in the chapter on excuses and apologies – in both letters they are followed by more request- or even supplication-like passages. In both letters, these requests or supplications are directly followed by promises of loyalty. These are not the only promises of loyalty in the entire corpus, but here the context is entirely clear so that they deserve slightly more attention. The fact that they are preceded by series of requests indicates that they play the same role that promises usually do in letters to social equals – they are meant to persuade the addressee to grant the request:

rev. <sup>16'</sup>*a-na-ku* ŠEŠ.MEŠ-*e-a* DUMU.ME[Š-*e-a*] <sup>17'</sup>*u* EN.MEŠ *ta-ab-te-e-[a]* <sup>18'</sup>*ni-il-li-kam<sub>2</sub>-ma*  
GIR<sub>3</sub>.2 *ša<sub>2</sub>* LUG[AL EN-*ni*] <sup>19'</sup>*niš-ši-iq u* IR<sub>3</sub>-*u<sub>2</sub>-ti* *ša<sub>2</sub>* LU[GAL] <sup>20'</sup>EN-*ni ni-pu-uš*

promise: rev. <sup>16'-.20'</sup>Me, my brothers, [my] sons and [my] friends will come and kiss the feet of the ki[ng, our lord] and serve the ki[ng], our lord!

The same promise is located in SAA 17 53 rev. 14'-.18'. A promise of the same kind, but this time in a letter to a ‘brother’, is attested in SAA 17 148<sup>94</sup> (Dietrich 2003, 129). Although it is cited from a previous message of the addressee, the passage directly following it is completely damaged, so it is impossible to tell if it was a complaint, reminder or something else:

obv. <sup>5</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> m.ḥa-za-a* <sup>1</sup>-DINGIR *ša<sub>2</sub> taš-pu-r[a]* <sup>6</sup>*um-ma ki-i ta-ṣab-<sup>1</sup>ta-ma<sup>1</sup>* <sup>7</sup>*ki-i 1-en* ANŠE.KUR.RA  
[*u<sub>3</sub>*] <sup>8</sup>*ki-i 1-en* ANŠE *u<sub>3</sub> [ki-i 1-en UDU<sup>?</sup>]* <sup>9</sup>*a-nam-dak-ka*

promise: obv. <sup>5-9</sup>As to Ḥazā-il, about whom you wrote: ‘If you capture him, I will give you as an equivalent a horse [or] a donkey or [a sheep (?)]!’

Although the function of recounting the promise in a new letter is unclear, it is certainly obvious that it in the original letter it served as an argument for the request.

SAA 17 102 (Dietrich 2003, 92–93) is a petition with a recommendation. The sender, Badâ, perhaps even begins with a promise to repay the king for his favour – but the passage is badly broken and thus uncertain. In the reverse, the sender argues for the person he recommended by comparing him to himself and promising that he will be as good a choice as the sender himself. This is therefore not a typical promise, in that the obligation created is far vaguer – the sender guarantees for the person he recommends and thus stakes his reputation on his correct conduct, likely creating a sort of obligation on his part to make sure that the conduct is indeed correct. It is far more a promise of a particular kind of future, a stronger prediction in which the sender has a personal interest:

rev. <sup>11</sup>*mam-ma a-mat* *ša<sub>2</sub>* LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia* <sup>12</sup>*ki-i ia-a-ši ul i-nam-din* <sup>13</sup>*al-la m.a-qar-d*.EN-*lu-mur*  
<sup>14</sup>*šu-u<sub>2</sub> mim-ma* *ša<sub>2</sub>* LUGAL *ki-iš-pu* <sup>15</sup>*ip-pu-uš-ma a-na* LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia* <sup>16</sup>*i-nam-din*

promise (as an argument):

<sup>94</sup> Dated to the reign of Sargon II.

rev. <sup>11.-16</sup> Nobody answers the commands of the king, my lord, as good as I – (that is) aside from Aqa-Bēl-lūmur! Whatever the king plans, he will carry it out and deliver to the king, my lord.

### Early Neo-Babylonian governor's archive from Nippur

7 promises from this part of the corpus are recounted as yet unfulfilled. They are followed either by complaints or simply serve as reminders.

In No. 10 (Cole 1996b, 56–57) what follows is evidently a complaint:

obv. <sup>4</sup>ul ki-i pi an-ni-i' taq-ba-a' <sup>5</sup>um-ma mim-ma ši-bu-ut-ka <sup>6</sup>šup-ram-ma lu-še-bi-lak-ka <sup>7</sup>3-šu<sub>2</sub>  
 LU<sub>2</sub>.DUMU-šip-ri-ia a-na <sup>8</sup>pa-ni-ka it-tal-ka <sup>9</sup>mim-ma ul tu-še-bi-la <sup>10</sup>a-du-u<sub>2</sub> 2 MA.NA  
 KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR ina ŠU.2 <sup>11</sup>m.ba-la-tu ul-te-bi-lak-ka <sup>12</sup>GIŠ.KIN ʾmuḥ<sup>1</sup>-ram-ma kin-ʾnu<sup>1</sup> <sup>13</sup>a-  
 ʾna pi<sup>1</sup>-i KI.LAM ʾha-a'-tu<sup>1</sup>

reminder (with a promise):

obv. <sup>4.-6</sup> Did you not write me as follows: 'Whatever you want, write to me and I will send it to you.'

complaint: obv. <sup>7.-9</sup> Three times (already) my messenger has gone to you, (but) you have not sent me anything.

introduction: obv. <sup>10.-11</sup> Now I'm sending you 2 minas of silver in the hands of Balātu.

request: obv. <sup>12.-13</sup> Receive and certify for me *kiškanû*-wood according to the cash price.

In this way, the promise that has not been kept is grounds for a compliant that precedes a very specific request.

In another similar case, No. 36 (Cole 1996b, 104–105), the sender reacts to a promise with a reminder:

obv. <sup>10</sup>UD.MEŠ-us-su ŠEŠ-u<sub>2</sub>-a <sup>11</sup>i-šap-pa-ra <sup>12</sup>um-ma man-ʾnu<sup>1</sup> <sup>be13</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.a-me-lu[t-tu]

rev. <sup>1</sup>še-bu-u<sub>2</sub> [a-na] <sup>2</sup>pa-ni-ia šup-r[a] <sup>3</sup>am-me-ni m.NUMUN-ib-ni <sup>4</sup>aš<sub>2</sub>-pu-rak-kam<sub>2</sub>-ma <sup>5</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.a-  
 mi-lut-ʾtu<sup>1</sup> <sup>6</sup>la ta-ad-da-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>

reminder: obv. <sup>10</sup>-rev. <sup>2</sup> Daily my brother writes to me: 'Who(ever) wants a slav[e], writ[e to] me!'

reproach: rev. <sup>3.-6</sup> Why did I send Zēru-ibni to you and you did not give him a slave?

This is especially striking since the sender makes an analogical promise at the beginning of the letter (obv. 6.-8.) to his 'brother'. A caravan has come, and the addressee is encouraged to have his pick. Although not mentioned explicitly, perhaps an expectation of reciprocity is hidden behind the promises to fulfil mutual requests.

A curious case is No. 26 (Cole 1996b, 87–88), a letter exchanged between brothers. It might be an indication that the declarations that senders will go somewhere that are so often to be found in the letters

were indeed taken to be promises – except the sender is not entirely certain whether the addressee did go where he intended to or not:

obv. <sup>5</sup>*ul*<sup>1</sup> *ki-i pi-i an-ri<sup>1</sup>-i* <sup>6</sup>[Š]EŠ-*u<sub>2</sub>-a*<sup>1</sup> *iq-ba-a*<sup>7</sup> *um-ma*<sup>1</sup> *a-na pa-an*<sup>8</sup> [LU<sub>2</sub>].*bi<sup>1</sup>-ri-ta a-ne<sub>2</sub>-eḫ-*  
*ḫi-si*<sup>9</sup> *[en-na]* *am<sup>1</sup>-me-ni* ŠEŠ-*u<sub>2</sub>-a*<sup>10</sup> *[la il]-lik-ma u<sub>2</sub>-ši-ib*<sup>11</sup> *[am-m]e-ni ul-tu U<sub>4</sub>-mu*<sup>12</sup> [ŠEŠ-  
*u<sub>2</sub>]-a* *il<sup>1</sup>-l[i]-ku*<sup>13</sup> [LU<sub>2</sub>.D]UMU-šip-*ri<sup>1</sup>-[šu<sub>2</sub>]*<sup>14</sup> *[l]a<sup>2</sup> il<sup>2</sup>-[tap<sup>2</sup>-ra<sup>2</sup>]*

reminder (with a promise):

obv. <sup>5-8</sup>Did my brother not write me as follows: ‘I will go back to the [people of] Birītu!’

reproach: obv. <sup>9-10</sup>[Now], why did my brother [not g]o (but) stay?

reproach: obv. <sup>11-14</sup>[W]hy did my [brother n]ot se[nt (?) his [me]ssenger since the day he went?

Quite a lot depends on restoring missing fragments here, though. Theoretically, the first reproach could perhaps also function without the restored negation: ‘Why did my brother go and stayed (without doing anything)?’. In any case, at the crux of this sequence is the need for communication. Including one’s plans in a letter gives them more weight, and as sending a letter is a whole process involving a messenger and likely a scribe – the addressee’s expectations are going to be higher. Moves included in correspondence have to be, after all, deliberate and likely deliberated. But it is the communication that is of essence – without the next letter, the sender cannot even be sure where his addressee is. The reproaches and excuses for not writing appear so frequently for exactly the same reason.

The sender of No. 51 (Cole 1996b, 127–128) only follows his reminder about a promise with a request:

rev. <sup>2</sup>(...) *ul*<sup>3</sup> *ki-i pi-i an-ni-i*<sup>4</sup> ŠEŠ-*u<sub>2</sub>-a* *iš-pu-ra*<sup>5</sup> *um-ma a-du-u<sub>2</sub>* ŠE.BAR *ma-la*<sup>6</sup> *še-ba-a-ti*<sup>7</sup> *lu-*  
*u<sub>2</sub>-še-bi-lak-ka a-du-u<sub>2</sub>*<sup>8</sup> ANŠE.A.AB.BA *a-na*<sup>9</sup> *pa-ni-ka al-tap-ra*<sup>10</sup> <sup>4 ½</sup> MA.NA *ki-i pi*<sup>10</sup> *ša<sub>2</sub>*  
KI.LAM *a-kan-ri<sup>1</sup>-ka*<sup>11</sup> *muḫ-ḫi-ram-ri<sup>1</sup>*<sup>re12</sup> *šu<sub>2</sub>-bil*

reminder (with a promise):

rev. <sup>2-7</sup>Did not my brother write to me as follows: ‘Now, let me send you as much grain as you wish!’?

introduction: rev. <sup>8-9</sup>I have sent you a camel.

request: rev. <sup>10-re12</sup>Offer me (grain worth) 4 ½ minas according to the market price there and bring (it).

It is no less than the sender taking up the addressee on his offer.

In No. 97 (Cole 1996b, 202–203), a letter to a ‘lord’, the promise made by the ‘lord’ occurs at the beginning of a petition-like request:

rev. <sup>1</sup>ŠE<sup>1</sup>.BAR ša<sub>2</sub> be-li<sub>2</sub> iš-pu-ra <sup>2</sup>[u]m-ma a-du-u<sub>2</sub> a-nam-din <sup>3</sup>[m]an-nu ša<sub>2</sub> UGU-ka-ma <sup>4</sup>[u<sub>3</sub>]  
 ša<sub>2</sub> šu-pa-la-ka <sup>5</sup>[a]-šib ŠE<sup>1</sup>.BAR be-li<sub>2</sub> it-tan-nu-<sup>6</sup>šū<sup>1</sup> <sup>6</sup>a<sup>1</sup>-na-ku i-de ki-i ŠUKU<sup>1</sup>.HI.<sup>7</sup>A<sup>1</sup>  
<sup>7</sup>i<sup>1</sup>-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-šū<sub>2</sub>-u<sub>2</sub> gab-bi <sup>8</sup>a<sup>1</sup>-šem-mu-ma um-ma a-ga-<sup>9</sup>a<sup>1</sup> <sup>9</sup>[NIG<sub>2</sub>].<sup>10</sup>GA<sup>1</sup> LU<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> be-li<sub>2</sub>-šū<sub>2</sub> ri-  
 mu-<sup>11</sup>tu<sup>1</sup> <sup>10</sup>i-ri<sup>1</sup>-mu-<sup>12</sup>šū<sup>1</sup> en-na i-na pa-an <sup>11</sup>m.DU<sup>1</sup>-NUMUN be-li<sub>2</sub> lid-din-ma lu-<sup>12</sup>u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-uš-šib-  
 ma <sup>12</sup>lu-u<sub>2</sub> ha-ma-ka a-na-ku

introduction (with a promise):

rev. <sup>1-2</sup>As to the (fields of) grain<sup>95</sup> about which my lord wrote: ‘Now I will give (it).’ –

argument (from equal treatment):

rev. <sup>3-5</sup>[Wh]oever is [se]ttled upstream [or] downstream of you, my lord has given him (fields of) grain.

argument: rev. <sup>6-7</sup>I know that there are fields for sustenance.

argument: rev. <sup>7-10</sup>I hear everyone (say) as follows: ‘This is [the pro]perty of a man whose lord has given him a grant!’

request: rev. <sup>10-12</sup>Now, may my lord give it before Mukīn-zēri, so that I may settle (there) and be a dependant<sup>96</sup>.

It is interesting that the promise cited by the sender is not enough. The sender points out that his lord gives fields to everybody (equal treatment is presumed). There is also no reason not to give a field since the sender knows that there are allotments available (second argument). The availability of land is further supported by what *everybody* says about grants. Having defended his position sufficiently, the sender then finally makes his request, including the detail that is has to be done before Mukīn-zēri, whom Cole 1996b, 68 in note to lines 16. and 26. identifies with the leader of Bīt-Amūkāni and the future king of Babylon.

Only a reminder of one’s own promise is preserved in No. 43 (Cole 1996b, 116–117), the following passage is badly damaged. The promise in No. 100 (Cole 1996b, 208–209) could be considered implicit. The sender complains about his inability to extract grain from a third party, about whom the addressee previously said that he would give it to the sender (obv. 5.-6.). This letter is discussed in detail in the chapter on excuses.

<sup>95</sup> Cole 1996b, 203-204, note to lines 20.–26. argues that the word behind the logogram ŠE.BAR has to stand for a field, and not just for grain. The question of how it was to be read is open. I know of no instance in which *uṭṭatu* has anything to do with fields.

<sup>96</sup> Thus Cole 1996b, 204, note to line 31. Also in the letters, *hamû* means ‘to be confident, to rely on’ (see CAD H, 72).

A fair number of promises is of course made after requests, including of course the same promise that is quoted in reminders – as in No. 33 (Cole 1996b, 97–99), in which this promise is, however, only implicit, although naturally enough, it follows a request:

rev. <sup>14</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> mi-nu-u<sub>2</sub> ši-bu-ut-ka* <sup>15</sup>*ina ŠU.2 m.DU<sub>3</sub>-ia* <sup>16</sup>*mus-sa-am-ma* <sup>17</sup>*šup-ru*

promise (implicit): rev. <sup>14-17</sup>.And whatever is your wish, indicate (it) and send in the hands of Bānāia.

The same implicit promise occurs in No. 52 rev. 2.-3. (Cole 1996b, 129)

The promise recounted in No. 2 (Cole 1996b, 40–42) should also be considered implicit:

obv. <sup>9</sup>(...) *ki-i* <sup>10</sup>*ŠEŠ-u<sub>2</sub>-tu* *u<sub>3</sub> MUN.HI.A* <sup>11</sup>*še-ba-ta* *LU<sub>2</sub> lu-u<sub>2</sub> ša-bit*

request (with an implicit promise):

obv. <sup>9-11</sup>.If you desire brotherhood and friendship, let the man be confined.

The implication of this argument is of course that the sender (who is the addressee of the present letter) is willing to supply both brotherhood and friendship provided his partner complies. A similar case features in No. 24 (Cole 1996b, 84–85), but here the implicit promise of argument from brotherhood is also followed by a series of explicit promises:

rev. <sup>2</sup>*[a-d]u ki-i ŠEŠ* <sup>3</sup>*u<sub>3</sub>* <sup>1</sup>*LU<sub>2</sub>.be-li<sub>2</sub> MUN.HI.A* <sup>4</sup>*[a]t-ta ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ-ia* <sup>5</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-šur-ma*  
*KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR-ka* <sup>6</sup>*i-na* <sup>1</sup>*GIN<sub>2</sub> IGI.4.GAL<sub>2</sub>.LA* <sup>7</sup>*luṭ-ṭir-ka* <sup>8</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> 10-šu<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>-ka* <sup>9</sup>*LU<sub>2</sub> mam-ma-*  
*nu-u<sub>2</sub>-ka* <sup>10</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> a-ta-mar* <sup>11</sup>*a-paṭ-ṭar-am-ma* <sup>12</sup>*a-kil-lak-ka* <sup>be13</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> GU<sub>4</sub>-ka* <sup>be14</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> ḥab-tu* <sup>be15</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-*  
*tar-rak-ṛka*<sup>1</sup>

request (with an argument from brotherhood and friendship, an implicit promise):

rev. <sup>2-5</sup>.[No]w, if [y]ou are my brother and my friend, watch my men!

promise: rev. <sup>5-7</sup>.I will pay you back the silver with 25% for every shekel.

promise: rev. <sup>8-12</sup>.And I will release ten of your men – anybody whom I have seen

promise: rev. <sup>be13-be15</sup>.and I will give you back the ox of yours which has been plundered.

It would be interesting to know what exactly motivated the sender to promise so much for the return of his ransomed men – perhaps the group was exceptionally large?

An explicit promise after an argument from brotherhood occurs in No. 75 obv. 12.-rev. 2. (Cole 1996b, 163–164), where it is quoted from the previous letter by the addressee and countered with a request that it is the addressee who should write to the (present) sender.

In other cases, the promises that occur after the requests can be very short and to the point, as in No. 45 (Cole 1996b, 120–121):

rev. <sup>9</sup>*ḥa-an-tiš a-ṛdī la LU<sub>2</sub>.ḥar-ra-a-nu* <sup>10</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> ṽLU<sub>2</sub>.ša<sub>2</sub>-kin ṽil-la-ku-u<sub>2</sub>-[ni]* <sup>11</sup>*i-[dī]-ma al-kam<sub>2</sub>-ma*  
<sup>12</sup>*ṽa-na<sup>1</sup>-din*

request: rev. <sup>9-11</sup>Quickly, before the caravan of the prefect comes, mak[e a de]posit and come!

promise: rev. <sup>12</sup>I will give (it to you).

In No. 60 (Cole 1996b, 141–143) the request with the following promise occurs after an account of a conflict about the quality oxen. The sender swears (rev. 4.-5.) that he chose quality animals, and nonetheless:

rev. <sup>6</sup>*en-na la tu-maš-ša<sub>2</sub>-ra-a-ni* <sup>7</sup>*pu-tu-ra-i-ma LU<sub>2</sub>.sar-ru-ti* <sup>8</sup>*lu-qab-bil-ma lud-dak-ka* <sup>9</sup>*a-na-ku*  
*gab-bi-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu i-de*

request: rev. <sup>6-7</sup>Do not abandon me! Ransom me!

promise: rev. <sup>7-8</sup>I will accept and give them to you.

argument: rev. <sup>9</sup>I know them all.

A long petition-like series of requests for a slave, with numerous alternative suggestions in case the ‘lord’ did not agree<sup>97</sup>, occurs in No. 83 (Cole 1996b, 177–179). The sender mentions twice that he would guarantee for the slaves (rev. 10. and 20.), and even promises to compensate for the costs<sup>98</sup> incurred by the persons chosen to hand over the slave.

Promise of compensation could also be used as an argument for a request in cases of ransom, as in No. 84 (Cole 1996b, 180–181):

obv. <sup>12</sup>*a-na-ku la-x-x* <sup>13</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> a-na piṭ<sub>2</sub>-ṽrī* <sup>14</sup>*ṽta-ad<sup>1</sup>-din*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-šal-lam-ga*

promise: obv. <sup>12</sup>-rev. <sup>1</sup>I will compensate you for the [...] that you gave as ransom.

In No. 44 (Cole 1996b, 118–119) the promise occurs after a request, but the request happens as a result of the sender being forced to reject the request of his ‘lord’, the addressee:

rev. <sup>1</sup>(...) *kī-i<sup>1</sup> 2.[l]a pa-ni ṽLU<sub>2</sub>.ka-ṽre-e<sup>1</sup> 3.[l]a maḥ-ra al-ṽkam<sub>2</sub>-ma<sup>1</sup> 4.ṽKU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR 1 MA.ṽNA*  
*x GIN<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> 5.u me-ṽreš-ti gab-bi<sup>1</sup> 6.a-ṽnam<sup>1</sup>-dak-ṽka*

<sup>97</sup> Cole 1996b, 179, n. to lines 14.-15. and 47. suggests that the sender is so eager to receive a slave because he wants to adopt him.

<sup>98</sup> The exact nature of the costs is unknown – the part of the line where the object to be compensated for would be located is damaged.



indirect rejection (with an explanation):

rev. <sup>1-3</sup>Because the investors do [n]ot like this

request: rev. <sup>3</sup>come

promise: rev. <sup>4-6</sup>and I will give you one mina and x shekel of silver or the entire consignment.

Not much is seen in terms of promises to write. The only certain attestation is No. 22 (Cole 1996b, 79–80), in which the sender explicitly mentions the news in the introduction of the topic:

obv. <sup>4</sup>*aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> ṭe<sub>3</sub>-e-mu* <sup>5</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub>* LU<sub>2</sub>.*kal-du ša<sub>2</sub> taš-pur* <sup>6</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.DUMU-*šip-ri-ia ša<sub>2</sub> a-na* <sup>7</sup>m.DU-NUMUN  
*il-lik* <sup>8</sup>*a-di-kan-na ul iḫ-ḫi-si* <sup>9</sup>*mi-nu-u<sub>2</sub> a-na* <sup>10</sup>ŠEŠ-*ia lu-uš-pu-ra* <sup>11</sup>U<sub>4</sub>-*mu* LU<sub>2</sub>.DUMU-*šip-ri-*  
*ia* <sup>12</sup>[*it*]-*te-eḫ-si* <sup>13</sup>*a-na* ŠEŠ-*ia* <sup>be14</sup>*a-šap-par*

introduction (with an explanation):

obv. <sup>4-8</sup>As to the report about the Chaldeans, about which you wrote – my messenger, who had gone to Mukīn-zēri, has not come back yet.

excuse: obv. <sup>9</sup>What could I have written my brother?

promise: obv. <sup>11-be14</sup>I will send my messenger to my brother on the (very) day he has come back.

There seems to also be only one promise after a request from the other party in No. 30 (Cole 1996b, 93–94) – but not before a demand to be paid back:

obv. <sup>4</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub>* LU<sub>2</sub>.*šab-ṛtu<sup>1</sup>-tu* <sup>5</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> taš-pur um-ma pu-ut-su-nu* <sup>6</sup>*ṛmaḫ<sup>1</sup>-[š]i a-du-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>7</sup>*lul-lik-ma ṭe<sub>3</sub>-ṛe-mu<sup>1</sup>*  
<sup>8</sup>AD.MEŠ-*šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>9</sup>*lul-ma-ad-du* <sup>10</sup>*ki-i ma-ad* KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR <sup>11</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> ina* UGU-*ḫi-ṛšu<sup>1</sup>-nu* <sup>12</sup>*a-*  
*par-ra-ṛsu<sup>1</sup> a-na* <sup>13</sup>*ŠU.2<sup>1</sup>-ia i-ṭir<sub>5</sub>*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*ul am-me-[ṛ]ik-ṛka<sup>1</sup>* <sup>2</sup>*al-[l]a-kam<sub>2</sub>-m[a]* <sup>3</sup>*a-ṛpaṭ-ṭar<sup>1</sup>-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu-tu*

introduction (with a request):

obv. <sup>4-6</sup>As to the captives about whom you wrote to me: ‘Gu[aran]tee their safety!’

suggestion: obv. <sup>7</sup>Let me go and find out what their ‘fathers’ think.

request (of compensation, conditional):

obv. <sup>10-13</sup>If it is much silver that I will have to set aside for them, pay me back.

promise: rev. <sup>1</sup>I will not de[l]ay.

promise: rev. <sup>2-3</sup>I will [g]o an[d] ransom them.

The first move reporting on the future actions on the sender should not just be considered a simple expression of plans. The sender is suggesting an alternative course of action – to first find out how much

the ransoming would cost. If the prize would be too much, he requests that he be compensated – but he nonetheless makes a promise not to delay and ransom the captives. I think this should be understood as a temporal sequence: the sender finds out the price of the ransom, a compensation for the sender is arranged, the sender ransoms the captives.

The patterns discernible in this part of the corpus are the effect of the relations based on reciprocity and mutual favours enjoyed by the governor and the various merchants and slavers with whom he had dealings. The number of attestations does not allow any direct correlation between the terms of address and expectations of reciprocity and mutual aid but promises certainly also played a role in requests directed at ‘lords’ (Nos. 60 and 83). Even in cases of hierarchical dependence, the cooperations of the ‘servants’ depended on reciprocal aid.

### Neo-Babylonian institutional correspondence

Several promises in the institutional corpus are recounted as unfulfilled by the senders, but the context is different each time and worth a short investigation. In No. 89 (Levavi 2018, 334–335), a petition of the decurions to the temple administrator. The issue at hand is the work that has or has not been guaranteed by different parties – the decurions do not agree to take responsibility for the entire work of the king, while others are unwilling to do so. They ask the temple administrator to guarantee for the work and remind him about his promise:

rev. <sup>6</sup>*at-ta pu-ut dul-lu* EN *liš-šī* d.UTU <sup>7</sup>*ki*-i *a-di ni-ḥe-le-eq u ina ŠU.2-ka* <sup>8</sup>*ni*-il-lu-*u*<sub>2</sub> *at-ta*  
 EN *iq-ta-bi* <sup>9</sup>*um-ma* *ʾa*-na-ku LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ *a-kan*-[*na a-na-šar*?] <sup>re10</sup>*en-na* LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ  
 EN *li-iš-š[ur]*

request: rev. <sup>6</sup>May you, lord, guarantee for the work.

complaint (with an oath):

rev. <sup>6-8</sup>By Šamaš, we will perish and slip away from your hands.

reminder (with a promise):

rev. <sup>8-9</sup>You, lord, have said: ‘I will [watch] my servants he[re]!’

request: rev. <sup>re10</sup>Now, let the lord watc[h] (his) servants!

The promise is also interesting for the light it might shed on the relations between the workers and the supervisors in the temple context. It almost sounds as if the decurions expected a client-like relationship with the temple administrator, who they want to take care of their interests, although, admittedly, the situation they are facing seems to be fairly dire. In any case, the presence of certain expectations with regards to one’s superior is evident. This is reminiscent of some of the petitioners in the royal Assyrian corpus, who reminding the king of his promises.

A similar promise to take care of the ‘servant’ is attested in No. 29 (Levavi 2018, 263–264). Here, however, the promise is explicitly identified as an oath by the sender:

obv. <sup>8</sup>(...) <sup>9</sup>*re-e-mu* EN *ki-i* 10.*ir-šu-u<sub>2</sub>* EN *it-te-<sup>r</sup>ma<sup>1</sup>-a<sup>1</sup>* <sup>11</sup>*ki-i la* LU<sub>2</sub>.EN-MUN-*ia* <sup>12</sup>*at-ta a-<sup>r</sup>dī<sup>1</sup>*  
*dum-qi<sub>2</sub>-ka* <sup>13</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-ba-<sup>1</sup>u-u<sub>2</sub> u* MUN.HI.A <sup>14</sup>*ep<sub>2</sub>-pu-šak-ka*

pre-request (with a promise):

obv. <sup>8-14</sup>And when my lord had mercy (on me), he swore: ‘Are you not my friend? I will take care of you and treat you well.’

This is then followed by a request to for a messenger to come to the temple and reassure the persons there. Why this is necessary is entirely unclear, as the passage referring to the initial problem is broken away, together with the name of the sender and the addressee. Nonetheless, the declarations about the treatment of ‘servants’ by the ‘lords’ were taken seriously. The question that remains is whether an oath is more of an obligation than a promise. One would expect this to be likely, and yet what was sworn here is recounted in the same manner as what was said in No. 89 above.

In No. 155 (Levavi 2018, 417–418) the broken promise is a part of a complaint – although its likely central part is broken:

obv. *a-na* TIN.TIR.KI *ki-i* 6.*tal-li-ku ki-i* <sup>7</sup>*tu-{ud}-sa-dir-ma* <sup>8</sup>*it-ti-ia<sub>2</sub>* <sup>9</sup>*ta-ad-dab-bu-ub* <sup>10</sup>*um-ma*  
LU<sub>2</sub>.A-KIN-*ka* <sup>11</sup>*il<sup>1</sup>-li-kam-ma* [GU<sub>4</sub>(.MEŠ)] <sup>1</sup>*lu<sup>1</sup>-ud-da-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>12</sup>[GU<sub>4</sub>(.MEŠ)] <sup>1</sup>*ul ta<sup>1</sup>-ad-da-*  
*aš<sub>2</sub>šu<sub>2</sub>*

(2 lines broken)

rev. <sup>1</sup>[*a-na*] TIN.TIR.KI <sup>2</sup>[*tal-l*]*a-ku* <sup>3</sup>*š<sub>2</sub>a la<sup>1</sup>* GU<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ <sup>4</sup>*la ta-al-la-ku* <sup>5</sup>*ki-i na-kut-tu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>6</sup>*a-na ŠEŠ-*  
*ia<sub>2</sub> al-tap-ra* <sup>7</sup>GU<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ *ma-la* <sup>8</sup>*ta-nam-din-nu* <sup>9</sup>KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR-*šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>10</sup>*a-nam-dak-ka*

introduction (with an offer or a promise):

obv. <sup>5-11</sup>When you went to Babylon as usual, he spoke to me as follows: ‘Your messenger should come. I will give him [ox(en)].’

complaint: obv. <sup>12</sup>(But) you did not give him [the ox(en)].

(break)

request (strongly worded):

rev. <sup>1-4</sup>(When) [you] go to Babylon, do not go without oxen.

post-request:

rev. <sup>5-6</sup>I am writing to my brother with great urgency.

promise: rev. <sup>7-10</sup> I will pay you silver for the oxen you will give me.

The first promise that ended up being ignored might actually not be a promise but an offer – there is too little of the original exchange left to tell. Nonetheless, the sender felt that the offer or promise was binding and that he can therefore fall back on it to make a request. Since there is the gap of two lines it is hard to say what follows, but considering how strongly the request is phrased, I do think it likely that this was originally a complaint. The request from the sender is then followed by the *nakuttu*-close, added for emphasis, and his own promise to pay the addressee back. This sequence is not unlike the promises and requests from the archive of the *šandabakku* – and indeed Levavi 2018, 417 suggests that the sender, Bēl-iddina, did not work for the temple. This would explain why it was necessary for him to negotiate for favours with the aid of promises. The position of Ninurta-šarru-ušur, the royal agent and quasi-outsider within the temple administration, whose emotional appeals for help, complaints, and threats are discussed in the relevant chapters of this work, was equally fraught.

A slightly different kind of negotiations, perhaps simpler, is attested in No. 161 (Levavi 2018, 426–427). The sender answers the temple administrator and the royal agent, who made an offer which included a promise:

obv. <sup>7</sup>(...) *um-ma* <sup>8</sup>*ina bar-sip*.KI *nid-dak-kam-ma* <sup>9</sup>*a-kan-na* <sup>1</sup>*qer<sup>1</sup>-ru-ub-tu<sub>4</sub>* <sup>10</sup>*ina ša<sub>2</sub>* URU *ša<sub>2</sub>*  
ŠE.BAR *i-bi-in-na-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>*

offer (a promise and a request):

obv. <sup>7-10</sup> ‘We will give (the grain) to you in Borsippa. Give it to us here in a town where (there is) grain.’

The offer is successful and in the present letter the sender follows the reminder of the promise with the report of his own arrangements and his own promise to do as the addressees ask (rev. 5.-11.)

A promise included in what is likely the first stage of a similar kind of offer as the ones seen above is attested in No. 49 (Levavi 2018, 286–288):

rev. <sup>11</sup>*u ki-i ši-ba-a-<sup>1</sup>ti<sup>1</sup>* <sup>12</sup>*mu-kar-ri-ša<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>re13</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub>* KU<sub>3</sub>.GI <sup>re14</sup>*šu-bi-lam-ma*

e. <sup>1</sup>[Z]U<sub>2</sub>.LUM.MA *a-na* 1 GUR *a<sub>4</sub>* <sup>2</sup>*lu-še-bi-lak-ka*

offer (with a promise):

rev. <sup>11-e</sup> <sup>2</sup> ‘And if you want, send me a golden incense bowl. I will send you dates, one kurru (for every shekel of its worth).

There is a fair number of promises following requests. In No. 1 (Levavi 2018, 230–231) a sender is likely trying to arrange for a transaction that would reduce transportation costs. Following the list of goods he wishes to have transferred to a certain person, he adds:

rev. <sup>1</sup>*a-na-ku a-kan-ni* <sup>2</sup>*mim-ma ma-la-<sup>1</sup>a<sup>1</sup>* <sup>3</sup>*še-ba-tu* <sup>4</sup>*lud-dak-ka*

promise: rev. <sup>1-4</sup>I will give you anything you want here.

A very similar promise is located after the request in No. 51 (Levavi 2018, 289–290):

rev. <sup>9</sup>*mim-ma ma-la ḥa-aš<sub>2</sub>-ḥa-ta* <sup>10</sup>*a-na ŠEŠ-ia<sub>2</sub> lu-še-bi-la*

promise: rev. <sup>9-10</sup>Whatever you need, I will send to my brother.

The letter is interesting since the sender also seems to promise on behalf of a third party that the addressee will be compensated for the sender's obligations (rev. 6.-7.).

The same form is found after a request in No. 68 (rev. 9.-12.), in a letter written to a 'father', and in No. 135 (rev. 5.-7.), in a letter exchanged between (multiple) 'brothers'.

A simple promise of compensation is equally likely, as already seen in No. 155 above. The sender of No. 46 (Levavi 2018, 283–284) requires sheep for the royal offerings, and if they are provided, he will compensate the addressee:

rev. <sup>5</sup>*aš<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub> at-te-eḥ-su* <sup>6</sup>*a-na-ku a-na ku-mu* <sup>7</sup>UDU.SISKUR.MEŠ <sup>8</sup>*a-nam-dak-ka*

promise: rev. <sup>5-8</sup>As soon as I have come back, I will pay you back for the (sheep) offerings.

No. 15 (Levavi 2018, 247–248) is somewhat unusual. The sender is writing to his 'father' (the temple scribe, in the body of the letter addressed as 'lord') to ask him for a favour – which seems to be the withholding of prebendary income. The letter starts with an allusion to a conflict between the sender and an otherwise unknown Nergal-iddina. The sender alleges that Nergal-iddina is idle (obv. 10.-11.) and declares that he should do his work, but the following part of the complaint is almost completely broken. The next legible passage is the argument for the request:

rev. <sup>3</sup>[M]UN.HI.A 'GAL<sup>1</sup>-ti <sup>4</sup>*a-na UGU-ḥi-ia<sub>2</sub> EN li-mi-n[i]* <sup>5</sup>*na-aš<sub>2</sub>-par-ti ša<sub>2</sub> EN-ia<sub>2</sub>* <sup>6</sup>*ana ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi al-lak* <sup>7</sup>*ina ŠU.2 EN-ia<sub>2</sub> liš-ša<sub>2</sub>-kin-ma* <sup>8</sup>*mam-ma 'KU<sub>3</sub>* <sup>1</sup>.BABBAR *pap-pa-si<sup>1</sup>-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>9</sup>*la i-nam-da-aš<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu-tu*

argument (for the request, from gratitude):

rev. <sup>3-4</sup>Let my lord coun[t] this as a great [fa]vour to me.

promise: rev. <sup>5-6</sup>I will serve my lord on account of this.

request: rev. <sup>7</sup>May (I) be placed in the hands of my lord.

request: rev. <sup>8-9</sup>May nobody give them the silver of their prebendary income.

This promise of service is typical for a vertical relationship: the sender cannot offer to reciprocate as it is not in his power. It is unclear whether the arguments follow or precede the actual request in this letter – although considering the length of the gap in the text (3 lines), the latter seems more likely.

The promise in No. 175 (Levavi 2018, 445–446) precedes the request, likely because the letter has a character of a petition, and the sender feels that he has to show his diligence and willingness to work before he dares ask for more workers:

obv. <sup>11</sup>.*ina* <sup>1</sup>*pu*<sup>1</sup>-*ul-ḥu* *ša*<sub>2</sub> <sup>1</sup>EN<sup>1</sup>.MEŠ-*e-a* <sup>12</sup>.*u*<sub>2</sub>-<sup>1</sup>*šu-uz-za*<sup>1</sup>-*a-nu* <sup>13</sup>.*um-ma*<sup>1</sup> ITL.MEŠ *a*<sub>4</sub> 3 *ni-pu-uš* <sup>14</sup>.*u*  
*na-aš*<sub>2</sub>-*par-ti* <sup>15</sup>.*ša*<sub>2</sub> EN-*ia*<sub>2</sub> *nu-šal-lim*

declaration of obedience:

rev. <sup>11.-12</sup>.We stand in fear of our lords,

promise:

rev. <sup>13.-15</sup>.saying: ‘We will work these three months and finish the task of our lords.’

The following moves focus on describing the diligence of the sender, and the relatively short request has a less prominent place. The difference between this and the letters with requests exchanged between ‘brothers’ is quite significant.

The sender of No. 201 (Levavi 2018, 475–476) is promising to show the addressee the culprits of theft:

obv. <sup>5</sup>.(...) KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR <sup>6</sup>.*ša*<sub>2</sub> d.UTU *ša*<sub>2</sub> *a-na* <sup>7</sup>GI.*bu-ra-ne*<sub>2</sub>-*e* SUM-*nu* <sup>8</sup>ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ *ša*<sub>2</sub> *iš-šu*<sup>1</sup>-  
*ma*<sup>1</sup> <sup>9</sup>.*ih-ḥi*-*{li}*-*liq*

rev. <sup>1</sup>.*al-kam*<sub>2</sub>-*ma* <sup>2</sup>.*lu-kal-lim-ka*

offer (with a promise):

obv. <sup>5</sup>.-rev. <sup>2</sup>.The silver of Šamaš that was given for the reed mats – the people who took (it) and fled – come! I will show (them) to you.

As expected in institutional correspondence with a hierarchical structure, some promises refer to obedience or compliance with the wishes of the other party. The interpretation of the promises is, however, impeded by the usual unwillingness of the senders to quote commands.

The sender of No. 17 (Levavi 2018, 249–250) is facing an accusation from his ‘father’ that the donkeys he sent were not received (obv. 5.-13.), and then mentions a ‘choice donkey’:

rev. <sup>3</sup>.*a-na* UGU-*ḥi* ANŠE *mur-ru-qu* <sup>4</sup>.*ša*<sub>2</sub> AD-*u*<sub>2</sub>-*a* *iš-pu-ra* <sup>5</sup>.*ul a-ka-šu*<sub>2</sub> <sup>6</sup>ANŠE *mur-ru-qu* <sup>7</sup>.*a-na*  
AD-*ia*<sub>2</sub> *a-šap-par-ra*

promise (with an introduction):

rev. <sup>3.-7</sup>.As to the choice donkey about which my father wrote to me – I will not delay. I will send the choice donkey to my father.

Although it cannot be certain, I would suggest it is quite probable that this was indeed a reaction to a command. A similar case is No. 106, obv. 8.-9., another letter to a ‘lord’ in which the possible command is not cited, as well as No. 191, rev. 8.-13., in which the sender promises to look for iron about which his ‘lord’ enquired or commanded him about.

A clear promise of obedience is made in No. 24 (Levavi 2018, 256–257), a letter to a ‘lord’:

rev. <sup>3</sup>*a-na* UGU-<sup>4</sup>*hi* <sup>4</sup>m.d.<sup>1</sup>*in-nin*<sup>1</sup>-<sup>1</sup>*ni*-<sup>1</sup>NUMUN<sup>1</sup>-DU<sup>3</sup> <sup>5</sup>A <sup>1</sup>m.E<sub>2</sub>.AN.NA<sup>1</sup>-<sup>1</sup>*li-pi-PAP*<sup>1</sup> <sup>6</sup>*ša*<sub>2</sub> EN <sup>1</sup>*iš*<sup>1</sup>-<sup>1</sup>*pur*  
*um-ma* <sup>7</sup>*a-na* *ku-um* m.d.EN-ŠEŠ-MU <sup>8</sup>*a*-<sup>1</sup>*bu-uk*<sup>1</sup>-<sup>2</sup>*šu*<sub>2</sub> *ina* ŠU.2 <sup>9</sup>EN-<sup>1</sup>*ia*<sub>2</sub><sup>?</sup> *ki-i ap-qid*<sup>1</sup> <sup>10</sup>*a*-  
<sup>1</sup>*nam-da-šu*<sub>2</sub>

introduction (with a command):

rev. <sup>3-8</sup>.As to Innin-zēru-ibni, the son of Eanna-līpi-ušur, about whom the lord wrote:  
‘Bring him instead of Bēl-aḫu-iddina!’ –

promise: rev. <sup>8-10</sup>.I will entrust and give him over to my lord.

A somewhat different promise of obedience is attested in No. 182 (Levavi 2018, 454). While the first reaction to the message from the addressee might be a reassurance, the second is an explicit promise of compliance:

obv. <sup>8</sup>(...) *ša*<sub>2</sub> EN <sup>9</sup>*iš-pu-ra a*-[*mur*] <sup>10</sup>*u*<sub>2</sub>-<sup>2</sup>*šu-uz*-[*za-ku*] <sup>11</sup>*u* EN.NUN-[*ti*] <sup>12</sup>*ša*<sub>2</sub> EN-[*ia*] <sup>13</sup>*a-nam-šar*  
rev. <sup>1</sup>*mim-ma* *ša*<sub>2</sub> EN <sup>2</sup>*iš-pu-ra* <sup>3</sup>*ul i-ša*<sub>2</sub>-*a*[*n-ni*] <sup>4</sup>*a-di* UGU *ša*<sub>2</sub> [*te*<sub>3</sub>-*mu*] <sup>5</sup>*ša*<sub>2</sub> EN-*ia il*-[*la-ku*]

introduction (with a reassurance?):

obv. <sup>8-13</sup>.As to what the lord wrote to me – L[ook?], [I am] working (here) and I will stand the  
wate[h] of [my] lord.

promise: rev. <sup>1-5</sup>.Nothing of what the lord wrote will be change[d] until [instructions] co[me].

## Late Babylonian private correspondence

The private correspondence also includes some unfulfilled promises, but they seem function as reminders and not really as complaints.

The sender of No. 57 (Hackl et al. 2014, 170–171), a letter to a brother, wishes to explicitly remind the addressee about his promise to pay:

rev. <sup>2</sup>*lu-u*<sub>2</sub> *i-da-tu*<sub>4</sub> <sup>3</sup>*ša*<sub>2</sub> *taq-ba-a* <sup>4</sup>*um-ma* <sup>4</sup>*a-na* U<sub>4</sub>-14-KAM 5.KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR *ša*<sub>2</sub> MUNUS.GU<sub>4</sub>.*bu-*  
*uš-tu*<sub>4</sub> <sup>5</sup>*a-na* *ma-la zi-it-ti-ka* <sup>6</sup>*a-na-ad-dak-ka* <sup>7</sup>*u*<sub>3</sub> *ri-kis qab-lu* <sup>8</sup>*a-na* m.<sup>1</sup>*lib*<sup>1</sup>-*lu*<sup>?</sup> <sup>9</sup>*a-na-ad-din*

reminder (about a promise):

rev. <sup>2-9</sup>Let it be known that you told me as follows: ‘On the 14<sup>th</sup> I will pay you silver for the cow according to your share and pay the military tax to Liblut.’

The letter ends here, and it is hard to say what else the sender could have meant.

The sender of No. 125 (Hackl et al. 2014, 239–240), a letter to a ‘father’ (later addressed as ‘lord’), seems also to be only reminding the addressee about their previous arrangement:

obv. <sup>6</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> EN iš-pu-[ra] <sup>7</sup>um-ma šu-pur-<sup>8</sup>am<sup>1</sup>-[m]a <sup>8</sup>KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR lu-še-bi-lak-ka <sup>9</sup>a-mur m.d.30-na-din-ŠEŠ <sup>10</sup>a-na EN-ia al-tap-ra <sup>11</sup>5 MA.NA KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR EN <sup>12</sup>lu-še-bi-la <sup>13</sup>ki-<sup>14</sup>i<sup>1</sup> a-na ši-bu-ti-ia <sup>14</sup>al<sup>1</sup>-tak-nu-<sup>15</sup>uš<sup>1</sup> be<sup>15</sup>.<sup>16</sup>ina<sup>1</sup> ITI.APIN

rev. <sup>1</sup>KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR a-na EN-<sup>2</sup>ia<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup>u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-še-eb-bi-la <sup>3</sup>u ia-a-nu-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>4</sup>KU<sub>3</sub><sup>1</sup>.BABBAR ul i-ša<sub>2</sub>-an-ni <sup>5</sup>ina NA<sub>4</sub>.KIŠIB-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-šeb-bi-la

introduction (with a promise):

obv. <sup>6-8</sup>As to what the lord wrot[e]: ‘Write to me! I will send you silver.’

follow-up:

obv. <sup>9-10</sup>Look, I have sent Sîn-nādin-aḥḥē to my lord.

request: obv. <sup>11-12</sup>May my lord send me five minas of silver.

conditional promise:

obv. <sup>13</sup>-rev. <sup>2</sup>If I use it for my needs, I will bring it to my lord in the month of Araḥsamnu.

conditional promise:

rev. <sup>3-5</sup>If not, the (sum of silver) will be unchanged (and) I will bring it (to my lord) with his (= the lord’s) seal.

Citing the initial offer as grounds for his sending a messenger, the sender explicitly asks the addressee to make good on this promise. In exchange, he promises either to give the silver back with interest in the month of Araḥsamnu or, if he cannot for some unknown reason spend the five minas on an unspecified business venture, to give back the silver with an untouched seal of his ‘lord’. The ‘lord’ and ‘father’ is an unnamed governor of Borsippa, the *šākin lēmi*. Although the private and the public was never completely separate in ancient Mesopotamia, it could be suggested that the use of the more familiar ‘father’ in the introductory formula may point towards non-administrative activities.

A similar promise to pay back after a request is attested in No. 71 (Hackl et al. 2014, 185–186). The sender is writing to a woman, his ‘sister’, who is likely his wife. The sender reports that he is currently at the royal court, waiting for a decision, and cannot leave. He therefore needs money – for that he asks his wife, with the following promise:



obv. <sup>14</sup>U<sub>4</sub>-mu ša<sub>2</sub> er-ru-bu <sup>be15</sup>KU<sub>2</sub>.BABBAR-<sup>1</sup>ka<sup>1</sup> <sup>be16</sup>ul i-ša<sub>2</sub>-an-nu

rev. <sup>1</sup>a-na-ad-dak-ka <sup>2</sup>u ki-i KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR-ka <sup>3</sup>a-na ši-bu-ti-ia <sup>4</sup>al-ta-kan KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR <sup>5</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> al-la KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR-<sup>1</sup>ka<sup>1</sup> <sup>6</sup>ma-šu-u a-nam-dak-ka<sup>1</sup>

conditional promise: obv. <sup>14</sup>-rev. <sup>1</sup>I will give you your silver unchanged on the day I enter (the house).

conditional promise: rev. <sup>2-6</sup>And if I use the silver for my needs, I will give you more than your silver (that you have given me).

The two alternatives almost seem to form an offer or a request for permission – but in any case, the obligation to pay the silver back is definitely present.

A number of promises is used as arguments after requests.

No. 12 (Hackl et al. 2014, 121) is a promise to pay back:

rev. <sup>7</sup>u mi-nu-u<sub>2</sub> ki-i NIG<sub>2</sub>.KA<sub>9</sub> <sup>8</sup>it-ti-šu<sub>2</sub> EN ip-pu-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>9</sup>u ina UGU-<sup>hi</sup>š<sup>u</sup><sub>2</sub> il-la-a<sup>1</sup> <sup>10</sup>a-na-ku gab-bi <sup>11</sup>a-na EN-ia<sub>2</sub> e<sup>t</sup>-ter

promise: rev. <sup>7-11</sup>And whatever accounts my lord makes with him, and whatever he will owe, I will pay everything back to my lord.

The promise to give silver is also attested in No. 187 (Hackl et al. 2014, 295–296), a lengthy request to send a camel, for which the sender will give the silver to his ‘lord’ – interestingly enough, the intermediary who will carry the silver is specified as somebody with whom the lord should be pleased (rev. <sup>4</sup>a-na man-nu ša<sub>2</sub> pa-an be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia<sub>2</sub> <sup>5</sup>maḥ-ru).

The sender of No. 32 (Hackl et al. 2014, 144–145) reminds his ‘brother’ about his own request, which remains unfulfilled. The sender rebukes the addressee for his lack of cooperation and demands that the addressee finally pays out the 20 kurru of dates, including the transport costs. Finally, in the last preserved move of the letter, he promises to pay the addressee back:

rev. <sup>8</sup>KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR-<sup>šu</sup><sub>2</sub>-nu ina E.KI <sup>9</sup>ina ŠU.2<sup>1</sup>-<sup>šu</sup><sub>2</sub> e-<sup>t</sup>ir-ra<sup>1</sup>

promise: rev. <sup>8-9</sup>I will pay you back through him in Babylon.

It is interesting that one’s own request is here recounted much in the same way as promises of the addressees are recounted in other letters. Of course, the addressee is Madān-bēlu-ušur, the prominent slave of the Egibi family and their business agent<sup>99</sup>. It may be that the request was actually more of a command (note also the polite term of address of ‘brother’).

<sup>99</sup> For his role in the Egibi enterprises, see Hackl et al. 2014, 150 in the introduction to No. 38.

The sender of No. 34 asks his ‘lord’ (‘father’ in the introductory formula) to pay him back, and backs his request up with the following promise:

rev. <sup>6</sup>.*a-na-<sup>7</sup>ku<sup>1</sup> ša<sub>2</sub> KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR a<sub>4</sub><sup>7</sup>.<sup>3</sup> GIN<sub>2</sub> <sup>1</sup>hum<sup>1</sup>-mu-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>8</sup>.ma-aš-šar-tu<sub>4</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> EN-ia <sup>9</sup>.<sup>1</sup>a<sup>1</sup>-n[a-aš]-<sup>1</sup>šar<sup>1</sup>*

promise: rev. <sup>6</sup>.-<sup>9</sup>. I will k[ee]p the watch of my lord for the three and one fifth shekels.

The sender of No. 161 (Hackl et al. 2014, 275) uses both a warning (rev. 3.-7.) and a promise (obv. be12.-rev. 2.) to motivate the addressees to fulfil his request (discussed in more detail in the section on warnings).

No. 207 (Hackl et al. 2014, 315–316), from two three senders to two addressees, ‘brothers’, likely belongs to an institutional context – this is suggested above all by the forty minas of silver mentioned in the request. Such a staggering sum would hardly be owned by a private businessman. The context of both the request and the promise are entirely unclear<sup>100</sup>, but it seems that the senders are willing to guarantee work as long as the addressees bring the silver (obv. <sup>13</sup>(...) *pu-ut <ne<sub>2</sub>>-peš-<sup>1</sup>tu<sub>2</sub><sup>14</sup> na-ša<sub>2</sub>-a-ni a-na UGU-[ku-nu] <sup>15</sup>nu-qar-rib<sup>1</sup>-iš* - ‘We will guarantee for the work<sup>101</sup> (?). We will deliver (?) it for you.’).

No. 227 (Hackl et al. 2014, 336–337) includes a promise that is strongly reminiscent of the promises about protecting one’s servants from the institutional corpus, while at the same time seems to hint strongly at a patron-client relationship:

obv. <sup>9</sup>.*ku-tal-la-a at-ta<sup>10</sup> ku-tal-la-a paq-dak-ka<sup>11</sup> mam-ma pir-ki it-ti-ka<sup>12</sup> ul i-dab-bu-ub<sup>13</sup> ki-i pir-ki it-ti-ka<sup>14</sup> i-dab-bu-ub<sup>be15</sup> a-na m.NUMUN-ia*

rev. <sup>1</sup>.*A-šu<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> <sup>1</sup>m.d.UTU<sup>?</sup>-ŠEŠ-URU<sub>3</sub><sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup>qi<sub>2</sub>-bi*

declaration or promise:

obv. <sup>9</sup>.-<sup>10</sup>. You are my substitute. I am entrusting you with this position.

promise: obv. <sup>11</sup>.-<sup>12</sup>. Nobody will lodge wrongful claims about you!

instruction: obv. <sup>13</sup>.-rev. <sup>2</sup>. If (somebody) lodges improper claims about you, tell Zērīja, son of Šamaš(?) -aḥu-ušur!

<sup>100</sup> The letter belongs to the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum, and it belongs either to the Ekur archive in Nippur or to the palace archive in Babylon (Hackl et al. 2014, 315) According to the editors, the Nippur provenance seems more likely.

<sup>101</sup> For the possible translation of *nēpeštu* as ‘ritual’, see Hackl et al. 2014, 316, commentary to line 15.

As Jursa 2011, 26–28 convincingly argues, the meaning of *kutallu* in this letter should likely be interpreted as ‘client’, and not just as ‘substitute’<sup>102</sup>. The sender seems to guarantee for the freedom from wrongful claims made against the addressee – there is an explicit instruction to tell a specific person in case this happens. In the following part of the letter, rev. 7.-8., the addressee is enjoined to send rations to the house of the sender, clearly in connection with the position of the substitute (*ku-tal-la-a paq-dak-ka* occurs before the request in line 6.). The whole sequence is preceded by a report of audience with the crown prince – if this is associated with the same matter, the client/patron arrangement seems to be more than just a private transaction.

In No. 26 (Hackl et al. 2014, 139), the sender switches topic with reference to a previous letter from his ‘lord’, and reports that a third party has not yet arrived in Kiš. This is followed by a promise to write as soon as the third party arrives:

rev. <sup>6</sup>*a-mur U<sub>4</sub>-mu ša<sub>2</sub> il-li-ku* <sup>7</sup><*a-na*> EN-*ia<sub>2</sub> a-šap-pa-ru*

promise: rev. <sup>6-7</sup>Look, on the (very) day that he comes, I will write to my lord.

It is impossible to tell from the context what exactly preceded this report and the promise. A similar case is No. 73 (Hackl et al. 2014, 187–188), although it would seem slightly more likely here that the preceding letter included a command from the ‘father’:

obv. <sup>5</sup>*en-na a-na UGU di-iš-pi* <sup>6</sup>*u GIŠ.GEŠTIN ša<sub>2</sub> EN iš-pu-ra* <sup>7</sup>*a-mur a-na URU.UD.KIB.ʽNUNʽ.KI* <sup>8</sup>*a-na UGU-ḫi al-tap-ra* <sup>9</sup>*a-na-aš<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub>-am-ma a-na* <sup>11</sup>A[D-*ia<sub>2</sub> uš<sub>2</sub>-š*]e-*eb<sub>2</sub>-bi-lu*

introduction: obv. <sup>5-6</sup>Now, as to the honey and the wine about which the lord wrote to me –

report: obv. <sup>7-8</sup>Look, I wrote about this to Sippar.

promise: obv. <sup>9-11</sup>I will take (them) and [bri]ng to [my] fat[her].

The sender is in the middle of fulfilling a task, and promises to finish it, which would make anything other than a command far less likely.

A promise can also follow a question from the addressee, as in No. 100 (Hackl et al. 2014, 213–214). The addressee, addressed as ‘lord’, enquires about grain deliveries, to which the sender reacts with an explanation and a promise:

obv. <sup>7</sup>(...) *a-na UGU-ḫi ŠE.BAR* <sup>8</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> [EN iš-pu-ru um-ma]* <sup>9</sup>ŠE.BAR *a-na ʽ1-en rit<sup>1</sup>-t[a]* <sup>10</sup>*ul tu-še-bi-l[a-a]-nu* <sup>11</sup>ŠE.BAR *i-na ma-ʽaš<sub>2</sub>-kat<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-tu<sub>4</sub>* <sup>12</sup>*a-ga-a ul at-ra-at* <sup>13</sup>ŠE.BAR *a-na dul-lu ul-tu* <sup>14</sup>ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bi ni-te-pu-uš* <sup>be15</sup>[*ša*]-*aḫ-ḫa-ru-tu<sub>4</sub>* <sup>be16</sup>[*ni-ta-k*]a-*al u<sub>3</sub>*

<sup>102</sup> This would be the typical meaning of the word in this period, referring to the person who takes over the duties imposed on somebody else in exchange for profit.

rev. <sup>1</sup>*re-eh-tu*<sub>4</sub> 20 GUR ŠE.BAR <sup>2</sup>*a-na* EN-*ia nu-ṛul*<sup>1</sup>-[*te-b*]i-<sup>ṛ</sup>*la*<sup>1</sup> <sup>3</sup>*re-eh-tu*<sub>4</sub> ŠE.BAR <sup>ṛ</sup>*ša*<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> E[N-*ia*]  
<sup>4</sup>*ina* ITI.NE *u* ITI.[KIN *a-na*] <sup>5</sup>EN-*ia nu-še-e*[*b-bi-la*]

introduction (with a question):

obv. <sup>7-10</sup>As to the grain about which [the lord wrote as follows]: ‘Did you not se[n]d me the grain as a single delivery?’

explanation: obv. <sup>11</sup>-rev. <sup>2</sup>There is no more grain on this threshing floor. [We u]sed (it) up for the work (together with) other crops. The remaining 20 kurrus of grain we de[live]red to my lord.

promise: rev. <sup>3-5</sup>The rest of the grain of [my] lor[d] we will br[ing] in the months of Abu and E[lūlu].

The reason why I think this is a promise and not a simple declaration of plans is both because of the vertical relationship between the sender and the addressee, and because for all intents and purposes the sender is submitting his accounts to his superior. Since the likely background is the payment of imposts or dues after the harvest (the months of Abu would likely be the time during which cereals were put in storage after the spring harvest), it would be unlikely for these declarations not to be binding.

In two cases, the promise seems unprompted and refers to praying for the addressee. The first attestation is in No. 126 (Hackl et al. 2014, 240–242). As already noted by the editors, the function of this letter is purely phatic – and the addressee is travelling and thus away from Borsippa (see the blessing in lines 19.-20.<sup>103</sup>). In the first place the sender reassures the addressee that all is well with him as well as the family (Rē’indu, the sender’s brothers and sisters, and the entire household). In the next move, he promises to pray for the addressee, Rēmūt-Bēl (his ‘lord’, according to Hackl et al. 2014, 248, likely his father) on two particular dates:

obv. ?/rev. ? <sup>14</sup>*a-na* U<sub>4</sub>-4-KAM <sup>15</sup>*u*<sub>3</sub> U<sub>4</sub>-17-KAM <sup>16</sup>d.A-E<sub>2</sub> *a-na* TIN <sup>17</sup>ZI.MEŠ *ša*<sub>2</sub> EN-*ia*<sub>2</sub> <sup>18</sup>*a-ša*<sub>2</sub>-*al-lu*

promise: obv. ?/rev. ? <sup>14-18</sup>On the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> day, I will ask Mār-bīti for the life and wellbeing of my lord.

The same promise appears in No. 131 (Hackl et al. 2014, 247–248), sent by Rē’indu to [Rēmū]t-Bēl, her ‘brother’ (likely husband):

obv. <sup>7</sup>(...) U<sub>4</sub>-4-KAM <sup>8</sup>U<sub>4</sub>-17-KAM *ša*<sub>2</sub> ITI-*us-su* <sup>9</sup>[d.A-E<sub>2</sub>] <sup>ṛ</sup>*a*<sup>1</sup>-[*n*]a <sup>ṛ</sup>TIN ZI.MEŠ-*ka*<sup>1</sup> <sup>10</sup>[ŠEŠ-*ia*<sub>2</sub> *a-ša*<sub>2</sub>-*al-la*]

<sup>103</sup> Neither the edition by Hackl et al. (that primary copy was not collates) nor the (posthumous) first edition by Ungnad 1959-1960, 82 note where the reverse actually begins. I am forced to use the line numbers without any indication of obverse/reverse. If the reverse is simply uninscribed, this is nowhere indicated.

promise: obv. <sup>7.-10.</sup>On the 4<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> day of every month [I will ask Mār-bīti] for your life and well-being<sup>104</sup>.

The information absent from the previous letter is offered here – the prayers are to take place every month on the same day. It would be interesting to see what the almanacs say about these days – were they particularly suited for receiving divine favours? No days are lucky in the almanacs in every month (Livingstone 2013), but there is a certain curious coincidence. The *eššēšu* festival, still celebrated in Uruk until the Hellenistic period, was in the Middle Babylonian period celebrated on every 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> day of the month (Lissen 2004, 45). However, no specific dates are mentioned in connection with this festival during the Neo-Babylonian period<sup>105</sup>, so this hypothesis must remain tentative. There is the obvious question if this even should be considered a promise – as in its form not discernible from any other declarations of plans made in the corpus. I would argue that the subject matter should decide the issue here – just as the promises to pay are not simple empty words, so the promises to pray create obligations, expressing the care of the senders towards their addressee.

This is a very diverse group of letters, and thus assessing the evidence is not a simple matter. Certainly, some traces of cooperation based on mutual favours are discernible, as well as hints of hierarchies in business enterprises. Moreover, this part of the corpus provides the only evidence of private care and piety in the form of promises to pray for the well-being of absent family members.

## Literary Texts

There are only two passages from literary texts that can be with certainty interpreted as promises. The first example is the promise made to Ūta-napišti and his wife in the XI Tablet of the Epic of Gilgameš after the betrayal of Ea is revealed and Enlil receives his just rebuke (George 2003, 716–717):

203. *i-na pa-na m.U<sub>4</sub>-ZI a-me-lu-tum<sub>3</sub>-ma* ‘Previously, Ūta-napišti belonged to the mankind,

204. *e-nin-na-ma m.U<sub>4</sub>-ZI u MUNUS-šu<sub>2</sub> lu-u e-mu-u<sub>2</sub> ki-ma DINGIR.MEŠ na-ši-ma*

but now, Ūta-napišti and his woman will be like us, the gods!

205. *lu-u<sub>2</sub> a-šib-ma m.U<sub>4</sub>-ZI ina ru-u<sub>2</sub>-qi<sub>2</sub> ina pi-i ID<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ*

May he settle in the distant parts, at the mouth of the rivers!’

The promise made to Ūta-napišti is at the same time a command. It removes him from the rest of humanity even spatially – he is now to dwell far away, like the gods. The words are spoken by the chastised Enlil, and what he speaks, immediately becomes the reality:

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<sup>104</sup> The editors restore here [my brother] in line 10. However, since the second person singular possessive pronoun *-ka<sup>1</sup>* is legible in line 9., adding the term of address seems to me unnecessary,

<sup>105</sup> Nonetheless, some evidence from the Hellenistic period suggests that the festival was still celebrated on the same, traditional days (Lissen 2004, 49).

206. *il-qu-in-ni-ma ina ru-qi<sub>2</sub> ina KA ID.MEŠ uš-te-ši-bu-in-ni*

They took me and settled me at the mouth of the rivers.

A similar kind of ‘them’ would also fulfil the commands of a king.

The second promise is the one made to Marduk in the Creation Epic *enūma eliš*. After the plot of Tīāmat, he is asked to vanquish her, but before he acquiesces, he shrewdly makes his own demands for supreme sovereignty over the gods (Tablet II, lines 155-162). After much conferring, the gods decide to grant Marduk what he wishes. This happens in the following sequence in Tablet IV (Lambert 2013, 86–87):

3. *at-ta-ma kab-ta-ta i-na DINGIR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ*

4. *ši-mat-ka la ša-na-an se<sub>3</sub>-kar<sub>3</sub>-ka d.a-nu-um*

5. *d.AMAR.UTU kab-ta-ta i-na DINGIR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ*

6. *ši-mat-ka la ša-na-an se<sub>3</sub>-kar<sub>3</sub>-ka d.a-nu-um*

7. *iš-tu U<sub>4</sub>-mi-in-ma la in-nen-na-a qi<sub>2</sub>-bit-ka*

8. *šu-uš-qu-u<sub>2</sub> u<sub>3</sub> šu-uš-pu-lu ši-i lu-u<sub>2</sub> qat-ka*

9. *lu-u<sub>2</sub> ki-na-at ši-it pi-i-ka la sa-ra-as se<sub>3</sub>-kar<sub>3</sub>-ka*

10. *ma-am-ma-an i-na DINGIR.MEŠ i-tuk-ka la it-ti-iq*

11. *za-na-nu-tum er-šat pa-rak DINGIR.MEŠ-ma*

12. *a-šar sa-gi-šu-nu lu-u<sub>2</sub> ku-un aš<sub>2</sub>-ruk-ka*

13. *d.AMAR.UTU at-ta-ma mu-tir-ru gi-mil-li-ni*

14. *ni-id-din-ka šar-ru-tum kiš-šat kal gim-re-e-ti*

15. *ti-šab-ma i-na UKKIN lu-u<sub>2</sub> ša-qa<sub>2</sub>-ta a-mat-ka*

16. *GIŠ.TUKUL.MEŠ-ka a-a ip-pal-ṭu-u<sub>2</sub> li-ra-i-su na-ki-ri-ka*

17. *be-lum ša<sub>2</sub> tak-lu-ka na-piš-ta-šu gi-mil-ma*

18. *u<sub>3</sub> DINGIR ša<sub>2</sub> lem-ne<sub>2</sub>-e-ti i-ḥu-zu tu-bu-uk nap-šat-su*

flattery: <sup>3.-6.</sup>You are the most honoured among the gods! Your destiny is without equal, your word is (like that of) Anu. Marduk, you are the most honoured among the gods! Your destiny is without equal, your word is (like that of) Anu!

promise (as a command): <sup>7.-10.</sup>From this day onwards, your utterance cannot be changed! It is in your hands to exalt and to abase. Your utterance is true indeed, your word cannot be rebelled against. None of the gods will transgress your border (that you establish)!

promise (?): <sup>11.-12.</sup>The shrines of the gods need provisioning – may your place be established where their sanctuaries are.

flattery: <sup>13.</sup>You are Marduk, our avenger!

promise (summarised): <sup>14.</sup>We have given you kingship over everything, the whole universe!

blessing or a request: <sup>15.-18.</sup>Sit in the assembly, may your word be exalted. May your weapons not miss the mark, may they slaughter your enemies! O, Lord! Spare the life of one who has trusted you, (but) destroy the life of the god who has planned evil!

The promise includes numerous elements of praise, and the first four lines have a distinct hymnic character. After the lines with the actual promise, the gods seem to give Marduk additional blessings (line 16.). The final plea, to have mercy on the trusting and to punish the evildoer would almost seem like something an Assyrian scholar would say to the king – and one needs to bear in mind that the gods who speak mean here a very concrete destruction of a particular god. In the following lines, the gods and Marduk seem to carry out a trial run of his new powers (lines 21.-28.), and when making a constellation appear and disappear is successful, the gods announce that he is indeed king. Marduk can now set out to vanquish Tiāmat.

## Conclusions

The use of promises reveals the structures of power in the society – including that of the gods. The word of the king, his command, can be a promise – and the same is true of the gods. Together they form a group of agents whose word is shown to change reality in a more dramatic fashion than that of other persons.

Promises serve to declare obedience – either of persons who want to summarily execute the commands of their superiors, including the king, or by persons who want to negotiate the orders from the persons who have a higher position in the hierarchy.

In a less hierarchic setting, promises serve to establish the bounds of mutual obligation, creating communities whose expectations are managed by the principle of cooperation. The promises can be then used to demand what one believes is one's due on the basis of the favours one granted the other party before, or on the basis of what the other party offered.

In rare cases, promises to pray for absent members of the family – outside of the introductory formulae of the letters – testify to the personal piety and care for the loved ones.

## **PART II: IN THE EYE OF THE CYCLONE**



## COMPLAINTS

Complaints will be defined here in the broadest sense as pointing out an unacceptable state of affairs, most usually with the expectation that the person to whom one writes or speaks will do something about it. This is of course the consequence of the data that are available: literacy in Mesopotamia was not at a stage in which one writes about one's gripes and grievances for the sake of immortalising them for posterity – one grabs the stylus and kneads the clay only when one is sufficiently motivated by issues that one wants or needs to solve. The culture was still predominantly oral, despite the outpouring of literary and magical works (Veldhuis 2011). The speaker or writer thus describes certain events or actions as wrong. There are several reasons for the wrongness: the actions can be wrong because they negatively impact the sender, they can be wrong from the point of view of the administrative structures, they can be wrong from the scholarly point of view, or they can be wrong from the point of view of law.

All the aforementioned types of wrongness can be pointed out in complaints. Bemoaning insufficient grain storage, however, needs not be the same action as listing the crimes of a would-be schemer planning a *coup d'état*. For this reason, I will try to locate the differences between complaints in petitions and administrative letters on the one hand, and complaints in denunciations – as far as this is at all possible. After all, the authors of the petitions to the kings also accused others of being the reason for their misfortune. In view of the correspondence so often being damaged, the difference can at times be difficult to see. A categorisation based only on the form of complaints as individual moves is not possible – I will therefore consider entire sequences. Only the presence of an entire sequence will make this possible. For this reason, I will discard incomplete letters, and only introduce the particularly interesting sequences from the letters preserved fragmentarily after establishing the patterns observable on the basis of the fully preserved letters first.

A denunciation is for the purpose of the following work defined as a speech action in which the speaker approaches a higher authority with the intent to disclose some crimes or misconduct of a third party. The implication made by the speaker/writer is that the crimes or misconduct endanger the stability of the higher authority and the institution they represent. One would of course expect a denunciation to name the accused – otherwise it would not fulfil its function. Conversely, it does not need to name the speaker/sender. The petitions, on the other hand, may include accusations as well, and supply the names of the senders' adversaries – but the aim of the complaints in petitions is to serve as an argument for the sender's request. At least in theory, not all petitions must involve a complaint, although the fragmentary state of many of them precludes the verification of this hypothesis, and moreover, the complaint is always a strong argument for any request.

In addition to complaining about the person who wronged them or about the wrongs, speakers and writers can also complain about their misfortune without pointing fingers at any offenders in particular. Complaints and grumbings about the negative emotional state or jeremiads about all possible or only

select misfortunes befalling the sender/speaker can serve as additional arguments for the request they present a higher authority with. Conversely, the complaints addressed to ‘brothers’ can be expected to rely on reciprocity and the interpersonal relationship of both parties – unless an institution is involved.

Unavoidable elements of complaints are requests and arguments. Firstly, is it vital to ascertain if requests need to follow at all. Secondly, it is interesting to see whether they follow or precede the complaints – if the precede the complaints, the complaints would take the slot meant for an explanation and not be the central part of the entire sequence at all.

The arguments are also impossible to omit. They might follow complaints or follow requests, or appear between complaints and requests, connecting them in a single chain, or follow the complaints and request(s) both. Different types of interlocutors and epistolographic partners will find different kinds of arguments convincing, and their partners will plot their letters accordingly. One can expect more arguments from interpersonal relationships and mutual cooperation in a more private milieu, while arguments from authority could be more frequent in the institutional context. Jursa and Hackl (2015) observe a certain diachronic development in institutional epistolography – in the Neo-Babylonian correspondence the arguments from interpersonal relationships are by far rarer than in the corpus of institutional letters from Old-Babylonian Mari. But there are also different ways in which one can consider the relationship and the obligations that both sides may have, depending on the relative social position of both parties, and this also deserves attention.

Some formulae found in the petitions and denunciations in the Neo-Assyrian royal corpus were investigated by Ponchia 1989. The four following formulae appear frequently in the Assyrian and Babylonian correspondence from the royal archives and systematically play the same role (listed without variants, Ponchia 1989, 115–116):

*šarru uda kī* (‘the king knows that’; introduces new information<sup>106</sup>)

*šarru lū uda* (‘may the king know!’; concludes the preceding passage with new information)

*šumma/kī ina pān šarri maḥir* (‘if the king (so) pleases...’; introduces a suggestion)

*kī ša ina pān šarri maḥirūni lēpuš* (‘may the king do as he pleases’; emphasises that the preceding passage was a suggestion)

*kī ša šarru ilā’ūni lēpuš* (‘may the king do what he can’; indicates a request for royal intervention)

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<sup>106</sup> This is a very important observation. When senders wish to inform the Assyrian king about the particulars of their work or the location to which they were posted, they frequently introduce the new information with this formula. I call this move ‘pseudo-reminder’ throughout the present work. This is a polite rhetorical device that allows to save the king’s face by not pointing out that he could be ignorant of something.

Of these, the last two formulae tend to occur in the final position of a letter. Ponchia investigates these formulae from the point of view of the royal decision-making processes and the power of the king, but the implementation of these formulae by the senders should be equally interesting.

The complaints included in denunciations are problematic by virtue of their presence in a context in which the sender is above all trying to show that a certain person presents a danger to the king or to the social order imposed by the Assyrian empire. Although some parts of the denunciations are likely to seem almost like complaints when the senders emphasise how the villainous actions of the person being denounced affect them or the community they belong to, one must not forget that the overarching aim of the entire missive is the accusation. As in all periods and likely in every human culture, underlying some denunciations must have been a healthy dose of self-interest, and the wish to ruin the reputation and probably the life of a hated rival. Nonetheless, these considerations must remain in the background, as usually there is no evidence either way.

The interpretation of some denunciations can be complicated further by the fact that some of them are anonymous. Luukko (2018, 165 and 167–168) presents a convenient list. The letters that belong in this category are SAA 15 189+208, SAA 15 199, SAA 16 62-71, SAA 16 73?, SAA 16 75. SAA 16 76, SAA 16 95. He notes that the persons denounced in the anonymous letters are invariably of a very high rank, always Assyrians, and those of them (especially Sāsi) who repeatedly crop up might have been involved in the tumultuous events at the beginning of Esarhaddon's reign (2018, 168–169).

## Neo-Assyrian royal correspondence

### A. Complaints

SAA 19 89 (Luukko 2012b, 92–94) is not a letter of complaint – its main function is to present the position of the sender, Nergal-uballiṭ, in the conflict with another official, Bēl-aplu-iddina. It does, however, include single moves that count as complaints:

- obv. <sup>16</sup>(...) LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-da* <sup>17</sup>A.ŠA<sub>3</sub> *ša* E<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.SUKKAL A.ŠA.GA <sup>18</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> E<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.sar-ti-ni* ID<sub>2</sub>.*ra-da-nu* <sup>19</sup>*la e-bir* KASKAL-LUGAL *ša a-na* <sup>20</sup>URU.*a-za-ri i-la-ku-u-ni* <sup>22</sup>*ta-ḥu-mu-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* : *a-ki ia-a-<sup>1</sup>ši<sup>1</sup>* <sup>22</sup>LUGAL *a-na* KUR.*qu-u-e u<sub>2</sub>-bi-la-ni-ni* <sup>23</sup>UN.MEŠ KU[R *i*]p-ta-*ṣu* <sup>24</sup>A.ŠA<sub>3</sub>.G[A.MEŠ-*š*]u<sub>2</sub>-*n[u]* <sup>1</sup>*u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-šu-<sup>1</sup>ra x x<sup>1</sup>* <sup>25</sup>IR<sub>3</sub><sup>1</sup>.MEŠ-*ni ša* <sup>1</sup>m.d.EN<sup>1</sup>-A-AŠ EN-ŠU.2-*šu<sub>2</sub>-<sup>1</sup>nu<sup>1</sup>* <sup>26</sup>*la <sup>1</sup>il-ku la<sup>1</sup> ḥu-ra-du* <sup>27</sup>*i[na* UG]U-*šu<sub>2</sub> i-ba-ši pi-ni* <sup>28</sup>[x x] *ta-ḥu-me e-ta-ba-<sup>1</sup>ru<sup>1</sup>-ni* <sup>be29</sup>URU.ŠE *ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bi i-ša-ab-tu<sub>2</sub>*
- rev. <sup>1</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a a-ki* LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>* <sup>2</sup>*ina* UGU LU<sub>2</sub>.LUL.MEŠ *iš-pur-<sup>1</sup>an<sup>1</sup>-ni-ni* <sup>3</sup>*ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bi a-ta-lak a-ta-ta-ḥa* <sup>4</sup>IGI.2.MEŠ-*ia* URU.ŠE *a-ta-mar* <sup>5</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.AB.BA.MEŠ *ša* KUR DUMU-*na-gi-ie-e* <sup>6</sup>IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ-*ni ša* <sup>1</sup>LUGAL<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup>3 *ina* IGI-*ia i-za-zu* <sup>7</sup>*a-sa-al-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu nu-uk a-<sup>1</sup>le-e* LU<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> [*ša*] <sup>8</sup>*a-na* m.EN-A-AŠ *i-din-<sup>1</sup>aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-n[i]* <sup>9</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ-*ni* LU<sub>2</sub>.AB.BA.MEŠ *ša<sub>2</sub>* KUR <sup>10</sup>*ma-a* ŠEŠ.MEŠ-*ni ip-ta-ṣu* A.ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>11</sup>*ra-mu ma-a i-tu-ru-du* <sup>12</sup>*ša* m.EN-A-AŠ *ša da-a-ni*

URU.ŠE ša <sup>13</sup>ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi i-ša-ab-tu<sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a <sup>14</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.AB.BA.MEŠ 'ša<sup>1</sup> KUR DUMU-na-gi-ie-e  
<sup>15</sup>2 3 i-ba-ši [l]i-li-ku-u-ni <sup>16</sup>TA IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ-ni ša m.EN-A-AŠ ina IGI LUGAL EN-ia<sub>2</sub> <sup>17</sup>lu-u-ki-  
nu A.ŠA<sub>3</sub> ša man-ni šu-tu<sub>2</sub>-u-ni (eras.) <sup>18</sup>a-na di-ib-bi la šal-mu-ti ina IGI LUGAL EN-ia<sub>2</sub> <sup>19</sup>i-  
da-bu-bu : A.ŠA<sub>3</sub>.GA ša NAM URU.ur-zu-ḫi-na <sup>20</sup>šum<sub>2</sub>-ma ra-mu ša la EN-e šu-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>21</sup>man-nu  
ša A.ŠA<sub>3</sub>.<sup>1</sup>GA<sup>1</sup> ša-ḫi-tu<sub>2</sub>-u-ni i-bat-taq <sup>22</sup>i-na ši-<sup>1</sup>ia-a<sup>1</sup>-ri LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> <sup>23</sup>i-ša<sub>2</sub>-[am-me-e-ma  
šu]<sub>m<sub>2</sub></sub>-ma IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ-ni-ia <sup>24</sup>ib-[ta-qu-u-ni x-l]i-si

explanation (of geographic conditions, as a pseudo-reminder):

obv. <sup>16</sup>.-<sup>21</sup>. The king, my lord, knows (that) the fields of the vizier (and) the fields of the chief judge do not cross the river Radanu. Their border is king's road goes to the town of Azari.

explanation (of events):

obv. <sup>21</sup>.-be<sup>29</sup> When the king brought me to Que, they [re]moved the people of the la[nd] (and) [t]hei[r] fie[lds] were aban[doned]. They are the servants of Bēl-aplu-iddina, their guarantor. No state or military service is imposed up[o]n him. They [did not listen (?)] to our command, crossed the border and captured a village there.

follow-up (with an investigation):

rev. <sup>1</sup>.-<sup>8</sup> Now, when the king, my lord, sent me for the criminals, I went there, raised my eyes (and) saw the village. Several elders of the country, local people, servants of the king, were in my presence. I asked them as follows: 'Where is the man [who] gave it (the village) to Bēl-aplu-iddina?'.

complaint:

rev. <sup>9</sup>.-<sup>13</sup> Our servants, the elders of the land, said: 'They removed our brothers. Their field was abandoned. (The men) of Bēl-aplu-iddina came down (and) captured the village there by force.'.

request: rev. <sup>13</sup>.-<sup>17</sup> Now, [m]ay several the elders of the land, local people, come (and) testify against the servants of Bēl-aplu-iddina before the king, my lord.

accusation: rev. <sup>18</sup>.-<sup>19</sup> They are saying untrue things before the king, my lord!

argument (rhetorical questions, from correct administrative practice):

rev. <sup>20</sup>.-<sup>21</sup> If a field is abandoned, does it have no owner? Can anybody who wishes it (simply) parcel it out?

declaration of innocence (with a prediction):

rev. <sup>22</sup>.-<sup>24</sup> Tomorrow, the king my lord [will] h[ear] (about it, but) my servants [have] not pa[r]celled out anything [indeed].

The long sequence, in effect, gathers evidence for the innocence of the sender and his subordinates. The local elders are first questioned by himself, and then sent to the king in order to be confronted with the persons the sender accuses. Finally, the sender poses two rhetorical questions about the process of parcelling out fields and the matter of ownership – as elsewhere, these questions serve as emphasis. In the last legible move, the sender foresees that the king will soon hear about the matter and explicitly declares that his subordinates are not guilty of any misconduct. In the final part of the letter, which is quite damaged, the sender deals with what he predicts his adversary, Bēl-aplu-iddina, might say to the king.

SAA 19 91 (Luukko 2012b, 95–96) is very fragmentary and thus unsuited to full analysis. Nonetheless, it is interesting because of the way in which the sender introduces his complaint:

obv. <sup>4</sup>*a-na* LUGAL EN-*ia a-ta-ḥa-ra* <sup>5</sup>*nu-uk la-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>1</sup>*la* <sup>1</sup>*i-ša<sub>2</sub>-mu-u-ni* <sup>6</sup>*šum<sub>2</sub>-mu ḥi-ṭa-a-a pa-an*  
LUGAL EN-*ia* <sup>7</sup>LUGAL EN-*ia li-du-kan-ni* <sup>8</sup>*a-ta-a an-nu-ti i-du-ku-u-ni*

complaint (with a challenge): obv. <sup>4-8</sup>I appealed to the king, saying: ‘No! They do not listen to me! If there is a wrongdoing of mine before the king, my lord, let the king, my lord, kill me! Why should they kill me?’

As far as the letter is preserved, ‘they’ are never named. The city lord about whom the sender complains is only mentioned by title. The sender asserts his innocence by means of a challenge – if he is guilty, he should be punished with death.

SAA 19 167 (Luukko 2012b, 169) is dated to the reign of Sargon II, and although it is only partially preserved, it is for several reasons interesting:

obv. <sup>1</sup>[LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>*] <sup>1</sup>ANŠE.*a-šap<sup>1</sup>-[pu]* <sup>2</sup>*ina* ŠU-*a-<sup>1</sup>a i-ta-na* <sup>3</sup>*la mu-[q]a-a-a la a-ḥa-ši-<sup>1</sup>in<sup>1</sup>*  
<sup>4</sup>*i[na b]u-bu-te i-mu-tu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>5</sup>Š[E.PA]D.MEŠ *ša* LUG[A]L *be-li* <sup>6</sup>*ṛi<sup>1</sup>-di-na-an-ni* <sup>7</sup>[*a-na*]  
UN.MEŠ KUR <sup>8</sup>[*a-na*] <sup>1</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.*um-<sup>1</sup>ma<sup>1</sup>-ni* *ša* ŠU.2 LU<sub>2</sub>.IGI.UM

rev. <sup>1</sup>*ṛa-na<sup>1</sup>* LU<sub>2</sub>.*kit-ki-te-e* <sup>1</sup>E<sub>2</sub>.<sup>2</sup>[GAL] <sup>2</sup>*ug-da-mir a-ti<sup>1</sup>-[din]*

complaint

obv. <sup>1'-4'</sup>[The king, my lord], gave pack anima[ls] to my care. I ca[n]not tend to them. They will die o[f h]unger.

explanation: obv. <sup>5</sup>-rev. <sup>2</sup>The ra[ti]ons which the ki[n]g, my lord, gave me – I have used them up completely<sup>107</sup>. I gave them to the people of the land, to the craftsmen in the service of the treasurer and to the craftsmen of the pa[lace (?)].

<sup>107</sup> The phrasing used here, *ugdammir attidin*, as well as the logographic writing of *mašennu*, treasurer, as LU<sub>2</sub>.IGI.UM and not LU<sub>2</sub>.IGI.DUB suggests that the scribe was more used to administrative and/or legal and not epistolographic or even literary conventions (already Luukko 2012b, 169, n. to lines 7. and rev. 2)

A closer reading suggests that this fragment is not a complaint at all. Although the sender certainly reports on the problems he experiences while taking care of the animals the king entrusted him with, he is placing more of an emphasis on the rightness and righteousness of his own conduct. It seems to me that he is either trying to reject a royal command or negotiate the performance of a royal order – or perhaps ask for more supplies.

SAA 19 15 (Luukko 2012b, 17–19) offers a rare glimpse into what happened after a complaint:

obv. <sup>3</sup>*šu-uh* 'LU<sub>2</sub>'.ENGAR.MEŠ <sup>4</sup>*ša* URU.*aš-šur-ni-ir-ka*-PAP <sup>5</sup>*ša* LUGAL *i-ḫu-ru-ni* <sup>6</sup>*ma-a*  
ŠE.NUMUN.ME-*ni ra-ḫi-iš* <sup>7</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a* BURU<sub>14</sub>-*šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>8</sup>SIG<sub>5</sub> : *a-dan-niš*

report (with a previous complaint):

obv. <sup>3-8</sup>.As to the farmers of the town of Aššūr-nīrka-ušur who appealed to the king saying: 'Our field was flooded!' – now their harvest is extremely good.

At least in some cases, the complaints were apparently followed-up.

SAA 5 46 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 40) is badly damaged, but certainly worth taking a look. Although the sender's name is broken away, he must be a vassal trying to obtain a royal intervention against a governor<sup>108</sup>. The passage in which he tries to solve the conflict on his own was already discussed in the chapter of threats – his own intervention of course fails. The sender then follows with an additional accusation against the deputy of his adversary (rev. 1.-2.) and requests verification by witness. Finally, he includes an emotional passage, in which he presents himself as an unjustly mishandled victim:

rev. <sup>5</sup>*ki-i ša* ZAG *u<sub>3</sub> K[AB x x x x]-ni* <sup>6</sup>*mi-nu i-qab-bi-u<sub>2</sub> ina* 'IGI' LUG[AL E]N-*ia<sub>2</sub>* <sup>7</sup>*d*<sup>1</sup>*e-ek-tu<sub>2</sub> a-*  
*[a-š]i lib-bi i-[k]aš-šad* <sup>8</sup>*[dib]-bi* 'ma<sup>1</sup>-a-d[u-u-t]e i-<sup>1</sup>na<sup>1</sup>-[zi]-ru-šu<sub>2</sub>

challenge (?): rev. <sup>5-6</sup>.When they [...] me right and left, what will they say before the ki[ng], my [lo]rd?

complaint (expression of helplessness):

rev. <sup>7</sup>[I] will be killed! He will r[e]ach my heart!

prediction (?): rev. <sup>8</sup>(But) man[y] [thi]ngs will curse him...

SAA 5 52 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 46–47) and SAA 5 53 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 47–48) include complaints against the Šubrian king who routinely harbours deserters:

rev. <sup>2</sup>(...) *u<sub>3</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ* *pa-ni-<u>-te* <sup>3</sup>*ša u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a* TA *pa-an dul<sub>6</sub>-li* LUGAL <sup>4</sup>*iḫ-ḫal-li-qu-u-*  
*ni ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bi i-lak-u-ni* <sup>5</sup>A.ŠA<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ GIŠ.KIRI<sub>6</sub>.MEŠ E<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ *id-da-na-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>6</sup>*ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub> KUR-  
*šu<sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-ša-aš-bat-su-nu*

<sup>108</sup> Thus Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 46, n. to lines 13. and 16.

complaint: rev. <sup>2-6</sup>. And the prime<sup>109</sup> men who are now fleeing in the face of the king's work (and) go there – he is giving them fields, orchards, (and) houses, (and) settling them in his land!

One has the overwhelming impression of exasperation. The sender, Aššūr-dūr-pānīja<sup>110</sup>, does not even follow with a request, but proceeds with the rest of his report.

In SAA 5 53, the same sender deals with a runaway murderer:

obv. <sup>4</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL-50-ia šu<sub>2</sub>-u ša LU<sub>2</sub>.gur-ra-a-a URU.mu-dur-na-a-a <sup>5</sup>a-na LU<sub>2</sub>.ḫa-za-ni ša URU.mu-dur-na i-du-ka <sup>6</sup>TA mar KASKAL il-li-kan-a-ni la il-li-ka <sup>7</sup>dul<sub>6</sub>-lu TA ŠEŠ.MEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub> la e-pu-uš <sup>8</sup>TA pa-an ip-ta-laḫ<sub>3</sub> 15 LU<sub>2</sub>.gur-ra-a-a <sup>9</sup>ina qa-a-ti-šu<sub>2</sub> i-ṣab-bat a-na KUR.URI-a i-la-ka <sup>10</sup>it-tal-ku-u-ni iq-ti<sub>2</sub>-bu-u-ni ana-ku m.DINGIR-da-la-a <sup>11</sup>a-na KUR.šu-bur-a a-sa-pa-ra mu-ku a-lik <sup>12</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ-ni-ka še-ri-da it-tal-ka <sup>13</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ-ni-šu<sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-se-ri-da-a ana-ku u<sub>2</sub>-sa-ḫi-ir <sup>14</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.A-šip-ri-ia ina GABA m.DINGIR-da-la-a a-sa-pa-ra <sup>15</sup>mu-ku LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL-50 ḫa-ni-u TA L[U<sub>2</sub>].ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>16</sup>mu-ku KUR-u<sub>2</sub> u<sub>3</sub> ne<sub>2</sub>-rab-a-ni gab-bu <sup>17</sup>ina UGU-ḫi-šu<sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-[ta]-ḫi-iš-ši <sup>18</sup>mu-ku at-ta ri-di-pi <sup>19</sup>i-da<sup>1</sup>-tu<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> a-lik <sup>19</sup>ir-ti-di-bi a-na KUR.šu-bur-a it-<ta>-la-ka <sup>20</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL-50 TA LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>21</sup>ina URU.mar-ḫu-ḫa URU.[bi]r-te <sup>22</sup>ša KUR.šu-bur-a-a e-ta[r]-bu <sup>23</sup>m.DINGIR-da-la-a e-ta-am-m[a]r-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>24</sup>[t]a-mit-tu<sub>2</sub> i-si-šu<sub>2</sub> i-sa-a[k-na] <sup>be25</sup>ma-a a-lik NA<sub>4</sub>.KIŠIB ša L[U<sub>2</sub>.EN.NAM] <sup>be26</sup>[i]s-ša al-la-ka lu re-[qa-ka] <sup>be27</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL-50-ia TA 1-me L[U<sub>2</sub>.ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ]

rev. <sup>1</sup>ša GIŠ.a-ri-te URU.mar-ḫu-ḫa-a-a <sup>2</sup>i-da-at m.DINGIR-da-la-a it-tal-ku-u-ni <sup>3</sup>ina KASKAL i-zu-ku-pu LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ-ni ša LUGAL EN-ia <sup>4</sup>et-ku la-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> mi-mi-ni ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu <sup>5</sup>la i-du-ku LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL-50 u<sub>2</sub>-ta-ḫi-iš-šu <sup>6</sup>is-su-ḫur ina URU.mar-ḫu-ḫa e-tar-bu <sup>7</sup>a-ni-nu ša u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a ri-id-pu a-<sup>1</sup>da<sup>1</sup>-at LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL-50 <sup>8</sup>ni-iš-ku-<nu>-u-ni la <i>-ṣi-bu-tu<sub>2</sub> la i-di-nu <sup>9</sup>LU<sub>2</sub> ip-tu-gu tu-ra LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ-ni ša LUGAL EN-ia <sup>10</sup>la-bi-ru-u<sub>2</sub>-te ša ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi kam-ma-su-u-ni <sup>11</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-še-šu-u-ni (eras.) i-du-nu

report (of a crime):

obv. <sup>4-9</sup>. A commander of fifty of mine – of the Gurreans, from the city of Meturna (?) – killed the mayor of the city of Meturna. When the campaign came, he did not go. He did not do the work with his brothers. He became afraid (of his crime), took 15 Gurreans in his hand, and went to Urartu.

report (with elements of a complaint as a rhetorical question):

<sup>109</sup> The meaning ‘former’ of *panû* (CAD P, 96) should be discounted on the basis of the men fleeing *now*. The editors are certainly right in their suggestion that the meaning ‘first(-ranking)’ is a better fit.

<sup>110</sup> The treasurer and the governor of the province of the treasurer, probably the successor of Ṭāb-šār-Aššūr (Parker 1998).

obv. <sup>10.-13.</sup>(When) they came (and) told (me about it), I sent Il-dalâ to Šubria, saying: ‘Go and bring down your servants!’ He went – (but) did he bring down his servants?

report (of the second attempt to capture the criminal, with some grumbling):

obv. <sup>13.-19.</sup>Again, I sent a messenger to Il-dalâ, saying: ‘The commander of fifty with his men! I [have] repeatedly hit<sup>111</sup> the mountain (area) and all the mountain passes because of him! You, pursue after him! Go!’ In his pursuit, he went to Šubria.

complaint (with an accusation):

obv. <sup>20.-be27.</sup>The commander of fifty with his men ent[er]ed the town of Marḥuḥa, a [for]tress of the Šubrian (king). Il-dalâ fou[n]d him there. He swo[re] a [p]act with him: ‘Come, [b]ring me the seal of the [governor] (and) the way will be fr[ee for you]!’.

report: obv. <sup>be27.-rev.</sup> <sup>6.</sup>My commander of fifty and one hundred of shield-[bearers] from Marḥuḥa went after Il-dalâ and attacked him on the way. (But) the servants of the king, my lord, were watchful! No, they (= the deserters) did not kill a single one of them (= the servants of the king). They wounded the commander of fifty. They entered Marḥuḥa again.

complaint:

rev. <sup>7.-11.</sup>It is us who now organised the hunt after the commander of the fifty. They did not capture him (and did not) give (him over to us). They took the man away! Once again, they (only) bring out and give the old servants of the king, my lord, who have been settled there!

Aššūr-dūr-pānīja seems to be phrasing his reports as a complaint. There is no request, and it does not seem that he believed the issue could be resolved. The overall tone is that of exasperation – especially in obv. 12.-13., in which the rhetorical question (evident from the additional vowel in *u<sub>2</sub>-še-ri-da-a*) serves to emphasise that the sender has long lost any hope. The complaints refer to different person – the first one is directed against the deserter and murderer, while in the final move the sender seems to again turn his attention to the Šubrians, who harbour deserters again.

The sender of SAA 5 118 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 94) complains about the disobedience of his subordinates:

obv. <sup>3.</sup>NA<sub>4</sub>.I.DIB.MEŠ <sup>4.</sup>NA<sub>4</sub>.d.ALAD.d.LAMA <sup>5.</sup>ina UGU-ḥi-ia <sup>6.</sup>[k]a-ar<sub>2</sub>-ri <sup>7.</sup>UN.MEŠ KUR <sup>8.</sup>mi-me-e-ni <sup>9.</sup>la im-ma-gur<sub>2</sub> <sup>10.</sup>a-na dul<sub>6</sub>-l[i-i]a <sup>11.</sup>la u<sub>2</sub>-[ṣu-u-ni] <sup>be12.</sup>ma-a ERIN<sub>2</sub>.ME[Š-ka] <sup>be13.</sup>r<sub>a</sub><sup>1</sup>-ni-<sup>r</sup>ni<sup>1</sup>-[e]

<sup>111</sup> Perhaps in the sense of searching or climbing repeatedly, although I admit that this association with *maḥāṣu* is influence by the modern languages know to me. *maḥāṣu* D also has an intensive meaning (CAD D, 83 sub *maḥāṣu* 7b.).



rev. <sup>1</sup>*la i<sup>1</sup>-šam-[u-ni]* <sup>2</sup>*a-na-ku* [x x] <sup>3</sup>*an-nu-<sup>r</sup>te<sup>1</sup> m[i<sub>3</sub>]-<sup>r</sup>i<sup>1</sup>-nu* <sup>4</sup>*ša i-ba-šu-u-ni* <sup>5</sup>*ša la-šu-u-ni* <sup>6</sup>*ki-i a-*  
*he-iš* <sup>7</sup>*la<sup>1</sup>-šu<sub>2</sub> la<sup>r</sup> i<sup>1</sup>-šam-u-ni*

explanation: obv. <sup>3.-6</sup>Stone thresholds (and) bull colossi are [i]mposed upon me!

complaint: obv. <sup>7.-be13</sup>(And yet) the people of the land refuse (to do anything). They do not c[ome] out to wo[r]k, saying: ‘Are we [your] men?’.

complaint: rev. <sup>1</sup>They do not listen.

(rev. 2.-3. damaged)

complaint: rev. <sup>3.-7</sup>All of them together, they do not listen – however they can and however not!

While the sender does not seem to have a broad spectrum of literary devices at his disposal, he repeats the same complaints twice, the second time with a particular emphasis, giving the entire letter a sense of extreme urgency.

The sender of SAA 5 169 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 125) reports on his conflict with the envoys of the Zikirtean king who are breaking his promise:

obv. <sup>8</sup>(...) *ina* UGU : KA <sup>9</sup>*ša LU<sub>2</sub>.zi-gir<sub>2</sub>-ta-a-a kas-pu* <sup>10</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-se-li* : *ina* URU.*dan-ni-te* <sup>11</sup>*a-sa-kan* :  
*ma-a* : *a-na* KUR.*pa-aš<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub>-te* <sup>12</sup>ANŠE.KUR.RA.MEŠ SUM-*ka* <sup>13</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a* : *bir-ti* IGI.2.MEŠ  
<sup>14</sup>*ša LU<sub>2</sub>.MAH.MEŠ* <sup>15</sup>*lu-u ma-di-du*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*ma-’a-da* : LU<sub>2</sub>.MAH.MEŠ <sup>2</sup>KA-*šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* : *u<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub>-bal-ku-tu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>3</sup>*ma-a* TA UGU : *ša* : LU<sub>2</sub>.EN-*ni*  
<sup>4</sup>*la ni-iš-me*

explanation (with a promise):

obv. <sup>8.-12</sup>Because of the words of the Zikirtean, who said: ‘I will sell you horses in the land of Paššate!’, I have brought silver up to the fortress.

request: obv. <sup>13.-15</sup>Now, may they make it clear to the envoys!

argument (with a complaint):

rev. <sup>1.-4</sup>They have been doing their best to break their word, saying: ‘We did not hear it from our lord!’.

The sender mentions the promise of the Zikirtean ruler as the basis for his complaint – but the request precedes the complaint, turning it into the reason for the request. In the remaining part of the letter, the sender asks the king to verify his words with the deputy envoy. The letter is also striking for its systematic use of gloss signs to separate syllabically written words.

The sender of SAA 5 200 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 144–145), Šarru-ēmuranni, bases his complaint on the previous behaviour of his colleague:

rev. <sup>5'</sup>(...) DUMU m.EN-SUM-na ina šad-da<sub>3</sub>-diš <sup>6'</sup>i-si-ia a-na KASKAL la i-li-ki <sup>7'</sup>ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ  
 SIG<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ ik-ta-la LU<sub>2</sub>.TUR.MEŠ <sup>8'</sup>qa-lu-te i-si-ia u<sub>2</sub>-še-ši <sup>9'</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a LU<sub>2</sub>.ša<sub>2</sub>-E<sub>2</sub>-ku-din  
 LUGAL EN <sup>10'</sup>liš-pu-ra lu-še-ši-šu<sub>2</sub> i-si-ia <sup>11'</sup>lil-li-ku

complaint: rev. <sup>5'-8'</sup>The son of Bēl-iddina did not go with me to the campaign last year. He withheld the good men (and) sent with me the young boys.

request: rev. <sup>9'-11'</sup>Now, let the king, my lord, send me a mule stable attendant (?), so that he brings him out (and) he comes with me.

In the next passage, the sender makes an argument based on a warning – already discussed in the chapter on threats and warnings. The central part of the sequence is the request, and the complaint serves as a basis for an implicit prediction: if the son of Bēl-iddina behaved wrongly once, he is bound to do so again.

SAA 5 260 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 186) is a badly damaged complaint. In obv. 3'-10'. is likely an account of the sender's (his name is broken) attempt at a resolution, while a clear complaint is still legible in the reverse:

rev. <sup>1'</sup>TA pa-an<sup>1</sup> LUGAL EN-ia a-[x x x] <sup>2'</sup>ma-a ḫi-bi-la-te-la mar iḫ-b[il-u-ka-ni] <sup>3'</sup>[I]i-di-na-ka  
 a-bat LUGAL <sup>4'</sup>la-a iš-me ḫi-bi-la-te-ia <sup>5'</sup>[I]a-a i-di-na TA E<sub>2</sub> LUGAL <sup>6'</sup>be-li<sub>2</sub> a-ḫu-ru-u-ni  
 LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ-ni <sup>7'</sup>ša LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia E<sub>2</sub> i-ma-ru-ni <sup>8'</sup>i-du-ka i-ḫa-bat KASKAL.MEŠ  
 LUGAL.MEŠ-ni <sup>9'</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-sa-ḫa-ri-ri a-na-ku <sup>10'</sup>TA E<sub>2</sub> la u<sub>2</sub>-ša UGU du-a-ki-ia <sup>11'</sup>i-da-bu-bu

complaint (with a reminder about a previous royal command):

rev. <sup>1'-11'</sup>[...] from the king, my lord [...]: '[Let] him repay you as much as he ow[es you]!'.  
 (But) he did not heed the word of the king. He did [n]ot repay me my debts. Since I appealed to the king, my lord, he has been killing (and) robbing the servants of the king, my lord, where(ver) he sees (them). He is laying waste to the king's roads! (And) I do not leave my house. He is plotting to kill me.

The following passage is completely broken. In the part of complaint that is still preserved, the sender shrewdly presents his enemy not only as his personal nemesis, but also as the person who disobeys the royal orders and threatens the stability of the economy by making the roads unsafe.

The simplest complaints might be most difficult to interpret. Since what is possibly a complaint includes what amounts to only a report of an issue, it is hard to be sure whether the sender saw this as a mere argument for his request or grounds for protest, as in SAA 15 17 (Fuchs and Parpola 2001, 13):

obv. <sup>5</sup>*a-na be<sub>2</sub>-et* <sup>6</sup>LUGAL *iš-pu-ra-ni-ni* <sup>7</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.A.BA *i-še-e-a* <sup>8</sup>*la-a-si* <sup>9</sup>LUGAL *li-is-pu-ru* <sup>10</sup>*a-su-mu a-na* LU<sub>2</sub>.EN.NAM <sup>11</sup>*ša URU.arrap-ra-ap-ḥa* <sup>12</sup>*a<sup>1</sup>-su-mu*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*a<sup>1</sup>-na m.aš-šur-U-LAL* <sup>2</sup>*a<sup>1</sup>-en* LU<sub>2</sub>.A.BA <sup>3</sup>*i-še-e<sup>1</sup>-a* <sup>4</sup>*[li]-i<sup>1</sup>-pu-ru*

complaint (or report of an issue?):

obv. <sup>5-8</sup>There is no scribe with me where the king sent me.

request: obv. <sup>9</sup>-rev. <sup>4</sup>May the king write – either to the governor of Arrapha<sup>112</sup> or to Aššūr-bēlu-taqqin (so that) they send me a scribe.

SAA 15 53 (Fuchs and Parpola 2001, 36) seems more likely to be a report about a problem than a complaint as such. Four Zalipeans escape to report that the other members of their group were captured by the Mannean ruler and cannot bring the expected horses (report in rev. 3.-5.). The sender, Nabû-rēmāni, is asking the king to send a royal companion to hear their story directly – but the connection between this action and bringing back the missing horses seems to be absent.

There is little variety in this part of the corpus. The issues faced by the highest officials of the Assyrian empire frequently have to do with the trouble at the borders, in which cases the help of the king might be uncertain. In other cases, the king is asked for help in conflicts between officials.

Many more complaints can be found in the petitions written by the scholars and priests to the kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal.

A short complaint is included in SAA 10 58 (Parpola 1993, 42–43), a letter from Balasî whose entire obverse and the first three lines of the reverse explain omens about birds to the concerned king. The complaint is followed by a request:

rev. <sup>4</sup>d.PA d.AMAR.UTU *a-na* LUGAL <sup>5</sup>EN-*ia lik-ru-bu* TI.LA <sup>6</sup>U<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ *ru-qu-ti ši-bu-u<sub>2</sub>-tu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>7</sup>*lit-tu<sub>2</sub>-tu a-na* LUGAL EN-*ia* <sup>8</sup>*lid-di-nu* LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ-*ia* <sup>9</sup>*i-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-ši ina* KUR-LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL-*ša<sub>2</sub>-qe<sub>2</sub>-e* <sup>10</sup>A.ŠA<sub>3</sub> GIŠ.KIRI<sub>6</sub> *i-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-ši* <sup>11</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ-*ni* *ša<sub>2</sub>* LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL-KAŠ.LUL <sup>12</sup>GIŠ.KIRI<sub>6</sub>.MEŠ-*ia iṣ-ša-aḥ-tu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>13</sup>*it-ta-ṣu* UN.MEŠ-*ia* <sup>14</sup>*uk<sup>1</sup>-ta-aš<sub>2</sub>-ši-du-ni* UN.MEŠ <sup>113</sup> <sup>15</sup>T[A *qa*]-*ni u<sub>2</sub>-kaš-ši-du-u-ni* <sup>16</sup>*[ig-d]u-ur-ru iḥ-tal-qu* <sup>17</sup>[DINGIR.MEŠ-*n*]i *la u<sub>2</sub>-ra-am-mu-ni* <sup>18</sup>*a<sup>1</sup>-[na LU]GAL re-e-mu* <sup>19</sup>*[li-iṣ-bat-s]u* LU<sub>2</sub>.ša<sub>2</sub>-EN.NUN <sup>20</sup>*[is-si-i]a lip-qi<sub>2</sub>-du* <sup>21</sup>*de-<sup>1</sup>e-ni le<sup>1</sup>-pu-uš*

<sup>112</sup> The spelling of Arrapha as URU.*arrap-ra-ap-ḥa* instead of the usual URU.*arrap-ḥa* certainly proves the veracity of the sender's words (the letter was already discussed in the introductory chapter).

<sup>113</sup> UN.MEŠ is missing in the book edition of SAA 10. Line 10 is also transliterated as a part of line 9. I have corrected this where possible on the basis of the photo P334229 available via CDLI (the quality of the photo is not very good).

blessing: rev. <sup>4-8</sup>May Nabû (and) Marduk bless the king, my lord. May they give the king, my lord, the life of distant days, old age and extreme longevity.

explanation: rev. <sup>8-10</sup>I have servants in the land of the chief cupbearer. I (also) have a field (and) an orchard.

complaint: rev. <sup>11-14</sup>The servants of the chief cupbearer coveted my orchard – they took (it) and chased my people away.

complaint: rev. <sup>14-16</sup>As [so]on as they chased them away, my people [became] afraid and fled.

supplication: rev. <sup>17</sup>May [the gods] not abandon me!

supplication: rev. <sup>18-19</sup>[May] the [k]ing [feel] pity for him (= his servant)!

request: rev. <sup>19-21</sup>May they appoint a guard [for] me (and) pass a (favourable) judgement on me!

When one consults the tablet, this petition seems, for all intents and purposes, to be almost a separate text. It is divided from the previous section, dealing with omens, by means of a singular ruling, and the complaint is introduced with a blessing. Balasî must of course explain the situation, so he starts with a very concise mention of his movable (servants) and immovable property (field and orchard). This ideal state of full possession ends when the covetous servants of the chief cupbearer chase away his servants and seize the immovables. The servants of the chief cupbearer are not named – likely because the chief cupbearer was too powerful an adversary to challenge directly. If the restoration of [DINGIR.MEŠ] in rev. 17 is correct, Balasî seems to express his complete powerlessness before progressin to a less specific request for the royal mercy, and the more specific request for a guard to be appointed to protect his possessions. The final implicit argument appears in the request to give favourable judgement<sup>114</sup>, seemingly directed at the watchmen, although of course the highest instance of the law is the king (Radner 2003, 887).

In SAA 10 143 (Parpola 1993, 111), the scribes of Kilizi as a collective provide a report about astronomical phenomena, and then introduce a simple complaint. What is striking is that the begin their petition with a blessing – it is inserted at the very beginning of the reverse. The contents and the layout of the tablet form a single whole:

rev. <sup>1</sup>d.AG u d.AMAR.UTU <sup>2</sup>a-na LUGAL *lik-ru-bu* <sup>3</sup>TA *pa-an il-ki* <sup>4</sup>tup-šik-ki *ma-šar-tu* <sup>5</sup>ša  
 LUGAL *la ni-na-šar* <sup>6</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.*di-da-be<sub>2</sub>-e* <sup>7</sup>tu[*p-šar-r*]u-tu <sup>8</sup>la [*i-l*]am-mu-du

blessing: rev. <sup>1-2</sup>May Nabû and Marduk bless the king!

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<sup>114</sup> Translated by Parpola as ‘let him do me justice’, which is less literal, but does reproduce the sense faithfully.

complaint: rev. <sup>3-5</sup> Because of the *ilku*-duty and the corvée labour we cannot keep the watch of the king

complaint: rev. <sup>6-8</sup> The pupils do not [le]arn the craft of the s[cri]be.

The problem complained about are the duties imposed by the state. No request follows, as voicing a complaint is seemingly immediately understood as a request for intervention.

SAA 10 163<sup>115</sup> (Parpola 1993, 125–126) is slightly damaged, but certainly worth a look. The sender, Nabû-iqbi, begins with a complaint:

obv. <sup>5</sup> *a-na-ku a-kan-na ma-aš-ša[r]-<sup>r</sup>ti<sup>1</sup> <sup>6</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia a-na-aš-ru<sup>7</sup> m.a-ša<sub>2</sub>-ri-du LU<sub>2</sub>.GAR-UMUŠ<sup>8</sup> <sup>8</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> GU<sub>2</sub>.DU<sub>8</sub>.A.KI <sup>9</sup>E<sub>2</sub>-AD<sup>1</sup>-i[a] <sup>9</sup>a-na LU<sub>2</sub>.na-a-a-lu it-ta-di[n] <sup>10</sup>u<sub>3</sub> ŠEŠ.MEŠ-e-a ul-tu E<sub>2</sub>-š[u<sub>2</sub>-nu] <sup>11</sup>ul-te-ši*

complaint: obv. <sup>5-11</sup> (While) I am keeping the watch of the king, my lord, Ašarēdu, the governor of Cutha, gave[e] the house of m[y] father to a *nayālu* tenant and driven my brothers from th[eir] home.

The following passage is too damaged, and when the reverse is legible again, it likely includes an account of Ašarēdu's taunts directed at the sender. Further accusations follow:

rev. <sup>4</sup>(...) EN.MEŠ <sup>5</sup>*di-ni-ia* ša<sub>2</sub> 50 MA.NA KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR <sup>6</sup>1 MA.NA KU<sub>3</sub>.GI ul-tu E<sub>2</sub>-AD-a <sup>7</sup>i[š-š]u-u<sub>2</sub> šul-ma-nu <sup>8</sup>*la-pa<sup>1</sup>-an* EN.MEŠ *di-ni-ia* <sup>9</sup>*it-ta-kal* u<sub>3</sub> EN.MEŠ <sup>10</sup>*di-ni-ia ina qa-an-ni-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>11</sup>*il-ta-kan* GIŠ.KIRI<sub>6</sub>-ia <sup>12</sup>*ki-i<sup>1</sup> iš-šu-u<sub>2</sub> a-na DUMU-ŠEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>13</sup>*i[t-t]a-din* LUGAL KUR.KUR <sup>14</sup>*ki-i<sup>1</sup> ša<sub>2</sub> pa-ni-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>re15</sup>*maḥ-ru li-pu-uš<sup>1</sup>*

complaint: rev. <sup>4'-9'</sup> My legal adversary<sup>116</sup>, who t[oo]k 50 minas of silver (and) 1 mina of gold from the house of my father, received a gift (or a bribe) from (another) legal adversary of mine.

complaint: rev. <sup>9'-11'</sup> And he (the first legal adversary) has placed him in his hem<sup>117</sup>.

complaint: rev. <sup>11'-13'</sup> He seized my orchard and g[av]e (it) to his nephew.

closing formula: rev. <sup>13'-re15'</sup> May the king of the lands do as he pleases.

The apposition 'of the lands' is a typical for letters written in the Babylonian dialect. The complaints have some striking features – above all in the use of relative clauses in the first complaint, which emphasises the gift or bribe (*šulmānu* may be both<sup>118</sup>) and mentions the enormous financial losses of 50 minas of silver and 1 mina of gold almost as an afterthought (but perhaps they were described in detail

<sup>115</sup> The letter is written in the Babylonian dialect.

<sup>116</sup> EN.MEŠ is a plural form, but the following verbal forms are in singular.

<sup>117</sup> Likely a gesture of protection, analogical to the attestations in CAD Q, 84 sub *qannu* B c.

<sup>118</sup> It certainly seems to be attested in negative contexts less often than the other word for bribe, *ṭātu*.

in the damaged part of the letter). The closing formula, in view of the lack of an explicit request, should be seen as the sole expression of a plea for royal intervention.

SAA 10 164 (Parpola 1993, 126–127) is a partial duplicate of the previous complaint. It is even more damaged than the previous letter, but the closing section is more developed than in SAA 10 163:

rev. <sup>8</sup>[*ki-i pa*]-<sup>1</sup>*an*<sup>1</sup> [LU]G[AL] *be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia* <sup>1</sup>*maḥ-ru*<sup>1</sup> <sup>9</sup>[LUGAL *b*]*e-li<sub>2</sub>-a li-ip-qid-ma* <sup>10</sup>[NIG<sub>2</sub>].KA<sub>9</sub>-*ia*  
*liš-ši-šu<sub>2</sub>-nim-ma* <sup>11</sup>*lid-di-nu-ni a-na šu-mu* <sup>12</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub>* LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia* AN-*e u* KI.TI[M] <sup>13</sup>*i-nu-uš-*  
*šu<sub>2</sub> be-li<sub>2</sub>* LUGAL.M[EŠ] <sup>14</sup>*la u<sub>2</sub>-maš-šar-an-ni-m[a]* <sup>15</sup>UN.MEŠ-*ia ina* E<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.DAM.[GAR<sub>3</sub>]

(ruling)

rev. <sup>16</sup>*la i-mut-tu* LUGAL KUR.KUR <sup>17</sup>[*k*]*i-i* <sup>18</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> pa-ni-šu<sub>2</sub> maḥ-r[i]* <sup>18</sup>*li-pu-uš*

suggestion: rev. <sup>8-11</sup>[If it] pleases [the k]i[ing], my lord, let [the king], my [l]ord give an order (and) let them take away my [pro]perty from him (and) give it to me.

flattery: rev. <sup>11-13</sup>Heaven and ear[th] tremble at the name of the king, my lord!

supplication: rev. <sup>13-14</sup>May the lord of king[s] not abandon me!

supplication: rev. <sup>15-16</sup>May my people not die in the house of a mer[chant]<sup>119</sup>!

closing formula: rev. <sup>16-17</sup>May the king of the lands do [a]s he pleases.

The address formulae are missing in both letters, so it is impossible to tell if one of them was addressed to a high official who was asked to forward the petition to the king – although as far as the contents can be assessed, the sender directs his plea to the king<sup>120</sup>. The presence of the ruling is also interesting – in other letters it could be used to separate a post-script or an archival note from the body of the text, but here it separates a single clause in two parts, with the verb after the ruling and the rest of the predicate before it.

Flattery is also a common motive in petitions (not all of them complaints). SAA 10 166<sup>121</sup> (Parpola 1993, 127–128), a petition from Rāši-ili to the king, begins with a fairly complex reminder of past royal favours:

obv. <sup>6</sup>*ul-tu še-eḥ-re-ku* <sup>7</sup>*a-di* UGU U<sub>4</sub>-*mu a-ga-a* <sup>8</sup>LUGAL EN-*ia ur-tab-ba-an-ni* <sup>9</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> 10-šu<sub>2</sub> la* ŠA<sub>3</sub>-  
*bi* LU<sub>2</sub>.KUR<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ <sup>10</sup>LUGAL EN-*a* ŠU.2-*a* <sup>11</sup>*ki-i iṣ-ba-tu* <sup>12</sup>*ub-tal-liṭ-an-ni* <sup>13</sup>LUGAL *re-ma-*  
*nu at-ta* <sup>be14</sup>*a-na kip-pat er-bet-ti*

<sup>119</sup> Parpola translates ‘moneylender’. While merchants are of course frequently attested in their capacity of bankers, the word ‘moneylender’ has a negative connotation, which I do not find in the Akkadian version of the word. An alternative translation would perhaps be ‘in the house of a creditor’.

<sup>120</sup> This does not necessarily mean that the tablet was not addressed to somebody else, see the three letters of apology SAA 17 52, SAA 53, and SAA 54 – all three discussed in the chapter on apologies.

<sup>121</sup> The letter is written in the Babylonian dialect.

rev. <sup>1</sup>*ta-ab-ti te-te-pu-u[š]* <sup>2</sup>*u<sub>3</sub>* <sup>1</sup>*U<sub>2</sub>* <sup>1</sup>NAM.TI.LA <sup>3</sup>*a-n[a na-ḫi]-ri-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>4</sup>*[ta-al-ta-kan]*

flattery (with an expression of gratitude):

obv. <sup>6-8</sup>The king, my lord, has reared me since the days of my childhood until now.

flattery (with an expression of gratitude):

obv. <sup>9-12</sup>Ten times (already) has the king, my lord, grasped my hand (and) saved my life from the enemies.

flattery (with a compliment):

obv. <sup>13</sup>You (sg.) are a merciful king.

flattery (with a compliment, description of good deeds):

obv. <sup>be14</sup>-rev. <sup>1</sup>You have bee[n] benevolent to the four quarters of the world.

flattery (with a compliment, description of good deeds):

rev. <sup>2-4</sup>And you [have placed] the plant of life in their [nostr]ils.

Judging from the traces on the reverse, the letter either included a very short complaint or perhaps more likely, a claim of innocence in the face of accusations (the verb *dabābu* in rev. 5. would suggest this). The next legible sequence must be a request. The sequence with expressions of gratitude – and they are not simple thanks in view of the request that follows and also likely also because they do not mention any concrete favours – and other assorted flattery is longer in comparison. The expressions of gratitude move from individual favours of bringing the sender up<sup>122</sup> and saving him from his adversaries, to a more general compliment referring to the king's mercy. While the mentions of personal favours addressed the king in the third person, here the sender veers into the second person – when the king is merciful, he is addressed as 'you', and in the next move praising his benevolence, he literally 'does good' also in the second person. This would again confirm that the use of second person with reference to the king is meant to encode friendliness. The plant of life, the same that Gilgameš strives so much to obtain, is attested in the Neo-Assyrian corpus multiple times (among the letters from the scholars, also in SAA 10 371<sup>123</sup>), and the same expression, 'place the plant of life in the nostrils' is also attested in SAA 21 110,

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<sup>122</sup> This in itself is not an uncommon motive. Another petition which begins with the descriptions of favour since childhood until adulthood, this time obtained from the father of the crown prince by the father of the sender, is SAA 10 182 (this one is written in the Neo-Assyrian dialect and script, and the father of the sender also experiences his share of royal misfortunes).

<sup>123</sup> Here, however, the sender, Kudurru, explains that he obtained it for the king, but then it was lost (obv. 14, *ih-te-liq*). The letter is also Babylonian, and the lower half of the reverse has a curiously broader spacing, as if the sender wanted to use a limited number of words to completely fill the surface of the tablet.

sent by Bēl-iqbī and the Gambuleans to Assurbanipal<sup>124</sup> and with a slightly different wording in SAA 17 112, sent by Aqār-Bēl-lūmur<sup>125</sup>.

In SAA 10 171 (Parpola 1993, 131), the unknown sender complains about not being summoned together with the other scholars. This letter was already discussed in the chapter on promises – but it is worth mentioning that the complaint is realised by naming the king's actions (not being summoned) and adding an argument presuming equal treatment (the sender was not summoned – unlike other scholars, obv. 4.-6.). His first appeal takes the form of a question about his *hītu* – his potential wrongdoing. The king reassures him and promises to summon yet. This is when the actual complaint starts (rev. 1.-6.<sup>?</sup>) – and is immediately broken away.

SAA 10 173 (Parpola 1993, 136) is a clearly composed, well-preserved complaint with an interesting argument structure. Marduk-šumu-ušur begins with the description of the initial, idyllic situation, when he received the gift from the king's father:

obv. <sup>6</sup>AD-š<sub>u2</sub> ša LUGAL EN-ia <sup>7</sup>10 ANŠE ŠE.NUMUN ina KUR.ḫa-laḫ<sub>3</sub>-ḫi <sup>8</sup>it-ta-na 14  
 MU.AN.NA.ME <sup>9</sup>A.ŠA<sub>3</sub> a-ta-kal <sup>10</sup>me-me-ni is-si-ia <sup>11</sup>la id-di-bu-ub <sup>12</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a LU<sub>2</sub>.EN.NAM  
<sup>13</sup>la KUR.bar-ḫal-zi it-tal-ka <sup>14</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.ENGAR iḫ-te-si <sup>15</sup>E<sub>2</sub>-su im-ta-ša<sub>2</sub>-a' <sup>16</sup>A.ŠA<sub>3</sub> ip-tu-ag  
<sup>17</sup>LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-da <sup>18</sup>ki-i muš-ke-nu <sup>19</sup>a-na-ku-ni <sup>20</sup>ma-šar-tu<sub>2</sub>

rev. <sup>1</sup>ša LUGAL EN-ia <sup>2</sup>a-na-šar-u-ni <sup>3</sup>(eras.)ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi E<sub>2</sub>.GAL <sup>4</sup>la a-ši-tu-u-ni <sup>5</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a A.ŠA<sub>3</sub>  
 pe-ga-ku <sup>6</sup>LUGAL at-ta-ḫar <sup>7</sup>LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> <sup>8</sup>de-e-ni le-pu-uš <sup>9</sup>ina bu-bu-ti lu la a-mu-at

pre-complaint (the initial, perfect situation):

obv. <sup>6-11</sup>The father of the king, my lord, gave me a cultivated field of 10 homers in the land of Ḫalahḫa. For fourteen years I had the use of the land (and) nobody had quarrel with me.

complaint: obv. <sup>12-16</sup>Now, the governor has come from Barḫalza, harassed the farmer, took away his house, (and) seized the field.

post-complaint (argument from helplessness realised as a pseudo-reminder):

obv. <sup>17-19</sup>The king, my lord, knows that I am (but) a poor man.

argument (from diligence):

obv. <sup>20</sup>-rev. <sup>4</sup>I keep the watch of the king, my lord. I do not neglect the palace.

explicit reference to petitioning the king:

<sup>124</sup> The script is Neo-Assyrian.

<sup>125</sup> Here, the plant of life is put in the sender's mouth (rev. <sup>17</sup>a-na pi-ia iš-ku-nu). Moreover, the sequences in SAA 17 112 and SAA 21 110 are clearly expressions of thanks.



rev. <sup>5-6</sup>Now (that) my field was taken away from me, I turn to the king.

request: rev. <sup>7-8</sup>May the king, my lord, decide my case (in my favour)!

plea: rev. <sup>9</sup>May I not die from hunger!

This complaint is particularly well-structured, almost like a compact literary work. The initial situation is akin to a pocket golden age of the sender: he enjoys the usufruct of his field, and nobody quarrels with him about his rights. Then a governor comes and destroys Marduk-šumu-ušur's small measure of peace: all components of a farm are listed metonymically (the farmer, the house, the field itself). The way the three elements are listed with the accompanying verbs only has a certain rhythmical quality to it (*ikkāru iḥtesī – bēssu imtaša' – eqlu iptuag*). Marduk-šumu-ušur then claims that he is but a poor man, and therefore, it is certainly implied, can do nothing against a governor (who is also not named). The next argument serves to portray the sender as an innocent sufferer – he diligently keeps the watch of the king and is not guilty of any negligence (why then, is the implied question, would he deserve to suffer?). Despite all this, his field was seized and Marduk-šumu-ušur has to appeal to the king for help. He asks for justice, and his last plea is not to die from hunger. I would like to say that this is surely an exaggeration – but it would not necessarily have to be. When the sender of 19 167 complains that he will not be able to feed all the animals given into his care, the words *ina bubūte imuttu*, 'they will die of hunger', (obv. 4') take on a very literal meaning. On the one hand, hunger and thirst are a common motive in the correspondence until the end of cuneiform, but on the other, the threat of starvation was for the ancient Assyrians and Babylonians certainly a real and constant danger, one or two failed harvests away.

SAA 10 180<sup>126</sup> (Parpola 1993, 144) is only a complaint in the sense that the sender is complaining about the crown prince that the promise given to him by the king has not been fulfilled yet:

obv. <sup>8</sup>*am-me-ni ina la pa-ši-ri* <sup>9</sup>*ina ku-šu a-ma-a-ti* <sup>10</sup>5 U<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ *a-ga-a* <sup>11</sup>LUGAL *iq-ta-bi* <sup>12</sup>*um-ma*  
*E<sub>2</sub> a-na* <sup>13</sup>*m.na-ši-ru* <sup>14</sup>*in-na-a* <sup>15</sup>*mam-ma* E<sub>2</sub> <sup>be16</sup>*ul id-di-na*

complaint: obv. <sup>8-9</sup>Why must I die for lack of [...] <sup>127</sup>(and) cold?

complaint (with a royal command):

obv. <sup>10.-be16</sup>Five days ago the king said: 'Give Nāširu a house!'. (But) nobody has given a house to me.

The following part of the letter includes a request to the crown prince realised as a reminder (explicitly:

obv. <sup>be17</sup>*a-na DUMU LUGAL* <sup>be18</sup>*be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia* rev. <sup>1</sup>*a-na UGU-ḥi* <sup>2</sup>*lu-ša<sub>2</sub>-aḥ-si-is-ma* – 'Let me remind the

<sup>126</sup> This letter is written in the Babylonian dialect.

<sup>127</sup> Parpola translates *pa-ši-ru* as 'means' but marks the translation as uncertain. I cannot improve upon his suggestion.

crown prince, my lord, about this.'). Having repeated his request for a house, the sender blesses the crown prince, which should be considered a kind of thanks in advance:

rev. <sup>6</sup>d.UTU *u* d.AMAR.UTU <sup>7</sup>*a-na* DUMU LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia* <sup>8</sup>*lik-ru-bu*

post-request (expression of gratitude):

rev. <sup>6-8</sup>May Šamaš and Marduk bless the crown prince, my lord.

In the other complaints discussed so far, the blessings preceded the request, and should be therefore understood as preparing the ground for the request. Here, however, the blessing is almost like a thanks in advance. After the blessing, the sender repeats his request once more.

Many passages of SAA 10 182 (Parpola 1993, 145–147) are damaged and impossible to restore. The letter is a complaint from Tabnî – a scholar who apparently lost the favour of the crown prince. The first move begins by recounting the favours received from the father of the crown prince by the father of the sender. Finally, the sender himself is received by the crown prince as a part of the benefits obtained by his father (obv. 31.-32.). All is going well for Tabnî as well, until something happens:

obv. <sup>be35</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a mi-i-nu* <sup>1</sup>*hi<sup>1</sup>-ta-a-a* *ina* [IGI DUMU MAN EN-*ia*]

rev. <sup>1</sup>*1-en* : <sup>1</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.HAL <sup>1</sup>*e-kal a-n[a]-ku i-[ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-ši-i]* <sup>2</sup>TA *be<sub>2</sub>-[et x x]x ik-lu-u-ni* <sup>3</sup>ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bi i[t-ti]-ab a-dan-niš* <sup>4</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a [an-nu-rig DUMU M]AN be-li<sub>2</sub> ur-ta-ad-di* <sup>5</sup>*a-na 1-e[n LU<sub>2</sub>.HAL SI]G<sub>2</sub>.ZA.GIN<sub>2</sub>.[SA<sub>5</sub> u]s-sa-bi-iš* <sup>6</sup>*ia-u<sub>2</sub> DUMU MAN [be]-li<sub>2</sub> ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi ik-ta-as-pa* <sup>7</sup><sup>1</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ *ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL ša<sub>2</sub> DUMU MAN* <sup>1</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ *ša<sub>2</sub> E<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-AD-<sup>1</sup>ia<sub>2</sub>* <sup>8</sup>*a-ke-e lu-ša<sub>2</sub>-pil* <sup>1</sup>*ma<sup>1</sup>-a* <sup>1</sup>*am<sup>1</sup>-mi-i* <sup>9</sup>*mi-i<sup>1</sup>-nu ta-ab-tu-šu<sub>2</sub> nu-[u]k DUMU MAN* <sup>10</sup>*[a-na a]-a-ši lu-ša<sub>2</sub>-<sup>1</sup>ab-ki mi-i-nu hi-ta-<sup>1</sup>ku<sup>1</sup>-nu* <sup>11</sup>*[x x x m]a-a-ti ša<sub>2</sub>-ni-<sup>1</sup>ti<sup>1</sup> <šu>-u<sub>2</sub> ka-ab-di* <sup>12</sup>*[ana-ku un-za]-ar-<sup>1</sup>hu ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL ša<sub>2</sub> DUMU MAN LA<sup>?</sup> <sup>1</sup>x<sup>1</sup> <sup>1</sup>SA<sup>?</sup>* <sup>13</sup>*[ina ŠA<sub>3</sub> e-tu-t]e ka-ra-ak* <sup>14</sup>*[x x x x]-<sup>1</sup>u<sup>1</sup>-te ša<sub>2</sub> DUMU MAN u<sub>2</sub>-ka-bi-du-šu<sub>2</sub>-u-ni*

question: obv. <sup>be35</sup>Now, what is my fault be[for the crown prince, my lord?]

complaint: rev. <sup>1-3</sup>One haruspex is enjoying (the leftovers) (and then) [there is] me. Have I been h[ap]py ever sin[ce] they withheld [...]?]

complaint (with an argument from equal treatment):

rev. <sup>4-5</sup>Now, [the crown pr]ince, my lord, has made it worse! [He] clothed on[e] haruspex in p[ur]ple.

complaint: rev. <sup>6</sup>(As for) me – the crown prince, my [lo]rd, broke my heart.

reproach: rev. <sup>7-8</sup>How can (the crown prince) thus bring low the servants of the king, of the crown prince – the servants of the house of his father!

argument (from loss of reputation):

rev. <sup>8</sup>.(They are saying): ‘That one over there, what is his favour?’.

denial:

rev. <sup>9-10</sup>.(To this,) I say: ‘May the crown prince make [m]e weep, (but) what is your (pl.) fault?’.

argument (from comparison with an extreme case):

rev. <sup>11-13</sup>.A [...] from another country is honoured, (while) [I, a houseborn s]lave of the king, of the crown prince [...] have been left [in the darkness].

The following passage is badly broken again, but when the text resumes, Tabnî boasts that he is better than two other scholars, because he has learnt his craft from his father (rev. 28.). A request is made for the crown prince to test the sender, followed by the closing formula and an additional reproach. In the final passage written on the edge, the sender recounts that his father is inconsolable (e. 1.), but here again the letter breaks off.

The most interesting part of this sequence is perhaps the very short move which indicates that the situation changed from favour to disfavour in obv. be35. Since the theme of Tabnî’s (and his father’s) personal golden age continues on both sides of the gap in the obverse, it seems unlikely to me that any further complaints would have had any place there. Right after the clause with the question, Tabnî begins with his arguments. In a sense they could be seen as complaints as well, as Tabnî mentions his negative emotional states several times – but this is clearly meant to serve as means of persuasion. Twice he uses comparison – in the first place, he mentions another haruspex, *bārû*, who enjoys (likely the leftovers), while something<sup>128</sup> of the Tabnî’s is being withheld (rev. 1.-3.), which causes an ironic question about the joyful state of his mind. The expectation behind this mention is that of an equal treatment – or even a better one, in consideration of the service of Tabnî’s father. The next comparison is an escalation – Tabnî is treated worse than even someone from a foreign land<sup>129</sup> (rev. 11.-13.). In contrast to the foreigner, Tabnî himself describes himself as *umzarhu*, a houseborn slave, which underlines his identity as both a native Assyrian and a long-time servant of the king, son of a servant of the king.

The treatment that Tabnî has been newly receiving at the hands of the crown prince breaks his heart (rev. 6. and re33.-34. in a reproachful question with *atâ*) and is a humiliation (rev. 8.) for a servant of the king and the crown prince, and Tabnî’s father is in the depths of depression, but for all the expressions of despondency, nothing is said directly about what is exactly entailed by the treatment Tabnî complains

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<sup>128</sup> Perhaps the leftovers mentioned in the preceding passage? But it seems like there would not be enough place for *rēhâte* in the gap.

<sup>129</sup> Perhaps a scholar or a *bārû*, someone whose position would have been equal with Tabnî’s. Parpola suggests there is a place for three signs in the gap, this would not fit either of the words, as Tabnî writes *bārû* logographically, as LU<sub>2</sub>.HAL.

about. The initial question about his wrongdoing follows the account of having been given the ‘leftovers’ but the crown prince, which likely indicates that they are the direct cause of Tabnî’s discontent. Something of his has been withheld – Parpola (2004b) supposes these were also the leftovers, and that no longer receiving them was equivalent to humiliation – this would explain the entire sequence, but at the same time, there it does not seem as though there would be enough place for the ‘leftovers’ in the gap in rev. 2., so this is far from certain.

There is no complaint as such in SAA 10 224 (Parpola 1993, 176–177) – not from the sender. But Adad-šumu-ušur intercedes for Urdu-Gula with a mention of his son’s emotional turmoil:

obv. <sup>be16</sup>ina UGU m.IR<sub>3</sub>-d.gu-la <sup>be17</sup>IR<sub>3</sub> ša LUGAL EN-ia

rev. <sup>1</sup>me<sub>2</sub>-e-mi-i-ni <sup>2</sup>la u<sub>2</sub>-šaḥ-si-is <sup>3</sup>ina ḥu-up lib-ba-te <sup>4</sup>i-mu-at ḥa-ba-šu <sup>5</sup>TA qa-at LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia<sub>2</sub> <sup>6</sup>ṛe<sup>1</sup>-li LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> <sup>7</sup>mu-bal-li-ṭu <sup>8</sup>ša UN.MEŠ ma-a’-du-te

intercession: obv. <sup>be16</sup>-rev. <sup>2</sup>Nobody has reminded the king about Urdu-Gula.

recounted complaint (?):

rev. <sup>3-6</sup>He is dying of broken heart. He is shattered (after) slipping from the hands of the king, my lord.

flattery: rev. <sup>6-8</sup>The king, my lord, has brought to life numerous people.

The intercession is framed as a reminder – even more so than in the case of excuses, this is a face-saving device for both sides of the discourse. The sender can claim that he is not imposing on the king and his domain by making direct demands, while the king can pretend his harsh treatment is a matter of forgetfulness.

A more complex version of the intercession for Urdu-Gula appears in SAA 10 226 (Parpola 1993, 177–178), also from Adad-šumu-ušur. The first part of the letter includes a very flattering account of the beginning of the reign of Assurbanipal as a true golden age – this has parallels in the Assurbanipal’s Coronation Hymn (Livingstone 1989, No. 11) as well as in the royal inscriptions – a similarly worded description features in Prism D, lines 22.-38. (Parpola 1983, 104). This account of *aurea aetas* switches seamlessly into a petition for Urdu-Gula – but also for himself:

obv. <sup>21</sup>(...) ša ḥi-ṭa-šu-u-ni a-na mu-a-te <sup>22</sup>qa-bu-u-ni LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> ub-tal-li-su <sup>23</sup>[ša MU].AN.NA.MEŠ ma-a’-da-ti <sup>be24</sup>ṛša<sup>1</sup>-bit-u-ni tap-ta-ṭar <sup>be25</sup>ṛša<sup>1</sup> U<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ ma-a’-du-ti <sup>be26</sup>mar-ṣu-u-ni ib-tal-ṭu

rev. <sup>1</sup>ba-ri-u<sub>2</sub>-ti is-sab-bu <sup>2</sup>ub-bu-lu-ti us-sa-at-mi-nu <sup>3</sup>mi-ri-šu-tu<sub>2</sub> ku-zip-pi uk-ta-at-ti-mu <sup>4</sup>a-ta-a a-na-ku TA m.IR<sub>3</sub>-d.gu-la <sup>5</sup>ina bir-tu-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu ik-ki-ni ku-ri lib-bi-ni <sup>6</sup>ša<sub>2</sub>-pil an-nu-rig LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> ra-a-mu <sup>7</sup>ša URU.NINA.KI a-na UN.MEŠ uk-tal-lim <sup>8</sup>a-na SAG.DU.MEŠ ma-a DUMU.MEŠ-ku-nu bi-la-a-ni <sup>9</sup>ina pa-ni-ia li-iz-zi-zu a-ni-nu m.IR<sub>3</sub>-d.gu-la <sup>10</sup>DUMU-a-a šu-

*u<sub>2</sub> is-se-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu-ma ina pa-an LUGAL <sup>11</sup>EN-ia li-zi-iz a-ni-nu TA UN.MEŠ-ma <sup>12</sup>gab-bu lu ḥa-di-a-ni ni-ir-qud <sup>13</sup>LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> ni-ik-ru-ub IGI.2-ia <sup>14</sup>TA LUGAL EN-ia šak-na ša ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi E<sub>2</sub>.GAL <sup>15</sup>i-za-zu-u-ni gab-bi-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu <sup>16</sup>la i-ra-’u-mu-un-ni be-el-MUN-ia <sup>17</sup>ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu la-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> ša šul-ma-an-nu <sup>18</sup>a-da-na-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu-un-ni i-maḥ-ḥar-an-ni <sup>19</sup>ab-bu-ut-ti i-ṣab-bat-u-ni LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> <sup>20</sup>re-e-mu ina UGU IR<sub>3</sub>-šu li-iṣ-bat-su <sup>21</sup>ina bir-ti UN.MEŠ gab-bu a-na-ku lu la <sup>22</sup>ḥa-di-a-nu-te-ia mar ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu <sup>23</sup>ina UGU-ia lu la i-ma-ši-u*

flattery (with good deeds of the king in extreme cases):

obv. <sup>21</sup>.rev. <sup>3</sup>The guilty, who were condemned to death, the king, my lord, has kept alive. [Those who] were imprisoned for many [ye]ars, you have released. Those who were ill for many days, recovered. The hungry have been sated, the parched have been anointed, those in need have been covered with cloaks.

reproach: rev. <sup>4</sup>.<sup>6</sup>Why then must I and Urdu-Gula be moody and dejected among them?

reminder (of a previous promise):

rev. <sup>6</sup>.<sup>9</sup>The king, my lord, has shown his love for Niniveh. He said to heads (of the families): ‘Bring me your sons! Let them stay in my entourage.’

argument (from equal treatment):

rev. <sup>9</sup>.<sup>11</sup>Urdu-Gula is my son. Let him stay in the entourage of the king, my lord, with them.

indirect request (with a component of a blessing):

rev. <sup>11</sup>.<sup>13</sup>Let us be joyful together with all the people, let us dance (and) bless the king, our lord!

declaration of loyalty: rev. <sup>13</sup>.<sup>14</sup>My eyes look (only) to the king, my lord.

argument from helplessness (with an emphasis on loyalty):

rev. <sup>14</sup>.<sup>16</sup>Those who stay in the palace – none of them love me.

argument from helplessness (with strong emphasis on loyalty):

rev. <sup>16</sup>.<sup>19</sup>I have no friend among them whom I could give a present, who would receive it and intercede for me.

request: rev. <sup>19</sup>.<sup>20</sup>May the king, my lord, have mercy upon his servant!

plea: rev. <sup>21</sup>May I not di[e] among all these people!

plea: rev. <sup>22-23</sup>May those who rejoice at my misfortune not attain their desire with regard to me!

Since the issue at hand is the loss of royal favour, no particular events are mentioned as being the reason for the complaint. Hardly unexpected, as this would likely displease the person who had the future of Urdu-Gula in his hands, the king. The complaints are expressed as negative emotional states of Urdu-Gula and his father (rev. 5. *ikku kurû* and *libbu šaplu* in rev. 5.-6.). A previous promise-like command to the heads of Ninivite families is introduced as a reason for Urdu-Gula joining his peers in the royal entourage, an argument from equal treatment again. The following moves focus on emphasising the powerlessness of Adad-šumu-ušur and his unflinching loyalty, which, it is implied, makes him isolated in the palace. Nobody will be willing to help him, not even a promise of a gift would persuade other courtiers to intercede for Adad-šumu-ušur and his son (rev. 16.-19.) – the king is their only hope. The request for mercy suggests perhaps that the disfavour might have been the result of some previous misconduct – perhaps, as Parpola (1987) suggests, this might have been as a result of his failure at a royal childbirth or miscarriage (touched upon in SAA 10 293 – however, this letter is extremely fragmentary). Two final pleas or supplications follow, both of them referring to the worst possible scenarios in case of the king not being receptive to Adad-šumu-ušur's petition. The first plea includes the death imagery, so common in the complaints and petitions in general, while the second refers to the enemies of Adad-šumu-ušur. The king is implored not to let them triumph over Adad-šumu-ušur and it is certainly interesting that this would be the exorcist's last word.

Once, among the compliments directed at the king, Adad-šumu-ušur, changes his address to the second form. Parpola (1983, 107) points out that this is a frequent device in the Mesopotamian literature, but also in the correspondence of Adad-šumu-ušur in particular<sup>130</sup>. Switches to second person address within compliments were already pointed out in other letters – and I believe that some patterns can be observed in the conditions under which this occurs, at least in epistolography.

Urdu-Gula of course also sent letters about his own complaints. In SAA 10 289, only a part of the complaint is preserved, but it is clear that somebody is withholding garments from the Urdu-Gula, his father, and the chief exorcist:

rev. <sup>3'</sup>[x TUG<sub>2</sub>.g]u-*zip-pi pa-ni-i*<sup>1</sup>u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-[te] <sup>4'</sup>[ša U<sub>4</sub>-2]2-KAM u<sub>3</sub> ša u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a <sup>1</sup>e<sup>1</sup>-[ru-bu-u-ni]  
<sup>5'</sup>[TUG<sub>2</sub>.gu]l-IGI.2 TUG<sub>2</sub>.GADA TUG<sub>2</sub>.ma-ak-[li-li] <sup>6'</sup>x<sup>1</sup>-[x]-šu<sub>2</sub> am-mar gab-bu-un-ni [x x x]  
<sup>7'</sup>i-na-aš<sub>2</sub>-ši la-a a-na LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL-[MAŠ.MAŠ] <sup>8'</sup>la a-na m.d.IM-MU-PAP is-si-šu<sub>2</sub> [u<sub>2</sub>-kal-lam]  
<sup>9'</sup>u<sub>3</sub> a-ne<sub>2</sub>-en-nu TA a-*hi-in-n*[i<sup>2</sup> ra-aq-te] <sup>10'</sup>ne<sub>2</sub>-ta-li-a bat-qu ša TUG<sub>2</sub>.gu-*zip-pi*<sup>1</sup>ni<sup>1</sup> <sup>11'</sup>ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>  
mi-i-ni ni-ik-šur TA a-a-ka <sup>12'</sup>ni-iš-ši-a ig-re-e ša am-mar LU<sub>2</sub>.TUR-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>13'</sup>a-ni-nu la ma-aš-  
ša-ni-ni u<sub>3</sub> LUGAL u<sub>2</sub>-da <sup>14'</sup>[ki-i] me-e<sub>h</sub>-re-e-šu<sub>2</sub> a-ne<sub>2</sub>-en-nu-ni

<sup>130</sup> Parpola refers to Caplice (1965, 120), who however only provides a short note on the switch between persons being a matter of stylistic choice and does not refer to terms of address at all.

complaint (with an accusation):

rev. <sup>3'-8'</sup> He is [...] taking the prime [gar]ments [which] a[r]rived on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and today – the *gulēnu*-coats, tunics, and *mak[lalu]*-garments [...], as many as there are. He does not [show] them neither to the chief [exorcist], nor to Adad-šumu-ušur who is with him.

complaint: rev. <sup>9'-10'</sup> And we are left [empty]-handed.

reproach: rev. <sup>10'-11'</sup> With what are we to fill the shortage of our garments?

reproach: rev. <sup>11'-13'</sup> How are we to receive (our) wages, (we) whose (wages) are not (even) equal to (those of) his servants<sup>131</sup>?

argument (from equal treatment):

rev. <sup>13'-14'</sup> And the king knows [that] we are his equals!

It is immediately evident that the reasons for a complaint are much more clearly stated when the reason is not the sudden lack of the royal favour.

SAA 10 294 (Parpola 1993, 231–234) is the very elaborate petition from Urdu-Gula himself. It begins with a greeting with a very long blessing sequence<sup>132</sup> – in some cases greetings do indeed depend on the topic of the following letter. It is worth carefully analysing it in its entirety, even though some parts of this very lengthy (45 lines in the obverse and 38 in the reverse, two on the left edge) petition are almost completely damaged. In the first sequence, Urdu-Gula recounts in a very exaggerated manner his modest beginnings. One could almost forget that he was the son of Adad-šumu-ušur:

obv. <sup>14</sup>TA *re-e-ši ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub> AD-šu<sub>2</sub> ša LUGAL LU<sub>2</sub> *la-ap-nu DUMU la-ap-ni kal-bu mi-tu* <sup>15</sup>[*sak-l*]u u<sub>3</sub> *su-uk-ku-ku a-na-ku* TA ŠA<sub>3</sub> *ki-qil-li-ti in-ta-at-ḫa-an-ni* <sup>16</sup>[*na-mu*]-<sup>r</sup>*a-te-šu<sub>2</sub> a-maḫ-ḫar-šu<sub>2</sub>* TA LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ SIG<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ-ti *šu-mi [i]z-zak-kar* <sup>17</sup>[*re*]-<sup>r</sup>*eḫ-a-ti ma-a'-da-a-ti ak-kal ina bi-ri-it i-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-ši* ANŠE.GIR<sub>3</sub>.NUN.NA <sup>18</sup>GU<sub>4</sub>.NITA<sub>2</sub> *it-tan-na u<sub>3</sub> MU.AN.NA-ia KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR 1 MA.NA 2 MA.NA a-kaš-šad*

pre-complaint (with the point of departure):

obv. <sup>14.-15</sup> From the beginning, during (the reign) of the father of the king, I was a poor man<sup>133</sup>, son of a poor man, a dead dog, a [simple]ton and a blockhead.

<sup>131</sup> Parpola translates ‘pupils’, which is far from impossible, but in view of the lack of context, I prefer the less specific translation.

<sup>132</sup> Parpola 1987, 272–273 claims that this might well be the most elaborate blessing in the entire Sargonid corpus and that it very skilfully exploits the elements of royal ideology to further Urdu-Gula’s own goals. The introduction of the petition with the call to listen to his subject is an allusion to the *Advice to a Prince* (<sup>1</sup>LUGAL *a-na di-ni la i-qu<sub>2</sub>*, in Lambert 1996, 112–113 versus obv. <sup>13</sup>LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub> a-na de-ni ša IR<sub>3</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> li-qu-la* in SAA 10 294).

<sup>133</sup> Here and in rev. 28. Parpola 1987, 273 suggests a literary allusion to the Poor Man of Nippur, who is also described as a poor man in the very first line of the composition – *eḫlum mār Nippur katû u lapnu* – ‘A man, citizen of Nippur, poor and destitute (...)’ (see Ottervanger 2016, 9).

pre-complaint (with gratitude towards the king's father):

obv. <sup>15-18</sup>. (The father of the king) raised me up from a dung heap (?). I received gifts from him. My name was m[en]tioned together with the (names) of the courtiers. I enjoyed copious [le]ftovers. From time to time, he gave me a mule (or) an ox, and in a year I could make (as much as) one or two minas.

Urdu-Gula then moves on to the account of his idyllic life in the retinue of the king when he was still the crown prince:

obv. <sup>19</sup>[UD.MEŠ] ša DUMU-LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia* TA LU<sub>2</sub>.MAŠ.MAŠ.MEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub> *re-ḫa-a-ti a-maḫ-ḫar* <sup>20</sup>[ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>]-bi *ap-ta-<sup>r</sup>te<sup>1</sup> at-ti-ti-iz ma-aš-šar-tu<sub>2</sub> [a]t-ta-aš-šar U<sub>4</sub>-mu am-mar ina IGI-šu<sub>2</sub> [a]z-zi-zu-u-ni ik-ki-be<sub>2</sub>-e-šu<sub>2</sub> at-ta-aš-šar ina E<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.SAG u<sub>3</sub> ša-ziq-ni* <sup>22</sup>ša *la-a pi-i-šu<sub>2</sub> la-a e-ru-ub a-kil u<sub>2</sub>-ka-la-a-ti ša UR.MAH at-ta-ad-gil<sub>2</sub>* <sup>23</sup>DINGIR-ka <sup>r</sup>u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-[s]al-li-ma u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub> id-da-at AD-šu<sub>2</sub> ur-ta-ad-di šu-mu SIG<sub>5</sub>* <sup>24</sup><sup>r</sup>uk-ta-in<sup>1</sup> u<sub>3</sub> *a-na-ku la-a ina pi-it-ti ep-še-ti-ia ep-ša<sub>2</sub>-ak* <sup>25</sup><sup>r</sup>ki-i<sup>1</sup> [la] <sup>r</sup>ina *pa<sup>1</sup>-ni-it-tim-ma ag-du-uš-šu-uš* <sup>26</sup>MU <sup>r</sup>la SIG<sub>5</sub><sup>1</sup> [l]i-iḫ-šu<sub>2</sub> u<sub>3</sub> *še-eš-šu-u<sub>2</sub> ša a-bi-ti iz-zi-'a-ar<sub>2</sub>* <sup>27</sup>ik-[ki]-<sup>r</sup>bi ša LUGAL EN-ia *at-ta-aš-šar LU<sub>2</sub>.EN.MEŠ-MUN la-a aš-ba-ta* <sup>28</sup>dib-<sup>r</sup>bi x x x<sup>1</sup>[x]-u<sub>2</sub>-tu *as-sa-ad-da-ad ma-az-za-as-su-nu nu-bat-tu* <sup>29</sup>x[x] <sup>r</sup>x x x u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> *ka-na-a-šu<sub>2</sub> ka-da-a-ru u<sub>3</sub> pu-luḫ-tu ša E<sub>2</sub>.GAL* <sup>30</sup><sup>r</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub><sup>1</sup>.MEŠ *ša-<sup>r</sup>ziq-ni<sup>1</sup> u<sub>3</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.SAG.MEŠ us-sa-am-mid mi-i-nu ina Š[A<sub>3</sub>-b]i* <sup>31</sup>aḫ-<sup>r</sup>za<sup>1</sup>-ku *šum-m[u] il-la-ka LU<sub>2</sub>.um-ma-a-ni dan-nu-ti u<sub>3</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.<sup>r</sup>2-u<sup>1</sup>-ti* <sup>32</sup><sup>r</sup>ANŠE.GIR<sub>3</sub>.NUN.NA.MEŠ<sup>1</sup> *i-na-aš<sub>2</sub>-ši-u ia-a-ši 1-en ANŠE.NITA<sub>2</sub> lid-di-[nu]-u-ni*

pre-complaint (with an account of own meritorious service):

obv. <sup>19-23</sup>. [(In) the days] (when my lord was) the crown prince, I was receiving<sup>134</sup> the 'leftovers' with his exorcists. I stood [a]t window openings<sup>135</sup> (and) kept watch. All the days that I spent in his service, I guarded his privileges. I did not enter the house of a eunuch or a courtier without his permission. I was viewed as one (who) enjoys the lion's (share<sup>?</sup> of the) 'leftovers' (?)<sup>136</sup>. I appeased your god.

pre-complaint (with flattery):

<sup>134</sup> Here, as well in *it-tan-na* and *a-kaš-šad* in line 18., *ak-kal* in line 17. (*i-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-ši* is nothing extraordinary), *a-maḫ-ḫar* and *[i]z-zak-kar* in line 16., Urdu-Gula is using the present-future tense to refer to the future. I would maintain that this is a conscious choice to lend his letter a more literary character.

<sup>135</sup> Parpola 1987, 271 mentions Urdu-Gula 'snooping around' – without indicating the passage of the letter he means exactly. He could not possibly refer to this reassurance about watching the windows – as Parpola also surely was aware, the various openings of a house (or palace) were viewed as liminal spaces through which demons (the purview of exorcists) could attempt to sneak inside – see lines 49.-89. of the first tablet of the series *saḡ-ba saḡ-ba*, which lists the passage from the gate towards the door and various windows that a demon could take while on his way to harm the inhabitants. The usual type of window appears in lines 72. and 74. of the Akkadian translation – <sup>72</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> *ina ap-ti u<sub>2</sub>-šar-ru* <sup>74</sup>ki-šad-su *liṭ-bu-ḫu* – 'If (the demon) leans into the window, may they (= the great gods) cut off his head!' (see Schramm 2001, 22–25).

<sup>136</sup> See Parpola 1987, 275, commentary to line 22. and CAD U, 54 sub *\*ukālu*.



obv. <sup>23-24</sup>Now, the king, my lord, added to his good name following his father.

complaint:

obv. <sup>24-25</sup>And I have not been treated according to my deeds. I have suffered (?) <sup>137</sup> as [never] before. I have relinquished my life!

assertion of innocence (with a list of wrong actions, and one's own proper actions listed as a contrast):

obv. <sup>26-30</sup>Bad reputation, [w]hispering about and betraying secrets <sup>138</sup> are to be despised. (But) I have guarded the privileges of the king, my lord. I have not made (any) friends. I have suffered [...] things. My office was my resting place. I have taught the servants, the courtiers and the eunuchs (alike), submission, toil and the fear of the palace <sup>139</sup> –

complaint:

obv. <sup>30-31</sup>what did I obtain because of it?

request (with an argument from equal treatment):

obv. <sup>31-32</sup>If it is acceptable that the chief scholars and their deputies receive mules, may they give me a single donkey!

The following passage of the obverse is badly broken. After mentioning that he received the 'leftovers' together with the exorcists, Urdu-Gula immediately proceeds to claim that he kept the watch of the window openings – thus also did the work of an exorcist, guarding the palace against the demonic attempts to sneak in. It is unclear what exactly Urdu-Gula refers to when he mentions the privileges or things/places reserved for the king, but this need not have sounded threatening or presumptuous to the king, as Parpola (1987, 271) suggests. Urdu-Gula adroitly intersperses the list of his meritorious deeds with the mentions of the good treatment he received at the hands of the king, after which he proceeds to a more open flattery. Directly after the compliment follows the first complaint, clearly forming a logical unit with the compliment – the king has done so well in respects with the exception of Urdu-Gula's miserable fate.

In the following move, Urdu-Gula mentions three types of misbehaviour a courtier and a scholar could presumably be guilty of – and immediately hastens to declare that his own conduct was proper. He did not find friends or benefactors (or both), and he has been infallibly diligent. Urdu-Gula then recounts

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<sup>137</sup> Parpola 1987, 276 comments that his translation of *ag-du-uš-su-iš* is purely based on context. Both *gašāšu* A ('to gnash one's teeth, to rage', CAD G, 52) and *gašāšu* B ('to trim, to cut', CAD G, 53) are a/u verbs. I am unable to offer a better suggestion.

<sup>138</sup> Or spreading rumours, although rumours are likely indicated by the whispers, see CAD A/2, 34 sub *amatu* A 3b.

<sup>139</sup> This motive also occurs in *ludlul bēl nēmeqi* Tablet II, l. <sup>32</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> pu-luḫ-ti* E.GAL *um-man u<sub>2</sub>-šal-mid* – 'And I taught the people to fear the palace.' (Lambert 1996, 40–41).

that he taught the eunuchs and non-eunuchs to toil away and fear the palace – and complains that for this he has not been given his due reward.

The last legible passage in the obverse includes an interesting case of an argument from equal treatment in a very humble iteration. If it is proper for the chief scholars and their deputies to receive a mule, Urdu-Gula should be given a donkey – since the mule is by far the more valuable and coveted animal, Urdu-Gula here deliberately places himself at the bottom of the scholarly hierarchy.

When the letter is again legible in the reverse, Urdu-Gula complains that he already attempted to send a petition through a eunuch, but this proved a failure (rev. 3.-4.). The letter he receives from the king in response apparently included a royal claim of ignorance (rev. <sup>5</sup>[*ma-a la u<sub>2</sub>*]-*da ki-a a-<sup>1</sup>kan<sup>1</sup>-ni-<sup>1</sup>i<sup>1</sup> šam-ru-ša-ka-a-ni* – ‘[I did not k]now that you have been having such a bad time.’). An interesting comparison is certainly SAA 21 17, in which Assurbanipal also claims ignorance when faced with a complaint of the elders of Nippur. Two attestations are perhaps not enough to establish pattern, but the evidence is certainly suggestive.

Urdu-Gula explains how important the letter from the king was to him (rev. 8.-9.). He guarded the letter like his only son (<sup>8</sup>(...) *ki-i DUMU e-d[i] <sup>9</sup>a[t-ta-š]ar*), but it brought him no release. This grumbling is followed by two proverbs, after which Urdu-Gula moves on to more concrete grievances:

rev. <sup>13</sup>(...) *an-nu-rig 2-ta MU.AN.NA.MEŠ TA mar 2 u<sub>2</sub>-m[a-me-ia] <sup>14</sup>[m]e-t[u]-ni 3-š<sub>u<sub>2</sub></sub> a-na URU.arba-il<sub>3</sub> ma-la a-na URU.ŠA<sub>3</sub>-URU ina GIR<sub>3</sub>.2-ia at-[ta-lak] <sup>15</sup>[man]-nu ra-<sup>1</sup>i-i-ma-ni qa-ti iš-bat u<sub>3</sub> lu-u ina IGI LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia <sup>16</sup>ra<sup>1</sup>-ta-a ina ŠA<sub>3</sub> URU.E<sub>2</sub>.GAL.MEŠ SAG LU<sub>2</sub>.MAŠ.MAŠ LUGAL iš-ši u<sub>3</sub> a-na-ku h[u-lu] <sup>17</sup>ša mu-da-bi-ri aš-ša-bat TA IGI ša UN.MEŠ i-ša-<sup>1</sup>u-lu-un-ni <sup>18</sup>ma-a a-ta-a ina GIR<sub>3</sub>.2-ka ta[l-la-k]a UN.MEŠ E<sub>2</sub> et-te-qu dan-nu-ti ina GIŠ.GU.<sup>1</sup>ZA<sup>1</sup>.MEŠ <sup>19</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.2-u<sub>2</sub>-ti ina GIŠ.sa-par-<sup>1</sup>ra<sup>1</sup>-ti LU<sub>2</sub>.še-eh-ru-ti ina ŠA<sub>3</sub> ANŠE.GIR<sub>3</sub>.NUN.NA.MEŠ <sup>20</sup>a-na-ku ina GIR<sub>3</sub>.2-ia*

complaint:

rev. <sup>13.-15</sup>. It has been now two years since the two bea[sts of mine] died. I [have] go[ne] three times to Arba’il (and) once to the Inner City (of Assur). (Was there anybody) [wh]o showed me mercy, took my hand and br[ought me] before the king, my lord?

reproach:

rev. <sup>16.-18</sup>. Why did the king summon an exorcist from Ekallāte and I had to take desert (= less frequented) ro[ads] because people were asking me: ‘Why do you c[ome] on foot?’?

complaint:

rev. <sup>18.-20</sup>. People pass by (my) house. The mighty on palanquins, their subordinates on carts, (and even) the servants on mules, (while) I have to walk!

The main preoccupation of this entire sequence is the lack of an animal that could serve as a mount, forcing Urdu-Gula to resort to the apparently humiliating act of travelling on foot. He complains that nobody wants to help him and reproaches the king for summoning an exorcist from Ekallate, even though, it is implied, Urdu-Gula would have served just as well (if not better) – Urdu-Gula meanwhile is travelling by the back roads, ashamed of people asking him why he has neither a mule nor a donkey. In the last argument, he presumes the expectation of treatment according to one's station while also introducing a comparison with three groups of people – the mighty, their deputies or subordinates, and the servants. All of them are provided with means of transport other than their own feet. Only Urdu-Gula has nothing, completely excluded and more miserable than a common servant.

In the next sequence Urdu-Gula pre-emptes royal doubts by stating that even though he is an Assyrian, the property, above all the land, he inherited from his father is very meagre (this also indicates that Adad-šumu-ušur had been dead at the time when this letter was written), although immediately afterwards he mentions that previously enjoyed royal favour permitted him to purchase more slaves (rev. 22.).

The next part of the letter has a less clear-cut structure, but the main point of contention seems to be the lack of a son who would take care of Urdu-Gula:

rev. <sup>23</sup>(...) *ina E<sub>2</sub>-kid-mur-ri e-ta-rab qa-re-e-tu e-ta-pa-aš<sub>2</sub>* <sup>24</sup>MUNUS *ši-i ta-ad-dal-ḥa-an-ni* 5 MU.AN.NA.MEŠ *la-a mu-'a-a-tu la ba-la-tu* <sup>25</sup>*u<sub>3</sub>* DUMU-*a-a la-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>* 3 MUNUS.MEŠ MU.AN.NA *an-ni-tu it-tuq-ta-an-ni* *u<sub>3</sub>* LU<sub>2</sub>.ENGAR <sup>26</sup>*la-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>* E<sub>2</sub> GIŠ.APIN A.ŠA<sub>3</sub> *la-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>* d.a-num d.EN.LIL<sub>2</sub> d.e<sub>2</sub>-*a ša ina* SAG.DU <sup>27</sup>*ša* LUGAL EN-*ia kun-nu-ni šum<sub>2</sub>-mu am-mar* KUŠ.E.SIR<sub>2</sub> *am-mar ig-ri* <sup>28</sup>*ša* LU<sub>2</sub>.TUG<sub>2</sub>.KA.KEŠ<sub>2</sub> *ma-aš-ša-ku-ni te-nu-u<sub>2</sub> ša* TUG<sub>2</sub>.gu-*zip-pi-ia i-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>-ni* <sup>29</sup>*u<sub>3</sub>* [G]IN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ LAL-*ṭi a-na* 6 MA.NA KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR SAG.DU *la ḥab-bu-la-ku-u-ni* <sup>30</sup>[*u<sub>3</sub> ina* 50<sup>?</sup> M]U.AN.NA.MEŠ-*ia ma-a a-na ši-bu-ti tak-šu-da tu-kul-la-ka lu-u man-nu* <sup>31</sup>[*ina* IGI x<sup>140</sup> *la*]-*a maḥ-rak el-li a-na* E<sub>2</sub>.GAL *la-a tar-ša-ak* : LU<sub>2</sub>.ra-ag-gi-mu <sup>32</sup>[*a-sa-'a-al* SI]G<sub>5</sub> *la-a a-mur ma-aḥ-ḥur* *u<sub>3</sub> di-ig-lu un-ta-aṭ-ṭi* <sup>33</sup>[*ša* LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>*]-*ia<sub>2</sub> a-ma-ar<sub>2</sub>-ka* SIG<sub>5</sub> : *na-as-ḥur-ka maš-ru-u<sub>2</sub>*

complaint:

rev. <sup>23.-25</sup>. I entered the Kidmuru temple (and) gave a banquet<sup>141</sup>. (But) this woman (only) vexed me. For five years I have been neither dead nor alive and I have no son.

complaint:

rev. <sup>25.-26</sup>. Three women have fallen to me this year, but there is no farmer, no farming equipment, (and) no field.

<sup>140</sup> Parpola restores 'king' in the translation.

<sup>141</sup> Aimed at ensuring progeny (see Parpola 1987, 277, commentary to line 23.).

complaint (with an oath):

rev. <sup>26-29</sup>By Anu, Enlil and Ea<sup>142</sup>, who are a solid presence in the mind of the king, my lord, I cannot (even) afford as much as (a pair) of sandals (or) the wages of a tailor! I do not have a change of garments and I have incurred a debt of (only) some shekels less than 6 minas, plus the interest!

complaint (with an emphasis on helplessness and lack of aid):

rev. <sup>30-32</sup>[And (I am in)] my [50<sup>th</sup> (?)] year already. They say: ‘Who will you trust when you reach old age?’. I am not pleasing [to the king (?)]. I go to the palace; I am no good. [I asked] a prophet but I saw nothing [good]. He was approachable<sup>143</sup> (?) (but his) vision lacking.

flattery: rev. <sup>33</sup>Seeing you, [the king], my [lord] is goodness! Your favour is riches!

The grievances that Urdu-Gula lists before his request (in the following broken passage, which I have not included above) are increasingly shorter and diverse, as if he was trying to compose the text in such a way that it even structurally demonstrates his overwrought state. His own attempts to do something about his situation are a failure, as the banquet he organises in the temple of Ištar is fruitless. He remains childless. When three women come as an unexpected boon, there is no way he can utilise his good fortune for lack of everything else. His poverty is absolute: he cannot afford sandals nor the wages of a tailor, and more dramatically perhaps, he has no change of garments. The same is the case for Gimil-Ninurta, the poor man of Nippur, who is also described as having no change of clothes<sup>144</sup> (<sup>10</sup>*la-biš-ma ša la te-ne<sub>2</sub>-[e] šu-ba-tu* – ‘Clothed in his only (set of) garments’, Ottervanger 2016, 9). Urdu-Gula uses the same word that is attested in the Poor Man of Nippur – *tēnū*, which to me suggests that his usage of the word *lapnu* (‘poor’) to refer to his poverty, instead of the much more common *muškēnu*, was a conscious choice (see note to obv. 14. above) and not just a coincidence.

Urdu-Gula proceeds to mention his advanced age – the exact number (Parpola suggests 50) is broken away, but the context is clear enough. He quotes a poem<sup>145</sup>, hinting at his anxiety about the future. He has no son, as he already explained, and cannot therefore expect to be taken care of in his older age. He is not pleasing – likely to the king (there is a gap). He is turned away from the palace and the prophet is of no help. The motive of trying to obtain aid from different sources is common enough in Akkadian literature, but here the first scene that comes to mind is surely the attempt at ensuring the assistance of

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<sup>142</sup> This is of course an allusion to the astrological series *Enūma Anu Enlil* (Parpola 1987, 273–274). Urdu-Gula flatters the king by declaring that he is perfectly familiar with this long and difficult composition.

<sup>143</sup> See CAD M/1, 68. Parpola translates ‘adverse’.

<sup>144</sup> The description of Gimil-Ninurta’s poverty, however, assumes a different structure. He is first presented as a poor and destitute man (*katū u lapnu*), but then the possessions he lacks are presented in a descending order of necessity (of sorts): first silver and gold (lines 4. and 5.), then grain (line 6.), then meat (a delicacy) and prime-quality beer (line 8.), and only in line 9. is it explicitly stated that goes to sleep hungry (*ina la ma-ka-l[e-e] bi-riš i-šal-lal*, Ottervanger 2016, 9).

<sup>145</sup> Parpola saw here a possible saying, but the clause has been in the meantime identified in a fragment of a poem (Jiménez 2014, 103–104).

various specialists in *ludlul bēl nēmeqi* (Lambert 1996, 38–39). Although a prophet does not feature in the list of cultic specialists accosted by the righteous sufferer, the sequence of moves describing being sent away seems suggestive enough.

The following passage seems to include a supplication to the king to help by providing for his most basic needs:

rev. <sup>34</sup>[ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bu x x ša LU]GAL *le-e-ṭi-ib liš-pur-an-ni am-mar 2 u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a-me* <sup>35</sup>[x x x x]-ke-e u<sub>3</sub>  
*te-ne<sub>2</sub>-e ša TUG<sub>2</sub>.gu-zip-pi*

request: rev. <sup>34.-35</sup>May [the heart... of the ki]ng soften! May he send me at least two beasts [...] and a change of garments!

According to Parpola (1987, 271), this modest request is simply the result of Urdu-Gula being sure that he cannot hope for anything better from the king after the failure of the petitions from his father. However, the hopelessness of his situation did not prevent him from crafting a sophisticated literary text. The motive of claiming that one is not asking for much is not entirely absent in the Akkadian requests – I believe that the modest choice of Urdu-Gula, even if realistic, was also deliberate.

The rest of the letter is almost completely broken, although in the line 37. one can still read a part of a presumable argument Urdu-Gula was trying to make by mentioning that he has known the king since his (the king's) childhood.

As has been already shown for other letters whose topic was obtaining the royal favour again, the exact cause of the complaint remains unclear. While Urdu-Gula, like Tabnî, almost gleefully provides a detailed account of his own abject suffering, there are no explicit accusations – although Urdu-Gula comes close when he states that he has not been treated according to his deeds. Parpola (1987, 270–271) claims that the king would have reason enough to personally dislike Urdu-Gula, who was according to him servile and enjoyed snooping around and complaining constantly. I believe a quick perusal of the preceding complaints in the petitions sent to the king is sufficient to determine that Urdu-Gula's tone is not particularly servile in comparison: it is the baseline of politeness that is completely different. Since Urdu-Gula is not servile in comparison, *he is not servile at all*. The politeness system of Akkadian in the first millennium BCE demanded simply that one debases oneself before the king. This is a phenomenon known from numerous other languages and cultures and under no circumstances evidence of servility, unless one takes contemporary Western polite behaviour to be normative universally.

Far more interesting is Parpola's suggestion that Urdu-Gula fell into disfavour as a consequence of problems with a pregnancy in the royal family, described in the otherwise badly damaged letter LAS 339+ = SAA 10 293, although this too, of course, remains firmly in the realm of speculation.

SAA 10 349 (Parpola 1993, 284–285) is a letter from Mār-Ištar, the agent of the king in Babylonia. It includes a series of reports on the progress of restoration works in various temples. Mār-Ištar mentions several different issues, but he is particularly unimpressed with what is happening in Der:

rev. <sup>11</sup>(...) *u*<sub>3</sub> E<sub>2</sub>-DINGIR.MEŠ <sup>12</sup>ša BAD<sub>3</sub>-DINGIR.KI TA *be*<sub>2</sub>-et *u*š-še-e-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>13</sup>kar-ru-u-ni a-du-na-kan-ni LU<sub>2</sub>.ŠA<sub>3</sub>.TAM <sup>14</sup>*u*<sub>3</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.EN-pi-qit-ta-a-te ša BAD<sub>3</sub>-DINGIR.KI <sup>15</sup>ina UGU a-ḫi-iš *u*<sub>2</sub>-bu-ku me-me-e-ni <sup>16</sup>ina UGU-ḫi la iq-ri-ib MU.AN.NA an-ni-tu<sub>2</sub> <sup>17</sup>*u*<sub>2</sub>-sa-ar-ri-u i-ra-aš-ši-pu <sup>18</sup>U<sub>4</sub>-mu ep-pu-šu U<sub>4</sub>-mu *u*<sub>2</sub>-ra-am-mu-u

report (with a strong undercurrent of a compliant):

rev. <sup>11.-18</sup>And the house of the gods in Der: ever since its foundations were laid until now, the temple administrator and the officials in Der have been pushing it onto each other. Nobody (even) started to work (there). This year, they have begun to build, (but) one day they do the work, and on the (second) day they leave it.

The complaint-like report is followed by a possible explanation for the current state of affairs (the Elamite crown prince has sent masons, rev. 19.-21.), and a suggestion on how to solve the problem (rev. 23.-re27.). In the end, the letters of Mār-Ištar are filled with explanations and accounts of heard news – they are shaped more by his role as Esarhaddon’s agent in faraway Babylonia (Baker 2001b, 739–740) than by the stylistic concerns. Of course, Mār-Ištar is a scholar in his own right and proficient at dealing with written matter, as evident from his style, but functional concerns would always play a crucial role.

A similar report (also with parallels with SAA 10 353, analysed in the section on denunciations – the discussion of the problem in this letter also includes a royal command in the initial part) appears in SAA 10 359 (Parpola 1993, 296–297), preceded by an account of previous events. The complaint features in obv. 11.-13. – and perhaps even further, but the next lines (about 15, according to the editor), are broken away. The letter ends with an assertion of loyalty from the sender who declares himself a dog of the king (rev. 10’.-11’.). The formula asking for a royal intervention follows (rev. 12’.-14’.).

SAA 10 328 (Parpola 1993, 266) is damaged, but the short passage with an indirect complaint about the lack of royal replies to the sender’s letters is preserved fully:

obv. <sup>8</sup>(...) *nap-šal-ti qut-PA* <sup>9</sup>me-UGU.MEŠ *maš-qi<sub>2</sub>-a-ti 3-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>10</sup>a-na LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia us-se-bi-la* <sup>11</sup>šum-ma *u<sub>2</sub>-s[e]-ri-bu ina pa-an [LUGAL EN]-ia* <sup>12</sup>šum-ma *la u<sub>2</sub>-še-rib-bu la u<sub>2</sub>-da* <sup>13</sup>la *gab-ri e-gir<sub>2</sub>-ti a-mar* <sup>14</sup>la SILIM-mu *ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia<sub>2</sub> aš<sub>2</sub>-am-me*

complaint: obv. <sup>8.-12</sup>I have sent salves, fumigants, phylacteries, and potions three times to the king, my lord. I do not know whether they have been br[ou]ght before [the king], my [lord].

SAA 187 (Parpola 1993, 154) is very unusual in that it includes a indirect complaint whose seemingly only aim was obtaining consolation – in any case, Adad-šumu-ušur can provide nothing else:

obv. <sup>7</sup>[m]a-a ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi ma-ri-iš a-dan-niš <sup>8</sup>ša ina še-ḥe-ri-ia an-ni-<sup>1</sup>e<sup>1</sup> <sup>9</sup>ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi iš-pil-u-ni a-<sup>1</sup>ke<sup>1</sup>-e  
<sup>10</sup>ne<sub>3</sub>-pu-uš lu-u<sub>2</sub> ša pa-ṭa-a-<sup>1</sup>ri<sup>1</sup> <sup>11</sup>ši-i mi-šil ma-ti-ka <sup>12</sup>lu ta-din lu tap-ṭu-ra-aš<sub>2</sub>-ši <sup>13</sup>mi-i-nu  
 ne<sub>2</sub>-pu-uš LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> <sup>14</sup>dul-lu ša a-na e-pa-a-še <sup>15</sup>la il-lu-ku-u<sub>2</sub>-ni šu-u<sub>2</sub>

complaint: obv. <sup>7-10</sup>. ‘I am so very grief-stricken! How did we act that I have become so dejected on account of my child?’.

consolation: obv. <sup>10-15</sup>. If it had been curable, you would have given half your kingdom and cured it! What could we have done? O, king, my lord! There was nothing we could have done<sup>146</sup>.

The scholar can only reassure the king that he did all he could – and he does this by emphasising the fairy tale-like reward the king would have surely offered.

SAA 10 242 (Parpola 1993, 193) includes another complaint from the king – this one, however, pertains to his health:

obv. <sup>5</sup>(...) ša LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> <sup>6</sup>iq-bu-ni ma-a a-ḥi-a <sup>7</sup>še-pi-ia la-mu-qa-a-a <sup>8</sup>u<sub>3</sub> ma-a IGI.2-ia la a-  
 pat-ti <sup>9</sup>ma-a mar-ṭak kar-rak <sup>10</sup>ina ŠA<sub>3</sub> ša ḥu-un-ṭu <sup>11</sup>šu-u<sub>2</sub> ina ŠA<sub>3</sub> eš-ma-a-ti <sup>12</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-kil-lu-u-ni  
<sup>13</sup>ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi šu-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>14</sup>la-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> ḥi-ṭu

rev. <sup>1</sup>aš-šur d.UTU d.EN d.PA <sup>2</sup>SILIM-mu i-šak-ku-nu

complaint (with an introduction):

obv. <sup>5-9</sup>. As to what the king, my lord, wrote to me: ‘My arms and legs are feeble!’ and also: ‘I cannot open my eyes, I am scratched and lie prostrate.’ –

explanation: obv. <sup>10-13</sup>. it is because of fever. It lingered inside the bones. This is the reason.

reassurance: obv. <sup>14</sup>-rev. <sup>2</sup>. There is no (serious) damage. Aššūr, Šamaš, Bēl (and) Nabû will grant health!

In SAA 10 320 (Parpola 1993, 258–259), the complaint is voiced in answer to a question from the king:

rev. <sup>6</sup>ša LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> iš-pur-an-ni <sup>7</sup>ma-a i-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-ši-i <sup>8</sup>TA ra-me-ni-ka <sup>9</sup>ta-ad-li-bi im-ma-te <sup>10</sup>a-  
 ri-qa pa-an <sup>11</sup>m.aš-šur-mu-kin-BALA.MEŠ-ia <sup>12</sup>a-na-ku a-du šu-la-an-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>13</sup>a-mur-u-ni a-na  
 šul-me <sup>14</sup>ša LUGAL at-tal-ka <sup>re15</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> <sup>re16</sup>ITI U<sub>4</sub>-me lu-ra-mu-ni

e. <sup>1</sup>dul-lu me-me-ni le-pu-uš u<sub>2</sub>-la-a <sup>2</sup>a-mu-at

question (with an introduction):

rev. <sup>6-9</sup>. As to what the king, my lord, wrote to me: ‘Is it (true) that you are concerned about yourself?’.

<sup>146</sup> Literally: ‘it was a work that could not be done’.

complaint (as a confirmation, with a question):

rev. <sup>9.-10.</sup>When am I (ever) free?

explanation:

rev. <sup>10.-14.</sup>I was with Aššūr-mukīn-palêya. As soon as I saw he was healthy (again), I came to greet the king.

request: rev. <sup>re15.-re16.</sup>Now, O king, my lord! Let me be released for a full month!

argument: e. <sup>1.-2.</sup>Let do something – otherwise I will die.

Perhaps the very direct tone of the sender was caused by the question from the king, which emboldened him to air his grievance without mincing words.

SAA 10 348 (Parpola 1993, 283–284) presents a complaint written to pre-empt an accusation:

obv. <sup>be23.</sup>*i-su-ri* LU<sub>2</sub>.GAR-UMUŠ KA<sub>2</sub>.DINGIR.KI

rev. <sup>1.</sup>*a-na* MAN EN-*ia*<sub>2</sub> *li-im-ni-i-u* <sup>2.</sup>*ma-a* DUMU.MEŠ KA<sub>2</sub>.DINGIR.KI *ina kur-ba-ni* <sup>3.</sup>*iš-še-e-u-ni* *si-il-a-te ši-na* <sup>4.</sup>*ina te-ki-i-ti* *ša a-na* LU<sub>2</sub>.GAR-UMUŠ.MEŠ <sup>5.</sup>*iq-bu-u-ni* *ma-a re-eš* GIŠ.GIGIR.MEŠ-*ku-nu* <sup>6.</sup>*iš-ša* KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR *ma-a'-du* *ina* UGU DUMU.MEŠ <sup>7.</sup>KA<sub>2</sub>.DINGIR.RA.KI <sup>8.</sup>*u*<sub>3</sub> GU<sub>2</sub>.DU<sub>8</sub>.A.KI *u<sub>2</sub>-tu-uš-si-ku* <sup>9.</sup>*it-taḥ-ru* DUMU.MEŠ KA<sub>2</sub>.DINGIR.RA.KI <sup>10.</sup>*muš-ke-e-nu-te* *ša me-me-e-ni-šu-nu* <sup>11.</sup>*la-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>-u-ni* *ki-il-lu is-sa-ak-nu* <sup>12.</sup>*ib-ti-ki-i-u<sub>2</sub>* LU<sub>2</sub>.GAR-UMUŠ <sup>13.</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ TA ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bi-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu uš-šab-bit* <sup>14.</sup>*ma-a* LU<sub>2</sub>.A-KIN.MEŠ-*e-a* *ina kur-ba-ni* <sup>15.</sup>*ta-aš-še-'a-a* *u<sub>3</sub> a-na* DAM <sup>16.</sup>m.DU<sub>10</sub>.GA-i LU<sub>2</sub>.*da-a-a-nu i-sap-ra* <sup>17.</sup>*ma-a mu-ut-ki* *ina pa-ni-ki lu pa-qid* <sup>18.</sup>KA<sub>2</sub> *la u<sub>2</sub>-ša-a : a-se-me ma-a* <sup>19.</sup>*a-na* LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ *ša ib-ki-i-u-ni* <sup>20.</sup>m.DU<sub>10</sub>.GA-i LU<sub>2</sub>.*da-a-a-nu* <sup>21.</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-sa-ad-bi-ib-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* *ki-i* <sup>re22.</sup>*an-ni-i šu-u<sub>2</sub> te<sub>3</sub>-e-mu* <sup>re23.</sup>MAN *be-li<sub>2</sub> lu-u u<sub>2</sub>-di*

prediction (with a potential complaint):

obv. <sup>be23.-</sup>rev. <sup>3.</sup>Perhaps the commandant of Babylon will write to the king as follows: ‘The Babylonians threw lumps of clay at me!’.

explanation (with an accusation and a strongly implied compliant):

rev. <sup>4.-15.</sup>This is a lie! Necessitated (?) by the fact that they told the commanders: ‘Prepare your (pl.) chariots!’, they assigned much silver to the citizens of Babylon, Borsippa and Cutha, (and) received it. The Babylonians, wretched paupers who have nothing, let out a wail and complained in tears. The commandant captured people from their midst, saying: ‘You threw lumps of clay at my messengers!’



report: rev. <sup>15.-21</sup>. He (= the commandant) sent word to the wife of Tābî, the judge: ‘May your husband be entrusted to you – he may not go outdoors!’ I heard that Tābî, the judge, incited the people who complained.

closing formula:

rev. <sup>21.-re23</sup>. This is the report. May the king, my lord, know this.

The entire sequence is in effect an explication of the conflict in Babylon. Mār-Ištar ends it with the subscript *tēmu*, report, but his aim was clearly to pre-empt the accusation and complain about the commandant in the process, while showing the Babylonians – the paupers (*muškenūte* in rev. 10) – in a more favourable light. On the other hand, Mār-Ištar also mentions why the commandants acted the way they did – because they also received their orders.

A complaint from the priestly corpus is attested in SAA 13 73 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 64). The issue at hand is completely personal:

obv. <sup>7</sup>.ITI *ina* U<sub>4</sub>-*me an-ni-i* <sup>8</sup>.TA *be<sub>2</sub>-et mar-ša-ku-u-ni* <sup>9</sup>*si-iḫ-lu šu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>10</sup>.TA *be<sub>2</sub>-et i-sa-ḫal-an-ni-ni*  
<sup>11</sup>.rPAB<sup>1</sup>.GAR.GAR *i-su* <sup>12</sup>*is-sa-aḫ-lu*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*ma-a ŠU.2 d.dil-bat* <sup>2</sup>*mar-ša-a-ka* <sup>3</sup>*ma-a ina* UGU *si-iḫ-ir* <sup>4</sup>.rša<sup>1</sup> *i-sa-a-te* <sup>5</sup>*pa-al-ḫa-ak* <sup>6</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> *la*  
LUGAL *la e-pa-aš<sub>2</sub>*

complaint: obv. <sup>7.-12</sup>. It is now a full month since I have become ill (and) since this acute pain has been piercing me. I have been feeling it in my jaw (and) ...(?).

explanation: rev. <sup>1.-4</sup>. (They told me) as follows: ‘It is the hand of Dilbat (= Venus)! It is because of intercourse (?)<sup>147</sup> with women!’

complaint: rev. <sup>5</sup>. I am afraid.

pre-request: rev. <sup>6</sup>. I cannot proceed without (the permission from) the king.

In the following passage, the sender requests that the king commands ‘him’ – that is, the appropriate specialist healer who is not mentioned – to act and cure the sender from his illness (rev. 7.-12.).

SAA 13 147 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 118) can be placed somewhere between a complaint and a simple request for royal intervention in resolving the conflict:

obv. <sup>8</sup>.LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-[d]a* <sup>9</sup>*ki-i d.15 ša<sub>2</sub> URU.arba-il<sub>3</sub>* <sup>10</sup>*dan-na-at-u<sub>2</sub>-ni* <sup>11</sup>*qa-ri-tu ina URU.arba-il<sub>3</sub>* <sup>12</sup>*te-ta-li-a* <sup>13</sup>*a-na LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL-da-ni-bat* <sup>14</sup>.ANŠE.KUR.RA *u<sub>2</sub>-ka-la* <sup>15</sup>[*l*]a *im-ma-gur<sub>2</sub>* <sup>16</sup>[*la*]  
<sup>17</sup>*i<sup>1</sup>-ma-ḫar-an-ni* <sup>be17</sup>[*la u<sub>2</sub>-še*]-*taq-an-ni*

<sup>147</sup> While CAD S, 239 sub *siḫru* does not note the meaning ‘intercourse’, *siḫru* can also mean ‘turn’ (in the sense of movement). This could well refer to various movements undertaken during sexual intercourse.

argument (realised as faux-reminder):

obv. <sup>8-10</sup>The king, my lord, kno[w]s that Ištar of Arba'il is powerful.

report: obv. <sup>11-12</sup>She has gone up to the (divine) feast in the city of Arba'il.

complaint:

obv. <sup>13-be17</sup>I am keeping a horse for the chief victualler. (However), he [re]fuses to receive it.  
[Nor does he le]t me pass (it) on.

In the following passage, the sender requests a sealed order for the chief victualler to disburse the offerings (rev. 4.-6.). The request is followed by two arguments:

rev. <sup>7</sup>*ku-um* d.15 <sup>8</sup>*ta-du-kan-ni-ni* <sup>9</sup>[T]A ŠU.2 LUGAL EN-*ia* <sup>10</sup>[*u<sub>2</sub>-s*]e-lu-u<sub>2</sub>-ni <sup>11</sup>[*ki-ma*] *bal-ṭa-ku*  
<sup>12</sup>[LU]GAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>* <sup>13</sup>[*l*]a-ap-p[a]h<sub>3</sub>

argument (from divine punishment, a warning?):

rev. <sup>7-8</sup>Or else (= if the materials for the offerings are not given), Ištar will kill me.

promise:

rev. <sup>9-13</sup>[Th]ey have [ma]de me slip away [fr]om the hands of the king, my lord. (But) I [will]  
re[v]ere the [ki]ng, my lord, [as long as] I live.

The mentions of slipping away from the king and the promises to stay loyal must have been originally far more widespread than it now seems – very often they appear in extremely damaged context. It is not clear whether they followed requests after complaints or something quite different, and for this reason they are here for the most part discarded.

SAA 13 154 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 126) is a complaint in which the reason for the sender's misfortunes is attributed to the criminal actions of a third party, against whom the crown prince is asked to protect the sender:

obv. <sup>8</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL-<sup>r</sup>*da-ni<sup>1</sup>-ba-te* <sup>9</sup>*ša la* LUGAL <sup>10</sup>*ša la* DUMU-LUGAL <sup>11</sup>*i-ṣab-ta* *u<sub>2</sub>-sa-ni-qa-a-ni*  
<sup>12</sup>E<sub>2</sub>-AD-*ia* <sup>13</sup>*in-ta-aš<sub>2</sub>-a* <sup>14</sup>*a-mar ša* AD-u-a <sup>15</sup>*ṣil-li* LUGAL <sup>16</sup>*iq-nu-u-ni*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*in-ta-aš<sub>2</sub>-a* <sup>2</sup>*i-ti-ši* <sup>3</sup>1 GU<sub>2</sub>.UN MA.NA KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR <sup>4</sup>*ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-lu* <sup>5</sup>20 MA.NA  
KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR <sup>6</sup>*ša a-nu-ut* E<sub>2</sub> <sup>7</sup>*na-mu-ra-a-te ša* LUGAL <sup>8</sup>*ša* AMA LUGAL <sup>9</sup>*i-se-niš i-ti-ši*  
<sup>10</sup>*a-kul-lu-u ša* AD-*ia* <sup>11</sup>*maḥ-ra-ak* <sup>12</sup>TA lib E<sub>2</sub>.KUR-ri <sup>13</sup>*ka-šu-da-ak* <sup>14</sup>DUMU-LUGAL *lip-*  
*qi-da* <sup>15</sup>*ša la* LUGAL <sup>16</sup>*ša* DUMU-MAN *lu la a-m[u-at]*

complaint (with an accusation):

obv. <sup>8-11</sup> The chief victualler captured me and interrogated without (the permission) of the king (and) the crown prince.

complaint: obv. <sup>12-13</sup> He took away the house my father.

complaint: obv. <sup>14</sup> rev. <sup>2</sup> All that my father obtained thanks to the king – he took it and carried away!

complaint: rev. <sup>3-9</sup> Together with that, he took away 1 talent of refined silver (and) 20 minas of silver in household utensils – the gifts of the king and the mother of the king.

complaint: rev. <sup>10-13</sup> I have received my father's provisions, (but now) I am chased away from the temple.

request: rev. <sup>14</sup> May the crown prince take care (of this)!

plea: rev. <sup>15-16</sup> May I not d[ie] without (the aid) of the king and the crown prince!

The sender lists all the things that were taken from him in no particular order, although the note that these were the gifts from the king and the queen dowager surely makes the conduct of the chief victualler even worse, as does the mention of the property being obtained under the aegis of the king. It seems that the sender followed in his father's steps and was active in the temple community but was eventually removed. This makes his situation somewhat parallel to that of Urdu-Gula, although of course the reasons for their losses were fundamentally different. Only in contrast with simple petitions like this one is the full artistry of Urdu-Gula evident.

The sender of SAA 13 158 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 128–129) complains about the treatment he receives at the hands of the crown prince. His answer to the reproach from the crown prince is discussed in the chapter on reactions to reproaches. Here I would like to take a look at the supplication-like passage of his letter, in which he expresses his dejection but also loyalty:

rev. <sup>4</sup> *a-na am-mi<sub>3</sub>-i-ni di-ib-bi ma-a 'd[u]-ti 'a<sup>1</sup>-d[a-bu-ub]* <sup>5</sup> *an-ni-u<sub>2</sub> rik-su ša da-ba-a-bi gab-bu*  
<sup>6</sup> *ina pa-an ma-ta-a-ti gab-bu la-ab-ki me-me-e-ni* <sup>7</sup> *ša ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bu i-šak-kan-an-ni-ni la-aš<sub>2</sub>-šū<sub>2</sub>* <sup>8</sup> *a-*  
*na ka-a-ša<sub>2</sub> a-da-gal-la ša be-li<sub>2</sub> at-ta-a-ni* <sup>9</sup> *ina pa-ni-ka ab-ti-ki šum-ma DINGIR.MEŠ-ka ina*  
*IGI-ka a-na re-e-me* <sup>10</sup> *[is]-sak-nu-ni di-a-ti-ia ša<sub>2</sub>-ak-ki-il* <sup>11</sup> *[u<sub>2</sub>-l]a-a qi<sub>2</sub>-bi-'a-a ma-a a-lik*  
*mu-u<sub>2</sub>-tu* <sup>12</sup> *[la-al]-lik-ma la-mut mi-i-nu a-qa-ab-bi*

rhetorical question: rev. <sup>4</sup> Why am I [speaking] so mu[ch]?

explicit summary: rev. <sup>5</sup> This is the whole gist of the matter.

declaration of helplessness:

rev. <sup>6-7</sup> I might cry in front of all the lands, (but) there is nobody who will comfort me.

declaration of loyalty: rev. 8'.-9' I only look at you, who are my lord. I have wept before you.

request: rev. 9'.-10' If the gods have [mo]ved you to have mercy with me, wipe away my tears.

post-request (with an alternative condition and a challenge):

rev. 11'.-12' [If n]ot, tell me: 'Go and die!', and I will.

declaration of helplessness in the form of a rhetorical question:

rev. 12' What else should I say?

The overall tone of this passage is very emotional. The sender tries to express in quite dramatic terms that he cannot hope for aid from anybody else but the crown prince, the only person to whom he is loyal. At the same time, in the whole passage the crown prince is addressed in the second person – in rev. 8' the sender is looking 'at you', in rev. 9' he weeps before 'you'. The request he makes in rev. 9'.-10' also uses simple imperative forms instead of the more common (and more polite) precativ. I would argue that this contributes to the overall emotional tone of this passage. Perhaps the sender was hoping to additionally suggest a certain familiarity between himself and his patron.

SAA 13 181<sup>148</sup> (Cole and Machinist 1998, 150–151) is a petition asking for the royal intervention because of the behaviour of the ruler of Bīt-Dakkūri:

obv. <sup>10</sup>URU.ma-li-la-ti <sup>11</sup>u a-pak.KI ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL a-na d.EN <sup>12</sup>id-di-nu LU<sub>2</sub>.EN-pi-qit-ti <sup>13</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> a-na-ku u LU<sub>2</sub>.qi<sub>2</sub>-i-pi <sup>14</sup>ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi ni-ip-qi<sub>2</sub>-du <sup>15</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.DUMU-da-ku-ru <sup>16</sup>ul-ta-ga-liš <sup>17</sup>u PI.MEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub> ut-[tir'-ma]

rev. <sup>1</sup>ul i-man-gur-ma <sup>2</sup>ZU<sub>2</sub>.LUM.MA a-na d.EN <sup>3</sup>ul i-nam-din <sup>4</sup>la-pa-an LUGAL ul ip-laḥ<sub>3</sub> <sup>5</sup>um-ma a-na-ku ina ram-ni-ia <sup>6</sup>a-nam-din-ma MU-a a-šak-kan <sup>7</sup>LUGAL ki-i ša<sub>2</sub> i-le-'u-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>8</sup>li-pu-uš

complaint: obv. <sup>10</sup>.-<sup>16</sup> The city of Malilati (and) the land of Apak, which the king gave to Bēl, (and) the official that I and the agent of the king nominated (there) – the Dakkūrean frightened them.

complaint: obv. <sup>17</sup>.-rev. <sup>3</sup> And he [turn]ed his ear away (?). He refuses to give the dates to Bēl.

accusation: rev. <sup>4</sup>.-<sup>6</sup> He does not revere the king, saying: 'I will give as I myself please! I will make a name for myself!'

closing formula: rev. <sup>7</sup>.-<sup>8</sup> May the king do what he can!

<sup>148</sup> This letter is written in the Babylonian dialect.

Although the main issue is the complaint about the lack of cooperation of the Dakkūrean ruler, the sender does not hesitate to add a denunciation-like passage concerning his potentially rebellious behaviour.

In SAA 13 190 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 162–163), a grumble-like complaint precedes a request for an audience:

rev. <sup>9</sup><sub>u<sub>3</sub></sub><sup>1</sup> [a-ki la] IR<sub>3</sub> ša LUGAL <sup>10</sup>ina [U<sub>4</sub>-me š]a iš-ši-pir-ti <sup>11</sup>LU[GAL] EN-ia<sub>2</sub> al-lik-an-ni <sup>12</sup>u<sub>3</sub> ina UGU dul-li-i<a> <sup>14</sup>a-ki x[x x x] a-ma-q[ut] <sup>15</sup>ina IGI LUGAL E[N-ia<sub>2</sub> l]a <sup>16</sup>e<sup>1</sup>-ru-bu <sup>16</sup>la IR<sub>3</sub>-a-a a-na-ku <sup>17</sup>LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> pa-ni-ka <sup>18</sup>am-mu-u-tu SIG<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ la-mur <sup>19</sup>a-[t]a-a ina bu-bu-tu<sub>2</sub> ša NINDA.MEŠ <sup>20</sup>a-mu-at a-ki kal-bi <sup>21</sup>a-sa-bu-u<sub>2</sub> a-du-u<sub>2</sub>-a-la <sup>22</sup>la E<sub>2</sub> <sup>23</sup>la GEME<sub>2</sub> la IR<sub>3</sub> <sup>re24</sup>a-ki ša LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> i-da-gal-an-ni-ni ga-am-rak <sup>re25</sup>[i]na UGU min<sub>3</sub><sup>in<sub>6</sub></sup> ta-ta-ab-kan-ni LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>

complaint (grumble):

rev. <sup>9-13</sup>. And [unlike] a servant of the king, on [the day when] I came here at a [wri]tten command of the ki[ing], my lord, I did not see the face [o]f the king, my lord.

complaint (grumble):

rev. <sup>13-14</sup>. I tum[ble down?] for my work, like a [...].

complaint (repeated):

rev. <sup>15</sup>. (And yet), I did not enter before the king, [my] lo[rd]!

argument: rev. <sup>16</sup>. Am I not your servant?

request: rev. <sup>17-18</sup>. O, king, my lord! Let me take a look at your beautiful face!

reproach: rev. <sup>19-20</sup>. W[h]y do I have to die for lack of bread?

complaint: rev. <sup>20-21</sup>. I bound and roam about like a dog. <sup>149</sup>

complaint: rev. <sup>22-23</sup>. I (have) no house, no maid, no servant.

complaint: rev. <sup>re24</sup>. If the king, my lord, regards me in this way, I am finished.

reproach: rev. <sup>re25</sup>. [W]hy did you lead me here? O, king, my lord!

This escalation of complaints is perhaps somewhat unexpected after a petition in the obverse of the letter, and the final seemingly simple request for an audience, but perhaps the dramatic tone is partially performative. The motive of dying of hunger, in more or less exaggerated version, is also attested in

<sup>149</sup> While this is not by any means a direct parallel, it is striking that in SAA 16 31 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 30) (likely a petition, but damaged) the motive of starvation and the comparison to a dog are fused together: rev. <sup>3</sup>.(...) ki-i kal-bi <sup>4</sup>ina si-in-qi ina bu-bu-ti <sup>5</sup>ša NINDA.HI.A lu la a-mu-’a-at – ‘May I not die of famine and lack of bread like a dog!’. Perhaps the two motives were associated at least spatially.

other letters, also in the earlier group of this corpus. The comparison with a dog that the sender includes in the following move foreshadows the request for a house. The image of moving about and not having a fixed residence (like the traditional enemies of the Mesopotamian civilisation – the nomads) is of course very negative – in SAA 13 20 the verb *dālu* (‘to roam, to rove around’) was almost an accusation on its own. The property the sender seems to ask for, a servant girl, a male servant, and a house present a far more comfortable picture than the basic necessities that Urdu-Gula requested of the king.

As to the patterns in the way the sender switches the form of address to second person: in rev. 16. the sender is ‘your servant’ – the use of second person possessive pronoun could be seen as an attempt of evoking a feeling of friendliness and cordiality. In rev. 17. it is ‘your’ face – arguably, the second person possessive pronoun could be triggered by the inalienability of the royal face and the potential for friendliness is the same as in the previous case. In rev. re25., it is the verbal form, which is in second person, included in a reproach. Possibly the selection of a second-person form here meant to give the impression that the reproach – and thus also the suffering that causes it – is particularly bitter.

On the whole, the complaints made by priests and scholars present the broadest variation in the entire corpus. The learned specialists of the Assyrian empire mobilised their whole learning in order to impress the king, used literary devices and literary allusions. At the same time, their position as clients of the Assyrian rulers can be gleaned from the recurring mentions of their helplessness – they have no friends, no one can intercede for them, and the king is their only hope.

There is a number of complaints from the diplomatic correspondence of Esarhaddon. SAA 16 29 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 28–29) is a complaint about a governor who does not comply with the orders of the king. The complaint is only made after a very lengthy and very interesting introduction:

obv. <sup>4</sup>[TA *re-e-š*]i LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub>-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub> *a-na-ku ŠEŠ-u-a a-na* m.EN-NUMUN-DU<sub>3</sub> *uš-mat-tan-ni* <sup>5</sup>[GIR<sub>2</sub>.2 DUMU-LUGAL] *a-ša-bat ina e-ke-l-ti bu-bu-ti la-pa-ni us-se-zib* <sup>6</sup>[TA DUMU-LUGAL *be*]-li<sub>2</sub>-ia<sub>2</sub> *a-na ŠA<sub>3</sub> URU.i-si-ti aḥ-tal-qa re-e-mu a-na LUGAL iṣ-ša-bat* <sup>7</sup>[x x x LU<sub>2</sub>].A-KIN DUMU-LUGAL *is-si-ia is-sap-ra* <sup>8</sup>[*ma-a ḥi-bi-la-te*]-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub> *ša* LU<sub>2</sub>.EN.NAM *ša<sub>2</sub> KUR.bar-ḥal-za iḥ-bil-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub>-ni tu-sa-ḥar ta-dan-aš<sub>2</sub>-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub>* <sup>9</sup>[d.E]N d.PA *u d.UTU ka-a-a-man ina UGU LUGAL EN-ia u<sub>2</sub>-šal-li* <sup>10</sup>[*m*]u-uk DUMU-LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub> GIŠ.GU.ZA LUGAL-u<sub>2</sub>-tu<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> E<sub>2</sub>-AD-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub> li-iṣ-bat* <sup>11</sup>*a-na-ku IR<sub>3</sub>-su UR.GI<sub>7</sub>-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub> u pa-liḥ-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub> i-na GISSU-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub> la-mur nu-u<sub>2</sub>-ru* <sup>12</sup>d.EN d.PA *u d.UTU šu-le-e-ka ki-i iṣ-mu-u<sub>2</sub>-ni* <sup>13</sup>LUGAL-ti *ša<sub>2</sub> da-ra-a-ta BALA-e GID<sub>2</sub>.DA.MEŠ a-na LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia<sub>2</sub> it-tan-nu* <sup>14</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> ki-ma še-e-ta d.UTU-ši KUR.KUR gab-bi ina še-e-ti-ka nam-ru* <sup>15</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> a-na-ku ina ŠA<sub>3</sub> e-tu-ti kar-rak me-me-ni a-di pa-an LUGAL la-a u<sub>2</sub>-qar-rab-an-ni* <sup>16</sup>*ḥa-ba-la-ta-ia ša a-na DUMU-LUGAL EN-ia<sub>2</sub> aḥ-ḥur-u-ni LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> is-si-ia iṣ-pur-u-ni* <sup>17</sup>*ma-a ḥi-bil-a-te-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub> sa-ḥa-ra di-na*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a m.se-e'-ra-pa-a'* LU<sub>2</sub>.EN.NAM *la i-ma-gur<sub>2</sub> la id-dan ma-a LUGAL mu-ḥur*

reminder (of the shared past, with expression of gratitude):

obv. <sup>4-6</sup>[From the beginnin]g, I have been his (= the king's) servant. My brother (tried to) make Bēl-zēru-ibni murder me. I grasped [the feet of the crown prince] (and) saved myself from the darkness and starvation. [With the crown prince], my [lo]rd, I fled to the tower<sup>150</sup>.

reminder: obv. <sup>6-8</sup>The king had mercy for me, (and) [...] sent a messenger with me, [saying:] 'You will give him back [his things] that the governor of Barḫalza owes him!'

argument in favour of granting the sender's request (with a prayer):

obv. <sup>9-11</sup>I constantly prayed for the king, my lord, to [B]ēl, Nabû and Šamaš, [sa]ying: 'May the crown prince seize the throne of kingship of the house of his father! I am his servant, his dog who reveres him. May I see light under his protection!'

pre-complaint (with demand of gratitude, with flattery):

obv. <sup>12-14</sup>When Bēl, Nabû and Šamaš heard (this) prayer for you, they gave the king, my lord, an everlasting kingship, and a long reign! And like (by) the sunrise, all the lands are brightened by your rising!

complaint: obv. <sup>15</sup>But I am stuck in the darkness!

complaint: obv. <sup>15</sup>Nobody brings me before the king.

reminder (pre-complaint):

obv. <sup>16-17</sup>The debts of mine, about which I petitioned the crown prince, my lord, (and because of which) the king, my lord, sent (a messenger) with me, saying: 'Give his debts back to him!' –

complaint: rev. <sup>1-2</sup>Now, Sē'-rapâ, the governor, refuses to give (them back), saying (instead): 'Appeal to the king!'

It is interesting to see how the term of address referring to the king switches between 'king' and 'crown prince' in passages referring to periods during which the (now) king possessed the previous title. The sender first describes the circumstances under which the king decided to grant him a favour – after they shared misfortunes and the sender presumably had ample opportunity to prove his loyalty. The king provides his messenger and gives a command to the benefit of the sender. After this reminder, the sender changes topic and declares that he prayed for the king. I already discussed the additional blessings in the petitions – some included in the upper part of the reverse, when the petition/complaint presents a change of topic (SAA 10 58, SAA 10 143, SAA 13 174) and some directly preceding the request part of a complaint-like sequence (SAA 13 185). However, only the present letter includes an entire prayer. The prayer is then heard by the gods and granted, which the sender exploits to emphasise his claim to

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<sup>150</sup> Or, less likely, to the town Issēte, see Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 28, commentary to obv. 6.

the royal favour. The king is then flattered with a comparison to the Sun (and in Akkadian, directly the sun god) which shines on all the lands – with one exception, the sender, who is kept in darkness. It is after this smooth transition from flattery to the dramatic situation the sender finds himself in that the complaint follows. The governor refuses to follow the royal command to pay the sender back his debts and tells him to appeal to the king instead. Unfortunately, the following part of the letter is hopelessly damaged.

In SAA 16 30 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 29) the complaint is marginal, as the main purpose of the letter is a request:

obv. <sup>4</sup>DU<sub>11</sub>.DU<sub>11</sub>.ME ša a-*hur-u-ni* <sup>5</sup>a-na AD-ka aq-bu-u-ni <sup>6</sup>ŠEŠ-u-a ina UGU-*hi* <sup>7</sup>de-e-ke  
<sup>8</sup>DUMU-a-a ina pi-i-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>9</sup>ta-bi-iḫ

rev. <sup>1</sup>BAD<sub>3</sub> [ma]-ki-i LUGAL <sup>2</sup>LUGAL liš-al <sup>3</sup>ana-ku ša du-a-ki <sup>4</sup>hal-qa ad-du-al <sup>5</sup>ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi  
LUGAL at-[te]-i-la <sup>6</sup>LUGAL lu-še-zib-an-ni

reminder: obv. <sup>4-7</sup>The lawsuit about which I appealed to your father – my brother was killed because of it.

complaint: obv. <sup>8-9</sup>My son is being/was slaughtered because of his testimony (?)<sup>151</sup>.

flattery: rev. <sup>1</sup>The king is the bulwark of the [we]ak<sup>152</sup>.

request: rev. <sup>2</sup>Let the king ask!<sup>153</sup>

flattery: rev. <sup>3-5</sup>Am I to be killed, lost, roaming about<sup>154</sup>? I have found [rest] (?) in the king!

plea: rev. <sup>6</sup>May the king save me!

The complaint refers to a lawsuit whose context, however, is entirely unclear. The son of the sender is either ‘being’ slaughtered or was slaughtered before, parallel to his brother – the stative form of the verb, *tabiḫ*, does not indicate the tense. The logic of the letter would make the former alternative more likely – one would after all ask for the royal intervention before one’s son is slaughtered. After the complaint, the king is treated to some flattery – but the epithet ‘bulwark or the weak’ (*dūr makī*) (otherwise very common) also makes clear the expectations the sender has about the role of the king as the protector of

<sup>151</sup> In the context of a lawsuit this is the most likely translation, although it would be unclear whose testimony is meant.

<sup>152</sup> Literally ‘wanting, lacking’.

<sup>153</sup> Since *mā* does not follow, I take this to be a complete request – for verification? – while the following clauses are solely the expression of the sender’s misery. Luukko and Van Buylaere suggest that the following clauses are the question to be asked.

<sup>154</sup> The editors suggest that *ad-du-al* in rev. 4. might be an ellipsis for the entire phrase *akī kalbu asabbu’ adualla* (‘Will I bound and roam about like as dog’), as attested in SAA 16 29. The idea has merit, but ‘roaming about’ has sufficiently negative connotations on its own. The sender of SAA 16 29 is also not the same person.



the weak and the one who guarantees justice. The final plea is rather general, but perhaps this was not the first appeal of the sender.

A complaint plays an important role in the petition in SAA 16 34 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 32–33). Having remarked that the father of the crown prince saw his work, which the sender did diligently with the bettering of his own reputation in mind, the sender Šumāia (actually a scholar, see Luukko 2011, 1280–1281, no. 8) makes multiple complaints:

obv. <sup>7</sup>(...) *u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a* LU<sub>2</sub>.A.BA <sup>8</sup>*ša* AD-*u<sub>2</sub>-a a-na ma-ne<sub>2</sub>-e* *ša dul-li* <sup>9</sup>TA ŠU.2 LU<sub>2</sub>.*šak-ru-te ip-qi<sub>2</sub>-du-u-ni* <sup>10</sup>*u<sub>3</sub>* LU<sub>2</sub>.A-SIG<sub>5</sub> *ša* AD-*ia* *ša ina dul-li* <sup>11</sup>*pa-qu-du-u-ni qa-an-ni iš-mu-u-ni* <sup>12</sup>*ma-a* LU<sub>2</sub>.A.BA *pa-qi<sub>2</sub>-id dul-lu it-ta-šu* <sup>13</sup>*ur-ta-am-me-u iḫ-tal-q[u]* <sup>14</sup>E<sub>2</sub> <sup>15</sup>KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR <sup>16</sup>*ša re-eḫ-te dul-li* [LUGAL *b*]*e-li<sub>2</sub>* <sup>17</sup>*la id-di-na u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a šum-<sup>18</sup>ma pa-an DUMU<sup>19</sup>-LUGAL* <sup>20</sup>*ma-ḫi-ir* NIG<sub>2</sub>.KA<sub>9</sub>-*ia liš-ku-nu DUMU-LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia* <sup>21</sup>*dul-lu lip-qid u<sub>3</sub> a-na-ku dul-lu* <sup>22</sup>*ša ina* URU.kal-*ḫa* *ša ina UGU AD-ia* <sup>23</sup>*le-e-pu-uš a-na DUMU-LUGAL la-ad-din* <sup>24</sup>*me-me-e-ni la-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> la-a i-ša<sub>2</sub>-man-ni* <sup>25</sup>*il-la-ka a-na la* LU<sub>2</sub> *ina pa-an DUMU-LUGAL* <sup>26</sup>*a-tu-ar a-mu-at šum-ma DUMU-LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>* <sup>27</sup>*pa-ni-šu<sub>2</sub> ina UGU-ḫi-ia us-sa-ḫi-ra* <sup>28</sup>*dul-la-ni* *ša DUMU-LUGAL ep-pa-aš<sub>2</sub>* <sup>29</sup>*a-na DUMU-LUGAL EN-ia ad-dan* <sup>30</sup>*ki-ma a-na-ku la-a e-pu-uš* <sup>31</sup>*man-nu-um-ma le-e-pu-uš*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*a-na DUMU-LUGAL EN-ia li-id-din* <sup>2</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.IGI-*ma-ne<sub>2</sub>-e* LU<sub>2</sub>.<sup>3</sup>*šak-ru<sup>1</sup>-te* <sup>4</sup>*le-e-pu-šu<sub>2</sub>* DUMU-LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub> lu-u da-ra* <sup>5</sup>*a-na-ku ina ŠA<sub>3</sub> a-ḫi-ia GIR<sub>3</sub>.2-ia* <sup>6</sup>*a-na DUMU-LUGAL EN-ia la-ap-laḫ<sub>3</sub>*

complaint: obv. <sup>7-13</sup>Now, the scribe whom my father appointed to count the work of the drunks (?) and the nobles<sup>155</sup> of my father who were assigned to the work – as soon as they heard: ‘A scribe was appointed!’, they left the work and fled.

explanation: obv. <sup>13-15</sup>[The king], my [I]ord, did not give me a house (?) nor the silver for the rest of the work.

suggestion: obv. <sup>15-17</sup>Now, if it pleases the crown prince, my lord, may they settle my accounts and may the crown prince, my lord, entrust the work to me.

promise: obv. <sup>17-19</sup>And I will do the work that was assigned to my father in Calah (and) give it to the crown prince.

complaint: obv. <sup>20</sup>Nobody listens to me.

<sup>155</sup> Šumāia appears to belong to a family of scholars (Luukko 2011, 1280–1281). Although *šakru* clearly means ‘drunk’, and although the word denoting the nobles is equally clear, they do not seem to fit the context. Why would the nobles be assigned to work together with the drunks, and why would a scholar be leading them? The editors write both words in cursive.

declaration of powerlessness: obv. <sup>21-22</sup>If it comes (to that) that I become a nobody before the crown prince, my lord, I will die.

promise (conditional): obv. <sup>22-be25</sup>If the crown prince, my lord, turns his face to me, I will do the work of the crown prince and give it to the crown prince, my lord.

argument (from irreplaceability):

obv. <sup>be26</sup>-rev. <sup>3</sup>If I would not do it, who would do it, and give it to the crown prince, my lord? Would the accountant and the drunks do it?

blessing: rev. <sup>3</sup>May the crown prince, my lord, live forever!

promise: rev. <sup>4-5</sup>May I revere the crown prince, my lord, with my arms and feet!

The sequence after the suggestion (introduced typically with *šumma pān mār šarri maḥir* – ‘If it pleases the crown prince, my lord’) is clear enough. The sender promises to do his work, declares that he will die if he loses his reputation, promises his diligence in return for the favour of the crown prince, emphasises that he is irreplaceable (I know of no other argument in this corpus structured in this way), and finally includes a blessing and a promise of reverence. In all this, the complaint in obv. 20 – that nobody listens to the sender – seems to almost be out of place. The function of the initial complaint, about the ‘drunks’ and ‘nobles’ who fled at the first news of a scribe coming for an inspection – is in this context equally unclear. Perhaps Šumāia wanted to make excuses for the work not having been finished by his late father? Blaming others for failures is hardly an isolated tactic in the Neo-Assyrian corpus. On the other hand, for all of Šumāia’s presumable learning, the structure of his petition is quite repetitive – one need only remember the sheer artistry of Urdu-Gula. His arguments seem fresh, suitable to the particular occasion he was referring to, and were perhaps considered more persuasive.

The main aim of this letter is clearly to request a nomination, as already evident from the suggestion. Šumāia even turns the career of his grandfather at the court of the grandfather of the crown prince into an argument for his own nomination:

rev. <sup>6</sup>DUMU-LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub> liš-al* TA AD-AD-ia <sup>7</sup>m.aš-šur-EN-GIN LU<sub>2</sub>.SAG *la-a iz-zi-zi* <sup>8</sup>id-da-te ki-i AD-AD-ka *ina* GIŠ.GU.ZA <sup>9</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-si-ib-u-ni a-na LU<sub>2</sub>.A.BA-[u<sub>2</sub>]-te <sup>10</sup>la iš-kun-šu-u u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a DUMU-LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>* <sup>11</sup>lu la u<sub>2</sub>-ra-man-ni šu-mu AD-AD-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>12</sup>ma-za-as-su ša AD-ia TA E<sub>2</sub>-ka <sup>13</sup>lu la i-ḫal-liq AD-u-a AD-AD-ia <sup>14</sup>ina E<sub>2</sub>-ka it-ti-is-su LUGAL AD-ka <sup>15</sup>DUMU EN-dul-li i-ra-am pa-ni-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>16</sup>ina UGU DUMU EN-dul-li ia-u mi-i-nu <sup>17</sup>ḫi-iṭ-ṭa-a-a UR.GI<sub>7</sub> ša DUMU-LUGAL <sup>18</sup>a-na-ku *ina* as-ku-pe-te ša E<sub>2</sub>-ka <sup>19</sup>[a-du-a]l DUMU-LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub> lu la u<sub>2</sub>-ra-man-ni*

request (for verification):

rev. <sup>6</sup>May the crown prince, my lord, ask!

argument (from family tradition):

rev. <sup>6.-10</sup>Did the eunuch Aššūr-bēlu-ka'' in not assist my grandfather? Afterwards, when your grandfather ascended the throne, did he not appoint him to the scriba[I] craft?

plea: rev. <sup>10.-11</sup>Now, may the crown prince, my lord, not forsake me!

plea: rev. <sup>11.-13</sup>May the name of his (= the crown prince's) grandfather and the position of my father not be lost from your house!

argument (from loyalty, with a reminder):

rev. <sup>13.-14</sup>My father (and) my grandfather served in your house.

argument (from the royal example):

rev. <sup>14.-16</sup>The king, your father, loves the son of one who worked (for him). He pays attention to the son of one who worked (for him)!

declaration of innocence (ignorance of one's faults):

rev. <sup>16.-17</sup>As to me – what is my fault?

declaration of loyalty:

rev. <sup>17.-19</sup>I am a dog of the crown prince, [I run ab]out at the threshold of your house.

plea: rev. <sup>19</sup>May the crown prince, my lord, not forsake me!

The primary argument for receiving a post, according to Šumāia, seems to be the fact that his grandfather and father both served the father and the grandfather of the crown prince he is addressing. Predictably enough, his skills are not mentioned at all<sup>156</sup>. Šumāia even resorts to pointing out the positive attitude of the king towards the offspring of his faithful servants (for Tabnî in SAA 10 182, learning from his father was also something to be proud of). In the next move he unexpectedly asks if he is at fault – not a very smooth transition. Finally, he underscores his loyalty by claiming he is like a dog that stays at the threshold of his master's house – keeping watch. In this version of the wandering without respite (the verb is *dālu* again), the overall meaning is no longer negative. After the final plea for aid follows the end of all investigations – a large gap.

It is also striking how often the nouns 'house' and 'father' do cause the switch from third person to second person with reference to the king (your house – rev. 12. and 18.; your grandfather – rev. 8.; your father – rev. 14.). A similar switch also occurs in other letters, although even here it is not a strict, as also demonstrated by 'his grandfather' in rev. 11.

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<sup>156</sup> But recommendations that include the skills of the scholars are not exceptional.

An interesting complaint written by a group of people – not just a single sender but 17 blacksmiths, is SAA 16 40 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 36). It begins with a report about the weapons produced by the group but does not at all include an address formula nor a blessing. The complaint starts after the report:

obv. <sup>9</sup>ŠEŠ-*u-ni* ina E<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.NINDA <sup>10</sup>*i-mu-at ša dul-lu* <sup>11</sup>*an-ni-e gab-bi* <sup>12</sup>*bu-le-e me-me-ni* <sup>13</sup>*la i-di-na-<sup>1</sup>na<sup>1</sup>-[še]*

(six lines damaged)

rev. <sup>3</sup>17 LU<sub>2</sub>.SIMUG AN.BAR x[x x] <sup>4</sup>*ša me-me-ni* A.ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*šu<sub>2</sub>* x[x x] <sup>5</sup>*la-a-šu<sub>2</sub>* ina ša A.ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*ni-ni* <sup>6</sup>*la-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>-ni* ŠE.NUMUN.MEŠ <sup>7</sup>*me-me-ni la i-di-na-na-še* <sup>8</sup>*dul-la-ni ša* E<sub>2</sub>.GAL.MEŠ <sup>9</sup>*ina* UGU-*hi-ni i-da-nu* <sup>10</sup>LUGAL *liš-<sup>1</sup>a-al lu-ši-ši* <sup>11</sup>*ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bi ni-ip-ta-ša*

complaint: obv. <sup>9-10</sup>Our brother is dying in the house of a baker.

complaint: obv. <sup>11-13</sup>Nobody has given [us] the firewood for the work.

complaint: rev. <sup>3-7</sup>(There are) 17 (of us) blacksmiths (but) none of us has a field [...]. Because we have no field, nobody has been giving us grain.

complaint: rev. <sup>8-9</sup>The work of the palaces has become hard on us.

request: rev. <sup>10</sup>May the king ask (and) investigate this!

complaint (?): rev. <sup>11</sup>We have withdrawn (?)<sup>157</sup> because of it.

The next section of the letter includes an explanation that might be related to this sequence with complaints. Nonetheless, there is no explicit request apart from the one asking for an investigation. The complaints themselves seem quite disjointed – could this be connected to the lack of introductory formula?

SAA 16 41 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 37) includes only a beginning of a longer complaint. Three senders introduce a royal order and claim that the magnates did not obey it, but the rest of the letter is completely broken.

SAA 16 43 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 38–39) is a complaint despite sharing some characteristics with denunciations (the presence of accusation, the naming of the guilty party). Nonetheless, in the end the sender focuses on the harm done to him, and a dispute or a lawsuit between the sender and the party he accuses is a looming presence in the background:

obv. <sup>9</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a* m.d.PA-MU-AŠ <sup>10</sup>*ša i-si-ia pa-ri-šu šu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>11</sup>IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ *ša* LUGAL *ša* A.ŠA<sub>3</sub> <sup>12</sup>*ša bir-te* URU *uḫ-ta-li-qi* <sup>13</sup>EŠ<sub>2</sub> <sup>iš</sup>.GAR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ *ša* LUGAL GU<sub>7</sub> <sup>14</sup>UGU *ša a-qa-bu-u-ni* <sup>15</sup>*nu-uk a-ta-a*

<sup>157</sup> See CAD P, 226 sub *pašāšu*, Translation is based on the West Semitic root pšš.

rev. <sup>1</sup>IR<sub>3</sub><sup>2</sup>.M[EŠ ša LUGAL *tu-ḫal-la-qa*] <sup>2</sup>EŠ<sub>2</sub>.GAR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ [ša LUGAL GU<sub>7</sub>] <sup>3</sup>*ma-a ta-ra-am bat-x*[x x x] <sup>4</sup>*ma-a ta-ra-am* [x x x] <sup>5</sup>*a-na* LU<sub>2</sub>.GAR-*nu*.MEŠ *a-na* LU<sub>2</sub>.<GAL>-*ki*<sup>1</sup>-*ṣir*.MEŠ <sup>6</sup>LUGAL *be-li liš-al-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>7</sup>*ina* UGU DU<sub>11</sub>.DU<sub>11</sub> *an-ni-i* <sup>8</sup>LUGAL *be-li i-se-e-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>9</sup>*lu-ki-na-a-ni ḫi-bil-a-te-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>10</sup>ša LU<sub>2</sub>.DUB.[SAR].MEŠ <sup>11</sup>*ina* GIŠ.*le-i* [*a-si-di*]<sub>r</sub>

accusation: obv. <sup>9-10</sup>Now, Nabû-šumu-iddin who is with me is a criminal!

complaint: obv. <sup>11-12</sup>He destroyed the servants of the king in the countryside and within the city.

complaint (with an accusation):

obv. <sup>13</sup>He is using the work quotas of the king.

follow-up: obv. <sup>14</sup>-rev. <sup>4</sup>As to what I told him, saying: ‘Why [are you destroying] the servants (?) [of the king] (and) [consuming] the work quota [of the king]?’ – (he answered) as follows: ‘[...] the grain heap [...] the grain heap.’

request (for verification): rev. <sup>5-9</sup>May the king ask the prefects and the cohort <commander>s (and) establish (my rights) in this dispute with him.

additional information: rev. <sup>9-11</sup>[I have list]ed the debts of the sc[ri]bes on a writing board.

It is unclear what the conflict between the sender and Nabû-šumu-iddina was about. Are the accusations and complaints all part of the issue at hand or did the sender use additional information to further discredit his opponent?

After the last passage with additional information follows a break. The last legible passage is the complaint that the adversary of the sender is plotting against his life in the left edge of the tablet (e. <sup>1</sup>*ina* UGU ZI.MEŠ-*ia i-da-bu-bu* [x x]). The next letter in the corpus, SAA 16 44 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 39), seems also to be a petition, of which only a greeting and the final part of the reverse are preserved. Nonetheless, there is a similar complaint/accusation to the one attested in SAA 16 43 (rev. <sup>3</sup>[*ina*] šul-<sup>1</sup>*ma*<sup>1</sup>-*na-te i-du-ku-u-ni* – ‘They are killing me with bribes!’), and a mention settling something – likely a court case (rev. 4’-5’).

SAA 16 48 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 44) is a petition to the palace scribe whose main aim is to recommend another official. Following the recommendation (rev. 2.-6.) and advice to give the recommended person clear instructions (rev. 7.-8.) follows a short reproach:

rev. <sup>8</sup>(...) *a-na mi<sub>3</sub>-i-ni* <sup>9</sup>*be-li<sub>2</sub> i-ḫa-si-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>10</sup>LU<sub>2</sub> *la a-še-er*

reproach: <sup>8</sup>Why does the lord mistreat him? The man has not been treated rightly.

This short complaint only serves as an argument for granting the sender’s request on behalf of his protégé.

In SAA 16 78 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 74–76), the sender defends his innocence by complaining about the palace scribe. The first passage is a prolonged declaration of innocence in answer to the demand of the king to speak the truth. The sender finally asserts that he will say everything as he saw and heard it happen:

obv. <sup>13</sup>TA U<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ *am-ma-te a-ki ina IGI-šu<sub>2</sub> a-za-zu-ni* <sup>14</sup>LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-da a-ki i-da-gal-an-ni-ni* <sup>15</sup>u<sub>3</sub> *pa-ni-šu<sub>2</sub> ina UGU-ḫi-ia-a-ni TA mar LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>* <sup>16</sup>ina [E<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>] *ip-qid-an-ni-ni ina IGI-šu<sub>2</sub> la mah-ri* <sup>17</sup>[u<sub>3</sub> ina] UGU *la pa-qa-di-ia a-na LUGAL EN-ia* <sup>18</sup>[i-da-bu-ub] *a-ki EN-da-me i-da-gal-an-ni* <sup>19</sup>[x x x]-šu<sub>2</sub> *it-ta-lak us-sa-ta-'i-da-ni* <sup>20</sup>[a-na x x]x.MEŠ u<sub>3</sub> IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub> *ša LU<sub>2</sub>.A.BA-KUR* <sup>21</sup>[LUGAL] *be-li<sub>2</sub> liš-'a-al* <sup>be22</sup>[i-da]-a-te *u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a a-ki GEME<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ* <sup>be23</sup>[KUR.ku]-sa-a-a-te *nu-ša<sub>2</sub>-aš-bat-u-ni* <sup>be24</sup>[ina UG]U E<sub>2</sub> *ša LUGAL ša 2-šu<sub>2</sub> 3-šu<sub>2</sub>*

rev. <sup>1</sup>a-na LUGAL EN-ia *aš<sub>2</sub>-pur-an-ni* <sup>2</sup>m.ITI.AB-a-a LU<sub>2</sub>.2-u<sub>2</sub> *ina IGI-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>3</sup>us-sa-an-zi-ir-an-ni *ša a-dan-niš* <sup>4</sup>a-ki EN-da-me-šu<sub>2</sub> *id-da-gal-an-ni* <sup>5</sup>ina UGU *an-ni-te LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> lu-ki-in-ma* <sup>6</sup>[šu]m<sub>2</sub>-ma *a-bu-tu<sub>2</sub> an-ni-tu<sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-du-ni* <sup>7</sup>aš<sub>2</sub>-mu-u-ni *ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi qur-ba-ku-u-ni* <sup>8</sup>a-na LUGAL EN-ia *la aq-bu-u-ni* <sup>9</sup>ina UGU *ša ina qab-si URU.kal<sub>3</sub>-ḫa aš<sub>2</sub>-mu-u-ni* <sup>10</sup>MUNUS-šu<sub>2</sub> *ša LU<sub>2</sub>.3-šu<sub>2</sub> ina UGU-ḫi-ia ta-da-bu-bu-u-ni* <sup>11</sup>la a-ma-gur<sub>2</sub>-u-ni *is-si-ša<sub>2</sub> la a-da-bu-u-ni* <sup>12</sup>mu-uk LUGAL *lu-ki-na-an-ni-ni* <sup>13</sup>d.EN u d.AG *uz-nu ra-pa-aš<sub>2</sub>-tu* <sup>14</sup>a-na LUGAL EN-ia *it-ta-nu* <sup>15</sup>a-ki-ma *ina ŠA<sub>3</sub> a-bi-te an-ni-te* <sup>16</sup>qur-ba-ku LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>* <sup>17</sup>a-na *ši-ip-ṭi liš-kun-an-ni*

pseudo-reminder: obv. <sup>13-15</sup>Since those days when I was serving him – the king, my lord, knows how he regarded me and trusted me.

complaint: obv. <sup>15-19</sup>(But) ever since the king, my lord, appointed me in [his household], he has not been pleased. (Indeed), he [spoke] with the king [ab]out not appointing me. He regards me as his mortal enemy<sup>158</sup>. He went [...] (and) spread rumours about me.

request (for verification):

obv. <sup>20-21</sup>May [the king], my lord, ask [the ...]s, and the servants of the palace scribe.

complaint: obv. <sup>22</sup>-rev. <sup>4</sup>[Lat]er, after we have settled the [Ku]shite slave girls [in t]he royal household – about which I wrote to the king, my lord, several times, Kanūnāiu, the deputy, has made me out to be (even) more hateful to him. He regards me as his mortal enemy.

request: rev. <sup>5</sup>May the king, my lord, settle (the matter) with this in mind!

oath: rev. <sup>6-12</sup>I swear that I knew nothing about this matter, (and) did not hear anything (about it, and) that I was not involved (in it, and) that I have told the king, my lord, (the truth) about what I

<sup>158</sup> Literally ‘blood enemy’, the term used in the context of murder and the reparations for it for both the perpetrator and the member of the victim’s family (see Roth 1987).

heard in the middle of Calah, what the woman of the third man (of the chariot team) said against me, about which I refused to litigate with her, (saying): ‘May the king settle (this case)!’

flattery: rev. <sup>13.-14.</sup> Bēl and Nabû has given the king a deep understanding.

declaration of innocence (realised as a challenge):

rev. <sup>15.-17.</sup> If I am involved in this matter, may the king impose a punishment on me!

The complaint present in this letter serves to reframe the conflict between the sender and the palace scribe as an interpersonal matter that has nothing to do with any improper conduct of the sender. The palace scribe trusts the sender until he becomes jealous and feels himself threatened by his nomination to a post – after this, only hostility is possible. The deputy of the palace scribe escalates the situation further by making the sender hateful in an unspecified way. This is followed by a request, and a long oath. The king is complimented on the vastness of his understanding, a flattery not irrelevant to the matter at hand. Finally, the sender finishes off his declaration of innocence by challenging the king to punish him, if he were to be proven guilty after all. The complaints, as already mentioned, are not the main goal of the letter but serve only a secondary function in proving that the sender deserves to be absolved from any blame.

A similar situation, albeit on a smaller scale, can be observed in SAA 16 82 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 77–78), a petition in which the scribes are blamed for the situation in which the sender finds himself placed (obv. 11.-12.). The remaining preserved sequence of the letter includes only a petition and moves in which the sender emphasises that he did not engage in improper conduct.

SAA 16 96 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 90) includes a complaint about the governor taking away the privileges of the city of Assur:

obv. <sup>8.</sup>[AD]-ka A[D-AD-ka] <sup>9.</sup>[A]D ša A[D-AD-ka] <sup>10.</sup>URU.ŠA<sub>3</sub>-URU *u<sub>2</sub>-[za-ki-u<sub>2</sub>] <sup>11.</sup>at-ta- u<sub>2</sub>-tu<sub>2</sub>-[x x x x] <sup>12.</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-tu<sub>2</sub>-ru-te t[a-sa-kan] <sup>13.</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a ša E<sub>2</sub> <sup>14.</sup>LU<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>.[GAR.KUR] <sup>15.</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.qe-ba-a-ni <sup>16.</sup>ina UGU URU.ŠA<sub>3</sub>-URU <sup>17.</sup>ip-ta-aq-du <sup>18.</sup>ŠE.nu-sa-ḫi i-<sup>19.</sup>na<sup>1</sup>-su-[ḫu] <sup>20.</sup>ŠE.ši-ib-še i-šab-bu-šu<sub>2</sub>*

rev. <sup>1.</sup>at-ta NUMUN.MEŠ GIN <sup>2.</sup>ša m.d.30-PAP.MEŠ-SU <sup>3.</sup>at-ta DUMU-ka <sup>4.</sup>DUMU-DUMU-ka le-bu <sup>5.</sup>a-na le-e-bi <sup>6.</sup>aš-šur d.UTU ik-tar-bu-ka <sup>7.</sup>LUGAL-u-tu<sub>2</sub> ina UGU-ḫi-ni <sup>8.</sup>tu-pa-aš<sub>2</sub> ina ti-ir-ṣ[i-ka] <sup>9.</sup>ŠE.nu-sa-ḫi-ni i-[na-su-ḫu] <sup>10.</sup>ŠE.ši-ib-še-ni i-[šab-bu-šu<sub>2</sub>]

explanation (of the initial situation, established by the ancestors of the king):

obv. <sup>8.-10.</sup> Your [father], [your] gr[andfather], [the fa]ther of [your] gr[andfather] ex[empted] the Inner City (of Assur).

reminder (?): obv. <sup>11.-12.</sup> (And) you ha[ve established] additional [privileges?] (for us).

complaint: obv. <sup>13-18</sup>. But now, those of the household of the g[overnor] have assigned (their) agents to the Inner City. They are collectin[g] the grain tax (and) extracting the straw tax<sup>159</sup>.

flattery: rev. <sup>1-2</sup>. You are the true seed of Sennacherib.

flattery: rev. <sup>3-6</sup>. Aššūr (and) Šamaš have blessed you, your son, the son of your son, generation upon generation.

flattery (with an indirect declaration of loyalty):

rev. <sup>7-8</sup>. You exercise kingship over us.

complaint: rev. <sup>8-10</sup>. (Yet it is) in [your] reig[n] (that) they [collect] our grain tax (and) our straw tax!

The next step is a change of topic; thus the complaint ends here without a request – but this is not a first complaint of this kind in the corpus. A complaint in itself implies a request. The senders of the letters are not named – only the titles are mentioned – the mayors of the Inner City and the elders. Although in the greeting formula the king is properly addressed as ‘the king, our lord’ (fully preserved in obv. 6.), in the rest of the letter he is systematically addressed in the second person, as far as preserved both in the possessive enclitic pronouns and in the verbal forms. Was this due to the status of Assur as the city in which every Assyrian king had to be crowned? Or did the elders enjoy a personal relationship with the king?

The complaint itself is a tiny literary masterpiece. It is preceded by the explanation of the longevity of the tradition exempting the city from taxes, reinforced by the explicit mention that it was also kept by the father, grandfather, and great-grandfather of the king. After this, follows the current irregular development: the agents appointed by the household of the governor or collecting the taxes, nonetheless. In the second part of the complaint, the king is treated to a hearty portion of flattery, and described as a legitimate king who, together with his line, enjoys the blessings of his gods. This is again, in parallel to the first part of the entire sequence, followed by a complaint, contrasting the positive characteristics of the king and his reign with the injustice brought upon the Inner City. The whole structure is not unlike the parallel couplets typical for the Mesopotamian literature – with minor changes. In the second iteration of the complaint about taxes, both nouns for both kinds of taxes are provided with first person plural possessive pronouns, emphasising who are the persons suffering the utter misery of taxation. Although very short, this complaint is the evidence of the learning of its writer(s).

Another complaint of the citizens of Assur (‘mayors, city scribe, heads of the families of the Inner City, and the citizens young and old’ – obv. 2.-5.) is SAA 16 97 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 91). Here, however, only the final passage is sufficiently preserved:

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<sup>159</sup> For the Assyrian tax system, see Radner 2007.



rev. <sup>10</sup>*a-na* LUGAL EN-*ni ni-iq-te-bi* <sup>11</sup>*šum-mu a-na* LU<sub>2</sub>.*ḥa-za-na-ti* <sup>12</sup>*i-pa-qi-du-ni-ši*  
<sup>13</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ-*ka UŠ<sub>2</sub>* <sup>14</sup>*2 e-gir<sub>2</sub>-a-ti* <sup>15</sup>*a-na* LUGAL EN-*ni ni-sap-ra* <sup>16</sup>*gab-ru-u<sub>2</sub> la ne<sub>2</sub>-mur*  
<sup>17</sup>A<sub>2</sub>.*2-ni a-na mi-tu-ti* <sup>18</sup>*ni-ti-din<sup>9</sup>* LUGAL LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ-*šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>19</sup>*lu la u<sub>2</sub>-ra-ma*

summary (?): rev. <sup>10</sup>We have told the king, our lord.

warning (as argument): rev. <sup>11-13</sup>If he is appointed to the position of the mayor, your servants will be dead.

reproach: rev. <sup>14-16</sup>We have already sent two letters to the king, our lord, but we have not seen an answer.

declaration of helplessness:

rev. <sup>17-18</sup>We have readied ourselves for death.

plea: rev. <sup>18-19</sup>May the king not forsake his servants!

This time, the king is addressed for the most part in the third person. Second person possessive pronoun occurs only with ‘your servants’ in rev. 13. The actual complaint is lost, and the complaints about not receiving a reply from the king and being prepared for death are only secondary to the main topic.

SAA 16 105 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 95–96) is a complaint from a third party, forwarded by the sender<sup>160</sup> to the king:

obv. <sup>10</sup>(...) m.*šum<sub>2</sub>-mu*-DINGIR <sup>11</sup>DUMU m.d.*a-ra-miš*-MAN-DINGIR.MEŠ <sup>12</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.*mu-šar-kis a-bat* LUGAL <sup>13</sup>*ina* IGI-*ia i-za-kar* <sup>14</sup>*ma-a* AD-*u<sub>2</sub>-a* *ina* KUR *na-ki-ri* <sup>15</sup>*me-e-ti ma-a* 50  
LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ <sup>16</sup>*ša* ŠU.2-*šu<sub>2</sub>* 12 ANŠE.KUR.RA.MEŠ <sup>17</sup>*ina* ŠU.2-*šu<sub>2</sub>-nu i-šab-tu-u-ni* <sup>18</sup>*it-tal-ku-u<sub>2</sub>-ni* <sup>19</sup>*ina bat-ti-bat-ti* *ša* URU.NINA <sup>be20</sup>*kam-mu-su* <sup>be21</sup>*ma a-na-ku aq-ṭi-ba-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu*  
<sup>be22</sup>*ma-a* AD-*u<sub>2</sub>-a* <sup>be23</sup>*lu me-e-ti*

rev. <sup>1</sup>EN.NUN *ša* LUGAL *a-ta-a* <sup>2</sup>*tu-ra-am-me-a tal-lik-a-ni* <sup>3</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a an-nu-rig* <sup>4</sup>*ina pa-an*  
LUGAL EN-*ia us-se-bi-la-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>5</sup>LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub> liš-al-šu* <sup>6</sup>*ki-i* *ša a-bu-tu-u-ni* <sup>7</sup>*a-na* MAN  
EN-*ia liq-bi* <sup>8</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.DAM.GAR<sub>3</sub> *šu-u* URU.*gar-ga-mis-a-a* <sup>9</sup>IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ-*šu<sub>2</sub> i-du-ku-uš* <sup>10</sup>*1-en ina*  
ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bi-šu-nu* <sup>11</sup>*la u<sub>2</sub>-še-zib nu-ša-bi-it* <sup>12</sup>*ki-din-nu* *ša* d.NIN.LIL<sub>2</sub> <sup>13</sup>*ša* d.GAŠAN-*ki-di-mu-ri*  
<sup>14</sup>*ša* AMA.MEŠ *ša i-ra-ma-ka-a-ni* <sup>15</sup>*a-na* MAN EN-*ia us-se-bi-la*

recounted complaint:

obv. <sup>10</sup>-rev. <sup>2</sup>Šumma-ilu, son of Aramiš-šar-ilāni, the recruitment officer, uttered the appeal to the king in my presence: ‘My father died in the enemy country. The fifty soldiers who were with him took the 12 horses and went away. They now stay in the environs of Niniveh. I told them

<sup>160</sup> The sender is Ubru-Nabû, the scribe of the New Palace (Baker 2011b, 1366, no. 15). For a scribe, he certainly seems to wield surprising authority.

as follows: “My father is indeed dead. But why did you abandon the watch of the king and go away?”.’

follow-up (with a request for verification):

rev. <sup>3-7</sup>I have now sent him before the king, my lord. May the king, my lord, question him, and may he tell the king, my lord, what his case is.

report:

rev. <sup>8-11</sup>This merchant from Karkemiš – (it was) his servants (who) killed him. None of them escaped: we captured them all.

blessing:

rev. <sup>12-15</sup>I am sending the king, my lord, the protection of Mulissu (and) of the Lady of Kidmuri, the mothers who love you.

It is tempting to suggest that it is the meaning of the verb ‘to love’ that causes the second person address in the blessing, but at this stage this is pure speculation. Two cases can be made about the identity of the merchant from Karkemiš. Elat 1987, 249–251 identifies the murdered father of Šumma-ilu with the merchant based on the presence of the anaphoric *šū* – which is typically used to refer to something that has already been mentioned. He also points out that the verb *mātu* used to refer to the late father of Šummu-ilu does not exclude a violent manner of death. Both observations are certainly correct, although the context is too obscure to be absolutely certain. The anaphoric pronoun could have as well been used in reference to the merchant having been mentioned previously in a letter from the king<sup>161</sup>.

Interestingly enough, as discussed in the chapter about reactions to reproaches, Šummu-ilu uses a why-question to accuse the servants who fled instead of doing their duty – whatever it was, especially in view of the possible profession of his father as merchant.

SAA 16 112 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 99) is a complaint with a clear intention to ask for a royal intervention, although, interestingly enough, the sender uses the closing formula typical for denunciations:

obv. <sup>4</sup>(...) *ša<sub>2</sub>-daq-diš ina URU.ṯar<sup>7</sup>-ni-nu* <sup>5.2</sup> *u<sub>2</sub>-rat ša ANŠE.KUR.RA.MEŠ* <sup>6</sup>LUGAL EN TA KI.[TA x x]x-a <sup>7</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.SAG.MEŠ *ša [x x x x]* <sup>8</sup>*a-na IR<sub>3</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> it-ti-ṯdin<sup>1</sup>* <sup>9</sup>*ina UGU LU<sub>2</sub>.IGI.DUB [x x x]* <sup>10</sup>*ek-ka-la TA m.d.PA-[x x]* <sup>11</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.A.BA *ṯša<sup>1</sup> LU<sub>2</sub>.[GA]L-ṯE<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>* <sup>12</sup>*ad-da-bu-[ub]* <sup>13</sup>*mu-uk ki-[su-tu<sub>2</sub> pa]-ni-tu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>14</sup>*a-na ANŠE.KUR.RA.MEŠ di-in* <sup>15</sup>*qu-la-le-e-a* <sup>16</sup>*is-sa-kan*

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<sup>161</sup> Although in this case the following clause with the information about the merchant having been murdered by his servants would be more likely to be a relative one. Elat insists that this letter indicates that it was possible for a merchant to work in a military context. Nonetheless, the matter of him being referred to first as a ‘recruitment officer’ and then as the ‘merchant of Karkemiš’ remains unexplained.

rev. <sup>1</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> i-qab-bi-a* <sup>2</sup>*ma-a a-na-ku* TA *E<sub>2</sub>-an-ni* <sup>3</sup>*a-pa-ra-as-ka* <sup>4</sup>*u* TA *E<sub>2</sub> LUGAL EN ina E<sub>2</sub>-*  
*EN.MEŠ-ia* <sup>5</sup>*ip-qid-da-ni-ni* <sup>6</sup>*ina UGU me-me-ni ina E<sub>2</sub>-EN.MEŠ-ia* <sup>7</sup>*la šal-ta-ak* <sup>8</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> TA*  
*LU<sub>2</sub>.A.BA ša ŠU.2-ia* <sup>9</sup>*ad-du-bu-bu ina UGU d[u-a]-k[i-ia]* <sup>10</sup>*i-da-bu-ub* <sup>11</sup>*E<sub>2</sub>-EN.MEŠ-ia gab-*  
*bi* <sup>12</sup>*ik-te-rik šal-lu-uš* <sup>13</sup>*is-sa-kan šal-ma-na-te* <sup>14</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-za-zi i-du-kan-ni* <sup>15</sup>*ak <an>-ni-im-ma šal-*  
*ma-na-te* <sup>re16</sup>*it-ti-din* *LU<sub>2</sub>.A.BA* <sup>re17</sup>*ša ina pa-na-tu-u-a* <sup>re18</sup>*it-ta-as-ḫa*

e. <sup>1</sup>LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-da*

explanation (of the initial situation):

obv. <sup>4.-10</sup> Last year in Tarninu, the king, my lord, gave his servant two teams of animals from (the possessions) un[der ...] the eunuch of [...] <sup>162</sup>. They used to eat [...] at the expense of the treasurer.

complaint (with own request being denied):

obv. <sup>10.-rev.</sup> <sup>3</sup> I spoke with Nabû-..., the scribe of the ma[jo]r domo, saying: ‘Give me [the pre]vious (amount) of fo[dder]!’ He insulted me and said: ‘I will cut you off from the inner quarters!’.

complaint (with a declaration of powerlessness):

rev. <sup>4.-7</sup> And ever since the king, my lord, appointed me in the house of my lords, I have had no authority here.

complaint: rev. <sup>8.-10</sup> And I spoke with the scribe under me, but he <sup>163</sup> plots to k[il]l [me].

complaint: rev. <sup>11.-14</sup> He gathered the entire house of my lords under himself. He is distributing presents (and) killing me.

complaint: rev. <sup>15.-re18</sup> In the same way, he gave gifts and pulled away the scribe who was serving me.

closing formula: e. <sup>1</sup> May the king know!

Of the rhetorical devices persuading the king to intervene, the sender marshals the account of his own failed intervention with the scribe, as well as the declaration of powerlessness. His attempt to entirely discredit his opponent could be seen in similar light.

<sup>162</sup> The editors suggest the treasurer because he occurs in the later part of the letter.

<sup>163</sup> Is the schemer Nabû-... or the scribe who serves the sender? The former would seem more likely, with the scribe of the sender perhaps playing the role of an informant.

The complaints in this group are also very disparate, although it is striking that that common motives – such as that of the dog wandering around or watching the threshold of the house of his lord reoccur every now and then in the letters from different senders.

## B. Denunciations

An early denunciation is SAA 19 76 (Luukko 2012b, 77–78). The name of the sender is partially broken, and in the obverse, he is trying to persuade the king to conquer Urartu. In the following passage, he introduces a report about the messengers, and finally denounces one of the messengers:

rev. <sup>11</sup>m.pa-ar-ni-al-de-e LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub>-ka <sup>12</sup>i-<sup>1</sup>da<sup>1</sup>-bu-bu i-su-<sup>1</sup>ri<sup>1</sup> a-na-<sup>1</sup>ku<sup>1</sup> <sup>13</sup>la k[e]t-tu<sub>2</sub> ina IGI LUGAL EN-ia<sub>2</sub> aq-<sup>1</sup>ti<sub>2</sub>-bi <sup>14</sup>LUGAL E[N] a-na KUR.šub-ri-ia-a-e liš-pur <sup>15</sup>m.par<sup>2</sup>-[ar]-<sup>1</sup>na<sup>1</sup>-al-de-e LU<sub>2</sub>.<sup>1</sup>da<sup>1</sup>-gil<sub>2</sub> MUŠEN.MEŠ-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub> <sup>16</sup>lu-[še-bi]-la LUGAL EN li-iš-ša-al-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub> <sup>17</sup>[ma-a a-na m]i<sub>3</sub>-i-ni MUŠEN.MEŠ u<sub>2</sub>-ta-bu-ni <sup>18</sup>[LU<sub>2</sub>.EN.N]AM TA LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL.MEŠ-[š]u<sub>2</sub> <sup>19</sup>[ta-m]i<sub>3</sub>-<sup>1</sup>tu<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> TA LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ-n[i] <sup>20</sup>ša <sup>1</sup>m<sup>1</sup>.aš-šur-EN-PAP i-sa-kan <sup>re21</sup>.ina UGU da-a-ki-i[a] <sup>1</sup>i<sup>1</sup>-da-bu-bu <sup>re22</sup>LUGAL <sup>1</sup>EN<sup>1</sup> lu-u<sub>2</sub>-da

denunciation: rev. <sup>11-12</sup>.Parni-aldê, your servant, is plotting.

request for verification (with an introduction):

rev. <sup>12-17</sup>.(But) maybe I have told unt[r]uths before the king, my lord? May the king write to the Šubrian that he may s[en]d P[ar]ni-aldê, his augur, (and) may the king ask him [as follows: ‘W]hy are you making the birds favourable to me?’.

complaint: rev. <sup>18-re21</sup>. [The go]vernor together with his magnates made a [sworn] pact with the servants of Aššūr-bēlu-ušur. They are scheming to kill me.

closing formula: rev. <sup>re22</sup>. May the king know!

The denunciation is very simple and not very concrete. One should therefore perhaps not be surprised that is followed by a longer move whose function is to explicitly introduce doubts and then dispel them. Finally, the sender also mentions his own problems: a vast conspiracy including the governor is threatening him. No request is voiced, but the closing formula, typical for denunciations, follows.

SAA 19 176<sup>164</sup> (Luukko 2012b, 175–176) is again damaged, but still interesting. The sender, Bēl-lēšir, denounces a crime committed by the Itu’aeans:

obv. <sup>4</sup>ina E<sub>2</sub>.GAL a-na šul-me <sup>5</sup>a<sup>1</sup>-ta-al-ka i-da-tu<sub>2</sub>-u-a <sup>6</sup>KUR.i-tu<sub>2</sub>-<sup>1</sup>a-a-a ša ina NAM <sup>7</sup>u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-ka-lu-u-ni <sup>8</sup>A<sub>2</sub>.2<sup>1</sup>-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub>-nu ina na-ge-e <sup>9</sup>i-ta-ba-lu UDU.MEŠ <sup>10</sup>ša ina na-ge-e i-ra-<sup>1</sup>u-u-ni <sup>11</sup>[i]na GIM sa-ar-te i<sup>1</sup>h<sup>1</sup>-tab-tu<sub>2</sub> <sup>12</sup>[x] <sup>1</sup>u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-ka-lu

<sup>164</sup> Dated to the reign of Sargon II.

denunciation:

obv. <sup>4.-12</sup>I went to the palace for an audience. After this, the Itu'aeans who hold (land) in the province laid their hands on the district. Instead of (paying) the fine, they plundered the sheep which grazed in the district (and) [...] have been holding (them still).

The following passage was apparently a request, but it is very badly broken. When the reverse is legible again, the sender provides an explanation framed as a pseudo-reminder (rev. 4'.-7'.) and requests that the sheiks (of the Itu'aeans) are questioned. In the following move, however, the sender seems to be reporting that he has the situation under control:

rev. <sup>11'</sup>*a-di* UN.MEŠ *a-ka-bu-su-ni* <sup>12'</sup>[Š]A<sub>3</sub> *ša* KUR *a-ka-bu-su-ni* <sup>13'</sup>[ḥ]*a-ra-ma-ma a-sa-pa-ra*

report: rev. <sup>11'.-13'</sup>I wrote (as soon) as I had subjugated the people and the [hea]rt<sup>165</sup> of the land.

The following passage includes the additional information that the plundered sheep belonged to the households of the queen, the governor and the magnates, which might be the reason the letter was written at all. This additional denunciation is followed by the closing formula *akī ša LUGAL ilā 'uni lēpuš* (rev. re20.-re21.), 'May the king do whatever he can!', typical for requests for royal intervention.

SAA 19 186 (Luukko 2012b, 186–187) reports that the Šubrian king is helping runaways. It is, however, phrased in such a way that it seems to be a report giving information and not an attempt to denounce the foreign king and incite the Assyrian king to do something about it. The overall tone is very dispassionate:

rev. <sup>3</sup>KUR.Šub-ri-a-a <sup>4</sup>TA IGI LU<sub>2</sub>.UŠ-kib-si <sup>5</sup>up-ta-zi-ri <sup>6</sup>ma-a LU<sub>2</sub>-ma la-a-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>7</sup>ina pa-ni-ia

report (or denunciation?):

rev. <sup>3.-7.</sup>The Šubrian concealed him from the tracker, saying: 'There is nobody in my presence!'.

In the second complaint or denunciation the Šubrian features again:

rev. <sup>12</sup>K[UR.Šu]b-[r]i-a-a <sup>13</sup>[la i-ma-gur<sub>2</sub>] <sup>14</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL-URU.MEŠ *la i-da<sup>1</sup>-an* <sup>15</sup>ša u<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub>-ḥa-li-qu-šu<sub>2</sub>-n[i] <sup>16</sup>KUR.Šub-ri-a-a EN-MU[N-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu]

report (or a denunciation?): rev. <sup>12.-16</sup>[The Šu]b[r]ian [refused] to give away the city overseers (as well as) those whom he helped to run awa[y]. The Šubrian is [their] frien[d]!

These both reports are followed by the declaration that the sender is also dispatching the tracker to the king, who can listen to his report personally.

The sender of SAA 5 100 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 79–80) is denouncing smugglers:

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<sup>165</sup> Luukko translates '[mora]le', but in fact *libbu* could also refer to simple spatial relations.

obv. <sup>4</sup>m.bu-ri-e m.e-zi-ie-e <sup>5</sup>m.ga-ma-lu m.e-ḫi-ie-e <sup>6</sup>PAB 4 ša ŠU.2 m.a-ri-a-ša-a <sup>7</sup>m.ku-ma-a-a  
m.bi-ri-a-un <sup>8</sup>P[AB] 2 ša ŠU.2 m.a-ri-e <sup>9</sup>6 m.ku-<sup>1</sup>ma<sup>1</sup>-a-a <sup>10</sup>an<sup>1</sup>-nu-ti <sup>11</sup>il-lu-ku ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>  
URU.bu-su-si <sup>12</sup>ša E<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL-KAŠ.LUL u<sub>2</sub>-šu-bu <sup>13</sup>URU.bu-su-sa-a-a ša-ḫi-ta-a-<sup>14</sup>te<sup>1</sup> <sup>15</sup>ša  
KUR.aš-šur.KI TA URU.kal-ḫi <sup>16</sup>TA URU.ni-nu-a i-laq-qe-u <sup>17</sup>a-na m.ku-ma-a-a an-nu-te <sup>18</sup>i-  
di-nu m.ku-ma-a-a an-nu-te <sup>19</sup>ina ŠA<sub>3</sub><sup>1</sup> URU.a-i-ra <sup>20</sup>E<sub>2</sub> m.SAG.DU-a-ni <sup>21</sup>ša ŠU.2 m.sa-ni-  
ie-<sup>22</sup>e<sup>1</sup> <sup>23</sup>EN-URU LU<sub>2</sub>.I[R<sub>3</sub>]

rev. <sup>1</sup>ša<sup>1</sup> LU<sub>2</sub>.EN.NAM ša URU.kal-ḫi <sup>2</sup>ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi e-ru-bu TA ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi <sup>3</sup>ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi KUR.URI u<sub>2</sub>-  
bu-lu <sup>4</sup>TA ma-ak-ka ša-ḫi-ta-a-te <sup>5</sup>a-na ni-ša<sub>2</sub> <sup>6</sup>u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-ba-al-u-ni

denunciation: obv. <sup>4</sup>rev. <sup>5</sup>Būrê, Ezije, Gamālu, Eḫijê – four (men) under Ariazâ, Kumāiu, Biriaun –  
two (men) under Arije – these six Kummeans go to Bususu, a town (belonging) to the household  
of the chief cupbearer and stay (there). The Bususuans buy Assyrian valuables in Calah and  
Niniveh (and) sell them to these Kummeans. The Kummeans enter the town of Aira of the  
household of Kaqqadānu, who is under Sanijê, the city lord (and) serv[ant] of the governor of  
Calah, (and) bring (the valuables) from there to Urartu. From there, they bring the valuables  
here.

The information is given in detail, and the names of the guilty parties are listed at the beginning of the  
message. The entire denunciation is followed by a request for the king to write to Sanijê, who would be  
able to arrest the six enterprising Kummeans, and in the final passage Aššūr-rēšūwa includes an  
insinuation almost masquerading as advice:

rev. <sup>9</sup>(...) LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> liš-al-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu <sup>10</sup>ša-ḫi-ta-a-te an-na-te TA a-a-ka <sup>11</sup>i-na-šu-ni a-na a-a-ša<sub>2</sub>  
i-da-nu-ni <sup>12</sup>man-nu TA ŠU.2-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu i-ma-ḫar-u-ni <sup>13</sup>man-nu u<sub>2</sub>-še-bar-ru-šu-nu-ni

advice (insinuation): rev. <sup>9-13</sup>May the king, my lord, ask them where they buy the valuables (and)  
where they sell them, (and) who receives them from them, (and) who lets them pass (the border).

Especially in the last clause, in the reference to passing the border, the sender seems to indicate that  
something serious is amiss.

SAA 15 168 (Fuchs and Parpola 2001, 115) is quite certainly a denunciation. It would take up too much  
place to quote the letter wholesale, so I will only focus on the individual moves. The name of the sender  
is broken. In the first legible passage<sup>166</sup>, the sender appears to be accusing a certain Batūlu of slandering  
a third party:

obv. <sup>1</sup>[m.ba-t]u-lu LU<sub>2</sub>.[x x x] <sup>2</sup>[IR<sub>3</sub> ša] LU<sub>2</sub>.EN.NAM [x x x] <sup>3</sup>[it-ta]l-ka kar-š[i ša] <sup>4</sup>[m.a]m-ia-  
ta-a' <sup>5</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.2-u' [IR<sub>3</sub> ša LUGAL] <sup>6</sup>E[N-i]a ina pa-ni LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia <sup>7</sup>e-ta-kal

<sup>166</sup> According to the editors, only about three lines are broken away.

complaint (with an accusation):

obv. <sup>1'-6'</sup> [Bat]ulu, the [...], [servant o]f the governor [...], [ca]me and slan[de]red [Am]mi-iata',  
the deputy (governor), [servant of the king m]y lo[rd] before the king, my lord.

The act of slander (*karṣu akālu*) is always presented in a quite negative light<sup>167</sup>. There is no doubt that the sender wishes to accuse Batūlu and ruin his reputation. It is immediately evident that the conflict is more than a mere difference of opinion.

In the following passage, the conflict escalates and Batulu brings 250 Chaldeans to harass Ammi-iata' in his own house, molest his slave-girls and lock them up in storerooms, slaughter his pigs and likely also steal his property (obv. 6'.-17'). The following passage is damaged, but it seems that even a town belonging to Ammi-iata' could not escape unscathed (rev. 2.-3.). The sender then attempts to resolve this issue on his own:

rev. <sup>4</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.NU.GIŠ.KIRI<sub>6</sub> *šu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>5</sup>*ša AD-ia ša AD-AD-ia<sub>2</sub>* <sup>6</sup>*a-sap-ra ina UGU-ḫi-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>7</sup>*ma-a lu-u<sub>2</sub>-bi-lu-ni-š-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>8</sup>*m.ba-tu-lu* LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ-*šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>9</sup>*i-sa-par ma-a pu-ga-ni-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>10</sup>LU<sub>2</sub> *iš-šab-tu ina UGU-ḫi-ia<sub>2</sub>* <sup>11</sup>*na-šu-ni*

report (of own intervention):

rev. <sup>4-11</sup> I sent the gardener of my father and my grandfather, saying: 'Let him be brought.'  
Batūlu sent his men, saying 'Seize him!', (but my men) captured (every) man (and) brought them to me.

Why does the sender need to lodge a complaint if his own intervention was successful? Because Batūlu apparently was not done yet:

rev. <sup>11</sup>(...)m.ba-tu-lu <sup>12</sup>*it-tal-ka ḫi-sa-ti* <sup>13</sup>[ina p]a-ni LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia<sub>2</sub> id-du-bu-ub*

complaint: rev. <sup>11-13</sup> (But) Batūlu went [be]fore the king, my lord, (and) claimed mistreatment.

The entire sequence of complaints and accusations served as an explanation for sender's conduct, who argues that he is innocent. In the final moves, he seems to be requesting an investigation. He reports that he is sending the prefects whom the king should ask for their testimony (14.-18.). The following move might also have been a request, but the last 2-3 lines are completely broken.

<sup>167</sup> A similar introduction of what likely was a denunciation (here, apparently, a letter of intercession) in the scholarly letter SAA 10 161. Here the first move in the denunciation is obv. <sup>5</sup>(...) m.d.aš-šur-KAR-ir <sup>6</sup>[DU]MU m.šil-la-a *ša<sub>2</sub>* LUGAL <sup>7</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub>-i-id-du* <sup>8</sup>*um-ma* m.d.PA-DUMU.UŠ-SUM-na <sup>9</sup>IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ-[i]a *id-du-uk* <sup>10</sup>*pi-ir-ša-a-ti* <sup>11</sup>*it-ti* [LUGAL i] *d-da-bu-ub* – 'Aššūr-ētir, [s]on of Šillāia, who informed the king as follows: "Nabû-aplu-iddina has killed [m]y servants!" is [s]aying l[ie]s and falsehoods to [the king].'

This letter is again a warning for interpreting fragmentary letters without caution. The part before the successful intervention of the sender is exactly like any other denunciation, and would be easily classified as a simple denunciation, were the following request not present.

The first denunciation in the scholarly corpus is made by the substitute king, and recounted by Nabû-zēru-lēšir in SAA 10 2 (Parpola 1993, 4–5). It is short and thus presents a good opportunity to quickly surmise all the basic elements of this type of a complaint:

obv. <sup>17</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> i-da-bu-ub ma-a* <sup>18</sup>*[ina] IGI LU<sub>2</sub>.ENGAR qi-i-bi* <sup>be19</sup>*ma-a ina ba-<sup>r</sup>a<sup>1</sup>-[di ša U<sub>4</sub>-X-KAM<sub>2</sub>]*  
<sup>be20</sup>*ma-a GEŠT[IN ni-si-ti]* <sup>be21</sup>*ta-[a'-ta-a-ti]*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*m.šal-la-a-a a-na m.d.PA-[u<sub>2</sub>-šal-li]* <sup>2</sup>*IR<sub>3</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> it-ti-din ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-b[i<sub>2</sub>]* <sup>3</sup>*ina UGU m.d.NIN.GAL-SUM-na* <sup>4</sup>*ina UGU m.d.UTU-ib-ni* <sup>5</sup>*ina UGU m.I-d.mar-duk* <sup>6</sup>*i-sa-al ma-a ina UGU ša<sub>2</sub>-bal-ku-te* <sup>7</sup>*ša ma-a-ti i-du-bu-ub* <sup>8</sup>*ma-a E<sub>2</sub>-BAD<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ ina bat-ta-ta-a-a* <sup>9</sup>*šab-bi-ta ma-a na-aš-ru šu-u* <sup>10</sup>*ina pa-an LU<sub>2</sub>.ENGAR lu-u la i-za-az* <sup>11</sup>*ma-a a-na m.d.PA-u<sub>2</sub>-šal-li* *IR<sub>3</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>12</sup>*liš-u<sub>2</sub>-lu ma-a šu-u gab-bu* <sup>13</sup>*i-da-bu-ub*

introduction: obv. <sup>17</sup>And he says as follows: ‘Say [be]fore the ‘farmer’!’

explanation of circumstances:

obv. <sup>be19</sup>.-<sup>be20</sup>. ‘In the even[ing of the x<sup>th</sup> day, we were drinking] win[e].’

denunciation: obv. <sup>be21</sup>.-rev. <sup>2</sup>. ‘Šallāia gave b[ribes] to Nabû-[ušalli], his servant.’

denunciation: rev. <sup>2</sup>.-<sup>9</sup>. ‘Because of this/Meanwhile<sup>168</sup>, he asked about Nikkal-iddina, Šamaš-ibni (and) Na’id-Marduk. He spoke about a revolt: ‘Capture (pl.) the fortified places in the region!’.’

warning: rev. <sup>9</sup>. ‘He should be watched!’

warning or advice:

rev. <sup>10</sup>. ‘He should not remain in the entourage of the farmer!’

request for verification (with a prediction):

rev. <sup>11</sup>.-<sup>13</sup>. ‘Let them ask Nabû-ušalli, his servant! He will tell everything.’

The substitute king begins his denunciation with the short report on the circumstances in which he learned about the plot and follows with the report about the crimes of the person he denounces. He then

<sup>168</sup> Parpola 1993, 5 translates ‘meanwhile’, but it seems at least equally likely that the following actions took place because of the bribes, and the two passages are connected logically. There is of course the matter of the *ta-* in obv. <sup>be21</sup>. restored as *ta-[a'-ta-a-ti]*. While the form of the verb *nadānu* in rev. 2. is evident and would fit with the ‘bribe’ nicely, one has to question the logic of giving *tātu* to one’s own servant – and if the action would be worth a denunciation at all. CAD T<sub>1</sub>, 63-64 provides a wealth of evidence for *tātu* also having a negative connotation, but in those contexts, it is invariably given to someone powerful in order to influence his conduct (such as the judge himself, see lines 97.-98 of the Great Šamaš Hymn, Lambert 1996, 132–133).



gives a warning and suggests that the object of his denunciation should be kept away from the king – the implication that it is for the safety of the king is likely. He then follows with a request for verification. The servant of Nabû-ušalli will surely tell everything.

A denunciation could be much more succinct. In SAA 10 98, Akkullānu (Parpola 1993, 75) writes to the king about the irregularities in the provisioning of the temple:

obv. <sup>17</sup>[š]a<sup>2</sup> ina x[x x x] <sup>be18</sup>ṣa<sup>2</sup> ina <sup>1</sup>E<sub>2</sub> [x x]x <sup>be19</sup>DUG.ḥa-ri-a-te be20.[ina I]GI GIŠ.BANŠUR  
LUGAL

rev. <sup>1</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-ma-al-lu-u-ni <sup>2</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a ba-aṭ-lu <sup>3</sup>iš-ka-nu-u-ni <sup>4</sup>ša a-na LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia<sub>2</sub> <sup>5</sup>aš<sub>2</sub>-pu-ra-an-ni <sup>6</sup>LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> la-a iš-al <sup>7</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a ša ITI.DU<sub>6</sub> <sup>8</sup>la-a GEŠTIN ṣu-ra-ri <sup>9</sup>la-a DUG.ḥa-ri-a-te <sup>10</sup>ina IGI aš-šur u<sub>2</sub>-ma-al-li-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>11</sup>la-a LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL-GEŠTIN la-a <sup>12</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.2-u-šu<sub>2</sub> la-a LU<sub>2</sub>.DUB.SAR-šu <sup>13</sup>GIR<sub>3</sub>.2 ana GIR<sub>3</sub>.2 ba-aṭ-lu <sup>14</sup>i-ša<sub>2</sub>-ku-nu <sup>15</sup>LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> lu-u-di

rebuke: obv. <sup>17</sup>-rev. <sup>6</sup>The [...] who fill the vats [in fr]ont of the king's table in the temple [...], and who now have abandoned their work, about whom I have (already) written to the king, my lord – the king, my lord, did not interrogate them.

complaint: rev. <sup>7-10</sup>Now, in the month of Tašrītu, they have not poured in the libation wine (into its containers) nor filled the vats (with beer) in front of Aššūr.

complaint: rev. <sup>11-12</sup>Neither the official responsible for wine, nor his deputy, nor his scribe!

complaint: rev. <sup>12-14</sup>All of them together have abandoned their work!

denunciation formula: rev. <sup>15</sup>May the king know!

The denunciation is so concise because Akkullānu is writing to the king for the second time – at least. He is only informing about new developments in the already bad situation, and he does it by summarising his initial complaint and mentioning that the situation remains as bad as it was.

A denunciation is clearly present in SAA 10 169<sup>169</sup> (Parpola 1993, 129–130). There is no address formula and no blessing, so that the letter might appear to be anonymous at first glance, but in fact a subscript at the very end of the reverse attributes the letter to Zakir (rev. <sup>11</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> m.za-kir, after a ruling), so it is more likely that the letter is an archival copy. The denunciation begins with an alleged order of the king, which the sender (and the Babylonians whose words he recounts) clearly thought to be false:

obv. <sup>1</sup>DUMU.ME ša<sub>2</sub> m.e-ṭe<sub>3</sub>-ru KUR.tam-<sup>1</sup>ti<sup>1</sup> x[x x x x x x x] <sup>2</sup>LUGAL it-ti-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu ip-te-qid [x x x x x x x] <sup>3</sup>uš-šab-bi-tum<sup>170</sup> um-ma a-mat LUGAL š[i-i um-ma x x x x x] <sup>4</sup>a-na AD.ME-ku-

<sup>169</sup> The letter is written in the Babylonian dialect.

<sup>170</sup> Note that the sign TUM can also be read *tu*<sub>4</sub>. Mimetic would of course be a thing of history at the time when the letter was written. However, I think it is a better choice to preserve the reading *tum* here and in other nominal

*n[u š]<sub>a2</sub> ni-is-ḫi id-di-nu bi-na-na-a-ši* LU<sub>2</sub>.TIN.TIR.KI.[MEŠ] <sup>5</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> m.u<sub>2</sub>-ba-ru* LU<sub>2</sub>.GAR-UMUŠ *um-ma ul a-mat* LUGAL *ši-i* <sup>6</sup>*[u]m-ma šad-da-qad i-na* URU.*ka-laḫ<sub>3</sub> a-na* UGU *su-ud-du-nu* <sup>7</sup>*[ša<sub>2</sub> ḫ]u-bul-lu la-bi-ru-tu<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> i-na ša<sub>2</sub>-la-mi ša<sub>2</sub>* TIN.TIR.KI <sup>8</sup>*[LUGAL ki]-i tam-ḫu-ra* LUGAL *ŠA-ba-šu<sub>2</sub> a-na* UGU-*ḫi-ku-nu il-te-eḫ-ṭa* <sup>9</sup>*[um-ma] i-na* TIN.TIR.KI *mi-nu-u<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>2</sub>-kin um-ma* URU *ḫe-pu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>10</sup>*[šu-u<sub>2</sub> um-ma] a-na-ku ul-te-šib u du-ra-ar<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> al-ta-kan* <sup>11</sup>*[um-ma] an-ni-tum a-ma-tum ša<sub>2</sub> ina pi-i* LUGAL KUR.KUR EN-*i-ni* <sup>12</sup>*[im-qu-ta] ʿx a<sup>1</sup>-na ʿx x<sup>1</sup> an-nu-ti* LUGAL *in-da-ḫa-ru* <sup>be13</sup>*[um-ma x x x x x x x x] it-ti-ni lip-qi<sub>2</sub>-du*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*[x x x x x x] it-tan-na ṭa-ti* LU<sub>2</sub>.TIN.TIR.KI.MEŠ <sup>2</sup>*[ma-la ul-t]u* E<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.DAM.GAR<sub>3</sub>.ME LUGAL *a-na* KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR *u<sub>2</sub>-paṭ-ṭi-ra* <sup>3</sup>*[x x x] ʿx<sup>1</sup>.ME ma-la ul-tu* KUR.NIM.MA.KI *u<sub>3</sub> KUR.ḫa-at-tum* <sup>4</sup>*[LUGAL u<sub>2</sub>]-paḫ-ḫi-ram-ma ana d.EN u d.zar-pa-ni-tum u<sub>2</sub>-zak-ku-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>5</sup>*[LU<sub>2</sub>.UŠ<sub>2</sub>.ME] mi-tu-tu ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL u<sub>2</sub>-bal-li-ṭu a-na* KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR *i-nam-di-nu* <sup>6</sup>*[u<sub>3</sub>] ma-a-tum ḫe-pi-tum ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL EN ik-ši-ru la ŠU.2 LUGAL* <sup>7</sup>*[u<sub>2</sub>-še-l]u-u<sub>2</sub> m.šil-la-a : a-ša<sub>2</sub>-bu ša<sub>2</sub>* TIN.TIR.KI *ul ši-bi* <sup>8</sup>*[x x x] ki-i u<sub>2</sub>-šad-ba-bu-šu-nu-ti* LUGAL EN <sup>9</sup>*[le-ʾ]u-u<sub>2</sub> mas-su-u<sub>2</sub> mu-de-e a-ma-tum* <sup>10</sup>*[ki]-i ša<sub>2</sub> i-le-ʾu-u<sub>2</sub> li-pu-uš*

introduction: obv. <sup>1-2</sup>The king appointed [Šillāia (?) ...] with the sons of Ēṭiru of the Sealand [...].

denunciation (with a demand):

obv. <sup>2-4</sup>They have seized [...], saying: ‘Th[is] is the word of the king<sup>171</sup>! Give us the [... which ...] gave your fathers as a *niṣḫu*-payment!’

denunciation (with the rejection of the demand, with the rejection of the request by the king):

obv. <sup>4-12</sup>The Babylonian[s] and their governor, Ubāru, (said) as follows: ‘This is not the order of the king. Last year when you appealed to [the king] with regards to the collection [of] the old [d]ebts from (when) Babylon was unharmed, the king grew angry with you (and said) [as follows]: “What is there in Babylon (to be taken)? The city lay in ruins! It was I who settled it and established freedoms<sup>172</sup>!”. This was the word that [came] from the mouth of the king of the lands, our lord.’

(broken passage)

denunciation (with an undercurrent of complaint):

rev. <sup>1-7</sup>(...) The payments<sup>173</sup> (?) of the Babylonians, [as man]y as the king redeemed for silver from the houses of merchants, the [...], which [the king] gathered from Elam and the

endings, as the sender is clearly attempting a loftier register, and his decision to use TUM = *tum/tu<sub>4</sub>* and not UD = *tu<sub>2</sub>* seems to be deliberate.

<sup>171</sup> That is, a royal command.

<sup>172</sup> The debt remission. On the topic of *andurāru* in the Neo-Assyrian period, see Villard 2007.

<sup>173</sup> Parpola translates ‘gifts’. This would require an unequivocally positive meaning, for which the context seems to me insufficient.

land of Ḫatti, and cleared for Bēl and Zarpanītum, [the] dead [bodies] whom the king brought to life – (all this) they are selling for silver [and] making the broken land which the king has restored<sup>174</sup> [sl]ip away from the king's hands.

denunciation: rev. <sup>7</sup>Šillāya does not wish the settling of Babylon.

flattery: rev. <sup>8-9</sup>Although has incited them [...], the king is [ab]le, well-informed and knows many things.

closing formula:

rev. <sup>10</sup>May the king do what he can.

The closing formula gives the entire letter the character of a petition. The second denunciation, in its emphasis on the misfortune that had befallen Babylon, has a strong component of a complaint, even though the central motive is still the accusation against Šillāia and his people.

A report of issues with denunciation-like passages appears in a letter from Mār-Ištar, SAA 10 353 (Parpola 1993, 289–291). After reintroducing a previous royal command, Mār-Ištar reports that the work on producing new accounts of the temple property, including herds, is not proceeding smoothly. The shepherds bribed the commandant and the temple administrator, and the offerings have ceased:

obv. <sup>19</sup>(...) LU<sub>2</sub>.SIPA.MEŠ <sup>20</sup>*šul-ma-nu a-na* LU<sub>2</sub>.GAR-UMUŠ [*u* LU<sub>2</sub>].<sup>1</sup>ŠA<sub>3</sub>.<sup>1</sup>[TAM] *it-tan-nu* <sup>21</sup>*a-du-na-kan-ni* NIG<sub>2</sub>.KA<sub>9</sub> [*ša*] GU<sub>4</sub>.NITA<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ *u*<sub>3</sub> UDU.HI.A.MEŠ <sup>22</sup>*la ep-šu*<sub>2</sub> *u*<sub>3</sub> UDU.NITA<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ *gi-ne<sub>2</sub>-e la u<sub>2</sub>-pa-q<sub>2</sub>-du* <sup>23</sup>*ina* ITI.BARAG GU<sub>4</sub>.*šak-la-lu-te* SISKUR.MEŠ *ša* MAN <sup>24</sup>*la e-pu-šu*<sub>2</sub> IGI.2 *ša* LU<sub>2</sub>.SIPA-GU<sub>4</sub>.NITA<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ <sup>be25</sup>*i-dag-gu-lu* GU<sub>4</sub>.*šak-la-lu-tu<sub>2</sub>* *ša ka-ri-bi* <sup>be26</sup>TA *pa-an* KA<sub>2</sub> *u<sub>2</sub>-sa-ḫa-ru-u-ni* *ina* UGU-ḫi <sup>be27</sup>GIŠ.BANŠUR *ša d.PA u<sub>2</sub>-se-li-i-u*

rev. <sup>1</sup>TA ŠA<sub>3</sub> GU<sub>4</sub>.*šak-lu-lu* *ša ka-ri-bi* <sup>2</sup>*ša pa-an d.na-na-a e-piš-u-ni a-se-me ma-a* <sup>3</sup>BIR 15-*šu<sub>2</sub>* *la-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>* DUMU.MEŠ *bar-sip*.KI *gab-bu* <sup>4</sup>*ut-ta-ta-zu-mu ma-a* GU<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ UDU.MEŠ *ša d.PA* <sup>5</sup>*pa-an* KUR *kat<sub>3</sub>-mu a-ta-a* LU<sub>2</sub>.SIPA.MEŠ *u<sub>2</sub>-šap-ḫu-zu* <sup>6</sup>*a-se-me ma-a* TA ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bi* LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL.MEŠ *i-ba-ši* <sup>7</sup>*ša* LU<sub>2</sub>.SIPA.MEŠ *is-[se]-e-šu<sub>2</sub> i-zi-zu-u-ni* <sup>8</sup>*a-na* <sup>1</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.GAR-UMUŠ<sup>1</sup> *ša [bar-sip].KI iq-ti-bi ma-a* <sup>9</sup>Ṛ<sup>1</sup> [x x x x x x x i]-<sup>1</sup>*da<sup>1</sup>-bu-bu* MAN *be-li<sub>2</sub>* <sup>10</sup>[*lu-u*] *u<sub>2</sub>-di i[su-ri a]-Ṛ<sup>1</sup>na<sup>1</sup>* MAN EN-*ia<sub>2</sub> i-qab-bi-i-u* <sup>11</sup>*ma-a* TA *la-bi-Ṛ<sup>1</sup>ri<sup>1</sup>* [NIG<sub>2</sub>.KA<sub>9</sub>.MEŠ] <sup>1</sup>*la<sup>1</sup> u<sub>2</sub>-pu-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>12</sup>*i-sa-na-li-i-[u* *ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub> *ti]-il-ti* <sup>13</sup>*ša ḫur-sa-an* <sup>1</sup>*ša<sup>1</sup>* [m.bur-na-d.bu]-<sup>1</sup>*ri<sup>1</sup>-ia-aš<sub>2</sub>* <sup>14</sup>MAN <sup>1</sup>KA<sub>2</sub>.DINGIR<sup>1</sup>.KI <sup>1</sup>*qa<sup>1</sup>-[bi ma-a]* <sup>1</sup>*ḫur<sup>1</sup>-sa-an* <sup>15</sup>ṚLU<sub>2</sub>.SIPA<sup>1</sup>.<sup>1</sup>[MEŠ NIG<sub>2</sub>.KA<sub>9</sub>.MEŠ

report (with an accusation):

<sup>174</sup> The verb used here, *kašāru* A, is typically used in the context of restoring, renewing, and repairing buildings and walls, frequently also in royal inscriptions (CAD K, 284-285). This word choice is certainly deliberate.

obv. <sup>19-20</sup> The shepherds gave a present to the commandant [and the] temple admini[strator].

complaint (with elements of a denunciation):

obv. <sup>21-be25</sup> (Not a single) account [of] the bulls and the sheep has been made until now. Also, they have not provided the rams for the regular offerings. In the month of Nisannu, they did not even perform the royal offerings of bulls. They do the shepherds' bidding.

complaint:

obv. <sup>be25-be27</sup> They turn the ungelded bulls of the blesser away from the gate (and) put (them) on the (offering) table of Nabû.

report (with an undercurrent of denunciation):

rev. <sup>1-3</sup> Of the blesser's ungelded bull sacrificed before Nanāia I have heard as follows: 'His right kidney was missing.'

report (of a complaint):

rev. <sup>3-5</sup> All the citizens of Borsippa are lamenting constantly: 'The bulls (and) the sheep of Nabû are being hidden away from the land!'

reproach:

rev. <sup>5</sup> Why are they letting the shepherds behave so arrogantly?

denunciation (?):

rev. <sup>6-9</sup> I have heard that there is one of the magnates who consorts w[ith] the shepherds. He said to the commandant of [Borsippa]: '[...] are plotting [...].'

closing formula:

rev. <sup>9-10</sup> The king, my lord, [should] know this!

pre-emptive argument:

rev. <sup>10-15</sup> Per[haps] they will tell the king, my lord: 'In the olden days, [the accounts] were not made.' They keep lyi[ng] constantly! [In an] ordeal [pro]verb of [Burna-Bu]riāš, the king of Babylon, it sa[ys:] '[The accounts] are the river ordeal of the shepherd[s].'

Although Mār-Ištar does not name any names, he mentions titles and ends his report of irregularities with the typical denunciation formula. At the same time, he includes a complaint from 'all citizens of Borsippa' (rev. 3.-5.), who also grumble against the impudence of the shepherds. This serves to keep them apart from the guilty parties (the shepherds as well as the commandant and temple administrator who take bribes), and thus to dissociate them from the misconduct. This is only emphasised by the

following reproach, ‘Why are they letting the shepherds behave so arrogantly?’. Mār-Ištar hardly means to accuse the residents of Borsippa. Interesting is also the pre-emptive argument against those who would claim that no accounts are necessary at all. For this, Mār-Ištar has a venerable proverb from the times of Burna-Buriāš, a Middle Babylonian king, which would be authoritative enough to prove that the accounts have already had much earlier precedents.

SAA 10 369 (Parpola 1993, 304–305) is a fragmentary denunciation about the irregularities in the treasuries of the temples. In obv. 7.-13. Mār-Ištar accuses the unnamed governor of Dūr-Šarruku of appropriating temple property sealed by Mār-Ištar previously and distributing it to his entourage. The next three lines are badly broken, but in the following passage Mār-Ištar makes an interesting argument:

obv. <sup>17</sup>(...) ‘LU<sub>2</sub>.NAM’.[MEŠ] <sup>be18</sup>[š]a pa-na-tu-uš-[š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub>] <sup>be19</sup>me-me-e-ni TA E<sub>2</sub>-[DINGIR.MEŠ]  
 rev. <sup>1</sup>la iš-ši-i-u u<sub>2</sub>-ma-[a] <sup>2</sup>šu-u i-si-ia-aṭ E<sub>2</sub>-na[k-kam-ti] <sup>3</sup>ša DINGIR u<sub>3</sub> LUGAL EN-ia<sub>2</sub> <sup>4</sup>ip-te-te  
 KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR it-ti-ši <sup>5</sup>ki-ma LU<sub>2</sub>.GAR-KUR LU<sub>2</sub>.EN.NAM <sup>6</sup>ša URU.NINA u URU.arba-il<sub>3</sub>  
<sup>7</sup>KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR TA E<sub>2</sub>-DINGIR.MEŠ it-ta-šu <sup>8</sup>šu-u liš-ši na-kan-tu <sup>9</sup>ša DINGIR u<sub>3</sub> MAN EN-  
 ia<sub>2</sub> ši-i <sup>10</sup>a-ta-a u<sub>2</sub>-ba-du-du

argument (from past behaviour of persons of the same rank):

obv. <sup>17</sup>-rev. <sup>1</sup>[T]he governor[s] before h[im] never took (anything) from the tem[ples].

complaint: rev. <sup>1-4</sup>(But) now, he behaved despicably (by) opening the trea[sury] of the god and the king, my lord, and taking the silver!

argument (equal treatment, ironic):

rev. <sup>5-8</sup>When the prefects (and) the governor of Niniveh and Arba’il took silver from the house of the gods, (then) may he also take it.

reproach: rev. <sup>8-10</sup>It is the treasure of the god and the king, my lord. Why is it being squandered?

Mār-Ištar complains at length about the conduct of the governor who took away the silver and animals from the temple treasury without authorisation. Although a part of the sequence is completely destroyed, two of his arguments are clear. In the first place, the conduct of the governor is compared against the behaviour of the past governors – he clearly comes short, and his comportment is summarised with the addition of the verb *šiāṭu* (‘to despise, to neglect’, in rev. 2.) to reenforce the negative impression. In the second place, Mār-Ištar compares the embezzling governor with other higher officials whose conduct is much better. At the same time, this move serves to imply that one governor might present a bad example for the other officials to follow. Finally, Mār-Ištar reproachfully asks for the reasons for frivolling away the money from the treasury ‘of the god and king’. Following this sequence, he requests the king to send a royal companion who would investigate the situation more closely and punish the embezzler. His final move, already discussed in the section on warnings, is completely in line with the preceding section:

rev. <sup>15</sup>[lu]-<sup>r</sup>di<sup>1</sup>-i-u lig-ru-ru [u<sub>2</sub>-la]-a <sup>16</sup>[NIG<sub>2</sub>.GA] 'ša<sup>1</sup> E<sub>2</sub>.KUR.MEŠ 'gab<sup>1</sup>-[bu]  
<sup>17</sup>[LU<sub>2</sub>].<sup>r</sup>NAM<sup>1</sup>.MEŠ u<sub>2</sub>-pa-a<sup>t</sup>-[tu-ru] <sup>18</sup>MAN be-li<sub>2</sub> lu-u u<sub>2</sub>-di

argument (with a warning):

rev. <sup>15-17</sup>[Let] them know (and) may they be afraid! [Otherwi]se, al[l] the property of the temples will be was[ted] by [the] governors.

closing formula:

rev. <sup>18</sup>May the king, my lord, know!

The warning used as an argument goes back to the same type of argument as the ones used above – from comparison with the conduct of others and everything this implies. Mār-Ištar's letters were composed in a careful and shrewd manner.

A slightly damaged denunciation is SAA 13 19 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 20–21), in which the temple official Dādî informs the king about the lack of cooperation from the shepherds:

obv. <sup>6</sup>[T]A SAG.DU ITI a-du a-kan-ni <sup>7</sup>[L]U<sub>2</sub>.SIPA nap-ti-ni a-na <sup>8</sup>[p]i-ri-šu<sub>2</sub> la-a i-ma-gur<sub>2</sub> <sup>9</sup>[l]a i-la-ak a-na-ku <sup>10</sup>UDU.MEŠ TA ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi KA<sub>2</sub>.GAL <sup>11</sup>a-la-qi u<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub>-kal <sup>12</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.SIPA ša ina E<sub>2</sub> DUMU.MEŠ <sup>13</sup>[HAL].MEŠ i-za-zu-u-ni <sup>be14</sup>[a-na pi-ri la] i-li-ka-ma

complaint (with an accusation): obv. <sup>6-9</sup>[Si]nce the beginning of the month, [t]he shepherd ( responsible) for the meals (for the offerings) has refused to come for his [t]ax collecion.

report (of the own attempt to deal with the situation):

obv. <sup>9-11</sup>I (have to) buy sheep from the city gate (the market) and fatten them on my own.

complaint (with an accusation):

obv. <sup>12-be14</sup>The shepherd who serves in the house of the [haruspic]es (?), [did not] come [for the tax collection].

The second part of the second complaint/accusation is partially damaged, and when the text resumes Dādî introduces an argument against letting the shepherds go unpunished:

rev. <sup>2</sup>(...) an-nu-ti <sup>3</sup>[DUMU.MEŠ KU]R.aš-šur-ma la-a i-ma-gur<sub>2</sub> <sup>4</sup>[LUGAL b]e-li la i-pa-lu-<sup>hu</sup>  
<sup>5</sup>[DUMU.MEŠ] KUR KUR<sub>2</sub> a-ke-e <sup>6</sup>[a-na] LUGAL EN-ia i-lu-ku

argument (from bad example and extreme cases):

rev. <sup>2-6</sup>(If) these (people), who are [Assy]rians refuse to revere [the king], my [l]ord, how will [the citizens] of foreign lands treat the king, my lord?

This type of argument is also attested several times in the form of a warning – but here it has a more nationalistic dimension. In the final move of the letter, Dādî informs the king about the actual names:

rev. <sup>7</sup>[i-s]u-ri LUGAL be-li <sup>8</sup>[i-qa-b]i ma-a TA a-a-ak <sup>9</sup>[šu-n]u m.arba-il<sub>3</sub>-a-a <sup>10</sup>[m.d.U]TU-AD-PAB ša URU.lud-din-DINGIR <sup>11</sup>[m.d.x]-A-SU ša URU.sa-lam-me <sup>12</sup>[LU]GAL be-li IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>13</sup>[lu-b]a<sup>2</sup>-<sup>3</sup>i u<sub>2</sub>-la-a

(two lines completely illegible)

denunciation: rev. <sup>7-11</sup>[Per]haps the king, my lord [will sa]y: ‘Where are [the]y from?’. [Š]amaš-abu-ušur is from the town of Luddin-ilu; [...]aplū-erība is from the town of Salammê.

advice: rev. <sup>12-13</sup>The [ki]ng, my lord, [should call] his servants to account. Otherwise [...].

Dādî identifies both shepherds and includes their whereabouts. He insists again that they have to be punished – the advice was surely followed by an argument realised as a warning, which however is now completely broken.

It is clear that the first letter did not provide a solution. In SAA 13 20 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 21–22), Dādî is compelled to complain about the shepherds again:

obv. <sup>6</sup>m.arba-il<sub>3</sub>-a-a m.gi-ri-tu <sup>7</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.SIPA nap-ti-ni <sup>8</sup>URU.lud-din-DINGIR-a-a <sup>9</sup>[an-nu]-rig <sup>7</sup>MU.AN.NA.MEŠ <sup>10</sup>[TA b]<sub>2</sub>-et UDU.MEŠ <sup>11</sup>[a-na] LUGAL i(emend.)-de-e-nu-ni <sup>be12</sup>[šu-nu la] <sup>r</sup>i<sup>1</sup>-ma-gur<sub>2</sub> <sup>be13</sup>[a-na pi-i]r-ri

rev. <sup>1</sup>[la] e-ru-bu <sup>2</sup>LUGAL<sup>1</sup> la i<sup>2</sup>-pa-lu-ḥu <sup>3</sup>ḥal<sup>1</sup>-qu i-du-lu

accusation: obv. <sup>6</sup>rev. <sup>3</sup>Arba’ilāiu (and) Gīrītu, the shepherds of the meals (for the offerings) from Luddin-ilu – it has [no]w been seven years [sin]ce they gave the sheep [to] the king. [They re]fuse to come [for the tax collec]tion. They do not revere [the king]. They roam around (like) runaways.

In the next passage, also discussed in the chapter on threats, Dādî recounts his attempt to deal with the shepherds on his own. His reproach (rev. 5.-6.) is unsuccessful. While the answer of the shepherds to his letter is not recorded, in the next passage they are roaming around with ten other men and utter threats. After showing that he did his best, Dādî explicitly asks for a royal intervention:

rev. <sup>re12</sup>an-nu-rig a-na <sup>re13</sup>LUGAL EN-ia as-par

e. <sup>1</sup>LUGAL be-li IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub> lu-[ba-<sup>3</sup>i-i]

request (with an introduction): rev. <sup>re12</sup>e. <sup>1</sup>Now, I have written to the king, my lord. May the king, my lord [call] his servants [to account].

A very similar kind of letter is SAA 13 31 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 34–35), in which Nādin-Aššūr accuses the scribes of the governor of Barhalza of not paying the temple tax:

obv. <sup>4</sup>*an-nu-rig* SAG.MEŠ <sup>5</sup>*ša* KUR-*ka* *ḥa-mu-su* <sup>6</sup>*ša*<sub>2</sub> URU.*bar-ḥal-zi* *mi-mi-ni* <sup>7</sup>*la-a* *na-ša*  
IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ-*ka* <sup>8</sup>*ina* E<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.DAM.GAR<sub>3</sub> *a-ti-din* <sup>9</sup>*ḥa-mu-su* *a-ta-ša* *e-ta-ba-aš*<sub>2</sub> <sup>10</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.A.BA.MEŠ  
*ša* LU<sub>2</sub>.EN.NAM <sup>11</sup>*ša* URU.*bar-ḥal-zi* LUGAL <sup>12</sup>*li-ša*<sub>2</sub>-*a*[*l*]-*šu*<sub>2</sub>-*nu* <sup>13</sup>*ma-a* *a-ta-a* *ḥa-mu-su*  
<sup>14</sup>*a-na* *d.aš-šur* *la* *ta-di-na* <sup>15</sup>*ma-a* LUGAL *lu-u* *ḥa-sis* <sup>16</sup>*a-ki-i* *ba-aṭ-lu* <sup>17</sup>*ina* UGU  
DINGIR.MEŠ-*ni-ka* <sup>18</sup>[*i-šak-k*]*a-nu-u-ni*

complaint: obv. <sup>4-7</sup>Nobody has been bringing the first fruits of your land (and) the one-fifth tax of the city of Barhalza.

report (own attempt to solve the issue):

obv. <sup>7-9</sup>I have sold your servants in the house of a merchant<sup>175</sup>, took the one-fifth tax, and performed (the offering).

request: obv. <sup>10-14</sup>The scribes of the governor of Barhalza – may the king ask them: ‘Why do you not give the one-fifth tax to Aššūr?’

criticism (realised as a reminder):

obv. <sup>15-18</sup>What is more, may the king bear in mind that they [have cea]sed to work at the expense of your gods!

It is interesting that Nādin-Aššūr addresses the king as only ‘king’ and not ‘king, my lord’ in obv. 11. and 15., rev. 2., and 11., although the full address occurs in the greeting. While the omission of the second part of the title is on its own is nothing extraordinary, Nādin-Aššūr also uses second person possessive pronoun of the first-person singular in obv. 7., 17., rev. 6., 10., and 12. This is quite systematic. Was it meant to create an impression of familiarity?

In the following move, Nādin-Aššūr twice uses the argument from bad example, formulated as a warning:

rev. <sup>1</sup>[*k*]*i-ma* *šip-ṭu* *ina* LU<sub>2</sub>.A.BA <sup>2</sup>*ṛ*<sup>1</sup>*-en* LUGAL *la-a* *iš-kun* <sup>3</sup>[*re-ḥu-te*] *la* *i-ga-ru-ru* <sup>4</sup>[*x x x*]*x*  
*an-ni-u* <sup>5</sup>[*ki-ma* LU<sub>2</sub>].GAR-*nu* *ḥa-mu-su* <sup>6</sup>[*la-a*] *na-ša* *ina* E<sub>2</sub>.DINGIR.MEŠ-*ka* <sup>7</sup>[*la*] *i-din*  
LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL.MEŠ <sup>8</sup>*re-ḥu-u-te* *ina* *ša*<sub>2</sub>-*a-šu*<sub>2</sub> <sup>9</sup>*i-da-gul-šu*<sub>2</sub> *ba-aṭ-lu* <sup>10</sup>*i-šak-ku-nu* *ina* E<sub>2</sub>-  
DINGIR.MEŠ-*ni-ka*

warning (as an argument, from bad example):

<sup>175</sup> While I do not believe that the ‘house of the merchant’ is meant to have any pejorative connotation, I think it is likely that the act of selling the servants of the king is recounted in order to accurately convey the despair of the sender.



rev. <sup>1-3</sup>. [I]f the king does not impose a punishment on one scribe, [the rest] will not be afraid.

warning (as an argument, from bad example):

rev. <sup>4-10</sup>. This is [...]:<sup>7</sup> [If a] prefect [does not] bring the one-fifth tax and does [not] give it to the temple, the remaining magnates will see observe (his example and) the work of your temples will cease.

Similar arguments were also used by Dādī in SAA 13 19 (what will the foreigners do if the Assyrians do not fear the king?). In both cases, the calls for punishment for the guilty parties should be evident.

Another denunciation is SAA 13 33 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 35–36), written by Mutakkil-Aššūr, high official of the Aššūr temple (Baker 2001c, 783, no. 8):

obv. <sup>9</sup>m.bi-bi-ia LU<sub>2</sub>.šak-nu <sup>10</sup>ša LU<sub>2</sub>.i-tu- 'a-a-a <sup>11</sup>m.tar-di-tu<sub>2</sub>-aš-šur LU<sub>2</sub>.sak-nu <sup>12</sup>ša LU<sub>2</sub>.i-tu- 'a-a-a <sup>13</sup>2-šu<sub>2</sub> qa-an-ni URU.ŠA<sub>3</sub>-URU <sup>14</sup>IGI KA<sub>2</sub>.GAL <sup>15</sup>[kam]-mu-su <sup>16</sup>[NINDA] is-sa-ḫe-iš

rev. <sup>1</sup>e-kul-lu <sup>2</sup>GIŠ.GEŠTIN i-ša<sub>2</sub>-ti-u <sup>3</sup>a-ši-tu<sub>2</sub> ša URU.ŠA<sub>3</sub>-URU <sup>4</sup>u-ba-du-du

accusation: obv. <sup>9</sup>-rev. <sup>4</sup>Bibīa, prefect of the Itu'aean, and Tardītu-Aššūr, prefect of the Itu'aean, his deputy, [s]it outside of the Inner City, before the (city) gate. They eat [bread] together (and) drink wine. They squander the custom dues of the Inner City!

The accusation component of this denunciation is short but has a very clear structure. First appears the who and where, with a description of the circumstances. In the second place, the misconduct is presented in detail – likely metonymically. Finally, Mutakkil-Aššūr summarises his accusation by stating what the actions of the denounced person mean: they are squandering the custom dues.

As previously attested in SAA 13 20, Mutakkil-Aššūr also tries his own luck in dealing with the miscreants before requesting the royal intervention:

rev. <sup>5</sup>ina UGU ša pi-i <sup>6</sup>is-si-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu ap-tu-u-ni <sup>7</sup>SAG.MEŠ i-ša-bat-tu<sub>2</sub>-u-ni <sup>8</sup>iḫ-ta-su<sup>7</sup>-u-ni <sup>9</sup>ku-zip-pi-ia ina UGU-ḫi-ia <sup>10</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-sa-li-ik <sup>11</sup>la e-mu-qa-a-a <sup>12</sup>ina UGU-ḫi-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu la a-ma-qu-ut

report (own attempt to resolve the issue):

rev. <sup>5-10</sup>. I started talking with them, (but) they seized the best things (?), harassed me, (and) made my garments go back to me (?).

declaration of powerlessness:

rev. <sup>11-12</sup>. I cannot oppose them.

In the following passage, Mutakkil-Aššūr makes another accusation against the Itu'aean prefects:

rev. <sup>13</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.*si-na-a-a* GIŠ.MEŠ <sup>14</sup>ina E<sub>2</sub> *aš-šur i-za-bil-u-ni* <sup>15</sup>*i-ša-bat-tu<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>16</sup>[x+]8 MA.NA  
KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR <sup>17</sup>*i-ta-ḫar-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu*

accusation:

rev. <sup>13.-17.</sup>They captured the Sinneans who were carrying the wood for the temple of Aššūr and received x+8 minas of silver from them.

This could well be the trigger for Mutakkil-Aššūr's denunciation – after all, he belonged to the temple personnel and was vitally interested in ensuring that goods delivered to the temple arrive safe and sound.

This denunciation does not include a direct request for the royal intervention. On the left edge, there follows the final, last accusation (s. 1.-3., the persons serving as express messengers have run away). The entire letter is an indirect request in itself – one could also consider rev. 11.-12., the assertion of Mutakkil-Aššūr's inability to deal with the problem, as the locus in which the request-like component is particularly strong.

SAA 13 128 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 98–99) is a denunciation against at least two persons, the lamentation priest Nabû-erība and Gallulu, the temple guard, with an accusation of appropriating gold from the statue of Ninurta:

obv. <sup>11</sup>ina ŠA<sub>3</sub> AD-šu<sub>2</sub> *ša* LUGAL EN-ia<sub>2</sub> 12.LU<sub>2</sub>.TU-E<sub>2</sub> *ša* E<sub>2</sub> d.MAŠ <sup>13</sup>TA ŠA<sub>3</sub> GIŠ.UR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ *ša*  
KU<sub>3</sub>.GI <sup>14</sup>*ša* SAG d.MAŠ 3 ŠU.SI <sup>15</sup>*mu-še-ši-i* KU<sub>3</sub>.GI *ib-ta-at-qu* <sup>16</sup>*ṭe<sub>3</sub>-e-mu* ina IGI AD-šu<sub>2</sub>  
<sup>17</sup>*ša* LUGAL EN-ia <sup>18</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-tir* LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ <sup>19</sup>[*gab-bi*]-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu ina GABA x[x]

reminder or explanation (with an account of a previous crime):

obv. <sup>11.-19.</sup>In the reign of the father of the king, my lord, the temple enterers cut off three finger's length of the golden protrusions (?) of the golden beams of the head of (the) Ninurta (statue). I reported this to the father of the king, my lord, and all these men [...] to meet (?) [...].

The new accusation likely begins in the gap and continues when the letter is legible again:

rev. <sup>4</sup>x[x x r]*u-tu* DAGAL <sup>5</sup>11 *ina* KUŠ<sub>3</sub> GID<sub>2</sub>.D[A] <sup>6</sup>*ib-ta-at-qu* 8 *sa-kan-ni* <sup>7</sup>*ša* KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR  
TA ŠA<sub>3</sub> E<sub>2</sub>.SIG<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ <sup>8</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-ta-si-ḫu* LU<sub>2</sub>.SAG *ša*<sub>2</sub> LUGAL <sup>9</sup>EN-ia *lil-li-ka le-mur* <sup>10</sup>m.d.PA-SU  
LU<sub>2</sub>.GALA <sup>11</sup>m.*ga-lul* LU<sub>2</sub>.EN.NUN E<sub>2</sub>-DINGIR <sup>12</sup>*šu-nu* EN *ba-ta-qi* <sup>13</sup>[*iš-a*]-*lu-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu*  
ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ <sup>14</sup>*ša is-si-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu lu-še-ṣu-u-ni*

accusation: rev. <sup>4.-8.</sup>They cut off [a ... x] spans wide and 11 cubits lon[g]. They removed 8 silver elements<sup>176</sup> from the walls.

<sup>176</sup> Cole and Machinist translate 'bands (?)', but the word is not recorded in the dictionaries. In any case, the length of 11 cubits (almost six metres) is substantial.

request: rev. <sup>8-9</sup>May a eunuch of the king, my lord, come and see.

denunciation: rev. <sup>10-12</sup>The culprits (guilty of the) cutting off are Nabû-erība, lamentation priest, and Gallulu, temple guard.

request: rev. <sup>13-14</sup>May they be interrogated and may the people who are with them be brought out!

Directly after the denunciation, the sender only asks for an investigation, and not a punishment for the guilty parties – unlike the sender of SAA 13 19 and SAA 13 31, who produces lengthy arguments in favour of severe consequences. After reporting that he himself together with the mayor of Calah sent the overseer of the city gates to inspect the temple, the sender, however, quickly changes his tune:

rev. <sup>20</sup>(...) *u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a* <sup>re21</sup>*a-na ki ma-ši i-tur-ru* <sup>re22</sup>*la-mu-du a-ḫa-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>re23</sup>*ina E<sub>2</sub>.KUR ta-la-ka*  
<sup>re24</sup>*AD-ka a-ḫa-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu ina E<sub>2</sub>.KUR* <sup>re25</sup>*ta-ta-lak*

e. <sup>1</sup>ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ TA ŠA<sub>3</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu *de-e-ku* LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub> ki-i ša* <sup>1</sup>*i*-[*la-u-ni*] <sup>2</sup>*le-pu-šu<sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-di-ia a-na-ku a-ḫaz de-ni la-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>1</sup>DUMU<sup>1</sup> *1-en* [*x x*] <sup>3</sup>*šu-nu* LUGA *be-li<sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-di*

argument (slippery slope implied):

rev. <sup>20-re21</sup>Now, how many have they become?

argument (with a reminder):

rev. <sup>re22-re23</sup>They were taught (a lesson, and yet) keep laying their hands on the temple!

reminder:

rev. <sup>re24</sup>e. <sup>1</sup>(In the reign of) your father, some of these people were killed.

closing formula:

e. <sup>1-2</sup>May the king, my lord, do as he c[an]!

complaint (or declaration of powerlessness):

e. <sup>2-3</sup>I am (completely) alone! There is no one taking the case. They [...].

closing formula:

e. <sup>3</sup>May the king know!

Although the sender does not mention the punishment explicitly, in the sequence before the first closing formula he is preoccupied with demonstrating why taking action against the culprits who robbed the temple is necessary. The culprits have become numerous – I feel it is at least implied that there might be many more in the near future, unless something is done. The reminder about the previous punishment both suggests how the present thieves could be punished and that the previous punishment was

insufficient if the thieves dared act again. The declaration of powerlessness realised as claim of being completely alone is also a motive attested more than once – a parallel occurs also in SAA 13 185 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 153), in a badly broken letter that might be either a complaint or an attempt to fend off accusations (rev. <sup>12</sup>*e-du a-na-ku ma-am-ma-nu-u<sub>2</sub>-a* <sup>13</sup>*ṛi<sup>1</sup>a-a'-nu* – ‘I am alone. There is no one on my side.’). A similar strategy consists of making a more concrete claim than just stating that one is alone – as Adad-šumu-ušur in his petition for Urdu-Gula, when he states that there is nobody who would intercede for him and his son (SAA 10 226 rev. 16.-19., discussed above).

The closing formula with an appeal for a royal intervention is followed by a short post-script that likely constitutes the argument for a royal intervention in view of the sender’s helplessness. Finally, the second closing formula is the one usually used for denunciations.

SAA 13 134 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 102–104) is a lengthy denunciation against the lamentation priest Pūlu. Its beginning is completely broken, but in the preserved part, Pūlu is accused of the following crimes and irregularities:

1. replacing temple furnishings without permission (obv. 6'.-12'.)
2. making a drawing of the elements of the divine statue (obv. 12'.-14'.)
3. making appointments without authority (obv. 16'.-17'.)
4. changing the practices related to offerings without permission (obv. 18'.-23'. and likely also at least rev. 9.-10.)
5. supervising the treasury of the temple without accountability (obv. 30'.-rev. 4.)
6. taking over the work of others (rev. 4.-8.)
7. performing the offerings incorrectly (rev. 13.-14. and 14.-15.)

The final section of the letter is very badly damaged. The introductory remark of the sender is as follows:

obv. <sup>5</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a m.pu-u<sub>2</sub>-lu* LU<sub>2</sub>.GALA *ki-i ra-[me-ni-šu]* <sup>6</sup>*ina* E<sub>2</sub> d.PA *up-pa-aš<sub>2</sub>*

accusation: obv. <sup>5</sup>*ṛi<sup>1</sup>-6 Pūlu, the lamentation priest, has been acting wil[fully] in the temple of Nabû.*

The accusations that follow do seem to be in line with the initial claim of wilful conduct and abuse of authority. In two cases, the sender has to give the full account of how the workings of the temple were established in the first place, once in obv. 18'.-23'. , and once in the following section, but in the second case a gap follows, so that the accusation that must have been introduced there is completely missing:

obv. <sup>18</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> [DUG.l]a-ḥa-a-ni ša* KU<sub>3</sub>.GI *ša [x] qa-a-a* <sup>19</sup>*[N]U LUGAL-ni ina* UGU-*ḥi* AD-*šu<sub>2</sub> ša*  
LUGAL *us-sa-zi-iz* <sup>20</sup>*1-en ina* IGI d.EN *1-en ina* IGI d.PA GEŠTIN.MEŠ *u<sub>2</sub>-ma-al-lu-u* <sup>21</sup>*in-*

*ne<sub>2</sub>-ep-su* GEŠTIN.MEŠ *ta-a-a-ru ša* E<sub>2</sub>.GAL *šu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>22'</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a ba-aṭ-lu ša-ki-in* : *šu-u<sub>2</sub>*  
 GEŠTIN.MEŠ <sup>23'</sup>*ṛi<sup>1</sup>-ma-da-ad i-ṛna<sup>1</sup>-aš<sub>2</sub>-ši*

explanation (of the initial situation):

obv. <sup>18'.-21'</sup> And the golden [b]ottles with the [eff]igy of the king on them – the father of the king has set them up. They were filling them with wine – one in front of Bēl (and) one in front of Nabû. They were decanted. This was the share of the palace.

accusation: obv. <sup>22'.-23'</sup> Now, it has (all) ceased. He measures out the wine and takes it.

Following the accusations, they are once more summarised by the sender:

rev. <sup>16</sup>*me<sub>2</sub>-me<sub>2</sub>-e-ni la-[a]* <sup>ṛep<sup>1</sup>-uš qa-a-la ša<sub>2</sub>-ki-in</sup> <sup>17</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> par-ši la-bi-ru-u<sub>2</sub>-te us-sa-aš<sub>2</sub>-ni-u<sub>2</sub>*

complaint: <sup>16</sup> Nobody can do (anything). There is a command to stay silent.

accusation: <sup>17</sup> And they have changed the ancient rites!

In line 18. of the reverse one can still read *liš-al*, which surely belonged to the request for verification, and in line 27. there are sure traces of a complaint (<sup>27</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> a-ṛna-ku<sup>1</sup> ina bu-bu-ṛu<sup>1</sup>-te [a]-ṛmu-at<sup>1</sup>* – ‘And I am dying of hunger.’). Together with the mentions of the sender’s father (obv. 24’. and rev. 26.), this complaint-like passage suggests that the sender’s interest in denouncing Pūlu might not have been entirely altruistic.

The sender of SA 13 138 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 110) is also denouncing temple thefts, while at the same time trying to ingratiate himself with the king:

obv. <sup>6</sup>*m.d.PA-DU<sub>3</sub>-uš LU<sub>2</sub>.SANGA ša<sub>2</sub> d.e<sub>2</sub>-a* <sup>7</sup>*tab-lu TA E<sub>2</sub>.KUR it-ta-bal* <sup>8</sup>*qa-a-ru ša KU<sub>3</sub>.GI* <sup>9</sup>*TA UGU GIŠ.BANŠUR ut-ta-ri* <sup>10</sup>*ša ina IGI d.15* <sup>11</sup>*iq-ṭa-la-pa it-te-ši* <sup>12</sup>*m.d.PA-SUM-A LU<sub>2</sub>.EN.NUN E<sub>2</sub>-DINGIR* <sup>13</sup>*ina ŠU.2-šu<sub>2</sub> iṣ-ša-bat* <sup>14</sup>*ṛu<sub>3</sub><sup>1</sup> [ina] pa-na-tu-u-a* <sup>15</sup>*[LU<sub>2</sub>.SANG]A ša d.e<sub>2</sub>-a* <sup>16</sup>*[tab-lu-u]m-ma* <sup>be17</sup>*it-ta-bal* <sup>be18</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-sa-ḫi-ru* <sup>be19</sup>*šu-nu-ma uk-ta-te-ṛmu<sup>1</sup>*

accusation (with a report of theft):

obv. <sup>6.-13</sup> Nabû-ēpuš, the administrator of the temple of Ea, stole temple property. He peeled off and carried away the gold ornament from the large (?) (offering) table before Ištar. Nabû-nādin-apli, the temple guard, caught him red-handed.

accusation (additional):

obv. <sup>14.-be19</sup> Even before my time, [the temple admini]strator of Ea committed [the]ft. (But) they (temple authorities?) returned (the stolen goods) and concealed (the matter).

The sender not only denounces the temple administrator as a thief, but likely implicates all temple officials who previously helped to hush the matters up. These accusations are followed with a request to interrogate the culprit (rev. 1.-2.), after which the sender emphasises his own meritorious service:

rev. <sup>2</sup>(...) *u<sub>2</sub>-di-na* <sup>3</sup>MAN *be-li<sub>2</sub> la u<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub>-za-za-ni-ni* <sup>4</sup>*tab-lu u<sub>2</sub>-tab-bu-lu u<sub>2</sub>-saḫ-ḫu-ru* <sup>5</sup>*šu-nu-ma* *ša<sub>2</sub> la dul-li* <sup>6</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> la me-me-ni u<sub>2</sub>-ka-tu<sub>2</sub>-mu* <sup>7</sup>*li-i' -šu<sub>2</sub> dan-nu ina ŠA<sub>3</sub> E<sub>2</sub>.KUR* <sup>8</sup>*e-pu-šu<sub>2</sub>*

accusation (with an implied boast):

rev. <sup>2-8</sup>Before, when the king, my lord, had not stationed me here, the kept thieving repeatedly. They can cover (everything) up without any effort (and) cause a great (deal of) whispers (?)<sup>177</sup> in the temple.

The sender tries to show that his nomination prevented further crimes from taking place, but at the same time:

rev. <sup>8</sup>(...) *u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a gab-bi-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>9</sup>*is-sa-ḫe-iš šak-nu* <sup>10</sup>*ma-a ki-i ḫa-ni-ma ne<sub>2</sub>-pu-uš* <sup>11</sup>*a-qab-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu la i-ša<sub>2</sub>-me-u* <sup>12</sup>*as-se-me a-na* MAN *be-li<sub>2</sub>* <sup>13</sup>*as-sap-ra* MAN *be-li<sub>2</sub>* <sup>14</sup>*ki-i ša<sub>2</sub> i-la-u-ni* <sup>15</sup>*le-pu-uš*

complaint: rev. <sup>8-11</sup>Now, they are all as one, (and say) as follows: ‘Let us do (it) like this!’. I am talking to them, (but) they do not listen.

closing formula (with an introduction):

rev. <sup>12-15</sup>I have written to the king, my lord. May the king, my lord, do what he can.

Thus, although the cover-ups are no longer an issue, the sender feels that other temple officials are against him. He still requires a royal intervention.

A short complaint is included after a passage with a request for permission in SAA 13 174 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 144–145)<sup>178</sup>:

rev. <sup>1</sup>*ka-ri-bu* *ša<sub>2</sub>* LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia<sub>2</sub> ana-ku* <sup>2</sup>*a-na* UGU LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia<sub>2</sub> ra-aḫ-ša-ku* <sup>3</sup>d.AMAR.UTU *u d.zar-pa-ni-tum ana* DIN ZI.MEŠ <sup>5</sup>*ṭu-ub ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi ṭu-ub* UZU *u la-bar* U<sub>4</sub>-me <sup>6</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub>* LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia u<sub>2</sub>-šal-li* <sup>6</sup>*la* ŠA<sub>3</sub> LUGAL *U-ia la el-li* <sup>7</sup>m.d.AMAR.UTU-*NUMUN-ib-ni a-na* UGU m.IR<sub>3</sub>-d.AG <sup>8</sup>*u m.na-di-nu ki-i it-tak-lu dib-bi-ia<sub>2</sub>* <sup>9</sup>*bi-i' -šu<sub>2</sub>-tu i-dab-bu-ub u a-na-ku* <sup>10</sup>*a-na* UGU LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia tak-lak* <sup>11</sup>IGI.2 *ša<sub>2</sub>* LUGAL *lu-u<sub>2</sub> ana* UGU-*ḫi-ia* <sup>12</sup>m.d.AMAR.UTU-*NUMUN-ib-ni* GIŠ.*šad-da-a-nu* <sup>13</sup>NA<sub>4</sub>.KIŠIB *ša<sub>2</sub>* m.MU-SUM-*na* <sup>14</sup>*ip-ti-ti* NA<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ <sup>15</sup>*ul-tu* ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bi it-ta-ša<sub>2</sub>-a* <sup>16</sup>LUGAL *lu-u<sub>2</sub> i-du*

<sup>177</sup> The spelling of *liḫšu* with *i'* instead of *iḫ* is a bit unusual. On the other hand, the word would fit the context.

<sup>178</sup> The letter is written in the Babylonian dialect.

declaration of loyalty:

rev. <sup>1-2</sup> I am the one who blesses the king. I trust in the king.

blessing: rev. <sup>3-5</sup> I pray to Marduk and Zarpanītu for the life, well-being, happiness, health and longevity of the king, my lord.

promise (of loyalty):

rev. <sup>6</sup> I will not slip away from the king!

complaint: rev. <sup>7-9</sup> Because Marduk-zēru-ibni trusted Urdu-Nabû and Nādinu, he is saying horrible things against me.

declaration of loyalty:

rev. <sup>9-10</sup> (But) I trust the king, my lord.

request: rev. <sup>11</sup> May the eyes of the king be upon me!<sup>179</sup>

denunciation: rev. <sup>12-15</sup> Marduk-zēru-ibni opened the chests seal(ed by) Šumu-iddina (and) took out the stones that were inside.

closing formula: rev. <sup>16</sup> May the king know this!

This sequence includes several very smooth transitions between moves – Rāši-ili, the sender, was certainly a talented letter-writer. The beginning is a declaration of loyalty and a blessing, as if at the beginning of a letter – a similar addition of a blessing in a petition that also begins in the reverse of a letter is also attested in SAA 10 58 and SAA 10 143. In SAA 13 185<sup>180</sup>, a blessing occurs in the context of a potential complaint (or an attempt to prove one's innocence), after a series of complaints and before a supplication (rev. <sup>9</sup> d.AMAR.UTU *u d.zar-pa-ni-tum* <sup>10</sup> *a-na* LUGAL ŠU<sub>2</sub> *be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia lik-ru-bu* <sup>11</sup> LUGAL *ina* ŠU.2-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu *la u<sub>2</sub>-maš-ša<sub>2</sub>-ra-an-ni* – 'May Marduk and Zarpanītu bless the king of the world, my lord! May the king not deliver me into their hands!').

A promise of loyalty (rev. 6.) is followed by a complaint that Marduk-zēru-ibni<sup>181</sup> is slandering the sender – in the same move Rāši-ili insinuates that Marduk-zēru-ibni is not trustworthy – in contrast to himself, who trusts in the king. After this, finally, follows the short denunciation.

The obverse of SAA 16 32<sup>182</sup> (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 30–31) is completely broken. The legible section of the letter is more of a denunciation than a complaint, although the presence of one of the closing formulas suggests that a royal intervention was also expected, and the letter was more likely

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<sup>179</sup> The sense here is the benevolent gaze (Dicks 2012).

<sup>180</sup> The letter is written in the Babylonian dialect.

<sup>181</sup> Nothing much is known about him, see Baker 2001a, no. 5.

<sup>182</sup> SAA 16 33 is a partial duplicate.

complaint on the whole. The first legible passage in the reverse is damaged, but clearly includes an accusation:

rev. <sup>3</sup>(...) *u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a x[x x x x]* <sup>4</sup>*de-e-ni la-a e-pa-aš<sub>2</sub>* <sup>5</sup>*da-ba-bu ša* LUGAL *la iš-me* <sup>6</sup>*e-ni ša*  
LU<sub>2</sub>.EN.NAM.MEŠ *i-da-gal* <sup>7</sup>*a-ni-ni* LUGAL *be-li de-e-nu* <sup>8</sup>*ša* AD-ka *e-pu-šu<sub>2</sub>-u-ni* <sup>9</sup>*ṭe<sub>3</sub>-e-mu*  
*iš-ku-nu-u-ni* <sup>10</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a an-nu-<rig>* *u<sub>2</sub>-sa-bal-ki-tu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>11</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> a-na-ku* TA ŠA<sub>3</sub> E<sub>2</sub>-AD-ia *gab-bu*  
<sup>12</sup>*ki-i kal-bi a-sa-ab-bu-u* <sup>13</sup>*ra-mi<sub>3</sub>-ni-ia la-aḥ-ri-id* <sup>14</sup>*ma-šar-tu ša* LUGAL EN-ia *la-šur*  
<sup>15</sup>BAD<sub>3</sub> *ma-ki-i* LUGAL LUGAL *be-li* <sup>16</sup>*ki-i ša i-la-u-ni le-pu-uš*

accusation: rev. <sup>3-6</sup>Now, [...] he does not doing justice (to me?). He does not listen to the words of the king. He (only) seeks the favour of the governors.

accusation: rev. <sup>7-10</sup>Hark, O king, my lord! They have overturned the judgement that your father made (and) the order that he gave.

complaint: rev. <sup>11-12</sup>And I (alone) among all (those of the) house of my father am bounding like a dog!

promise (of loyalty, as a pre-request:

rev. <sup>13-14</sup>(So) may I (also) be vigilant and keep the watch of the king, my lord.

flattery: rev. <sup>15</sup>The king is the bulwark of the weak.

closing formula: rev. <sup>15-16</sup>May the king, my lord, do what he can!

After what was likely a string of detailed accusations, the sender summarises the offenses of the guilty parties, whose names are lost in the gap, as overturning the royal justice established by the father of the king. It is certainly striking that second person possessive pronoun appears here in the mention of the royal father – a similar phenomenon occurs in SAA 13 128 and SAA 16 30. Was mention of relatives a trigger for more intimate language? The sender complains about bounding like a dog – the idiom is attested in full in SAA 13 190 and partially in SAA 16 30. In the next move, he pledges his loyalty to the king, promising diligence. The compliment the sender uses is the same as chosen by the sender of SAA 16 30 (a different person). Finally, the formula serving as the request for royal intervention follows.

This letter is also interesting for the request directed at the scribe that appears in the final passage:

rev. <sup>17</sup>*man-nu* LU<sub>2</sub>.A.BA <sup>18</sup>*ša ta-sa-su-u-ni* <sup>19</sup>TA IGI LUGAL EN-ka *la tu-pa-zar* <sup>20</sup>*ṭa-ab-ti ina* IGI LUGAL *qi-bi* <sup>21</sup>EN d.AG *ṭa-ab-ta-ka* <sup>22</sup>*ina* IGI LUGAL *liq-bi-u<sub>2</sub>*

request: rev. <sup>17-20</sup>Who(ever) you are, O scribe, who are reading (this letter)! Do not hide it from the king, your lord! Speak well (for me) before the king!

blessing: rev. <sup>21-22</sup>(And if you do so), may Bēl (and) Nabû speak well for you before the king!



The scribe is said to be reading the petition aloud to the king. The sender includes a blessing as a post-request, a perfect analogy to the favour he himself wishes to obtain.

SAA 16 42 is a clear-cut denunciation, sent by multiple senders to the king:

obv. <sup>8</sup>(...) E<sub>2</sub>-EN.MEŠ-ni <sup>9</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.EN.NAM.MEŠ <sup>1</sup>ub<sup>1</sup>-ta-di-du <sup>10</sup>LUGAL la u<sub>2</sub>-da <sup>11</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.EN.NAM  
ša URU.arrap-ḫa <sup>12</sup>ti-din-tu ša LUGAL <sup>13</sup>a-na be-li-ni <sup>be14</sup>id-di-nu-u-ni <sup>be15</sup>ip-tu-ag-ga

rev. <sup>1</sup>a-na LUGAL be<sub>2</sub>-li-ni <sup>2</sup>lu ud-da-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> ki-i <sup>3</sup>E<sub>2</sub>-EN.MEŠ-ni ba-du-du-nu <sup>4</sup>LUGAL u<sub>2</sub>-da ki-  
i EN-ni <sup>5</sup>TA EN-de-ni-šu <sup>6</sup>la i-da-bu-bu-u-ni <sup>7</sup>u<sub>3</sub> a-ni-nu E<sub>2</sub> ni-da-bu-bu-ni <sup>8</sup>i-ḫa-as-su-na-ši  
<sup>9</sup>LUGAL ina pa-an 1-en <sup>10</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.GUB.BA-pa-ni-šu <sup>11</sup>li-ip-qi-da-na-ši <sup>12</sup>ša te<sub>3</sub>-mi<sub>3</sub>-ni ina IGI  
LUGAL <sup>13</sup>i-qab-bu-u<sub>2</sub>-ni <sup>re14</sup>u<sub>3</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.qur-bu-tu<sub>2</sub> <sup>re15</sup>ina UGU E<sub>2</sub> IR<sub>3</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>re16</sup>lip-qid

e. <sup>1</sup>de-na-ni ša E<sub>2</sub> le-pu-uš

denunciation: obv. <sup>8-10</sup>The governors are squandering the house of our lords (and) the king knows nothing!

accusation: obv. <sup>11-be15</sup>The governor of Arrapha took away the gift that the king gave to our lord!

denunciation (repeated, explicit):

rev. <sup>1-3</sup>May it be known to the king, our lord! The house of our lords has been squandered.

pre-request (pseudo-reminder, with an undertone of a complaint):

rev. <sup>4-8</sup>The king knows that our lord does not quarrel with his adversary and when we dispute (with him), he mistreats us.

request: rev. <sup>9-e</sup><sup>1</sup>May the king assign one of his courtiers to report our story before the king. And may he appoint a royal companion over the house of his servant so that he may give his judgement in the lawsuit of the house.

Although very short, this complaint is structured carefully. The actual complaint is framed by two warning-like denunciations that the governors are squandering the ‘house of our lords’ – in both cases the ignorance of the king about these serious and urgent matters is emphasised, explicitly in the opening frame, and implicitly in the closing frame. The denunciation is followed by an explanation introduced with a pseudo-reminder, which sheds further light on the conflict with the governor. The lord of the senders ‘does not quarrel’, and the senders on their own are helpless against the powerful adversary. This is followed by a very detailed request regarding the solution to the issue – the king is asked to send

a member of his retinue to report on what the senders have to say<sup>183</sup>, and further to send a royal companion who will be powerful enough to establish order.

The denunciations against Sāsî in SAA 16 59 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 52–53), SAA 16 60 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 54–56) and SAA 16 61 (a partial duplicate, Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 56–57) are certainly interesting, but badly damaged. The parts of the letters that include threats are discussed in the relevant chapter, while here I will only analyse chosen passages, because restoring the entire sequences of moves is impossible.

All three letters were sent by Nabû-rēḫtu-uṣur and despite being denunciations, the overall tone in the legible passages is that of a warning. Warnings follow immediately after the introductory formula and the short report that the goddess Nikkal revealed the enemies of the king in SAA 16 59 (obv. 5.-9., as far as legible), followed by a lengthy gap. A passage including a denunciation that is well-preserved followed on the reverse, but the presence of *mā* indicated that this is a part of a longer report whose source was originally some third party:

rev. 2' (...) *ma-a* GEME<sub>2</sub> *ša<sub>2</sub>* m.EN-PAP-PAB *ina q[an-n]i ša<sub>2</sub>* 'URU'.K[ASKAL].2 *ina* U[GU x x x x] 3' *ma-a* TA ŠA<sub>3</sub> ITL.SIG<sub>4</sub> *sa-ar-ḫa-at ma-a da-ba-bu* SIG<sub>5</sub> *ina* UGU-ḫi 4' *ta-da-bu-bu ma-a a-bat* d.NUSKA *ši-i ma-a* LUGAL-*u-tu a-na* m.*sa-si-i* 5' *ma-a* MU NUMUN *ša<sub>2</sub>* m.d.30-PAP.MEŠ-SU *u<sub>2</sub>-ḫal-la-qa* LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL-*mu-gi-ka* 6' *ina šap-la* KA<sub>2</sub>.GAL *ša<sub>2</sub>* E<sub>2</sub> d.PA E<sub>2</sub> m.EN-PAP-PAB *liš-al* LU<sub>2</sub>.*še-e-pi* [ša<sub>2</sub>] 7' GEME<sub>2</sub> *ina* E<sub>2</sub> m.*sa-si-i u<sub>2</sub>-bi-lu-ni lu-bi-lu-ni-ši dul-lu* LUGAL? [x x x] 8' *ina* UGU-ḫi-ša<sub>2</sub> *le-pu-šu<sub>2</sub>* m.EN-PAP-PAB TA URU.KASKAL *lu-bi-lu-ni* d.NUSKA [x x x] 9' MU NUMUN *ša<sub>2</sub>* m.*sa-si-i ša<sub>2</sub>* m.EN-PAP-PAB *ša<sub>2</sub>* UN.MEŠ *ša<sub>2</sub>* *is-si-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu u<sub>2</sub>-du-[u-ni]* 10' *li-iḫ-liq* MU NUMUN *ša<sub>2</sub>* LUGAL EN-*ia* d.EN d.PA *a-na 'ša-at'* [U<sub>4</sub>-*me lu-ki*]n-nu

denunciation (partial):

rev. 2'.-5'. 'A slave girl of Bēl-aḫu-uṣur [...] out[sid]e the city of Ḫa[rā]n [...]. She has been in a trance (?) since the month of Simanu. She speaks good things about this as follows: "This is the word of Nusku! The kingship belongs to Sāsî! I will destroy the name and the seed of Sennacherib!"'

advice: rev. 5'.-8'. Let your commander of a squadron interrogate the household of Bēl-aḫu-uṣur under the gate of the temple of Nabû. The foot soldiers [who] brought the slave girl to the house of Sāsî – let them bring her there (and) let them<sup>184</sup> perform a [...] ritual on her account [...] the king. Let them bring in Bēl-aḫu-uṣur (and) [...] Nusku.

<sup>183</sup> In a manner typical of a still predominantly oral culture, it is the spoken word that is in the end of greater importance than written matter.

<sup>184</sup> Not the foot soldiers. This third person plural form is rather the impersonal plural referring simply to the persons responsible for a particular task.

warning (as argument for the advice):

rev. 9'.-10' May the name (and) the seed of Sāsî, Bêl-aḥu-uṣur and people who kn[ew] with them  
(= their accomplices) be destroyed!

blessing: rev. 10' May Bêl (and) Nabû [esta]blish the name (and) the seed of the king. my lord,  
until distant [days]!

This denunciation is thus, as far as preserved, not entirely typical. Although Nabû-rēḫtu-uṣur provides information about the conspiracy against the king, his main concern seems to be to advise the king on what to do with the traitors. The language of the prophecy he uses is discussed in some detail in the chapter on warnings, but his use of the imperative forms is immediately striking – he seems to be speaking on behalf of the goddess Nikkal. His office is unknown (Baker 2001d, 861, no. 4), but his familiarity with the language of prophecy as well as the strong undercurrent of advice in his letters would suggest he could be a scholar. Furthermore, the warning that the king should destroy the name and the seed of the traitors is a motive well-known from the royal *adê* treaties – also the succession treaty of Esarhaddon (No. 6), where it is significantly enough attested in the section dealing with traitors (Parpola and Watanabe 1988, 34):

<sup>138</sup>(...) *šum-ma am-mar ṣa-ba-ti-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>139</sup>*du-a-ki-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu ma-ṣa-ku-nu la ta-ṣab-bat-a-ša<sub>2</sub>-nu-ni* <sup>140</sup>*la ta-du-ka-a-ša<sub>2</sub>-nu-ni MU-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu NUMUN-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>141</sup>*ina KUR la tu-ḫal-la-q-a-ni*

<sup>138</sup>.-<sup>141</sup> If you are able to capture them (and) kill them, you will capture them (and) kill them. You will destroy their name and their seed from the land!<sup>185</sup>

In the rest of the reverse, Nabû-rēḫtu-uṣur suggests what questions should be put to the conspirators (this sequence is very damaged, so I refrained from citing it in full, rev. 11'.-17'). The bottom of the reverse is badly broken. In the left edge Nabû-rēḫtu-uṣur gives some more practical advice and repeats the warning to the king to save his life (e. <sup>4</sup>(...) ZI.MEŠ-*ka še-zib*).

The overall tone of SAA 16 60 is similar – except that the initial denunciatory sequence is explicitly stated to be the words of Mulissu and not Nikkal:

obv. <sup>5</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> [ina Š]A<sub>3</sub> [ta-ab-ti ṣa<sub>2</sub> AD-ka ina ŠA<sub>3</sub> a-de-e ṣa<sub>2</sub> A]D-k[a u ina Š]A<sub>3</sub> a-de-ka* <sup>6</sup>*ṛi<sup>1</sup>-ḫa-tu-u-ni*  
*[i ṣa<sub>2</sub> ina UGU ZI.MEŠ-k]a ṛi<sup>1</sup>-[da-bu-bu-u]-ni* <sup>7</sup>*šu-nu ina ŠU.ṛ2<sup>1</sup>-[ka i-ša<sub>2</sub>-ka-an-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu] MU-*  
*šu<sub>2</sub>-nu [TA KUR aš]-šur.KI* <sup>8</sup>*TA ŠA<sub>3</sub> ṛE<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>.[GAL-ka tu-ḫal-la-q-a] da-ba-bu an-ni-ṛu<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>* <sup>9</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub>*  
*d.NIN.LIL<sub>2</sub> [šu-u*

promise (realised as a prophecy):

<sup>185</sup> All attestations of this expression in Esarhaddon's succession treaty are discussed by Nissinen 1998, 117, n. 442.

<sup>5-8</sup>Those who transgressed against [the generosity of your father (and) [ag]ainst the treaty [of] yo[ur fat]her, [those who] p[lot] [against you]r [life] – they will [be placed in your] hands, (and) [you will erase] their name [from the land of Aš]šūr (and) from [your] pal[ace]. [This] the word of Mulissu!<sup>186</sup>

The motive of destroying the name of the traitors, already discussed above, occurs here for the second time. Unfortunately, the rest of this letter is even more damaged than SAA 16 59. It is only in the final sequence of the reverse where one can follow the warnings and reassurances again (rev. 13'.-re22'). The urgency of Nabû-rēhtu-ušur is evident in the moves whose primary goal seems to be persuasion – as in rev. <sup>16'</sup>(...) 'e<sup>1</sup>-gir<sub>2</sub>-tu<sub>2</sub> an-ni-tu<sub>2</sub> lu ši-ip-tu<sub>2</sub> <sup>17'</sup>ina UGU-<sup>1</sup>ka<sup>1</sup> i-<sup>1</sup>ma<sup>1</sup>-[x – 'May this letter be a spell that [...] <sup>187</sup>upon you.'

SAA 16 62 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 57–58) still revolves around the conspiracy of Sāsî, but its denunciation appears to be anonymous<sup>188</sup>. I would actually hesitate to classify the letter as a denunciation – the preserved passages seem to rather point at a letter of advice, not unlike those written by scholars. Nonetheless, one has to bear in mind the advice in the correspondence from Nabû-rēhtu-ušur. The initial passage includes an introduction of a topic with a reminder, followed by a reproach:

obv. <sup>3</sup>(...) a-ta-a LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> a-da-ka-an-ni <sup>4</sup>[l]a iš-al la u<sub>2</sub>-ši-ši a-bu-tu-u qal<sub>3</sub>-li-su <sup>5</sup>ši-i LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> a-na a-bi-it an-ni-te LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> <sup>6</sup>lu<sup>1</sup> la i-ši-ia-ṭa

reproach: obv. <sup>3-4</sup>Why has the king, my lord, [n]ot asked (nor) investigates (this) until now?

rhetorical question: obv. <sup>4-5</sup>Is this a trifling matter?

admonition: obv. <sup>5-6</sup>The king, my lord, should not neglect this matter – O, king, my lord!

The mention of investigation and the possibility for neglect might suggest a denunciation – after all, Nabû-rēhtu-ušur also enjoins the king not to neglect the words of Mulissu (SAA 16 60, obv. 9.). However, the following move instructs the king to perform rituals. Unless this is a similar case to the rituals Nabû-rēhtu-ušur mentioned in connection with the slave girl prophesying the kingship of Sāsî, the possibility of a denunciation should be dismissed.

In SAA 16 63 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 58–62) the same anonymous sender provides a very lengthy denunciation of multiple parties. In the introduction he mentions that Kutî, the scribe, Tufî, the

<sup>186</sup> Although the restorations in this passage may at first appear too bold, they are in fact based on the duplicate of this letter, SAA 16 61.

<sup>187</sup> Certainly not 'cast', as the verb would be *nadû* and thus incompatible with the spelling *i-<sup>1</sup>ma<sup>1</sup>-[x*. A spell can be also 'recited', *manû* (CAD Š/3, 89-90), but for this the gap would be too small and the prepositional phrase would make no sense.

<sup>188</sup> See Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, xxx–xxxv for the possible identity of the sender of this letter, who is also the sender of SAA 16 63, SAA 16 64, SAA 16 65, SAA 16 66, SAA 16 67, and SAA 16 68. To summarise, the sender clearly is not based at court, uses a consistent orthography, and could perhaps be a scholar (some of the words he uses are lexical rarities, hapax legomena: *bunbullu*, *dannatānu*, *eqû*, *etāqu* Štn, *ḥiddu*, *ikīsu*, *luādu*, *maqaltānu*, *maṣātānu*).

scribe, Adad-killanni, the chief administrator, Qurdî, the chariot driver, Nērî-Iāu, the chief of accounts, Palṭî-Iaū, the deputy, and Zāzâ, the wife of Tarṣî, the servants of the governor, might know about the matter of Guzana (obv. 2.-7.).

It is not entirely clear if the elegant, itemised list of crimes that follows pertains to the ‘matter of Guzana’ or not, although this is somewhat suggested by the logic of the letter – the mention of *a-bi-te ša URU.gu-za-na* is after all placed at the very top of the obverse, preceding the rest of the contents almost in the manner of a heading. Moreover, the events in the city are explicitly noted in the following passages.

The crimes are listed with the names of the guilty parties:

1. Kutî and Tutî: 1. did not listen to the command of the son of the sender (obv. 10.-12.); 2. allowed themselves to be bribed in order not to make the shepherds pay their assigned quotas (obv. 12.-20.);
2. Qurdî, the chariot driver: committed blasphemy and uttered threats (obv. 21.-26.; for the discussion of the threats, see the relevant chapter);
3. Adad-killanni, the chief temple administrator: he abetted Qurdî (obv. 26.-27.)
4. Šamāš-ēmuranni, the governor, Palṭî-Iaū, and Nērî-Iāu are accused of disloyalty:

obv. <sup>27</sup>(...) m.d.UTU-IGI.LAL-ni LU<sub>2</sub>.EN.NAM TA m.pal-ṭi<sub>2</sub>-ia<sub>2</sub>-u <sup>28</sup>[TA] m.ni-ri-ia-u i-ta-ma-lik ma-a a-a-e-ša<sub>2</sub> ni-ši-bat <sup>29</sup>ma-a šu-nu a-na LU<sub>2</sub>.EN.NAM ma-a ša SIG<sub>2</sub>.SA<sub>5</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-lab-bi-i[š]-<sup>r</sup>u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-[ka-ni] <sup>30</sup>[ša H]AR KU<sub>3</sub>.GI GIR<sub>2</sub> KU<sub>3</sub>.GI i-di-nak-kan-ni ma-a [x x x]

denunciation (with a discussion of treason, with an encouragement to take bribes):

obv. <sup>27-30</sup>Šamaš-ēmuranni, the governor, took counsel with Palṭî-Iaū (and) [with] Nērî-Iāu, saying: ‘Who(se side) should I we take?’. They (replied) the governor as follows: ‘[...] the one who clothed [you] in purple, [who] gave you the golden [ri]ng (and) the golden dagger!’

The reaction of the governor is to command his two associates to gather the elders of Guzana (obv. 31.-be32.):

obv. <sup>be33</sup>ṛi<sup>1</sup>-qa-bu-ni-ni ma-a i-sa-al-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu ma-a a-na a-a-<sup>r</sup>e<sup>1</sup>-[ša<sub>2</sub>] <sup>be34</sup>[pa-n]i-ku-nu ma-a e-ta-pal m.10-sa-ka-a LU<sub>2</sub>.EN-GIŠ.GI[GIR] <sup>be35</sup>[ma-a q]i-ba-na-ši a-na mi-i-ni ta-ša<sub>2</sub>-al-an-na-[ši]

rev. <sup>1</sup>[ma]-a DUMU.MEŠ-ni ša<sub>2</sub>-’a-la ma-a a-na ka-ša<sub>2</sub>-nu-<sup>r</sup>u<sup>1</sup>-ma a-sa-a[l-ku-nu] <sup>2</sup>ma-a qi-ba-a-ni ma-a e-tap-lu-u-ni ki-i a-[ḥa-iš] <sup>3</sup>ma-a ḥi-ir-šu ša DUMU.MEŠ-ni ša DUMU.MUNUS.MEŠ-ni ma-a [x x x x] <sup>4</sup>m.aš-šur-NUMUN-ib-ni ne<sub>2</sub>-ta-kal ma-a EN-<sup>r</sup>a<sup>1</sup>-[de-e ša LUGAL] <sup>5</sup>a-ne<sub>2</sub>-e-nu ma-a ina UGU m.aš-šur-PAP-AŠ pa-ni-ni š[a]k-n[u]

denunciation (with a conversation):

obv.<sup>be33</sup>-rev.<sup>5</sup> They told me as follows: ‘He asked them: “Who are you [loy]al to?”. Adda-sakâ, the cha[riot]eer, answered him as follows: “[T]ell us why do you ask us (about this)? As our sons!”. (To which the governor said) thus: “(But) I am asking [you]! (So) tell me.”. (To which) they answered as o[ne]: “We have eaten the slice (?)<sup>189</sup> of our sons and daughters (and) [that?] of Aššūr-zēru-ibni (and) we keep [the treaty of the king]. We are lo[y]al to Esarhaddon.”.’

The governor seems not to be pleased with this reaction, but the passage that contains his answer is too broken to permit an analysis.

The next accusation pertains to Taršî, the scribe of Guzana (as reported by three loyal denouncers to the sender):

rev. <sup>12</sup>(...) m.ta-ra-ši-i <sup>13</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.A.BA ša URU.gu-za-na DUMU-šu<sub>2</sub> E<sub>2</sub> m.aš-šur-NUMUN-DU<sub>3</sub> i-ti-din <sup>14</sup>m.aš-šur-NUMUN-DU<sub>3</sub> ki-i TA DUMU.M[EŠ LU]GAL šu-tu-u-ni DUMU-šu<sub>2</sub> ša m.tar-ši-i <sup>15</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL-NIG<sub>2</sub>.KA<sub>7</sub>.MEŠ šu-u ki-i 10 U<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ an-na-te ša m.aš-šur-NUMUN-DU<sub>3</sub> <sup>16</sup>ina URU.ni-nu-u-a i-du-lu-u-ni DUMU m.tar-ši-i GAL-ka-šir <sup>17</sup>šu-u HAR KU<sub>3</sub>.GI GIR<sub>2</sub> KU<sub>3</sub>.GI TUG<sub>2</sub>.ša<sub>2</sub>-ši-il-li <sup>18</sup>SAG m.aš-šur-NUMUN-DU<sub>3</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-ka-la m.tar-ši-i an-ni-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>19</sup>LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> da-an-na-ta-a-nu ma-ša-ta-a-nu šu-u <sup>20</sup>IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ ša<sub>2</sub> MUNUS-E<sub>2</sub>.GAL ša DUMU-MAN ša E<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL.MEŠ <sup>21</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.za-ku-u<sub>2</sub> up-te-ii-ši a-na E<sub>2</sub> m.aš-šur-NUMUN-DU<sub>3</sub> i-ti-din <sup>22</sup>u<sub>3</sub> DUMU-šip-ri.MEŠ ša LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> a-na URU.gu-za-na <sup>23</sup>i-ša<sub>2</sub>-par-an-ni m.ta-ra-ši-i MUNUS-šu<sub>2</sub> qu-la-a-li <sup>24</sup>ša i-ša<sub>2</sub>-ka-nu-u-ni man-nu i-šam-me f.za-za-a MUNUS-šu<sub>2</sub> ša m.LAL-i <sup>25</sup>DUMU.MEŠ-ša<sub>2</sub> la ša bal-lu-ṭi šu-nu LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.SANGA <sup>26</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.i-ki-i-su ša m.tar-ši-i šu-u MUNUS.MEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu <sup>27</sup>d.30 TA AN-e u<sub>2</sub>-še-ra-da-a-ni

accusation (of abusing authority):

rev. <sup>12.-18</sup> Taršî, the scribe of Guzana, has given his son to the household of Aššūr-zēru-ibni. When Aššūr-zēru-ibni is/was with the [ki]ng’s sons, the son of Taršî is/was the chief accountant. When Aššūr-zēru-ibni is lingering in Niniveh, the son of Taršî is the chief tailor (and) holds the golden ring, the golden dagger, (and) the parasol of Aššūr-zēru-ibni.

explanation:

rev. <sup>18.-19</sup> O, king, my lord! This Taršî is a powerful (and) influential man!

<sup>189</sup> So the editors. *ḥirṣu* means ‘a cut of meat’, but also ‘block of wood cut to fit, exact copy (in the insulting comparisons of the enemies of Assyrian kings, discussed in the introduction), standard measure, and a track of a wheel (thus a copy, in a sense, CAD H, 199). Even though one would expect the cut of meat to be associated with *akālu*, perhaps a more idiomatic meaning is necessary. Since Aššūr-zēru-ibni seems to enjoy a good reputation (in rev. 14. he accompanies the sons of the king), he seems to be mentioned as a positive influence rather than negative. Either the idiom should mean that the elders trust Aššūr-zēru-ibni (like their own sons and daughters?), or that the elders in some way follow the example of the good official and their offspring (?), or perhaps that the elders are older and thus have already covered the tracks that the wheels of the others will only follow? The passage demanding that the governor asks the sons of the elders instead of them is unexplainable to me. Is this meant to imply that even children would know the answer?

accusation:

rev. <sup>20.-21.</sup>He took away the servants of the queen, of the crown prince, of the household of the magnates, the exempts, (and) gave them to the household of Aššūr-zēru-ibni.

accusation (in the form of a question):

rev. <sup>22.-24.</sup>And the messengers who the king, my lord, is sending to Guzana – who knows<sup>190</sup> (all) the insults that Taršî and his woman hurl (at them)?

advice: rev. <sup>24.-25.</sup>Zazâ, the woman of Taršî, and her sons should not be kept alive!

additional denunciation:

rev. <sup>25.-26.</sup>O, king, my lord! The chief temple administrator is the brother-in-law of Taršî!

accusation: rev. <sup>26.-27.</sup>Their wives bring down the moon from the sky!<sup>191</sup>

In the following passage the anonymous sender mentions a humiliation (rev. 30. *al-tu-u-da*, ‘I was embarrassed’), but the passage is damaged. Afterwards, he disputes the words of a third party, wishes for an audience, and mentions what the king said previously (thus suggesting that the anonymity of the letters was not a result of the sender’s being afraid of the retaliation of the person’s he accused, but rather of familiarity with the king, with whom he was in constant communication).

On the whole, the denunciation is not very stylistically elaborate: the sender lets the crimes speak for themselves. He occasionally uses rhetorical questions for emphasis (obv. 20.; rev. 22.-24.), and some of his lexical choices are clearly sophisticated (powerless and influential – *dannatānu* and *maṣatānu* in rev. 19.). He gives advice – similar to that given by Nabû-rēḫtu-ušur – only once, in rev. 24.-25.

SAA 16 65 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 64–65) is a denunciation sent by the same anonymous sender who denounced at length the various irregularities in Guzana. Here, he expresses his outrage about a son of a goldsmith learning exorcistic literature:

obv. <sup>2</sup>(...) m.pa-ru-tu <sup>3</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.SIMUG.KU<sub>3</sub>.GI ša E<sub>2</sub> MUNUS-E<sub>2</sub>.GAL <sup>4</sup>ki-i LUGAL DUMU-LUGAL DUMU-KA<sub>2</sub>.DINGIR.RA.KI <sup>5</sup>ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR i-si-qi ina E<sub>2</sub> ra-mi-ni-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>6</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-se-ši-ib-šu<sub>2</sub> IM.GID<sub>2</sub>.DA <sup>7</sup>ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi LU<sub>2</sub>.a-ši-pu-te a-na DUMU-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>8</sup>iq-ṭi<sub>2</sub>-bi UZU.MEŠ i-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-ši <sup>9</sup>ša LU<sub>2</sub>.ba-ru-u-te uk-tal-li-mu-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>10</sup>li-iq-te ša 1 U<sub>4</sub>-a-na-d.EN.LIL<sub>2</sub> <sup>11</sup>i-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-ši lu e-ta-mar <sup>12</sup>i-na pa-ni ša LUGAL EN-ia<sub>2</sub> <sup>13</sup>ina UGU da-ba-bi an-ni-e <sup>14</sup>LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> a-na IR<sub>3</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> liš-pu-[r]a

<sup>190</sup> Literally ‘who hears’.

<sup>191</sup> They are witches, as any enthusiast of Lucius Apuleius Madaurensis immediately recognises. For other Greek and Roman attestations of witches bringing down the moon, see Reiner 1995, 98–101.

denunciation: obv. <sup>2.-11</sup>Parrūtu, a goldsmith of the household of the queen, has bought a Babylonian like the king and the crown prince, (and) settled him in his house. He (= the Babylonian) has recited tablets<sup>192</sup> from the exorcistic corpus to his son. There are omens from the corpus of extispicy – he has shown them to him. There is a collection of (astronomical omens) *enūma Anu Enlil* – indeed he has seen (even) them!

emphasis: obv. <sup>12</sup>(All this right) in front of the king, my lord!

request: obv. <sup>13.-14</sup>May the king, my lord, write to his servant about this matter.

It is clear that the knowledge of extispicy, exorcism and astronomic omens was considered by the sender something to be tightly controlled and supervised – otherwise the mention of the travesty happening right under the king's nose would make little sense. There is an obvious concern about unauthorised use of magic with intent to harm the king in the royal correspondence, most visible in the passages underscoring the duty of the scholars to inform the king about the portents they observed (Parpola 1972, 31–32). That this concern was not entirely unfounded is suggested by letters such as SAA 16 59, in which magical practices, in this case prophecy, is utilised by those conspiring against the throne. Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, xxxv suggest professional jealousy as an additional motive for the denunciation. There certainly seemed to be no lack of negative feelings directed at those who did not learn their craft from their father, as evident from the petition of Tabnī to the crown prince (SAA 10 181, rev. 24.-28.)

Following the request for an answer, the rest of the obverse is destroyed, and when the reverse is legible again, it is not entirely clear that the same matter is still discussed. Coincidentally, the person that surely must be identified as the son of the goldsmith who is here being denounced, is also attested as an author of a letter – Nabû-sagībi, son of Parrūtu ( Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, xxxvi, the letter is edited in SAA 16 81).

SAA 16 69 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 68) is a short anonymous denunciation addressed to the crown prince:

obv. <sup>3</sup>m.d.PA-PAP LU<sub>2</sub>.ša<sub>2</sub>-ḫu-ṭa-ri <sup>4</sup>iq-ṭi-bi-ia ma-a 1 MA.NA <sup>5</sup>KU<sub>3</sub>.GI m.d.30-TI-su-iq-bi  
<sup>6</sup>DUMU m.NIN.GAL-SUM-na <sup>7</sup>ina ŠU.2 LU<sub>2</sub>.mu-kil-KUŠ.PA.MEŠ <sup>be8</sup>a-na m.sa-s[i]-i  
rev. <sup>1</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.ḫa-za-nu [ša<sup>2</sup>] 'DUMU<sup>2</sup>-MAN<sup>2</sup> <sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-še-bi-la <sup>3</sup>ma-a mi<sub>3</sub>-i-nu ša LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> <sup>4</sup>i-qab-bu-u<sub>2</sub>-ni

denunciation (with mention of the source):

<sup>192</sup> More particularly, IM.GID<sub>2</sub>.DA are often school tablets (see already Langdon 1934, 112–113 on the reading of the logogram as *lignnu* and Meier 1937-1939, 238-239, n. 15 for the suggestion that *lignnu* were the tablets on which the pupils wrote their exercises).



obv. <sup>3</sup>-rev. <sup>4</sup>Nabû-nāšir, the staff-bearer, has told me as follows: ‘Sîn-balāssu-iqbi, the son of Nikkal-iddina, has brought one mina of gold through a chariot driver to Sāsî, the mayor of (?) the crown prince (?)’<sup>193</sup>, saying: “What is it that the king, my lord, commands?”.’

Sāsî would then be usurping the title and the authority of the king. Since Sîn-balāssu-iqbi, son of Nikkal-iddina, is attested as the governor of Ur (Baker 2002, no. 3) and one mina of gold is a lump sum, the danger hinted at in this denunciation was certainly to be taken seriously.

SAA 16 95 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 88–90) is an anonymous denunciation about the behaviour of the governor after the death of the king, but only the beginning is preserved, and it seems to be focussed on a simple retelling of events, without any additional stylistic interventions.

SAA 16 127 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 113–114) exhibits multiple traits of a denunciation. A curious feature of this letter is the elaborate greeting formula, followed by what can only be flattery (a declaration that the god Šamaš has allowed the king to subjugate all of the lands, obv. 10.-12.). After this passage, the sender, Itti-Šamaš-balātu, introduces a move in which he pretends to refer to shared knowledge and immediately names he reason for all his trouble:

obv. <sup>13</sup>KUR *be<sub>2</sub>-et* LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub> iš-ku-ni-ni* <sup>14</sup>*a-ge-e ša* <sup>1</sup>*ep<sup>1</sup>-sa-tu-ni* LUGAL EN *u<sub>2</sub>-du* 15.*m.ik-ki-lu-u<sub>2</sub> la u<sub>2</sub>-ra-am-mu* GIŠ.MA<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ <sup>16</sup>*ina ka-a-ru ša* LUGAL EN-*ia la e-la-a-ni u* <sup>17</sup>*ka-a-ru gab-bi a-na pa-ni-šu<sub>2</sub> us-saḫ-ḫir* <sup>18</sup>*ša a-na pa-ni-šu<sub>2</sub> il-la-kan-ni* <sup>19</sup>KASKAL.2 *i-na GIR<sub>3</sub>.2-šu<sub>2</sub> i-šak-kan* <sup>20</sup>*ša a-na ka-a-ru ša* KUR.*aš-šur.KI il-la-ni* <sup>21</sup>*i-du-ak* GIŠ.MA<sub>2</sub>-*šu<sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-pa-ši* <sup>22</sup>*ma-a TA ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi E<sub>2</sub>.GAL is-sa-par-u-ni* <sup>23</sup>*ma-a ša ta-ba-kan-ni e-pu-<sup>r</sup>uš-ma<sup>1</sup>* <sup>be24</sup>*m.DINGIR-ma-a-di i-qab-bu-niš-<sup>r</sup>šu<sup>1</sup>* <sup>be25</sup>.1 URU.*ši-mir-a-a šu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>be26</sup>*šu-u<sub>2</sub> a-na* KUR.*aš-šur.KI il-lak* <sup>be27</sup>*il-la-ka mi-i-ni*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*š<sub>a2</sub><sup>1</sup> a-ba-tu-ni mi-i-ni ša* *ṭe<sub>3</sub>-mu-ni* <sup>2</sup>*i-ḫar-ra-ši il-la-ka i-qab-ba-šu<sub>2</sub>*

pseudo-reminder: obv. <sup>13</sup>.-<sup>14</sup>‘The king, my lord, knows (what) the place where he posted me is made of!’

accusation: obv. <sup>15</sup>.-<sup>17</sup>Ikki-lū<sup>194</sup> does not let the ships come up to the harbour of the king, my lord but has turned the entire trading quarter to himself.

complaint (with a strong undertone of an accusation):

<sup>193</sup> The restored [ša] = ‘of’ and the reading of the damaged signs as ‘crown prince’ are not certain. In SAA 16 59, rev. 12’. Sāsî is referred to as *ša-muḫḫi-āli* (written LU<sub>2</sub>.ša-UGU-URU), a city overseer. *ḫazannu* on its own could be ‘mayor, chief magistrate of a city or town’, but if he is ‘of the crown prince’, the translation ‘superintendent’, as chosen by the editors, would be better. Nissinen 2002, 1094, no. 7. sub b. reads this line (rev. 1.) LU<sub>2</sub>.*ḫa-za-nu* [ša] URU.[...], but in the photo provided by CDLI – P334309 – the sign looks much more like DUMU than URU.

<sup>194</sup> That is, Iakīn-Lû, the king of the city of Arwad on the Phoenician coast (Tenney 2000). In view of the strongly differing spelling, I decided to preserve the orthography of the letter.

obv. <sup>18-23</sup>Who(ever) comes to him, he prepares everything for him, (and) who(ever) comes up to the Assyrian dock, he kills him and robs his ship. (He's saying) as follows: 'The wrote to me from the palace: "Do (what is) pleasing to you!"'.<sup>2</sup>

denunciation: obv. <sup>be24</sup>Ilu-mādi informs him – he is from Šimirra. He comes and goes to Assyria, he finds out in detail what is the news (there), comes (back and) tells him (everything).

After this sequence follows a potential question from the king, answered by the sender with an excuse proclaiming his fear as well as his own inability to act without the permission from the king (rev. 3.-6.). After this, the denunciation follows uninterrupted:

rev. <sup>6</sup>(...) LUGAL EN *lu u<sub>2</sub>-du* <sup>7</sup>*ma-du-ti ina* LU<sub>2</sub>.*man-za-za pa-ni ša* LUGAL EN-*ia* <sup>8</sup>*ša* KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR *a-na* E<sub>2</sub> *an-ni-i id-di-nu-u-nu* <sup>9</sup>*šu-nu* TA LU<sub>2</sub>.DAM.GAR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ <sup>10</sup>*i-na bat-ta-ta-a a u<sub>2</sub>-pal-laḥ<sub>3</sub>-u-ni* <sup>11</sup>*a-na-ku a-na* UGU LUGAL EN-*ia tak-ku-lak* <sup>12</sup>.1 GIN<sub>2</sub> ½ GIN<sub>2</sub> *a-na me-me-ni la ad-dan* <sup>13</sup>*a-na* LUGAL EN-*ia ad-dan* <sup>14</sup>LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub> lu-u<sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-du* <sup>15</sup>*kal-bi me-e-ti a-na-ṛku* <sup>16</sup>*i-na li-mu mu-ta-ni* LUGAL EN *ub-tal-[liṭ-a]-ni* <sup>17</sup>LUGAL DINGIR-*a-a u<sub>3</sub>* LUGAL *ṛdu-ma-qī* <sup>18</sup>[*še*]-*zib-an-ni u<sub>3</sub> lu la a-mu-[a]t* <sup>19</sup>[*sa-a-ri ina*] ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bi E<sub>2</sub>.GAL ša* EN-*ia lu u<sub>2</sub>-da* <sup>20</sup>[*x x ŠA<sub>3</sub>*] *ṛE<sub>2</sub>*.<sup>1</sup>.GAL *ša* LUGAL EN-*ia lu-za-in* <sup>21</sup>[DINGIR.MEŠ *ša*] AN-*e u<sub>3</sub> ša* KI.TIM <sup>22</sup>[*a-na* LUGAL] EN-*ia lik-ru-bu*

complaint (with an insinuation):

rev. <sup>6-10</sup>May the king, my lord, know that many are the courtiers in his retinue who have invested<sup>195</sup> silver with this house. They together with the merchants – all of them are scaring me!

declaration of loyalty:

rev. <sup>11</sup>(But) I trust in the king, my lord.

declaration of loyalty:

rev. <sup>12-13</sup>I will not give<sup>196</sup> a single shekel, half of a shekel to anybody else. I will give it to the king, my lord!

closing formula: rev. <sup>14</sup>May the king know!

flattery (with a humilific phrase):

rev. <sup>15</sup>I am a dead dog.

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<sup>195</sup> Literally 'give'.

<sup>196</sup> This could also be translated in the present tense. I feel, however, that the future tense communicates the function of this phrase better. The sender is not making excuses, he is declaring his loyalty by promising.

flattery: rev. <sup>16</sup>.The king, my lord, has sav[ed] me from a thousand pestilences!

flattery: rev. <sup>17</sup>.The king is my god and my adornment!

plea: rev. <sup>18</sup>.[S]ave me and may I not d[i]e!

declaration of loyalty (realised as a plea):

rev. <sup>19</sup>.May I know the [whisks<sup>197</sup> (?) in] the palace of the king, my lord.

declaration of loyalty:

rev. <sup>20</sup>.May I adorn the [interior] of the palace of the king, my lord!

blessing: rev. <sup>21</sup>.May [the gods of] heaven and earth bless [the king], my lord!

The request of the sender is again not stated explicitly, but the series of flattering remarks, declarations of unwavering loyalty and the blessing indicate clearly that the sender wished for a royal intervention. These moves are reminiscent of the style of prayers. The sender emphasises his absolute misery by claiming he is a dead dog – at the same time, he debases himself, which provides an efficient contrast to the flattery which he uses with regard to the king. He expresses something akin to gratitude for having been saved from a thousand pestilences – while at the same heaping on the royal praise. He equates the king with a god and wishes to be his jewel or adornment – this is most likely an allusion to the statues of the gods who were clothed and adorned with jewellery. Finally, he begs the king to save him so that he does not die. In this passage, he uses an imperative form (rev. <sup>18</sup>.[še]-zib), a clear parallel to language of the prayer – also a logical step, considering Itti-Šamaš-balātu already explicitly stated that the king is his god.

SAA 16 128 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 114–115) is a partial duplicate of SAA 16 127. The passage about the king of Arwad and his informant are missing – instead the sender only complains about the members of the royal entourage who invested with the merchants (rev. 1’.-4’.). Likely the shorter letter refers to the same original state of affairs.

All the denunciations here are quite different – and I fully admit that some of them, especially the more damaged ones – could be complaints. It seems that the senders exploited in their accusations exactly the same stylistic devices that could be used in complaints – except for those expressing their own abject misery.

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<sup>197</sup> The phrase is restored after SAA 16 128, a partial duplicate of the present letter (rev. re16.). In the other letter, however, the brooms of whisks occur with the verb *kullu*, ‘to hold’.

## Neo-Babylonian letters in the Neo-Assyrian royal correspondence

### A. Complaints

SAA 19 133 (Luukko 2012b, 135–136), dated to the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, provides a reaction to a complaint – in a letter that is otherwise too damaged to be investigated fully:

obv. <sup>10'</sup>(...) *i-na* <sup>11'</sup>*maḥ<sup>1</sup>-ri-i* <sup>11'</sup>m.d.AG-ŠEŠ-ir *a-na* LU<sup>1</sup>GAL<sup>1</sup> [*i*]l-tap-ra *um-ma* <sup>12'</sup>m.GIN-NUMUN ANŠE.KUR.RA.MEŠ *ša*<sub>2</sub> KA<sub>2</sub>-BAR<sub>2</sub>.SIPA.KI <sup>13'</sup>*a-na* UGU TIN.TIR.KI *ki-i* <sup>14'</sup>*u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-še-l[u]-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>14'</sup>*mam-ma ul-tu* TIN.TIR.KI *ul uš-ši-ma* <sup>15'</sup>*e-re-šu<sub>2</sub> ul ni-ri-iš ar<sub>2</sub>-ki-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>16'</sup>LUGAL *il<sup>1</sup>-tap-ra um-ma ina bi-[r]it* <sup>17'</sup>TIN.TIR.KI *u BAR<sub>2</sub>.SIPA.KI* <sup>17'</sup>*su<sup>1</sup>-lim*

complaint (with an introduction):

obv. <sup>10'.-15'</sup>Earlier, Nabû-nāšir [w]rote to the king as follows: ‘Mukîn-zēri has mo[ve]d up the horses from the gate of Borsippa to Babylon. Nobody can leave Babylon (and) we cannot cultivate our fields.’.

royal command (with an introduction):

obv. <sup>15'.-17'</sup>Later, the king wrote as follows: ‘Make peace between Babylon and Borsippa!’

The complaint from Babylon is structured in a very simple manner: the undesirable event is followed by the results thereof. If the wording of the letter is to be believed, it was not followed by a request, or the request was abridged when the sender quoted the previous letter. Nabû-nāšir was in luck, and the king commanded that the sender<sup>198</sup> (?) to mediate.

In SAA 17 21 (Dietrich 2003, 23), dated to the reign of Sargon II, the short, reproach-like complaint is used almost as an indirect request – the reproaches make the petition to the vizier look particularly demanding:

rev. <sup>2</sup>(...) *en-na im-ma-ti* LU<sub>2</sub>.šak-nu *ul-tu* <sup>3</sup>E<sub>2</sub>-m.da-ku-ri *u<sub>2</sub>-ši* TIN.TIR.KI *gab-bi* <sup>4</sup>*ip-ta-al-ḥ[u* *u]m-ma a-na* ŠU.2 UR.GI<sub>7</sub> <sup>5</sup>*muš-šu-ra-ni am-mi<sub>3</sub>-ni* TIN.TIR.KI *gab-bi* <sup>6</sup>ŠU.2-su-nu *a-na be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia i-de-ek-ku-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>7</sup>*u be-li<sub>2</sub> sa-ki-it* *ša*<sub>2</sub> d.AMAR.UTU *id-da-aš<sub>2</sub>-šum-ma* <sup>8</sup>*mim-mu-šu<sub>2</sub> it-tab-šu<sub>2</sub>-u<sub>2</sub> šul-ma-ni bab-ba-nu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>9</sup>*a-na* d.EN *i-nam-din šul-ma-ni* *ša*<sub>2</sub> *i-nam-di-nu* <sup>10</sup>*ki-i* TIN.TIR.KI *ki-i ina pa-an* d.EN *ba-nu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>11</sup>*am-mi<sub>3</sub>-ni* TIN.TIR.KI *iḥ-ḥap-pi u be-li<sub>2</sub> sa-ki-it* <sup>12</sup>d.UTU *u* d.AMAR.UTU *a-na ab-bu-ut* *ša*<sub>2</sub> KUR.aš-šur.KI <sup>13</sup>*il-tak-nu-ka* LUGAL *šuk-pi-id-ma* <sup>14</sup>*lil-li-kam<sub>2</sub>-ma* TIN.TIR.KI *a-na* d.AMAR.UTU <sup>15</sup>*lu-zak-ki* MU-ku-nu *a-na da-ra-a-[ti]* <sup>16</sup>*ina* E<sub>2</sub>.SAG.IL<sub>2</sub> *u* E<sub>2</sub>.ZI.D[A *liš-kun*]

<sup>198</sup> The name of the sender and the name of the addressee are both broken away. The letter, however, was apparently not addressed to the king, and the term of address ‘brother’ can be still read in the obverse.

complaint: rev. 2-5. Now that the prefect has left Bīt-Dakkūri, the whole of Babylon has become afraid, saying: ‘We have been given over to the dogs!’.

reproach: rev. 5-7. The whole of Babylon raises its hands towards my lord, and (yet) my lord keeps silent.

argument (for the indirect request, from reciprocity towards the god):

rev. 7-10. Who(ever) has received (gifts) from Marduk (and) some (property) of his has become reality, gives a beautiful present to Bēl. And the present that he gives is as good as Babylon, if it is pleasing to Bēl.

reproach: rev. 11. Why does my lord keep silent when Babylon is being destroyed?

indirect reproach: rev. 12-13. Šamaš and Marduk have established you for the intercession of Assyria!

request: rev. 13-15. Persuade the king, so that he comes to exempt Babylon for Marduk!

argument (from good reputation):

rev. 15-16. [May you make] your (pl.) name everlasting in Esagila and Ezid[a]!

After a series of complaints and reproaches – which are very literary and not very concrete – the sender finally makes his request for the addressee, the vizier, to persuade the king. He uses an imperative form, which is likely the logical consequence of the strong-handed arguments he uses in the preceding passages. He resorts to the divine authority: assuming a very humble pose afterwards would likely not be appropriate. The argument he introduces, in which he insinuates that exempting Babylon from taxes would constitute the customary reciprocation of Bēl’s blessing is also interesting – the same argument is very readily used in relationships with non-divine agents. Additionally, the complaint is framed by the same reproach for the silence of the addressee – in rev. 5-7. and 11., further contributing to the literary character of the petition.

A short complaint is present in SAA 17 29 (Dietrich 2003, 33)<sup>199</sup>:

obv. 11. LU<sub>2</sub>.TUR.MEŠ-ia *gab-bi ša* A.MEŠ 12. *i-ša-q-qu-in-ni iḥ-tal-q[u]* 13. u<sub>3</sub> UN.MEŠ-ia *ša<sub>2</sub> i-na*  
URU.k[*a-laḥ<sub>3</sub>*] 14. [n]*a-kut-tu ir-ta-šu-u<sub>2</sub>* 15. *a-di la ku-ši i-kaš-ša<sub>2</sub>-du* 16. LUGAL *liq-bi-ma*  
KASKAL.2 *a-na* [GIR<sub>3</sub>.2-*šu<sub>2</sub>-nu*] 17. *liš-ku-nu-m[a*

complaint: obv. 11-14. All my servants, who provide me with water, have fled, and my people who are in C[alah], have become [w]orried.

request: obv. 15-17. May the king command that they [send them over] before winter comes!

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<sup>199</sup> Also dated to the reign of Sargon II.

This is the most basic and direct use of a complaint, with request following it immediately.

SAA 17 46 (Dietrich 2003, 43–44), dated to the reign of Sargon II, could also be a denunciation, since only a short passage with an accusation directed at a named adversary is preserved:

rev. <sup>2</sup>*u[l-tu U]GU-<sup>hi</sup> <sup>3</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> qa-bal ša<sub>2</sub> m.u<sub>2</sub>-qu-pu <sup>4</sup>LUGAL ir-ku-su <sup>5</sup>ma-a'-diš i<sup>h</sup>-t[e]-bil-an-ni*  
<sup>6</sup>*GIŠ.KIRI<sub>6</sub>-u<sub>2</sub>-a ina me-l[i] <sup>7</sup>ub-bal it-t[a-ši] <sup>8</sup>1-me ŠE.BAR it-t[a-ši] <sup>9</sup>30 GUR ŠE.NUMUN-*  
*u<sub>2</sub>-a <sup>10</sup>ša TUKUL-ti-IBILA-<sup>r</sup>E<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>.[ŠAR<sub>2</sub>.RA] <sup>11</sup>LU[GA]L [A]D-ka i-x[x x x]*

complaint (introductory, a general remark):

rev. <sup>2-5</sup>E[ver sin]ce the king girded the loins<sup>200</sup> of Uqūpu, he has wr[o]nged me greatly.

complaint: rev. <sup>6-7</sup>He to[ok] away my orchard by (?) flood[ing] (it).

complaint: rev. <sup>8</sup>He to[ok] away one hundred (kurrus) of my grain.

complaint: rev. <sup>9-11.(...)</sup>30 kurrus of cultivated field, which Tiglath-pil[eser], the k[i]ng, your [fa]ther [...].

Nonetheless, as far as preserved, all the crimes enumerated by the sender refer to the wrongs done to him personally. The structure of the complaint itself indicates foresight and planning: the sender first makes a general declaration of having been harmed, and then follows with a detailed list of his losses.

In SAA 17 47 (Dietrich 2003, 44), the complaint follows a broken promise, which was already discussed in the chapter on promises. The letter is badly damaged, but it seems that this passage begins with a change of topic (rev. 6'.-15'). The complaint is followed by an explicit request and a blessing.

SAA 17 48 (Dietrich 2003, 44–45)<sup>201</sup> is another case of a complaint in which the root of all evil is a single person. It is interesting, however, that the sender precedes the complaint sequence with a reminder about a royal command:

obv. <sup>5</sup>LUGAL *iq-ta-ba-a um-ma a-lik <sup>6</sup>e-reš e-še-du ka-lak-ka-a-ti <sup>7</sup>mu-ul u<sub>3</sub> ina GISSU-ia a-kul*  
<sup>8</sup>*LU<sub>2</sub>.A-KIN ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL lil-li-kam<sub>2</sub>-ma <sup>9</sup>li-mur qaq-qar ša<sub>2</sub> AD-ia ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL <sup>10</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-tir-ram-*  
*ma id-din-a[n-ni] <sup>11</sup>ak-ka-a-a-i m.man-nu-ki-i-u[r-ba-il-lim] <sup>12</sup>ni-du-tu u<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub>-lik-šu<sub>2</sub> ina UG[U*  
*x x] <sup>13</sup>ŠE.BAR-a IN.NU-a u<sub>3</sub> U<sub>2</sub>.SUM-[a] <sup>14</sup>id-liq um-ma a-lik LUGAL šu-[um-<sup>h</sup>ir] <sup>15</sup>ki-i*  
*LUGAL qaq-qar-ka it-t[a-din] <sup>16</sup>al-kam<sub>2</sub>-ma mim-mu-ka i-š[i] <sup>17</sup>en-na LUGAL qaq-qar-a it-*  
*ta-[an-na] <sup>18</sup>um-ma mim-mu ul a-nam-s[i-iq] <sup>19</sup>a-du-u<sub>2</sub> ina la mi-ni a-m[a-ti x x] <sup>20</sup>a-na a-ka-*  
*li-ia u<sub>3</sub> <sup>21</sup>a-na ŠE.NUMUN-ia ŠE.BAR ia-a'-n[u] <sup>22</sup>ki-i <sup>h</sup>i-tu-u<sub>2</sub>-a i-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>-u<sub>2</sub> [lu-u<sub>2</sub>] <sup>23</sup><sup>r</sup>a<sup>1</sup>-*  
*mu-tu am-mi<sub>3</sub>-ni LUGAL <sup>24</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-bal-la-<sup>ta</sup>-ni u<sub>3</sub> <sup>be25</sup>[m.man]-nu-ki-i-ur-ba-il-li[m] <sup>be26</sup>[id-d]u-*  
*kan-ni*

<sup>200</sup> That is, appointed.

<sup>201</sup> Dated to the reign of Sargon II.

reminder (about a royal command, a promise):

obv. <sup>5.-7</sup> The king told me as follows: ‘Go, plant, fill the storerooms, and eat under my protection!’.

complaint (realised as a request):

obv. <sup>8.-12</sup> Let a messenger of the king, my lord, come (and) see how Mannu-kī-A[rba’il] has turned the land of my father, which the king had returned to me, into wasteland!

complaint: obv. <sup>12.-14</sup> He burned [...] my grain, my straw and [my] garlic.

complaint (with a challenge):

obv. <sup>14.-16</sup> (He said) as follows: ‘Go (and) ap[peal to] the king! If the king (really) ga[ve] you the land, come (and) ta[ke] what(ever) is yours!’.

reminder: obv. <sup>17.-18</sup> Now, (when) the king ga[ve] me the land, (he said) as follows: ‘I will not cho[ose] (anything from it).’

complaint: obv. <sup>19</sup> (But) now I will d[ie] for lack of everything!

complaint: obv. <sup>20.-21</sup> I have n[o] grain to eat and (no grain) to seed with!

declaration of innocence (with a challenge):

obv. <sup>22.-23</sup> If I have transgressed, [I should ha]ve died!

reproach: obv. <sup>23.-be26</sup> Why is the king letting me live when [Man]nu-kī-Arba’il is [ki]lling me?

The complaint is structured around the royal promises (discussed in the chapter on promises), which the sender contrasts with the reality. The second promise, about not choosing anything from the land of the sender (obv. 18.), is juxtaposed with the fact that there is absolutely nothing to choose from. The sender has no grain left for his basic sustenance, and no grain for seeding. In the following passage, he argues that he is innocent – the good treatment of one who has not committed any wrongs is presumed. The actions of the king are contrasted with the actions of the evildoer the sender is complaining about; while the king is keeping him alive, Mannu-kī-Arba’il wants him dead (obv. 23.-be26.).

The beginning of the obverse is badly damaged, but it seems that the complaint continues further – albeit with many gaps. It seems likely that the sender attempts to ruin Mannu-kī-Arba’il’s reputation further by claiming that he has no reason to seize his land (rev. 3’.-9’.)

SAA 17 63 (Dietrich 2003, 60–61) is a rare example, in this corpus, of a letter not sent to the king. It is dated to the reign of Sargon II, and includes a complaint about the low spirits of the sender:

obv. <sup>3</sup>(...) ša<sub>2</sub> ŠEŠ-ia i[š-p]ur <sup>4</sup>um-ma ŠA<sub>3</sub>-ba-ka l[u-u<sub>2</sub>] <sup>5</sup>ta-ab-ka mi-nu-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>6</sup>tu-ub ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi-ia  
 LU<sub>2</sub>.[KUR<sub>2</sub>] <sup>7</sup>a-na tar-ši-ni ma-da[k-tu] <sup>8</sup>na-di mu-ši u<sub>3</sub> [U<sub>4</sub>-mi] <sup>9</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> še-el-ti nu-u[l-taš<sup>?</sup>-bat<sup>?</sup>]  
<sup>10</sup>u<sub>3</sub> ul-tu pa-ni-ku-[nu] <sup>11</sup>mam-ma a-na ha-mat-i[a] <sup>12</sup>ul il-li-k[a] <sup>13</sup>mim-ma ŠA<sub>3</sub>-ba-a ul t[a-a-  
 bi] <sup>14</sup>kit-ti at-[tu-u<sub>2</sub>-ka] <sup>be15</sup>ŠA<sub>3</sub>-ba-ka ta-a[b-ka]

rev. <sup>1</sup>i-na E<sub>2</sub>-LU<sub>2</sub>.EN.MEŠ-[ka] <sup>2</sup>aš<sub>2</sub>-ba-ta NINDA.HI.[A] <sup>3</sup>ta-ak-kal u<sub>3</sub> K[AŠ.HI.A] <sup>4</sup>pa-an ta-a-  
 bi i-na [E<sub>2</sub>-EN-ka] <sup>5</sup>ta-šat-ti

complaint (with an introduction including a reassurance):

obv. <sup>3-6</sup>As to what my brother wr[o]te: ‘M[ay] you be pleased!’. What is there to be  
 pleased about?

complaint: obv. <sup>7-9</sup>The [enemy] has pitched ca[mp] opposite to us. Day and [night] we [gather (?)]  
 for battle.

reproach: obv. <sup>10-12</sup>And from yo[ur] (pl.) side, nobody has com[e] to help me!

complaint: obv. <sup>13</sup>I am not pl[eased] at all!

taunt: obv. <sup>14</sup>-rev. <sup>5</sup>(But) y[ou] must be indeed plea[sed with yourself]! You sit in the house  
 of [your] lords, eat bread and drink b[eer] with a joyous face, in [the house of your lord]!

The sender shows the full extent of his displeasure, clearly taunting the addressee for his indolence. All  
 this was likely intended to serve as an argument for the request that seems to be following in the next  
 passage of the reverse, although the text is partially broken (rev. 6.-10.).

A complaint about a governor whose actions are preventing the sender from fulfilling his own tasks is  
 preserved in SAA 17 130 (Dietrich 2003, 115):

obv. <sup>5</sup>m.d.AG-MU-GAR-un LU<sub>2</sub>.GAR-UMUŠ ku-nu-ut LUGAL <sup>6</sup>a-na UGU GIŠ.KIRI<sub>6</sub>.MEŠ u  
 ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ <sup>7</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-sa-am-man-ni ul u<sub>2</sub>-maš-šar-ni-ma <sup>8</sup>dul-la-a ul ip-pu-uš 1-en a-mat <sup>9</sup>LUGAL  
 li-ip-ru-su-ma i-na bi-rit a-ha-meš <sup>10</sup>lu-u<sub>2</sub>-sa-ak-kit-an-na-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>11</sup>a-du-u<sub>2</sub> a-na pa-an LUGAL il-  
 lak <sup>12</sup>mi-nu-u<sub>2</sub> šu<sub>2</sub>-u<sub>2</sub> LUGAL li-ip-ru-su

complaint (with an accusation):

obv. <sup>5-8</sup>Nabû-šumu-iškun, the governor, the foster child of the king, is hampering me with  
 regards to the orchards and the troops. He does not let me do my work.

flattery: obv. <sup>8-10</sup>(Just) one word from the king would settle (the matter), so that there would be  
 silence<sup>202</sup> between us!

<sup>202</sup> Silence can have negative associations in situations in which somebody is expected to speak up or act (see the  
 discussion on the complaint made against Tiāmat in the section on literary texts below). Otherwise, however,  
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report: obv. <sup>11</sup>Now, he has gone to the king.

request: obv. <sup>12</sup>May the king decide what it will be.

As in other letters analysed in the preceding paragraphs, this complaint is likely a pre-emptive move on the part of the sender intended to prove his innocence and claim that the other party is guilty – especially since the sender already knows that his adversary is heading for an audience. The compliment used by the sender is interesting – the power of the king is being praised in direct connection with his ability to arbitrate between both parties.

SAA 17 34 (Dietrich 2003, 36), dated to the reign of Sennacherib, is a petition of the type in which the idyllic report is suddenly made dissonant by the complaint made by the sender. Nabû-šumu-lēšir even includes a very creative blessing:

obv. <sup>4</sup>[U<sub>4</sub>]-mu-us-su i-na pa-te-e up-[pī] <sup>6</sup>[a-d]i<sup>1</sup> tur-ru KA<sub>2</sub> i-na na-še-e <sup>7</sup>[n]e<sup>2</sup>-eš-ŠU.2 i-na pa-an  
d.EN <sup>8</sup>u<sub>3</sub><sup>1</sup> d.GAŠAN-ia (eras.)a-na LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia <sup>9</sup>[a-k]ar-rab NINDA.HI.A ba-ni  
KAŠ.SAG <sup>10</sup>[t]a-a-bi GIŠ.IG DINGIR ša<sub>2</sub> mi<sub>3</sub>-i-ti zaq-pa-at <sup>11</sup>[l]e-'a-a-ni qa-tu-u<sub>2</sub> u  
LU<sub>2</sub>.TIN.TIR.KI.MEŠ <sup>12</sup>[m]a-la U<sub>4</sub>-4-KAM<sub>2</sub> a-na E<sub>2</sub>.SAG.GIL<sub>2</sub> <sup>13</sup>i<sup>1</sup>-lu-nim-ma GIŠ.IG i-mu-  
ru ina pa-an <sup>14</sup>d.EN u<sub>3</sub> d.GAŠAN-ia LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-a <sup>15</sup>[i]k-ta-rab-bu u<sub>3</sub> ma-a'-diš <sup>16</sup>[ha]-mu-  
u<sub>2</sub> LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia lu-u<sub>2</sub> ha-me <sup>17</sup>[GIŠ.I]G E<sub>2</sub>.SAG.GIL<sub>2</sub> u TIN.TIR.KI <sup>18</sup>[E<sub>2</sub>]-DINGIR.MEŠ-  
ka ma-a'-diš ta-a-bi <sup>19</sup>u<sub>3</sub><sup>1</sup> ia-a-ši ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi la ta-a-bi <sup>20</sup>[ki]-na-ku u<sub>3</sub> PAD.HI.A ka-la-a-ti

blessing: obv. <sup>4-9</sup>[Da]ily, from the opening of the door soc[kets un]til the closing of the gate [I p]ray to  
Bēl and My Lady for the king, my lord!

report (all is well): obv. <sup>9-16</sup>The bread is good, the prime beer is [sa]tisfactory, the door of the god  
of the dead one (?) was built. [The p]lating is finished and the Babylonians [w]ho went up to  
the Esagila on the 4<sup>th</sup> day and saw the door, [b]lessed the king and [re]joiced greatly.

post-report (reassurance):obv. <sup>16</sup>May the king be joyful.

compliment (likely as thanks):

obv. <sup>17-18</sup>[The doo]r of Esagila and Babylon, [the house] of your gods, are magnificent  
indeed.

complaint: obv. <sup>19</sup>But among (all) this, I am not pleased (at all).

complaint: obv. <sup>20</sup>I am [lo]yal and (yet) my rations have been stopped!

The report, although it needed to be made anyway, presents a spectacular opportunity for the sender to juxtapose his undeserved (he is, after all, loyal) with the idyllic image of Babylon and its temples, where

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silence means peace and is a desired quality – as in the Mesopotamian myths, in which gods send the deluge to remove the noisy humanity (both in the epic of Gilgameš and the myth of Atar-ḫasis).

all work is done, and the citizens are blessing the king. The device of signalling the complaint as in obv. 19. and only after this mentioning any details (obv. 20.) is also attested elsewhere. Unfortunately, the following passage is badly damaged, and too little is preserved of the reverse to allow any conclusions at all.

Only a small fragment of a complaint is preserved in SAA 17 105 (Dietrich 2003, 94)<sup>203</sup>, but the sole fact that it can be recognised as such, illustrates how the sender repeatedly exploit the same schemas, often from a limited number of stock rhetorical devices:

rev. <sup>9</sup>*a-na-ku ina KUR-LU<sub>2</sub>.KUR<sub>2</sub> u 1-en [IR<sub>3</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL<sup>?</sup>] <sup>10</sup>*m.šu-la-a LU<sub>2</sub>.HAL i-qab-<sup>r</sup>bi<sup>1</sup> <sup>re11</sup>.u ziq-ni-šu<sub>2</sub> i-ba-qa-<sup>r</sup>an<sup>1</sup> [um-ma] <sup>re12</sup>.am-mi<sub>3</sub>-ni LUGAL qab-li-[šu<sub>2</sub><sup>?</sup>] <sup>re13</sup>.i-rak-ka-si la-pa-ni-<sup>r</sup>šu<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> <sup>re14</sup>.la ip-laḥ<sub>3</sub> i-<sup>r</sup>x<sup>1</sup>-[x]**

declaration of powerlessness:

rev. <sup>9</sup>*I am in the land of the enemy.*

argument (from the authority of a haruspex?):

rev. <sup>10</sup><sup>1</sup>.<sup>re14</sup><sup>?</sup>*Šulâ, the haruspex, is saying (while) pulling his beard[:] ‘Why is the king girding [his] loins? He does not fear him (= the king)!*

The reproach for not fearing the king or the assertion that one does fear the king (the latter perhaps more often) has so far featured often enough that one should appreciate the significance of this social norm properly. A king, or broader speaking, a lord is to be feared – that is, respected.

The sender of SAA 17 117 (Dietrich 2003, 104–105)<sup>204</sup> squeezes a short complaint between a report and a gap:

obv. <sup>14</sup>*i-na bu-un-ni ul-tu <sup>15</sup>m.<sup>r</sup>x x<sup>1</sup> [x]-<sup>r</sup>DA<sup>1</sup> ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL <sup>16</sup>bal-tu-<sup>r</sup>u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-[ma] ša<sub>2</sub> ina <sup>r</sup>KUR<sup>1</sup>-[KUR<sub>2</sub><sup>?</sup> ul-tu] <sup>17</sup>KUR-na-ki-ri pa-<sup>r</sup>ni<sup>1</sup>-[šu<sub>2</sub> i-šak-kan-ma<sup>?</sup>]*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*il-<sup>r</sup>lak<sup>1</sup> [u<sub>3</sub> a-na] <sup>2</sup>KUR.aš-sur.KI [i-ne<sub>2</sub>-eḫ-ḫi-sa] <sup>3</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.A-KIN ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL a-na pa-[an IR<sub>3</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>] <sup>4</sup>ul-tu <sup>r</sup>KUR<sup>1</sup>-na-ki-<sup>r</sup>ri<sup>1</sup> <sup>5</sup>i-ḫar-ru-pa-am-ma il-la-<sup>r</sup>ka<sup>1</sup> <sup>6</sup>šu<sub>2</sub>-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>r</sup>šu<sup>1</sup>-lum ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-šu <sup>7</sup>i-šem-me-e-ma ŠA<sub>3</sub>-ba-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>8</sup>ina GISSU LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> i-bal-luṭ <sup>9</sup>en-na am-mi<sub>3</sub>-ni LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-a-ni <sup>10</sup>i-na šu-lum a-na E<sub>2</sub>-<sup>r</sup>šu<sup>1</sup> <sup>11</sup>i-ru-ba-am-ma LU<sub>2</sub>.A-<sup>r</sup>KIN ša<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> LUGAL <sup>12</sup>a-na pa-an UR.GI<sub>7</sub>.MEŠ [an-nu-ti] <sup>13</sup>la il-li-ka [ŠA<sub>3</sub>-ba-ni] <sup>14</sup>ip-ta-laḥ<sub>3</sub> in-<sup>r</sup>da<sup>1</sup>-[ra-aš] <sup>15</sup>u<sub>3</sub> il-te-ne-[em-mun<sup>?</sup>] <sup>16</sup>a-na ši-tu-ti <sup>r</sup>ni<sup>1</sup>-[tu-ra]*

pre-complaint (argument, from expected conduct):

<sup>203</sup> Dated to the reign of Sennacherib.

<sup>204</sup> Dated to the reign of Sennacherib.

obv. <sup>14</sup>-rev. <sup>8</sup>Under favourable circumstances<sup>205</sup>, (when) [...] the [...] of the king have/has survived and (those) who are in the enemy country [have decided (?)] to go [and return to] the land of Aššūr, a messenger of the king sets out in advance t[o his (= the king's) servant] from the enemy country. He (= the servant) hears about the well-being of the king, his lord, and his heart revives under the protection of the king, his lord.

reproach: rev. <sup>9-13</sup>Now, why is it that the king, our lord, entered his house safely and a messenger of the king did not come before [these] dogs (= the senders)?

complaint: rev. <sup>13-16</sup>[We]<sup>206</sup> have become fearful and sick with worry. We are constantly distressed. (We are thinking): 'We have been turned over to neglect!'

This is another complaint about lack of communication. It constitutes one of the rare glimpses into the Assyrian and Babylonian customs in the first millennium, in which the expectations of at least one party are stated explicitly. These expectations, however, are much easier to trace in the correspondence from the rulers to their subjects or in the letters exchanged between equals (or virtual equals). Apparently, the presence of this custom was enough for the senders to feel snubbed when the king neglected to send his messenger – which they, however, express in very humilific style, by equating themselves with dogs, and, on the other hand, flattering the king somewhat indirectly by stating that his word revives his servant (literally 'the heart of his servant', rev. 7.-8.).

A fair number of complaints is attested among the Babylonian letters from the reign of Esarhaddon and later kings.

SAA 18 17 (Reynolds 2003, 20) includes a short complaint, almost an accusation, meant to besmirch the reputations of the sender's enemies and thus serve as an argument in his petition on behalf of Bēl-usāti:

obv. <sup>14</sup>m.d.EN-*u<sub>2</sub>-sa-tu* <sup>15</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.SIPA AB<sub>2</sub>.GU<sub>4</sub>.HI.A *ša<sub>2</sub>* LUGAL

rev. <sup>1</sup>*a-na* UGU *pi-i* <sup>2</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub>* m.*šil-la-a a-kan-na* <sup>3</sup>*ša-bit* *ša<sub>2</sub> la* LUGAL *i-ma-ti* <sup>4</sup>*gab-bi* *ša<sub>2</sub> ši-bu-ti-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>5</sup>*ip-pu-šu* *u<sub>3</sub> ša<sub>2</sub>* LUGAL <sup>6</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-maš-ša<sub>2</sub>-ru* <sup>7</sup>LUGAL *ki-i* *ša<sub>2</sub> i-le-* <sup>8</sup>*u<sub>2</sub> li-pu-uš*

explanation: obv. <sup>14</sup>-rev. <sup>3</sup>Bēl-usāti, the cowherd of the king, is imprisoned here on the order of Šillāia.

prediction (indirect request):

rev. <sup>3</sup>Without the king, he will die.

complaint: rev. <sup>4-6</sup>All of them only do as they wish and abandon (the interests) of the king!

<sup>205</sup> Dietrich translates 'normally'.

<sup>206</sup> Literally: '[our hearts]'.

closing formula: rev. 7<sup>-8</sup> May the king do what he can.

The petition is very short, but the sender still found the space to discredit his adversaries.

SAA 18 24 (Reynolds 2003, 24–25) is not entirely preserved, but would have been a petition with a complaint against one person who is jeopardising the interests of the sender (whose name is completely obliterated):

obv. 6<sup>4</sup> MA.NA KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR *ina* 1 MA.NA.AM<sub>3</sub> u<sub>3</sub> *ina* ½ MA.NA.AM<sub>3</sub> 7<sup>7</sup> *ki-i iš-riq-an-ni a-na ša<sub>2</sub>-a-ri ut-tir* 8<sup>8</sup> *m.a-mat-d.EN-u<sub>2</sub>-GIN LU<sub>2</sub>.qal-la ša<sub>2</sub> ina pa-ni-ia<sub>2</sub>* 9<sup>9</sup> *ki-i u<sub>2</sub>-šad-bi-bu* 1 MA.NA KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR *ki-i* 10<sup>10</sup> *iš-šu-u<sub>2</sub> a-na URU.ah-[x x] ul-tah-liq-šu<sub>2</sub>* 11<sup>11</sup> [L]U<sub>2</sub>.qal-la *a-na* KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR *it-ta-din ki-i aš<sub>2</sub>-pu-ru* 12<sup>12</sup> [u]t-tir-raš-šu<sub>2</sub>

accusation: obv. 6<sup>6</sup>–7<sup>7</sup> He stole from me four minas of silver, one mina (or) half a mina each time and squandered them<sup>207</sup>.

accusation: obv. 8<sup>8</sup>–11<sup>11</sup> He incited Amat-Bēl-ukīn, a slave who serves me, to take one mina of silver and after he helped him escape to Ah[...], he gave [the] slave for silver.

report (?): obv. 11<sup>11</sup>–12<sup>12</sup> (But) when I wrote to him, he [r]eturned him.

There is no request, and the following, fairly elaborate passage, includes a series of curses against whoever destroys the letter – much like the note to the scribe not to hide the letter from the king discussed above. It is indeed not unlikely that the curses are modelled after the curses in the Assyrian treaties, as Reynolds remarks, although one has to note that the order of the gods in the present curse is different than in the succession treaty of Esarhaddon. The curse threatening destruction of the name (obv. 11<sup>11</sup>–rev. 1.) is common in every possible context.

SAA 18 59 (Reynolds 2003, 45) is not completely preserved, but the complaint with a lengthy explanation of the background is perfectly legible:

obv. 5<sup>5</sup> d.LUGAL.MAR<sub>2</sub>.DA ša<sub>2</sub> MA[R<sub>2</sub>.DA.KI] 6<sup>6</sup> ŠEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> m.d.AG ŠEŠ-[šu<sub>2</sub>] 7<sup>7</sup> ša<sub>2</sub> d.U.GUR šu-[u<sub>2</sub>] 8<sup>8</sup> LUGAL AD-ka mi-iš-ri<sup>1</sup> 9<sup>9</sup> ša<sub>2</sub> MAR<sub>2</sub>.DA.KI i-te-ti-ri 10<sup>10</sup> ki-i iš-tu-ru 11<sup>11</sup> ina E<sub>2</sub>.ZI.DA ina pa-ri<sup>an</sup> d.AG 12<sup>12</sup> il-ta-kan 13<sup>13</sup> LU<sub>2</sub>.GAR-UMUŠ ša<sub>2</sub> URU.m[a-ra]d<sup>be14</sup> (eras.) šu-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>be15</sup> ina ra-ma-ni-šu<sub>2</sub>

rev. 1<sup>1</sup> na-mur-ta-šu<sub>2</sub> 2<sup>2</sup> a-na AD-ka 3<sup>3</sup> i-na-aš<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub>-a 4<sup>4</sup> en-na DUMU-m.da-ku-ru 5<sup>5</sup> URU.ma-ra-ad 6<sup>6</sup> a-na ra-ma-ni-šu<sub>2</sub> 7<sup>7</sup> it-ta-šu<sub>2</sub> 8<sup>8</sup> a-di la il-la-ku 9<sup>9</sup> L[UGAL l]i-iš-’a-a[l]

explanation (pre-complaint):

<sup>207</sup> Literally: ‘turned them into wind’.

obv. <sup>5</sup>rev. <sup>3</sup>Lugal-Marada of Ma[rad] is the brother of Nabû (and) the brother of Nergal. The king, your father, took away the territory of Marad. When he wrote it down, he placed (it) before Nabû in the temple of Ezida. The commandant of M[ara]d – he used to bring his audience gift to your father on his own (authority).

complaint: rev. <sup>4-7</sup>Now, the son of Dakkūru has taken Marad for himself!

request (for verification?):

rev. <sup>8-9</sup>Before he comes, [ma]y the k[ing] as[k ...].

It is striking that the argument used by the sender is partially based on the kinship relationship between the gods. In the next step, the authority of the royal father is invoked, and the key points of the process by which he established the borders is mentioned. As in numerous other letters, it is the mention of the father of the king that triggers the switch in the address form to the second person singular.

SAA 18 60 (Reynolds 2003, 45–46) is written by the same person as SAA 18 59, Aqār-Bēl-lūmur. It is perhaps not insignificant that the greeting in this letter, which is a petition with a complaint, the blessing formula is significantly more elaborate than in the previous letter. In any case, it seems that the leader of Bīt-Dakkūri is proving himself a nuisance on a more personal level as well:

obv. <sup>8</sup>DUMU-m.*da-ku-ru* NIG<sub>2</sub>.KA<sub>9</sub>.MEŠ-*ia* <sup>9</sup>*iḥ-te-eṭ-tu* AMA-*a* <sup>10</sup>*u* ŠEŠ.MEŠ-*e-a* <sup>11</sup>*ina bu-bu-ti id-du-<sup>r</sup>uk<sup>1</sup>* <sup>12</sup>*ši-pi-ir-(eras.)ti* <sup>13</sup>*a-na* UGU-*ḫi-(eras.)šu* <sup>14</sup>*a-na* LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia* <sup>be15</sup>*ki-i aš<sub>2</sub>-pu-ru* <sup>be16</sup>*ga-ba-ru-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>be17</sup>*ul a-mur*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*ap-ta-la-aḫ* <sup>2</sup>LUGAL *i-di a-kan-na* <sup>3</sup>*ul <sup>r</sup>šu<sup>1</sup>-šu-bu-ta-ka* <sup>4</sup>*E<sub>2</sub>-a u* LU<sub>2</sub>.*qa-al-la-a* <sup>5</sup>*ia-a<sup>1</sup>-nu u* *ina* KA<sub>2</sub>.DINGIR.KI <sup>6</sup>*im-mu-u<sub>2</sub>-a* *ša<sub>2</sub> ina pa-an* <sup>7</sup>[A]MA-*ia u* ŠEŠ.MEŠ-*<sup>r</sup>e-a<sup>1</sup>* <sup>8</sup>*ak-lu-u<sub>2</sub>* DUMU-m.*da-ku-ru* <sup>9</sup>*uḫ-te-eṭ-tu* <sup>10</sup>*a-di 2-šu<sub>2</sub> da-al-ḫa-ak* <sup>11</sup>*ina pi-i-ka el-lu* <sup>12</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> d.UTU u* d.AMAR.UTU <sup>13</sup>*i-kar-ra-bu-uš* <sup>14</sup>*in-da-aq-tu* <sup>15</sup>*ma-a E<sub>2</sub>-ka* <sup>16</sup>*i-ra-ap-pi-iš* <sup>re17</sup>*en-na ina* GISSU LUGAL <sup>re18</sup>*be-<sup>r</sup>li<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-ia li-ir-pi-iš*

complaint: obv. <sup>8-11</sup>The son of Dakkūru has destroyed my property (and) killed my mother and my brothers with deprivation.

complaint (with the mention of a previous attempt to secure a royal intervention):

obv. <sup>12</sup>rev. <sup>1</sup>When I sent a message to the king about him, I saw no reply (and) I became afraid.

pseudo-reminder: rev. <sup>2-5</sup>The king knows that I am not provided for here. I have no house and no slave.

complaint: rev. <sup>5-9</sup>And my records, which I was had deposited in Babylon with my [mo]ther and my brothers – the son of Dakkūru destroyed them.

summary: rev. <sup>10</sup>(Thus), I am doubly plagued!

reminder (with a royal promise, with flattery):

rev. <sup>11.-re16</sup>From your pure mouth, which is blessed by Marduk and Šamaš, came as follows: ‘May your house increase!’.

request: rev. <sup>re17.-re18</sup>Now, may (it) increase under the protection of the king, my lord.

The request is realised as a reminder about a royal promise. To soften the possibility for loss of face, the sender supplements the reminder with a blessing and the flattering remark that the mouth of the king is ‘pure’ (a second person pronoun follows the mouth – is the switch in address caused by the inalienability of the body part?). The structure of the complaint must have been carefully planned – the son of Dakkūru is blamed for killing the family of the sender, and then for the destruction of his records, which the sender explicitly summarises as two calamities.

SAA 18 61 (Reynolds 2003, 46–47) is badly preserved, but the final passage with the request is nonetheless very interesting:

rev. <sup>3</sup>m.ni-ne<sub>2</sub>-e-a LU<sub>2</sub>.MAŠ <sup>4</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> E<sub>2</sub>-be-li<sub>2</sub>-<sup>5</sup>šū<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> u<sub>2</sub>-maš-ši-ru-ma <sup>5</sup>ih-li-qu<sup>1</sup> E<sub>2</sub> A.ŠA<sub>3</sub>.GA <sup>6</sup>u<sub>3</sub> DAM-a <sup>7</sup>i-nam-<sup>8</sup>di<sup>1</sup>-nu-niš-šū<sub>2</sub> <sup>8</sup>u<sub>3</sub> <sup>9</sup>a-ki<sup>1</sup> ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL EN-a <sup>9</sup>ap-<sup>10</sup>tal<sup>1</sup>-lah<sub>3</sub> ki-i mi-<sup>11</sup>ta<sup>1</sup>-ku <sup>10</sup>e-ka-nu li-iq-bi-ru-<sup>12</sup>in-ni<sup>1</sup> <sup>11</sup>ul URU ul EDIN ul <sup>12</sup>KUR<sup>1</sup> <sup>12</sup>ul UN.MEŠ ul 1 qa <sup>13</sup>NINDA.HI.A i-na <sup>14</sup>E<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-EN-ia<sub>2</sub> <sup>14</sup>a-na tu-<sup>15</sup>ub ma<sup>1</sup>-ha-ra <sup>15</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia<sup>1</sup> <sup>16</sup>li-šak<sup>1</sup>-kan]

complaint (with an accusation against the person complained about):

rev. <sup>3.-7</sup>Nenēa, the exorcist who abandoned the house of his lord and fled – they are giving him (my) house, field and my wife.

complaint: rev. <sup>8.-13</sup>And although I have revered the king, my lord, when I die, where will they bury me? There is no city, no open country, no land, no people, not a single loaf<sup>208</sup> of bread (for me) in the house of my lord.

request: rev. <sup>14.-16</sup>May this petition be settled favourably!

The final passage might or might not be the main request, but if so, it is refreshingly direct. The lack of place where the sender could be buried is likely supposed to indicate the absolute depths of destitution. As in other petitions and complaints, the sender also does not hesitate to ruin the reputation of the party who allegedly unlawfully receives his property – the exorcist is a disloyal escapee.

SAA 18 70 (Reynolds 2003, 53–55) is a letter from the *šandabakku* to the king. The entire obverse is allocated to the short excuse and a protracted declaration of loyalty of the entire city of Nippur to Assyria. It is only in the reverse that the governor of Nippur states the actual problem:

<sup>208</sup> *qû* is literally the volume unit of about a litre.

rev. <sup>5</sup>(...) A.MEŠ-*e-ni* <sup>6</sup>*ia-a-nu ina šu-um-me la ni-ma-ta* <sup>7</sup>LUGAL AD-*ka* A.MEŠ *ša*<sub>2</sub> ID<sub>2</sub>.*ba-ni-ti*  
<sup>8</sup>*it-tan-na-na-a-ši um-ma ši-li-iḫ-ti* <sup>9</sup>*ša*<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> ID<sub>2</sub>.DU<sub>3</sub>-*ti a-na* EN.LIL<sub>2</sub>.KI *ḫi-ra-a* <sup>10</sup>*m.šil-la-a ik-*  
*te-la-n[a]-<sup>1</sup>a<sup>1</sup>-ši*

complaint (general): rev. <sup>5-6</sup>We have no water.

plea: rev. <sup>6</sup>May we not die of thirst!

explanation: rev. <sup>7-9</sup>The king, your father, gave us the water from the Bānītu Canal, saying:  
‘Dig up an offshoot from the Bānītu Canal to Nippur!’.

complaint: rev. <sup>10</sup>(But) Šillāia has cut us off.

Again, the mention of the royal father causes the switch to the second person possessive pronoun. In many petitions the explanation of the royal gifts and grants precedes the complaint, but here the governor of Nippur clearly wished to appeal to the loyalty of his city in the first place; the explanation with the almost-argument from the commands of the previous king was thus relegated to a less prominent but not less important position. After the complaint about Šillāia cutting of Nippur from the canal follows a request with very detailed instructions:

rev. <sup>10</sup>(...) *en-na* <sup>11</sup>LUGAL *a-na m.u<sub>2</sub>-bar* LU<sub>2</sub>.GAR-UMUŠ *ša*<sub>2</sub> TIN.TIR.KI <sup>12</sup>*liš-pu-ram-ma ši-li-*  
*iḫ-ti* <sup>13</sup>*ša*<sub>2</sub> ID<sub>2</sub>.DU<sub>3</sub>-*ti lid-din-an-na-ši-ma* <sup>14</sup>A.MEŠ *it-ti-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu ni-il-ti* <sup>15</sup>*ina šu-um-me-e la-*  
ŠU.2 LUGAL <sup>16</sup>*la ni-il-li* u<sub>3</sub> KUR.KUR <sup>17</sup>*gab-bi la [i]-qab-bu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>18</sup>*um-ma*  
LU<sub>2</sub>.EN.LIL<sub>2</sub>.KI.MEŠ <sup>19</sup>*ša*<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> GIR<sub>3</sub>.2 *ša*<sub>2</sub> KUR.*aš-šur*.KI <sup>re20</sup>*[i]š-bat-u<sub>2</sub> ina šu-um-me-e* <sup>re21</sup>*a-na*  
*ši-re-e* <sup>re22</sup>*in-da-lu-u<sub>2</sub>*

request: rev. <sup>10-14</sup>Now, may the king write to Ubāru, the commandant of Babylon, so that he  
gives us the offshoot of the Bānītu Canal, so that we can drink the water with them.

plea: rev. <sup>15-16</sup>May we not slip away from the hands of the king because of thirst!

argument: rev. <sup>16-re22</sup>And may all the lands not [s]ay as follows: ‘The Nippurians who [g]rasped  
the feel of the land of Aššūr – they suffered plenty of thirst!’.

In the final passage of the letter, the governor of Nippur resumes the argument about loyalty, and also points out the potentially demoralising value of the suffering of his city – an alliance with Assyria would hardly be seen in favourable light if it spread that the king allows his loyal ‘servants’ to endure the lack of water.

SAA 18 76 (Reynolds 2003, 58) is too fragmentary to deserve a full analysis, but it has to be mentioned that the unknown sender (name broken away) reports on his own attempt to solve the issue of missing provisions by asking the governor of Nippur for help – but he declines (obv. 6’.-9’.), even though, as the sender notes, he had a plentiful harvest (obv. 10’.-11’.). In the next (and last) preserved passage, the

sender reminds the king about his past contributions in terms of grain deliveries (obv. 12'.-rev. 8.), likely with the implication that this should be now rewarded.

SAA 18 94 (Reynolds 2003, 79) is, as far as preserved, for the most part a petition. The issue at hand might be the royal disfavour, since the reasons for the letter seem vague – that is, aside from the suffering of the sender:

rev. <sup>3'</sup>(...) 7 MU.AN.NA *a-ga šib-ti lem-nu* <sup>4'</sup>*šab-ta-ku ša<sub>2</sub> la* LUGAL E<sub>2</sub>-a *na-a-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>5'</sup>NIG<sub>2</sub>.KA<sub>9</sub>-  
*ia ħu-uṭ-ṭu-u<sub>2</sub> ina bu-ba-a-ti* <sup>6'</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> NINDA.HI.A i-na šib-ti-ia<sub>2</sub> a-ma-a-tu* <sup>7'</sup>*ma-du-u<sub>2</sub>-tu ša<sub>2</sub> a-na*  
LUGAL EN-ia<sub>2</sub> *iḥ-ṭu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>8'</sup>*u LUGAL re-e-mu iš-ku-na-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu-tim-ma* <sup>9'</sup>ZI.MEŠ-*šu<sub>2</sub>-nu i-re-*  
*en-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu-<sup>r</sup>ti<sup>21</sup>-ma* <sup>10'</sup>*šu-ug-lu-u<sub>2</sub> pu-uq-qud a-na bu-ul-ṭu* <sup>11'</sup>*a-na-ku ul ša<sub>2</sub> ħi-ṭu e-piš lum-nu*  
<sup>12'</sup>*ina bu-bu-u<sub>2</sub>-tu ina šib-ti-ia<sub>2</sub> la a-ma-tu* <sup>13'</sup>EN LUGAL.MEŠ *lip-qi<sub>2</sub>-dan-nu a-na bul-ṭu*

complaint: rev. <sup>3'.</sup><sup>4'</sup>These seven years I have been held in durance vile<sup>209</sup>.

complaint: rev. <sup>4'.</sup><sup>5'</sup>Without the king, my house has been taken and my property destroyed.

complaint: rev. <sup>5'.</sup><sup>6'</sup>I am dying of hunger in my captivity.

argument (from equal treatment):

rev. <sup>7'.</sup><sup>9'</sup>Many are those who have transgressed against the king, my lord. But the king has shown them mercy and spared their lives.

argument (from extreme case):

rev. <sup>10'</sup>Even the life of a deportee is spared.

declaration of innocence:

rev. <sup>11'</sup>I am (neither) guilty (of any crime, nor) a villain!

plea: rev. <sup>12'.</sup><sup>13'</sup>May I not die of hunger in my captivity! May the lord of kings allow me to live!

The sender uses an argument from equal treatment – if others have been forgiven and spared, so should be he, as well. In the final plea for his freedom, the sender also manages to incorporate a flattering epithet for the king – the lord of kings. As in some other instances, the sender complains about the treatment he receives – and maintains his innocence.

SAA 18 123 (Reynolds 2003, 96–97) is a petition on behalf of the deaf people whose rations are not being delivered, following SAA 18 121 and SAA 122, whose state of preservation is even poorer. The gist of the complaint seems to be as follows (there is no address formula nor a blessing):

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<sup>209</sup>For felicitous turn of phrase, I am indebted to Reynolds.



obv. <sup>1</sup>r2 U<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ<sup>2</sup>-š<sub>u</sub> x x<sup>1</sup> NINDA.HI.A SUM.SIKIL *ana* LU<sub>2</sub>.GEŠTU.2.LA<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ SUM *a-di* U<sub>4</sub>-17-KAM<sub>2</sub> NINDA.HI.A *la*<sub>3</sub> KU<sub>4</sub> <sup>2</sup>U<sub>4</sub>-17-KAM<sub>2</sub> 1 *qa* <sup>1</sup>U<sub>2</sub><sup>?</sup>.š<sub>a</sub><sup>2</sup>-*de-e ar<sub>2</sub>-ki-ia* š<sub>a</sub><sup>2</sup> NA<sub>4</sub>.KIŠIB *u*<sub>2</sub>-*ka-li-u<sub>2</sub>-š<sub>u</sub>* NINDA.HI.A <sup>3</sup>KI LU<sub>2</sub>.š<sub>a</sub><sup>2</sup>-*kin*<sup>?</sup> *ana* LU<sub>2</sub>.GEŠTU.2.LA<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ SUM *a-di* U<sub>4</sub>-21-KAM<sub>2</sub> NINDA.HI.A *la*<sub>3</sub> KU<sub>4</sub>

complaint: obv. <sup>1-3</sup>(For?) two days [...], bread and onions (were to be) given to the deaf. Until the 17<sup>th</sup> day, the bread was not delivered. On the 17<sup>th</sup> day, one litre of ...<sup>210</sup>. After my (appeal?), when they showed (?)<sup>211</sup> him the seal, the bread was (to be) given from the prefect to the deaf people. Until the 21<sup>st</sup>, no bread was delivered.

The orthography of this letter reminds one rather of administrative texts – the verbs are written with logograms only, *nadānu*, ‘to give’, with SUM, and *erēbu*, ‘to enter’, with KU<sub>4</sub>. The verb written syllabically, *u<sub>2</sub>-ka-li-u<sub>2</sub>-š<sub>u</sub>* in obv. 2., seems to be missing a syllable (‘to show’ is *kullumu* not *kullû*). The following passages of the complaint seem to be badly damaged, but some passages can at least be summarised without much trouble:

- in obv. 10.-12. a third party offers the use his resources, which are plentiful. The sender at first declines in view of lack of permission from the king, but then is forced by hunger to relent; however, this does not seem to help;

- in obv. 13.-14. the deaf people are called upon as witnesses to something, an accusation likely follows;

- the sender remarks that he is dying of hunger and obduracy (rev. <sup>5</sup>u<sub>3</sub> *ina bu-bu-tu u ina šip-ši-ne<sub>2</sub>-ti a-ma-ta*);

- he seems to be informing his addressee about the warnings (?) he receives from unspecified third parties (rev. <sup>6</sup>um-ma UGU-*hi* LUGAL *u* LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL-*ka-šir* <sup>7</sup>š<sub>a</sub><sup>2</sup> *ta-ka-la-ta nik-la-ta ana* LUGAL *i-ter-bu-u<sub>2</sub>-nu* – ‘You trust the king and the chief tailor – (and) intrigues have reached the king!’.).

All in all, the sender complains about the lack of rations, and the role of the chief tailor in the entire matter seems to be unclear but rather negative. Nowhere does the sender seem to make any requests – not to any putative addressee. In the final passage of the letter, the sender only declares his ignorance (rev. <sup>re12</sup>(...) *ki-i iq-bu-u<sub>2</sub> ki-i la<sub>3</sub> iq-bu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>re13</sup>ul *i-di* – ‘Whether they told (him?) or not – I do not know.’).

SAA 18 146 (Reynolds 2003, 119–120) is a complaint following a report about a skirmish between the Assyrian and Babylonian troops:

rev. <sup>1</sup>ul-tu UGU š<sub>a</sub><sup>2</sup> URU.bi-rat <sup>2</sup>he-pu-u<sub>2</sub> *u* DINGIR.MEŠ-e-š<sub>u</sub><sup>2</sup> *ab-ku* <sup>3</sup>mi-i-tu *a-na-ku u un-qu* KU<sub>3</sub>.GI <sup>4</sup>š<sub>a</sub><sup>2</sup> LUGAL EN-*ia<sub>2</sub> ki-i a-mu-ru* <sup>5</sup>ab-ta-lu<sub>3</sub> *u<sub>3</sub> en-na* <sup>6</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.A-[K]IN-*ia<sub>2</sub> a-na šu-lum*

<sup>210</sup> If the uncertain reading is correct, this would be an unknown plant.

<sup>211</sup> The verbal form is defective.

LUGAL EN-ia <sup>7</sup>ki-i aš<sub>2</sub>-pu-ra un-qu ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL <sup>8</sup>be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia<sub>2</sub> ul a-mu-ur-ma ul ab-lu<sup>9</sup> <sup>9</sup>mi-i-tu  
a-na-ku LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-a <sup>10</sup>la u<sub>2</sub>-maš-šar-an-ni

explanation (with gratitude related to a previous favour):

rev. <sup>1-5</sup>When the town of Birat was destroyed and its gods lead away, I was a dead man. And then I saw the golden signet of the king, my lord, and came back to life!

complaint: rev. <sup>5-9</sup>Now, as I sent a me[s]senger (to inquire) about the well-being of the king, my lord, I have not seen the signet of the king, my lord and have not been revived. I am a dead man!

plea: rev. <sup>9-10</sup>May the king, my lord, not forsake me!

This sequence is somewhat reminiscent of the letter in which the sender complains about the lack of a royal greeting after the king has returned safely to his palace (SAA 17 117). The preceding passage about the wondrous ability of the royal signet to revive the dead is used as a precedent on which the present request for communication is based.

SAA 18 160 (Reynolds 2003, 132–133) is a complaint included in a petition. It is addressed to a certain Aqarâ (apparently not to be identified with the governor of Babylon under Assurbanipal):

obv. <sup>4</sup>(...) be-li<sub>2</sub> ul i-<sup>1</sup>du<sup>1</sup>-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>5</sup>ki-i a-na UGU-<sup>hi</sup> E<sub>2</sub> <sup>he</sup>-pu-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>6</sup>u na-du-u<sub>2</sub> er-ru-bu <sup>7</sup>6-me ŠE.BAR ša<sub>2</sub>  
E<sub>2</sub>-AD-ni m.tab-ne<sub>2</sub>-e-a ŠEŠ-u<sub>2</sub>-a <sup>8</sup>ki-i iš-šu-u<sub>2</sub> gim-ri <sup>9</sup>ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi a-na UGU-<sup>hi</sup>-šu<sub>2</sub> u a-na UGU-  
<sup>hi</sup> <sup>10</sup>ŠEŠ.MEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub> ig-da-mar <sup>11</sup>A.ŠA<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi im-ta-<sup>har</sup> <sup>be12</sup>u mim-ma ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi  
<sup>be13</sup>ul maḥ-rak <sup>be14</sup>u be-li<sub>2</sub> i-di

rev. <sup>1</sup>ki-i ke-en-šu <sup>2</sup>(eras.)la ma-ša-ka <sup>3</sup>u ša-bit ŠU.2-ia<sub>2</sub> ia-a-nu <sup>4</sup>en-na a-ki ša<sub>2</sub> be-li<sub>2</sub> <sup>5</sup>i-le-<sup>u</sup> a-na  
LU<sub>2</sub>.GAR-UMUŠ <sup>6</sup>be-li<sub>2</sub> lip-qid-an-ni <sup>7</sup>la ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia<sub>2</sub> la <sup>1</sup>a <sup>1</sup>il

pseudo-reminder: obv. <sup>4-6</sup>My lord knows that I am entering a ruined and abandoned house!

complaint (?): obv. <sup>7-10</sup>When Tabnēa, my brother, took 600 (homers) of grain from the household of our father, all the (good) feeling(s) between him and his brothers were over.

complaint: obv. <sup>11-be13</sup>He received fields from it, and I have received nothing.

declaration of powerlessness (2x, as a pseudo-reminder):

obv. <sup>be14</sup>-rev. <sup>3</sup>And my lord knows that I cannot beg, and there is nobody (who) would take my hand.

request (with the petition formula):

rev. <sup>4-6</sup>Now, may my lord do what he can (and) entrust me to the commandant.

plea: rev. <sup>7</sup>May I not bind (myself to an agreement?) not in accordance (with the wishes) of my lord!

The complaint is about not receiving property from the estate of the father of the sender. The most interesting part, perhaps, is the formula associated with royal petitions. Either it was not something directed exclusively at the king, or the sender tried to flatter the addressee by implicitly equating him with the king, or – a third possibility – a certain inflation of politeness took place during the development of letter writing under the rule of the Sargonids and the expressions previously used only with reference to the king found a more widespread use.

SAA 18 181 (Reynolds 2003, 148–150) is a petition with a complaint about lost property, written to the king (Assurbanipal) by a Babylonian official, Nabû-balāssu-iqbi, about whom not much else is known:

obv. <sup>5</sup>(...) *am-mi<sub>3</sub>-ni* 1-*en-šu<sub>2</sub>* 2-*šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>6</sup>LUGAL EN-*ia* *am-ḥur-ma mam-ma ul iš-’a-al-an-ni* <sup>7</sup>*ki-i* MU *ša<sub>2</sub>* KUR.URI.KI *ina* IGI LUGAL EN-*ia<sub>2</sub>* *la ba-nu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>8</sup>*u<sub>3</sub>* *ḥi-iṭ a-na* LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia aḥ-ṭu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>9</sup>*a-na-ku ḥi-iṭ a-na* LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia<sub>2</sub> ul aḥ-ṭi* <sup>10</sup>*a-di-i la* KUR<sub>2</sub>-*ti ki-i al-li-ka* <sup>11</sup>*a-mat* LUGAL *a-na* UGU *m.ar<sub>2</sub>-ra-bi aq-ta-bi* <sup>12</sup>*um-ma dib-bi-ia a-na* E<sub>2</sub>.GAL *i-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-ši* <sup>13</sup>*ul ip-laḥ<sub>3</sub>* NIG<sub>2</sub>.KA<sub>9</sub> *it-ta-ši ki-i iṣ-ba-tu* <sup>14</sup>*ina* ŠU.2 *il-tak-na-an-ni* *u<sub>3</sub> en-na* <sup>15</sup>*i-na pa-na-at* UN.MEŠ *gab-bi ki-i al-li-ka* <sup>16</sup>*ina* GIR<sub>3</sub>.2 LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia aš-ša-bat* U<sub>4</sub>-*mu a-ga-a* <sup>17</sup>*ap-pa-a a-na mi-tu-tu a-lab-bi-in* <sup>18</sup>*um-ma-na-tu<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> mi-tu-ma pa-aš<sub>2</sub>-ḥu* <sup>19</sup>*ul-tu šad-da-qad<sub>3</sub> mam-ma* NINDA.HI.A *ša<sub>2</sub> pi-ia ul i-nam-di-na* <sup>20</sup>*bu-bu-tu u<sub>3</sub> ṣu-um-mu-u<sub>2</sub> UGU-a in-da-qut* <sup>21</sup>*al-lak-ma* *ina* UGU PU<sub>2</sub> A.MEŠ *a-šat-ti* GIR<sub>3</sub>.2-*ia<sub>2</sub>* <sup>22</sup>*a-mes-si u<sub>3</sub> E<sub>11</sub>-ma ma-aš-šar-ti* <sup>23</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia a-nam-šar re-eš-šu* *ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bi GIŠ.ZU* <sup>25</sup>*um-ma ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ ze-’i-ra-ne<sub>2</sub>-e-a a-kan-na* <sup>26</sup>*i-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-ši ki-i* *ša<sub>2</sub> la* LUGAL *i-par-rik-u<sub>2</sub>-in-ni* <sup>27</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> ki-i a-mat-a bi-il-ti* *ina* *pa-an* LUGAL <sup>28</sup>*i-qab-bu-ma* LUGAL GAZ-*an-ni*

rev. <sup>1</sup>2 ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ *ša<sub>2</sub> KU<sub>3</sub>.GI a-na* UGU ZI.MEŠ-*ia* <sup>2</sup>*iš-’r-šu-u<sub>2</sub>* U<sub>4</sub>-*’mu-us<sup>1</sup>-su a-na* UGU *da-ki-ia* <sup>3</sup>*’u<sub>3</sub> ḥul<sup>1</sup>-lu-qi<sub>2</sub>-ia i-dab-bu-ub ki-i a-mat-a bi-il-tu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>4</sup>*’a-di pa<sup>1</sup>-an* LUGAL EN-*ia<sub>2</sub>* <sup>1</sup>*ul-tak-ši-du-ni* LUGAL EN-*ia<sub>2</sub>* *lu-u<sub>2</sub> i-di* <sup>5</sup>2-*ta a-mat*.MEŠ *’ša<sub>2</sub>* <sup>1</sup>*ina* IGI LUGAL EN-*ia<sub>2</sub>* *la ṭa-a-ba* <sup>6</sup>*m.LUGAL-’lu-u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-da-a-ru i-te-pu-uš a-mat* LUGAL *ši-i* <sup>7</sup>*’um<sup>1</sup>-ma mam-ma* *’ḥu<sup>1</sup>-ub-tu* *ša<sub>2</sub>* KUR.URI.KI *ša<sub>2</sub>-la-nu-u<sub>2</sub>-a* <sup>8</sup>*la i-šap-par* *šu-u<sub>2</sub>* DUMU.MUNUS-*su* *ša<sub>2</sub> m.TIN.TIR.KI-a-a* <sup>9</sup>DUMU *’LU<sub>2</sub>* <sup>1</sup>[S]IPA *ana al-la* KUR.MEŠ *gab-bi ḥi-iṭ* <sup>10</sup>*a-’na* LUGAL EN-*ia<sub>2</sub>* <sup>1</sup>*iḥ-ṭu-u<sub>2</sub> al-tap-par u* 1-*en* A.ŠA<sub>3</sub> <sup>11</sup>*ki-i* *’u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-tir-ru it-tan-na-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>* LU<sub>2</sub>.SUKKAL *u* LU<sub>2</sub>.*sa-ar<sub>2</sub>-te-nu* <sup>12</sup>LUGAL *ina* *ma-a-ti ip-te-qid um-ma di-i-nu kit-ti* <sup>13</sup>*’u<sub>3</sub><sup>1</sup> mi-ša<sub>2</sub>-ru* *ina* *ma-ti-ia<sub>2</sub> di-i-na ṭup-pi* *ana ṭup-pi* <sup>14</sup>[*a-di l*] *a m.LUGAL-lu-u<sub>2</sub>-da-a-ru a-na ḥa-za-nu-tu* <sup>15</sup>[*ip-pi*]-*qi<sub>2</sub>-du* LU<sub>2</sub>.*sa-ar<sub>2</sub>-te-nu di-na-a ip-ta-ras* <sup>16</sup>*’a<sup>1</sup>-me-lut-[t]i* *’ša<sub>2</sub>* <sup>1</sup>E<sub>2</sub>-*’AD<sup>1</sup>-ia<sub>2</sub>* ŠU.2-*ši-bit-ti ki-i u<sub>2</sub>-šab-bi-ta* <sup>17</sup>*it-tan-ni* m.LUGAL-*lu-u<sub>2</sub>-da-a-ru ki-i il-li-ka* <sup>18</sup>*di-na-a ul-ta-bal-kit en-na a-me-lut-ta-a* <sup>19</sup>*ri-i-qu ta-pal-laḥ<sub>3</sub> u<sub>3</sub> a-na-ku* *ina* *ṣu-mi* <sup>20</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> A.ME[Š]* *’a<sup>1</sup>-ma-a-tu it-ti-šu<sub>2</sub> a-dab-bu-ub-ma* 20 30 <sup>21</sup>*tuk-ka-a-ta* *ša<sub>2</sub> ul-tu* E<sub>2</sub> *a-ga-a a-na-ku* <sup>22</sup>*la a-mu-ru la aš<sub>2</sub>-mu-u<sub>2</sub> u la i-du-u<sub>2</sub> a-na* UGU-*ḥi-’ia<sub>2</sub>* <sup>1</sup> <sup>23</sup>*i-’na-as<sup>1</sup>-suk* *ša<sub>2</sub> ap-pi-it-ti* *ina* UKKIN *ša<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ* <sup>24</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> [LU]GAL* *’be<sup>1</sup>-li<sub>2</sub>-ia<sub>2</sub> it-ti-ia<sub>2</sub> i-*

*dab-bu-bu-ma i-tur-ra*<sup>25.ṛd<sup>1</sup></sup>.AMAR.UTU ša<sub>2</sub> HUŠ-su a-bu-bu IGI.BAR-su AD rem-nu-u<sub>2</sub><sup>26</sup> at-  
 ta šu-u<sub>2</sub> EN LUGAL.MEŠ NIG<sub>2</sub>.KA<sub>9</sub> ki-i ša<sub>2</sub><sup>27</sup> LU<sub>2</sub>.sa-ar<sub>2</sub>-te-nu ip-ru-us-su u NIG<sub>2</sub>.KA<sub>9</sub><sup>28</sup> ša<sub>2</sub>  
 E<sub>2</sub>-AD-ia<sub>2</sub> lid-di-nu-ma LUGAL<sup>re29</sup> ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi lu-up<sub>2</sub>-lah<sub>3</sub>

reproach: obv.<sup>5-8</sup> Why is that I have (already) appealed to the king more than once and nobody has asked me about it, as if the name of Akkad were not pleasing in the eyes of the king, and as if I had wronged the king, my lord!

declaration of innocence:

obv.<sup>9</sup> (But) I have not transgressed against the king, my lord!

complaint (about the past):

obv.<sup>10-14</sup> Before the hostilities, I went and invoked the word of the king about Arrābu, saying: ‘I have a matter for the palace!’. He was not fearful<sup>212</sup>, (and) took away my property. He captured me and put in custody.

complaint (about the more recent past):

obv.<sup>14-17</sup> And now, when I have gone before all the people (and) grasped the feet of the king, my lord, on this very day I am prostrating myself unto death!

expression of resignation:

obv.<sup>18</sup> (But at least) the multitudes of the dead are at peace!

complaint: obv.<sup>19-20</sup> Since last year nobody has been giving me the bread for my mouth. Hunger and thirst have befallen me.

argument (from diligence):

obv.<sup>21-23</sup> I go, drink the water from the well, wash my feet<sup>213</sup> and go up to keep the watch of the king, my lord.

complaint (framed as a reminder, with an attempt to pre-empt the opponent):

obv.<sup>23-28</sup> At the beginning, I wrote in a writing board to the king: ‘There are people who hate me here. If they bar me from the king, and if they speak ugly words about me to the king, the king will kill me!’.

<sup>212</sup> This is a criticism.

<sup>213</sup> I am unable to say why ‘feet’. The depictions of personal hygiene in Mesopotamian sources, including literary texts, can explicitly mention washing the whole body with water and anointing with oil, the process including the head and hair. There are some indications that hands needed to be washed before eating (Pappi 2016-2018, 1). In cult one washes above all the hands (Sallaberger 2006-2008, 297), although Pappi (ibid.) also mentions feet.

accusation: rev. <sup>1-3</sup>There two men who have taken gold against my life. Daily they plot to kill me and destroy me.

introduction (of a denunciation-like passage):

rev. <sup>3-4</sup>If they have succeeded in making these ugly words reach the king, my lord, may the king know:

denunciation: rev. <sup>5-6</sup>Šarru-lū-dāri has done two things that are not pleasing in the eyes of the king, my lord!

accusation (preceded by an explanation of a royal edict):

rev. <sup>6-10</sup>This is the word of the king: ‘No one is to manage the booty from the land of Akkad without my say-so!’. He (= Šarru-lū-dāri) (and) the daughter of Bābilāiu, son of the [R]e’û family, have committed more crimes against the king, my lord, than all the other lands!

complaint: rev. <sup>10-11</sup>I wrote (to the king), but when he returned one field to me, he gave it to him(self?).

accusation (preceded by an argument with an explicit mention of the duties of two high officials):

rev. <sup>11-18</sup>The king appointed the vizier and the chief judge in the land, saying: ‘Render true and just judgements in my land!’. [Befo]re Šarru-lū-dāri [was app]ointed as a mayor, the chief judge had for a period of time<sup>214</sup> decided my case. He seized the serva[n]ts of my father’s house as stolen property and returned them to me. When Šarru-lū-dāri came, he overturned the verdict.

complaint: rev. <sup>18-20</sup>Now, my servants revere an idle man and I myself am dying for lack of wate[r]<sup>215</sup>.

complaint (report of own attempt to seek resolution, and a declaration of innocence):

rev. <sup>20-24</sup>I speak with him, but he hurls dozens<sup>216</sup> of calumnies at me, (about matters) I have neither seen, nor heard, nor known in this household. In the same manner, he repeats (the calumnies) when he speaks with me in the assembly of the servants of the [ki]ng.

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<sup>214</sup> For two possible translations of *tuppi ana tuppi* (literally: ‘tablet to tablet’) see Parpola 1983, 50 (here ‘systematically’) and Parpola 1993, 87, SAA 10 109, rev. 4. (here ‘for a period of time’).

<sup>215</sup> It is passages like this one that demonstrate that one should not treat all the complaints made by the letter-writers seriously. It was only in obv. 21. that Nabû-balāssu-iqbi reported that he drinks the water from the well, and several lines later he is dying of thirst. Since it is extremely unlikely that the well dried up while he was focussed on the lines between obv. 21. and rev. 19.-20., it is obvious that these complaints, here as well as in other letters, are not meant to be taken literally. The action of drinking water from the well might perhaps be seen as an argument for a simple (= destitute?) lifestyle of the sender (the usual beverage of choice would be after all beer, not water), while the death of thirst is a more fanciful rhetorical figure for absolute deprivation.

<sup>216</sup> Literally, ‘twenty (or) thirty’.

flattery: rev. <sup>25.-26.</sup>You, the lord of the king, are (the god) Marduk, whose fury is deluge, whose glance is a merciful father.

request: rev. <sup>26.-28.</sup>May the king, my lord, give (me) the property as the chief judge decided, and the property of the house of my father!

argument: rev. <sup>28.-re29.</sup>Let me serve the king with them<sup>217</sup>!

As Reynolds 2003, 150 in note to rev. 25. correctly points out, the phrase in which the king is equated with Marduk is a literary allusion to a prayer to Marduk, BMS 11, lines 1.-2. (see Mayer 1976, 395 and Mayer 2004 for a full edition of the prayer). However, whereas the prayer has <sup>1</sup>(...) d.AMAR.UTU *ša<sub>2</sub> e-zes-su a-bu-bu* <sup>2</sup>*nap-šur-šu a-bu re-me<sub>2</sub>-nu-u<sub>2</sub>* - ‘Marduk, whose fury is deluge, (but) whose subsiding (of anger) is like (that of) a merciful father’, the flattery of Nabû-balāssu iqbi reframes the allusion in order to make it more suitable within a sequence of a request: rev. <sup>25.</sup>r<sup>d</sup>.AMAR.UTU *ša<sub>2</sub> HUŠ-su a-bu-bu* IGI.BAR-su AD *rem-nu-u<sub>2</sub>* - ‘Marduk, whose fury is like the deluge, whose glance is like (that of a) merciful father’. Since Nabû-balāssu-iqbi is not seeking forgiveness, the mention of the divine gaze, in many contexts associated with favourable divine attention (Dicks 2012), is a more logical alternative than focusing on divine anger. This is a deliberate choice and not a simple misquotation<sup>218</sup>.

The entire sequence is highly remarkable. Nabû-balāssu-iqbi begins with a reproach, which incidentally also informs the royal addressee that he is not petitioning the king for the first time. This frank admission constitutes a reproach – and the clearly aggrieved tone of the sender could seem incongruous with the later passages of the message, especially with the final flattering move, explicitly juxtaposing the king with the god Marduk. But it should be by now clear that the Akkadian letters in the first millennium were not being written in a stylistic monotone<sup>219</sup>.

The reproach smoothly turns into a declaration of innocence. He then moves on to a succinct explanation about the circumstances under which he lost his property. Not much detail is provided, but since this is not the first petition from Nabû-balāssu-iqbi, perhaps he was more verbose in his initial missives. He then progresses to his current appeal (obv. 14.-17.), which he describes as abasing himself unto death. From this, a very smooth transition is made to an expression of despair – at least those who are death are at peace, released from their trouble (obv. 18.). The following moves are complaints about the absolutely hopeless position of Nabû-balāssu-iqbi. He has no food and is suffering thirst and hunger. When he mentions that he is drinking water from a well, this is perhaps not as contradictory as it at first

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<sup>217</sup> Or: ‘here’, as Reynolds translates.

<sup>218</sup> Mayer 2004, 207 mentions in his edition of the prayer that the changed quotation causes the contrasting pair of ‘fury’ and ‘calming down’ to disappear. This is certainly true – as is true that this contrast is more relevant in the context of a prayer. In a petition, however, when the sender is asking the king to right a wrong, the mention of anger is unnecessary – or even damaging.

<sup>219</sup> The idea of style being appropriate to a matter discussed, of *decorum*, is ultimately of no relevance here: there is no one universal *decorum*, and the senders of the correspondence studied here evidently were not being indecorous from their own point of view.

appears. A Mesopotamian would rather drink beer – although water is still considered to be a vital part of the basic sustenance (Parpola 2004a, 233). The litany of complaints ends with a declaration of loyalty: despite everything, Nabû-balāssu-iqbi is keeping the king's watch (obv. 22.-23.)

In the following sequence he moves on to recounting the contents of his previous petition – it was apparently written on a writing board. There men plotting against him are potentially blocking his access to the king<sup>220</sup> – and after the quotation from his previous letter, Nabû-balāssu-iqbi follows by denouncing their crimes in more detail (rev. 1.-18.). Šarru-lū-dāri is explicitly mentioned as being guilty of two separate offences. Nabû-balāssu-iqbi introduces each of these offences with an explication about why they constitute a misconduct. The first offence is actually unclear: Nabû-balāssu-iqbi cites a royal command (*amat šarri*) about managing booty. He does not seem to be stating explicitly how Šarru-lū-dāri violated it: he only says that he and his accomplices have transgressed against the king more than all other lands (rev. 8.-10.). When Nabû-balāssu-iqbi confronts Šarru-lū-dāri, he does not show remorse and rectify his conduct but takes away Nabû-balāssu-iqbi's field instead.

The second transgression is also a direct violation of a royal command. Nabû-balāssu-iqbi cites the order given to the vizier and the chief judge who are to pronounce just judgements for the king. For a moment, all is as it should be, as the chief judge returns Nabû-balāssu-iqbi's property to him (rev. 15.-17.). However, when Šarru-lū-dāri is given the office, he overturns the verdict, and the royal justice is in disarray. Nabû-balāssu-iqbi does not hesitate to comment on this with additional complaints about the miserable fate of his servants and his own thirst (rev. 18.-20.).

In the next sequence Nabû-balāssu-iqbi reports on his own attempts to deal with his adversary: he is met with rumours or calumnies which pertain to matters completely unknown to him. This is perhaps reminiscent of the way in which some senders of the letters attempt to ruin the reputations of their enemies, in addition to complaining about how they were wronged.

In the final sequence, there is the flattery with the allusion to the prayer, already discussed above and an explicit request to return Nabû-bēl-iqbi's property, so that he may serve the king. The structure of the letter is very linear, with no repetitions and no framed sequences. The transitions between the moves are especially smooth: considered together with the reworked literary quotation, they indicate an output of a talented and experienced scribe. Another petition from Nabû-balāssu-iqbi is SAA 18 182 (Reynolds 2003, 150–151), but apart from the greeting in the obverse and the few closing line in the reverse, it is completely broken, so it is impossible to say whether this petition preceded or followed SAA 18 180.

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<sup>220</sup> Was Nabû-balāssu-iqbi thus giving the king an out? To little is known about the context but considering how Assurbanipal denies any responsibility for the elders of Nippur being turned away from an audience with him, and blames his and their officials instead, this is perhaps not as far-fetched as it would at first seem (see SAA 21 17).

rev. <sup>5'</sup>IR<sub>3</sub> *u* EN EN.NUN *ša*<sub>2</sub> LUGAL EN-*ia*<sub>2</sub> *a-kan-na a-na-ku* <sup>6'</sup>*u* EME.MEŠ *ma-a'-da-a-ti ina*  
EN.LIL<sub>2</sub>.KI *ina* GISSU LUGAL EN-*ia*<sub>2</sub> <sup>7'</sup>(*eras*)*ši-pir-ti* LUGAL *u<sub>2</sub>-šal-lam u it-ti-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>8'</sup>*a-*  
*dab-bub* m.AN.ŠAR<sub>2</sub>-EN-*taq-qin* LU<sub>2</sub>.*šak-nu ša<sub>2</sub> a-na* <sup>9'</sup>{*ša<sub>2</sub> a-na*} *šu-tu-qu-ti ša<sub>2</sub> un-qa-a-ti u*  
LU<sub>2</sub>.A-KIN *ša*<sub>2</sub> LUGAL <sup>10'</sup>*ina* EN.LIL<sub>2</sub>.KI *paq-du ana* UGU *un-qa-a-ti u* IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ <sup>11'</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub>*  
LUGAL *ša<sub>2</sub> il-la-ku-nim-ma* 3 U<sub>4</sub>-[*m*]*u* 4 U<sub>4</sub>-*mu ina* EN.LIL<sub>2</sub>.KI <sup>12'</sup>*aš<sub>2</sub>-bu-ma la i-man-gu-ru-*  
*ma la u<sub>2</sub>-šet-ti-iq-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu-tu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>rel3'</sup>[*ana*] UGU-*hi it-ti-šu<sub>2</sub> ki-i ad-bu-bu* <sup>rel14'</sup>[*um-ma*]-*a*  
LU<sub>2</sub>.EN.LIL<sub>2</sub>.KI.MEŠ *u* KUR *gab-bi* <sup>rel15'</sup>[*q*]*u-[l]a-li-ia il-tak-nu* <sup>rel16'</sup>ŠU.2-*su<sub>2</sub> a-na* UGU-*hi-ia<sub>2</sub>*

e. <sup>1</sup>[*x x x x x x x x x x x x x x um*]-*ma* SAG.DU-*ka a-bat-taq-ma ina ti-ik-ki* <sup>2</sup>[*x x x x*]*x*

rev. 5'-8'. Here, I am the servant and the keeper of the watch of the king, my lord. There are many foreign language( speaker)s in Nippur under the protection of the king, my lord. I carry out the king's orders and speak with them.

rev. 8<sup>r</sup>:-12<sup>r</sup> (As to) Aššūr-bēlu-taqin, the prefect who is appointed in Nippur to pass on the sealed orders and the messengers of the king – about the sealed orders and the servants of the king who come and stay in Nippur for 3 (or) 4 days – he did not agree to let them pass.

rev. <sup>re13'</sup>·e. <sup>1</sup>·When I spoke with him [ab]out this, [sayin]g: ‘The Nippurians and the entire land have [di]sparaged me!’ he [raised?!!] his hand against me [..., sa]ying: ‘I will cut off your head [and ...] by the neck [...!!]’.

SAA 18 202 (Reynolds 2003, 168–170) is a letter from the governor of Nippur. In the obverse, he is reporting the news of a potential Elamite invasion. In the reverse, after a gap, a complaint is partially preserved:

rev. <sup>11</sup>.(...) [... d<sup>2</sup>].*aš-šur* DUMU m.d.PA-ŠEŠ-PAP <sup>12</sup>[x x x x]x *ša<sub>2</sub> ana* EN.LIL<sub>2</sub>.KI *i-ru-bu* <sup>13</sup>.[a<sup>2</sup> x  
x *ana p*]a-ni-šu<sub>2</sub> *is-sa-kil* ŠU.2-<sup>14</sup>ru<sup>1</sup> *a-na* Š[A<sub>3</sub>-bi] *ki id-du-u<sub>2</sub>* DUMU.MEŠ-DU<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ <sup>15</sup>.ša<sub>2</sub>



EN.LIL<sub>2</sub>.KI *u<sub>2</sub>-ṣab-bat i-na-aṭ-ṭu*<sup>16</sup> *u a-na* KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR *i-nam-din it-ti-ṣu<sub>2</sub>*<sup>17</sup> *ki-i ad-bu-bu qu-la-li-ia*<sup>18</sup> *ina* UKKIN *ša<sub>2</sub> KUR-ia il-tak-ni*<sup>19</sup> *ina* IGI UN.MEŠ *KUR-ia up-ti-iḫ-ḫa-ni*<sup>20</sup> *ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub> URU *ana pi-ir-ki it-ta-na-lak*<sup>21</sup> URU *a-ki ma-de-e us-sa-am*<sup>22</sup> LUGAL EN-a *liš-pur-am-ma* URU-ṣu<sub>2</sub><sup>re23</sup> [*l*]-<sup>re23</sup>mur<sup>1</sup> *u lip-qid u a-na*<sup>re24</sup> DUMU m.d.PA-PAB-PAP *liq-<sup>re24</sup>bu A<sub>2</sub>*<sup>1</sup><sup>re25</sup> *ma-la-a*<sup>re25</sup> ŠU.2-su *la-pa-<sup>re26</sup>ni*<sup>1</sup><sup>re26</sup> EN.LIL<sub>2</sub>.KI *lik-li*

complaint: rev. 11.-16. [...] Aššūr, son of Nabû-aḫu-ušur [...] who entered Nippur, wi[thout?! ...] appropriated (it) [for] him[self]. As he put his hand t[o it], he is capturing, beating and selling the nobles of Nippur.

follow-up (attempt to solve the issue on one's own):

rev. 16.-19. When I spoke to him, he insulted me in the assembly of the land (and) made me look foolish before the people of my land.

complaint: rev. 20.-21. He is continuously behaving wrongly in the city (and) causing trouble in the city.

request: rev. 22.-re25. May the king, my lord, send (someone) [to i]nspect his city and tell the son of Nabû-aḫu-ušur to keep his hands off Nippur!

The sequence is quite familiar at this point: the governor of Nippur complains about an issue, reports on his own attempt to intervene in the matter, which fails, and asks the king explicitly for help, with a fairly detailed request listing all the actions that he wishes the king to carry out.

## B. Denunciations

SAA 17 152 (Dietrich 2003, 133–134) is a lengthy petition for military aid. In the obverse, the senders (Abi-iaqia, Abi-iadi', Zērūtî, Šullumu, and Aḫi-bi-gannu – all likely tribal leaders) report on their untenable strategic position and request immediate military aid. In the reverse, they denounce or accuse Abi-iaqar, the sheikh of the Puqudeans:

rev. 1.m. [AD-i]a-qar LU<sub>2</sub>.p[u-q]u-da-a-a<sup>2</sup> *šul-mu-u<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> KUR a-na pa-an LUGAL EN-ia<sub>2</sub>*<sup>3</sup> *ul ši-bi tuk-te-e u<sub>2</sub>-ba- 'a ši-kin*<sup>4</sup> [*ša<sub>2</sub>*<sup>?</sup>] *a-dan-nu ša<sub>2</sub> iš-ku-nu ul-te-en-nu*<sup>5</sup> *ma-ku-tu<sub>2</sub> rak-šu<sub>2</sub> u ḫu-ub-ti um-ma a-na*<sup>6</sup> *ram-ni-ia lu-bu-uk ša-ba-a-ti ša<sub>2</sub> ŠU.2*<sup>7</sup> *ul ši-bu u a-na-ku m.in-da-bi-ia<sub>2</sub>* LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL-1-lim<sup>8</sup> *it-ti-ia ina E<sub>2</sub>-ia kab-sa-an-ni*<sup>9</sup> *ia-a-nu-u<sub>2</sub> du-u<sub>2</sub>-ru a-na LUGAL at-ta-din-ma*

accusation: rev. 1.-3. [Abi-i]aqar, the P[uq]udean, does not wish for peace before the king, my lord.

accusation: rev. 3. He seeks revenge.

accusation: rev. 3.-4. He changed the schedule that he had set.

accusation: rev. <sup>5-6</sup> Poverty and plunder are with him. (He is saying) as follows: ‘I will take (it) for myself!’.

accusation: rev. <sup>6-7</sup> He does not wish for the clasping of hands.

complaint: rev. <sup>7-9</sup> And I, together with Indabia, the thousandman, am trampled at home. Otherwise, I would have given the fortress to the king.

The accused Abi-iaqar is presented both as a criminal and as a rebel.

SAA 17 122 (Dietrich 2003, 108–109) is a contains a short passage that seems like a denunciation, but is in fact another pre-emptive strike of the sender against his opponent:

obv. <sup>be20</sup> [m.a-qar-d].<sup>1</sup>EN<sup>1</sup>-IGI u<sub>3</sub> DAM-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub>

rev. <sup>1</sup>ṭe<sub>3</sub>-e-<sup>1</sup>mu<sup>1</sup> m.AD-eri-ba il-tak-nu <sup>2</sup>um-ma ki-i ša<sub>2</sub> ta-at-tal-ku <sup>3</sup>dib-bu na-az-ru-ti <sup>4</sup>ša<sub>2</sub>  
m.d.AG-MU-SU ina E<sub>2</sub>.GAL <sup>5</sup>du-bu-ub min-de-e-ma <sup>6</sup>dib-bi-ia na-az-ru-ti <sup>7</sup>ina E<sub>2</sub>.GAL i-dab-  
bu-ub <sup>8</sup>LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> lu-u i-di ki-i <sup>9</sup>ṭe<sub>3</sub>-e-mu ul-tu E<sub>2</sub>-i-ni <sup>10</sup>šak-nu

denunciation: obv. <sup>be20</sup>-rev. <sup>5</sup>[Aqār]-Bēl-lūmur and his wife have commanded Abu-erība as follows:  
‘When you have gone, speak hateful words about Nabû-šumu-erība in the palace!’

mention of a possibility:

rev. <sup>5-7</sup> Perhaps he will curse me out in the palace.

closing formula: rev. <sup>8-10</sup> May the king, my lord, know, that the command has come from our house!

Is the emphasis on the internal conflict in the last passage meant to make the sender appear innocent?

SAA 18 54 (Reynolds 2003, 40–41) is a denunciation, in which separate items are divided by rulings. In the first sequence of the letter the king asks about the source of the sender’s previous allegations:

obv. <sup>7</sup>um<sup>1</sup>-[ma ina pi ma]n-ni taš-mi m.za-kir <sup>8</sup>[x x x x] <sup>1</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> DUMU e-me-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub> <sup>9</sup>[ša<sub>2</sub> m.x x x i]q-  
ta-ba-a <sup>10</sup>[da-ba-bu<sup>?</sup> ar-ku]-<sup>1</sup>u<sub>2</sub> <sup>1</sup>u maḥ-ru-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>11</sup>[ša<sub>2</sub> a-na LUG]AL EN-ia<sub>2</sub> aš<sub>2</sub>-pur <sup>12</sup>[ina pi  
LU<sub>2</sub>.GAR-U]MUŠ ša<sub>2</sub> KIŠ.KI u m.za-kir <sup>13</sup>[al-te-me]

report: obv. <sup>7-13</sup> ‘[From wh]om did you hear (about these matters)?’ – Zākuru, the [...] of the brother-in-law of [...] told me (about them). [The previous] and later [rumours (?), about which] I wrote [to the ki]ng, my lord – [I heard] (about them) [from the gov]ernor of Kiš and Zākuru.

The source of information could also a play a role. In the following part of the letter, the sender includes two accusations, divided by rulings. In the final passage, he makes a complaint against one the persons he accused in the earlier part of the letter:

rev. <sup>16</sup>*u ana-ku nap-ša<sub>2</sub>-ti-ia<sub>2</sub> ana LUGAL EN-ia<sub>2</sub>* <sup>17</sup>*lu-u pa-aq-da gab-bi na-a-ši* <sup>18</sup>*u<sub>2</sub> qat<sub>2</sub>-te-e-ma ina tuk-ka-a-ti* <sup>19</sup>*[i]-da<sup>1</sup>-a-ki ana UGU ša<sub>2</sub> : NIG<sub>2</sub>.KA<sub>9</sub>-ia<sub>2</sub>* <sup>20</sup>*[x x i]š-šu<sub>2</sub>-u<sub>2</sub>*

declaration of loyalty:

rev. <sup>16-17</sup>.And (as to) me – my life is indeed entrusted to the king, my lord!

complaint: rev. <sup>17-19</sup>.He will finish us all – he will [k]ill us with oppression!

complaint: rev. <sup>19-20</sup>.Besides taking my property, he [...].

Although the sender phrased the previous parts of the letter as denunciations that do not involve him at all, in the final passage of the letter he hardly seems a disinterested party. The complaint about being killed is phrased in such a way that structurally it resembles lines from literary compositions, with two verbal forms creating a parallelism.

A clear-cut denunciation is attested in SAA 18 56 (Reynolds 2003, 41–43):

obv. <sup>3</sup>*m.ŠEŠ.MEŠ-ša<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-a L[U<sub>2</sub>.G]AL-E<sub>2</sub> m.<sup>1</sup>d.EN-it-ta<sup>1</sup>-[din]* <sup>4</sup>*LU<sub>2</sub>.mu-tir-te<sub>3</sub>-e-mu ša<sub>2</sub> m.d.AG-u<sub>2</sub>-šal-lim* <sup>5</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> URU.E<sub>2</sub>-m.da-ku-ru KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR ma-a<sup>1</sup>-du ina ŠU.2-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>6</sup>*na-šu-u<sub>2</sub>-ni i-da-bu-bu um-ma ni-il-lak-ma* <sup>7</sup>*ANŠE.KUR.RA.MEŠ ni-maḥ-ḥa-ra LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> lu-u<sub>2</sub> i-di*

denunciation:

obv. <sup>3-7</sup>.Aḥḥēšāia, t[he m]ajor domo, (and) Bēl-itta[din], the information officer of Nabû-ušallim of Bīt-Dakkūri, are carrying a lot of silver with them, (and) saying: ‘Let us come and buy horses!’.

closing formula: obv. <sup>7</sup>.May the king, my lord, know!

It is certainly striking that the sender does not seem to actually know that much apart from the names and titles. The exact sum of silver is not mentioned, and the plans of obtaining horses are also recounted without any detail. The following passage of the letter deals with a third party who does not wish to cooperate with the sender without a royal order and a royal companion (obv. 8.-13.), but the next passage is a report with an undertone of a denunciation, about Bēl-iqīša (the leader of the Gambuleans, thus certainly someone to be watched, see Baker 1999, no. 7), who is travelling around and making connections with the local leaders (obv. 14.-rev. 5.). Finally, a more concrete allegation follows:

rev. <sup>6</sup>*URU.E<sub>2</sub>-ḥu-us-sa-an-ni* <sup>7</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> UGU ID<sub>2</sub>.pi-ti ina bi-rit GU<sub>2</sub>.DU<sub>8</sub>.A.KI* <sup>8</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> KIŠ.KI na-du 1-me ZU<sub>2</sub>.LUM.MA-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>9</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> 1-me ŠE.NUMUN-šu<sub>2</sub> mu-’u-un-ti ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL šu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>10</sup>*m.d.AG-di-ni-a-mur ki-i iš-šu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>11</sup>*a-na m.d.EN-BA-ša<sub>2</sub> it-ta-di-is-su* <sup>12</sup>*pi-ḥa-ti TIN.TIR.KI šu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>13</sup>*AD-šu<sub>2</sub> AD-AD-šu<sub>2</sub> ul i-kul* <sup>14</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> ul ina mi-šir-i-šu<sub>2</sub> šu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>15</sup>*a-du-u<sub>2</sub> mim-ma ša a-mu-ru* <sup>16</sup>*ra-na<sup>1</sup> [L]UGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia al-tap-ra* <sup>17</sup>*ra<sup>1</sup>LUGAL be<sup>1</sup>-li<sub>2</sub>-a ki-i ša<sub>2</sub> ra<sup>1</sup>-le-’u-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>18</sup>*li-pu-u[š]*

explanation (pre-complaint): rev. <sup>6-9</sup>. The town of Bīt-ḫussanni, on the bank of Pitu between Cutha and Kish – its (yield) of dates is 100 (kurrus) and its (yield) of grain is 100 (kurrus) – it is a sustenance field of the king.

complaint: rev. <sup>10-11</sup>. Nabû-dēnī-amur took it (and) gave to Bēl-iqīša.

argument: rev. <sup>12</sup>. It is in the province of Babylon.

argument: rev. <sup>13</sup>. (Neither) his father (nor) his grandfather had the use (of it).

argument: rev. <sup>14</sup>. And it is not within his borders.

closing summary: rev. <sup>15-16</sup>. Now, I have written to the [k]ing, my lord, everything that I have seen.

closing formula: rev. <sup>17-18</sup>. May the king, my lord, do what he can!

Despite the tone at the beginning of the letter, the sender does wish to secure a royal intervention. It is hard to say what was the primary issue at hand – did the sender realise that a denunciation discrediting the person he wished to complain about offers the perfect opportunity for a complaint?

It is perhaps worth comparing the argument against appropriating a town against the one made in SAA 18 59 (from a different sender, discussed under complaints). The present argument mentions the established customs (the father and the grandfather of the Gambulean leader), but also clear-cut facts such as the position of the town within the borders of the province of Babylon. In SAA 18 59, the argument depends on established facts as well (the borders of the city of Marad having been established anew after the changes made by the royal father – but this is still evidently considered tradition venerable enough to deserve a mention), but also on the relationships between the gods. The position of Lugal-Marada as the brother of Nabû and Nergal – together with the remark that the commandant of Marad used to bring audience gifts to the king – seems to form an argument for a degree of self-determination sufficient to protect the city against the greed of the leader of Bīt-Dakkūri.

SAA 16 152 (Reynolds 2003, 123–124) is a denunciation from the reign of Assurbanipal, but since only the passages mentioning the accusations are preserved, a closer analysis is unnecessary. The structure, as far as preserved, lists the name of the denounced person – the title of the denounced person – and their crimes (first person is denounced in rev. 2'.-rev. 1.; the second person in rev. 1.-9.; what follows is likely advice).

SAA 18 170<sup>221</sup> (Reynolds 2003, 139–140) is, as far as preserved, a clear-cut denunciation:

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<sup>221</sup> As evident from the term of address, this letter is not addressed to the king, but to a 'lord' (the restorations in obv. 4'. and rev. 12. are clearly correct, in rev. 9. there is also a second person singular enclitic pronoun). Reynolds 2003, 139–140 in note to rev. 10. remarks that the spelling *ma-la-a* for *mala* is otherwise attested only in letters to the vizier from the reign of Sargon II (SAA 17 20 and SAA 17 77). The possibility that this letter could also belong to the same group (and thus is earlier than the rest of the correspondence edited in SAA 18) cannot be discounted, even if the introductory formula is completely lost.

obv. <sup>3'</sup>[aš<sub>2</sub>]-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.ta-bal-a-a ša<sub>2</sub> ina BAD<sub>3</sub> <sup>4'</sup>[EN]-ia di-ni-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub> li-pu-uš <sup>5'</sup>[ki]-r<sup>1</sup> iš-r[i-q]u a-na KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR <sup>6'</sup>[a-n]a KA<sub>2</sub>.DINGIR it-ta-din <sup>7'</sup>IR<sub>3</sub>-ka ki-i iš-mu-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>8'</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.gu-ru-ma-a-a ša<sub>2</sub> it-ti-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub> <sup>9'</sup>a-na GIŠ.za-qi<sub>2</sub>-pa-nu il-tak-nu <sup>10'</sup>u<sub>3</sub> š<sub>u</sub>-u<sub>2</sub> ki-i iḫ-li-qu <sup>11'</sup>a-na KA<sub>2</sub>.DINGIR i-te-((bu))-ru-ub <sup>12'</sup>ša<sub>2</sub>-ni-ia-a' m.aš-šur-U-LAL

rev. <sup>1'</sup>a-na bi-rit ID<sub>2</sub> a-na ta-be<sub>2</sub>-e-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub> <sup>2'</sup>š<sub>u</sub>-u<sub>2</sub> ki-i ša<sub>2</sub> <iš>-mu-u<sub>2</sub> a-lik-ma <sup>3'</sup>ina pa-na-at m.aš-šur-U-LAL ul-ta-an-ḫi-iš <sup>4'</sup>aš-šur-U-LAL ki-i ša<sub>2</sub> iš-mu-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>5'</sup>man-di-is-su ki-i iš-pu-ra <sup>6'</sup>ul ik-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub>-us-su a-di-i E<sub>2</sub> <sup>7'</sup>m.aš-šur-U-LAL i-mu-tu a-na LU<sub>2</sub>.gu-ru-ma <sup>8'</sup>[u]l i-ru-ba u<sub>3</sub> en-na <sup>9'</sup>[k]a-la-a E<sub>2</sub> IR<sub>3</sub>-i-ka iḫ-te-pe-e-ma <sup>10'</sup>[x] ma-la-a ZI.MEŠ li-šim-ma <sup>11'</sup>[ši]t-tu-tu liš-mu-u<sub>2</sub> li-ig-ru-ru <sup>12'</sup>[EN]-r<sup>1</sup> a<sup>2</sup> i-di ki-i x [x] KIN š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub>-nu <sup>13'</sup>[i]-zi-ir-ti ina E<sub>2</sub>-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub>-nu šak-na-tu

request (with introduction of a topic):

obv. <sup>3'.4'</sup>[A]s to the Tabalean at the city wall, may my [lord] decide his case.

accusation: obv. <sup>5'.7'</sup>[When] he stole (property), he sold it to Babylon for silver.

follow-up: obv. <sup>7'.9'</sup>When your servant heard (about it), he impaled the Gurumians who were with him.

accusation: obv. <sup>10'.11'</sup>But he ran away (and) entered Babylon.

accusation (also serving as an explanation):

obv. <sup>12'</sup>rev. <sup>6'</sup>Another time, as Aššūr-bēlu-taqqin was invading the (region) enclosed by the river – when he heard (about it), he went and prepared a fight before Aššūr-bēlu-taqqin. When Aššūr-bēlu-taqqin heard (about it), he sent a report about him, (but) did not catch him.

explanation (pre-complaint):

rev. <sup>6'-8'</sup>Until Aššūr-bēlu-taqqin died, he did [n]ot enter the Gurumu (territory).

complaint: rev. <sup>8'-9'</sup>And now, the [en]tire house of your servant is destroyed.

request (with an argument from giving example):

rev. <sup>10'-11'</sup>May (my lord) remove whatever lives (are there), (and) may [the r]est hear of it and be afraid!

pseudo-reminder:

rev. <sup>12'</sup>My [lord] knows that they are [...]

argument (?): rev. <sup>13'</sup>There is a [c]urse in their house.

The sender (whose name is completely broken) does not seem a completely disinterested party, but he argues his case above all by denouncing his adversary as a criminal and a person acting against the

Assyrian interests in the region<sup>222</sup>. The first argument he uses in the request after his complaint also is in line with denunciations: a punishment is deemed necessary to make the others fearful and obedient. The last legible passage mentions a curse in ‘their’ house, while the rest of the letter is too broken to make any sense of it.

SAA 18 183 (Reynolds 2003, 151–152) was likely also a denunciation, although an important part of it is missing. The sender, Aplāia, reports that he is sending the sons Bēl-iddina, ‘adversary and troublemaker’ (obv. <sup>4</sup>(...) DUMU.MEŠ EN-da-ba-ba <sup>5</sup>[DU]MU.MEŠ *mu-šam-ḫi-šu*) who claimed that they are deserters. In fact, however:

obv. <sup>7</sup>(...) *ma-a’-diš lu-mun-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>8</sup>[in]a *pa-an* LUGAL EN-ia *ma-a-da*

accusation: obv. <sup>7-8</sup>Their misdeeds [a]gainst the king, my lord, are numerous indeed.

The following passage surely included the first more concrete accusation, but it is too fragmentary. In the obverse, when the letter is legible again, the sender argues for his trustworthiness:

rev. <sup>1</sup>[E]N-‘MUN<sup>1</sup>.HI.A *‘a-na-ku ul-tu d.GIŠ.NU<sub>11</sub>-MU-GI.NA a-na* <sup>2</sup>‘URU.kar-d.U.GUR *a-na* UGU *ma-dak-tu<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>2</sub>* LUGAL EN-ia *u<sub>2</sub>-ša-a* <sup>3</sup>‘a-na-ku *ina* U<sub>4</sub>-me-šu<sub>2</sub> *ina* ‘ma<sup>1</sup>-dak-tu<sub>2</sub> *ša<sub>2</sub>* LUGAL *m.d.za-ba<sub>4</sub>-ba<sub>4</sub>-eri-ba it-ti* <sup>4</sup>‘d.GIŠ.NU<sub>11</sub>-MU-GI.NA *ki-i u<sub>2</sub>-ša-a m.re-man-ni-DINGIR LU<sub>2</sub>.mu-šar-ki-su* <sup>5</sup>‘id-duk *u<sub>3</sub>* TUG<sub>2</sub>.HI.A.MEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub> *it-ta-šu<sub>2</sub> u<sub>3</sub> ul-(eras.)tu* <sup>6</sup>‘it-ba-am-ma *ul-tu TIN.TIR.KI (eras.) in-qu-tu* <sup>7</sup>‘ina *ma-dak-tu<sub>2</sub> i-qab-bu um-ma* TUG<sub>2</sub>.SAGŠU *ša<sub>2</sub> i-na* SAG.DU-ia<sub>2</sub> <sup>8</sup>‘ša<sub>2</sub>-ak-nu *ša<sub>2</sub> m.re-man-ni-DINGIR LU<sub>2</sub>.mu-šar-ki-su šu-u<sub>2</sub>* TUG<sub>2</sub>.SAGŠU <sup>9</sup>‘ša<sub>2</sub> *ina* SAG.DU-šu<sub>2</sub> *šak-nu-ma a-na pa-an* LUGAL EN-ia *il-li-ku ša<sub>2</sub> m.re-man-ni-DINGIR* <sup>10</sup>‘LU<sub>2</sub>.mu-šar-ki-su *šu-u<sub>2</sub> ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ a-gan-nu-tu ul EN.MEŠ-MUN* <sup>11</sup>‘šu-u<sub>2</sub>-nu EN.MEŠ-da-ba-ba *šu-u<sub>2</sub>-nu ki-i i-na dib-bi* <sup>re12</sup>‘an-nu-tu *šal-mu la šal-mu a-na* LUGA[L E]N-[i]a *aš<sub>2</sub>-pu-ru* <sup>re13</sup>‘a-na UGU-ḫi *lu-mut* LUGAL *a-na IR<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub> liš-pu-ram-ma* <sup>re14</sup>‘KASKAL.2 *ina bi-rit* TIN.TIR.KI ‘u<sup>1</sup> BAR<sub>2</sub>.SIPA.KI *lip-ru-su*

assertion of loyalty (with mention of meritorious service):

rev. <sup>1’-3’</sup>I am [a f]riend. When Šamaš-šumu-ukīn set out for Kār-Nergal against the camp of the king – on this day, I was in the camp of the king.

denunciation: rev. <sup>3’-8’</sup>Zabāba-erība, when he left with Šamaš-šumu-ukīn, he killed Rēmanni-ilu, the recruitment officer, and took his head-covering. And after he had departed and deserted from Babylon, he was saying in the camp: ‘The head-covering which is on my head, it belonged to Rēmanni-ilu, the recruitment officer!’.

<sup>222</sup> If Reynolds’ suggestion is to be followed, the Aššūr-bēlu-taqqin mentioned in the letter would be the (likely) governor of an area near the Babylonian frontier (Whiting 1998, no. 7).

confirmation: rev. <sup>8'-10'</sup> The head-covering from his head, which went to the king, was (indeed that) of Rēmāni-ilu, the recruitment officer.

accusatory summary:

rev. <sup>10'-11'</sup> These men are not friends! They are adversaries!

declaration of trustworthiness (as a challenge):

rev. <sup>11'-re13'</sup> If I have written untrue words to the kin[g, m]y [lo]rd, may I die for it!

request: rev. <sup>re13'-re14'</sup> May the king write to his servant that they should cut off the road between Babylon and Borsippa.

This is apparently a denunciation in which the sender only wishes to ensure the cooperation of the king in suppressing his own enemies. No royal assistance is required to capture them, as the sender already took care of that. Now he is only recounting their crimes and emphasising that the king should not take them for friends or allies.

The differences between the Babylonian and Assyrian letters, as evident from the attestations in both sections above, are due to the different political situation of the senders and their different position with regards to the king. It is nigh impossible to tell what the differences between the realisations of the speech actions of complaining and denouncing in these two dialects might be.

### Early Neo-Babylonian governor's archive from Nippur

No. 2 (Cole 1996b, 40–42) is a letter exchanged between two 'brothers'. The overall structure of the complaint is not much different than in numerous complaints in the Babylonian letters from the Assyrian royal archives:

obv. <sup>21</sup>(...) 1-en-šu<sub>2</sub> 2-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>be22</sup>la kit-ta-a <sup>be23</sup>aḥ-tar-ša-a

rev. <sup>1</sup>en-na a-šap-pa-rak-kam<sub>2</sub>-ma <sup>2</sup>ul <sup>1</sup>ta<sup>1</sup>-qi<sub>2</sub>-pan-ni <sup>3</sup>ina maḥ-<sup>1</sup>ri<sup>1</sup>-i L[U<sub>2</sub>].sar-ru-ti-<sup>1</sup>ia<sub>3</sub> <sup>4</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>-tu<sub>2</sub>-<sup>1</sup>ka<sup>1</sup> ki-i u<sub>2</sub>-šab-bit <sup>5</sup>1-en 5 KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR ta-an-da-ḥar-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu-tu <sup>6</sup>ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi an-<sup>1</sup>ni<sup>1</sup>-i MUN.HI.A-a <sup>7</sup>ḥu-su-u[s] am-me-ni LU<sub>2</sub>.ḥal-qu <sup>8</sup>tu-tir-ram-ma a-na LU<sub>2</sub>.be-li<sub>2</sub> KUR<sub>2</sub>-ia <sup>9</sup>ta-nam-<sup>1</sup>din<sup>1</sup> ki-i mim-ma <sup>10</sup>te-ri-<sup>1</sup>ša<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-an-ni šup-ram-ma <sup>11</sup>lu-še-bi-lak-ka

declaration of fair conduct:

obv. <sup>21-be23</sup> Have I (even) once (or) twice made an unjustified withdrawal?

reproach: rev. <sup>1-2</sup> Now I have written to you because you did not trust me.

reminder: rev. <sup>3-5</sup> Previously, when I captured my abductors of your slaves, you received them for (ony) five (shekels) of silver each!

explicit reminder (and a demand of reciprocity):

rev. <sup>6-7</sup>Rememb[er] this favour of mine!

complaint (as a reproach):

rev. <sup>7-9</sup>Why did you take away my runaway and (why) are you giving him to my enemy?

promise: rev. <sup>9-11</sup>If you wish for anything from me, write me, and I will send it to you.

Although the context of the letter is missing, both moves preceding the reminder are likely related to the complaint about giving the runaways of the sender to his enemy. The sender emphasises that he has always been fair in his dealings with his ‘brother’, reminds him the favour he owes him, complains about the runaways, and finally promises the addressee to reciprocate should the addressee react positively to his unstated request. But it is nothing unusual for the request not to be stated explicitly, especially for two ‘brothers’ who must have been in contact with each other constantly.

Quite similar is another exchange between ‘brothers’, No. 11 (Cole 1996b, 58–59):

obv. <sup>4</sup>*a-di* UGU-*hi* *mi-ni-i* <sup>5</sup>*ki-i* *al-ta-nap-pa-rak-kam<sub>2</sub>-ma* <sup>6</sup>*la* *ta-šem-ma-nu* <sup>7</sup>*ki-i* *taš-pur* <sup>8</sup>*um-ma*  
*m.ḥa-ir-a-nu* <sup>9</sup>*lu-u<sub>2</sub>* *ša-bit* <sup>10</sup>*rSAG<sup>1</sup>-ka a-na ŠA<sub>3</sub>-rbi-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>11</sup>*la ta-nam-du*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*a-mat-ka* *ki-i* *aš-šu-ru<sup>1</sup>* <sup>2</sup>*a-na-aš-šar-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>3</sup>*a-di* 10 ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ *it-ti-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>4</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-šaḥ-li-qu* <sup>5</sup>*a-na*  
UGU-*hi-ka* <sup>6</sup>*ki-i* *at-ta-ki-la* <sup>7</sup>*hi-bil-ta* <sup>8</sup>*taḥ-te-bi-la-an-ni*

reproach: obv. <sup>4-6</sup>Why do you keep not listening to me when I have written to you?

rebuke: obv. <sup>7-11</sup>Since you wrote as follows: ‘May Ḫairānu be captured!’, do not ignore him (?)<sup>223</sup>!

promise (?): rev. <sup>1-2</sup>I will keep your word as I kept it (before).

complaint: rev. <sup>3-8</sup>Until he made ten men escape, you were (still) doing me wrong – even though I trusted you!

The letter ends with this complaint, and if anything in the sequence can be considered a request, it could only be the move in which the sender rebukes his brother not to ignore Ḫairānu. In this letter, again, the sender appeals to the relationship he has with his ‘brother’ whose word he always kept: the expectation of reciprocity needs not be stated explicitly.

No. 10 (Cole 1996b, 56–57), another letter between ‘brothers’, includes a complaint based on an unfulfilled promise (discussed in chapter on promises). It is followed by an explicit request.

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<sup>223</sup> In the note to lines 10.-11., Cole notes that the translation is based on context (1996b, 59).



The situation is a bit more complex in No. 18 (Cole 1996b, 72–73):

obv. <sup>4</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.gu-du-du ša<sub>2</sub> E<sub>2</sub>.m.ia-a-ki-nu <sup>5</sup>ki-i il-lik-u<sub>2</sub>-nu <sup>6</sup>4 ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ 5 ANŠE.MEŠ <sup>7</sup>iḥ-tab-tu  
ni-i-nu <sup>8</sup>a-na ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi LU<sub>2</sub>.a-ram <sup>9</sup>ni-šap-par ar<sub>2</sub>-ki-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>10</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.UNUG.KI-a-a ki-i <sup>11</sup>il-lik-u<sub>2</sub>-nu  
um-ma <sup>12</sup>ḥu-bu-ut-ku-nu ša<sub>2</sub> ḥab-tu <sup>13</sup>a-du-u<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.si-lul-lu <sup>14</sup>ina UNUG.KI i-pa-aš<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub>-ru<sup>1</sup>  
<sup>15</sup>a-du-u<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.EN.LIL<sub>2</sub>.KI.‘MEŠ<sup>1</sup> <sup>16</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> ŠEŠ.MEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu DUMU.‘MEŠ<sup>1</sup> <sup>17</sup>ḥab-tu il-tap-rak-  
[ka]

rev. <sup>1</sup>‘LU<sub>2</sub>.DUMU‘-KIN-ka lil-l[ik-ma] <sup>2</sup>ru<sup>1</sup>-tu x (x) x [(x)] <sup>3</sup>‘UNUG‘.KI x x (x) [(x)] <sup>4</sup>ru<sub>3</sub><sup>1</sup> ig-de-  
ru-u<sub>2</sub>-k[a] <sup>5</sup>šup-ram-ma ra-ma-na-ru<sup>1</sup> <sup>6</sup>ni-iš-šur at-ta <sup>7</sup>u<sub>3</sub> šu<sub>2</sub>-u<sub>2</sub> it-ti a-ḥa-ru<sup>1</sup>meš<sup>1</sup> <sup>8</sup>sa-al-ma-tu-  
nu <sup>9</sup>u<sub>3</sub> at-ru<sup>1</sup>-nu <sup>10</sup>ḥu<sup>1</sup>-ub-t[a]-ni <sup>11</sup>i-ḥab-bat

complaint: obv. <sup>4-7</sup>The band of Bīt-Iakīn, when they came, plundered 4 men (and) 5 donkeys.

follow-up: obv. <sup>7-14</sup>We were about to write to the Arameans about it, (but) later the Urukians came  
saying: ‘The things that were stolen from you – now the peddlers in Uruk are selling it.’

pre-request: obv. <sup>15-17</sup>Now the Nippurians – whose brothers were plundered – have written to you!

request: rev. <sup>1-3</sup>(?)Let your messenger come [and ...] Uruk [...].

request (alternative?):

rev. <sup>4-6</sup>And (if) they have turned hostile toward yo[u], write to us so that we may guard  
ourselves.

argument (from interpersonal relationship):

rev. <sup>6-11</sup>You and he – you are at peace with each other. And (yet) he is making capti[v]es  
of our people!

The letter is exchanged between brothers. Within the complaint, the sender (representing a group of Nippurians – see obv. 15.-17., the first-person plural forms in obv. 7., 9., and rev. 6., as well as the second person plural form in obv. 12.) explains how new information influenced his course of action, and finally progresses to make his request, which is too broken to allow an interpretation. An additional request for information that might serve as a warning is made afterwards. Finally, the Nippurians conclude with a rebuke based on an argument from reciprocity of friendly relations. This is another such case in this corpus.

No. 6 (Cole 1996b, 48–49), on the other hand, is quite similar to the complaints made sent in petitions to the king. The language used by the unknown sender to his ‘lord’ is, of course, far less sophisticated:

obv. <sup>4</sup>ul be-li<sub>2</sub> a-de-e <sup>5</sup>ru<sup>1</sup>-ti m.DU-NUMUN <sup>6</sup>ru<sub>3</sub> LU<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>.ru-bu-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>7</sup>iš-bat um-ma ru<sup>1</sup>man-nu<sup>1</sup> <sup>8</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> [u]l-  
tu EN.LIL<sub>2</sub>.KI <sup>9</sup>ru<sub>3</sub><sup>1</sup> LU<sub>2</sub>.ru-bu-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>10</sup>ru<sup>1</sup>-li-kam<sub>2</sub>-ma <sup>11</sup>ru<sub>3</sub> UDU.MEŠ<sup>1</sup> GU<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ<sup>1</sup> <sup>be12</sup>[u<sub>3</sub><sup>?</sup>  
LU<sub>2</sub><sup>?</sup>.MEŠ<sup>?</sup>]

rev. <sup>1</sup>[i<sup>2</sup>-tab<sup>2</sup>]-<sup>2</sup>ka<sup>2</sup>-ma<sup>2</sup> a<sup>21</sup>-n[a] <sup>3</sup>KU<sup>3</sup>. [BABBAR] <sup>4</sup>it<sup>2</sup>-tan<sup>2</sup>-na<sup>21</sup>-šu<sup>2</sup>-nu-[ti] <sup>5</sup>la-IGI<sup>2</sup> E<sup>2</sup>-AD-šu<sup>2</sup> bi-lat <sup>6</sup>in<sup>2</sup>-na<sup>21</sup>-[š]i<sup>2</sup>-ma<sup>21</sup> en-na<sup>2</sup> <sup>7</sup>DUMU m.šak-nu DUMU m.ḥa-la<sup>1</sup>-pi <sup>8</sup>m.[ia]-da-a<sup>1</sup>-DINGIR <sup>9</sup>a-na<sup>1</sup> EN.LIL<sup>2</sup>.KI<sup>1</sup> i-tab-ka <sup>10</sup>be-li<sup>2</sup> liq-ba-aš<sup>2</sup>-šum<sup>2</sup>-ma <sup>11</sup>LU<sup>2</sup>.qal-la lu-tir-r[a] <sup>12</sup>DUMU m.šak-ni <sup>13</sup>DUMU m.ḥa-la-pi <sup>14</sup>šu-u<sup>2</sup>

argument (from a treaty):

obv. <sup>4</sup>-rev. <sup>4</sup>Did my lord not conclude a treaty with Mukīn-zēri (and) the Rubu<sup>1</sup>, saying: ‘Whoever comes [f]rom Nippur and the Rubu<sup>1</sup> tribe and carries off (?) sheep, oxen [or people (?)] and sells (?) them fo[r] silver – tribute<sup>224</sup> will be carried away from the house of his father.’?

complaint: rev. <sup>4</sup>-<sup>7</sup>Now, the son of Šaknu, the son of Ḥalapi has carried [Ia]da<sup>1</sup>-il off to Nippur.

request: rev. <sup>8</sup>-<sup>9</sup>May my lord tell him to return the slave.

reminder: rev. <sup>10</sup>-<sup>12</sup>He is the son of Šaknu, the son of Ḥalapu.

Not unlike in the petition to the Assyrian king attested in SAA 18 181 (discussed above), the sender explicitly names the violated rule before making his complaint. The request, also like in SAA 18 181, is explicit and concrete. Perhaps a common tradition of writing petitions was an underlying pattern in both cases – although the writer of SAA 18 181, whether the sender himself or the scribe, could develop it in a much more sophisticated manner.

A different pattern of complaint-petition to one’s lord is attested in No. 16 (Cole 1996b, 67–69):

obv. <sup>4</sup>[m.d].MAŠ-DU<sup>3</sup>-uš LU<sup>2</sup>.ENGAR-a <sup>5</sup>[GI]Š.APIN-a ki-i u<sup>2</sup>-maš-šir<sup>3</sup> <sup>6</sup>[ki]-i iḥ-li-qi<sup>2</sup> a-du-u<sup>2</sup> <sup>7</sup>ina E<sup>2</sup> m.d.AG-APIN-eš <sup>8</sup>LU<sup>2</sup>.IGI.GUB a-kan-na-ka <sup>9</sup>šu-u<sup>2</sup> be-li<sup>2</sup> liš-pu-raš-ši <sup>10</sup>u<sup>3</sup> ki-i pa-ni be-li<sup>2</sup>-ia <sup>11</sup>ma-ḥir um-ma lu-uk-li-ši <sup>12</sup>šup-ram-ma m.d.UTU-APIN-eš <sup>13</sup>a-kan-ni <sup>14</sup>lu<sup>1</sup>-bu-uk

complaint: obv. <sup>4</sup>-<sup>6</sup>As Ninurta-ēpuš, my farmer, abandoned [th]e plough, (and) after he ran away

—

report: obv. <sup>6</sup>-<sup>9</sup>he is now here, in the household of Nabû-ēreš, the courtier.

request: obv. <sup>9</sup>May my lord send him to me.

alternative request: obv. <sup>10</sup>-<sup>13</sup>Or, if it pleases my lord (and he says): ‘Let me keep him!’, write to me so that I may bring Šamaš-ēreš here.

The complaint serves as little more than an explanation for the request (both clauses of the complaint are grammatically subordinate). The alternative request includes the formula typical for suggestions – *kī pāni bēlā maḥir*. One almost has the impression that the sender would prefer the second alternative.

<sup>224</sup> See Cole 1996b, 159, commentary to lines 6, 13, and 28 for the different orthographic representation of different meanings of the word *biltu* attested in this archive (when spelled syllabically, *biltu* means ‘tribute’).

The switch between precative in ‘may my lord send him to me’ (obv. 9.) and the simple imperative form in the suggestion made by the sender is a bit difficult to explain.

No. 21 (Cole 1996b, 78–79) includes a different kind of a complaint made before a ‘lord’:

rev. <sup>1.1/3</sup> GIN<sub>2</sub> KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR *a-na* <sup>2</sup>UGU m.ZALAG<sub>2</sub>-*a-ni* <sup>3</sup>*be-li<sub>2</sub>* *ip-ru-su* <sup>4.1/2</sup> MA.NA GIN<sub>2</sub>  
KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR <sup>5</sup>*ul-tal-lim* <sup>6</sup>*en-na me-nam-ma* <sup>7</sup>m.SUM.NA-ŠEŠ <sup>8</sup>*um-ma-a* 10 GIN<sub>2</sub>  
KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR <sup>9</sup>*šup-ra<sup>1</sup>-a* <sup>10</sup>*di-ni ša<sub>2</sub>* *be-li<sub>2</sub>* DU<sub>3</sub>-uš <sup>11</sup>*me-nam-ma kal-an-nu*

reminder: rev. <sup>1.-5.</sup>My lord decided (the payment) of 30 shekels against Nūrāni. He (then) paid the half a mina (= 30 shekels) of silver in full.

reproach: rev. <sup>6.-9.</sup>Why (is) now Nādin-ahi (saying) as follows: ‘Send me ten shekels of silver!’

reproach: rev. <sup>10.-11.</sup>The verdict that my lord gave – why is he withholding it from me?

Apart from the reminder referring to an already decided case, the sender frames his entire complaint as a series of reproachful questions. On the other hand, the reminder about the already finalised case resembles the other complaints to lords, in which the basis for the complaint is made clear in the first move.

Some complaints in this corpus are realised as simple reproaches, without any additional moves. A typical example is attested in No. 64 (Cole 1996b, 147–149), a letter exchanged between brothers:

rev. <sup>3</sup>*am-me-ni* LU<sub>2</sub>.A-KIN <sup>4</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub>* ŠEŠ-*ia<sub>2</sub>* *i-tal-kan-ni*

reproach: rev. <sup>3.-4.</sup>Why did the messenger of my brother go away?

A reproach in a more complicated sequence is attested in No. 89 (Cole 1996b, 186–187):

obv. <sup>5</sup>*ul ki-i pi-i an-ni-i* <sup>6</sup>*a-na* ŠEŠ-*ia* *aq-bi* <sup>7</sup>*um-ma* LU<sub>2</sub>.TUR.MEŠ *dul-lu* <sup>8</sup>*ina pa-ni-ka li-pu-uš*  
<sup>9</sup>*u<sub>3</sub>* *mim-mu-u<sub>2</sub>* LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub>-E<sub>2</sub>.GAL.†MEŠ<sup>1</sup> <sup>10</sup>*ir-ri-†šu<sup>1</sup>-u<sub>2</sub>-ka in-na-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu-ti* <sup>11</sup>*am-me-ni ul-tu*  
*a-na* KUR LU<sub>2</sub>.*kal-da* <sup>12</sup>*al-li-ka a-di-kan-na dul-lu* <sup>13</sup>*ul ta-mur u<sub>3</sub>* *mam-ma ina pa-an*  
<sup>14</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub>-E<sub>2</sub>.GAL.MEŠ *ia-a<sup>1</sup>-nu-um-†ma<sup>1</sup>* <sup>15</sup>GIŠ.†UR<sub>3</sub><sup>1</sup>.MEŠ *giš-tal-li* <sup>16</sup>GIŠ.SAG.KUL  
BABBAR GIŠ.*ši-i-pi* <sup>17</sup>*u<sub>3</sub>* GIŠ.UMBIN *ul i-nam-din-aš<sub>2</sub>-†šu<sup>1</sup><sub>2</sub>* <sup>18</sup>*dul-lu-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu muš-šur* <sup>19</sup>*it-ti-bi*  
*be-li<sub>2</sub>-a-ni* <sup>20</sup>*ki-i il-li-ka* <sup>21</sup>*mi-na-a ni-qab-bi* <sup>22</sup>*en-na ki-i na-kut-ti* <sup>23</sup>*aš<sub>2</sub>-pu-rak-ka U<sub>4</sub>-mu ṭup-pi*  
*ta-mur* <sup>24</sup>*nu-bat-ta la ta-ba-a-ti* <sup>25</sup>*a-lik-ma* E<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ *ina pa-ni-ka* <sup>26</sup>*lu-u<sub>2</sub>-ša-lil*

reminder: obv. <sup>5.-10.</sup>Did I not tell my brother as follows: ‘May the servants work under your supervision and whatever the builders request of you, give (it) to them.’

reproach: obv. <sup>11.-13.</sup>Why have you not seen to the work since I came to Chaldea until now?

complaint: obv. <sup>14.-17.</sup>And (as long) as there is nobody supervising the builders, no one gives them beams, rungs, white bolts, rafters and a wagon.

complaint: obv. <sup>18</sup>Their work is abandoned.

argument (with a warning):

obv. <sup>19-21</sup>He has set off – what will our lord say when he arrives?

expression of urgency:

obv. <sup>22-23</sup>Now, I am writing to you with great urgency.

request: obv. <sup>23-25</sup>When you see this tablet, do not tarry! Come!

warning (or a promise?):

obv. <sup>25-26</sup>Let me roof the buildings before you!<sup>225</sup>

The sender complains to his brother about him not doing the work that the sender requested him to do. The request is introduced at the very beginning as a reminder, followed by the account of the results of the addressee's neglect. The addressee is indirectly warned with the consequences of his inaction – what will 'our lord' say when he arrives? In the final sequence the sender emphasises the urgency of his message and explicitly requests the addressee to come.

This would appear to be a completely unremarkable letter – if perhaps phrased a bit differently than the other complaints exchanged between brothers. However, the entire reverse of the tablet with this letter is filled with a school exercise with measures of volume (from one *sūtu* to one *kurru*). Does it mean that the letter is also a school exercise? Some obvious school tablets are attested in this archive, so a school tablet would not be completely out of place. As far as one can tell from Cole's copy of the tablet, the signs are rather expertly written, especially in comparison with other tablets from this archive. There is nothing in the contents of the letter itself that would be indicative either way. Nonetheless, it is striking that the lines 15.-17. list so many words beginning with the sign GIŠ, almost like cited from a thematic list, although this sequence does not seem to be attested in any preserved tablet of ur<sub>5</sub> -ra = *hubullu*. The pacing of this letter might also be different than the in the others from this corpus: a relatively long passage is entirely devoted to a single topic.

No. 92 (Cole 1996b, 190–192) includes a short complaint-like question, although its context seems rather obscure. In the preceding move the sender refers to a denial (?) made by the addressee before the prefect:

rev. <sup>15</sup>(...) *ša<sub>2</sub> a-na* <sup>16</sup>*šak-ni-ka um-ma* <sup>17</sup>*ul ħe-ra-ka ħa-ru* <sup>18</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> be-li<sub>2</sub>-i-nu u-ħa-ša<sub>2</sub>-h[u]* <sup>re19</sup>*ra-bu-*  
*u<sub>2</sub>-tu šu<sub>2</sub>-[nu]* <sup>re20</sup>*ina UGU-ħi-i-[nu]*

complaint (with an introduction):

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<sup>225</sup> Cole translates 'Or I will have to roof the buildings in front of you'.

rev. <sup>15.-re20</sup>. As to what (you said) to your prefect: ‘I am not a digger!’ – the diggers of our lord [are] causing a deprivation. Are the[y] greater than [us]?

The unfair treatment is alluded to by comparing the relative social position of the sender and the addressee with that of the diggers.

No. 100 (Cole 1996b, 208–209) is a complaint against a third party, although the tone is not very accusatory:

obv. <sup>4</sup>.ŠE.BAR <sup>5</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> taq-bu-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>5</sup>um-ma a-lik-ma* m.GAR-MU <sup>6</sup>*lid-dak-ka ki-i aq-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>7</sup>um-ma*  
*mim-ma a-na <sup>1</sup>ka<sup>1</sup>-a-ša<sub>2</sub> <sup>8</sup>ul a-nam-dak-ka <sup>9</sup>a-di šu<sub>2</sub>-u<sub>2</sub> i-šap-pa-ram-ma <sup>10</sup>i-na-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>-u<sub>2</sub>-ma*  
*<sup>11</sup>3-šu<sub>2</sub> a-na pa-ni-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>13</sup>ki-i al-lik <sup>be14</sup>iš-pu<sup>1</sup>-ra*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*um-ma i-na mah<sup>1</sup>-ri-i <sup>2</sup>ša<sub>2</sub>-la-nu-uš-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>3</sup>a-na* m.AD-DINGIR-a <sup>4</sup>*ki-i ad-din <sup>5</sup>lib-ba-ti-ia <sup>6</sup>in-*  
*da-al ki-i at-ta <sup>7</sup>tal-lak pa-ni-ka <sup>8</sup>lud-gul u ia-a-nu-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>9</sup>šup-<sup>1</sup>ram<sup>1</sup>-ma lul-lik*

reminder (with a promise):

obv. <sup>4.-6</sup>. The grain about which you said: ‘Go! May Šākin-šumi give (it) to you!’ –

complaint (with a quoted rejection of a request):

obv. <sup>6.-10</sup>. when I told him (about it), he (said to me) as follows: ‘I will not give anything to you until he writes a letter and brings (it)!’.

follow-up (own attempt to solve the issue and an excuse used as a rejection):

obv. <sup>11</sup>.-rev. <sup>6</sup>. When I went to him for the third time, he wrote to me: ‘Previously, when I gave (grain?) to Abu-ilā’ī without his permission, he was furious with me!’.

request (with an alternative):

rev. <sup>6.-9</sup>. If you go, I will wait for you. And if not, write to me so that I may come.

It seems that the rejection of the request on the basis of lack of authority was persuasive to the sender – he does not seem to be blaming Šākin-šumi beyond reporting on the events. There is no emphasis on taking care of the matter in the manner preferred by the sender – indeed, he seems to have no preference at all: either he or the addressee can come, as long as the grain is correctly transferred in the end.

No. 104 (Cole 1996b, 214–215) is a complaint about lack of communication:

obv. <sup>4</sup>.<sup>1</sup>am<sup>1</sup>-me-<sup>1</sup>ni<sup>1</sup> ul-<sup>1</sup>tu<sup>1</sup> <sup>5</sup>a-na LU<sub>2</sub>.E<sub>2</sub>.a-<sup>1</sup>ram<sup>1</sup> <sup>6</sup>tal-<sup>1</sup>lik<sup>1</sup> <sup>7</sup>te<sub>3</sub>-en-<sup>1</sup>ga<sup>1</sup> <sup>7</sup>u<sub>3</sub> šu-lum-<sup>1</sup>ga<sup>1</sup> <sup>8</sup>.<sup>1</sup>la<sup>1</sup> a-šem-<sup>1</sup>mu<sup>1</sup> <sup>9</sup>na-kut-ti ar<sub>2</sub>-<sup>1</sup>šik<sub>2</sub>-ku<sup>1</sup>

reproach: obv. <sup>4.-8</sup>. Why do I not hear your reports and your greeting since you went to Bīt-Aram?

complaint: obv. <sup>9</sup>. I’m worried (about you)!

The complaint about being worried at the same time likely served to maintain the relationship: after all, it can be a good feeling to know that one's 'brother' worries about one.

No. 72 (Cole 1996b, 158–160) is a complaint to a lord with a more emotional tone than the other attested in this part of the corpus:

obv. <sup>6</sup>GU<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ<sup>1</sup> *ki-<sup>r</sup>i aḥ<sup>1</sup>-t[ir]* <sup>7</sup>be-li<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> *ki-i* <sup>1</sup>u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-ša<sub>2</sub>-a[š<sup>?</sup>-bit] <sup>8</sup>um-ma a-du-u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> [KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR]  
<sup>9</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-še-bi-la-a[k-ka] <sup>10</sup>mim-ma be-li<sub>2</sub> ul [u<sub>2</sub>-še-bi-li] <sup>11</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.<sup>r</sup>A-šip-ri<sup>1</sup>-ka <sup>1</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-ba<sup>1</sup>-[<sup>1</sup>a] <sup>12</sup>hi-iš-bi  
<sup>r</sup>ŠA<sub>3</sub><sup>1</sup> ḥa-ma-ti <sup>13</sup>a-na-[ku] <sup>2</sup>GU<sub>2</sub>.ME <sup>r</sup>SIG<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-[ia<sub>2</sub>] <sup>be14</sup>šu<sup>?</sup>!-[uš<sup>?</sup>-b]u-[ta<sup>?</sup>-ku<sup>?</sup>]

rev. <sup>1</sup>m.S[U-d.AMAR.U]TU DUMU <sup>2</sup>m.MU-Š[EŠ ana] man-de-<sup>r</sup>si<sup>1</sup> <sup>3</sup>ki-i aš<sub>2</sub>-<sup>r</sup>pur<sup>1</sup> m.x-x-x <sup>4</sup>ip-ti-  
<sup>r</sup>si<sup>1</sup>-[š<sub>u</sub><sup>2</sup>-ma i-na] <sup>4</sup>URU.ḥi-in-da-[a-nu] <sup>5</sup>id-di-nu-š<sub>u</sub><sup>2</sup>

complaint: obv. <sup>6</sup>.-<sup>be14</sup>When I prepa[red] the loads, my lord se[ized(?)] (them), saying: ‘Now I have sent y[ou silver(?)]!’. (But) my lord has not [sent me] anything. I se[ek] your messenger, (but) it is like (seeking) abundance in an arid wasteland<sup>226</sup>. I have been d[ep]r[ived(?)] of [my] two loads of wool.

follow-up (failed attempt to resolve the issue on one's own):

rev. <sup>1</sup>.-<sup>5</sup>When I sent E[rība-Mard]uk, son of Nādin-a[ḥi, for] information, [PN] hid [him] and (then) they sold him in the town of Ḥindanu.

The sender then informs that he was forced to ransom Nādin-aḥi on his own and proceeds to a request, although only the first part is preserved:

rev. <sup>10</sup>(...) a-na] <sup>11</sup>LU<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>.DAM.<sup>r</sup>GAR<sub>3</sub><sup>1</sup>-ra SIG<sub>2</sub>-i[a u] <sup>12</sup>a-<sup>r</sup>na m.SUM.NA<sup>1</sup>-ŠEŠ <sup>r</sup>be-li<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> <sup>13</sup>liq-bi<sup>1</sup>-  
ma

request: rev. <sup>11</sup>.-<sup>13</sup>May my lord speak [to] the merchant (about) m[y] wool [and] to Nādin-aḥi.

More specific instructions for the lord must have followed in the next passage, but the rest of the letter is too broken to allow an analysis.

No. 85 (Cole 1996b, 181–182) includes a complaint about the lack of communication:

rev. <sup>1</sup>en-na EME-š<sub>u</sub><sup>2</sup> mit-tu <sup>r</sup>am<sup>?</sup>-me<sup>?</sup>-ni<sup>?</sup> <sup>2</sup>i-na GI[R<sub>2</sub>.A]N.BAR ta-ku-<sup>r</sup>us-si<sup>1</sup> <sup>3</sup>u<sub>3</sub> ina <sup>r</sup>za-qap<sup>1</sup> tan-  
ki-si <sup>4</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.DUMU-KIN-<sup>r</sup>ka<sup>1</sup> ul am-mar <sup>5</sup>u<sub>3</sub> <sup>r</sup>šu<sup>1</sup>-lum-<sup>r</sup>gu<sup>1</sup> ul ta-<sup>r</sup>šap-par<sup>1</sup> <sup>6</sup>ḥa-an-ṭiš šu-<sup>r</sup>lum-gu  
mus-si<sup>1</sup>-ma <sup>7</sup>šup-ra m.d.AG-<sup>r</sup>ŠEŠ<sup>1</sup>.MEŠ-<sup>r</sup>SUM-na<sup>1</sup> <sup>8</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.DUB.SAR-ka<sup>1</sup>-ma <sup>9</sup>d.AG u

<sup>226</sup> For the interpretation of *ḥamattu* as dry and barren land, see Cole 1996b, 159, commentary to line 12. The passage from the Tukulti-Ninurta II inscription, *ina libbi ḥamatte eqel namrāši artedi*, ‘I advanced into the heart of *ḥamattu*, a difficult terrain’, should be clear enough, especially in view of the terrain Tukulti-Ninurta refers to (southern end of the Wadi Tharthar).

d.<sup>1</sup>AMAR.UTU<sup>1</sup> *a-na be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia<sub>2</sub>* <sup>10</sup>*lik-ru-bu* [*liš-ṭur-ma*] <sup>11</sup>*šu-lum-šu<sub>2</sub>* [*b*]*e-li<sub>2</sub> lu-mas-s[i-ma]*  
<sup>12</sup>*liš-pu-ra*

complaint: rev. <sup>1</sup>Now his tongue is dead.

taunt or a joke(?): rev. <sup>1-3</sup>Did you cut it with an [ir]on dag[ger] or did you cut it off (while) it was sticking out?

complaint: rev. <sup>4-5</sup>I do not see your messenger and you do not ask about my well-being.

request: rev. <sup>6-12</sup>Quickly, find your greeting and send it to me! Nabû-aḥḥē-iddina, your scribe – [may he write]: ‘May Nabû and Marduk bless my lord!’. (Then), let my [l]ord fin[d] his greeting [and] send it to me.

In his commentary to the letter, Cole provides the likely only possible interpretation of the letter as complaining to the addressee about the lack of messages from the governor of Nippur and asking him to intervene on behalf of the sender, his ‘brother’ (1996b, 182).

### Neo-Babylonian institutional correspondence

What could be considered complaints in this part of the corpus can often be very simple. No. 9 (Levavi 2018, 240), a letter to a ‘father’, contains only a statement and a request:

obv. <sup>8</sup>*mi-irḥ-šu* <sup>9</sup>*ina pa-ni-ni* <sup>be10</sup>*ia-a-nu*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*mi-irḥ-šu* <sup>2</sup>*a-na d.IGI.DU* <sup>3</sup>EN *lu-še-bi-la*

complaint: obv. <sup>8-be10</sup>We have no woven fabrics.

request: rev. <sup>1-3</sup>May the lord bring woven fabrics for Nergal.

Despite the simple structure, the request is polite. The term of address undergoes the change from ‘father’ to ‘lord’, as often occurs in the body of the letter. The sender also manages to mention that the textiles are for Nergal, thus likely reinforcing his request. A similarly simple complaint mentioning the lack of goods and followed by a request is also attested in No 56 (obv. be17.-rev. 5.) and No. 171 (obv. 6.-be12.).

A very basic complaint can also be made with a single reproachful question without a follow-up request, as in No. 44 (Levavi 2018, 281):

rev. <sup>5</sup>(...) *mi-nam-ma* <sup>6</sup>GIŠ<sup>1</sup>.*ḥal-lim*.MEŠ-*ka* <sup>7</sup>*la taš-pur-am-ma* <sup>8</sup>ZU<sub>2</sub>.LUM.MA <sup>9</sup>*la iš-šu-u*

reproach: rev. <sup>5-9</sup>Why did you not send your rafts (and why) did they not take the dates?

In No. 118 (Levavi 2018, 369), the reproach is followed by a request (rev. 2.-4.). In No. 157 (Levavi 2018, 420–421), the first complaint assumes the form of a reproach about the lack of communication (obv. 7.-8.), while the second complaint immediately follows:

obv. <sup>8</sup>(...) d.EN *ki-i* <sup>9</sup>*a-gur-a i-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>10</sup>*u* d.EN *ki-i al-la* <sup>11</sup>ITL.ʽSIG<sub>4</sub>ʽ *u* ITL.ŠU <sup>12</sup>*la-bi-ni u ša-ra-pa* <sup>13</sup>*i-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>14</sup>*en-na ši-pir-ta-ka* <sup>15</sup>*lu-mur ki-i at-tu-a* ʽŠA<sub>3</sub>ʽ *bi-ti-ia<sub>2</sub>* <sup>be16</sup>ʽmaʽ *la-a-ta* <sup>be17</sup>ʽmiʽ *na-a dul-lu*

rev. 1.ʽiʽ *baṭ-til*

complaint: obv. <sup>8-9</sup>By Bēl, there are no bricks!

explanation: obv. <sup>10-13</sup>And by Bēl, it is not possible to form and bake them outside of Simanu and Duʽūzu!

request: obv. <sup>14-15</sup>Now, I wish to see your message.

admission: obv. <sup>15-be16</sup>And as to me, I am angry with you!

reproach: obv. <sup>be17</sup>rev. <sup>1</sup>Why has the work stopped?

The complaints are short and only partially related – the explanation after the first one serves to make the addressee understand why the shortage of bricks is so acutely felt precisely at the moment. He requests a message and admits that he is angry with his ‘brother’ (the temple administrator). The final reproach, about the cessation of work, seems to me to present a change of topic. The letter is certainly remarkable for the number of issues covered in the relatively short span of text.

No. 14 (Levavi 2018, 145–146) is structurally not complex, although it requires a longer explanation:

obv. <sup>10</sup>*a-na UGU-ḫi* ŠE.BAR <sup>11</sup>*a-na DUMU-KIN-ka* <sup>12</sup>*ki-i aq-bu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>13</sup>*um-ma* ŠE.BAR <sup>14</sup>NIG<sub>2</sub>.GA *maʽ-di* ʽre-e-ḫiʽ

rev. <sup>1</sup>*um-ma ia-a-nu* {*u<sub>2</sub>*} <sup>2</sup>m.d.AMAR.UTU-NUMUN-TIL <sup>3</sup>*i-na-aš<sub>2</sub>-ši-iš* <sup>4</sup>*en-na ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ* ʽa <sup>5</sup>ŠE.BAR-*su-nu ta-ḫe-li-qu* <sup>6</sup>*en-na EN lil-lik-kam-ma* <sup>7</sup>KASKAL.2 *a-na GIR<sub>2</sub>.2 ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ* ʽaʽ <sup>8</sup>EN *li-iš-kun* <sup>9</sup>*u ia-a-nu-<u<sub>2</sub>>* *en-na* <sup>10</sup>*liš-pu-rak-ku a-na UGU* <sup>11</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> ŠA<sub>3</sub>-ba-ka* <sup>12</sup>*i-ri-šu* d.EN <sup>13</sup>ʽli-diʽ *is-su*

explanation: obv. <sup>10-14</sup>About the grain – when I told your messenger: ‘There is much grain left in the (temple) property’,

complaint: rev. <sup>1-5</sup>(he said) as follows: ‘No. Marduk-zēru-šubši will take (it all).’. Now, these men – their grain will be lost.

request: rev. <sup>6-8</sup>May the lord come and prepare everything for them.

alternative request:



rev. <sup>9-10</sup>. And if not, let him write to you now (to complain?).

blessing: rev. <sup>11-13</sup>. May Bēl give him (the lord) whatever your heart desires.

The only significant development is the addition of the blessing after the request. It is similar to the ones already discussed in the petitions to the Assyrian kings, if of course far less elaborate.

A simple complaint is expanded with an argument from custom in No. 151 (Levavi 2018, 413):

obv. <sup>6</sup>GIŠ.MA<sub>2</sub> <sup>u<sub>2</sub>-šu-uz-zu</sup> <sup>7</sup>u m.d.na-na-a-ŠEŠ-MU <sup>8</sup>ŠE.BAR *ik-te-la-* <sup>9</sup>a <sup>9</sup>maḥ-ru-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>10</sup>IM.KIŠIB  
<sup>ša<sub>2</sub></sup> EN <sup>11</sup>.id-din-nu <sup>be<sup>12</sup></sup>a-na

rev. <sup>1</sup>.d.na-na-a-ŠEŠ-MU <sup>2</sup>.ki-i ad-din-nu <sup>3</sup>ŠE.BAR *ad-du-uš* <sup>4</sup>.en-na ši-pir-tu<sub>4</sub> <sup>5</sup>a-na pa-ni <sup>6</sup>m.d.na-na-a-ŠEŠ-MU <sup>7</sup>.tal-lik-kam<sub>2</sub>-ma <sup>8</sup>ŠE.BAR *lid-din-ni*

report: obv. <sup>6</sup>.The boat is ready,

complaint: obv. <sup>7-8</sup>.but Nanāia-aḥu-iddina has been withholding the grain.

explanation (of the usual procedure):

obv. <sup>9</sup>.rev. <sup>3</sup>.Previously, I would give the sealed (document) that they issued from my lord to Nanāia-aḥu-iddina, (and) I would thresh the grain.

request: rev. <sup>4-8</sup>.Now, may a message go to Nanāia-aḥu-iddina, so that he can give me the grain.

With the dispassionate tone, the complaint is clearly administrative in nature.

No. 22 (Levavi 2018, 254–255) is a complaint about misfortune that has befallen the sender and about which the addressee cannot really do anything:

rev. <sup>1</sup>「LUGAL」 *it-ti* <sup>2</sup>TIN.TIR.KI *gab-bi* <sup>3</sup>ḥa-niq <sup>ša<sub>2</sub></sup> *pi-ia<sub>2</sub>* <sup>4</sup>ul *iš-me di<sup>?</sup>-i-ni* <sup>5</sup>mu-kin-ni *ul u<sub>2</sub>-kin-na {an}* <sup>6</sup>u *ḥur-ša<sub>2</sub>-nu ul al-lik* <sup>7</sup>iš-ša-ab-ta-nu <sup>8</sup>.en-na 「MUN」 *at-ka* <sup>9</sup>a-na *ab-bu-nu-ni* <sup>10</sup>lu-še-da<sup>21</sup> DINGIR.MEŠ <sup>11</sup>.a-na UGU-ḥi-ia <sup>12</sup>「EN」 *lu-uš-še-li*

complaint: rev. <sup>1-7</sup>.The king is furious with the whole of Babylon! He did not listen to my words. My witness did not testify, and I did not undergo the river ordeal<sup>227</sup>. He imprisoned me.

argument (from interpersonal relationship):

rev. <sup>8-10</sup>.Now, may I inform our fathers about your kindness!

request: rev. <sup>10-12</sup>.May the lord pray to the gods for me!

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<sup>227</sup> Levavi (2018, 255) notes that the practice of the river ordeal must have fallen out of use by the time this letter was written. It is indeed likely that the sender mentions the ordeal simply to exhaust all possibilities of proving his innocence, and not as a reference to something that would really happen. A similar case would be presented by the mentions of ransoming among the private Late Babylonian letters (see Hackl et al. 2014, 349–351, No. 241).

This is precisely the kind of evidence that is missing from the Assyrian royal archives. A desperate scholar could have written a similar letter – albeit in a more elegant style – to his father or associate. It is symptomatic that the only thing for which the sender can ask in this situation is prayer – his lord cannot help him by interceding with the king. Nonetheless, the request for prayer is preceded by an argument, which means that it was something rather important for the sender – this might constitute evidence for private piety.

No. 25 (Levavi 2018, 257–258) is a letter to the temple scribe from his ‘brother’. After the greeting, the sender informs the addressee about his whereabouts, and immediately follows with a reproach:

obv. <sup>7</sup>d.GAŠAN ša<sub>2</sub> ‘UNUG.KI’ <sup>8</sup>lu-u<sub>2</sub> ‘ti<sup>1</sup>-i-de <sup>9</sup>ki-i ‘ša<sub>2</sub>’ aš<sub>2</sub>-‘pu<sup>1</sup>-rak-ka <sup>10</sup>um-ma ina GA-BI-  
TE<sub>3</sub>.KI <sup>11</sup>a-‘na a-ka-de<sub>3</sub>’<sup>1</sup>.KI <sup>12</sup>qer-be<sub>2</sub>-ku-ma ina bur-ti <sup>13</sup>na-‘as<sup>1</sup>-ka-ak <sup>be14</sup>ŠU.<2>-a ul-tu  
ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi<sup>1</sup> <sup>be15</sup>[ta]š-bat

complaint (with an oath):

obv. <sup>7</sup>.-be<sup>15</sup>.The Lady of Uruk knows indeed that when I wrote to you: ‘I am in GA-BI-TE, close to Akkad, and I am thrown into a pit!’ [you] did not help me!

The reproach is almost an accusation – emphasised by the presence of an oath. Although *būrtu*, ‘pit’, is not typically a metaphor for trouble<sup>228</sup>, one must not forget the following lines from the Dialogue of Pessimism (Lambert 1996, 146–147):

50. [la ta]-ra-ma be-li<sub>2</sub> la ta-r[a-ma]

51. MUNUS bur-tu<sub>2</sub> bur-tu<sub>2</sub> šu-ut-ta-tu ḥi-ri-tum

52. MUNUS paṭ-ri AN.BAR še-e-lu ša<sub>2</sub> ik-ki-su ki-šad eṭ-l[i]

exaggerated agreement (with the suggestion of the ‘lord’):

<sup>50</sup>.-<sup>52</sup>. ‘[Do not I]ove, my lord, do not lo[ve]! A woman is a hole – a hole! A pitfall, a ditch. A woman is the piercing iron dagger who cuts the man’s throat.’

The meaning of *būrtu* here and in the letter is closer to ‘trap’ or ‘danger’. *būrtu* is also the pit that the hunter digs unsuccessfully in Tablet I of the epic of Gilgameš in order to entrap animals. A hole is something one can fall into or be thrown in – perhaps with the added association with the grave somewhere in the back of one’s mind. The associations with ‘trouble’ are thus indirect, but certainly sufficient, although the West Semitic influence cannot be excluded with certainty.

In the next passage, the sender progresses to discuss the purchase of boats, likely a new topic.

<sup>228</sup> Levavi 2018, 258 in n. to line 12. proposes a West-Semitic influence.

The sender of No. (Levavi 2018, 261–263) recounts his conflict with a third party, and asks his ‘brother’ to intervene on his behalf:

obv. <sup>4</sup>m.šu-la-a lu-u<sub>2</sub> ma-a-<sup>1</sup>da<sup>1</sup> <sup>5</sup>ki-i u<sub>2</sub>-ba-<sup>1</sup>a-šu<sub>2</sub> it-ti-ia <sup>6</sup>id-dab-bu-ub pir-<sup>1</sup>ki ma-la<sup>1</sup> <sup>7</sup>ba-šu-u<sub>2</sub> a-na pa-ni-ia <sup>8</sup>ul-te-la-<sup>1</sup>a ŠE.BAR a<sub>4</sub> <sup>9</sup>i-na 20 URU.MEŠ it-tan<sup>1</sup>-na-aš<sub>2</sub> <sup>10</sup>u<sub>3</sub> šit-ti u<sub>2</sub>-bu-ṭa-nu <sup>11</sup>ki-i iš-ša<sub>2</sub>-<sup>1</sup>a it-<sup>1</sup>tan<sup>1</sup>-ni<sup>1</sup> <sup>12</sup>60<sup>2</sup>-šu<sub>2</sub> GUR ŠE<sup>1</sup>.BAR i-ba-<sup>1</sup>aš<sub>2</sub>-ši<sup>1</sup> <sup>be13</sup>[ša<sub>2</sub> ana pa-n]i-šu<sub>2</sub> ta-aš<sub>2</sub>-p[u-ra] <sup>be14</sup>ra<sup>1</sup>-di UGU ša<sub>2</sub> e[n-na] <sup>be15</sup>KASKAL.2<sup>1</sup> a-na GIR<sub>3</sub>.2-<sup>1</sup>ia<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>

rev. <sup>1</sup>ul iš-<sup>1</sup>kun-(x)<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup>70<sup>1</sup> GUR a-<sup>1</sup>ki-i <sup>1</sup>me <sup>3</sup>it-tan-<sup>1</sup>ni a-qab-ba<sup>1</sup>-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>4</sup>um-ma ma-ṭa-[a]-ta <sup>5</sup>i-qab-ba-a um-ma <sup>1</sup>d.AG u d.AMAR<sup>2</sup>.UTU<sup>2</sup> <sup>6</sup>ki-i a-na d.GAŠAN ša<sub>2</sub> UNUG.KI <sup>7</sup>a-nam-di-nu ki-i u<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub>-an-nu-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>8</sup>70 GUR su-ud-dir-ma <sup>9</sup>ši-pir-ti a-na UGU šu-pur <sup>10</sup>u<sub>3</sub> ina UGU-ḥi-šu<sub>2</sub> pu-ut-ti<sub>3</sub>-šu <sup>11</sup>NA<sub>4</sub>.KIŠIB-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>12</sup>tak<sup>pi1</sup>-ši-pir-ti <sup>12</sup>ḥa-an-ṭiš šu-bi-la-šu<sub>2</sub>

complaint: obv. <sup>4-8</sup>When I called Šulāia to account vehemently indeed, he cast all possible aspersions on me.

explanation: obv. <sup>8-12</sup>As he gave me the grain from the 20 towns and the compensations for the rest (of the grain), there were 60 kurrus of grain left.

complaint: obv. <sup>be13</sup>-rev. <sup>3</sup>[What] I wro[te] [to h]im about – he has not prepared it for me until n[ow]. He gave (me) 70 kurrus of grain instead of a hundred.

follow-up (with a promise):

rev. <sup>3-7</sup>When I told him: ‘You have a defic[i]t!’, he said: ‘By Nabû and Marduk (?), I will (either) give (it) to the Lady of Uruk (or) I will double it!’.

request: rev. <sup>8-12</sup>Take care of the 70 kurrus; send a message about it and open it (the storehouse?) at his expense. Quickly send the sealed document for adjustments!

The complaint appears to be in essence already taken care of. The sender already received a promise from his partner and is now asking the addressee to make good on it. He nonetheless needs to explain the situation and does it in such a way that he appears to be the blameless, while shrewdly besmirching his adversary’s reputation. The basic structure of the sequence is still complaint-request, although the situation requires an additional explanation.

A complaint about a conflict with a third party is also attested in No. 114 (Levavi 2018, 363–365):

obv. <sup>5</sup>(...) d.UTU <sup>1</sup>ki<sup>1</sup>-i lu ma-du <sup>6</sup>pa-ni-ia<sup>1</sup> la be<sub>2</sub>-<sup>1</sup>šu!-<sup>1</sup>u<sup>1</sup> LU<sub>2</sub>.UMBISAG E<sub>2</sub> <sup>7</sup>pir-ki<sup>1</sup> it-ti-ia <sup>8</sup>la id-dab-bu<sup>1</sup> <sup>1</sup>/<sub>3</sub> <MA.NA> 4 GIN<sub>2</sub> <sup>9</sup>KU<sub>3</sub>.<sup>1</sup>BABBAR ba<sup>1</sup>-ab-ti <sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> MA.<sup>1</sup>NA<sup>1</sup> 4 GIN<sub>2</sub> <sup>10</sup>la in-<sup>1</sup>ḥu-ra-an<sup>1</sup>-ni-ma <sup>11</sup>a-na m.NUMUN-ia<sub>2</sub> A m.DU<sub>3</sub>-a <sup>12</sup>la id-<sup>1</sup>di<sup>1</sup>-nu <sup>13</sup>u <sup>1</sup>ŠUK<sup>1</sup>.HI.A ša<sub>2</sub> m.A-a <sup>be14</sup>ul-tu UGU ša<sub>2</sub> <sup>be15</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.ŠA<sub>3</sub>.TAM i-<sup>1</sup>dab-bu<sup>1</sup> <sup>be16</sup>[i]-<sup>1</sup>na ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR LU<sub>2</sub>.ŠA<sub>3</sub>.TAM<sup>1</sup>

rev. <sup>1</sup>*it-ta-ši-šu<sub>2</sub> u ʔer-di<sup>1</sup>* <sup>2</sup>*m.NIG<sub>2</sub>.DU ki-i u<sub>2</sub>-ʔar-ri-du* <sup>3</sup>*um-ma a-mat LUGAL ši-i mam-ma*  
<sup>4</sup>*NIG<sub>2</sub>.BA ul i-šab-bat LU<sub>2</sub>.ŠA<sub>3</sub>.TAM* <sup>5</sup>*un-da-aš<sub>2</sub>-šir KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR* <sup>6</sup>*a-na m.d.AG-na-din-*  
<sup>7</sup>*MU LU<sub>2</sub>.ŠA<sub>3</sub>.TAM ul id-din um-ma* <sup>8</sup>*a-na ku-mu KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR-ia* <sup>9</sup>*ŠAM<sub>2</sub> ANŠE ša<sub>2</sub> ina*  
<sup>10</sup>*IGI-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>10</sup>*ak-te-liš mim-mu-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>11</sup>*ma-la taš-šu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>12</sup>*ter-ri-ma* <sup>13</sup>*in-na-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>14</sup>*LU<sub>2</sub>.ŠA<sub>3</sub>.TAM*  
<sup>15</sup>*a-na* <sup>16</sup>*LU<sub>2</sub>.EN-da-ba-[bi-ka]* <sup>16</sup>*la i-ʔta<sup>1</sup>-[ar]*

grumble (with an oath): obv. <sup>5-12</sup>. By Šamaš, I am so very angry! The temple scribe is accusing me unfairly! He took 24 shekels of the 44 shekels of silver and gave them to Zēria, son of Ibnāia.

complaint: obv. <sup>13</sup>·rev. <sup>5</sup>. And when the (order) came from the temple administrator about the rations of Aplāia, the temple administrator took from the silver. But when Kudurru complained as follows: ‘This is the word of the king: “Nobody may claim gifts!”.’, the temple administrator relinquished (the silver).

complaint (with a denial of payment):

rev. <sup>5-10</sup>. The temple administrator did not give the silver to Nabû-nādin-šumi, saying: ‘I have withheld it instead of my silver, the price of the donkey that is (already) with him.’

request: rev. <sup>10-13</sup>. Whatever you took from him, give (it) back!

argument (from interpersonal relationship):

rev. <sup>14</sup>·<sup>re16</sup>. Do not tu[rn] the temple administrator into [your] ene[my]!

Although the letter is addressed to a ‘lord’, the sender is expressing his anger freely and makes his demands by means of the more direct imperative forms. The third person address term ‘lord’ is completely absent apart from the greeting. Categorising the final argument as based on the interpersonal relationship might be a bit imprecise. The temple administrator is mentioned by title, and thus as representative of the temple hierarchy. The addressee is urged not to make trouble with the powerful personage because of the function he holds. In a sense, this argument could be also considered an indirect warning.

A conflict about silver involving a third party is also attested in No. 120 (Levavi 2018, 371–372), a letter to a ‘father’. Here it is the ‘father’ who is asked to give the silver back (rev. 11.-12.)

A different case of complaint is attested in No. 30 (Levavi 2018, 264–265) – the grumbling tone is used to rationalise the request the sender, the royal agent Ninurta-šarru-ušur, is making:

obv. <sup>6</sup>*DU<sub>10</sub>.GA-ia<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> a-na-ku a-kan-na* <sup>7</sup>*a-mu-ʔtu<sup>1</sup>-u ʔat-tu<sup>1</sup>-nu* <sup>8</sup>*ina ʔši-bu-ut-ti<sup>1</sup>-ku-nu* <sup>9</sup>*la ta-qab-*  
<sup>10</sup>*ba-ʔa um-ma* <sup>10</sup>*ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bu-u<sub>2</sub> dul-lu ša<sub>2</sub> ʔsi<sup>1</sup>-ki-ir* <sup>11</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> ina qal-la u qal-la-ta* <sup>12</sup>*ni-ip-pu-uš dul-lu*  
<sup>13</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> a-kan-na dan-na* <sup>14</sup>*iš-kar-ra-a-tu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>15</sup>*SIG<sub>4</sub> ina UGU-ḥi-i-ni ʔka<sup>1</sup>-bit* <sup>16</sup>*ʔ1<sup>1</sup>-en a-me-lu*  
<sup>17</sup>*a-na U<sub>4</sub>-mu 1 me 10 SIG<sub>4</sub>*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*al-la ki-i* <sup>2</sup>*ina* ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ *pi-tin-nu-tu* <sup>3</sup>ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ-*i-ni gab-bi* <sup>4</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub>* <sup>1</sup>*a-kan-na iḫ-te-liq*  
<sup>5</sup>ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ *pi-tin-nu-tu* <sup>1</sup>*ag<sup>1</sup>-ra-tu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>6</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> a-na dul-lu* DU<sub>10</sub>.GA <sup>7</sup>*di-ka-a-ma šup-ru*

rhetorical question: obv. <sup>6-7</sup>Is it good for me to die here?

reproach (with exaggeration):

obv. <sup>7-12</sup>Do not say, as you (pl.) would (surely) like: ‘We will do the work of the dam with a (single) slave and a (single) slave-girl.’!

complaint: obv. <sup>12-13</sup>The work here is hard.

complaint: obv. <sup>14-be17</sup>The quota upon us is heavy; a hundred bricks for a single man per day!

complaint: rev. <sup>1-4</sup>Additionally, all the strong men among our workers have fled.

request: rev. <sup>4-6</sup>Hire and send strong troops who are suitable for this job!

The royal agent vents his frustration with insufficient support of his addressees. At the same, he lines up his complaints before the request in order to persuade the addressees that their assistance is really necessary. The way he goes about it, taunting them with the claim that they surely wish they could tell him to do the work with only two slaves, has however the potential to escalate the conflict further.

Ninurta-šarru-ušur is hardly the only person to complain about the hard work and the lack of manpower. An eerily similar version of this complaint is also attested in No. 40 (Levavi 2018, 276–277):

obv. <sup>6</sup>*dul-lu ina* UGU-*ḫi-ni* <sup>7</sup>*id-di-ni-ni ḫa-an-ṭiš* <sup>8</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.*ḫal-pi šup-ra-nu* <sup>9</sup>ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ *pi-ti-nu-tu*  
<sup>10</sup>*lid-di-in (x) u* <sup>1</sup>*ni<sup>1</sup>-pe-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>11</sup>*ina* UGU-*ḫi la* <sup>1</sup>*ta-šel-la-’a*

complaint: obv. <sup>6-7</sup>The work has become too heavy for us.

request: obv. <sup>7-9</sup>Quickly, send reinforcements! They should give strong men so that we can work.

appeal for haste: obv. <sup>11</sup>Do not neglect it!

Another complaint about insufficient workforce is attested in No. 116 (Levavi 2018, 366–367). The addressee here is the lord, causing the sender to assume a slightly humbler tone. The complaint takes a more dramatic turn in another letter from the same sender, No. 117 (Levavi 2018, 267–269). This time the sender is addressing his ‘father’:

obv. <sup>6</sup>(...) LU<sub>2</sub>.<*ša<sub>2</sub>*>-IGI-E<sub>2</sub>.GAL <sup>7</sup>U<sub>4</sub>-*mu-us-su i-du-uk-kin* <sup>8</sup>*um-ma su-uḫ-pa-’a* <sup>9</sup>d.AG *ki-i ina* <sup>5</sup>*me* ERIN<sub>2</sub>.ME <sup>10</sup>*dul-lu ni-ik-tal-da* <sup>be11</sup>.rLU<sub>2</sub>.ERIN<sub>2</sub> x<sup>1</sup>-[x] <sup>be12</sup>*šu-zu<sup>1</sup>-’zu<sup>2</sup>*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*a-na a-kan-na* <sup>2</sup>*lil-li-ku* <sup>3</sup>*ia-a-nu-u<sub>2</sub> a-na-ku* <sup>4</sup>*ad-da-a-ku* <sup>5</sup>*5* GU<sub>2</sub>.UN KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR <sup>6</sup>*i-ḫal-liq* d.UTU [*ki-i*] <sup>7</sup>AD-*u<sub>2</sub>-nu* EN.[MEŠ-*nu*] <sup>8</sup>*al-<la>-nu-uk* <sup>9</sup>*i-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>10</sup>*ḫa-ba-lu-u<sub>2</sub>*  
<sup>1</sup>*ina* E<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> [DINGIR] <sup>11</sup>*el<sup>2</sup>-lu*

complaint: obv. <sup>6-8</sup>The palace overseer is killing me daily, saying: ‘Lay (bricks)!’.

argument (with an oath):

obv. <sup>9-10</sup>By Nabû, we would not make it (even) with 500 men!

request: obv. <sup>be11-</sup>rev. <sup>2</sup>[...] (and) assign workers, so that they come here.

warning (as an argument):

rev. <sup>3-6</sup>Otherwise, I will be killed, and the five talents of silver lost!

argument (from interpersonal relationship and powerlessness):

rev. <sup>6-9</sup>By Šamaš, we have no father (or) lords but you!

warning (as argument): rev. <sup>10-11</sup>Damage will be done (?) to the te[mple]!

Perhaps the more emotional tone of this letter can be explained by the different term of address – ‘father’ – which could point to a more personal relationship between the sender and the addressee. The arguments used by the sender are of two kinds. In the first place, he emphasises his own unfortunate circumstances and points towards the relationship with his ‘father’ (and ‘lord’). In the second place, he does not hesitate to use the negative institutional consequences to further strengthen his line of argument: the silver will be lost and damage done to the temple. The argument from the interpersonal relationship serves further to underline the helplessness of the sender and his group, and perhaps even to emphasise their aloneness in trouble – much like the arguments of the type ‘I am alone’ and ‘no one would intercede for me’ attested in the Neo-Assyrian royal corpus.

No. 31 (Levavi 2018, 266–267) seems to be a complaint with a denunciation, addressed to the royal agent, temple administrator and temple scribe, the ‘lords’ of the sender:

obv. <sup>6</sup>(...) m.d.AG-MU-MU <sup>7</sup>BARA<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ ša<sub>2</sub> na-<sup>8</sup>du-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>8</sup>it-ta-sa-<sup>9</sup>aḥ-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu-ti<sup>1</sup> <sup>9</sup>a-na E<sub>2</sub> mim-ma sa-a[<sup>d</sup>’-r]u<sup>10</sup> <sup>10</sup>lu-u<sub>2</sub> ti-da-<sup>11</sup>’a<sup>1</sup> B[ARA<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ] <sup>11</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> d.GAŠAN ša<sub>2</sub> UNUG.KI <sup>12</sup>la<sup>1</sup> [t]u-maš-š[ar] <sup>12</sup>ḥi-tu a-na <sup>13</sup>UGU-ḥi-ku-nu<sup>1</sup> <sup>13</sup>la tu-<sup>14</sup>šab-ša<sub>2</sub>-’a<sup>1</sup> <sup>14</sup>m.URU-lu-<sup>15</sup>mur<sup>1</sup> [x]-<sup>15</sup>x<sup>1</sup> <sup>15</sup>ina A.ŠA<sub>3</sub> <sup>16</sup>iz-[za-qa-p]u <sup>be16</sup>ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi <sup>17</sup>d.ba-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>be17</sup>iz-za-qap <sup>be18</sup>u ki-i m.ia-qa-bu-<sup>18</sup>DINGIR<sup>1</sup>

rev. <sup>1</sup>ina UKKIN ša<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.din-nu-u<sub>2</sub>-ru <sup>2</sup>a-na d.GAŠAN ša<sub>2</sub> UNUG.KI <sup>3</sup>it-ta-din-su A.ŠA<sub>3</sub> <sup>4</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> d.GAŠAN ša<sub>2</sub> UNUG.KI šu-u <sup>5</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.AB.BA.MEŠ gab-bi <sup>6</sup>i-du-u<sub>2</sub> u E<sub>2</sub> um-<sup>7</sup>ma<sup>1</sup> <sup>7</sup>ul ša<sub>2</sub> m.d.AG-MU-MU E<sub>2</sub> <sup>8</sup>e’-lu-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>8</sup>šu-u<sub>2</sub> ina pe-tu KA<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> <sup>9</sup>UNUG.KI<sup>1</sup> <sup>9</sup>DUMU m.URU-lu-mur ul-tu ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi <sup>10</sup>ul-tu-ši u E<sub>2</sub> it-ti <sup>11</sup>it-ta-ši <sup>12</sup>maḥ<sup>1</sup>-ri-<sup>13</sup>i<sup>1</sup> <sup>12</sup>a-na LU<sub>2</sub>.AB.BA.MEŠ tal-ta-par-ra-nu <sup>13</sup>[u<sub>3</sub>] GEŠTU.2 ra-ma-ni-ku-nu <sup>14</sup>tal-ta-kan-a<sub>4</sub> en-na <sup>15</sup>a-du-u<sub>2</sub> GEŠTU.2-ku-nu <sup>16</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIN<sub>2</sub>.ME ip-te-tu u <sup>re17</sup>ra-man-gu-nu <sup>re18</sup>ina ḥi-tu uš-ra-<sup>19</sup>’a<sup>1</sup>

e. <sup>1</sup>A.ŠA<sub>3</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> d.GAŠAN ša<sub>2</sub> UNUG.KI la tu-maš-šar-’a

denunciation: obv. <sup>6.-10</sup> Nabû-šumu-iddina removed the pedestals that were (already) built, (even though?) everything was pre[pared] in the house. You should know this!

plea: obv. <sup>10.-11</sup> Do not [a]band[on] the pe[destals] of the Lady of Uruk!

warning (as argument):

obv. <sup>12.-13</sup> Do not lay guilt upon yourselves!

explanation: obv. <sup>14.-rev.</sup> <sup>4</sup> Ālu-lūmur se[t up ...] in the field (and) put Bābu in it. But in the assembly of Dinnuru (people or town), Iaqabu-ilī gave it (= the field) to the Lady of Uruk. It is the field of the Lady of Uruk.

confirmation (with an argument from authority):

rev. <sup>5.-6</sup> All the elders know this.

explanation: rev. <sup>6.-8</sup> And the house: ‘It does not belong to Nabû-šumu-iddina! It has (only) the upper storey.’

accusation: rev. <sup>8.-11</sup> . He sent out the son of Ālu-lūmur during the opening of the gate and he took the house with him.

reminder (of previous correct conduct, as argument for the following request):

rev. <sup>11.-14</sup> Previously, you wrote to the elders [and] listened to them.

request (indirect): rev. <sup>14.-16</sup> Now, you have heard the people!

warning (as argument):

rev. <sup>16.-re18</sup> And guard yourselves from guilt!

plea: e. <sup>1</sup> Do not abandon the field of the Lady of Uruk!

Although the letter is addressed to ‘lords’, the request is realised in very demanding terms. The ‘lords’ are warned against committing a crime against the goddess, although the warning is not explicit but rather formed as advice – at least at the surface. The strong undercurrent of denunciation might be giving the addressees an out: if a third party is guilty, they might be able to save face. The argument in the final passage of the letter appeals to the authority of the elders, and it names a positive precedent for the decision expected by the sender.

Kīnēnāia writes to the royal agent, temple administrator and the temple scribe in No. 174 (Levavi 2018, 443–445), complaining about a third party seizing a field that belongs to him:

obv. <sup>4</sup>(...) A.ŠA<sub>3</sub> a<sub>4</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> E<sub>2</sub>-LU<sub>2</sub>.SIPA-i <sup>5</sup>ša<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> LU<sub>2</sub>.UMBISAG ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi-[šu<sub>2</sub>] ip-qid-an-ni <sup>6</sup>m.GI-d.AMAR.UTU UD-23-KAM ša<sub>2</sub> ITI.ŠU <sup>7</sup>ki-i il-li-ka <sup>8</sup>iṭ-ṭe-<sup>1</sup>ra<sup>1</sup>-an-ni <sup>9</sup>ul-tu A.ŠA<sub>3</sub> ul-te-la-

- an-ni*<sup>10</sup> *um-ma man-na* LU<sub>2</sub>.UMBISAG *e<sub>2</sub>-an-na*<sup>11</sup> A.ŠA<sub>3</sub> *at-tu-u<sub>2</sub>-a šu-u<sub>2</sub>*<sup>12</sup> d.AG *lu-u<sub>2</sub> i-de*<sup>13</sup> *ka-al-la-ka* LUGAL<sup>14</sup> *ina ŠU.2-ia<sub>2</sub> iš-šu-šu<sub>2</sub>*<sup>be15</sup> *mam-ma ina ŠU.2-ia<sub>2</sub>*<sup>be16</sup> *it-ta-šu-šu<sub>2</sub>*
- rev. <sup>1</sup>*man-na a-na* d.GAŠAN *ša<sub>2</sub>* UNUG.KI <sup>2</sup>*id-di-is-su*<sup>3</sup> LU<sub>2</sub>.UMBISAG *E<sub>2</sub> mam-ma ša<sub>2</sub> da-na-nu*<sup>4</sup> *ina UGU-ḫi-ia<sub>2</sub> ip-pu-šu<sub>2</sub>*<sup>5</sup> GIŠ.GEŠTIN *ki-i iq-tu-pu*<sup>6</sup> *it-ta-ši a-qa<sub>2</sub>-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>*<sup>7</sup> *um-ma* LU<sub>2</sub>.UMBISAG *E<sub>2</sub> i-ta-mar*<sup>8</sup> *mi-nam-ma ša<sub>2</sub> la* LU<sub>2</sub>.UMBISAG *E<sub>2</sub>*<sup>9</sup> GIŠ.GEŠTIN *a-ga-a ta-qat-tap*<sup>10</sup> *iṭ-ṭe-ra<sup>1</sup>-an-ni ši-la-ni-ia<sub>2</sub>*<sup>11</sup> *ul-te-bi-ir mu-ši u kal* U<sub>4</sub><sup>12</sup> *ina ṭar-re-e ša<sub>2</sub> iṭ-ra<sup>1</sup>-an-ni*<sup>13</sup> *a-nam-ziq a-mur a-kan-na*<sup>14</sup> *ma-aš-šar-ti ša<sub>2</sub> EN-ia<sub>2</sub> a-nam-šar*<sup>re15</sup> *ki-i pa-ni-ka* ṛma-ḫir<sup>ṛ</sup><sup>re16</sup> *lul-lik* ṛLU<sub>2</sub>.UMBISAG *E<sub>2</sub>*<sup>ṛ</sup><sup>re17</sup> *lu-u<sub>2</sub> ṛi<sup>1</sup>-de ki-i ul-t[u]*<sup>re18</sup> UGU-ḫi *ša<sub>2</sub>* d.GAŠAN *ša<sub>2</sub>* [UNUG.KI]
- e. <sup>1</sup>*a-ga-a a-na-ku in-da-at-ti la* ṛšak<sup>ṛ</sup><sup>1</sup>-na-ka<sup>2</sup> KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR *ša<sub>2</sub>* *ina pa-ni-ia a-na* m.TIN-su A m.ḫaš-di-a *ki-i*<sup>3</sup> *a-ḫi-ṭu la ta-di-is-su*

complaint (with a quoted challenge):

obv. <sup>4</sup>rev. <sup>4</sup>As to the field of the household of the shepherd, to which the scribe appointed me – Marduk-ušallim came on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of Du'ūzu, beat me (and) drove me away from the field. (He was) saying: 'Who is the scribe of Eanna? This is my field! Nabû knows indeed that I hold it! The king gave it into my hands! Who took it away from me? Who gave it to the Lady of Uruk? What is the power that the temple scribe can exercise over me?'

follow-up (attempt at confrontation):

rev. <sup>5</sup>rev. <sup>5</sup>As he was picking the grapes, I told him: 'The temple scribe has already inspected<sup>229</sup> (it). Why do you pick these grapes without his permission?'. (But) he beat me (again and) broke my ribs.

complaint: rev. <sup>11</sup>rev. <sup>13</sup>Day and night I have been suffering for the blows he gave me.

declaration of diligence:

rev. <sup>13</sup>rev. <sup>14</sup>Look, I have been keeping the watch of my lord.

request (for permission):

rev. <sup>re15</sup>rev. <sup>re16</sup>If it pleases you, let me come.

declaration of loyalty (?):

rev. <sup>re16</sup>rev. <sup>1</sup>May the temple scribe know that I have made no complaints<sup>230</sup> against the Lady of [Uruk] about this!

<sup>229</sup> In order to impose payments, see Jursa 1998, 28.

<sup>230</sup> This translation follows the suggestion of CAD I, 147, although the meaning of *indattu* is listed as 'uncertain'.



complaint: e. <sup>2-3</sup>You did not give the silver that I was owed to Balāssu, son of Ḫašdāia – as if I were at fault!

The final complaint seems to be unrelated to the preceding passages. On the whole, this letter of complaint is a petition for intervention, not unlike the letters from the Assyrian corpus. The sender explains his situation and recounts his own attempt to deal with the interloper – the attempt is failed, which emphasises the need for intervention of a higher instance. The sender also provides an argument from meritorious service. It is only his request that is not very directly formulated. Evidently, he expects the addressees to do something about his present preoccupation, but the only thing he directly asks for is the permission to come – perhaps in order to report on to the addressees in person?

A complaint with a petition for intervention in the case of missing workers is attested in No. 178 (Levavi 2018, 449–450). The most interesting part is the declaration that the senders make:

rev. <sup>8</sup>*bi-i-š pa-ni-ni* <sup>9</sup>*ia<sub>2</sub>-a-nu a-<sup>Γ</sup>na* AD<sup>7</sup>.MEŠ

argument (?): rev. <sup>8-9</sup>We are not angry at you (for the sake (?)) of the fathers.

Levavi (2018, 450) translate this as ‘We’re not upset (for us, but) for (our) fathers’, which would make this a very interesting argument – the senders would be in effect be claiming that their request is only is being made for the sake of the interests of the addressees. However, the enclitic possessive pronoun does not seem to be typically used for the object of anger (see CAD B, 5). The reason for anger is usually introduced with *ina muḫḫi* or *itti*.

No. 172 (Levavi 2018, 438–441) begins with an accusation against the temple administrator (obv. 4.-6.), but in the following passages the sender (the royal agent, Ninurta-šarru-ušur) explains his current position. After making his request for resources (ten minas of silver, bitumen, grain, rev. 2.-8.), Ninurta-šarru-ušur complains at length about both the amount of work and the treatment he receives:

rev. <sup>9</sup>*a-di-i 3-šu<sub>2</sub> dul-la ni-ip<sub>2</sub>-pu-uš-ma* <sup>10</sup>*al-la šad-da-qad<sup>1</sup> u ša<sub>2</sub>-nu-u<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>2</sub>-nu-u<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>11</sup>*dul-la a-tar ni-ip-pu-uš* <sup>12</sup>*mi-nam-ma-ta* LU<sub>2</sub>.ŠA<sub>3</sub>.TAM <sup>13</sup>*a-kan-na i-šap-par-am-ma* <sup>14</sup>KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR *tu-še-bi-la-ni-iš-šu u a-na-ku* <sup>15</sup>*a-šap-par-am-ma* KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR *ul tu-še-bi-la-a-ni* <sup>16</sup>*en-na* 10 MA.NA KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR *ḫa-an-ṭiš* <sup>17</sup>*a-na 2* LU<sub>2</sub>.UMBISAG.MEŠ *lid-din-nu-u<sub>2</sub>-ma* <sup>18</sup>*a-[na]* <sup>19</sup>*IGI<sup>1</sup>-ia lil-lik-ku-u<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>19</sup>*ia-a-nu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>?</sup> LU<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>.A-KIN *ša<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.ša<sub>2</sub>-IGI-E<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>.GAL* <sup>20</sup>*il<sup>1</sup>-la-kam<sub>2</sub>-ma* *ina UGU-ḫi ši-[bit-t]i* <sup>re21</sup>*Γi-nad<sup>1</sup>-da-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu-u<sub>2</sub>-tu*

complaint: rev. <sup>9-11</sup>We are working threefold! We are doing (the current) work in addition to that of last year and two years ago.

reproach (argument from equal treatment):

rev. <sup>12-15</sup>Why is that when the temple administrator writes to you, you send him silver, and when I write to you, you do not send me (anything)?

request: rev. <sup>16.-18.</sup>Now, may they quickly give 10 minas of silver to the two scribes, so that they come [be]fore me!

threat: rev. <sup>19.-re21.</sup>Otherwise, the messenger of the palace overseer will come and throw them into cus[to]dy!

The rest of the letter is another complaint, realised as a reproach for doing nothing followed by a request for verification, and a request to get an ox that, as the royal agent claims, belongs to him.

A denunciation-like passage preceding a request is also attested in No. 94 (Levavi 2018, 339–341):

rev. <sup>9.</sup>EN *lu-u<sub>2</sub> i-de* LU<sub>2</sub>.GAR-UMUŠ <sup>10.</sup>*a-kan-na* LU<sub>2</sub>.*qal-la* *ša<sub>2</sub>* m.d.AG-NUMUN-MU <sup>11.</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.SIMUG *iš-ša-bat* <sup>12.</sup>*um<sup>1</sup>-ma* <sup>12.</sup>GIR<sub>2</sub>.AN.BAR.ME *ina* MU.AN.NA <sup>13.</sup>*ta-nam-di-nu a-*  
*mur qal-la-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>14.</sup>*ina* E<sub>2</sub> *ki-lu u* m.d.AG-NUMUN-MU <sup>15.</sup>*u* DUMU-*šu<sub>2</sub>* *ina* ŠU.2-*šu<sub>2</sub>* *ḫal-qu* <sup>16.</sup>*ši-*  
*pir-ti* *ša<sub>2</sub>* EN-*ia<sub>2</sub>* *a-na* <sup>be17.</sup>*pa-ni* LU<sub>2</sub>.GAR-UMUŠ *u* m.<sup>1</sup>*qur-bi<sup>1</sup>* <sup>be18.</sup>*ina* UGU-*ḫi tal-li-ka*

accusation: rev. <sup>9.-13.</sup>May the lord know: the governor of Uruk has seized the slave of Nabû-zēru-iddina, the smith, saying: ‘You will give me 12 iron daggers per year!’.

complaint: rev. <sup>13.-15.</sup>Look, the slave is in prison, while Nabû-zēru-iddina and his son have fled from him.

request: rev. <sup>16.-be18.</sup>May a message about this go to the governor and Qurbu from my lord!

Although the final request is quite specific, it is also indirect: the subject of the clause is the message, not the lord. The senders avoid naming the addressee (the temple administrator) being identified as the person carrying out the action himself. The initial passage resembles a denunciation and is certainly phrased like an accusation, but the senders are likely not without a personal stake. As Levavi 2018, 340 mentions, at least two of the senders were blacksmiths themselves – they were likely interceding on behalf of a colleague.

A short accusatory report is included in No. 100 (Levavi 2018, 348–349), also a letter to a lord:

obv. <sup>10.</sup>(...) *ina la mam-ma*

rev. <sup>1.</sup>m.d.AG<sup>1</sup>-TIN-<sup>1</sup>*su<sup>1</sup>-E* A m.IGI-*ni-ia<sub>2</sub>* <sup>2.</sup>*ki-i ni-bu-ku* d.GAŠAN *ša<sub>2</sub>* UNUG.KI <sup>3.</sup>*u* d.*na-na-a lu*  
*i-da-a<sub>4</sub>* <sup>4.</sup>*ki-i qe<sub>2</sub>-mu* *ma-la ta-ad-din-an-na-a-ši* <sup>5.</sup>*1-en* TUG<sub>2</sub>.KUR.RA *u<sub>3</sub>* KUŠ.E.SIR<sub>2</sub>-*i-ni* <sup>6.</sup>*la*  
*iš-šu-u<sub>2</sub>* *u<sub>3</sub>* *la iḫ-li-iq*

accusation (with an oath): rev. <sup>1.-6.</sup>We lead Nabû-balāssu-iqbi, son of Pānia, unaccompanied. Lady of Uruk and Nanāia know indeed that he took all the flour you had given us, one blanket and our sandals, and fled.

The complaint with an accusation is followed by a request – introduced with a blessing, but it is too damaged to allow a more detailed analysis.

An interesting case is offered by No. 235 (Hackl et al. 2014, 344–345). The sender introduces an accusation or denunciation against Šulāia, which is not completely preserved. The sender recounts himself confronting the other party about selling limestone:

rev. <sup>8</sup>(...) *pi-i-l[u]* <sup>9</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> ina E<sub>2</sub> na-du-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>10</sup>*a-na KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR it-ta-din* <sup>11</sup>*ki-i aq-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-ši* <sup>12</sup>*um-ma at-ta man-nu* <sup>13</sup>*NIG<sub>2</sub>.KA<sub>9</sub> mam-ma it-ti-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>14</sup>*ul i-pu-uš i-qab-bi* <sup>15</sup>*um-ma ul i-<sup>r</sup>di<sup>1</sup>* <sup>re16</sup>*et-ti-bi ša<sub>2</sub>* <sup>re17</sup>*EN-ia<sup>1</sup>* <sup>re18</sup>*a-na-ku ta-<sup>r</sup>ab<sup>1</sup>-[tu<sub>2</sub>]* <sup>re18</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> a-na-ku*

e. <sup>1</sup>*te-pu-<sup>r</sup>uš<sup>1</sup>* AD *a-na DUMU ul* <sup>1</sup>*ip-pu-uš<sup>1</sup>*

accusation: rev. <sup>8-10</sup>The limesto[ne] that was stored in the house – he sold it!

report (of a confrontation):

rev. <sup>11-15</sup>When I told him: ‘Who (do you think) you are? Nobody settled the matter with him!’ – he said: ‘I did not know.’

summary: rev. <sup>re16-17</sup>e. <sup>2</sup>I protested (against this) for my lord! The favour that you showed me, a father does not grant (his) son!

The perfect form *et-te-bi* might also refer to the action undertaken by writing the letter – but I believe the sender means here the confrontation he just finished describing. He interprets it as the direct result of the favour he received from the addressee – it constitutes his show of gratitude, his thanks. This (again) implies that the relationship of a ‘lord’ and his servant also had to rely on at least nominal reciprocity.

No. 150 (Levavi 2018, 411–412) seems to include a sort of a gripe or grumble about an issue that has already been solved:

rev. <sup>9</sup>*m.si-lim-d.EN* <sup>10</sup>*pir-ki GAL-u* <sup>11</sup>*it-ti-ia<sub>2</sub>* <sup>12</sup>*id-dab-bu-ub* <sup>re13</sup>*u a-na ka-a-š[u<sub>2</sub>]* <sup>re14</sup>*ul a-mur-ka-ma*

e. <sup>1</sup>[(x)] *a-qab-bak-ka* [*a-na DINGIR.ME*]Š *ki-i u<sub>2</sub>-šal-lu-u* ŠU.2-a <sup>2</sup>[*ina*] ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi *iš-ša-bat*

complaint: rev. <sup>9-10</sup>e. <sup>1</sup>Silim-Bēl is accusing me for no good reason. And I did not (even) see yo[u] (and) could<sup>231</sup> not say (?) (anything).

report (?): e. <sup>1-2</sup>As I prayed [to the god]s, he helped me [on] account of this!

The identity of the person who helped the sender is unclear – the traces of .ME]Š after the logogram for ‘god’ are apparently visible, which excludes the possibility of direct godly intervention. Levavi suggests Kūnāia the palace scribe as a tentative possibility, although I also agree with Levavi that this seems

<sup>231</sup> For present forms negated with *ul* that are to be translated as ‘could not, did not want’ when they refer to past actions, see GAG § 151 b 3.

difficult. In any case, since the assistance was provided, the matter must be considered resolved and the sender is indeed only complaining for the sake of it.

A complaint preceding a request for intervention is attested in No. 124 (Levavi 2018, 377–378). The ‘lord’, the temple administrator is petition (with an imperative form) on behalf of three senders about a third party who is taking water from the irrigation canal belonging to the temple. The senders complain about what happened and mention the number of the canals.

No. 125 (Levavi 2018, 378–381) is a complaint to the temple administrator about temple dependants who occupy the plots belonging to the senders. Some passages are reminiscent of the petitions to the king and the entire letter deserves some more attention:

obv. <sup>5</sup>13 MU.MEŠ *a-ga-a* GIŠ.hum-mu-tu NI.ʽTUK<sup>1</sup>.KI-e *u*<sub>3</sub> GIŠ.a-lu <sup>6</sup>*a-na* d.GAŠAN ša<sub>2</sub> UNUG.KI *ni-iz-za-qap*<sub>2</sub> ʽGIŠ.GIŠIMMAR<sup>2</sup> ʽhi<sup>2</sup>-[l]e<sup>2</sup>-pu *u*<sub>3</sub> ʽx<sup>1</sup>.GAG <sup>7</sup>30 ŠE.NUMUN *ni-iz-za-qap*<sub>2</sub> ʽU<sub>4</sub>-mu<sup>1</sup> *a-ʽga-a*<sup>1</sup> <sup>8</sup>20 GUR *u*<sub>2</sub>-hi-ni *ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi *i-te-ʽlu*<sup>2</sup>-ʽu<sup>1</sup> <sup>9</sup>*en-na* *a-mur* LU<sub>2</sub>.ši-ra-ku *a-na* ʽŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi<sup>1</sup> <sup>10</sup>*ki-i* *u*<sub>2</sub>-ri-du-ʽu *ina* bi-ri-šu<sub>2</sub>-[nu] <sup>11</sup>LU<sub>2</sub> 1 *me* *qaq-qar* *za-qa*<sup>1</sup>-pa<sup>1</sup> *u*<sub>2</sub>-za-mi-z[u]-ʽu <sup>12</sup>*a-kan-na* *a-ni-ni* *ina* IGI m.d.EN-GI LU<sub>2</sub>.UMBISAG *a-na* <sup>13</sup>*dib-bi-šu*<sub>2</sub>-nu *ki-i* *ni-id-da-bu*-ʽu <sup>14</sup>*um-ma* LUGAL *qaq-qar* ŠE.NUMUN *it-<ta>-na-ku-nu-šu*<sub>2</sub> <sup>15</sup>*mi-nam-ma* GIŠ.a-lu (eras.) ša<sub>2</sub>-ʽan<sup>1</sup>-tu *qaq-qar* <sup>16</sup>*la-pa-ni* GARIM *ru-ʽu*<sub>2</sub>-qu<sup>1</sup> *ta-na-ša-a*<sub>4</sub> <sup>17</sup>m.d.EN-GI *ina* pu-ḥur-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu *iq-ta-bi* <sup>18</sup>*um*<sup>1</sup>-ma LU<sub>2</sub>.A-šip-ri *ana-ku* ša<sub>2</sub>-[a]p-ra-ak <sup>19</sup>*um-ma* *re-eš* *qaq-qar* ša<sub>2</sub> d.GAŠAN ša<sub>2</sub> UNUG.KI <sup>20</sup>*i-ši* *en-na* *re-eš* *qaq-qar* *at-ta-šu*<sub>2</sub> <sup>21</sup>*ina* {i} *ku-mu* *ka-lu-u*<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> *i-[ba-aš*<sub>2</sub>]-šu-*u*<sub>2</sub> <sup>22</sup>*ina* UGU 1 *me* 10 GUR ŠE.NUMUN *ina* GARIM š[a<sub>2</sub>] d.GAŠAN UNUG.KI <sup>23</sup>*it-ta-na-ku-nu-šu*<sub>2</sub> *ka-lu-u*<sub>2</sub>

rev. <sup>1</sup>*a-na* UGU-ḥi-ku-nu *u*[l] *a-mur* *a-mur*<sup>2</sup> 1 *me* LU<sub>2</sub>.UNUG.KI-*a-a* ša<sub>2</sub> *ina* IGI-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu *iq-bu-u*<sub>2</sub> <sup>3</sup>*u* *en-na* *a-ni-ni* *iq-ta-ba-na-a-šu*<sub>2</sub> <sup>4</sup>*um-ma* *a-na* IGI m.d.AG-ŠEŠ.MEŠ-MU *al-ka-ʽa* <sup>5</sup>*dib-bu-u*<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> *la* EN *i-te-ep-šu-na-a-šu*<sub>2</sub> <sup>6</sup>U<sub>4</sub>-mu ša<sub>2</sub> *u*<sub>2</sub>-za-mi-zu-šu<sub>2</sub> 1 *lim* ḥu-ša-bi ša<sub>2</sub> <sup>7</sup>6 *qa* 12 *qa* *ka-bir* *ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi *id-du-ku*-ʽu <sup>8</sup>*a-ni-ni* *ul-tu* ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi *ul-te-lu-na-šu*<sub>2</sub> <sup>9</sup>*a-mur* *pa-ni* ʽe<sub>3</sub>-mi-ka *ni-ʽdag-gal*<sup>1</sup> <sup>10</sup>KA<sub>2</sub> *ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi GIŠ.a-lu.MEŠ ša<sub>2</sub> d.GAŠAN ʽša<sub>2</sub> UNUG<sup>1</sup>.KI <sup>11</sup>*ip-te-tu-u*<sub>2</sub> *u* *ina* bi-ri-šu<sub>2</sub>-[nu] *iq-ta*-bu-*u*<sub>2</sub> <sup>12</sup>*um-ma* *man-ni* ša<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.RIG<sub>7</sub> ʽša<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> [ip-šu]-ni <sup>13</sup>*i-da-bu-ub* d.GAŠAN ša<sub>2</sub> UNUG.KI *lu-u*<sub>2</sub> <sup>14</sup>*ti-i-de* *ki-i* gam<sup>am</sup>-ma-[ru]-ma *ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi <GIŠ>.a-lu ša<sub>2</sub> d.GAŠAN ša<sub>2</sub> UNUG.KI *i-ba-aš*<sub>2</sub>-šu<sup>1</sup> [x x ša<sub>2</sub><sup>2</sup>] ʽŠEŠ<sup>1</sup>-ku-ʽnu<sup>1</sup> <sup>15</sup>*la* ša-bu-*u*<sub>2</sub> *um-ma* *dib-bu* *u*<sub>2</sub>-i[l<sub>3</sub>-ti<sub>3</sub> š]a<sub>2</sub><sup>2</sup> *a-na* {ku} ŠU.2<sup>2</sup>-ni<sup>2</sup> <sup>16</sup>*te-li* *a-na* LUGAL *ina* UGU-ḥi *qi-bi* [(x) U<sub>4</sub><sup>2</sup>]-mu <sup>17</sup>m.d.ŠEŠ.MEŠ-MU m.d.AG-DU<sub>3</sub> *u* m.d.in-nin-šum<sub>3</sub>-DU<sub>3</sub> <sup>18</sup>*šu*<sub>2</sub>-nu *ana* UGU-ḥi *id-da-ʽbu*<sup>1</sup>-<bu>-ʽu LU<sub>2</sub>.DUMU-šip-ri-ka <sup>19</sup>*lil-li-kam*<sub>2</sub>-ma *li-mur* *mi-nu-u*<sub>2</sub> *ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi <sup>20</sup>*i-pu-šu*-ʽu m.d.AG-MU-KAM A-šu<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> m.SUM.NA-ŠEŠ <sup>21</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.NAGAR šu-*u*<sub>2</sub> *ma-la* 100 LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ *ina* UGU-ḥi <sup>22</sup>*id-da-bu-ub* *en-na* ʽse-ḥe-e<sup>1</sup> ša<sub>2</sub> *dul-lu* <sup>23</sup>*a-ni-ni* m.d.AMAR.UTU-KAM *la* *i-ʽka*<sup>1</sup>-a-ʽšu<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> <sup>24</sup>ʽEN<sup>1</sup> *liš-pu-ra-aš*<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>

explanation (the initial state of affairs):

obv. <sup>5-7</sup>(For the past) 13 years, we have been planting the early-bearing Dilmun palms and *alu*-trees for the Lady of Uruk. We have been planting date palms, willow (?) and 30 kurrus (of?) [...].

report: obv. <sup>7-8</sup>20 kurrus of unripe dates sprouted (only) today.

complaint: obv. <sup>9-11</sup>Now, look! When the temple descended (there), they divided the land among themselves, one plot of land per person.

follow-up: obv. <sup>12</sup>-rev. <sup>1</sup>When we complained about them to Bēl-ušallim, the scribe, saying: ‘The king gave you (pl.) plots of cultivated land. Why do you take the *alu*-trees (and) acacia plots instead of the faraway irrigation district?’. Bēl-ušallim spoke in their assembly, saying: ‘I am a messenger, sent (with the command): “Inspect the lands of the Lady of Uruk!”. Now, I have inspected the land. Instead of the marshland that w[as (there?)], they gave you 110 kurrus of cultivated land in the irrigation district o[f] the Lady of Uruk. I did not see (any) marshland at your disposal.’.

argument (from numbers):

rev. <sup>2</sup>Look, it is one hundred Urukians who spoke before them (about this).

complaint: rev. <sup>3-4</sup>And now, he told us: ‘Go before Nabû-aḫḫē-iddina!’.

criticism: rev. <sup>5</sup>He treated us like a no-lord!

complaint: rev. <sup>6-8</sup>On the day they divided (the land), they cut down 1000 firewood, 6 *qû* (and) 12 *qû* thick. They drove us away.

indirect request: rev. <sup>9</sup>Look, we are waiting on your instructions!

complaint: rev. <sup>10-13</sup>They opened the gate in the middle of the *alu*-trees of the Lady of Uruk. And among themselv[es, they sa]id: ‘Who of the serfs will complain about our [actions]?’.

argument (from divine authority):

rev. <sup>13-14</sup>(But) the Lady of Uruk knows that it is comp[le]te among the *alu*-trees of the Lady of Uruk!

argument (?):

rev. <sup>14-16</sup>(And that?) [the ... of (?)] your brothers is needed, with the following wording: ‘The words of a document that falls (?)<sup>232</sup> into your hands – talk to the king about it!’.

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<sup>232</sup> Although in the earlier letters the meaning of *elû* (move up, go up, rise) together with ‘hands’ is usually the opposite action – ‘to slip away from somebody’, here the preposition is without doubt *ana*, denoting movement towards the person and not away from them.

request: rev. <sup>16.-20.</sup>[On the da]y that Bēl-aḥḥē-iddina, Nabû-ibni and Innin-šumu-ibni talk about this, may your messenger come and see what they did there.

additional information: rev. <sup>20.-22.</sup>Nabû-šumu-ēreš, son of Iddin-aḥi – he is a carpenter – he talked about this with as many as one hundred men.

complaint: rev. <sup>22.-23.</sup>Now we are astir because of the work.

appeal for haste: rev. <sup>23.</sup>Marduk-ēreš should not tarry!

request: rev. <sup>24.</sup>May the lord send him!

Structurally, the complaint begins with the indication of the starting point of the senders who recount their long history of work in the orchards. The report that new plants have only just sprouted certainly provides a nice touch, emphasising the diligence of the senders. This idyllic orchard life is then disturbed by the temple serfs who occupy the plots belonging to the senders (and the group they are a part of). As in numerous Neo-Assyrian complaints to the king, the senders attempt to appeal to a lower instance in order to solve their issue with unexpected squatters. The intervention does not seem to result in the resolution that the senders and their colleagues desire, and Bēl-ušallim, the scribe, sends them to Nabû-aḥḥē-iddina, the temple administrator (the addressee), despite one hundred Urukians testifying about the matter of the serfs. Bēl-ušallim treats the senders as ‘no-lord’, which again points at the expectations one had for one’s superiors. A further complaint about the situation follows – perhaps its insertion in the slot right after the failed resolution might indicate a temporal sequence – that is, while the issue remains unsolved, the serfs divide the plots and in addition to that cut down the firewood. On the other hand, the mention that the senders were driven away by the serfs might point towards a summary of the complaint for the sake of the new, higher instance who is meant to take care of it.

The next passage involving the opening of the gate is a bit obscure owing to the gaps and it is unclear who is opening the gate of the *alu*-trees. If the serfs are meant to reassuringly speak to each other about the loyalty of other serfs to their cause, it is a bit unusual that they dissociate ‘the serfs’ from ‘us’ in the pertinent clause (<sup>12.</sup>(...) *man-ni ša<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.RIG<sub>7</sub> ‘ša<sub>2</sub>’ [ip-šu]-ni* <sup>13.</sup>*i-da-bu-ub* – ‘Who of the serfs will speak of our [deeds]?’). Finally, a request for a messenger follows, after which additional information is provided about a certain carpenter who spoke with one hundred men – perhaps the same Urukians who testified in the lines above<sup>233</sup>. In the final move, the need for prompt action is emphasised further and the request for the lord to send somebody is repeated – here, however, the messenger is named. Overall, despite the length of the petition, the tone of the senders is quite factual. Not a single reference to the death imagery, otherwise fairly common even in the institutional correspondence, is made, and the only reference to what may be considered the emotional state of the senders is the very short passage in the penultimate move (<sup>22.</sup>(...) *en-na ‘se-ḥe-e’ ša<sub>2</sub> dul-lu* <sup>23.</sup>*a-ni-ni* – ‘We are now astir because of the work.’).

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<sup>233</sup> So Levavi.

Levavi 2018, 378 suggests a West Semitic background for the authors of the letter, and this could perhaps explain the lack of typical stylistic forms used in the complaints almost until the very end of cuneiform correspondence.

A simple complaint-request sequence is extended with an interesting argument in No. 37 (2018, 272–273):

obv. <sup>5</sup>(...) <sup>u</sup><sub>3</sub> SIK<sub>2</sub>.HI.A <sup>6</sup>ina E<sub>2</sub> ia-a-nu <sup>7</sup>MUNUS.MEŠ il<sup>1</sup>-la <sup>8</sup>SIK<sub>2</sub>.HI.A baṭ-la-’a <sup>9</sup>en-na a-du-u<sub>2</sub>  
<sup>10</sup>m.d.AG-DU-A <sup>11</sup>u m.ŠEŠ.MEŠ-[e-a] <sup>12</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.mu-saḥ-’hir<sup>1</sup> [(x)]

rev. <sup>1</sup>a-na ŠEŠ-ia <sup>2</sup>al-tap-par-ra <sup>3</sup>nu-bat-ta i-na <sup>4</sup>pa-ni-ka la i-be<sub>2</sub>-’tu-u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> <sup>5.2</sup>GU<sub>2</sub>.UN SIK<sub>2</sub>.HI.A  
<sup>6</sup>hi-ti-i-ma <sup>7</sup>in<sup>1</sup>-na<sup>1</sup>-aš<sub>2</sub>-š<sub>2</sub>u<sub>2</sub>-nu-tu

complaint: obv. <sup>5-6</sup>There is no wool in the temple.

complaint: obv. <sup>6-8</sup>Because of lack of wool, the women ceased working.

report: obv. <sup>9</sup>-rev. <sup>2</sup>Now, I have sent my brother Nabû-mukīn-apli and Aḥḥē[ia], my agents.

appeal for haste: rev. <sup>3-4</sup>May they not tarry in your presence!

request: rev. <sup>5-7</sup>Weigh out two talents of wool and give them to them.

The argument concerns the consequences of there not being any wool at the disposal of the temple – the women do not work. Levavi sees here a kind of folk wisdom about the nature of women (2018, 273) – but I am not certain if I can agree that the sender did not have to mention explicitly what the consequences of the deficit of wool are. Despite their brevity, the communication in letters is not that efficient. However, the general term ‘women’ does indeed stand out. In a purely factual statement, one would expect a more specific term, such as the ‘female weavers’. But then, the male workers are constantly referred to as ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ, ‘troops’ or simply ‘men’. Perhaps MUNUS.MEŠ is the female equivalent of the same.

In No. 90 (Levavi 2018, 335–337), the a complaint is made both before and after the request. The complaint before the request is a reproach followed by the failed attempt to solve the issue without any assistance:

obv. <sup>5</sup>mi-na-’a ul-tu <sup>6</sup>at-ta-’a a-kan-na ‘ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ<sup>1</sup> <sup>7</sup>šal-mu-tu u<sub>2</sub>-š<sub>2</sub>u-zu <sup>8</sup>u en-na al-la 2 [(x)]  
<sup>9</sup>ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ a-kan-na ia-a-n[u] <sup>10</sup>u a-na LU<sub>2</sub>.qī<sub>2</sub>-i-pi ki-i <sup>11</sup>aq-bu-u<sub>2</sub> um-ma  
‘LU<sub>2</sub>.HUN.GA<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>.MEŠ <sup>12</sup>a-’gur<sup>1</sup>-ra-nu um-ma KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR <sup>13</sup>ina IGI ni-ni ia-a-nu

complaint: obv. <sup>5-9</sup>Why (is that) as long as you were here, the workers all served here, and now none of them apart from two remain?

follow-up: obv. <sup>10-13</sup>And when I said to the royal agent: ‘Hire workers!’, (he said) as follows: ‘There is no silver!’.

After recounting his own rejected request, the sender asks that the addressee sends the silver for hiring new workers. If the request is not complied with, the sender threatens to inform the king. He emphasises the urgency of the request and complains about the work again:

rev. <sup>11</sup>*dul-lu lu ma-du* <sup>12</sup>*ina UGU-ḫi ni-ni da-a-nu*

complaint: rev. <sup>11-12</sup>We have a lot of hard work!

This complaint, however, serves as an argument for the preceding request. Since the work is hard and there is so much of it, the hired workers are really necessary.

In No. 141 (Levavi 2018, 398–400), the sender complains about the lack of funds to pay the workers:

obv. <sup>5</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.ŠA<sub>3</sub>.TAM <sup>1</sup>il<sup>1</sup>-t[ap-r]a <sup>6</sup>um-ma <sup>1</sup>a-mur <sup>15</sup>MA.NA KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR <sup>7</sup>ul-te-bi-lak-ka <sup>8</sup>al-la <sup>10</sup>MA.NA KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR <sup>9</sup>m.d.AG-UŠ<sub>2</sub>-TIN-<sup>1</sup>iṭ ul<sup>1</sup> iš-ša<sub>2</sub>-<sup>9</sup>a <sup>10</sup>a-mur a-di <sup>5</sup>MA.NA KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR <sup>11</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> m.LU<sub>2</sub>-d.na-na-a iš-ša<sub>2</sub>-<sup>9</sup>a <sup>12</sup>15 MA.NA KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR tul-te-bil <sup>13</sup>a-du-u<sub>2</sub> ERIN<sub>2</sub>.ME <sup>1</sup>a<sub>4</sub><sup>1</sup> <sup>be14</sup>ina bu-bu-tu <sup>be15</sup>ina ŠU.2-ia

rev. <sup>1</sup>it-ta-<sup>1</sup>iš<sup>1</sup>-<sup>2</sup>u <sup>2</sup>2 me GUR ŠE.BAR m.IR<sub>3</sub>-d.AG <sup>3</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL E<sub>2</sub><sup>?</sup> <ki>-li<sup>?</sup> ki-i <sup>4</sup>id-din<sup>1</sup> <sup>1</sup>ITI ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi <sup>5</sup>it-<sup>1</sup>ta<sup>1</sup>-ši-iz-<sup>6</sup>u <sup>6</sup>u en-na ni-is-ḫi <sup>7</sup>a-kan-na ia-a-nu <sup>8</sup>m.ta-qiš-d.ME.ME nu-bat-ti <sup>9</sup>ina pa-ni-ka la <sup>1</sup>i<sup>1</sup>-[b]a-<sup>1</sup>at<sup>1</sup> <sup>10</sup>ŠE.BAR ŠEŠ-u<sub>2</sub>-a lid-<sup>1</sup>da-aš<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>

explanation: obv. <sup>5-12</sup>The temple administrator wrote to me: ‘Look, am delivering to you 15 minas of silver.’. (But) Nabû-mītu-uballit did not bring me more than 10 minas of silver. (But) look, with the 5 minas of silver that were brought by Amēl-Nanāia, you did bring me 15 minas of silver.

complaint: obv. <sup>13</sup>-rev. <sup>1</sup>Now, these men are slipping away from my hands for hunger!

additional information:

rev. <sup>2-5</sup>When Arad-Nabû, the prison (?) overseer gave me 200 kurrus of grain, they subsisted on it for one month.

complaint: rev. <sup>6-7</sup>But now, there are (really) no payments left here!

appeal for haste: rev. <sup>8-9</sup>May Taqīš-Gula not t[a]rry in your presence!

request: rev. <sup>10</sup>May my brother give him the grain!

The complaint does not refer to somebody’s actions, as the 15 minas of silver were indeed sent after all, but to the untenable position of the sender and the workers he oversees. The additional information about the 200 kurrus given to the sender by Arad-Nabû serve to emphasise the absolute exhaustion of resources as well as indirectly point to the truthfulness of the sender, who did not forget to include the tiniest detail. As in several other letters in this part of the corpus, the request is directly preceded by an appeal in which the sender underscores the necessity for an urgent solution of the issue he raises.



Another complaint about payments for workers is No. 166 (Levavi 2018, 432–433). The sender is addressing his ‘lord’, the temple administrator and the longest part of the letter is devoted to an explanation of the problems related to obtaining silver. In rev. 9.-14., the sender reminds his ‘lord’ about his lack of assistance even though:

rev. <sup>15</sup>*a-ki-i ha-na-qu* <sup>16</sup>*1-en KA<sub>2</sub> a-na GI BI* <sup>17</sup>*ina UGU-<sup>r</sup>hi-nu<sup>1</sup> it-ta-<sup>r</sup>suk<sup>1</sup>* <sup>re18</sup>*.<sup>r</sup>m<sup>1</sup>.i-[din<sup>2</sup>]-d.EN*  
<sup>re19</sup>*.<sup>r</sup>u* <sup>2</sup> *MA.NA KU<sub>3</sub><sup>1</sup>.BABBAR* <sup>re20</sup>*šu-pur <sup>r</sup>id-dan<sup>1</sup>-nu ia-a-nu-<u>* <sup>re21</sup>*.<sup>r</sup>di-ka-nu<sup>1</sup>*  
*K[U<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR]* <sup>re22</sup>*.<sup>r</sup>E<sub>2</sub> NIG<sub>2</sub>.GA.MEŠ ana<sup>1</sup> ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ gab-bi it-ta<sup>1</sup>-din*

e. <sup>1</sup>*u a-ni-ni ul id-din-na-a-šu<sub>2</sub> um-ma* <sup>1 ½</sup> *<sup>r</sup>GU<sub>2</sub>.UN<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup><sup>r</sup>KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR ina IGI<sup>1</sup> m.d.AG-ŠEŠ-*  
*MU <sup>r</sup>ap-te-qid<sup>1</sup>*

complaint: rev. <sup>15.-17</sup> (But) he assigned us to/with GI BI – (it was) like suffocation!

request: rev. <sup>re18.-re20</sup> Send I[ddin (?)]-Bēl and two minas of silver so that he gives it (to us).

argument (warning):

rev. <sup>re20.-re21</sup> Otherwise, we (are as good as) murdered!

complaint (about unequal treatment):

rev. <sup>re22.-e.2.</sup> The treasury has paid all the workers – but we have not been paid. (He = the official from the treasury) says as follows: ‘I have (already) entrusted 1 ½ talents of silver to Nabû-aḫu-iddina (= the sender).’

The sender focuses above all on explaining the situation factually, but he does also include the remark about himself and his colleagues being as good as dead.

In No. 181 (Levavi 2018, 453–454), the sender also complains about too much work (obv. 7.-rev. 3.), but the request he makes is unfortunately broken.

In No. 155 (Levavi 2018, 417–418), the complaint seems to be realised as a reminder after a broken promise:

obv. <sup>10</sup>*um-ma LU<sub>2</sub>.A-KIN-ka* <sup>11</sup>*.<sup>r</sup>il<sup>1</sup>-li-kam-ma* <sup>12</sup>*[GU<sub>4</sub>(.MEŠ)] <sup>r</sup>lu<sup>1</sup>-ud-da-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>13</sup>*[GU<sub>4</sub>(.MEŠ)] <sup>r</sup>ul*  
*ta<sup>1</sup>-ad-da-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>*

reminder (with a promise or an offer):

obv. <sup>10.-12.</sup> ‘May your messenger come! I will give him [(an) ox(en)].’

complaint: obv. <sup>13</sup> You did not give him [(an) ox(en)]!

Unfortunately, the gap in the following two lines makes further analysis impossible. When the letter is legible in the reverse, the sender makes a seemingly strong demand, inserts a *nakuttu*-clause for emphasis and promises to pay back for the animal (rev. 1.-4.; rev. 5.-6.; rev. 7.-8. respectively).

In No. 163 (Levavi 2018, 428–429), the sender informs his ‘lord’ that he had to flee because of unfounded accusations:

obv. <sup>6</sup>ṛpiš-ki<sup>1</sup> a-na pa-ṛni-ia<sup>1</sup> <sup>7</sup>ki-<i><sup>ṛ</sup>il<sup>1</sup>-la-ṛ<sup>1</sup> a<sup>1</sup> ul-tu <sup>8</sup>ṛUNUG<sup>1</sup>.KI at-ta-ša-<sup>9</sup>a<sup>9</sup> [ši-p]ir-ti a-na EN-ia<sup>10</sup> ki-i aš<sub>2</sub>-pu-ru <sup>11</sup>ši-pir-ti ša<sub>2</sub> EN-ia<sub>2</sub> <sup>12</sup>ul a-mur-ma <sup>13</sup>ul ab-ṛluṭ<sup>1</sup> <sup>be14</sup>ṛa-mur<sup>1</sup> a-na <sup>be15</sup>ṛURU<sup>1</sup>?<sup>1</sup> KUR-ti-ia<sub>2</sub> <sup>be16</sup>a-ma-qut-tu<sub>2</sub>

rev. <sup>1</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub>-ka a-na-ka <sup>2</sup>ši-pir-ti ša<sub>2</sub> EN-ia<sub>2</sub> <sup>3</sup>lu-mur-ma lu-ub-luṭ

report: obv. <sup>6-8</sup>When unjust accusations were made against me, I left Uruk.

complaint: obv. <sup>9-13</sup>I sent a [mes]sage to my lord, but I did not see an answer and did not live.

warning (as argument): obv. <sup>be14-be16</sup>Look, I will flee to the city (?) of my land!

declaration of loyalty:

rev. <sup>1</sup>I am your servant!

request: rev. <sup>2-3</sup>Let me see a message from my lord and may I revive!

The declaration of loyalty might have doubled as a humilific device and an attempt to indirectly appeal to the sense of duty towards the servant the sender likely expected from his lord. The threat could also be a warning – if the sender meant being forced to flee. It could also be a complaint, if the addressee would not perceive this action to be undesirable. As this letter demonstrates, the imagery of dying and being revived is not only attested in the royal correspondence. While it could be flatteringly exploited to juxtapose the king with the gods, the meaning of ‘dying’ and ‘living’ or ‘being restored to life’ is clearly prosaic. If one were to choose a less literal translation, perhaps ‘being finished’ for ‘dying’ would be quite in order.

In No. 217 (Levavi 2018, 491–493), the sender recounts a complaint (with an accusation) a third party made before the king. The king grants the petitioner what he wishes by commanding him to write to the temple administrator:

obv. <sup>6</sup>m.d.AG-LUGAL-URU<sub>3</sub> A-šu<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> m.MU-URU<sub>3</sub> <sup>7</sup>LUGAL a-na UGU LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub> ul-te-ziz <sup>8</sup>um-ma LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ ul i-man-gur-ma <sup>9</sup>dul-lu ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL ul ip-pu-uš <sup>10</sup>LUGAL iq-ta-ba-<sup>11</sup>a um-ma <sup>11</sup>a-na LU<sub>2</sub>.ŠA<sub>3</sub>.TAM šu-pur-ma <sup>12</sup>liš-pu-ra-ak-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu-nu-tu

complaint (recounted, with an accusation):

obv. <sup>6-9</sup>Nabû-šarru-ušur, son of Šumu-ušur, stood before the king, saying: ‘The men refuse to do the work of the king!’.

command (from the king):

obv. <sup>10-12</sup>The king said: ‘Write to the temple administrator! Let him send them to you.’.

The sender then urges the temple administrator to send the men and emphasises that the king personally entrusted the matter to him. The following sequence includes a complaint on a different topic:

rev. <sup>9</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.š[i]-ra-ku gab-bi <sup>10</sup>bi-ru-u<sub>2</sub> i-qa-bu-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>11</sup>um-ma re-ḫa-an-ni <sup>12</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> ITL.SIG<sub>4</sub> u ITL.ŠU  
<sup>13</sup>mam-ma ul id-di-ni-an-na-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>14</sup>EN liq-bi-i-ma <sup>15</sup>lid-din-nu-niš-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu-tu <sup>re16</sup>lu-u<sub>2</sub> ma-a-du  
<sup>re17</sup>pa-ni-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu <sup>re18</sup>bi-šu-’u

report: rev. <sup>9-10</sup>*All the s[e]rfs are starving.*

complaint (recounted):

rev. <sup>10-13</sup>They are saying: ‘Nobody has given us our payments for Simanu and Du’ūzu!’

request: rev. <sup>14-15</sup>May the lord command that they give it to them!

argument: rev. <sup>re16-re18</sup>They are indeed very angry.

This presents one of the very few arguments based on the anger of the subordinates in this corpus.

The common topics in this part of the corpus are, as expected, the problems encountered during the execution of administrative tasks and the lack of funds. The arguments based on interpersonal relationships are perhaps more frequently attested because of the expectations the senders have for their ‘lords’.

## Late Babylonian private correspondence

The writers of the very late correspondence sometimes seem to want to fit as many topics in a single message as possible. Some complaints seem therefore to have the form of reproaches followed by requests (No. 8. rev. 13.-re18. ) or only reproaches (No. 39, rev. 7.-9.)

No. 24 (Hackl et al. 2014, 136–137) is basically a petition to the sender’s ‘brother’. As his first move after the greeting, the sender makes the following complaint as an argument for the following request:

obv. <sup>5</sup>(...) ti-i-de <sup>6</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> AD u ŠEŠ al-la-nu-uk-ka <sup>7</sup>la dag-lak-ku

complaint (pseudo-reminder):

obv. <sup>5-7</sup>You know that I have neither a father nor a brother apart from you!

This is not unlike the argument from being completely alone that some senders enjoyed in their correspondence with the Assyrian kings. The verb expressing the perception that nobody is there is actually *dagālu*, ‘to look’, but in an extended meaning also ‘to belong’ (CAD D, 21). A similar pattern can be observed in No. 45 (Hackl et al. 2014, 157–160), in which the sender makes the argument before a request to his ‘father’ (obv. <sup>3</sup>(...) *a-na-ku* <sup>4</sup>*ina ʔe<sub>3</sub>-mi-ia u<sub>3</sub> mam-ma ul* <sup>1</sup>*dag<sup>1</sup>-la-ka ša<sub>2</sub>* <sup>5</sup>*it-ta-ḥu-u<sub>2</sub>-a iz-zi-zu* – ‘I am acting according to the plan/command, but I do not have anybody who would stand by my side.’)

No. 27 (Hackl et al. 2014, 140) is a complaint about missing payment of silver – when the sender tries to take a third party to account, he fails (the words of the guilty party are unfortunately broken in obv. 10 and perhaps the following line). Thereafter, the sender reports that his debtor fled the city – no request follows.

No. 32 (Hackl et al. 2014, 144–145) is a complaint caused by the addressee not complying with a previous command or request from the sender:

obv. <sup>5</sup>*ši-pir-ta-a al-tap-pa[r]-ra* <sup>6</sup>*um-ma* <sup>1</sup>20<sup>1</sup> GUR ZU<sub>2</sub>.LUM.MA <sup>7</sup>*gam-ru<sup>1</sup>-tu a-na* <sup>8</sup>*m.ina*  
GISSU-d.EN<sup>1</sup> *i-ru<sup>1</sup> din<sup>1</sup>* <sup>9</sup>*mi-na-am* <sup>10</sup>*tu-še-ti-iq-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>11</sup>*[a-mur] en-na*

rev. <sup>1</sup>20 G[UR ZU<sub>2</sub>.LUM.MA] <sup>2</sup>*a-di* E.KI <sup>3</sup>*gu-um-ru<sup>1</sup>-ma* <sup>4</sup>*in-na-aš<sub>2</sub>-ši* <sup>5</sup>*la tu-še-ru<sup>1</sup>-ti-iq-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>6</sup>*ši-*  
*pir-ta-a ru<sup>1</sup>-u<sup>1</sup>* <sup>7</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.mu-kin-ne<sub>2</sub>-e

reminder: obv. <sup>5-8</sup>I sent you my message as follows: ‘Give a complete (= without deductions) 20 kurrus of dates to Ina-šilli-Bēl!’.

reproach: obv. <sup>9-10</sup>Why did you let him go empty-handed?

request: obv. <sup>11</sup>-rev. <sup>4</sup>[Look], give him the complete 20 k[urrus of dates] together with (transport costs) to Babylon!

admonition: rev. <sup>5</sup>May he not go empty-handed!

argument: rev. <sup>6-7</sup>May my message be my witness!

The arguments used by the sender refer to the existence of a previous letter – this should be sufficient for the addressee to act. A similar situation is attested in No. 160 (Hackl et al. 2014, 274–275), obv. 4.-6. – although here the complaint (or rebuke?) is introduced with the phrase *lū idātu*, the phrase emphasising assertions for rhetorical or even legal purposes (see Hackl et al. 2014, 144, in commentary to No. 30, line 4.). Another letter in which the sender precedes his complaint with his own request or command is No. 180 (Hackl et al. 2014, 290–291), although the complaint is only preserved fragmentarily. The situation is slightly different in No. 203 (Hackl et al. 2014, 312): the sender recounts a reminder he made to third parties about what they owe to him (obv. 11.-rev. 1.) – but they ignore his

demands, and the sender urges his ‘lord’ to produce a new debt note, so that they debt can be finally extracted.

In No. 38 (Hackl et al. 2014, 150–151), the sender, Madān-bēlu-ušur, complains about a third party giving him the wrong animals – this is the reason why Madān-bēlu-ušur cannot lead them to his ‘lord’, but he offers to bring the sheep which are his share. Finally, he reiterates his initial complaint:

rev. <sup>1</sup>*ul id-din-nu* <sup>2</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> il-lak-ku* <sup>3</sup>*ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>3</sup>MUNUS.GEME<sub>2</sub> *i-na-ad-an-ni* <sup>4</sup>*u<sub>3</sub>* (eras.)LU<sub>2</sub> *di-i-ni-ia* <sup>5</sup>*ul te-pu-uš* <sup>6</sup>*2-ta* UZ<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ *u<sub>3</sub>* <sup>7</sup>*1-ta im-mir-tu<sub>4</sub>* <sup>8</sup>*i-ta-bak-ku qu-ru-be<sub>2</sub>-e-tu<sub>4</sub>* <sup>9</sup>*im-mir-tu<sub>4</sub>* *u* DUMU-šu<sub>2</sub> *ul i-ma-an-gur* <sup>10</sup>*ul i-nam-din-nu i-ṭi<sub>3</sub>-pi-i* <sup>11</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> at-tu-šu<sub>2</sub> a-na-ku-ṛu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>12</sup>*il-ta-par-ri* <sup>13</sup>*kap-du ṭe<sub>3</sub>-en ša* EN-ia <sup>14</sup>*a-na* UGU-ḫi *lu-šim-me*

complaint (repeated):

rev. <sup>1</sup>He did not give (them to me).

complaint: rev. <sup>2-3</sup>In that he goes (away), he treats me like a slave-girl.

rebuke: rev. <sup>4-5</sup>And you do not give me justice!

complaint: rev. <sup>6-10</sup>He brought two goats and one sheep – (and yet) he refuses to give me the available (animals) – a sheep and her young.

complaint: rev. <sup>10-12</sup>He additionally sent me (animals) from those that belong to him.

request: rev. <sup>13-14</sup>Let me quickly hear a command from my lord about this!

The exact background of the conflict is unclear, but it is striking that Madān-bēlu-ušur, a slave himself, considers being treated like a ‘slave-girl’ something so extremely inappropriate. This gives insight into the gender ideology prevalent in the Late Babylonian society.

In a number of complaints, the senders mention somebody who make unjustified claims against them, *pirku/pišku* + *dabābu*. A good example is No. 45 (Hackl et al. 2014, 157–160), in which the sender asks his ‘father’ – actually an older brother – for help:

obv. <sup>15</sup>[m].ṛd.AG<sup>1</sup>-URU<sub>3</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> *u* m.re-ṛmut<sup>1</sup> <sup>be16</sup>[DU]MU.MEŠ *ša<sub>2</sub>* m.KAR-d.A[MAR.UTU]

rev. <sup>1</sup>[pi]š-ki it-ti-[ia] <sup>2</sup>*id-da-ab-bu-u[b-u]* ŠE.BAR] <sup>3</sup>*ul id-(di)din-nu* <sup>1</sup>*e[t ši]-ṛpir-tu<sub>4</sub>* <sup>4</sup>*u<sub>3</sub>* DUMU-šip-ri *ki-ṛi* *ša<sub>2</sub>* <sup>1</sup>*m.bar-ze-en-na* <sup>5</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> ki-i* *ša<sub>2</sub>* LU<sub>2</sub>.SUKKAL EN *liš-ša<sub>2</sub>-am-ma* <sup>6</sup>*a-na* IGI m.gu-za-nu LU<sub>2</sub>.pa-qu-du <sup>7</sup>*u* m.MU-d.U.GUR LU<sub>2</sub>.u<sub>2</sub>-mar-za-na-pa-ta <sup>8</sup>EN *lu-še-bi-lu a-mur* KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR *la-IGI* <sup>9</sup>*m.ša<sub>2</sub>-d.EN-at-ta* EN *liš-ši-ma a-na* <sup>10</sup>UGU *ši-pir-tu<sub>4</sub>* *u<sub>3</sub> mar šip-ri* <sup>11</sup>EN *lid-din kap-du ṭe<sub>3</sub>-e-mu* <sup>12</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub>* EN-ia *lu-uš-mu*

complaint: obv. <sup>15</sup>-rev. <sup>3</sup>Nabû-ušur and Rēmûtu are maki[ng unju]stified claims against [me]. They did not give me [grain].

request: rev. <sup>3-8</sup>May the lord take a singl[e mes]sage and a messenger either from Barzenna or from the vizier and send it to Gūzānu, the watcher, or Iddin-Nergal, the governor.

request: rev. <sup>8-11</sup>Look! May the lord take the silver from Ša-Bēl-attā and give it for the message and the messenger.

request: rev. <sup>11-12</sup>Quickly! May I hear the instructions from my lord!

The focus of the letter is the request, very specific, considering the terms of address – but then, the sender and the addressee were brothers.

No. 52 (Hackl et al. 2014, 165–166) is sent after the sender has already tried to contact the addressee several times:

obv. <sup>5</sup>(...) 2-šu<sub>2</sub> 3-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>6</sup>ki-i aš<sub>2</sub>-pur-rak-ka <sup>7</sup>ŠE.BAR ul tu<sup>1</sup>-še-bi-lu <sup>8</sup>BURU<sub>14</sub> na-a-<sup>1</sup>di<sup>1</sup>

complaint: obv. <sup>5-7</sup>Although I have written to you two or three times, you have not sent me the grain.

taunt (rhetorical question):

obv. <sup>8</sup>Is the harvest abandoned?

Following this question, the sender mentions his messenger by name, and urges the addressee to take care of the matter immediately.

The lengthy complaint against the chariot driver Libluṭ is discussed at length in the chapter on threats and warnings (No. 61, Hackl et al. 2014, 175–177).

No. 72 (Hackl et al. 2014, 186–187) resembles the No. 100 from the archive of the Nippur governor (see above), in which the sender informs the addressee about a third party is refusing to give him goods without written authorisation:

obv. <sup>3</sup>(...) ZU<sub>2</sub>.LUM.MA ša<sub>2</sub> ina IGI <sup>4</sup>m.ba-la-ṭu ša<sub>2</sub> EN iš-pu-ru <sup>5</sup>um-ma ZU<sub>2</sub>.LUM.MA a-na m.ni-qu-du <sup>6</sup>i-šam-ma i-din um-ma ši-pir-tu<sub>4</sub> <sup>7</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> m.DU<sub>10</sub>.GA-ia<sub>2</sub> lu-mur-ma ZU<sub>2</sub>.LUM.MA <sup>8</sup>lu-ud-da-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>

complaint (with an introduction):

rev. <sup>3-8</sup>The dates that are with Balātu about which the lord wrote to me: ‘Take the dates and give them to Niqūdu!’ – he (= Balātu told me) as follows: ‘Let me see a message from Tābia and I will give him the dates!’.

In the following, partially broken passage, the sender gives an account of the dates, and finally repeats Balātu’s demand in rev. 5’.-7’., after which the ‘lord’ is requested to provide the suitable message for Balātu.

No. 170 (Hackl et al. 2014, 282–283) is somewhat similar – the sender and the addressee make different claims about a delivery of bricks. The sender was to be given the bricks by a third party, which has not happened (obv. 5.-be8.). The addressee is urged to send a message.

The sender of No. 96 (Hackl et al. 2014, 209) complains to his ‘lord’ about the lack of communication:

obv. <sup>8</sup>(...) *lu ma-du* <sup>9</sup>*na-kut-tu* <sup>4</sup>*aš<sub>2</sub>-ta-aš<sub>2</sub>-š[i]* <sup>10</sup>*[m]i-nam-ma* *te<sub>3</sub>-e-m[u]* <sup>11</sup>*[ša<sub>2</sub>]* EN-ia *i-ri-i[q-ma]*  
<sup>12</sup>*[i]-na* 3-ta *[ši-pir-re-ti]* <sup>13</sup>*[t]e<sub>3</sub>-e-m[u]* <sup>be14</sup>*[a-na]* EN-i[a]

rev. <sup>1</sup>*[a]l-t[a-par]* <sup>2</sup>*[mi-n]a-<sup>r</sup>a<sup>1</sup> t[e<sub>3</sub>-e-mu]* <sup>3</sup>*[ša<sub>2</sub>]* EN-ia *ul a[š<sub>2</sub>-me]*

complaint: obv. <sup>8-9</sup>I have been very worrie[d]!

reproach: obv. <sup>10-11</sup>[W]hy is the messag[e of] mu lord staying [away]?

complaint: obv. <sup>12</sup>-rev. <sup>1</sup>[I] have wri[ttten to] m[y] lord three [messages]!

reproach: rev. <sup>2-3</sup>[Wh]y do I not [hear] a me[ssage from] my [lord]?

No request follows this complaint directly, but surely it was clear enough what the sender wanted. Another complaint caused by the lack communication from a ‘lord’ is No. 235 (Hackl et al. 2014, 344–345), obv. 6.-10. A similar complaint, although formulated in a drier manner, is No. 141 (Hackl et al. 2014, 257–258), obv. 5.-7. This shorter complaint is however followed by a longer one:

obv. <sup>8</sup>*ki-i ta-ṭi-pi-an-ni* <sup>9</sup>*ul-tu a-ga-a* <sup>10</sup>*m.<sup>r</sup>mu<sup>1</sup>-šal-lim-d.AMAR.UTU* <sup>11</sup>*a<sup>1</sup>-kan-na-<sup>r</sup>ka<sup>1</sup> ta-bak-ka*  
<sup>be12</sup>*ul ta-šaq-[qi<sub>2</sub>]*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*a-ga-<sup>a</sup> EN<sup>1</sup>* <sup>2</sup>*MUN-u<sub>2</sub>-tu* <sup>3</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> BAR<sub>2</sub>.SIPA.KI.MEŠ* <sup>4</sup>*piš-ki ina pa-ni-ia<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>2</sub>-kin* <sup>5</sup>*[ina] ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*  
*bi ki-i ši-<sup>r</sup>pir<sup>1</sup>-ta-a* <sup>6</sup>*la ta-me-<sup>r</sup>e<sup>1</sup>-šu<sub>2</sub>*

reminder: obv. <sup>8</sup>You added me (as a person obliged to work).

complaint: obv. <sup>9-be12</sup>(And yet) since then, you have been taking Mušallim-Marduk there. You did not do the irrigat[ion] (work).

taunt: rev. <sup>1-3</sup>Is this the friendship of the Borsippians?

complaint: rev. <sup>4</sup>I am being treated unfairly!

admonition: rev. <sup>5-6</sup>Do not forget my message [about] this!

In the following passage, the sender finally makes his request. It is fascinating that the argument about the addressee not fulfilling his obligations with regards to the sender is based on the unstated principle that the addressee, as a Borsippian, represents his entire city, and should he not act properly, the reputation of the entire city will suffer.

Almost as an afterthought, the sender of No. 124 (Hackl et al. 2014, 238–239) mentions that he is being harassed:

rev. <sup>5</sup>[m.d.AMA]R.UTU-DUMU-<sup>1</sup>LUGAL-*ri-u<sub>2</sub>-sur*<sup>1</sup> <sup>6</sup>[i]*h-ta-sa-an-ni* <sup>7</sup>*i-qab-ba-a um-ma* <sup>8</sup>3  
MA.NA <sup>1</sup>/<sub>3</sub> GIN<sub>2</sub> KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR <sup>9</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub>* d.EN *ina* UGU-*hi-ka*

complaint (with quoted demand):

rev. <sup>5</sup>.-<sup>9</sup>[Ma]rduk-mār-šarri-ušur [has] been haranguing me: ‘You (still) owe three minas (and) <sup>1</sup>/<sub>3</sub> shekels of silver to Bēl!’.

No request follows – but it is also not needed.

The sender of No. 132 (Hackl et al. 2014, 248–249) directs at his ‘father’ a rebuke and a reproach:

obv. <sup>5</sup>d.AG *ki-i ul-tu re-eš* <sup>be6</sup>*a-di qi<sub>2</sub>-it* <sup>be7</sup>.[<sup>1</sup>MU AD<sup>1</sup>-*u<sub>2</sub>-a* <sup>1</sup>*at-ta*<sup>1</sup>

rev. <sup>1</sup>*am-me-ni piš-ki* <sup>2</sup>*it-ti-ia<sub>2</sub>* *ta-dab-bu-ub*

rebuke (with an oath):

obv. <sup>5</sup>.-<sup>be7</sup>.By Nabû! You were not a father to me from the beginning to the end of this year!

reproach: rev. <sup>1</sup>.-<sup>2</sup>.Why are you making unjustified claims against me?

The two requests that follow do not seem to be directly related. The sender thus makes a complaint based on the expectations of a client-patron relationship that his ‘father’ failed to fulfil.

The background of No. 135 (Hackl et al. 2014, 250–252) is a conflict about the ‘sister’ of the addressees (here very likely an actual sister). A third party claims that she is a slave-girl who belongs to him (obv. 9.-12.). The sender rebukes his addressees, his ‘brothers’ for doing nothing for fear of the governor (obv. 15.-be18.), which causes the man who seized the ‘sisters’ of the addressees to escape justice. The complaint then follows:

rev. <sup>7</sup>m.d.AG-*ke-šir it-te-me* <sup>8</sup>*ki-i un-deš-šir*<sub>3</sub> <sup>9</sup>*u en-na-a a-na-ku ana pir-ku* <sup>10</sup>*ta-na-suk-an-na-in-nu* <sup>11</sup>*ak-ka-i ki-i* <sup>12</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> ram-ni-ku-nu ana* UGU-*hi-ia<sub>2</sub>* <sup>13</sup>*ta-nam-di-nu*

complaint: rev. <sup>7</sup>.-<sup>8</sup>.Nabû-kešir is swearing not to release her.

complaint: rev. <sup>9</sup>.-<sup>10</sup>.And now you cut off (my claims) unjustly!

reproach: rev. <sup>11</sup>.-<sup>13</sup>.How much of what is your responsibility will you shove upon me?

The request that follows is formulated as a rebuke (rev. 13.-15.), and finally the sender promises or offers to send a different slave-girl as compensation.

The sender of No. 150 (Hackl et al. 2014, 266–267) mentions his negative feelings, caused by the unfortunate situation:



rev.<sup>234</sup> <sup>19</sup>u<sub>3</sub> a<sup>1</sup>-na UGU <sup>20</sup>piš<sup>1</sup>-ki ša<sub>2</sub> it-ti-ia<sub>2</sub> <sup>21</sup>da-ab<sup>1</sup>-bu u<sub>3</sub> <sup>22</sup>iš-šem<sup>1</sup>-mu-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>23</sup>ul ša<sub>2</sub>-al<sup>1</sup>-ma-ku

complaint: rev.<sup>19-23</sup> And as to the wrongful claims that are being made against me and (which) are being heard (around here) – I am not happy (at all).

This complaint is followed by a request. It is striking that the sender thought the mention of him not being all right should suffice to motivate his ‘brother’ to act. No explanation is made about the situation at all.

An emotional state without any details is also referred to in No. 198 (Hackl et al. 2014, 307–308):

rev. <sup>2</sup>(...) a-kan-nu mim-ma <sup>3</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> i-ṭi-ib<sub>2</sub>-a-ni ab-ba-<sup>1</sup>lu<sup>1</sup> <sup>4</sup>u ab-ba-lu bi-i-ši <sup>5</sup>mu-ši u <sup>1</sup>kal<sup>1</sup> U<sub>4</sub>-mu  
<sup>6</sup>ina di-in-du u u<sub>2</sub>-pa-ṭu <sup>7</sup>[a]š<sub>2</sub>-ba-ku

grumble: rev.<sup>2-7</sup> Here, everything that was good for me has – alas, alas<sup>235</sup>! – turned ugly. By night and by day, [I] sit in tears, my nose runny<sup>236</sup>!

The following passage is damaged, but it seems to refer to the gods granting the sender the ability to see his ‘lord’ again. In the following move (rev. re9.-e. 2.) the sender speaks of his plans. It would seem that the function of the complaint here was purely phatic.

No. 162 (Hackl et al. 2014, 275–277) is a lengthy complaint:

obv. <sup>5</sup>(...) am-me-ni <sup>6</sup>E<sub>2</sub>-a ta-ḫe-ep-pu <sup>7</sup>ina pa-ni ḫa-pe-e E<sub>2</sub>-ka <sup>8</sup>ta-al-lak pu-ut <sup>9</sup>e-ṭe<sub>3</sub>-ru ša<sub>2</sub> A.ŠA<sub>3</sub>  
<sup>10</sup>ki-i ta-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>11</sup>A.ŠA<sub>3</sub>-a in-na-kal <sup>12</sup>(eras.) <sup>13</sup>u<sub>3</sub> GIŠ.GIŠIMMAR ša<sub>2</sub> <sup>14</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-rab-bu-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>15</sup>id-  
di-ku-’u

rev. <sup>1</sup>u at-ta ina E<sub>2</sub>-ka <sup>2</sup>ŠA<sub>3</sub>-ba-ka ṭa-ab-ka <sup>3</sup>en-na ŠE.BAR ša<sub>2</sub> ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi <sup>4</sup>e-re-šu<sub>2</sub> gab-bi <sup>5</sup>na-  
ša<sub>2</sub>-a-ta <sup>6</sup>en-na a-na EN-ia<sub>2</sub> <sup>7</sup>al-tap-ra <sup>8</sup>al-kam-ma A.ŠA<sub>3</sub>-a <sup>9</sup>e-ṭir-šu<sub>2</sub> BURU<sub>14</sub>.MEŠ-ia<sub>2</sub> <sup>10</sup>i-bi-  
in-ni

reproach: obv.<sup>5-6</sup> Why are you destroying my household?

rebuke: obv.<sup>7-8</sup> Your (own) household is on its way to ruin!

complaint: obv.<sup>8-15</sup> (Even) though you guaranteed for the payment for the field, my field is (now) being consumed! And (even) the palm tree that I raised (myself) is being cut down!

rebuke: rev.<sup>1-2</sup> And (meanwhile), you (sit) at home, feeling happy!

<sup>234</sup> Since the numbering in the edition does not indicate where the reverse starts, I had to use the number from the beginning of the obverse. However, these lines are most certainly to be found in the reverse. I was unable to locate a copy or a photo of BM 29490.

<sup>235</sup> Sokoloff and Abraham (2011, 24–25) argue against this translation, but Hackl et al. (2014, 307–308), in commentary to lines 12f. refute these arguments quite convincingly.

<sup>236</sup> *upāṭu* (CAT U, 178-179) is ‘mucus’, also occasionally referring to the sap of the trees. The word is by no means only attested in medical texts.

complaint: rev. <sup>3-5</sup>Now (even) the entire grain of my harvest has been carried away!

request (with a flattering introduction):

rev. <sup>6-10</sup>Now, I am writing to my lord! Come, pay for my field (and) give me my harvest (back)!

Strikingly, the sender uses the same motive that is also attested in SAA 17 117: the addressee sits at home, in perfect mood, doing nothing, while the sender is suffering enormously. Despite the letter being addressed to a ‘brother’ and the second person and imperative forms being used throughout, in the move preceding the request, in which the sender explicitly refers to his own message, he calls his ‘brother’ his ‘lord’. This must have been strategic flattery. As in other complaints, the tone of rebuke need not be taken as incongruent with the flattering term of address. The Akkadian rules of communication seem to require a certain measure of directness, even when it is accompanied by compliments and flattery.

In No. 200 (Hackl et al. 2014, 309–310), the sender makes a short complaint summarising his unfortunate circumstances, before progressing to an elaborate request sequence:

obv. <sup>3</sup>(...) *en-na ki-i aš<sub>2</sub>-mu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>4</sup>*dib-bi ina UGU-ḫi-ia bi-šu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>5</sup>*pa-aṭ-ṭi-re-e KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR u mu<sup>1</sup>-*  
*šiḫ-tu<sub>4</sub>* <sup>6</sup>*ma-la ina UGU-ḫi-ia ina GU<sub>2</sub>.DU<sub>5</sub>.<A>.KI* <sup>7</sup>*it-ta-šu-u<sub>2</sub>*

complaint: <sup>3-7</sup>Now, as I have heard, the things are ugly for me. They took away the silver altars and the robe, as much as I have owed in Cutha.

The complaint served not only as an argument for the request, but also as an explanation. The sender asks the addressee to bring items to the house of a third party – perhaps the reason why his own house is not the default destination is indicated in the complaint.

The female sender of No. 213 (Hackl et al. 2014, 322–324) writes to her father to rebuke him and complain before asking him to solve her problems with third parties in her stead:

obv. <sup>6</sup>*am-me-ni ina pa-ni-ka* <sup>7</sup>*a-na-ku u DUMU.MUNUS.MEŠ-ia* <sup>8</sup>*ina ṣu-um-me-e* <sup>9</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> ši-pir-tu<sub>2</sub>*  
*a-ma-a-ta* <sup>10</sup>*re-ši-ka di-ke-e-ma* <sup>11</sup>*d.UTU a-mur am-me-ni* <sup>12</sup>*m.d.EN-TIN-iṭ ina IGI-ka*  
<sup>13</sup>*ZU<sub>2</sub>.LUM.MA-ia* <sup>14</sup>*gab-bi iš-ši* <sup>15</sup>*a-na<sup>1</sup> m.d.EN-NIGIN-ir* <sup>be16</sup>*[ki]-i aq-bu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>be17</sup>*ṛi<sup>1</sup>-qab-ba-*  
*a*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*um-ma a-mur* <sup>2</sup>*ZU<sub>2</sub>.LUM.MA-i-ka* <sup>3</sup>*ina pa-ni m.d.EN-DIN-iṭ* <sup>4</sup>*u m.d.EN-TIN-iṭ*  
<sup>5</sup>*ZU<sub>2</sub>.LUM.MA ka-la-ma* <sup>6</sup>*ul id-di-nu* <sup>7</sup>*ki-i aq-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu-ti* <sup>8</sup>*um-ma ZU<sub>2</sub>.LUM.MA* <sup>9</sup>*i-bi-*  
*na-nu* <sup>10</sup>*i-qab-bu-nu* <sup>11</sup>*um-ma al-ki-ma* <sup>12</sup>*a-na A m.da-ku-ru* <sup>13</sup>*a-na ṛUGU-ḫi<sup>1</sup> qi<sub>2</sub>-bi-i* <sup>14</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub>-ni-*  
*ia-a-na* <sup>15</sup>*ki-ṛi aq<sup>1</sup>-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu-ti* <sup>re16</sup>*um-ma* <sup>re17</sup>*al-ki-ma*

e. <sup>1</sup>*DINGIR.MEŠ ši-si-i a-na-ku pa-ni* <sup>2</sup>*EN-ia ad-da-gal mi-nu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>3</sup>*tur-ti a-mat ša<sub>2</sub> EN-ia lu-uš-*  
*mu*

reproach: obv. <sup>6-9</sup>Why am I, together with my daughters, dying before you thirst for lack of your messages<sup>237</sup>?

rebuke: obv. <sup>10-11</sup>Raise your head and look at Šamaš!

reproach: obv. <sup>11-14</sup>Why did Bēl-uballiṭ remove all my dates in your presence?

complaint (with an attempt at own intervention):

obv. <sup>15</sup>-rev. <sup>6</sup>[Wh]en I spoke to Bēl-upaḥḥir, he said: ‘Look! Your dates are with Bēl-uballiṭ.’ And (yet) Bēl-uballiṭ refuses to give me the dates.

complaint (with another attempt at resolution):

rev. <sup>7</sup>-e. <sup>1</sup>When I told them: ‘Give me (my) dates!’, they said: ‘Go, speak to the son of Dakkūru about this!’. When I spoke (about this) another time, (they said) as follows: ‘Come! Cry out to the gods!’.

indirect pre-request (with an expression of hope):

e. <sup>1-2</sup>I am waiting for my lord.

indirect request:

e. <sup>2-3</sup>Let me hear what the answer of my lord is!

Despite the density of reproaches and the rebuke with reference to Šamaš – the addressee is enjoined to look at the Sun in the Sun’s capacity as the god of justice<sup>238</sup> – the final request is very indirect and polite. As rather common, the term of address also switches from ‘father’ in the greeting to ‘lord’ in the body of the letter. The multiple attempts to confront the persons unwilling to give the sender, Gāgāia, her dates, all end in failure. Gāgāia is taunted – first with the ironic command that she should go to the ‘Son of Dakkūru’ (surely, as the editors also point out, a metonymic and obsolete reference to the source of authority), and then up the stakes by directing her to appeal the gods. Thus, the sender is made to understand that she is completely powerless: only gods could help her (and surely her adversaries do not mean this really, either). In the Neo-Assyrian corpus, the senders claimed that the king is their only hope, and occasionally equated him with gods – here this trope is subverted and turned into a taunt. Since Gāgāia’s letter only mentions her daughters, she had no son and no husband who could represent her interests: a dire position to find oneself in for a woman in the 7<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century Babylonia<sup>239</sup>.

No. 241 (Hackl et al. 2014, 349–351) is a lengthy letter of complaint, sent by a man and a woman (a married pair?), although it is only the woman who speaks, to a ‘brother’, whom he calls in the body of

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<sup>237</sup> Literally: ‘for thirst of your messages’.

<sup>238</sup> This must have been a stock phrase – it is also attested in No. 241.

<sup>239</sup> The letter is dated to the period of the Neo-Babylonian empire, but it is impossible to say anything more precise (Hackl et al. 2014, 322).

the letter her ‘son’. Whatever the exact relationship, all three persons must have belonged to the same family:

obv. <sup>4</sup>*ak-ka-a*’-i *ki-i a-na-ka* <sup>5</sup>*a-mut-tu-u<sub>2</sub>-ma* MUN.HI.A <sup>6</sup>*ina ku-tal-li-ia a-na* DUMU.MEŠ <sup>7</sup>*tep-pu-uš u<sub>3</sub> ina hu-ub-ti* <sup>8</sup>*tam-mar-ru-ma a-na* KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR *ta-paṭ-ṭar-ru* <sup>9</sup>*en-na a-na-ku a-na tar-ṣu* <sup>10</sup>*pa-ni-ia<sub>2</sub> pa-ni-ia<sub>2</sub>* MUN.HI.A <sup>11</sup>*ul te-pu-uš re-eš-ši-ka* <sup>12</sup>*dī-ki-ma* d.UTU *a-mur ul* DUMU-*u<sub>2</sub>-a* <sup>13</sup>*at-ta ul a-na-ku-ma u<sub>2</sub>-rab-bi-ka* <sup>14</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> a-na-ku um-ma lul-li-kam-ma* <sup>15</sup>*a-kan-na-ka ina pa-ni-ka* <sup>16</sup>*lu-šib en-na am-me-ni m.re-mut* <sup>17</sup>*a-kan-na-ka im-ru-uš-ma* <sup>18</sup>KASKAL.2 *ana* GIR<sub>3</sub>.2-*šu<sub>2</sub> la taš-kun-ma* <sup>19</sup>*la il-li-ka* <sup>20</sup>*en-na a-du-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>21</sup>*m.ṣal-mu u m.d.AG-BA-ša<sub>2</sub>* <sup>22</sup>*a-na pa-ni ŠEŠ-ia<sub>2</sub>*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*al-tap-ra*

complaint (with a rebuke):

obv. <sup>4.-11</sup>How will you help my children instead of me after I die and find (them) in captivity (and) ransom for silver, (when even as) I am now alive, you grant me no favours.

rebuke: obv. <sup>11.-12</sup>Raise your head and look at Šamaš!

argument (from interpersonal relationship):

obv. <sup>12.-13</sup>Are you not my son? Did I not raise you?

complaint (with a reminder):

obv. <sup>14.-16</sup>And did I not say as follows: ‘Let me come and settle here with you.’?

reproach: obv. <sup>16.-19</sup>Why did Rēmūtu become ill there, and you did not prepare anything for him (so) he could not come?

indirect request (?):

obv. <sup>20</sup>-rev. <sup>1</sup>Now, I am sending Šalmu and Nabû-iqīša to my brother!

The mention of sending people to the ‘brother’ might actually be connected with the following set of moves, in which the sender, Saggilāia, gives detailed instructions about a purchase of dates. A direct request does not follow, but the addressee must have understood what his ‘sister’ wanted. It is possible that the main goal of the letter was a rebuke<sup>240</sup>. The demand to look at Šamaš is also present in No. 213, another letter written by a woman – a striking coincidence only? The mention of ransoming captives is, as the editors suggest, surely an echo of the earlier times (one need only a glance at the correspondence of the *šandabakku* analysed above) – in the 6<sup>th</sup> century Babylonia was largely peaceful (Hackl et al. 2014, 351).

<sup>240</sup> It is also possible that the request in rev. 11.-14. refers to the initial topic discussed in the letter.

In contrast to the institutional correspondence, many more complaints refer to the interpersonal relationships between the senders and the addressees. Emotional states seem to be mentioned more often, and the overall tone of the letters seems to be more empathetic.

## Literary Texts

Perhaps unsurprisingly, only a moderate number of complaints is attested in literary texts. Since complaints, as was already evident from the chapters concerning epistolography, feature above all in request, it is to be expected that they are not made by gods very often.

The reproach by Humbaba and the short complaint preceding the request Ištar makes of her father in the epic of Gilgameš are discussed in the chapter on threats and warnings.

Far more striking is the complaint made by the hunter when he is spooked by Enkidu haunting the vicinity of the waterhole in Tablet I (George 2003, 544–547):

123. *a-bi [iš-te]<sub>n2</sub> eṭ-lu ša<sub>2</sub> il-l[i-ka ana pūt mašqi (?)]*

124. *ina m[a-ti d]a-an e-mu-q[i<sub>2</sub> i-šu]*

125. *[ki-ma ki-iš-ri] ša<sub>2</sub> d.a-nim dun-nu-n[a e-mu-qa-šu]*

126. *[it-ta-na-al-la]k ina UGU KUR-i k[a-la U<sub>4</sub>-mi<sup>?</sup>]*

127. *[ka-a-a-nam-m]a it-ti bu-lim [ik-ka-la U<sub>2</sub><sup>?</sup>]*

128. *[ka-a-a-nam-ma GI]R<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub> ina pu-ut maš-qi<sub>2</sub>-<sup>r</sup>i<sup>1</sup> [šak-na<sup>?</sup>]*

129. *[pal-ḫa-ku-ma u]l a-ṭe-eḫ-ḫa-a a-na š[a<sub>2</sub>-a-šu]*

130. *[um-tal-li bu]-<sup>r</sup>u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-ri ša<sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-ḫar-ru-u<sub>2</sub> [ana-ku]*

131. *[ut-ta-as-si-iḫ n]u-bal-li-ia ša<sub>2</sub> uš-n[i-lu]*

132. *[uš-te-li ina ŠU.MEŠ<sup>?</sup>-ia] bu-lam nam-maš-ša<sub>2</sub>-a ša<sub>2</sub> ED[IN]*

133. *[ul i-nam-din-a]n-ni a-na e-peš ED[IN]*

complaint (with elements of praise):

<sup>123.-133</sup> Father, [a cert]ain man who ca[me by the waterhole (?)] – he is [the] strongest in the l[and], [he possesses] migh[t], [his might] is grea[t like a lump of rock] from the sky. A[ll day long (?), he wander]s in the mountains, he [constantl]y [eats grass<sup>241</sup> (?)] with the herd. His [fe]et [are (?)] constantly] by the waterhole. [I am afraid], I do [n]ot come near h[im]. [He has filled up the

<sup>241</sup> Literally, ‘plants’.

p]its that [I] dug, [he has uprooted the traps that I la[id]. [He has made slip from my hands (?)]  
the herd, the animals of the grass[land]. [He does not allow] me the work of the wilder[ness]!

Already in the second line of this passage does one note the difference between the complaints in epistolography and literature. The hunter generously heaps praise upon Enkidu, which is important from the point of view of the narration but would be nigh impossible in real complaints. Otherwise, the hunter provides a reasonable account of the events that led him to suffer and notes his emotional reaction – fear, not unlike in the real complaints attested in correspondence.

This complaint is not followed by a request, but as already noted in the complaints from the epistolographic corpus, a request is not needed. Bringing the attention of the addressee or interlocutor to the things that are wrong is already sufficient. The father of the hunter thus answers with advice, but the passage is badly damaged. What is clear, however, is that the father of the hunter encourages him to go to Uruk, to Gilgameš, and at the same time already suggests that he take Šamḥat who will later play an important role in the process of bringing Enkidu to civilisation. The hunter goes to Uruk and repeats the same complaint before Gilgameš (lines 150.-160.), to which Gilgameš replies with the same advice that was already given by the hunter's father, at least as far as preserved (George 2003, 546–549):

162. *a-lik ša-a-a-di it-ti-ka ḥa-rim-tu<sub>2</sub> f.[š]am-ḥat u<sub>2</sub>-ru-ma*

163. *e-nu-ma bu-lam i-<sup>r</sup>sa<sup>1</sup>-[an]-<sup>r</sup>ni<sup>1</sup>-qu ana maš-qi<sub>2</sub>-i*

164. *ši-i liš-ḥu-uṭ lu-bu-ši-š[a<sub>2</sub>-ma lip]-<sup>r</sup>ta<sup>1</sup>-a ku-zu-ub-ša<sub>2</sub>*

165. *im-mar-ši-ma i-ṭ[e-e]ḥ-ḥa-a a-na ša<sub>2</sub>-a-ši*

166. *i-nak-kir-šu<sub>2</sub> bu-ul-šu<sub>2</sub> š[a<sub>2</sub> i]<sup>r</sup>-bu-u<sub>2</sub> UGU EDIN-šu<sub>2</sub>*

advice: <sup>162.-166</sup>Go, hunter, and lead [Š]amḥat the harlot with you. When the herd rea[c]hes the waterhole, let her remove h[er] clothes, [let her re]veal her charms. He will see her and app[r]oach. The herd will separate from him, w[ho g]rew up upon their grassland.

All happens as the father of the hunter and Gilgameš predicted.

The second complaint in the epic of Gilgameš is more of a lament or self-reproach, which seems to provide the moment of katharsis – anachronic though the term is – after which Gilgameš reconciles himself to the thought of mortality in the final passages of Tablet XI (George 2003, 722–723):

311. *[a-na ma]n-ni-ia m.UR-ŠANABI<sub>2</sub> i-na-ḥa i-da-a-a*

312. *a-na man-ni-ia i-ba-li da-mu ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi-ia*

313. *ul aš<sub>2</sub>-kun dum-qa ana ram-ni-i[a]*

314. *[ana] UR.MAH ša<sub>2</sub> qaq-qa-ri dum-qa e-te-pu-uš*

315. *e-nin-na a-na* 20 DANNA *e-du-u<sub>2</sub> i-na-aš-šam-ma*

316. *ra-a-ṭa ki-i ap-tu-ṛu<sub>2</sub> at<sup>1</sup>-ta-bak u<sub>2</sub>-nu-tu<sub>2</sub>*

317. *ut-ta a-a-i-ta ša<sub>2</sub> ana KI-ia i[š-ša]k-nu ana-ku lu aḫ-ḫi-is u GIŠ.MA<sub>2</sub> e-te-zib ina kib-ri*

self-reproach: <sup>311.-317.</sup>[For wh]om of mine did I toil<sup>242</sup>, Ur-šanabi? For whom of mine did I bleed my heart dry? I did not do a favour for myself. I did a favour [for] a Lion of the Earth<sup>243</sup>. Now for twenty *bēru*<sup>244</sup> the tide has been rising<sup>245</sup>! When I opened the channel, I threw away the tools<sup>246</sup>. What kind of thing will be p[u]t for my sign<sup>247</sup>? I should have turned back and abandoned the boat on the shore.

As the journey follows, Gilgameš encourages Ur-šanabi to inspect the architecture of Uruk, the story comes full circle. Although Gilgameš addresses his question in line 311. to Ur-šanabi, this is clearly a private, personal expression of despair. No consolation is expected.

Additional two complaints can be gleaned from *enūma eliš*. In the first complaint, the gods are addressing Tiāmat in Tablet I (Lambert 2013, 56–57):

113. *e-nu-ma ABZU ḫa-ram-ki i-na-ru-ma*

114. *i-du-uš-šu la tal-li-ki-ma qa-liš tuš-bi*

115. *ib-ni-ma ša<sub>2</sub>-ar er-bet-ti ša<sub>2</sub> pu-luḫ-ti*

116. *šu-ud-lu-ḫu kar-ša-ki-ma ul ni-šal-lal ni-i-nu*

117. *[u]l ib-ši lib-bu-uk-ki ABZU ḫa-ram-ki*

118. *u<sub>3</sub> d.mu-um-mu ša<sub>2</sub> ik-ka-mu-u<sub>2</sub> e-diš aš<sub>2</sub>-ba-ti*

119. *iš-tu U<sub>4</sub>-mu at-ti dul-lu-ḫiṣ ta-dul-li*

120. *u<sub>3</sub> ni-i-ni ša<sub>2</sub> la ni-sak-ki-pu ul ta-ra-[a]m-mi-na-ši*

121. *[a]m-ra sar-ma-’u-ni ḫu-um-mu-ra i-na-tu-ni*

122. *[ḫ]u-uš-bi ab-ša<sub>2</sub>-na la sa-ki-pi i ni-iš-lal ni-i-ni*

123. *ep-ši ta-ḫa-zi gi-mil-la-šu-nu tir-ri*

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<sup>242</sup> Literally, ‘did I tire my arms out’.

<sup>243</sup> The snake who ate the plant of life.

<sup>244</sup> Over 10 km. George uses ‘league’, but the nautical league is only over 5 km.

<sup>245</sup> Covering the hole that Gilgameš previously made to reach the plant of life in the Apsû.

<sup>246</sup> This refers to the method of obtaining the plant of life from the Apsû, see George 2003, 523–524. The channel, *r[ātu]*, likely appears in line 288. of Tablet XI, although the passage is badly broken.

<sup>247</sup> *ana KI-ia* is literally ‘for with-me’, and *itti* is of course not *ittu*, ‘sign’, but it is difficult to find a better translation.

124. x [(x)]-ru<sup>2</sup>-u<sub>2</sub>-šu-nu [e]p-ši-ma a-na za-qi<sub>2</sub>-qu šu-uk-ni

rebuke (with a reminder):

<sup>113.-114.</sup>When they killed your spouse, Apsû, you did not go to his side, you sat in silence.

complaint: <sup>115.-116.</sup>He created (= Anu) the four fearful winds. Your belly is disturbed (by the winds), and we cannot sleep.

rebuke: <sup>117.-118.</sup>Your heart was not with Apsû, your spouse, nor with Mummu, who is imprisoned.

taunt: <sup>118.</sup>(Now) you sit alone.

curse (?): <sup>119.</sup>From this day, you will be deliriously confused!

accusation (with a complaint):

<sup>120.</sup>And us, who have no rest – you do not love us!

request (with a strong component of a complaint):

<sup>121.-124.</sup>Look at our burden! Our eyes are shrivelled! Lift<sup>248</sup> (our) unremitting yoke, so that we may sleep! Make battle, avenge them! ... them! Turn them into nothingness!

This is by far the most emotional and dramatic complaint in the entire corpus. The gods reproach Tiāmat for her silence when Apsû was killed – this motive is also fairly common in correspondence. The complaint that the gods cannot sleep appears for the first time. The second rebuke accuses Tiāmat of abandoning both Apsû and Mummu – but she gets her just desserts: now she ‘sits alone’. The gods then make a prediction for Tiāmat or curse her with miserable fate, only to immediately accuse her of not loving them. Finally, after this mix of rebukes and complaints, the gods progress to a request, but it is phrased in such a way that the component of a complaint is felt very strongly – all the actions that are required of Tiāmat refer to the negative physical and mental state of the speakers.

There rebukes that Tiāmat faces seem to possess a strong gendered component. She seems to be accused of failing to act as a good wife by abandoning Apsû, and then as a no good mother, who does not love her children. The fact that it is a female deity/monster who can be rebuked in such a harsh manner is likely also not a coincidence. In the face of this relentless disapproval, Tiāmat decides to grant the request of the gods.

The second complaint is more of a denunciation. In the beginning of Tablet II, Ea reports on Tiāmat’s evil plan to his father Anšar (Lambert 2013, 64–65):

11. *a-bi ti-GEME<sub>2</sub> a-lit-ta-ni i-zi-ir-ra-an-na-ti*

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<sup>248</sup> Literally, ‘break off’ (like a reed etc.).



12. *pu-uh<sub>2</sub>-ru šit-ku-na-at-ma ag-giš la-ab-bat*  
 13. *is-ḫu-ru-šim-ma DINGIR.MEŠ gi-mir-šu-un*  
 14. *a-di ša<sub>2</sub> at-tu-nu tab-na-a i-da-a-ša al-ku*  
 15. *im-ma-as-ru-nim-ma i-du-uš ti-GEME<sub>2</sub> te-bu-u<sub>2</sub>-ni*  
 16. *ez-zu kap-du la sa-ki-pu mu-ša u<sub>3</sub> im-ma*  
 17. *na-šu-u<sub>2</sub> tam-ḫa-ra na-zar-bu-bu la-ab-bu*  
 18. *UKKIN.NA šit-ku-nu-ma i-ban-nu-u<sub>2</sub> šu-la-a-ti*

complaint (with elements of a denunciation):

<sup>11.-18</sup>Father, Tiāmat, our mother, has grown to hate us! Raging furiously, she has established an assembly. All the gods have turned to her – including those you created, they all walk by her side. They ... and raised by the side of Tiāmat. Furiously scheming, relentless by day and night, craving battle, raging (and) fierce – they have gathered an assembly to prepare for strife!

In the following lines, Ea recounts all actions of Tiāmat with the same wording with which they were previously recounted in the narrative – the entire report ends in line 48. of Tablet II. Anšar's reaction is that of a profound disquiet (Lambert 2013, 66–67):

49. *iš-me-ma an-<šar<sub>2</sub>> a-ma-tu<sub>2</sub> ma-gal dal-ḫat*  
 50. *u<sub>3</sub>'-a iš-ta-si ša-pat-su it-taš-ka*  
 51. *ez-ze-et kab-ta-[a]s-su la na-ḫat ka-ras-su*  
 52. *e-li d.e<sub>2</sub>-a b[u]-uk-ri-<sup>1</sup>š<sup>1</sup>u ša<sub>2</sub>-gi-ma-šu<sub>2</sub> uš-taḫ-ḫa-aḫ*  
 53. *ma-ri ša<sub>2</sub> te-e[g-ru]-u<sub>2</sub> tu-qu-un-tum*  
 54. *mim-mu-u<sub>2</sub> i-du-uk-ka [te]-pu-šu i-taš-ši at-ta*

narrative: <sup>49.-52</sup>Anšar heard this, (and) was greatly disturbed. 'Woe!', he cried and bit his lip. He was furious, his heart could not be calmed. His roar was becoming silent over his s[o]n, Ea.

demand: <sup>53.-54</sup>My son, who led the war! All that [you] did with your own strength, take (it) on yourself!

Anšar reacts with confusion and fury, and when he speaks, he blames Ea and demands that he take responsibility. Certainly, this would be a situation that the letter-writers wished at all cost to avoid when they accused somebody.

The final complaint appears in the myth of Nergal and Ereškigal. This is the lament that precedes the request to the gods to give Nergal to Ereškigal as her husband (Ponchia and Luukko 2013, 19):

308. (...) *u[l]-tu<sub>2</sub> še-eh-ra-ku-ma DUMU.MUNUS.MEŠ-ku*

309. *[u]l i-di mi-lu-lu ša<sub>2</sub> KI.SIKIL.MEŠ*

310. *[u]l i-[di] d[a]-ka-ka ša<sub>2</sub> še-he-ra-a-ti*

complaint: <sup>308.-310.</sup>Ever [si]nce I was a child and a daughter, I did [n]ot know the play of maidens; I did [n]ot kn[ow] the gambolling of girls!

Request for Nergal follows immediately. Ereškigal clearly uses her misery as an argument for the request, so this complaint is used as a tool of persuasion. Although the mention of play, *mēlulu*, could be an euphemism for eroticism, a far more convincing analogy seems to me the passage from the *eršemma* prayer quoted by Ponchia and Luukko (2013, 59), in which Nergal, as god of death, is asked not to enter places in which children play:

<sup>20</sup>*bēlu ašar mēlulti lā tazzaz* <sup>21</sup>*šeħrūtu ašar mēlulti lā tušeššā*

<sup>20.-21.</sup>O Lord, do not remain in the place of games! Do not bring out the children from where they play!

Thus, Ereškigal would have also obligingly kept away from where the girls played, at a detriment to her own entertainment.

The complaints in the literary works, although relatively few, do include a number of motives also observed in the epistolography. Although the complaint made by the hunter incorporates praise for Enkidu, of the kind that would be unlikely to occur in a real letter, it is not followed by a request, as in ‘real’ letters. The complaint made by the gods to Tiāmat is very emotional, and the rhetorical devices make it different from the complaints and rebukes that appear in epistolography – although the small number of private letters could be skewing the view here. Moreover, Tiāmat does not act when her spouse is in danger – like the addressees of letters and rebukes cited in them do not react when the sender is facing peril. The complaint-denunciation made by Ea before his father is a complete failure from the point of view of a typical accuser but serves to move the plot of the Creation Epic further along. The complaint made by Ereškigal before the request serves to emphasise her need to be compensated for her restraint – and in this sense is not that different from the servants and officials of the Assyrian kings underscoring their loyalty and meritorious service.

## Conclusions

The complaints can occupy either a central position in the letter or, more often, serve as the reason for the addressee to comply with the sender’s request. The wording of each complaint is influenced above

all by the actual topic and the events the sender is facing: some opponents cannot be named; the faults of kings can often be mentioned only in a circumspect manner.

Some motives certainly occur now and again. The senders like to emphasise that they are alone, and nobody can help then, apart from the addressee (SAA 10 58, SAA 10 226, SAA 10 294, SAA 13 128, SAA 13 185, SAA 13 158, SAA 17 105, No. 117 in the institutional corpus, No. 24 among the private letters, and many others). This loneliness might be, as in some Assyrian letters (SAA 10 226) the result of the senders being loyal, but similar declarations also appear in post-Assyrian correspondence. In some complaints, the senders do their best to besmirch the reputation of the person who is responsible for their suffering – these passages are difficult to separate from denunciations. The denunciations, at the very minimum, should list and name the guilty parties – although some cautious senders omit their own names out of fear of retaliation or because of other reasons.

Frequent arguments that cooccur with complaints are based on analogy, be it positive or negative. The senders often mention that they should be treated in the same way their equals are, while treating criminals with lenience might provide bad example to others, who would be emboldened to act in an analogously improper manner.

In the context of institutions, complaints frequently pertain to or are motivated by hard work (SAA 16 40, Nos. 90, 117, 172 and others in the Babylonian institutional correspondence) or by third parties allegedly squandering the resources belonging to the institution (SAA 10 369, SAA 13 33, SAA 16 42). An allegation frequently made in the Assyrian corpus is that of a third party not fearing the king – unlike, it is implied or stated explicitly, the sender.

Finally, there is some correlation with the occurrence of blessings – either in very elaborate greetings (SAA 10 294, SAA 18 60), before the petition with a complaint (SAA 10 58, SAA 10 143, SAA 13 174), or after the petition or request (SAA 10 180, SAA 16 105, No. 14 in the institutional correspondence) and the complaints and petitions. In earlier letters, as already discussed, blessings or promises of prayers were associated with requests, by following or preceding them directly. The complaints do not necessarily need a request. On the other hand, they can be followed by very specific instructions, if they were made in the context of shared work.

In the corpus from the early Neo-Babylonian archive of the governor of Nippur, numerous complaints – and indeed numerous requests – are based on the explicitly stated principle of mutual cooperation and reciprocation. Although the archive belongs to a governor, almost no titles are mentioned apart from the basic polite terms of address, giving the entire group of texts a distinctly informal or non-administrative character.

Similarly, the interpersonal relationships can be appealed to in the other groups of correspondence. In No. 125 from the institutional Babylonian letters, a person complained about treats the sender as a ‘no-lord’, in No. 117 the sender has ‘no other father nor brother’ – the relationships can be mentioned both

critically and as an argument for a request. Similar cases are of course attested in the private Babylonian correspondence (Nos. 24, 132, 241, and more), and even Tiāmat is rebuked for ‘not loving’ the gods who wish to incite her. In order to convince the king, one resorts to argument from meritorious service and innocence – or at least the ignorance of any fault.

The tone of the complaints can repeatedly oscillate between expressions of debasement and direct rebukes directed at the partner of the communicative exchange. This does not mean that the users of Akkadian were in any way ‘dramatic’, but that the baseline for politeness and appropriate expression of emotions was different than in modern Western societies. The Akkadian language use in the first millennium (and not only in the first millennium) simply required a level of directness and exaggeration that the modern reader is not accustomed to. A lot of this language must be performative – such as the frequent deployment by the letter writers of the language of living and dying. This must have been at least to an extent a reaction to the constant presence of death, war, and famine in the ancient Mesopotamian society. Death had to be in some way tamed and incorporated into civilised life – the Mesopotamians did not choose to make the mention of death a taboo, as some other cultures, but rather used it frequently and in reference to matters that were likely causing a discomfort or anxiety only – such as a lack of messages. The mentions of hunger and constant deprivation also likely refer to a real threat – even if it does not loom over the senders themselves<sup>249</sup>.

The two basic principles of the Akkadian complaints in the first millennium seem to be thus:

1. be as direct as possible about your misery, hide nothing, exaggerate the smallest discomfort
- and
2. frequently mention your expectations.

Even in the royal correspondence, the arguments made by the petitioners (meritorious service, innocence or ignorance of fault, equal treatment, fearing the king, diligence) presume a set of expectations about the treatment of clients and subjects. If these expectations are often not stated explicitly but concealed behind the presumptions made by the senders, it is because the king needs to be treated with kid gloves, and politeness requires that one does not encroach upon his preserve – at least not too much.

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<sup>249</sup> One need only mention the so-called ‘siege texts’ (Oppenheim 1955) from Neo-Babylonian Nippur (the dated texts cover the year 702 BCE and then the period between 656 and 617 BCE, approximately the same period of time as large swathes of the correspondence analysed in the present work). The texts are contracts for the sale of young children, bought by the owner of the archive, Ninurta-uballit, in order to save them from starvation (*bulluṭu*, the verb frequently used in the correspondence to refer to the desired state, achieved thanks to the favours and aid of the ‘lords’ and ‘brothers’). On the basis of earlier, mostly Old-Babylonian sources Richardson (2016) reports that hunger was a mainstay of the Mesopotamian society, despite the royal propaganda claiming otherwise – although the frequent use of the images of hunger and thirst in the Old-Babylonian epistolography need not always be taken seriously.

### **PART III: SILENCE AGAIN**

## APOLOGIES AND EXCUSES

In the philosophy of language, apologies have been traditionally classified together with other acts encoding attitudes towards the actions of other people: Austin's perlocutionary acts (Austin 1962, 159–160) and Searle's expressives (Searle 1976, 12). The attitude of the speaker encoded by apology is supposed to be that of regret (a good summary of the issues presented by the attempts to provide a definition of apologies is provided by Oishi 2013).

If apologies are to be considered expressions of regret, the conclusion would have to be reached that there is no such thing as an apology in the Akkadian letters in the first millennium and indeed, in the majority of other textual genres.

It could be argued, though, that this definition and the prominent presence of regret therein is culture-bound and language-bound<sup>250</sup>. A broader definition is supplied by the sociological tradition: Erving Goffman classifies apologies as a type of a remedial act, which is meant to transform what is offensive into something that is no longer offensive (Goffman 1972, 109). According to Goffman, "an apology is a gesture through which an individual splits himself into two parts, the part that is guilty of an offence and the part that dissociates itself from the delict and affirms a belief in the offended rule" (Goffman 1972, 113). If apologies are dissociations from offensive conduct, they can be identified in the texts with relative ease. It is only a question of how one does it – although it needs to be mentioned in advance that dissociation by denying that the offensive conduct took place would hardly count as an apology at all – this would be a completely different strategy for dealing with committing offences and losing face. Denial of one's involvement in the offence, however, does not necessarily preclude a speech action from being an apology – one can apologise for events and situations that are completely beyond one's control and there is no compelling reason why it should be different in case of offences beyond one's control.

Already Sallaberger 1999, 108, fn. 150 points out that in cases where offense was caused by a sender of a letter, what can be considered as functional equivalents of apologies does appear. There are two distinct tendencies among the examples selected by Sallaberger from the corpus of Old-Babylonian letters:

the sender asks the addressee not to blame them for their actions

the sender asks the addressee not to be angry about their actions.

In this sense, all the apologies are technically realised as requests. Additionally, as Sallaberger points out, the focus of the Old-Babylonian apology is entirely on the addressee and their reaction, not on the wrongdoing of the sender. Sallaberger remarks that this situation is typical on the whole of Old-Babylonian politeness strategies, which seem to have at their centre the person of the other and usually

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<sup>250</sup> One need not look further afield than to the numerous criticisms against the early speech act theory as nothing more than (English) speech act verb theory (Wierzbicka 1991).

do not refer to the self. Whether this holds for the politeness strategies in the first millennium BCE, remains to be seen.

At the same time, a focus on the situational component of apologies involves an additional risk of imposing one's own cultural norms upon the culture whose norms are to be investigated. While the mitigation of the caused offence, whatever its nature, clearly must be considered the core function of an apology, different cultures have different standards by which they judge actions that do or do not cause offence. This could at first not appear to be problematic, but some cultures are known to require apologies in cases where others would opt for completely different speech acts – a well-known modern example is Japanese, in which apologies are deployed where most modern European languages would require an expression of gratitude<sup>251</sup>. One could also imagine that some offences that would require an apology from the point of view of a modern analyst, could require something more than just words for an ancient letter-writer. The solution to this issue is to first focus on moves that are obviously apologies, and then look for moves that are similar to what constitutes apologies in this corpus, even when they are used in contexts where one would not necessarily expect an apology. If the occurrences of apology-like phrases are not something else, the unexpected contexts in which they emerge will simply have to be acknowledged as a part of a different system of social norms.

Many strategies to dissociate oneself from one's own offensive conduct are theoretically possible. The strategies prioritising the reaction of the addressee/interlocutor so common in the Old-Babylonian period were already mentioned above. In addition to the asking the addressee/interlocutor not to be angry and not to blame the offender, the speaker/writer could also focus on their own offense, promise restitution, or conversely offer a 'non-apology' apology by trying to completely avoid the responsibility for the offense<sup>252</sup>. An obvious candidate for a type of apology focussing on the offensive conduct is an excuse (wherein the speaker dissociates themselves from the offence by stating that it was committed unwillingly and/or that it was unavoidable because of some external factors).

Indeed, as is evident at the first cursory glance at the textual record, the majority of apologies in the first millennium BCE Akkadian fall under this category. For this reason, the excuses and apologies will be grouped in a single chapter, with the excuse treated as a subtype of an apology and I will simply refer to excuses as excuses throughout the following sections.

Although the preoccupation of the apology is the already committed offence, in epistolography, where the senders and addressees must bear in mind that their exchanges might be significantly hampered by

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<sup>251</sup> The function of apology in these contexts is to compensate for the amount of trouble somebody else has taken on behalf of the person uttering the apology (Oishi 2013, 532).

<sup>252</sup> 'Non-apology' is a modern term meant to criticise above all powerful actors who refuse to acknowledge their responsibility for committing an offence, frequently also for causing real harm. A 'non-apology' frequently focusses on the emotional reaction of the offended party, which in the contemporary individualistic and success-oriented culture has undertones of weakness. One could, however, easily imagine an apology without taking responsibility which does not make a mockery of the whole act.

the intervals between the deliveries of letters, a sender might feel compelled to anticipate the recognition made by the addressee that the conduct of the sender was offensive and decide to deliver an apology before it is demanded. These apologies will be here called ‘pre-emptive’. Granted, every unprompted apology is in a sense ‘pre-empted’, in that the dissociation from the offensive conduct when caught can entail a significant loss of face. I will only refer to the apologies as ‘pre-emptive’ when the senders of the letters explicitly state their concerns about being reprimanded, thus identifying themselves the part of their conduct that the addressee could consider unacceptable.

## Neo-Assyrian royal correspondence

The earliest Neo-Assyrian apologies encompass scant 6 items in total from the administrative correspondence of Tiglath-pileser III<sup>253</sup>. All apologies from this part of the corpus are excuses.

The pre-emptive excuses are typically preceded by a potential reproach or reproachful question to which the sender produces an answer that absolves him from responsibility. Only one excuse among the oldest letters belongs to this type: SAA 19 61.

SAA 19 14 (Luukko 2012b, 17) is addressed to the to the palace scribe and the excuse is not followed by any additional steps<sup>254</sup>. SAA 19 57 (Luukko 2012b, 62–63) is interesting because the sender (a governor of the province Našibina, Luukko 2012b, xvi) excuses himself before the king for the delay in fulfilling the order of the commander-in-chief:

obv. <sup>4</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.tar-ta-nu ma-a <sup>5</sup>1 lim : ŠE.NUMUN.MEŠ a-ru-uš <sup>6</sup>MU.AN.NA tak-tar-ma <sup>7</sup>la mu-qa-a-a  
a 1 lim ŠE.NUMUN.MEŠ<sup>1</sup> <sup>8</sup>la a-ra-aš<sub>2</sub> <sup>9</sup>a-di a-š<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-pa-ru-ni<sup>1</sup> <sup>10</sup>GIŠ.APIN.MEŠ : ša<sup>1</sup>  
<sup>11</sup>KUR.bar-ḫal-zi ŠE.NUMUN.MEŠ<sup>1</sup> LU<sub>2</sub>.tar-ta<sup>1</sup>-[nu ma-a] <sup>12</sup>si-mi-in ŠE.NUMUN.MEŠ<sup>1</sup> <sup>13</sup>e-ti-iq a-sa-pa-ar  
<sup>14</sup>TA ŠA<sub>3</sub> URU.kap<sup>1</sup>-ri <sup>15</sup>ša pa-an URU<sup>1</sup>.ar<sub>2</sub>-pa-da

rev. <sup>1</sup>GU<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ u<sub>2</sub>-bal-u-ni <sup>2</sup>GIŠ.APIN.MEŠ GU<sub>4</sub>.NITA<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ <sup>3</sup>a-na a-ḫa-meš u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-qa-rab <sup>4</sup>am-mar e-mu-qa-a-a<sup>1</sup>-ni <sup>5</sup>ŠE.NUMUN.MEŠ<sup>1</sup> a-ra-aš<sub>2</sub>

introduction (with a cited command):

obv. <sup>4-5</sup>The commander-in-chief (ordered me): ‘Cultivate 1000 (homers) of seed!’

excuse: obv. <sup>6-11</sup>The year has drawn to an end (?), but I am unable to cultivate 1000 (homers) of seed until I send for the ploughs of Barḫalza.

follow up (with a cited reproach):

obv. <sup>11-13</sup>The commander-in-chief (wrote to me) [thus]: ‘The season of seeding has passed!’

<sup>253</sup> The letters with apologies are SAA 19 14, SAA 19 57, SAA 19 81, SAA 19 17, SAA 19 61, SAA 19 74. Other letters from this volume either originate from Babylonia or from the reign of Sargon II and will be discussed below.

<sup>254</sup> For a detailed analysis, see the following section.



follow-up (attempt to resolve the issue):

obv. <sup>13</sup>-rev. <sup>1</sup>I have sent (a message and) they are bringing me oxen from a village under jurisdiction of the city of Arpad.

promise of redress:

rev. <sup>2-5</sup>I will bring together the ploughs (and) the oxen (and) cultivate as seed as I can.

The most remarkable feature of this letter is perhaps the fact that the sender involves the king in his conflict with the commander-in-chief. Was the resolution between the two of them impossible?

The excuse in SAA 19 17 (Luukko 2012b, 20) should despite everything be considered pre-emptive. The sender either identifies what could be considered an offence (potentially inadequate provisions for a campaign) or emphasises his loyalty and diligence by asserting his readiness to supply anything he can – or both:

rev. <sup>5</sup>ANŠE.NITA<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ-ia <sup>6</sup>la-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>7</sup>TA ma-ši-en <sup>8</sup>ANŠE.NITA<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ-ia <sup>9</sup>i-ba-šu<sub>2</sub>-u-ni  
<sup>10</sup>GIŠ.gir-si-ia-ma <sup>11</sup>a-na KASKAL <sup>re12</sup>la-am-<sup>r</sup>tu-uh<sup>1</sup>

pre-emptive excuse:

rev. <sup>5-6</sup>I have no donkeys.

promise of redress (in the irrealis mood):

rev. <sup>7-re12</sup>If I had donkeys, I would offer my carts for the campaign.

A different case is presented by SAA 19 61 (Luukko 2012b, 66) whose sender (Dūrī-Aššur, governor of Tušhan, Luukko 2012b, xvi) explicitly mentions the reproach he thinks the king could make (obv. 8-r.1). This is then followed by the excuse (sending a messenger is not possible because of snow, r. 2-3), emphasised by the eye-witness account of the scouts (r. 3-5). Finally, the sender promises redress for the potential offence – he will send a messenger as soon as the snow retreats (r. 6-8).

The sender of SAA 19 74 (Luukko 2012b, 76–77) explains that he cannot send a detailed report of losses yet as his forces have not gathered together.

In SAA 19 81 (Luukko 2012b, 85–86) the sender (Aššur-šallimanni, governor of Arrapha, Luukko 2012b, xvi) only quotes his own previously deployed excuse. Nonetheless, the whole sequence sheds light on what was expected after an apology had been made: after the excuse about a delay the sender informs the king that the people he was waiting for are assembled (obv. 5.-9.). The king is then urged to verify Aššur-šallimanni's claim with its source:

obv. <sup>4</sup>ša a-na 'LUGAL' be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia<sub>2</sub> aš<sub>2</sub>-pu-ra-ni <sup>5</sup>mu-uk la-am-mar-ku UN.MEŠ <sup>6</sup>be<sub>2</sub>-et i-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu-  
<sup>7</sup>ni' lu-pa-ḫi-ra <sup>7</sup>a-na LU<sub>2</sub>.na-si-ka-'ti' aš<sub>2</sub>-sa-al <sup>8</sup>ma-a 1-en la re-e-ḫe ma-a <sup>9</sup>an-nu-tim-ma šu-  
<sup>10</sup>nu <sup>10</sup>an-nu-rig LU<sub>2</sub>.na' si-ka-a-ti <sup>11</sup>il-'la' ku-ni 'LUGAL' be-li<sub>2</sub> <sup>12</sup>liš-al-'šu-nu

introduction (with quoted admission of offence and excuse):

obv. <sup>4-6</sup>As to what I wrote to the king, my lord: 'I will be late. I want to gather people  
 where(ever) they are.' –

follow-up (report of finishing work):

obv. <sup>7-9</sup>I asked the sheikhs (and they answered), saying: 'Not a single one is left. These  
 are (all of) them.'

request for verification:

obv. <sup>10-12</sup>They sheikhs are now coming; may the king, my lord, ask them!

The number of apologies in the earliest part of the corpus is low and they are not elaborate. A simple admission of the wrong, followed by the reason and sometimes promise of redress seems to be sufficient. It is difficult to speculate on the basis of so few examples, it could still be suggested that the simple form of excuses is connected to the high rank of all the senders mentioned above. The governors belong to some of the highest-ranking officials of the Assyrian Empire and the relationship they had with the king seems fundamentally different than that enjoyed, for instance, by the scholars<sup>255</sup>. Another feature is that apologies/excuses seem to be used when an action is not undertaken or not undertaken quickly enough – thus in cases of negligence.

The Neo-Assyrian excuses/apologies from the reign of Sargon present a slightly larger group<sup>256</sup>. As in the previous groups, the sender may excuse themselves well in advance: there are 3 such excuses in this part of the corpus. The writer of SAA 1 100 (Parpola 2015, 84–85) explains the absence of beams destroyed in a fire in his account of timber. In SAA 5 215 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 153–154) the issue is missing troops – after giving an account of all his forces the writer (governor of Mazamua, Adad-issē'a, Hunger 1998) foresees that more questions could be forthcoming about the soldiers who are missing. Their absence is due to the major-domo (*rab-ekalli*) being late. Adad-issē'a supplies his excuse with a promise: the delayed major-domo will bring the soldiers with him. In SAA 19 169<sup>257</sup> (Luukko 2012b, 171) the sender fears that he will be questioned about the royal companion (*ša-qurbūti*) not preceding the party of the tribute-bearers and provides the excuse that the companion of the king is

<sup>255</sup> 42% of the senders in SAA 19 belong to a 24-person large group of highest officials (Luukko 2012b, xv).

<sup>256</sup> The letters with excuses/apologies are SAA 1 100, SAA 1 125, SAA 1 181, SAA 1 244, SAA 5 35, SAA 5 126, SAA 5 199, SAA 5 215, SAA 5 227, SAA 5 293, SAA 15 41, SAA 15 60, SAA 15 129, SAA 15 156, (SAA 19 189 = SAA 5 215).

<sup>257</sup> Although the editors of SAA date this letter to the reign of Sargon II, PNA 1-I (Fabritius 1998, 57) prefers the reign of Tiglath-pileser III. I have chosen to follow SAA. Nothing apart from the facts evident from this letter is known about the sender.

otherwise occupied. This is again accompanied by the promise that the companion will move on as soon as he has completed his current task.

The interesting feature of all these pre-emptive excuses is that in all 3 cases they occur at the final position of the letter. This is, however, not surprising when one considers that they refer to the same main topic of the body of the letter: when all else is reported and accounted for (and it is likely no coincidence that two out of three excuses occur in letters that give an actual account of people or goods), one has to forestall any reproaches and accusations that might follow if the higher authority decides that the tasks falling under the responsibility of the sender were not executed correctly.

Other apologies/excuses from this part of the corpus do not pre-empt the reproaches from the addressee, and most of them are used in the function of apology. Some form

SAA 1 125 (Parpola 2015, 101) is perhaps the most apology-like apology in this group of letters – at least from the modern point of view. The sender Kišir-Aššūr (the governor of Dur-Šarrukīn, Baker 2000, 621) excuses himself for speaking up – justifying why from his point of view informing the king (about an earthquake, obv. 4.-11.) was necessary:

rev. <sup>8</sup>*ma-a* <sup>'</sup>*da ina ši-a-ri* <sup>9</sup>*ina li-di-iš* <sup>10</sup>LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub> i-šam-me* <sup>11</sup>[*ma*]-<sup>r</sup>*a* <sup>1</sup>*a-ta-a taš-me* <sup>12</sup>[*la-a*]  
*taš-pu-ra* <sup>13</sup>[*ina UG*]U *šu-u* <sup>14</sup>[*a-na*] LUGAL [EN-*ia*] <sup>re15</sup>[*a-sap-ra*]

prediction (with a potential royal reproach):

rev. <sup>8.-12</sup>Tomorrow (and) on the day after the king will hear many things, (and say) ‘Why did you not write to me (even though) you heard (about it)?’

excuse:

rev. <sup>13.-re15</sup>It is for this reason that I have written to the king.

This is remarkable in view of the duty to inform the king of whatever one has heard and seen (see Fales 2015 and the injunctions to report treason in the loyalty oaths edited by Parpola and Watanabe 1988). The sender of SAA 1 125 defends himself against potential reproaches from the king for not informing him, but at the same time he feels the need to explain why he is sending the letter in the first place. It seems it was not that obvious what kind of information is to be passed on immediately and what is not – this is not the only passage in the Neo-Assyrian royal correspondence where this potential for conflicting interpretations is evident.

In SAA 1 181 (Parpola 2015, 142–143) the excuse is not uttered by the sender (restored as Bēl-liqbi, the governor of Šupat, Gesche 1999, 322), but rather quoted from a conversation the sender had with another person (name broken). The excuse is preceded by a reproach and an accusation from the sender (obv. 16.-19.) and the first reaction of the accused is not a verbal excuse but a gesture – if the Bēl-liqbi can be trusted to have given an accurate account:

obv. <sup>19</sup>(...) IGI.2-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub> ina UGU-*hi-ia* <sup>be20</sup>[*I*]a ik-ru-ru <sup>be21</sup>[*ma-a*] ITI.BARAG šam-mu <sup>be22</sup>[*it*]-tu<sub>2</sub>-uq-  
ta ANŠE.KUR.RA.MEŠ

rev. <sup>1</sup>[*ma*]-a i-ma-q[*a-t*]u-u<sub>2</sub>-ni <sup>2</sup>[*I*]a-a u<sub>2</sub>-š[*am-ša* (...)]

report (with a gesture signifying guilt?)

obv. <sup>19-20</sup>.He did not look at me.

report (of an excuse):

obv. <sup>be20</sup>-rev. <sup>2</sup>.He said: ‘my (supply of) grass fell in Nisan. Horses keep arriving and I can[not cope].’

While the restoration in rev. 2 is not absolutely certain, it is more than plausible. It seems to be the most obvious case where the excuse is serves to justify the offence instead of admitting responsibility and offering redress. It is also interesting to note that the gesture of not looking at the offended party – and therefore of looking away – is apparently associated in with making excuses.

The situation in SAA 5 35 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 29–30) is rather more complex. The excuse is uttered by the Šubrian king after the author of the letter reproaches him for his refusal to extradite deserters. The king responds curtly that he ‘fears the gods’ (obv. <sup>22</sup>(...) TA IG[*I*] <sup>23</sup>DINGIR.MEŠ *pal-ḥa-ku* (...)). While from a purely formal standpoint this certainly constitutes an excuse, it would seem to me that it is not so from the discursive point of view: the excuse is could as well be ironic and likely meant to be to be a challenge, perhaps even insulting – especially in view of the complete breakdown in the negotiations in the next exchange of the sender with the king. Here the sender explicitly criticises the Šubrian for *not* fearing gods and insults him (obv. 30-32).

The sender of SAA 5 126 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 98) excuses the absence of his major-domo in an answer to a royal reproach. The absence is motivated by factors beyond the control of the sender.

The excuse in of SAA 5 199 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 144) is interesting because the sender of the letter (Šarru-ēmuranni, governor of Mazamua, Radner 2011, 1234–1235) admits that he did commit the offense the king asks him to account for. This admission, however, is preceded by the excuse with the very practical explanation about the longer duration of travel for the sender’s Arraphan counterpart.

The sender of SAA 15 129 (Fuchs and Parpola 2001, 88–90) is writing to a governor and not to the king. The preceding passage is broken, but it might have been contained new information introduced in a previous letter from the current addressee or possibly a reproach. The sender then claims that he was previously unaware of the current whereabouts of his lord and had planned accordingly. This excuse is followed by the prediction of the writer and a request for new orders so that the sender can fulfil his duties.

The sender of SAA 15 156 (Fuchs and Parpola 2001, 106–107) is being called to account for a delay in work assignments<sup>258</sup>. In his first move, he admits that the work is not finished, and then produces the excuse that the workers were busy with agricultural tasks. He reports that he nonetheless released the men to work on their assignments and that they are taking care of it now.

In SAA 15 60 (Fuchs and Parpola 2001, 40–41) the excuse serves likely to prepare the king for the possibility that he may be delayed in carrying out the royal order. He first makes a promise to his best to come (obv. <sup>6</sup>(...)mi-nu <sup>7</sup>mu-qa-a-a (...)), and then mentions that he had to leave one of his chariots because of the snow, which, as the king surely knows, is a serious issue. The following part of the letter is too damaged to identify the following moves.

In three cases the excuses seem to serve as rejections of royal orders or as justifications for not following them. The first example is SAA 5 105 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 82–83):

rev. <sup>4</sup>ina UGU GIŠ.ziq-pi ša LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> <sup>5</sup>iš-pu-ra-ni ku-up-pu <sup>6</sup>qar-ḫu KALAG-an u<sub>2</sub>-di-ni <sup>7</sup>le-ma-tu<sub>2</sub>-ḫu SAG.DU DINGIR GIBIL <sup>8</sup>ša ITI.ŠE ina URU.BAD<sub>3</sub>-m.LUGAL-GI.NA <sup>9</sup>ṛi<sup>1</sup>-ma-tu<sub>2</sub>-ḫu u<sub>2</sub>-bu-lu <sup>10</sup>[a]l-la-ka ṛe<sub>3</sub>-me u<sub>2</sub>-ta-ra

introduction: rev. <sup>4-5</sup>As to the saplings about which the king, my lord, wrote me:

rejection of an order (with an excuse and an admission):

rev. <sup>5-7</sup>The snow (and) the ice is strong. They (the saplings) cannot be picked up yet.

promise of redress: rev. <sup>7-9</sup>They will pick them up and transport them to Dur-Šarrukin at the beginning of the new moon of the month of Addaru.

promise: rev. <sup>10</sup>I will (also?) come and give my report.

It seems to me that this excuse is made as a reaction to a royal command – which however is not cited by the sender. If preceded by a question of the kind to be discussed in the following section, it would be classified as an excuse, but as a reaction to an order it is an indirect rejection.

The second example is SAA 15 41 (Fuchs and Parpola 2001, 29). This is not a simple rejection of an command: the excuse is preceded by a quoted royal order, but the actions of the sender (name broken away) and his subordinates are already accomplished, so this is not simply a case of negotiating the extent of acceptable disobedience. The sender is justifying taking a different course of action that the desired by the king, because it was simply more practical:

obv. <sup>3</sup>(...) ina UG[U x x] <sup>4</sup>[š]a LUGAL EN iš-pur-[an-ni] <sup>5</sup>[m]a-a E<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ ša e-[pu-šu-ni] <sup>6</sup>[k]i-i ṛša<sup>1</sup> URU.ba-q[ar-ri ku-up-ru?] <sup>7</sup>[ina] UGU-ḫi-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu li-ik-pa-r[u-ni] <sup>8</sup>LUGAL EN u<sub>2</sub>-da ki-i

<sup>258</sup> This letter is discussed in more detail in the following section.

*ku-p[u-u] <sup>9</sup>qar-ḥa-a-te an-na-[ka] <sup>10</sup>i-da-’i-nu-ni la-aš<sub>2</sub>-[šu] <sup>11</sup>e-bir-tu<sub>2</sub> la ta-ri-[ḥa] <sup>12</sup>ta-ša<sub>2</sub>-  
ḥu-ḥu E<sub>2</sub>.M[EŠ] <sup>13</sup>[š]a SIG<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ ina UGU-ḥi-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>14</sup>[ni]-ir-te-ši-bi*

introduction (with a royal command):

obv. <sup>3-7</sup>.As t[o the ... about] which the king, my lord wro[te me as] follows: ‘The houses that are being bu[ilt] – they should be cover[ed] with [bitumen?] as in Ba[qarru]!’

objection (formulated as a reminder):

obv. <sup>8-10</sup>.The king, my lord, knows that snow and ice are very hard her[e].

excuse: obv. <sup>10-12</sup>.No, the baked bricks do not ke[ep] (but) fall apart.

admission: obv. <sup>12-14</sup>.For this reason, [we] have built house[s o]f mud bricks.

The sender explicitly admits not following a royal command – which makes it even more unfortunate that his name and position remain unknown. He does not ask for permission but informs *post factum*. His objection to the royal command, formulated as a reminder, obviously provides a means for the addressee to save face. In any case, this illustrates that the Neo-Assyrian administration did not operate according to the principle of blind obedience – even if the way this excuse/rejection is formulated points at the necessity of letting the king save his face, as when the explanation is given in the form of a reminder in lines 8.-10. of the obverse.

The final example of an excuse used as a justification for rejecting a royal command is SAA 15 61 (Fuchs and Parpola 2001, 41–42). The function of the excuse seems even more evident, as is it used as a complementary move to the rhetorical question the precedes it:

obv. <sup>3</sup>(...) ina UGU na-mur-te <sup>4</sup>ša ITI.AB ša LUGAL EN-li iš-pur-an-ni <sup>5</sup>ma-a 3  
ANŠE.KUR.RA.MEŠ 2 GU<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ 20 UDU.MEŠ <sup>6</sup>20 DUG.ŠAB.MEŠ tu-ba-la-an-ni <sup>7</sup>U<sub>4</sub>-3-  
KAM<sub>2</sub> ša ITI.ZIZ<sub>2</sub> e-gir<sub>2</sub>-tu <sup>8</sup>ta-ta-al-ka i-ma-ti u<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub>-šu-u <sup>9</sup>is-se-niš LUGAL u<sub>2</sub>-da GU<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ  
ša ma-a-te <sup>10</sup>an-ni-ti QAL<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ a-dan-niš a-<sup>1</sup>na-ku<sup>1</sup> <sup>11</sup>GU<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ-e na-mur-tu ša<sub>2</sub> E<sub>2</sub>-  
[EN.MEŠ]-a <sup>12</sup>la u<sub>2</sub>-da

introduction (with a royal command):

obv. <sup>3-6</sup>.As to the audience gift of the month of Kinūnu, about which the king, my lord, wrote as follows: ‘Bring me three horses, two bulls, twenty sheep, and 20 jugs (of wine)!’

rejection (with an excuse in the form of a rhetorical question):

obv. <sup>7.-8.</sup>The letter came on the third day of the month of Šabātu<sup>259</sup>. When can they deliver (them)?

excuse (with an explanation in the form of a reminder and a rhetorical question):

obv. <sup>9.-12.</sup>At the same time, the king knows that the bulls of (this) land are very small.  
Don't I know (what kind of) bulls (is suitable for) the audience gift of the house [of my lords]?

The use of excuses to justify rejecting orders is of course nothing out of the ordinary. In a sense, one could maintain that even in this context they still maintain their function of separating the sender from his offensive conduct – in as much as disobedience might be offensive even in cases in which it is rationally the better option.

A slightly different excuse is attested in SAA 1 244 (Parpola 2015, 189–190). It is a badly damaged denunciation, written to the vizier. The sender is likely (the name is broken away) Taklāk-ana-Bēl, the governor of Našibina (Pruzsinszky 2011). In the final passage the sender encourages the vizier to make the entire matter known in the palace, and the placement of the excuse for writing the letter in the sequence turns it into an additional argument for informing the palace about the criminal activities of the person the sender accuses:

rev. <sup>13.</sup>*a-ta-a qa-la-a-ka da-ba-bu* <sup>14.</sup>*an-ni-u<sub>2</sub> ina E<sub>2</sub>.GAL š[a<sub>2</sub>]-aš<sub>2</sub>-me* <sup>15.</sup>*a-du at-ta ina UG[U x x]x*  
<sup>16.</sup>*a-na ḫi-iṭ-ṭi la ta-š[a-kan-an-n]i?* <sup>17.</sup>*[i]l-la-ka a-du taš-[mu-u-ni]* <sup>18.</sup>*[be-l]i<sub>2</sub> lib-ba-te-ia i-[mal-la]*

reproach: rev. <sup>13.</sup>Why do you keep silent?

request: rev. <sup>13.-14.</sup>[In]form the palace about his matter!

argument (or rebuke?): rev. <sup>15.-16.</sup>Until you [...], you will not [make me] responsible (for this)!

excuse (as an argument for informing the palace):

rev. <sup>17.-18.</sup>(If I did not write,) [it] would happen that as soon as you have he[ard] (of this),  
[my lord]d w[ill be filled] with anger at me.

Although the sender addresses the vizier as his ‘lord’, the mixture of second and third person forms is very interesting – in the final move two different forms feature almost next to each other (‘you have he[ard]’, ‘my lord w[ill be filled]’).

For the most part, the excuses in this corpus are uttered in response to reproaches – be they from the king or from the senders themselves, when they recount conversations with third parties. In other cases, the senders actively anticipate the reproaches to come and reply to them in advance. It could therefore

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<sup>259</sup> *Kinūnu* is the tenth month, while *Šabātu* is the eleventh. The sender argues it had already been too late when the command arrived.

be argued that this part of the corpus completely lacks purely apologetic excuses or pure apologies. In view of the large proportion of letters from the highest Assyrian officials, this should perhaps not be surprising. It is not impossible that they would feel sure enough of their position not to offer apologies unprompted. One could even speculate that offering apologies unprompted could cause the person apologising to lose face and thus was as a rule avoided. On the other hand, such absence of excuses/apologies could simply be due to the administrative and official character of the letters.

The correspondence of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal will be treated in no chronological order but rather according to the actors participating in it. The excuses and apologies in the letters written by scholars<sup>260</sup> tell a lot about their place at the Neo-Assyrian court. The excuses and apologies made by the scholars are with a single exception unprompted.

The most prominent type of excuse among the scholarly letters is the excuse for speaking up. It can be accompanied by the explicit mention of a potential reproach from the king, making it pre-emptive – or it can occur on its own. The simple version of this type of excuse can be found in SAA 10 43, SAA 10 87, SAA 10 97, SAA 10 116 and SAA 10 160<sup>261</sup>. The most striking are perhaps the excuse and the apology in SAA 10 43 (Parpola 1993, 33), written by the astrologers Balasî and Nabû-ahhê-erîba. Both scholars want to persuade the king to stop fasting. It is likely the sensitive nature of this advice that makes them apologise for speaking up twice: the first apology occurs directly after the greeting formula and is, atypically for epistolography, a compliment. It would be an example of the polite forms focussing on the person of the addressee/hearer, typical in the Old Babylonian period:

obv.     <sup>7</sup>(...) LUGAL EN-ni <sup>8</sup>*re-ma-nu šu-u<sub>2</sub>*

compliment:     obv. <sup>7-8</sup>The king, our lord, is merciful.

This is followed directly by the advice to stop fasting – expressed in fairly strong terms (obv. <sup>15</sup>LUGAL *muš-ke-e-nu* – ‘the king, a poor man!’). The initial apology must have been deemed insufficient by the senders as after the scolding they give the king, they excuse themselves once again in the final move of the letter:

rev.     <sup>8</sup>TA ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi-ni <sup>9</sup>*ni-id-du-bu-ub* <sup>10</sup>*ni-ip-ta-la[h<sub>3</sub>]* ina UGU <sup>11</sup>*a-na* LUGAL *ni-is-sap-ra*

excuse:             rev. <sup>8-11</sup>We thought about it and we became afraid(, so) we have not written to the king.

It is hard to say to what extent the apology and the following excuse are a pure formality. Both scholars do not seem to mince words in upbraiding the king for his bad mood and unwillingness to eat.

<sup>260</sup> The letters with apologies/excuses in this part of the corpus are SAA 10 43 (twice), SAA 10 45, SAA 10 75, SAA 10 87, SAA 10 90, SAA 10 92, SAA 10 93, SAA 10 94, SAA 10 96, SAA 10 97, SAA 10 103, SAA 10 116, SAA 10 160 (in a Babylonian script), SAA 10 179, SAA 10 202, SAA 10 228, SAA 10 260, SAA 10 273, and SAA 10 329.

<sup>261</sup> Although this letter is written in Neo-Babylonian script, I decided to analyse it together with the rest of scholarly correspondence.



Nonetheless, there seems to exist a certain tension when it comes to the selection of matters that need to be mentioned to the king and matters that need to be discussed. Scholars, with their position of clients to the powerful patron whom they are also meant to give advice, were placed in a particularly precarious situation.

In other instances, the scholars excuse their messages as attempts to remind the king of something or to instruct him, as in SAA 10 87, SAA 10 90, SAA 10 92, SAA 10 93, SAA 10 94, SAA 10 103 and SAA 10 116. SAA 10 87 (Parpola 1993, 65–66), SAA 10 90 (Parpola 1993, 67–68), SAA 10 92 (Parpola 1993, 69), SAA 10 93 (Parpola 1993, 70), 94 (Parpola 1993, 71), SAA 10 97 (Parpola 1993, 74) and 103 (Parpola 1993, 80) are all written by Akkulānu: the practice of excusing his missives as reminders or advice seems to have been in his case customary. In SAA 10 93 he uses a full excuse in the form of a conditional clause (rev. <sup>1</sup>*ki-ma ina* [U<sub>4</sub>-*me an-ni-i*] <sup>2</sup>*l[a]* *u<sub>2</sub>-šaḫ-sis* <sup>3</sup>LUG[AL] *be-li<sub>2</sub>* <sup>4</sup>*la i-ra-u<sub>2</sub>-bu* <sup>5</sup>*ma-a a-ta-a* <sup>6</sup>*la tu-šaḫ-sis-a-ni* – ‘If I hadn’t reminded the king on [this day], wouldn’t the king my lord be beside himself with fury and say: “Why did you not remind me?”’), but in SAA 94 and 103 he only inserts the clause with the potential royal reproach – the meaning should however be clear enough (SAA 10 103, rev. <sup>5</sup>*is-su-ri* LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>* <sup>6</sup>*i-qab-bi ma-a a-ta-a* <sup>7</sup>*la tu-šaḫ-si-si* – ‘Perhaps the king will say: “Why did you not remind me?”’). In SAA 10 87 he only identifies the letter as a reminder (rev. <sup>8</sup>*ḫi-is-su-tu ši-i* <sup>9</sup>*a-na* LUGAL EN-*ia* <sup>10</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-sa-aḫ-si-is* – ‘This is a reminder. I have (only) wanted to remind the king, my lord.’). The preceding passage contains a suggestion and a request for orders.

Another way to formulate an excuse as a reminder can be observed in SAA 10 116 – this time the sender (Bēl-ušēzib) uses the noun *taḫsistu* (rev. 10’) instead of the Š-stem form of the verb *ḫasāsu*. This excuse follows a recommendation for an appointment as a scribe. This letter would be perhaps the strongest argument for the hypothesis that these ‘reminders’ were but a polite fiction serving to soften the potential for loss of face when explaining something or submitting requests to the king. The reminders need not be a polite fiction to serve as excuses, though. It is already enough that this function must be explicitly identified.

In other excuses for speaking up the verb *ḫakāmu* in the Š-stem appears twice – once in SAA 10 90 (Parpola 1993, 67–68) written by Akkulānu, in which the sender scolds the king for his deployment of the substitute king, and once in SAA 10 97<sup>262</sup> (Parpola 1993, 74) after a partially broken recommendation. In yet another letter from Akkulānu, SAA 10 92 (Parpola 1993, 69), the excuse is formulated as a request (rev. <sup>1</sup>LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>* *lu u<sub>2</sub>-di* <sup>2</sup>*liš-me* (...) – ‘May the king know and hear (about this)...’), followed by potential royal reproach with the same verbs negated.

<sup>262</sup> The name of the sender is broken, but the letter is attributed to Akkulānu.

The overrepresentation of correspondence written by Akkullānu among the excuses for speaking up is certainly a mark of his personal style. Nonetheless, this kind of excuse was also utilised by other scholars and should not be considered a simple idiosyncrasy.

Finally, SAA 10 160 (Parpola 1993, 120–124) is of interest because it provides an excuse for the silence of its sender as well as his decision to speak up after all: curiously enough, both choices are motivated by fear:

obv. <sup>6</sup>(...) *ina pu-luḥ-ti LUGAL EN-ia<sub>2</sub> <sup>7</sup>ki-i GISKIM SIG<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ u la SIG<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ i-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-š<sub>2</sub>u<sub>2</sub>-u<sub>2</sub>*  
<sup>8</sup>*ina AN-e am-ma-ru pal-ḫa-ak-ma a-na LUGAL EN-ia<sub>2</sub> ul a-šap-par*

excuse: obv. <sup>6-8</sup>(...) for fear of the king, my lord, when there were good or bad signs for me to see in the sky, I was afraid and did not write to the king, my lord.

obv. <sup>9</sup>*en-na a-du-u<sub>2</sub> ki-i ap-la-ḫu um-ma a-na ḫi-ṭi-ia* <sup>10</sup>*la i-ta-ri a-du-u<sub>2</sub> ana LUGAL EN-ia<sub>2</sub> al-tap-ra*

excuse: obv. <sup>9-10</sup>Now, I grew fearful that it would turn into my fault and presently I have written to the king, my lord.

Excuses and apologies for speaking up are not the only kind found in the letters from the scholars. As elsewhere, the scholars make excuses for delays. In SAA 10 96 (Parpola 1993, 73–74) excuses not writing to the king about the offerings on the day before and offers redress immediately – a list of magnates who did not agree to contribute. It follows the simple schema of excuse – admission:

obv. <sup>8</sup>(...) *la u<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub>-an-ši* <sup>9</sup>*la u<sub>2</sub>-si-ik ina ti-ma-li* <sup>10</sup>*a-na LUGAL EN-ia<sub>2</sub> la aš<sub>2</sub>-pu-ra*

excuse: obv. <sup>8-10</sup>I was not able to find out (which of them did not agree and thus) did not write to the king yesterday.

That one should write to the king with all haste is evident from SAA 10 202 (Parpola 1993, 163–164), where the excuse is preceded by the reproachful question from the king about not answering his letter. Adad-šumu-ušur explains that he was busy driving the rams to the palace and left his writing-board at home. He promises to extract the relevant interpretation presently. This is the only excuse in this group prompted by a reproach from the king.

The final excuse from this group refers to a delay is SAA 10 228 (Parpola 1993, 180–181). This is a thank-you letter but a few shorter passages on the reverse deal with slightly different topics. The first of the passages is introduced with a reference to the royal order to ask a third party for an explanation. Adad-šumu-ušur could not obey the royal command because the person he was supposed to ask is absent. This excuse again follows the simple schema of excuse – admission:

rev. <sup>9</sup>(...) *a-na URU.kal-ḫa i-ta-lak* → excuse (‘He has gone to Kalhu’)

<sup>10</sup>*la aš<sub>2</sub>-al-šu<sub>2</sub> (...)*

→ admission ('I could not ask him')

The rest of excuses or apologies are not so easy to categorise. Balasî in SAA 10 45 (Parpola 1993, 34–35) appears to be apologising for not seeing any omens in the sky. The form of this apology is exceptional. It is partially a plea not to be abandoned (perhaps based on the assumption that those who do not manage to see the signs do not in effect take their duties seriously enough and should be dismissed – although the plea not to be abandoned is a common topos in the correspondence):

e. <sup>1</sup>LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub> it-ti-ši ur-tam-man-ni* <sup>2</sup>*ina ħi-ip ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi ʔe-e-me ina UGU-ħi-ia* 3. *la-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>*

apology (?) (with indirect supplication, emotional reaction, and an admission):

e. <sup>1-3</sup>The king, my lord, has abandoned me! I am in panic; I have nothing to report.

Nabû-aḥḥē-erība, the sender of SAA 10 75 (Parpola 1993, 57), presents a simple excuse for not including a blessing in his greeting. The excuse is inserted right after the greeting itself: the blessing is missing because 'it is a gloomy day (today)' (obv. <sup>5</sup>*U<sub>4</sub>-mu ša<sub>2</sub> ta-di-ir-ti* <sup>6</sup>*šu-u<sub>2</sub>*).

The sender of SAA 10 179<sup>263</sup> (Parpola 1993, 142–144), Kudurru, writes from a confinement to confess about his participation in a treasonous plot. He performs a divination favourable to the would-be conspirators. After his confession he hastens to reassure the king with an oath that the entire enterprise was a lie (rev. <sup>19</sup>[DINGIR.MEŠ *ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>]-ia<sub>2</sub> ki-i LU<sub>2</sub>.ḪAL-u<sub>2</sub>-tu* <sup>20</sup>[*ša<sub>2</sub> e-pu-šu*] *al-la ša<sub>2</sub>-a-ru me-ħu-u* <sup>21</sup>[*šu-u<sub>2</sub> (...)*] – '[By the gods of the king], my [lord!] The extispicy [which I performed was] nothing but wind and storm<sup>264</sup>'). Kudurru's excuse is that he was afraid for his life. The following passage is interesting enough to deserve a more extensive note:

rev. <sup>21</sup>(...) TA ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi-ia *a]-dab-bu-ub um-ma la (i)-du-kan-ni* <sup>22</sup>[*en-na a-du*]-<sup>1</sup>*u<sub>2</sub> a-na LUGAL al-tap-ra* <sup>23</sup>[*um-ma LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-a l]a i-šem-me-ma la (i)-du-kan-ni*

excuse: rev. <sup>21'-23'</sup>I was (only)] thinking: "May he not kill me!". [Now then], I am writing to the king [(since I thought) to myself:] "May [the king, my lord] not hear about it and kill me.

Kudurru excuses himself for complying with the demands of the conspirators by mentioning his fear of being killed, but it is also the same fear of being killed, this time by the king, that motivates him to finally confess his offences.

An interesting excuse occurs also in SAA 10 260 (Parpola 1993, 204–205), written by the chief exorcist with a correction to a previous letter:

obv. <sup>10</sup>TA ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi-ia *e-te-li* <sup>11</sup>*ki iš-ši-a-r[i]* <sup>12</sup>*U<sub>4</sub><sup>1</sup>-um DINGIR UR[U]*

<sup>263</sup> The letter is written in the Babylonian dialect.

<sup>264</sup> That is, a lie.

rev. <sup>1</sup>[š<sub>u</sub>]-tu-ni <sup>2</sup>[ina] ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi al-ta-s[um] <sup>3</sup>la DUG<sub>3</sub>.GA a-na u<sub>2</sub>-[še-e] <sup>4</sup>a-na e-pa-[a-še] <sup>5</sup>a-na U<sub>4</sub>  
7-KAM<sub>2</sub>-im-ma <sup>6</sup>ni-kar-ri-ik ne<sub>2</sub>-ep-pa-aš<sub>2</sub>

admission: obv. <sup>10</sup>-rev. <sup>1</sup>I had slipped my mind that tomorrow is the day of the city god.

excuse: rev. <sup>2</sup>I was in a rush.

redress 1 (correction) : rev. <sup>3-4</sup>It is not good for going out and performing (the ritual).

redress 2 (promise) : rev. <sup>5-6</sup>We will prepare and carry it out on the seventh day

The last excuse from this group of letters is reminiscent of the excuses used as justifications made by the highest officials for not following royal orders. The following move, however, suggests that the main topic of SAA 10 273 (Parpola 1993, 214) was not making excuses at all but complaining by the behaviour of a fellow scholar:

obv. <sup>7</sup>[LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>]-<sup>1</sup>ia<sup>1</sup> iš-sap-ra-a-ni <sup>8</sup>[m]a-a a-lik dul-lu a-na <sup>9</sup>f.KUR-i-ti e-pu-uš <sup>10</sup>e-tap-aš<sub>2</sub>  
re-eḫ-te dul-li <sup>11</sup>i-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-ši la e-pu-uš <sup>12</sup>ina a-de-e at-ta-la-ka <sup>13</sup>ina UGU-ḫi mi-i-ni m.š<sub>u</sub>-ma-a  
<sup>14</sup>ir-di-pa TA URU.ka-lah<sub>3</sub> <sup>15</sup>il-li-ka a-na f.KUR-i-ti <sup>16</sup>iq-bi ma-a dul-lu š<sub>u</sub>-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>17</sup>[x x]x-<sup>18</sup>u-um-  
ma <sup>18</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub>-aš-bat e-pu-sa-ak-ki

rev. <sup>1</sup>[x x x]x-ši lu-u iš-al-a-ni

introduction (with a royal command):

obv. <sup>7-9</sup>[The king], my [lord] wrote to me as follows: ‘Come and perform a ritual for Šadditu!’

explanation (with compliance and justification for not finishing the task):

obv. <sup>10-12</sup>I performed the ritual, but there was still more to do. I did not perform (the rest),  
(because) I left for the treaty.

complaint: obv. <sup>13</sup>-rev. <sup>1</sup>Why did Šumaya hasten from Calah and said to Šadditu: ‘This ritual is  
[...]. I will prepare and perform it for you (fem. sg.). [...] He should have asked me!’

Even a scholar, it seems, did not owe blind obedience, and could admit to partially disobeying a royal command when he had more pressing obligations – like setting out to make it for an *adē* ceremony<sup>265</sup>. This would-be excuse seems in fact only to be an explanation of the sender’s absence – the apologetic tone is completely absent from the letter. The sender is preoccupied above all else with the offer of a rival scholar to finish his ritual for him – which he does badly, according to a further passage of the letter. The criticism is scathing:

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<sup>265</sup> A Babylonian official in another letter though (see the discussion of SAA 18 162 below) excuses himself for not taking the oath, because he received a sealed royal order and had to take care of that first. The importance of the treaty seems thus to have been relative.

rev. <sup>15</sup>*a-ta-a šu-u<sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-du-lih<sub>3</sub>* <sup>16</sup>*r<sup>1</sup>e<sup>1</sup>-[ta]-[pa<sup>1</sup>]-[aš]* *la-a a-le- 'e-e* <sup>re17</sup>*r<sup>1</sup>le<sup>1</sup>-[pu]-[uš<sup>1</sup> u<sub>2</sub>-la-a* <sup>re18</sup>*ina ŠU.2-  
šu<sub>2</sub> lu-u a-mur*

reproach: rev. <sup>15-16</sup>Why did he hurry and pe[rf]orm it? He is useless!

offer: rev. <sup>re17</sup>I will pe[rf]orm it.

challenge (with an insult): rev. <sup>re.17.-re.18</sup>Or should I have learned from his example?<sup>266</sup>

Even though the scholars excuse themselves for speaking up by explicitly stating that their letters are reminders or instructions, on the other hand they do not hesitate to use very direct language to express their disapproval. The same contrast could be observed in SAA 10 43, in which the senders compared the king to a poor person in the course of their rebuke, but at the same time sandwich the rebuke between two apologies.

Very excuses can be found in SAA 13<sup>267</sup>. SAA 13 118 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 90–91). The apology is prompted by the question from the king about the arrival of horses and the sender is forced to admit that the animals are not there yet. What follows is an apology in several steps:

rev. <sup>6</sup>*mi-nu* <sup>7</sup>TA *pa-an hi-se-[te]* <sup>8</sup>*ša LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-[ia]* <sup>9</sup>*lu la-a hal-[qa-ku]* <sup>10</sup>E<sub>2</sub> *pa-aq-d[a?-ku-ni]* <sup>11</sup>LUGAL *ha-si-s[i]* <sup>12</sup>d.AG *uz-[nu]*

e. <sup>1</sup>*ra-pa-aš<sub>2</sub>-tu a-na* LUGAL <sup>2</sup>*be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia lid-din*

expression of powerlessness: <sup>6</sup>What (can I say)?

apology: <sup>7-9</sup>May [I] not [be] lost because of the reminder from the king, [my] lord.

excuse (reminder): <sup>10-11</sup>The king knows where [I am] posted.

post-apology (blessing): <sup>rev.12-e.2</sup>May Nabû give (even) broader under[standing] to the king, my lord.

Although the use of compliments in apologies could be noted before in SAA 10 43, the blessing here seems to be unique. Certainly, it was intended to cause the king to be better disposed towards the sender. This again serves to illustrate the wide range of applications blessing had in communication.

The sender of SAA 13 126 makes a pre-emptive excuse for speaking out, although whatever he wanted to communicate to the king so urgently is now completely broken. However, considering the tone as well as the final passage of the letter, it must have been either a complaint or a denunciation (or both). Directly after the break he states:

<sup>266</sup> Literally: ‘looked at his hands’.

<sup>267</sup> SAA 13 158 is discussed in detail in the following section.

rev. <sup>2'</sup>[*ina ši-a-ri ina l*]<sup>3'</sup>*i-di-iš* <sup>3'</sup>LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub> i-ša<sub>2</sub>-am-me* <sup>4'</sup>*ana-ku ina UGU-*hi* a-mu-at* <sup>5'</sup>*ma-a a-ta-a la tu-ša<sub>2</sub>-aš<sub>2</sub>-man-ni*

excuse for speaking up (with a prediction):

rev. <sup>2'.</sup><sup>4'</sup>[Tomorrow (or) the day a]fter, the king, my lord, will hear (about it) (and) I will die for it, (because)

potential reproach: rev. <sup>5'</sup>(the king will) say: ‘Why did you not inform me?’

SAA 13 178<sup>268</sup> (Cole and Machinist 1998, 147–148) is an excuse for a delay in coming for an audience:

obv. <sup>3</sup>*a-na pa-an* LUGAL EN-*ia<sub>2</sub> al-la-ka* <sup>4</sup>m.DUMU-d.15 *ki-i il-li-ka* <sup>5</sup>*um-ma GIŠ.ki-gal-la-a-nu a-šaṭ-ṭar* <sup>6</sup>*mim<sub>3</sub>-ma* *ša<sub>2</sub> it-ti-šu<sub>2</sub> a-na a-ma-ru ṭa-a-bu ia-a'-nu* <sup>7</sup>*ina pa-ni-šu at-te-mir-ka* <sup>8</sup>*a-di ina pa-ni-ia<sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-qat-tu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>9</sup>*al-la-kam-ma* GIR<sub>3</sub>.2 *ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL EN-ia<sub>2</sub> a-ni-šiq*

excuse: obv. <sup>3.-7</sup>I was about coming to the king, my lord, when Mār-Ištar arrived (and) said: ‘I will inscribe the pedestals.’ Nothing here pleased him (and so) I was delayed in his presence.

promise of redress: obv. <sup>8.-9</sup>As soon as he has finished with me, I will come and kiss the feet of the king, my lord.

The small number of excuses and apologies in SAA 13 is certainly to be attributed to the range of topics covered by the correspondence edited in this volume: many of the letters are petitions or complaints and denunciations. When not, they report on the progress made on the various tasks connected to temples and cult. The relationship of the senders is fundamentally different than that of the scholars in SAA 10 whose distance to the king seems to have been much closer.

The scant number of apologies and excuses in SAA 16 can be partially explained by the topic of the letters and the relatively large number of petitions and complaints. With a single exception, all letters discussed here are dated to the reign of Esarhaddon. The final passage of SAA 16 114 is likely to be an excuse for speaking up:

rev. <sup>re9</sup>*ina ši-ia-a-ri* LUGAL *i-šam-[me]* <sup>re10</sup>*ina UGU* *ša la a-kul-u-ni* [x x] <sup>re11</sup>LUGAL *ina UGU-*hi* id-[du-kan-ni]*

excuse (with a prediction):

rev. <sup>re9.-re11</sup>Tomorrow the king will he[ar] (about it, and) the king will k[ill me] because I have not consumed [...].

<sup>268</sup> The letter is written in the Babylonian dialect.

Based on the similarity with other letter in which the senders predict a negative reaction of the king, I believe this passage is meant either to explain why the sender is sending the letter or serve as a plea for mercy – by mentioning the worst-case scenario the sender strives to avoid it.

SAA 16 121 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 104) is a quite fragmentary letter of apology in which a sender recounts ignoring a royal command:

obv. <sup>9</sup>LUGAL *a-na* LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> *ir-tu-[a-na]* <sup>10</sup>*ma-a qi<sub>2</sub>-ri-ib ina IGI A<sub>2</sub>.2-<sup>1</sup>e<sup>1</sup>-[a]* <sup>11</sup>*ana-ku a-ba-ak-ka la aq-ri-i[b]*

command: obv. <sup>9-10</sup>The king became an[gry] at his servant, saying: ‘Come before my arms!’.

rejection (only reported): obv. <sup>11</sup>I wept, (but) I did not com[e].

Under usual circumstances, this could be considered simply a more anticipating the next rejection of a royal order or an excuse. That the latter is by far the more likely possibility, is evident because of the way this move is phrased. The use of the humilific term of self-reference ‘his (the king’s) servant’ is clearly a strategic choice. While the following section of the obverse is too damaged to permit an analysis, in the reverse it is clear that he makes an accusation against a third party (rev. 5’.-10’.), perhaps as an attempt to shift the blame. Finally, he likely uses a direct appeal for royal mercy, although the move had to be partially restored:

rev. <sup>11’</sup>ša<sup>1</sup>-*nu-te-š*u<sub>2</sub> *a-na* LU[GAL EN-*ia*] <sup>12’</sup>*aq-ṭi-[bi]* <sup>13’</sup>*mu-uk* LUGAL EN *r[e-e<sup>2</sup>-mu<sup>2</sup>]* <sup>14’</sup>*ina* UGU-*ḥi* LU<sub>2</sub>.IR<sub>3</sub>.M[EŠ-šu<sub>2</sub> *liš<sup>2</sup>-kun<sup>2</sup>]* <sup>15’</sup>*am-mar ina pa-ni-[š*u<sub>2</sub> x x] <sup>16’</sup>*ni-qar-rib-u-ni*

reminder (with an apology):

rev. <sup>11’-16’</sup>The second time I spo[ke] to the ki[ng, my lord] as follows: ‘[May] the king, my lord, [have (?)] m[ercy (?)] upon his servants!’.

Again, the sender refers to himself as a ‘servant’. In the following passage the sender seems to announce his arrival for an audience. This reinforces the hypothesis of the present letter being a letter of apology – the sender must remind the king of the apology, or else he might risk not being allowed in the royal presence at all.

SAA 16 127 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 113–114) is a letter of complaint with the elements of a denunciation. There is an excuse, triggered by a potential reproach which refers to the inability of the writer to resolve the situation on his own:

rev. <sup>4</sup>*ma-a a-ta-a la ta-ša-bat-si* <sup>5</sup>*i-na pa-ni-š*u<sub>2</sub> *š*u-*u*<sub>2</sub> *pal-ḥa-ak ša la* LUGAL <sup>6</sup>EN-*ia la a-šab-bat-si*

potential reproach: rev. <sup>4</sup>‘Why did you not capture him?’

explanation: rev. <sup>5</sup>He is with him.

excuse: rev. <sup>5</sup>I am afraid.

excuse: rev. <sup>5-6</sup>I will not arrest him without the permission of the king, my lord.

The sender then proceeds with his complaint. The excuse, in effect, serves as an argument underscoring the need for royal intervention. The potential reproach from the king pre-empts the reservations that king might have had, giving the sender an opportunity to better present his case. In this case, the excuse likely did not fulfil its usual function.

The second potential reproach is located in SAA 16 150 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 130). It is followed certainly by an excuse (obv. 8'.-rev. 6.), although it is partially broken.

From the reign of Assurbanipal comes SAA 16 143 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 126–127), a letter concerning building activities in the city of Tarbišu. After a report, there comes a reproach or a question from the king, but the next move from the sender is completely broken. In the reverse, the editors tentatively restore another question (the particles introducing reported speech are clearly visible), to which the sender's reply is as follows:

rev. <sup>4'</sup>(...) *i-na* [ŠA<sub>3</sub> U<sub>4</sub>-*me š*]a <sup>5'</sup>DUMU-LUGAL *šu-[tu]-u-ni* m.d.PA-MAN-*a-ni* <sup>6'</sup>*ina* E<sub>2</sub>-*ku-tal-li*  
*ina pa-an* LUGAL <sup>7'</sup>*us-se-rib-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu is-pi-lu-rat* <sup>8'</sup>*is-sak-nu-šu-nu* <sup>9'</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a* m.SILIM-*mu-*  
*KUR it-ta-lak* <sup>10'</sup>A<sub>2</sub>.2-*šu<sub>2</sub>* *ina* UGU E<sub>2</sub> *is-sa-kan* <sup>11'</sup>*a-na ša-aḥ-su-si šu-u* <sup>12'</sup>*a-na* LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>-*  
*ia* <sup>13'</sup>*as-sap-ra*

explanation (?): rev. <sup>4'.-8'</sup>In [the days whe]n he (= the king) was the crown prince, Nabû-šarrāni brought them before the king to the Rear Palace. They put the crosses on them (at that time).

report: rev. <sup>9'.-10'</sup>Now, Šulmu-māti has started to work on the palace.

excuse: rev. <sup>11'.-13'</sup>I (only) wrote to remind the king, my lord.

Since the initial explanation indeed consists of a reminder, this could be taken quite literally. The excuses framed as reminders might actually originate from a prototypical situation of this kind, in which the sender makes an explicit statement in order not to offend the king with impudent claims about his lack of knowledge.

Finally, the letters from the correspondence of Assurbanipal demonstrate how the king could apologise – or rather make his excuses and avoid blame. There are three excuses/apologies in total in this volume of SAA (Parpola 2018).

SAA 21 17 (Parpola 2018, 15–16) is actually strictly speaking not an excuse but should be at least noted here as the single example of a king's reaction to a complaint. The elders of Nippur are quoted bemoaning not being allowed to speak to the king – half of their group was held back. In answer, the



Assurbanipal finds other person to explicitly blame for this mishap (high officials on both sides, rev. 1-7), and then swears that he was unaware of what was happening (rev. 7-11). This is also a pattern that occurs elsewhere in reaction to reproaches, accusations, and complaints, and will be considered in more detail in the relevant section. It is, however, striking that despite the relatively low number of royal letters this kind of speech action occurs at least once.

The move in SAA 21 38 (Parpola 2018, 32) is likely to be a quoted excuse from a previous missive to the addressee (Sîn-[tabni]-uṣur, governor of Ur, see Novotny 2002). Considering the usage of the perfect tense (rev. <sup>1</sup>*ma-a* LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL.MEŠ <sup>2</sup>*ik-tal-un-ni*) it is not unlikely that the quoted move was an excuse and not an indirect rejection of a royal command. The king reacts to this with a calm reassurance (rev. 3-6) and a permission to come now (rev. 7-9) – or alternatively to come later (rev. 10-15).

Another excuse in this part of the corpus in SAA 21 104 (Parpola 2018, 87–89), a letter from the Babylonian king Šamaš-šumu-ukīn to the king, his<sup>269</sup> brother. The circumstances under which the letter was composed are not entirely clear, although the editor supposes that Šamaš-šumu-ukīn must have allowed the Elamite ships with grain to depart without Assurbanipal's permission (Parpola 2018, 87, n. 104). Several words in the missive are obscure variants or otherwise unknown, and although some of Parpola's proposals seem probable<sup>270</sup>, others are less so<sup>271</sup>. Nonetheless, the excuse in the letter is evident:

obv. <sup>10</sup>(...) *ne<sub>2</sub>-me-el* <sup>11</sup>1 2-*šu<sub>2</sub> a-na* ŠEŠ-*ia aš<sub>2</sub>-pur-an-ni* <sup>12</sup>*gab-ri di-ib-bi la iš-pur-ni-ni* <sup>13</sup>*a-na-ku ap-ta-laḥ<sub>3</sub>* m.um-man-ni-gaš <sup>14</sup>*am-mi<sub>3</sub>-i* DUMU MAN LUGAL *u<sub>2</sub>-da* <sup>15</sup>*ra-as-mu šu-u mu-uk* <sup>16</sup>*pi-iq-ta-a-te ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub> *it-tu-sa-te* <sup>17</sup>*ša* ŠE.†PAD†.MEŠ *an-ni-ti*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*me-me-ni e-pa-ša<sub>2</sub>* <sup>2</sup>*su-ma-me-tu<sub>2</sub> i-kar-ra-a[r<sub>2</sub>]* <sup>3</sup>*u<sub>3</sub>* LUGAL *u<sub>2</sub>-da a-ni-nu* <sup>4</sup>*am-mar ša<sub>2</sub> a-ni-nu-ni* <sup>5</sup>*am-mar it-su-si am-mar* <sup>6</sup>*me-me-ni la ma-ša-an-ni* <sup>7</sup>*a-sap-ra mu-uk* GIŠ.MA<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ <sup>8</sup>*ra-am-me-ia lu-še-ti-qu*

apology: obv. <sup>10-13</sup>Because I had written to my brother repeatedly and not received an answer, I became fearful.

excuse: obv. <sup>13-15</sup>As the king knows, this Ummanigaš can be rash (?).

excuse: obv. <sup>15</sup>-rev. <sup>1</sup>I (thought) to myself, perhaps he will do something to the sacks (?) with the grain and cause poisoning (?).

<sup>269</sup> 'To my brother' in the letter (obv. 1.)

<sup>270</sup> See note to obv. 16.

<sup>271</sup> See note to rev. 2. – *su-ma-me-tu<sub>2</sub>*, a hapax legomenon, which Parpola associates with Syr. *samem* (to poison), with a note about *šu-ma-am-tum* in Hh 24 165 (sic!). The entry for *šu-ma-am-tum* in Hh 24 164 (MSL 11, Reiner 1974, 83) is however a translation of the Sumerian *še šu-hu-uz*. This Sumerian verb is to be translated as 'to set fire, to burn' and as such the translation for *šumamtu* proposed by CAD 'parched grain' seems much more probable (CAD Š/3, 265). On the other hand, the worry about 'doing something to the sacks (?)' would be more reasonable in the context of poison.

excuse: rev. <sup>3-6</sup>. And (as) the king knows, we all, without exception, cannot do anything about any of the sacks (?).

admission: rev. <sup>7-8</sup>. I have (therefore) ordered: ‘Release the boats so that they can pass!’

The apologetic character of this passage is emphasised by the switch to a more formal tone – from ‘my brother’ in the greeting formula to ‘the king’ in the claims of shared knowledge (LUGAL *u<sub>2</sub>-da* in lines obv. 14. and rev. 3.). The sequence of moves is followed by a report of immediate redress – after receiving new orders from the king, Šamaš-šumu-ukīn without delay commands for the boats to be stopped.

Finally, there is the use of an excuse in a passage of warnings and admonitions in SAA 21 21<sup>272</sup> (Parpola 2018, 19) related to the command of Assurbanipal that his traitorous brother, referred to as ‘cripple’, *ḫummuru* (obv. 4.) be captured before he manages to run away. The excuse is only a theoretical one, to be made by the addressees if they fail their task:

rev. <sup>1</sup>(...) *u la ta-qab-ba-a* <sup>2</sup>[*u*]*m-ma dib-bi ša<sub>2</sub> niš-mu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>3</sup>*um-ma i-ḫi-tu ki-i ni-ip-ḫu-ru* <sup>4</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> šu-u<sub>2</sub>*  
*ina KASKAL.2* <sup>1</sup>*bul-ṭa<sup>?</sup>-a<sup>?</sup>* <sup>1</sup>*iḫ-te-liq* <sup>5</sup>*e-mu-qe<sub>2</sub>-ku-nu a-na a-a-lu* <sup>7</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> a-ḫa-meš lil-li-ku* <sup>3</sup>*u<sub>3</sub>* <sup>7</sup>*i-*  
*na KUR-ku-nu ma-ṣar-ta-šu<sub>2</sub>-ma* <sup>8</sup>*lu-u dan-na-at*

admonition (with a potential excuse):

rev. <sup>1-4</sup>. And do not say: ‘The things we heard were wrong. We assembled but he got away *with his life* (?) on the road.’

command (with an undercurrent of an admonition):

rev. <sup>5-7</sup>. May your forces come to each other’s aid.

admonition: rev. <sup>7-8</sup>. And may your guard against him be strong in the land.

The rejection of a potential excuse is a powerful stylistic device that underlines that absolute necessity of vigilance and the utmost important of capturing the traitor.

## Neo-Babylonian letters in the Neo-Assyrian royal correspondence

The oldest example of excuse in this part of the corpus is SAA 19 135 (Luukko 2012b, 138–139) sent by the Babylonian official Nabû-balāssu-iqbi (Radner 2001, 806), dated by SAA to the reign of Tiglath-pileser III. It could actually be considered almost a justification: it is not entirely certain if the sender recognises his conduct as an offence, although he readily admits to it:

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<sup>272</sup> The letter is written in the Babylonian dialect, but since it is a royal letter, I am placing it in the Assyrian section.

rev. <sup>9</sup>*gab-ra-šu<sub>2</sub> a-na E<sub>2</sub>-GAL* <sup>10</sup>*la u<sub>2</sub>-še-bi-la ši-pir-ti* <sup>11</sup>*i-na ŠU.2* 'LU<sub>2</sub>.A-KIN' *ki-i am-ḥa-ra-aš<sub>2</sub>*  
<sup>12</sup>*MU.MEŠ ša<sub>2</sub> 'UN'.MEŠ ša<sub>2</sub> ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi* <sup>13</sup>*šaṭ-ru ul nu-mi-is-si* <sup>14</sup>*a-na UGU-ḥi ul i-di*

admission: rev. <sup>9.-10</sup>I did not send the answer to the palace.

excuse: rev. <sup>11.-14</sup>When I received the letter from the messenger, I did not recognise the names of the persons from the letter, and I did know nothing about it.

No explicit (promise of) redress follows. In the next passage Nabû-balāssu-iqbi praises the king or reassures him with reference to the stability of his conquered territories, although this must not necessarily be in connection with the preceding excuse.

The next Babylonian excuses/apologies are dated to the reign of Sargon II. The name of the sender of SAA 17 21 (Dietrich 2003, 23) is sadly broken. In answer to the question from the king about the lack of correspondence he makes the following excuse:

obv. <sup>8</sup>*ul-tu MU.AN.NA 2-ta ṣab-ta-ku* <sup>9</sup>*u en-na ša<sub>2</sub> ap-paṭ-ru ṭe<sub>3</sub>-ma-a ul aš-bat* <sup>10</sup>*ki-i ap-paṭ-ru*  
d.EN u d.AG <sup>11</sup>*a-na ba-laṭ ZI.MEŠ ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia* <sup>12</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.suk-kal-lu u<sub>2</sub>-ṣal-li* <sup>13</sup>*um-*  
*ma im-ma-ti LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>* <sup>14</sup>*il-la-kam<sub>2</sub>-ma ki-di-nu-ti* <sup>15</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> TIN.TIR.KI i-šak-kan*

excuse: obv. <sup>8</sup>For two years, I had been imprisoned.

excuse: <sup>9</sup>And even now, as I was set free, I have been unable to make any plans.

redress? <sup>10.-12</sup>As I was set free, I prayed to Bēl and Nabû for the life and good health of the king, my lord, and of the vizier,

pre-request: <sup>13.-15</sup>saying: 'When will the king, my lord, come and establish the privileges of Babylon?'

Considering the request that follows, this a very smooth switch from an excuse to a petition.

SAA 17 52 (Dietrich 2003, 48), SAA 17 53 (Dietrich 2003, 49–50), and SAA 17 54 (Dietrich 2003, 50) are by the editor dated to the reign of Sennacherib (Dietrich 2003, xxiv). All three letters are partial duplicates and refer to the same matter (Dietrich 1998, 89): the sender, Babylonian official<sup>273</sup> Bēl-ibni (Baker and Brinkman 1999, 305, no. 8) laments being slandered by an opportunistic group of men from Elam and by his unnamed opponent. About this he informs the king (SAA 17 52), the chief eunuch (SAA 17 53) and another official whose name or (more likely) title is not preserved<sup>274</sup> (SAA 17 54).

In the letter to the king, he makes an excuse for not visiting the king (obv. <sup>14</sup>(...) *ki-i aš<sub>2</sub>-mu-u* [*ki-i ap-la-ḥu*] <sup>15</sup>*ul al-li-ka*<sup>275</sup> – 'When I heard (about the slander), I did not come, [because I was afraid]'. This

<sup>273</sup> Dietrich 1998; Dietrich 2003, xxiv considers him to be identical with the man who later ruled as the Babylonian king. One must note, however, that Bēl-ibni is not exactly an uncommon name.

<sup>274</sup> Dietrich 1998, 90 suggests the palace administrator *ša pān ekalli*.

<sup>275</sup> The damaged signs are restored on the basis of SAA 17 53, making the readings absolutely certain.

is followed by what could be considered a promise of redress (obv. <sup>15</sup>(...) *en-na* [ARAD-*u<sub>2</sub>-ti*] <sup>16</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub>* LUGAL EN-*ia<sub>2</sub> aš-ši-bi* – ‘Now I long to serve the king, my lord’). The same sequence occurs in SAA 17 53 (excuse in obv. 12-13, and the redress in lines 13-14), but in SAA 17 54 the part of the letter that would have contained this or a similar passage is completely destroyed. After this passage comes an argument for the forgiveness the sender of the letter requires. This is certainly interesting as it is, as many other arguments both in the Babylonian as well as Assyrian parts of the correspondence, based on the expectation of equal treatment – that is the fact that others were forgiven is for the writer of the letter a sufficient reason to be forgiven himself<sup>276</sup>:

obv. <sup>15</sup>(...) *mam-m[a ma-la]* <sup>16</sup>*re-eš-šu i-iḫ-tu-u<sub>2</sub> ḫi-tu-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>17</sup>[LU]GAL AD-*ka uz-zak-ki-š[u<sub>2</sub>-n]u-ti*

argument: obv. <sup>15-17</sup>[Every]one who at the beginning committed an offence was pardoned (lit. cleared) by the [ki]ng, your father.

Other instances of the verb *zakû* in the royal correspondence refer to the freeing from obligations. CAD Z, 29 (*zakû* 4 b) places this usage of *zukkû* in the realm of legal speech, as ‘pardon’ or ‘free from guilt’. The context here would however suggest the slightly more metaphorical meaning of ‘forgiveness’ in the sense of ‘clearing of guilt’.

The following passage is broken in SAA 17 52, but can be restored on the basis of SAA 17 53. Bēl-ibni proclaims that he is not guilty, which is a move that starts the petition-like sequence of the rest of the letter in all three versions.

The senders of SAA 17 120<sup>277</sup> (Dietrich 2003, 106–107) are two Babylonian officials. The main topic of the letter is a report on an Elamite attack followed by what seems to be a complaint with a strong apologetic tone. The entire sequence begins like many of the complaints with an explanatory move about a similar situation from the past:

rev. <sup>22</sup>*aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> dul-lu ša<sub>2</sub> ID<sub>2</sub> ša E<sub>2</sub>-m.ṽ<sup>1</sup>*ra-a-a ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL BE-ni* <sup>23</sup>*ṽe<sub>3</sub>-e-mu iš-kun-an-na-ši um-ma li-is-ki-ru* <sup>24</sup>LUGAL BE-ni *i-di ṽina šad-da<sup>1</sup>-qad<sub>3</sub> šal-ṽla-šat<sup>1</sup>-ti* UN.MEŠ KUR *ma-a ṽdu* <sup>25</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> a-ki ša<sub>2</sub> 1-en LU<sub>2</sub>.ENGAR šu<sub>2</sub>-šu-nim-ma ina UGU-ḫi iz-zi-iz-zu**

introduction (with a roya command):

rev. <sup>22-23</sup>.As to the work on the river of Bīt-Deraya as to which the king, our lord,m gave us the command: ‘It should be dammed’ –

<sup>276</sup> A similar case among many is SAA 18 94 Reynolds 2003, 79, rev. <sup>7</sup>*ma-du-u<sub>2</sub>-tu ša<sub>2</sub> a-na LUGAL EN-ia<sub>2</sub> iḫ-tu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>8</sup>*u LUGAL re-e-mu iš-ku-na-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu-tim-ma* <sup>9</sup>*ZI.MEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu i-re-en-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu-ṽti<sup>7</sup>-ma* – ‘Many are those who have sinned against the king, my lord, but the king has shown them mercy and spared their lives’.

<sup>277</sup> Also dated to the reign of Sennacherib.

reminder: rev. <sup>24.-25.</sup>The king, our lord knows, that last year and the year before there were plenty of people in the land, and they were brought out and worked together as one<sup>278</sup>.

The pseudo-reminder is followed by the report that the situation has become less favourable and the short passage that could be an admission of offence (rev. <sup>27.</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> ul ni-i<sub>h</sub>-ru-up-ma i[na U]GU-*hi* ni-iz-ziz* – ‘And we did not work on this before.’). Thereafter follows what could be a complaint – but also perhaps an attempt to avoid blame (rev. <sup>28.</sup>*U<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ iq-tir-ba-ni u<sub>3</sub> U[N].MEŠ ma-la ša<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>29.</sup>*ŠA<sub>3</sub><sup>1</sup>-ba-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu ul pa-ṭir-ma a-ki ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu ul ip-pu-šu<sub>2</sub>* – ‘The days have come but all the people are not free of worry and do not act as they please’). What could turn it again into an excuse is the potential admonition from the king in line 30. of the reverse which lends the complaint a more apologetic tone. The senders follow this move with a claim that they are powerless against the unruly workers and finish with the *akī ša šarru ilē’u līpuš* (rev. 31-32), more typical of complaints than apologies.

At the same time, this letter is structured in a way that is not dissimilar to the justifications for not following orders realised as excuses that were discussed earlier in the Assyrian part of this section – although here the main concern seems to be not justifying one’s action but rather impressing upon the king that the situation of the senders is truly unacceptable.

An interesting case is presented by SAA 17 69 (Dietrich 2003, 65–66), dated to the reign of Sargon II. The name of the sender is completely broken away, but the way in which he reacts to the royal reproach (obv. 12’.-13’) is unusual. In the first place, he makes an excuse for keeping a certain Aḫu-ilā’i away from his brothers, but then insists that he is not interfering with Aḫu-ilā’i at all – at least not after he came to Bīt-Dakkūri:

obv. <sup>11’.</sup>(...) *ša<sub>2</sub> LUG[AL be-li<sub>2</sub>-a iš-pu-ra]* <sup>12’.</sup>*um-ma mi-nu-u<sub>2</sub> hi-tu [la-pa-an]* <sup>13’.</sup>*ŠEŠ.MEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub> tap-ru-us-s[u] m.ŠEŠ-DINGIR-a-a* <sup>14’.</sup>*la IR<sub>3</sub>-u<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL šu-u<sub>2</sub> [ki]-i la-pa-an* <sup>15’.</sup>*ŠEŠ.MEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub> a-par-ra-su-š[u<sub>2</sub> ki]-nu šu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>16’.</sup>*i-na ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi ŠEŠ.MEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub> ku-mu m.ŠEŠ-DINGIR-a-a* <sup>17’.</sup>*a-na EN.NUN-u<sub>2</sub>-tu* <sup>18’.</sup>*aš<sup>1</sup>-ba-tu* <sup>18’.</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> a-na NINDA.HI.A-ni u A.M[E]Š-ni it-ti a-ḫa-meš* <sup>19’.</sup>*kun-na-’at<sup>1</sup> DINGIR.MEŠ ša<sub>2</sub> LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia* <sup>20’.</sup>*ki-i ul-[t]u E<sub>2</sub> a-na E<sub>2</sub>-m.da-ku-ru* <sup>21’.</sup>*i-la-a a-na mim-ma m.ŠEŠ-DINGIR-a-a* <sup>22’.</sup>*qe<sub>2</sub>-’er<sup>1</sup>-bi-ku-ma*

introduction (with a royal reproach):

obv. <sup>11’.-13’.</sup>As to what the kin[g, my lord, wrote]: ‘What is wrong that separated him [from] his brothers?’

excuse: obv. <sup>13’.-16’.</sup>Is Aḫu-ilā’i not a servant of the king? If I keep him away from his brothers, (it is only because) he is (the most) loyal from among his brothers.

protestations of innocence (with an oath):

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<sup>278</sup> Literally: ‘as one farmer’.

obv. <sup>16'.</sup>-<sup>22'</sup> Instead of seizing Aḥu-ilā'i for the guard duty, which is fixed together with our (rations of) bread and water<sup>279</sup>, (I swear) by the gods of the king, my lord, that since he came up to Bīt-Dakkūri I have not approached Aḥu-ilā'i.

The sender thus has an excuse at the ready for separating Aḥu-ilā'i from his brothers, but also declares that he is not doing it anymore. The protestations of innocence and the oath do not exhaust the subject entirely, as in the next move the sender describes Aḥu-ilā'i as a witness and likely 'a wild bull', although the following passage is almost completely destroyed.

Again, not many apologies are to be found among the letters edited in SAA 18. SAA 18 8 (Reynolds 2003, 12) is a badly damaged petition addressed to the king (although the entire introductory formula is broken away). While the sender is trying to obtain the royal assistance, he seems equally preoccupied with not provoking royal ire:

rev. <sup>3</sup>[a-ki ma]-<sup>1</sup>a <sup>1</sup>-de-e a-na LUGAL EN-ia<sub>2</sub> <sup>4</sup>[uṣ-t]a-<sup>1</sup>ni<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup>-iḥ LUGAL EN-a a-na ḥi-ṭi-ia <sup>5</sup>[la] <sup>1</sup>i<sup>1</sup>-  
šak-kan

argument (from meritorious service):

rev. <sup>3</sup>-<sup>4</sup>[I have gre]atly [ex]hausted myself for the king, my lord!

apology: rev. <sup>4</sup>-<sup>5</sup>May the king, my lord, [not] put the blame on me!

The following move seems a request. Although this apology is realised as a plea, and does not seem offer any redress, it should still be considered an apology. It is only a small step away from the pleas beseeching the other party not to be angry, which are quite obviously also apologies.

SAA 18 68 (Reynolds 2003, 52) is an excuse for not visiting the king, although in a broken context:

rev. <sup>6</sup>(...) la<sup>1</sup>-pa-ni da-a-ki <sup>7</sup>a[p-tal-l]aḥ a-na šu-lum LUGAL <sup>8</sup>ul al-li-ka

excuse: rev. <sup>6</sup>-<sup>7</sup>I was afraid of assassination

admission: rev. <sup>7</sup>-<sup>8</sup>(so) I did not come to greet the king.

In the following move, the sender mentions the unsavoury rumours that he intends to bring to the royal attention at length. He then proceeds with the promise to visit the king without further delay:

e. <sup>1</sup>la a-ka-ši la a-ma-ti <sup>2</sup>lul-li-kam<sub>2</sub>-ma a-(na) LUGAL <sup>3</sup>lu-uq-bu

promise: e. <sup>1</sup>-<sup>3</sup>I would not tarry and die. Let me come and tell (everything) the king.

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<sup>279</sup> On the importance of bread and water as the basic sustenance provided to the Assyrian subjects, see Parpola 2004a, 233–234.

In SAA 18 70 (Reynolds 2003, 53–55) is an apology for not coming for an audience, this time in a letter from the *šandabakku* and located at the beginning of the letter, directly after the greeting:

obv. <sup>5</sup>LUGAL *i-di ša<sub>2</sub> lu ma-a[ ]-da* <sup>6</sup>*mar-ša-ak la mar-ša-ak* <sup>7</sup>*a-na šul-mi* LUGAL *at-tal-kam<sub>2</sub>-[m]a?* <sup>8</sup>*a-du-u<sub>2</sub>* m.d.EN-*u<sub>2</sub>-sa-tu* ŠEŠ-*u<sub>2</sub>-a* <sup>9</sup>*u<sub>3</sub>* 10 LU<sub>2</sub>.DUMU.MEŠ DU<sub>3</sub>.MEŠ *ša<sub>2</sub>* EN.LIL<sub>2</sub>.KI <sup>10</sup>*a-na šul-mi* LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia* <sup>11</sup>*al-tap-ra* (...)

excuse (with a reminder emphasising shared knowledge):

obv. <sup>5-6</sup>The king knows that I am very ill.

post-excuse: obv. <sup>6-7</sup>If I were not ill, I would have come to the royal audience.

redress: obv. <sup>8-11</sup>Now I have sent Bēl-usātu, my brother, and ten noblemen of Nippur to greet the king, my lord.

What follows is a petition begging for the usage of Banitu Canal, emphasising the loyalty of Nippureans despite the enmity of neighbouring cities.

SAA 18 125 (Reynolds 2003, 102–104) is a lengthy denunciation against Ḫinnumu, a politically active Babylonian who served also as the governor of Uruk (Brinkman 2000). Many passages are damaged, but it is clear enough that many of the crimes of Ḫinnumu and his associates are listed in detail. In rev. 8-9., the old allegation made by the father of the current king resurfaces, regarding the chariots and horses Ḫinnumu is alleged to have given over to the Elamite king. What follows might be an excuse – but also a justification:

rev. <sup>9</sup>(...) [*um-ma*] <sup>10</sup>*ki-i iṣ-ba-tu-in-ni a-na* LUGAL KUR.NIM.MA.KI *it-tan-nu-i[n-ni* (...)

excuse: rev. <sup>10</sup>When they captured me, I was given to the king of Elam.

As excuses come, this one does seem to be quite succinct and indirect: as if the Ḫinnumu were trying to avoid addressing the accusations directly while at the same dissociating himself from his crime by emphasising that the choice was not his. The hypothesis might be supported by the following account of further events: as a consequence of another Urukian providing a testimony against Ḫinnumu, a river ordeal is ordered, and although his accuser clears it (rev. 14, partially restored), Ḫinnumu refuses to undergo his trial (rev. 15), which is as much as an admission of guilt.

The reproach in SAA 18 153 (Reynolds 2003, 124–125) is potential and used as an excuse for speaking up and denouncing a merchant by the sender (obv. 10.-11.).

SAA 118 162<sup>280</sup> (Reynolds 2003, 134) is sent by an official who was scheduled to join the treaty. Directly after the greeting, he excuses his inability to do so at the appointed time:

<sup>280</sup> This letter is dated to the reign of Assurbanipal (Reynolds 2003, xxviii).

obv. <sup>4</sup>(...) *a-na* UGU <sup>5</sup>*a-de-e* *ša<sub>2</sub>* TIN.TIR.KI <sup>6</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub>* LUGAL EN-*a iš-pu-ra* <sup>7</sup>*ul qer-be<sub>2</sub>-ka un-qu* <sup>8</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub>*  
 LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia* <sup>9</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub>* m.AN.ŠAR-*ra-mi-im*-LUGAL <sup>10</sup>*a-na* UGU-*hi-ia iš-ša<sub>2</sub>-a* <sup>11</sup>*a-na-ku u*  
 ŠEŠ.MEŠ-*ia* <sup>12</sup>*ki-i ni-il-lik-ku* <sup>13</sup>*ina* KUR.*a-ra-ši ma-šar-ta* <sup>14</sup>*it-ti-šu<sub>2</sub> it-ta-šar* <sup>15</sup>*a-da-nu* *ša<sub>2</sub> a-*  
*de-e* <sup>16</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub>* TIN.TIR.KI <sup>be17</sup>*ul ak-šu-du*

introduction: obv. <sup>4-6</sup>Concerning the treaty of Babylon which the king, my lord, wrote to me about

admission: obv. <sup>7</sup>I was not present.

excuse: obv. <sup>7-14</sup>(There was) a sealed order from the king, my lord, which Aššūr-rā'im-šarri brought to me. My brothers and I went and kept watch with him in the land of Raši.

admission: obv. <sup>15-be17</sup>(And thus) I could not arrive at the appointed time of the treaty.

In the following move, Kabtiya explains that he managed to rectify his misstep already on his way home (be. 18.-rev. 7.) The last part of the letter is devoted solely to the protestations of loyalty.

Only short a fragment of the obverse and the reverse of SAA 18 184<sup>281</sup> (Reynolds 2003, 152) is preserved, so that it is not entirely clear what the main subject was. Nonetheless, the preserved lines of the reverse point strongly towards a denunciation. In the final preserved passage, the sender notes a potential question from the king about not informing him previously (rev. 6') and excuses himself for his silence (rev. 6') (...) *k[i-i aš<sub>2</sub>-mu-u<sub>2</sub>]* <sup>7</sup>ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bi* *ša<sub>2</sub>* LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia<sub>2</sub> še-eḫ-tu* [*ap-ta-laḫ<sub>3</sub>-ma*] <sup>8</sup>*ul aq-bi um-ma en-na x[x x x x]* <sup>9</sup>*i-duk-kan-<sup>1</sup>ni*) – 'W[hen I heard] that the king is angry, [I became fearful and] did not say (anything), thinking to myself, now [...] he will kill me.'). The information which the sender at first failed to provide, was likely contained in the damaged part of the letter, hence the lack of a promise of redress.

There are not many apologies and excuses on the Babylonian side of the Neo-Assyrian royal archives, but when they do appear, they do not seem to differ that much from their Assyrian equivalents.

## Early Neo-Babylonian governor's archive from Nippur

This part of the corpus cannot boast of numerous apologies and excuses, either.

No. 1 (Cole 1996b, 37–39) is especially interesting, as it includes an straight-out admission of guilt and seems to refer to a case of miscommunication. It is written by a Kudurru who was likely the governor himself (Cole 1996b, 6) to a Nabû-nāšir who might be the identical with the Babylonian king (Cole 1996b, 38). Whether the king or not, Kudurru addresses his counterpart as a 'brother'. The exact context of the apology is elusive:

rev. <sup>3</sup>(...) *ša<sub>2</sub> ŠEŠ-u<sub>2</sub>-a* 4.*a-na m.mu-ri i-qab-bu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>5</sup>*um-ma le-mut-ta-na-tu-nu* <sup>6</sup>*mi-nam-ma* *ša<sub>2</sub> 1*  
 MA.<sup>1</sup>NA KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR<sup>1</sup> *taš-pur-a-nu* <sup>7</sup>*kit-tu an-na-a hi-tu-u<sub>2</sub>-a am-me-ni* <sup>8</sup>*a-na ŠEŠ-ia la aš<sub>2</sub>-*

<sup>281</sup> This letter is dated to the reign of Assurbanipal (Reynolds 2003, xxxi).



*pur um-ma ša<sub>2</sub>* <sup>9</sup>5 MA.NA KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR <<5 MA.NA KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR>> SIG<sub>2</sub>.ta-kil-tu <sup>10</sup>u<sub>3</sub>  
 SIG<sub>2</sub>.ar<sub>2</sub>-ga-man-nu muḥ-ram-ma <sup>11</sup>š<sub>u</sub><sup>1</sup>-bil ina <sup>12</sup>LU<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>.kal-du gab-bi-š<sub>u</sub><sup>12</sup>ki-<sup>13</sup>i<sup>1</sup> u<sub>2</sub>-ba-<sup>14</sup>u<sub>2</sub>  
 SIG<sub>2</sub>.ta-kil-tu <sup>13</sup>ba-ni-ti u<sub>3</sub> SIG<sub>2</sub>.ar<sub>2</sub>-ga-man-nu <sup>14</sup>bab-ba-nu-u<sub>2</sub> i[a]-a-<sup>15</sup>nu ar<sub>2</sub>-ka a-na ŠEŠ-ia<sub>2</sub>  
 al-t[ap]-ra en-na SIG<sub>2</sub>.ta-kil-ti <sup>16</sup>bab-ba-n[i]-t[a] SIG<sub>2</sub>.ar<sub>2</sub>-ga-man-nu <sup>17</sup>bab-ba-nu-<sup>18</sup>u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> u<sub>3</sub>  
 SIG<sub>2</sub>.ta-kil-tu <sup>18</sup>ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bu-u<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>2</sub> a-na TUG<sub>2</sub>.mu-šip-tu <sup>19</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> ŠEŠ-ia<sub>2</sub> i-maḥ-ḥa-š<sub>u</sub> ina ŠU.2  
<sup>20</sup>m.mu-ru ŠEŠ-u<sub>2</sub>-a lu-še-bil <sup>21</sup>u<sub>3</sub> mi-nu-u<sub>2</sub> ši-bu-tu <sup>22</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> ŠEŠ-ia<sub>2</sub> ŠEŠ-u<sub>2</sub>-a lu-mas-si-ma liš-  
 pur

introduction of topic: rev. <sup>3-6</sup>.As to what my brother is saying to Murru: ‘You reprobates! What is this about this one mina of silver that you wrote about?’<sup>282</sup>

admission: rev. <sup>7</sup>.Indeed, this was my fault.

self-reproach: rev. <sup>7-11</sup>.Why did I not write to my brother: ‘Buy and send me blue-purple and purple wool for five minas of silver’?

admission(?): rev. <sup>11-14</sup>.When I looked for it, I did not find quality blue-purple wool and good purple wool among all the Chaldeans.

excuse(?): rev. <sup>14</sup>.(Only?) later I wrote to my brother.

request: rev. <sup>15-20</sup>.Now may my brother send me in the hands of Murru some beautiful blue-purple wool beautiful purple wool, and as much blue-purple wool as they need to weave a *mušiptu*-garment<sup>283</sup> for my brother.

promise: rev. <sup>21-22</sup>.And may my brother think about what his wish is and send (me a letter about it).

At first glance, it is not entirely clear what the initial offensive conduct here was. It would appear that the addressee insults the sender and his messenger, and then enquires about a one mina of silver that is the object of some unclear contention. Although the context is entirely unclear, it must have something to do with the five minas for which the wool was to be bought, which are mentioned later. After admitting his guilt, the sender reproaches himself for not making a request to the addressee in the first place, which suggests that the apology was for a miscommunication in the first place. He admits that he was unable to find the wool on his own and segues seamlessly into the same request he did not think to directly make before. That this time the request is expressed in the more polite precative form (rev. 20.)

<sup>282</sup> Cole 1996b, 38 proposes a different interpretation. According to his edition, only the insult is quoted from the speech of the addressee and the following clause about one mina of silver is attributed to the sender. It seems to me, however, that it makes more sense to combine the clause with the insult and the following question into a single utterance made by one person, since in the following clause the sender seems to admit his offence.

<sup>283</sup> It is certainly interesting that although both kinds of purple wool were precious and expensive, the *mušiptu*-garment on its own was hardly anything to write home about (see the prices of the garments in Malatucca 2017, 114 – note however that Joannès 2010, 406 takes the word to be a generic term for a garment of any sort, for more details see Zawadzki 2010, 411–412).

as opposed to the imperative used for the request that was not made (rev. 10.-11.) is likely not coincidental. In the final move of the letter, Kudurru follows his request with a promise of reciprocity.

In No. 41 (Cole 1996b, 113–115) the sender dutifully reports to his ‘lord’ that he sold all his iron before he knew that his lord might need it. He offers immediate redress in writing to an associate not to sell any more iron (obv. 16.-rev. 6.). This is followed by an excuse that he would not have sold anything had he known (rev. <sup>7</sup>[*en-na a*]-<sup>8</sup>*du ki*<sup>1</sup>-*i* AN.BAR <sup>8</sup>[*be-li<sub>2</sub> še*]-*bu-u<sub>2</sub> a-na mam-ma* <sup>9</sup>[*ul ad*]-*din-ma ul aš<sub>2</sub>-qul* – ‘[Now then] (had I known that) [my lord] wants the iron, I would [not have] weighted and sold it to anybody.’). He is, however, swift to turn the blame towards the addressee (rev. <sup>10</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> a-na*<sup>1</sup> *ḥa-ra-pi* <sup>11</sup>*be-li<sub>2</sub> ul iš-pur* <sup>12</sup>*ul-tu m.ḥa-bil-GI.NA* <sup>13</sup>*il-li-ka ul iq-ba-a* <sup>14</sup>*u<sub>3</sub>* AN.BAR *ina pa-ni-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>15</sup>*ad-din* (...)) – ‘But my lord did not write to me beforehand. When Ḥabil-kīnu came, (my lord) did not tell me (anything) and (so) I sold the iron in his presence.’), almost turning the excuse into a justification. The attempt to make the addressee share the blame is nonetheless followed by a move with a request to write how much iron is needed, a clear case of redress (rev. 15.- re.19.)

Another case of a clear-cut apology in this corpus is No. 63 (Cole 1996b, 146–147). In the final passage of the letter the sender, having discussed other shipments and the details of their business transactions, asserts that he did indeed send something (the shipment) to his brother:

rev. <sup>8</sup>*ak-te-ra-ma* <sup>9</sup>*lu-še-bi-la-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>10</sup>*um-ma ul-lam-ma* <sup>11</sup>*ŠA<sub>3</sub>-ba-ti-ia* <sup>12</sup>*ŠEŠ-u<sub>2</sub>-a*<sup>1</sup> <sup>re13</sup>*la*<sup>1</sup> *i-mal<sub>2</sub>-l[a]*

admission: rev. <sup>8</sup>I hesitated<sup>284</sup>.

redress: rev. <sup>9</sup>(But) indeed I sent it.

excuse (with an admission):

rev. <sup>10</sup>.-<sup>re13</sup>Thinking to myself: ‘It had been a long time. May brother’s heart not fill with anger.’

Another instance of trying to avert the anger of the other party is No. 110 (Cole 1996b, 222–223). This apology is inserted between two moves requesting the assistance of the lord in a legal matter. It directly precedes a threat and perhaps this was the entire point:

rev. <sup>19</sup>’[*en*]-<sup>1</sup>*na*<sup>1</sup> *ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi* <sup>1</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> be-li<sub>2</sub>*<sup>1</sup>-[*ia*] <sup>20</sup>’[*mim*<sup>?</sup>-*ma*<sup>?</sup>] *la i-ma-al-lu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>21</sup>’*ul tal*-<sup>1</sup>*la*<sup>1</sup>-*kam<sub>2</sub>-ma* <sup>re22</sup>’[*a-n*] *a be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia* <sup>re23</sup>’*ul al-la-ka*

excuse: rev. <sup>19</sup>’-<sup>20</sup>’[No]w, let [my] lord not be angry!

<sup>284</sup> Cole 1996b, 146–147 translated ‘I waited’, with a note pointing to the Aramaic loanword identified by von Soden. However, this hypothesis had to be discounted on the basis of the Aramaic verb always occurring in the D-stem (Abraham and Sokoloff 2011, 37) I am reverting to the meaning ‘to think, to hesitate(?)’ assigned by CAD K, 304 (*katāru* B).

threat: rev. <sup>21'-re23'</sup> (But if<sup>285</sup>) you do not come (to my aid), I will not come (either).

This type of apology is similar to the ones identified by Sallaberger among the Old-Babylonian letters, focussing on the feelings of the other (the addressee). In the first millennium corpus, this is one of very few instances of this kind.

Some of the excuses occur in the context of rejections of commands and requests, just like the ones analysed previously in the Neo-Assyrian part of the corpus. No. 80 (Cole 1996b, 170–172), addressed to a ‘lord’, deals with a matter of sending a person related to a court case, and the excuse is part of the conditional rejection uttered by that person:

obv. <sup>6</sup>*am-me-ni* m.DINGIR-*a-AD a-na* <sup>7</sup>*pa-an be-<sup>l</sup>li<sub>2</sub>-a<sup>1</sup> i-<sup>l</sup>li<sup>1</sup>-kam<sub>2</sub>-ma* <sup>8</sup>*a-na di-ni-šu<sub>2</sub> UGU di-ni-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>9</sup>*i-šab-bat-šu<sub>2</sub> en-na a-na* <sup>10</sup>*a-kan-na-ak-ka um-ma* <sup>11</sup>*lul-lik pal-ḫa-ka ki-i* <sup>12</sup>*tu-ta-kal-la-a-nu* <sup>13</sup>*šu-mi* DINGIR.MEŠ *be-li<sub>2</sub> <sup>l</sup>lu<sup>1</sup>-še-la-a*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*a-na pa-ni-ka lul-<sup>l</sup>lik<sup>1</sup>*

rejection: obv. <sup>6-9</sup>Why should Ilā-abu have come before my lord, if he (= my lord) was to capture him because of his court case?

reported rejection (with an excuse, rejection is conditional, with a demand):

obv. <sup>10</sup>-rev. <sup>1</sup>Now there, he (is saying) as follows: ‘I would go, but I am afraid. If you could grant me (this and) swear an oath by the gods, I will come to you.’

A slightly more excuse-like case occurs in No. 98 (Cole 1996b, 204–206), also a letter to a ‘lord’, but this time preceded by a command:

obv. <sup>6</sup>*aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>1</sup>[EN]-*ḫar-bi<sup>1</sup>*. [MEŠ] <sup>7</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> <sup>l</sup>be-li<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> iš-<sup>l</sup>pu-ra<sup>1</sup>* <sup>8</sup>*um<sup>1</sup>-ma la <sup>l</sup>it<sup>1</sup>-[tal-l]ak-ka* <sup>9</sup>*pa-ni-ia<sup>1</sup>* <sup>10</sup>*li<sup>1</sup>-gu-<sup>l</sup>lu<sup>4</sup>* <sup>10</sup>*a-ki-i<sup>1</sup> [ḫab<sup>2</sup>]-<sup>l</sup>ta<sup>1</sup>-nu* <sup>11</sup>*k[i-i]* <sup>1</sup>EN-*ḫar-bi*.MEŠ<sup>1</sup> <sup>12</sup>*a-na pa-an <sup>l</sup>be<sup>1</sup>-li<sub>2</sub>-ia* <sup>13</sup>*ni-il-tap-ra*

introduction (with command from the addressee):

obv. <sup>6-9</sup>As to the [owners] of the *ḫarbu*-ploughs about whom my lord wrote to me as follows: ‘They must not le[av]e you. Let them wait for me!’

excuse: obv. <sup>10-13</sup>It is because we were [plun]dered (?) that we sent the owners of the *ḫarbu*-ploughs to my lord.

Regardless of the correctness of the restoration for [*ḫab<sup>2</sup>]-<sup>l</sup>ta<sup>1</sup>-nu* in line 10. the sender is giving a reason for his disobedience.

<sup>285</sup> The negation *ul* would actually indicate a main clause (also noted by Cole). I am unable to propose a better solution than a defective conditional clause.

Similarly, an excuse appears as a third rejection of a request in No. 100 (Cole 1996b, 208–209). The letter is addressed to a ‘brother’, but the rejections of a request occur outside of the letter, in a letter exchange with a third party. Although the party rejecting the request, Šākin-šumi, is not addressed with a title, he himself uses second person singular pronoun to refer to the sender of the letter (obv. 7.):

obv. <sup>4</sup>ŠE.BAR *ša<sub>2</sub> taq-bu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>5</sup>*um-ma a-lik-ma* m.GAR-MU <sup>6</sup>*lid-dak-ka ki-i aq-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>7</sup>*um-ma mim-ma a-na* <sup>8</sup>*ka<sup>1</sup>-a-ša<sub>2</sub>* <sup>9</sup>*ul a-nam-dak-ka* <sup>10</sup>*a-di šu<sub>2</sub>-u<sub>2</sub> i-šap-pa-ram-ma* <sup>11</sup>*i-na-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>-u<sub>2</sub>-ma* <sup>12</sup>*i-nam-dak-ka* <sup>13</sup>*3-šu<sub>2</sub> a-na pa-ni-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>14</sup>*ki-i al-lik* <sup>15</sup>*iš-pu<sup>1</sup>-ra*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*um-ma i-na maḥ-ri-i* <sup>2</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub>-la-nu-uš-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>3</sup>*a-na* m.AD-DINGIR-a <sup>4</sup>*ki-i ad-din lib-ba-ti-ia* <sup>5</sup>*in-da-al*

introduction (with a request or instructions):

obv. <sup>4-6</sup>The grain<sup>286</sup> about which you said: ‘Go to Šākin-šumi, may he give it to you!’ –

report of an issue (with rejection, demand, and an excuse):

obv. <sup>6</sup>-rev. <sup>5</sup>When I told him (about this, he said) as follows: ‘I will not give anything to you until he writes, brings and gives you (a letter).’ When I came to him for the third time, he wrote to me as follows: ‘Before, when I gave (grain) to Abu-ilā without his permission, he was angry with me.’

In his following move, the sender is trying to arrange for a way for the addressee to authorise Šākin-šumi to give out the grain to the sender. It is certainly remarkable that the excuse, which one would tentatively expect to be the polite manner of rejecting a request (both because of its indirectness and because of its presence in the royal correspondence), occurs only when the sender attempts to persuade Šākin-šumi for the third time.

If anything, the patterns in the usage of apologies and excuses in the early Neo-Babylonian letters are remarkably similar to those observed in the Neo-Assyrian correspondence. The lack of apologies similar to that in No. 63 there is likely due to the prevalence of royal addressees.

## Neo-Babylonian institutional correspondence

There are only several apologies/excuses among the institutional correspondence of the Neo-Babylonian period. In Nos. 16, 120, 164, and 203, the excuse appears directly after the greeting. No. 195 remains as a more liminal case, while No. 193 is an apology without an excuse.

<sup>286</sup> On the translation of ŠE.BAR = *uṭṭatu* as ‘barley’ or (more likely here) ‘wheat’, see Cole 1996b, 100, n. to line 9. I prefer Cole’s interpretation ‘main cereal crop’ and have used ‘grain’ throughout.

In No. 16 (Levavi 2018, 248–249), the sender excuses himself for not visiting his ‘lord’, the temple scribe. It is the most elaborate of the excuses from this part of the corpus, and thus deserves to be quoted in its entirety:

obv. <sup>3</sup>ITL.MEŠ <sup>1</sup>U<sub>4</sub>-mu.MEŠ *a-ga-a mar-ša-ku-ma*<sup>1</sup> 4. <sup>1</sup>UNUG<.KI> *ul u<sub>2</sub>-ši<sup>1</sup> u ma-la <sup>1</sup>a<sup>2</sup>-lak<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup> <sup>5</sup>a-na*  
<sup>1</sup>*pa-ni ŠEŠ-ia<sub>2</sub> ul<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup> ma-ša-[ku]* <sup>6</sup>*en-na <sup>1</sup>ša<sub>2</sub>-ta-ru a-ga-a<sup>1</sup> <sup>7</sup>iš-ša<sub>2</sub>-tar ina 1-et a-ma[t EN-ia<sub>2</sub>]* <sup>be8</sup>*a-*  
*ba-lu<sup>2</sup> za-ku-[tu<sup>2</sup> (x)]*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*ul e-re-ši mam-ma <sup>2</sup>ina pa-ni EN-ia<sub>2</sub> la i-par-r[ik]* <sup>2</sup>KIN-ti *a-mat ša<sub>2</sub> EN-ia<sub>2</sub> lu-uš-me-ma*  
<sup>3</sup>*lu<sup>1</sup>-ub-lu<sup>2</sup>*

excuse: obv. <sup>3-4</sup>. This (last) months and days I was sick. I did not leave Uruk.

admission: obv. <sup>4-5</sup>. And I was in no state to come to my brother (sic!).

redress: obv. <sup>6-7</sup>. Now I have written this letter.

apology: obv. <sup>7-be8</sup>. (Just) one word from [my lord] will revive me.

apology: obv. <sup>be8</sup>-rev. <sup>1</sup>. I do not wish for forgiveness.

flattery: rev. <sup>1-2</sup>. No one can oppose my lord.

post-apology: rev. <sup>2-3</sup>. May I hear the message, the word of my lord, and may I live.

Since what follows this apology is only a possible scribal notation (Levavi 2018, 249), this letter is complete as is and thus the single one in the Babylonian corpus concerned only with the communicative act of apologising. The sender is writing to his ‘lord’ – although the term of address ‘brother’ occurs in line 5. of the obverse, it might be an oversight<sup>287</sup> or perhaps more likely, an attempt at ingratiation.

First, the sender delivers his excuses for not visting his lord, then designates his letter as an attempt of redress. He apologises by pre-emptively stating the result of forgiveness (just one word will mean that he is revived) and again, by stating that he does not (even) wish to be forgiven. The noun *zakū[tu* in line 8. is tentatively translated by Levavi as “exemption”. Nonetheless, in view of the passages in SAA 17 52 (obv. 16.-18.), 53 (obv. 14.-15. and 17.-19.), and 54 (obv. 7’.-9’) the meaning of being cleared of guilt, that is pardoned or forgiven, would be in my opinion a much better fit. This apology *sensu stricto* is followed by a flattering move, likely meant to serve as a means of persuasion<sup>288</sup>. In the final move the sender makes a request that reveals partially what he wished to accomplish with his apology – a letter from his ‘lord’ as a confirmation that forgiveness is granted and the relationship between both parties is not irreparably damaged by the offensive conduct of the sender.

<sup>287</sup> See also the note to line 5 in Levavi 2018, 248.

<sup>288</sup> But note also the compliment serving as apology in SAA 10 43.

Although it seems puzzling that a relatively minor misstep of not visiting on time would require such an extensive apology, perhaps the nature of the relationship between the sender and the recipient could explain it. Nothing similar can be observed among the royal letters, although excuses in parallel situations of not appearing for an audience do occur. Perhaps a more elaborate apology is typical of a less than purely official relationship? This could strengthen the argument for the usage of the term of address ‘brother’ in line 5. could then be more than a simple mistake.

The following apologies are far less elaborate. In No. 120 (Levavi 2018, 371–372) the sender informs his ‘father’ that the lack of messages from him is caused by hard work (obv. <sup>6</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> ma-la a-ga-a U<sub>4</sub>-mu* <sup>7</sup>*ši-pir-ti-a la ta-mu-ru* <sup>8</sup>*dul-lu ina muḥ-ḥi-ia<sub>2</sub>* <sup>8</sup>*da-a<sup>1</sup>-nu* – ‘That until this day you did not see a message from me is because my work is (so) hard.’). The sender then moves on to address the conflict about one mina of silver between the recipient and the royal agent. No. 164 (Levavi 2018, 429–430) is sent by the royal agent to the temple administrator, his ‘brother’. The excuse pertains to a lack of report:

obv. <sup>4</sup>*a-na UGU dul-la ul ak-šu-ud* <sup>5</sup>*ku-um ki-i ṭe<sub>3</sub>-em<sub>4</sub>* *ša<sub>2</sub> dul-la a-na* <sup>6</sup>*ŠEŠ-ia la aš<sub>2</sub>-pu-ra*

admission: obv. <sup>4</sup>I did not finish<sup>289</sup> the work.

excuse: obv. <sup>5-6</sup>This is why I did not send the report of the work to my brother.

Finally, the sender of No. 203 (Levavi 2018, 477–478) makes a simple excuse for not sending a letter to his ‘lord’. He was occupied with a royal visit (obv. <sup>4</sup>(...) *ul-tu UGU* <sup>5</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> GIŠ.MA<sub>2</sub> EN iš-pu-ra* <sup>6</sup>*LUGAL ki il-li-ku* <sup>7</sup>*kap-da ši-pir-ti ana EN-ia* <sup>6</sup>*ul aš<sub>2</sub>-pu-ra* (...) – ‘After the lord sent the boat I could not quickly send a message to my lord, because the king came.’).

This corpus also includes excuses that are likely to be associated with rejections of previous commands. No. 195 (Levavi 2018, 468–469) is a letter to the royal agent, whom the sender refers to as his ‘lord’. Depending on what the sender reacts to in the following passage, it could be either a straightforward excuse or a rejection of a command by means of an excuse:

obv. <sup>16</sup>(...) *a-na UGU* <sup>17</sup>*a-la-ku* *ša<sub>2</sub> TIN.TIR.KI* <sup>18</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> EN iš-pur-ru* <sup>be19</sup>*ma<sup>1</sup>-la dib-bi* <sup>be20</sup>*it-ti-ia<sub>2</sub>*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*ul ma-ṣu* <sup>2</sup>*a-mur m.ki-na-a* <sup>3</sup>*EN li-ša<sub>2</sub>-al*

introduction: obv. <sup>16-18</sup>.As to the journey to Babylon about which my lord wrote –

excuse or rejection: obv. <sup>be19</sup>-rev. <sup>1</sup>It is impossible for me.

request for verification: rev. <sup>2-3</sup>Look, may my lord ask Kīnāya!

<sup>289</sup> Levavi 2018, 430 translated this clause as ‘I did not get there’. However, the verb *kašādu* also has the meaning ‘to finish completely’ (CAD K, 280, *kašādu* 2i). This and several other Middle and Neo-Babylonian letters are cited under this rubric also with the noun *dullu*.

Since the change of topic is truncated and does not include the quoted passage from the preceding letter, it is impossible to tell if this should be an excuse or a rejection.

Finally, No. 193 (Levavi 2018, 465–466) must be an apology<sup>290</sup> even though the sender absolutely refuses to admit responsibility. He instead underscores his diligence and offers a compensation of the addressee's choice (the addressee is the royal agent, his 'lord'):

obv. <sup>6</sup>(...) *a-na* UGU <sup>7</sup>AN.BAR *ša<sub>2</sub>* EN *iš-pu-ra* <sup>8</sup>d.EN *u* d.AG *ki-i a-ki-i ša<sub>2</sub>* <sup>9</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.A-KIN *ša<sub>2</sub>* EN-  
<sup>10</sup>*ia* <sup>10</sup>*ši-pir-ti iš-ša<sub>2</sub>-am-ma* <sup>11</sup>*id-din-nu a-ka-lu* <sup>12</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> me-e al-ḫe-me* <sup>13</sup>[x] GU<sub>2</sub>.UN AN.BAR *a-na*  
KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR <sup>14</sup>*la aš<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub>-am-ma* <sup>15</sup>*a-na* EN-*ia* <sup>16</sup>*la u<sub>2</sub>-še-bi-la*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*ḫi<sup>1</sup>-ṭu a-na* EN-*ia<sub>2</sub>* <sup>2</sup>*ul aḫ-ṭu a-na* <sup>3</sup>UGU *mi-nu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>4</sup>*ki-i ḫa-an-na-qa-ta* <sup>5</sup>*u pa-ni ša<sub>2</sub>* EN-*ia* <sup>6</sup>*a-na*  
<sup>7</sup>*ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi-ia* <sup>7</sup>*bi-i-šu-'u* <sup>8</sup>*ḫi-šiḫ-ti ša<sub>2</sub>* EN-*ia<sub>2</sub>* <sup>9</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> i-ba-šu-u* <sup>10</sup>EN *liš-pu-ra* <sup>11</sup>*ṭe<sub>3</sub>-em u šu-lum*  
<sup>12</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub>* EN-*ia<sub>2</sub>* *lu-uš-me*

protestation of diligence (with an introduction of the topic and an oath):

obv. <sup>6-16</sup>As to the iron about which my lord wrote – by Bēl and Nabû, as soon as the messenger of my lord brought and gave me the letter, I (swear I) did not take bread nor water, (but immediately) bought [x] talents of iron for silver and brought them to my lord!

protestation of innocence (explicit denial of culpability):

rev. <sup>1-2</sup>I did not do wrong by my lord.

reproach: rev. <sup>2-7</sup>Why is (then) my lord annoyed and why is he grimacing at me?

promise of redress (indirect, as a request):

rev. <sup>8-10</sup>If there is anything that my lord needs, let him write to me.

request for messages (with a conciliatory undertone):

rev. <sup>11-12</sup>Let me hear the instructions and (a message of the) wellbeing of my lord!

This is the most important letter in the corpus, offering data that is absolutely crucial to the understanding of the apologies in the first millennium (and perhaps in Akkadian on the whole). This letter cannot be anything but an apology and yet the sender explicitly denies his responsibility for the offence – either a missing delivery of iron or the delivery taking too long<sup>291</sup>. He is nonetheless offering an apology – gently reproaching the addressee for being angry with him and offering compensation. Acknowledging responsibility for the offence and offering an apology seem to be here two completely separate actions. This has far-reaching implications for the assessing the scope of situations in which an apology was

<sup>290</sup> Thus also Levavi 2018, 465.

<sup>291</sup> Both suggestions already made by Levavi 2018, 465 Since the sender emphasises the immediacy of his actions, I think that the delay of delivery might be more probable.

necessary: it would seem that the person uttering the apology need not be personally responsible for the offence and need not acknowledge any responsibility. It is enough that offensive conduct took place – even if one was not directly culpable, one needs to recognise that it happened and offer redress. At the same time, asserting one’s lack of involvement in any wrongdoing is equally important, in case one could be burdened with the consequences and forced to offer redress disproportionate to one’s culpability.

While the above apologies certainly present a meagre sample, some interesting features reoccur, one would like to say, systematically – although one can hardly speak of a system in a set of five. The apology in No. 193 is significant for its protestations of innocence and the reproachful form that the request not to be angry takes – but even though it is a reproach, the anger of the addressee is given a prominent place. The excuses are made right after the greeting, regardless of what kind of topic is discussed afterwards, and of the terms of address used between the partners in the exchange (Nos. 16 and 203 are written to a ‘lord’, No. 120 to a ‘father’, and No. 164 to a ‘brother’). Additionally, all four attestations are concerned with excusing lack of communication: not visiting the addressee in No. 16, not writing a message (*šipirtu*, Nos. 120 and 203) or a report (*tēmu*, No. 164). Why is that one has to apologise for not sending a message and not, as the case may be, for not fulfilling a request? Even No. 195, if it indeed an excuse and not an indirect rejection, with the mention of the journey could likely refer to some form of direct communication.

### Late Babylonian private correspondence

Slightly more apologies/excuses can be identified among the private Neo-Babylonian letters edited in AOAT 414 (Hackl et al. 2014)<sup>292</sup>. There are some strikingly features both in the position of the apology/excuse within the letter, the typical addressee, as well as the causes of offense that the senders of the letters deem to be worth apologizing for.

Only one of these letters is addressed to a brother – No. 201 (Hackl et al. 2014, 310–311), which also is one of the very few letters in this subcorpus in which the apology focuses on the anger of the addressee just as in the Old-Babylonian apologies described by Sallaberger 1999, 108. fn. 150 and already mentioned above (and see also the discussion to Cole 1996b, No. 63):

obv. <sup>5</sup>(...) GU<sub>4</sub> u ANŠE.MEŠ <sup>6</sup>ul qer-bu-ma a-na pa-ni <sup>7</sup>ŠEŠ-ia ul al-lik-ka

<sup>8</sup>pa-ni ša<sub>2</sub> ŠEŠ-ia la i-bi-i’-šu

<sup>292</sup> The letters with excuses/apologies are Nos. 22, 27, 39, 40, 90, 138, 195, 201, 232, 233 and 235. Four more candidates for excuses are Nos. 71, 94 and 232 but the assessment of their contents would depend on the contents of the preceding letter. No. 71 (Hackl et al. 2014, 185–186) could simply provide new information about the sender’s inability to travel. No. 94 (Hackl et al. 2014, 206–208) is likely an answer to a previous accusation, underscoring the sender’s innocence, similarly to No. 232 obv. 8.-14. (Hackl et al. 2014, 341–342) for which this is perhaps even more likely, as other people’s (likely malicious) gossip seems to be mentioned in the lines 13.-14. of the obverse.



<sup>9</sup>*a-mur* KASKAL *ša<sub>2</sub>-ni-ti a-na* <sup>10</sup>*pa-ni ŠEŠ-ka!*(for: *ia*) *al-la-ka*

excuse: obv. <sup>5-7</sup>(...) There were no bulls nor donkeys, so I didn't go to my brother.

request of forbearance: obv. <sup>8</sup>May my brother not be angry!

promise of redress: obv. <sup>9-10</sup>Look, I will come to you next time.

The entire apology is executed in three moves: the first part identifies the offensive action – illustrating also that a complete separation from it is not possible. The second move is a request not to be angry because of the objectionable conduct, and finally in the third move the writer of the letter promises to make up for his mistake and visit his 'brother' at a later date. Even with the request not to be angry, this apology does include an excuse (there were no bulls nor donkeys). This apology occurs directly after the greeting and in the following section the sender deals with a completely different topic.

No. 126 (Hackl et al. 2014, 240–242) likely also includes an apology with the mention of the anger of the addressee. The phrasing seems to imply that the addressee might become annoyed at the lack of news, all the more likely since the apology follows the reassuring passages about the well-being of the entire family:

obv./rev.(?)<sup>293</sup> <sup>11</sup>*la ta-ḫa-ra-aš* <sup>12</sup>*u<sub>3</sub>!* *pa-ni-ka* <sup>13</sup>*la i-bi-iš-šu!* - *'u*

reassurance: <sup>11</sup>You do not have to ask for details (anymore).

apology: <sup>12-13</sup>And do not be angry.

A request for the addressees not to be angry is also attested in No. 135 (Hackl et al. 2014, 250–252), in the context of a complaint. The phrasing is identical with No. 126 (rev. <sup>4</sup>(...) *pa-ni-ku-nu* <sup>5</sup>*ina* UGU *la i-ba-a'-iš* – 'Do not be angry on account of this!'), but despite the presence of *ina* UGU and the preceding clause mentioning a crime or misconduct, it is not entirely clear what the sender wants the addressees not to be angry about, unless he means his own complaint.

Apology/excuse follows the greeting directly also in Nos. 39 (Hackl et al. 2014, 151–152) 90 (Hackl et al. 2014, 203) and 195 (Hackl et al. 2014, 302–304). The apology/excuse in No. 22 (Hackl et al. 2014, 131–134) is admittedly placed not directly after a greeting, but preceded by a reassurance that the sender is well (lines 5-7 of the obverse). However, this reassurance can be considered a move preparing the reader for the apology. In four more letters the apology/excuse is the last move before the end of the tablet: Nos. 27 (Hackl et al. 2014, 140), 138 (Hackl et al. 2014, 254–255), 232 (Hackl et al. 2014, 341–342) and 233 (Hackl et al. 2014, 342–343). The position at the beginning of the body of the letter or as

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<sup>293</sup> Neither the present edition nor the earlier copy indicate where the reverse begins. I am forced to count the lines from the beginning of the obverse.

the last words the addressee will read (or hear) points to the importance of the act of apology for the writers of the letters: both these positions can be considered especially prominent.

As already mentioned, only No. 201 is addressed to a brother. The rest of the letters with apologies/excuses are sent to persons with higher social rank than the sender – to a ‘lord’ (Nos. 27, 39, 40, 90, 138, 195, 233, 235), to a ‘lady’<sup>294</sup> (No. 22) or to a ‘mother’ (No. 232). Despite the small total of apologies/excuses that could be extracted from this subcorpus, this predominance of social superiors among the addressees of apologies is suggestive of the existence of different social norms for one’s equals and inferiors.

The simplest apology/excuse is a simple statement of the reason for one’s unacceptable conduct, as in No. 138 (Hackl et al. 2014, 254–255):

obv. <sup>9</sup>ina lib<sub>3</sub>-bi ša<sub>2</sub> mar-ši <sup>10</sup>ki-i a-na IGI EN-ia<sub>2</sub> <sup>be11</sup>la aš<sub>2</sub>-pur-ru-šu<sub>2</sub>

excuse: <sup>9</sup>.-<sup>be11</sup>. It is because of sickness that I didn’t send him (the messenger) to my lord.

This simple statement of reason can be emphasised with an assertory oath as in No. 232 (Hackl et al. 2014, 342–343):

rev. <sup>15</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> a-na IGI EN-ia <sup>16</sup>la al-li-<sup>17</sup>ku<sup>1</sup> <sup>be16</sup>d.PA lu-u<sub>2</sub> i-du ki-i lu ma-da <sup>e1</sup>la mar-ša-ku ma-la a-la-ku ma-ša-ku-ma

excuse: <sup>15</sup>.-<sup>e1</sup>. That I didn’t come to my lord – Nabû knows that I was very ill and in no condition to travel.

In two cases the apology/excuse is more expanded. No. 90 is a letter of apology with no other communicative goal than to provide two excuses for not contacting the ‘lord’ earlier (Hackl et al. 2014, 203)<sup>295</sup>. It is, however, interesting that following the excuse the sender explicitly refuses to be blamed:

obv. <sup>5</sup>ma-la a-ga-<sup>1</sup>a U<sub>4</sub><sup>1</sup>-[mu] <sup>6</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> ši-pir-ta-a <sup>1</sup>EN<sup>1</sup> <sup>7</sup>la i-mu-<sup>1</sup>ru<sup>1</sup> <sup>8</sup>il-la mam-ma ša<sub>2</sub> E<sub>2</sub> <sup>9</sup>la i-du-u<sup>10</sup> ki-i ši-pir-ta-a <sup>11</sup>EN la i-mu-ru <sup>be12</sup>12.<sup>1</sup>d.EN<sup>1</sup> u d.AG lu-<sup>1</sup>u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>

rev. <sup>1</sup>i-du-<sup>1</sup>u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup>ki-i <sup>3</sup>hi-tu <sup>1</sup>i<sup>1</sup>-[na] <sup>3</sup>ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi-ka <sup>4</sup>at-ti-li-i<sup>1</sup>-ka <sup>5</sup>KASKAL.2 ši-i ša<sub>2</sub> <sup>6</sup>DUMU TIN.TIR.KI ša<sub>2</sub> <sup>7</sup>ina pa-ni-ia <sup>8</sup>ul u<sub>2</sub>-maš-š[ar-u<sup>1</sup> <sup>9</sup>a-na IGI-k[a] <sup>10</sup>ul <sup>1</sup>x<sup>1</sup> [x x (x)]

excuse (with explicit rejection of blame):

obv. <sup>5</sup>.-rev. <sup>4</sup>For all these da[ys] in which you did not see my message and I did not know that you did not see my message because nobody was at home, Bēl and Nabû know that I will not carry a fault because of this for you!<sup>296</sup>

<sup>294</sup> The ‘lady’ is in fact the biological mother of the sender (Hackl et al. 2014, 131).

<sup>295</sup> Approximately three last lines of the reverse are completely broken but it is unlikely that a new topic would fit there.

<sup>296</sup> For the interpretation of the form *at-ti-li-i<sup>1</sup>-ka*, see Hackl et al. 2014, 203, n. 16.

excuse: rev. <sup>5-10</sup>This caravan of the Babylonians that is with me – they do not rele[ase] them (and this is why) I couldn't...<sup>297</sup>

The editors also classify this set of moves as an apology. However, if an apology is also possible without any recognition of responsibility or even culpability, should not all protestations be grouped together with the apologies? Perhaps they should be, especially in view of letters such as No. 193 in from the institutional corpus (see above). It might well be that the key issue for the users of Akkadian was indeed the reaction of the addressee. In the administrative letters information was a necessity, hence the prevalence of excuses with occasional pseudo-reminders, which permitted the addressee to save face. But in the end, what decided if something was offensive and thus apology-worthy, was the reaction of the other party. The sender or speaker could be well within their rights to think there is no offence unless the addressee says so – unless they are angry.

No. 195 (Hackl et al. 2014, 302–304) contains some repetitions but possibly ends on a curious note:

obv. <sup>4</sup>*qe<sub>2</sub>-me ša<sub>2</sub> taq-ba-a' qe<sub>2</sub>-me ki-i aš<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub>-a' <sup>5</sup>ša<sub>2</sub>-ki-in u a-na-ku mar-ša-ak <sup>6</sup>ma-la šu-bu-lu ul an-ši <sup>7</sup>ul-tu U<sub>4</sub>.EŠ<sub>3</sub>.EŠ<sub>3</sub> mar-ša-ak <sup>8</sup>ina lib<sub>3</sub>-bi ki-i qe<sub>2</sub>-me a-na EN-ia <sup>9</sup>la u<sub>2</sub>-še-bi-lu u<sub>3</sub> te<sub>3</sub>-e-me-a <sup>10</sup>la taš-mu-u<sub>2</sub> ina GIŠ.MI ša<sub>2</sub> DINGIR.MEŠ <sup>11</sup>um-ma un-daš-šir<sub>3</sub>-an-ni <sup>12</sup>a-mur u<sub>4</sub>-mu-su d.EN.LIL<sub>2</sub> u d.MAŠ <sup>13</sup>a-na EN-ia u<sub>2</sub>-šal-lu*

introduction (with an excuse and an admission):

obv. <sup>4-5</sup>The flour of which you spoke: when I brought the flour, it was stored, and I was ill. I could not deliver it.

excuse: obv. <sup>7-10</sup>I had been sick since the festival. This is why I didn't deliver the flour to my lord and why you didn't hear my report.

indirect promise of redress (?):

obv. <sup>10-11</sup>Thank to the gods, the fever has left me now.

blessing: obv. <sup>12-13</sup>Look, daily I pray for my lord to Enlil and Ninurta.

This apology/excuse consists of five moves. First the sender introduces his topic with reference to a conversation with the addressee and explains the nature of his offence. Then he gives the reason for his negligence: he was ill and thus not fit to take care of the delivery that was required of him. In his third move, the sender partially repeats his core excuse, this time furnishing it with an additional temporal dimension: the illness started during or after the festival. It is explicitly stated that the sickness is the reason for unacceptable conduct, whose both elements – not delivering the flour and not sending the requisite report are dutifully listed. Following this, the sender executes his next move by stating that his

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<sup>297</sup> The editors restore 'send you a messenger', which is not unlikely.

bout of fever is over, thus implying that he can take care of his duties again (for which the letter itself is tangible evidence). The last move could technically be separate from the preceding part of the apology/excuse, but it also does not belong to the following section of the letter, which begins with an explicit change of topic. I would argue that the blessing, in the form otherwise attested as a greeting in letters to social superiors, should be considering the final part of the apology, similar to the promise in No. 201 discussed above. The daily prayer is an additional compensation for the offensive conduct.

In two cases, ignorance is given as an excuse. No. 232 is a letter to a ‘mother’ (Hackl et al. 2014, 341–342). In the last passage, the sender excuses himself for not contacting the addressee earlier:

rev. <sup>6</sup>*a-na* DINGIR.MEŠ <sup>7</sup>*a-na* UGU-*hi* <sup>7</sup>AMA-*ia* <sup>8</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-šal-li* <sup>8</sup>*ul i-de ki-i* <sup>9</sup>ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>9</sup>*a-ga-a ta-ku-uš-ša<sub>2</sub>-a* <sup>10</sup>*ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bi ki-i* LU<sub>2</sub>.A-KIN-*ia* <sup>11</sup>*la ta-am-ma-ra*

blessing: rev. <sup>6-7</sup>I am praying to the gods for the sake of my mother.

excuse: rev. <sup>8-11</sup>I did not know that you will linger like that (there). This is why you did not see my messenger (until now).

The blessing could belong to the previous sequence, in which the sender tries to reassure his ‘mother’ and urges her not to pay heed to idle chitchat, although the exact nature of the matter of the female servant is unclear.

In a similar manner, the person about whose actions the sender of No. 235 (Hackl et al. 2014, 344–345) complains, justifies his conduct with ignorance when directly confronted:

rev. <sup>8</sup>(...) *pi-i-l[u]* <sup>9</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub> ina* E<sub>2</sub> *na-du-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>10</sup>*a-na* KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR *it-ta-din* <sup>11</sup>*ki-i aq-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-ši* <sup>12</sup>*um-ma at-ta man-nu* <sup>13</sup>NIG<sub>2</sub>.KA<sub>9</sub> *mam-ma it-ti-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>14</sup>*ul i-pu-uš i-qab-bi* <sup>15</sup>*um-ma ul i-<sup>1</sup>dī*

complaint (introduction): rev. <sup>8-10</sup>He sold for silver the limestone that was kept in the house.

complaint (confrontation, with a challenge):

rev. <sup>11-14</sup>When I told him thus: ‘Who (do) you (think you) are? Nobody did the accounts with him!’ –

reaction (excuse): rev. <sup>14-15</sup>he said: ‘I did not know.’.

This excuse is nonetheless not satisfactory to the sender, as he informs ‘his lord’ regardless.

No. 40 is something on the verge of being justification, in which the sender gives the impression that the expectation that he should be doing something else than what he did is almost absurd<sup>298</sup>.

The patterns that emerge from the private correspondence of the Late Babylonian period are thus not very different from the previous subcorpora. Only in one letter does the sender appeal to the addressee

<sup>298</sup> The letter is discussed in more detail in the following section.

with the request not to be angry (No. 201). The matters for which the senders feel the need to excuse themselves is very often the lack of communication – be it messengers or letters. Although the common excuse among the institutional correspondence was hard work, this is completely missing here – no superiors needed to be convinced that their subordinates are following the ethos of the temple official and giving their very best. Instead, illness seems to be the most common motive (Nos. 39, 138, 195, 233), but travel (No. 22) or lack of messengers (No. 27) also are featured, not to mention the two excuses from ignorance (Nos. 232 and 235).

## Literary Texts

The only passage from a literary text that I believe could be considered an excuse is located near the end of the Tablet III of *enūma eliš*. Having recited the message from Anšar about Tiāmat's evil plan, Kaka recounts also the demand made by Marduk as a condition of his intervention against Tiāmat (Tablet III, lines 116.-122.) and urges them to comply with his request. The reaction of the other gods is as follows (Lambert 2013, 82–83):

125. *iš-mu-ma d.laḥ-ḥa d.la-ḥa-mu is-su-u<sub>2</sub> e-li-tum*

126. *d.i<sub>2</sub>-gi<sub>3</sub>-gi<sub>3</sub> nap-ḥar-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu i-nu-qu mar-ši-iš*

127. *mi-na-a nak-ra a-di ir-šu-u<sub>2</sub> ši-bi-it t[e<sub>3</sub>-mi-n]i*

128. *la ni-i-di ni-i-ni ša ti-GEME<sub>2</sub> e-p[iš-taš]*

reported emotional reaction (despair):

<sup>125.-126.</sup>When Laḥḥa and Laḥamu heard, they cried aloud. All the Igigi gods moaned unhappily.

declaration of ignorance:

<sup>127.</sup>What changed that (made her) make (this) de[cision about us]?

excuse (?): <sup>128.</sup>We did not know what were Tiāmat's de[eds]!

The great gods with Laḥḥu and Laḥamu are claiming ignorance of Tiāmat's evil plot. This could be understood in two ways. Either the gods are mentioning their ignorance in order to express their joy about uncovering her scheme before it could be carried out, or they indirectly excuse themselves for not taking any actions themselves. The logic of the narration would point towards the latter possibility. The fact that the excuse is based on ignorance is, as I hope to show in the following chapter about reactions to reproaches, doubly significant.

## Conclusions

Although the number of apologies and excuses is rather scant, some patterns in their distribution suggest themselves. No obvious differences that could be explained by the dialects are evident – if the apology

to the king is executed with a compliment, as in SAA 10 43, it is more likely because of the power differential between the senders and the addressee. The apologies that focus on the undesirable reaction of the addressee, on their anger, can be addressed to ‘brothers’ as well as to ‘lords’.

The pre-emptive excuses often serve to give reasons for writing letters. Some idiocrasies of style are evident, as in the case of Akkullānu the scholar, who apparently enjoyed framing his correspondence as reminders.

The most important realisation is that the apologies in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium Akkadian corpus do not require the admission of responsibility on the part of the person uttering the apology. What needs to be recognised is that a wrongdoing or an offence took place, but the party apologising need not be directly involved. Especially in the case of institutional activities, the consequences of an offence could be very real and involve punishment. There is sometimes something like a parallel track for separating the interpersonal offence from the actual administrative issue, such as in No. 193 from the corpus of Neo-Babylonian temple letters. On the other hand, in the Neo-Assyrian correspondence this separation is quite impossible to distinguish.

This points toward an important characteristic of the Akkadian apology in the first millennium: its main aim seems to lie in the averting of the consequences that await the speaker/writer, but likely only as much as they involve the person somehow wronged by the improper conduct. I do not say ‘avoid consequences’, as the senders do confront the (potential) sources thereof, the person they have offended. If the person is an equal, they can be directly appealed to not to be angry. If their position in the social hierarchy is superior, this is often apparently not possible and less direct methods of confrontation, such as compliments or flattery, have to be strategically exploited. If external factors are involved, the senders/speakers seem to feel that the delivery of relevant information will be sufficient to prevent a disruption of an otherwise harmonious relationship. In this sense, the Akkadian apologies are somewhat similar to the premodern Chinese apologies investigated by Kádár (2007), although there does not seem to be a systematic deployment of honorifics/humilifics as a politeness strategy aimed at averting anger. The frequent strategy from the Chinese apologies – that of invoking the expected anger in an exaggerated manner in order to diffuse it is only attested in Akkadian marginally and always in conditional clauses (the challenges of the type ‘I am guilty, may the ‘lord’ punish me/may I die’). The senders and writers of Akkadian apologies seem far more often to promise redress.

In fact, the insistence of the sender of No. 193 (Levavi 2018, 465–466) from the institutional Babylonian correspondence brings to mind other instances of the senders insisting on their innocence, sometimes in a context reminiscent of an apology, even if badly broken, such as SAA 18 94, discussed in the footnote above:

rev.    <sup>2</sup>’*a-na* LUGAL EN-*ia aḥ-ṭu-u<sub>2</sub> ḥi-ṭu-u<sub>2</sub>-a* <sup>3</sup>’*ul i-du 7 MU.AN.NA a-ga ṣib-ti lem-nu* <sup>4</sup>’*ṣab-tak-*  
       *ku ṣa<sub>2</sub> la* LUGAL E<sub>2</sub>-*a na-a-ṣu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>5</sup>’NIG<sub>2</sub>.KA<sub>9</sub>-*ia ḥu-uṭ-ṭu ina bu-ba-a-ti* <sup>6</sup>’*ṣa<sub>2</sub> NINDA.HI.A i-na*

*šib-ti-a a-ma-a-tu* <sup>7'</sup>*ma-du-u<sub>2</sub>-tu* *ša<sub>2</sub> a-na* LUGAL EN-*ia<sub>2</sub> iḫ-tu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>8'</sup>*u* LUGAL *re-e-mu iš-ku-na-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu-tim-ma* <sup>9'</sup>*ZI.MEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu i-re-en-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu-ṛti<sup>9'</sup>-ma* <sup>10'</sup>*šu-ug-lu-u<sub>2</sub> pu-uq-qud a-na bul-tu* <sup>11'</sup>*a-na-ku ul* *ša<sub>2</sub> ḫi-tu ul e-piš lum-nu* <sup>12'</sup>*ina bu-bu-u<sub>2</sub>-tu ina šib-ti-ia<sub>2</sub> la a-ma-tu* <sup>13'</sup>*EN LUGAL.MEŠ lip-qi<sub>2</sub>-dan-nu a-na bul-tu*

protestation of innocence (with an apologetic undertone?):

rev. <sup>2'-.3'</sup> If I committed a wrong against the king, my lord, I do not know (which).

complaint:

rev. <sup>3'-.6'</sup> These seven years, I have been kept in vile captivity. Without the knowledge of the king, they have taken my house and destroyed my property. I am dying without sustenance in my imprisonment.

argument (with an analogy, with an apologetic undertone?):

rev. <sup>7'-.9'</sup> Many (were) those who have done their wrongs against the king, but the king has shown them mercy and spared their lives.

argument (from extreme case):

rev. <sup>10'</sup> (Even) a deportee is allowed to live.

protestation of innocence: rev. <sup>11'</sup> (And) I am not guilty of (any) wrong nor evil.

request: rev. <sup>12'-.13'</sup> May I not die of hunger in my captivity! Let the lord of kings assign me to life!

The overall character of a petition and the elements of a complaint are clear. Since the protestations of innocence do not disqualify a speech action as an apology, perhaps this fragment should also be understood to have at least a partially apologetic character. In fact, the sender is presenting himself as an innocent (or at least ignorant) sufferer, who does not know what his fault is before the king – who would by extension be placed in a very flattering, godlike position. If this is the case, and if this take on the protestations of innocence was deliberate – and since the letter is a written document, nothing compels us to think that it should not be deliberate – perhaps the manner in which the sender makes his appeal should be considered fundamentally apologetic.

The final conclusions, however, can only be reached after the investigation of other speech actions that might trigger apologies or excuses. This I will do in the following chapters, devoted to the reactions to reproaches.

## **REACTIONS TO REPROACHES: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A POTENTIAL OFFENCE IS POINTED OUT TO THE SPEAKER/WRITER?**

Identification of apologies in the text, although a valid strategy, has obvious limits. A formal typology can be arrived at and some typical offences that require an apology can be distilled from the texts. What would, however, be missing is a broader look at how the writers of the letters behave in general when faced with an offence, and thus, which offences do not require an apology and which perhaps trigger a completely different reaction, since an apology would not be sufficient.

I intent to at least partially mitigate this methodological inadequacy by turning to the reproaches from the epistolary partners of the senders, quoted in the letters, and the wide gamut of reactions that the senders present in answer to them. In essence, this will be a sort of an attempt at tracing adjacency pairs in the correspondence, although of course the epistolary turns are much more protracted and much more thought is likely put into anticipating what the other party can communicate.

Reproaches for the purpose of the following investigation are not limited to declarative clauses expressing a stance of the speaker/sender critical of the conduct chosen by the listener/addressee. In fact, I will be for the most part omitting the declarative clauses, as their context seems to be overwhelmingly different, and focus only on the reproachful questions that ask about mistakes the speaker/sender believes that the listener/addressee has made. This type of question can be certainly seen as a way of ensuring accountability (see Baker and Groß 2015, 81–82) in an administrative setting – and they surely played this role as well. However, reproaches in the sense proposed here are not limited to the administrative contexts but seem to be a universal feature of Akkadian correspondence in the first millennium BCE.

To further demarcate ‘reproaches’ from other questions that are to be found in this corpus, I will further state that these questions:

1. invariably presume the guilt of the person being addressed. The question is seemingly not asked in order to ascertain if the offence has been committed and establish the degree of culpability of the person addressed, but always presumes the worst-case scenario.
2. most typically ask about the reasons for committing the assumed offence, although sometimes providing further details about the presumed offence can be demanded,
3. for these reasons, even a question that might have been a simple request for information, becomes at least potentially a question about offence and culpability. While on the surface a question about the whereabouts of people who are to be transported by the person asked can



indeed only refer to their whereabouts, in view of the other questions of this type it has at least the potential of being perceived by the person asked as presuming an offence. ‘Where are the people?’ would then at least have the potential for presuming ‘Because they should be here, and they are not’.

Questions about information the sender/speaker is missing or questions with different functions are extremely easy to distinguish from reproaches, as they never assume the offensive conduct of the listener/addressee in the matter at hand. On the other hand, despite the culpability being – at least at face value – presumed in case of reproaches, it is equally evident that this presents little obstacle for the interlocutors/addressees in denying any responsibility or indeed denying that an offence has been committed in the first place.

The issue of reproaches and the forms they assume was previously discussed by Mayer 2013. He does not explicitly try to define reproaches but conceives of them as reactions to wrongdoings<sup>299</sup>. He offers, however, the following typological summary:

1. Formal structural elements of the reproach and accusation – introductory questions
2. Individual criticisms, reprimands, reproaches and complaints as declarations or questions
3. More serious reproaches, accusations, expressions of contempt, verbal abuse (this is a more diverse category than might at first appear and includes far more than only insults<sup>300</sup>)
4. Emotional, fanciful or ‘poetic’ expressions (interjections, animal metaphors and comparisons)
5. Admonitions, warnings and threats.

The introductory elements of reproaches or accusations are questions – which Mayer classifies according to their form into a) why-questions, b) what + dependent clause questions, c) *mannu-atta*-questions (roughly the equivalent of ‘Who do you think you are?’), d) is-it-good-like-this questions (either with *damqu* or its synonyms), e) ‘is it gentlemanlike’-questions and f) questions about things being appropriate, g) how-can-you questions, h) how-long questions<sup>301</sup>, i) don’t-you-know questions, j) how-did-I-deserve-this questions, k) questions with an apostrophe to a god, l) declarative clauses with ‘never’.

<sup>299</sup> „Es kamen Mißverständnisse vor, Irrtümer, Fehlverhalten, Falschheit, Lüge, Betrug, grobe Manieren, Gemeinheit, Brutalität usw. Als Reaktion darauf kam es zu Ärger, Kritik und Tadel, Vorwurf, Protest, Klage und Anklage, Spott, Verachtung, Beschimpfung, Beleidigung und Drohung.“ (‘Misunderstandings happened, as well as mistakes, improper conduct, falsehoods, lies, deceit, bad manners, baseness, brutality, and so on. As reactions to those came anger, criticism and reprimand, reproach, protest, complaint and accusation, derision, contempt, abuse, insults, and threats.’). Mayer also underlines the emotional character of reproaches (Mayer 2013, 207).

<sup>300</sup> Under no. 5 ‘hubris, boasts, too much licence’ (Hochmut, Angeberei, Willkür) features for instance the Neo-Assyrian reproach PN<sub>1</sub> PN<sub>2</sub> *atâ ip̄izū atta qalāka* – ‘Why did PN<sub>1</sub> (and) PN<sub>2</sub> behave arrogantly (and yet) you kept your silence?’ (KAV 197, Mayer 2013, 254). Here the category is based on what is criticised, while all the neighbouring categories derive from the type of insult used.

<sup>301</sup> Cicero immediately comes to mind.

Although Mayer lists examples for all periods of the Akkadian language, his attestations include more numerous examples from the earlier periods, which also influences the typology. Some forms present in the later layers of the language are absent – the ‘is-it-good-like-this’ questions under d) could also be supplemented with ‘do-you-like-it’ questions expressed with *pān PN mahir* that clearly have a similar function. The forms subsumed under e) are based on the distinction in the status of the free man, *awīlum*, as opposed to not entirely free social classes – this distinction seems not to be productive in the first millennium BCE<sup>302</sup>. Finally, the appropriateness of things in f) is expressed with the word *naṭû*, which is no longer used outside of literature after the Old-Babylonian period. Nonetheless, the list is certainly a valuable point of departure.

Mayer makes the important observation that especially the why-questions can be asked with the expectations that the addressee answers but sometimes they can also be purely rhetorical (Mayer 2013, 210). Some questions, like the why-questions, seem to be more likely to require an answer or be more likely to be understood as non-rhetorical.

A clear example of a rhetorical question is the pattern c) – ‘Who do you think you are?’, which can be followed by a dependent clause. Despite the literal meaning of the question *mannu atta* – ‘Who are you’, it is evident that the senders (or speakers, in case the clause occurs in a recounted conversation) absolutely do know the identity of the other party. Hence the interpretation ‘Who do you think you are’ must be correct. The *mannu atta* clause on its own, should be, I believe, interpreted as more of a challenge than a rebuke – after all, the person uttering this clause is calling into doubt the very identity of the other party.

I will look at the various forms that reproaches, complaints, and accusations can take in the chapter devoted to complaints. For this chapter, only reproaches in the form of why-questions and some accusations will be considered.

## Neo-Assyrian royal correspondence

There are 10 reproaches in the Neo-Assyrian correspondence of Tiglath-pileser edited in SAA 19. However, three of them do not include the reaction of the partner in the exchange<sup>303</sup>. Of the remaining 7, two include reproaches uttered in the course of a conversation, and one is not a question.

The first example, which simply reiterates offensive inaction of the sender – is not expressed with a question, which makes the move a rebuke. SAA 19 14 (Luukko 2012b, 17) shows that the reaction to this type of rebuke does not deviate from the possible reactions to the reproaches expressed with questions:

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<sup>302</sup> That is, outside of literature.

<sup>303</sup> In SAA 19 87 the reproach is quoted from a letter written by a third party, in SAA 19 144 the reproach is uttered by the sender and directed at the addressee, in SAA 19 147 the reproach also is also uttered by the sender.

obv. <sup>12</sup>.<sup>r</sup>TUG<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>.<sup>ṣi</sup>-<sup>r</sup>bir<sup>1</sup>-[a-ti] <sup>be13</sup>[ša] be-<sup>r</sup>li<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> <sup>be14</sup>.<sup>r</sup>iq<sup>1</sup>-[bu]-u-<sup>r</sup>ni<sup>1</sup> [ma-a] <sup>be15</sup>.<sup>r</sup>la<sup>2</sup>-a<sup>1</sup> ta-<sup>r</sup>din<sup>1</sup>-[ni]

rev. <sup>1</sup>[TUG<sub>2</sub>].<sup>r</sup>ṣi-bir-tu<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup>.ša <sup>r</sup>pit<sup>1</sup>-te ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi <sup>3</sup>.<sup>r</sup>ša<sup>1</sup> EN-ia la-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>4</sup>.<sup>r</sup>TUG<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>.<sup>ṣi</sup>-bir-a-ti <sup>5</sup>.<sup>r</sup>sad<sup>1</sup>-ra-te ina  
ŠA<sub>3</sub> <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> 'MA<sup>1</sup>.NA-a-a <sup>6</sup>KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR i-du-nu

introduction: obv. <sup>12</sup>.-<sup>be14</sup>.The be[lts as to which] my lord said:

reproach: obv. <sup>be15</sup>.‘You did not gi[ve] (them).’

excuse: rev. <sup>1</sup>.-<sup>5</sup>.There are no [be]lts like what my lord (wanted). The ordinary belts sell for half  
a mina of silver each.

SAA 19 70 (Luukko 2012b, 71–72) is a letter to the palace herald about the events at the Urartian border. After a broken passage the sender recounts his conversation with a third party whose name is not preserved. In the first place he reproaches his interlocutor for attacking the Ukkéan:

rev. <sup>9</sup>.nu-uk a-ta-a : URU-[šu<sub>2</sub>] <sup>10</sup>.ta-ka-ša-da (...)

reproach: rev. <sup>9</sup>.-<sup>10</sup>.‘Why do you conquer [his] city?’

This is met with a less than ideal reaction. The interlocutor feels that he was in the right:

rev. <sup>11</sup>.ma-a EN-ša-si-ia šu<sub>2</sub>-<sup>r</sup>u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>

justification: rev. <sup>11</sup>.‘He is my adversary.’

The sender then follows by ordering his interlocutor to bring back the booty he plundered, so that he can give it back to the Ukkéans. The second reproach follows directly:

rev. <sup>15</sup>.nu-uk : a-[t]a-a qa-la-k[a] <sup>16</sup>.KUR.URI-a-a ina t[a]-ḥ[u]-me ša LU[GAL] <sup>17</sup>.URU.bir-tu<sub>2</sub> i-  
ša-bat <sup>re18</sup>.<sup>r</sup>nu-uk<sup>1</sup> LU<sub>2</sub>.EN URU.MEŠ <sup>re19</sup>.ša ba-te-ba-<sup>r</sup>tu-ka<sup>1</sup> <sup>re20</sup>.i-si-ka zak-<sup>r</sup>ku<sup>1</sup> il-ki <sup>re21</sup>.i-si-  
šu<sub>2</sub>-nu : na-ḥi-ši

reproach: rev. <sup>15</sup>.-<sup>17</sup>.I said: ‘Why do you stay silent when the Urartian is capturing a fort at the  
royal border?’

explanation (as argument for the following command):

rev. <sup>re18</sup>.-<sup>re20</sup>.(And) I said: ‘The city overseers around you are exempt from state service.’

command: rev. <sup>re21</sup>.Fight with them!

It is evident from this sequence that the purpose of the reproach here was indeed to express a critical stance of the speaker/sender and that what the sender intended was to deploy the reproach together with the following argument/explanation in order to persuade the other party to do his bidding. This he seems to have accomplished only partially:

e. <sup>1</sup>[*ma-a šum<sub>2</sub>-mu KUR.UR*]*I-a-a šum<sub>2</sub>-mu LU<sub>2</sub>.e-mu-qi* <sup>2</sup>[*i-sap-ra šum<sub>2</sub>-mu it-ta*]*l-ka [m]a-a : a-la-ka KI-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>3</sup>*a-ma-ḥa-ša*

promise (of compliance, conditional): e. <sup>1-3</sup>[He said: ‘If the Urar]tian either [sends] his forces [or come]s (himself), I will come and fight him.’

For all his reproaches, the sender of SAA 19 70 only managed to extract a conditional promise.

The second reproach – or reproaches – from a conversation occur in SAA 19 125 (Luukko 2012b, 126–128), a lengthy letter expounding on the situation in Babylonia. The sender, whose name is not preserved, confronts inhabitants of a certain location with a similar reproach twice:

obv. <sup>1</sup>(...) *m[u-u]k* <sup>1</sup>*a-ta-a* <sup>1</sup>L[UGAL] <sup>2</sup>[*it-tu-š*]*i at-<sup>1</sup>tu<sup>1</sup>-nu ina E<sub>2</sub> kam-mu-sa-<sup>1</sup>ku<sup>1</sup>-n[u]* <sup>3</sup>[*mu-uk*]  
LU<sub>2</sub>.e-mu-q[*i*] *ša E<sub>2</sub>.GAL ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi*

reproach: obv. <sup>1-2</sup>[I sa]id: ‘Why is that the king has [come] out (but) you ar[e] staying at home?’

reassurance<sup>304</sup>: obv. <sup>3</sup>[I said:] ‘The force[s] of the palace are (already) there.’

The attempt at rousing the people is a failure:

obv. <sup>4</sup>[*ma-a ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>]-<sup>1</sup>bi* *la ni-il-lak* (...)

rejection: obv. <sup>4</sup>[They said:] ‘We will not go [there].’

The sender complains that as long as he is not successful in his persuasion, he cannot proceed any further. He then sends a subordinate to them again with an almost identical message, but this time it is preceded by an explicit instruction that the reproach is meant to persuade the people to come out (obv. <sup>11</sup>*a-<sup>1</sup>lak?* *qi<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-ba-[aš<sub>2</sub>]-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>1</sup>*lu<sup>1</sup>-u-š<sub>u</sub>-u<sub>2</sub>-ni* – ‘Go and tell [th]em to come out’). The measure is not a complete success again, but the messenger manages to obtain a conditional promise of compliance:

obv. <sup>19</sup>(...) *ma-a i-da-bu-ub* <sup>20</sup>*ma-a šum<sub>2</sub>-ma LU<sub>2</sub>.e-mu-qi i-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-ši* <sup>21</sup>[*i*]*t-tal-ku-u-ni ne<sub>2</sub>-ta-mar*  
*ma-a TA ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi* <sup>22</sup>[(x)] *nu-ša-a ma-a u<sub>2</sub>-la-a LU<sub>2</sub>.e-mu-qi* <sup>23</sup>[*la*] *il-li-ku-u-ni ma-a la-aš<sub>2</sub>-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub>*  
*la nu-š[a]-<sup>1</sup>a*

promise: obv. <sup>19-23</sup>”They say: ‘If there are really troops (and) they [c]ome, we will see them and we will come out. (But) if the forces do [not] come, we will not come out.’”

The remaining 4 reproaches are attributed to the addressees of the letters – either quoted from a previous missive or mentioned as a possibility. SAA 19 51 and SAA 61 were already discussed in the previous section of the present work. The potential for a royal reproach necessitates the sender to make a pre-emptive excuse.

<sup>304</sup> This could also be an indirect request.

Far more interesting are the last 2 attestations. In all three cases the senders either denying that the offensive conduct occurred in the first place, or if it did, they refuse to admit responsibility.

In SAA 19 33 (Luukko 2012b, 38–40) the sender cites the king demanding to know about cattle sent from Tabal. The king reproaches the sender for not having reported this before (obv. 9.). This is an allegation that the sender denies:

obv. <sup>10</sup>2-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub> ma-ši ina UGU EN-ia <sup>11</sup>a-sa-pa-ra

counterclaim: obv. <sup>10-11</sup>I have already written about this twice to my lord.

The assertion of innocence is followed by the account of cattle and horses that the king demanded in the first place.

The existence of the offence is also denied in SAA 19 100 (Luukko 2012b, 106–107), sent by Šamaš-būnā'ī, an Assyrian official in northern Babylonia (Luukko 2012b, xvi). In his reproach, the king asks Šamaš-būnā'ī why he did not send troops (obv. 5.). In a somewhat damaged passage, the accused explains that this is not the case:

obv. <sup>6</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ '50?'<sup>1</sup> ša LU<sub>2</sub>.i-[t]u-[']e <sup>7</sup>TA 'ši?-di?'<sup>1</sup> ID<sub>2</sub>.MAŠ.GU<sub>2</sub>.QAR 'a<sup>1</sup>-na <sup>8</sup>bat-ti am-[m]i-ti ša ID<sub>2</sub> <sup>9</sup>KASKAL ša URU.UD.[KIB.NU]N.[K]I? 'x x<sup>1</sup>-[k]a-te-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-nu <sup>10</sup>is-si-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub>-nu i[t]-t[u?]-ši]-r<sub>u</sub><sup>1</sup> <sup>11</sup>a-na pa-an LUGAL<sup>1</sup> be-li<sub>2</sub>-[ia<sub>2</sub> i]t-<sup>1</sup>tal-ku<sup>1</sup>

counterclaim: obv. <sup>6-11</sup>The troops, 50<sup>2</sup> I[tu]'eans s[et] out from the course (?) of Tigris to the other side of the river by the Sippar road, together with their [...]s and [w]ent to the king, [my] lord.

Since the following passage is broken, it is unclear whether the sender made any further arguments to persuade the king of his innocence.

From the correspondence of Sargon II, there is a total of 34 reproaches. 5 of them are not quoted from a previous letter by the addressee but uttered by the sender<sup>305</sup>. As in the previous group of letters, the reactions of the people faced with the reproaches vary.

A modest number of tokens comes from letters that comprise recounted conversations and I shall focus on them in the first place. In SAA 1 29 (Parpola 2015, 28–29) the sender is Sennacherib, the crown prince. He recounts the letter exchange he had with the ruler of Arzabia:

rev. <sup>12</sup>KUR.ar-za-bi-a-a i-sa-ap-ra ma-a KUR.u<sub>2</sub>-ka-a <sup>13</sup>su pa-ni-ia lu-pa-ti-u<sub>2</sub> ma-a a-ta-a <sup>14</sup>ṛi<sup>1</sup>-du-ka-an-ni at-tu-nu qa-la-ku-nu <sup>15</sup>[LU<sub>2</sub>.qu]r-bu-te-ia ina UGU KUR.u<sub>2</sub>-[ka-a]-a a-sa-par <sup>16</sup>[mu-uk T]A KUR.ar-za-bi-i-a-[a la ta-d]a-bu-ub <sup>17</sup>[a-du E<sub>2</sub> LUG]AL DU-an-ni bir-tu-k[u-nu lap]-ru-us

<sup>305</sup> These are: SAA 1 237, SAA 1 244, SAA 5 115, SAA 5 121, and SAA 15 288.

introduction (with a demand, followed by a reproach):

rev. <sup>12.-14.</sup>The Arzabian wrote to me as follows: ‘The Ukkaean (ruler), he must be kept away from me! Why do you (pl.) keep silent when he is killing me?’

follow-up (with a command and a decision):

rev. <sup>15.-17.</sup>I sent my [com]panion to the U[kka]ean, [saying: ‘Do not qu]arrel [wi]th the Arzabian! [I will a]rbitrate between y[ou until the k]ing arrives!’

The Arzabian’s reproach seems to have been successful: he manages to ensure the aid of the crown prince (and thus Assyria – he used a plural form for a reason, after all) against the Ukkaean.

In SAA 1 179 (Parpola 2015, 140–141) the sender reports that he removed the servants of an Arabian ruler from his jurisdiction, whereafter the ruler confronts him with a threat:

obv. <sup>13.</sup>*ma-a a-ta-a* LU<sub>2</sub>.ARAD.ME-*ia tu<sub>2</sub>-še-l[i]* <sup>14.</sup>*ma-a ina* E<sub>2</sub>.GAL *a-ša<sub>2</sub>-pa-ra*

reproach: obv. <sup>13.</sup>‘Why did you expel my servants?’

threat: obv. <sup>14.</sup>‘I will write (about this) to the palace!’

This negotiation strategy proves to be successful. While the sender still supplies a justification of his conduct, he indirectly admits that it constituted an offence by proposing a compensation in kind:

obv. <sup>15.</sup>(...) *m[u-k]u* LU<sub>2</sub>.ARAD.MEŠ-*ka a-na* LU<sub>2</sub>.ARAD.‘MEŠ<sup>1</sup>-[i]a <sup>16.</sup>*i[h]-ta-sa-’u mu-ku* TA *ma-ši* ‘LU<sub>2</sub>.ARAD<sup>1</sup> <sup>17.</sup>*ša* LUGAL *at-ta-ni mu-ku* A.ŠA<sub>3</sub>.[G]A GIŠ.SAR <sup>18.</sup>*i-na* KUR.*ia-su-bu-qi la-di-na-ka ša-bat*

justification: obv. <sup>15.-16.</sup>I t[ol]d (him): ‘Your servants mistreated my servants.’

redress: obv. <sup>16.-18.</sup>I told (him): ‘(But) since you are a servant of the king, let me give you fields and gardens in the land of Yasubuqu. Take (them)!’

The sender then makes his intention explicit: the report of the conversation is made so that the king is informed in case the Arabian ruler decides he is unhappy with his compensation after all, and instead makes good on his initial threat.

SAA 1 181 has already been discussed in the section on excuses. Confronted with the reproach from the sender (obv. 17.-19.), the interlocutor of Bēl-liqbi looks away and justifies his offensive conduct (obv. be21.-rev. 2.). Since the name of the guilty party is damaged, the following passage is not entirely clear, but the whole letter seems to be a complaint meant to force the compliance of the guilty party by means of royal intervention.

The sender of SAA 5 2 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 4–5), the governor Liphur-Bēl, reports on his dealings with the Urtians. His messenger was instructed to reproach them:

obv. <sup>12</sup>(...) *a-ta-a a-ni-nu* <sup>13</sup>*sa-al-ma-ni at-tu-nu* <sup>14</sup>*at-tu-nu* URU.HAL.ŠU.MEŠ-*ni* <sup>15</sup>*tu-ša-ba-ta*

reproach: obv. <sup>12-15</sup>. ‘Why do you capture our forts when we and you are at peace?’

The messenger does not seem to be able to accomplish much. The Urartian denies any responsibility, and seems, for his part, to taunt the Assyrians:

rev. <sup>1</sup>*ana-ku* : *mi<sub>3</sub>-nu le-pu-uš* <sup>2</sup>*ma-a* BE-*ma ina ta-ḥu-me-ku-nu* <sup>3</sup>*ina* URU.HAL.ŠU.MEŠ-*ku-nu*  
<sup>4</sup>*aḥ-ti-ṭi<sub>2</sub> ina ŠU.2-ia* <sup>5</sup>*ba-i-a*

rejection of responsibility: rev. <sup>1</sup>. ‘What am I to do?’

challenge: rev. <sup>2-5</sup>. ‘If I have slipped into your fortress across your border, call me to account!’

This account of failed negotiations is followed by a report of where the Urartian forces seem to be stationed.

Similarly, SAA 5 35 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 29–30) is the account of another governor, Ša-Aššūr-dubbu, negotiating with the Shubrian<sup>306</sup>. Again, the initial reproach fails to assure the compliance of the foreign king. Asked why he seizes the Urartian deserters instead of giving them to the Assyrians (obv. 18.-22.), the Shubrian justifies his conduct in such a way that can only be a provocation:

obv. <sup>22</sup>(...) *ma-a* TA IG[I] <sup>23</sup>DINGIR.MEŠ *pal-ḥa-ku*

rejection of responsibility (a taunt?):

obv. <sup>22-23</sup>. He said: ‘I fear the gods.’

When another issue arises, and the Shubrians return the Urartian scout to Urartu, the sender can only rage impotently and insult the Shubrian king:

obv. <sup>30</sup>(...) *nu-u* *k a-ta-a* <sup>31</sup>*a-ba-ti mu-ru* <sup>32</sup>*ša* KUR.‘URI’-[*a-a*] <sup>32</sup>TA IGI DINGIR.MEŠ *la pal-ḥa-[k]a*

insulting reproach: obv. <sup>30-32</sup>. ‘(You) *abati*, foal<sup>307</sup> of the Urt[ian]! Why are [y]ou not afraid of the gods (now)?’

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<sup>306</sup> The Shubrian king is here Hu-Tešub (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, xxi). This is not the only case in which the Shubrian king refuses to send back the deserters. In SAA 5 53, he also refuses to extradite a deserter who is a known murderer.

<sup>307</sup> The assumption that the word following *a-ba-ti* is an Assyrian translation is likely correct (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 29, note 35). What remains then is the question of why it should be an insult and which animal is meant exactly. Lanfranchi and Parpola translate the Akkadian noun *mūru* as ‘calf’ (‘foal’ in the glossary), but it can also mean ‘(donkey) foal’. Perhaps the idea behind the insult is not simply that the Shubrian is an animal but that he is as a calf or foal of the larger and more troublesome beast, the Urartian? Additionally, donkeys are featured as metaphorical enemies of the Assyrian state in the Akkadian literature of the period (see Edzard 2004 with bibliography, and Fink and Parpola 2019). No donkey foals seem to have been used for comparison with the enemy

The reaction of the Shubrian to the second round of reproaches is not recorded, but since a further complaint about Urartian emissaries follows the reproach, it should be clear that the verbal persuasion was a failure.

The last reproach from a conversation or letter exchange with third parties in SAA 5 is mostly interesting in that it is recognised as a failure by the sender himself. SAA 5 46 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 40) is attributed to an unknown vassal king who complains about an Assyrian governor. He recounts how he attempted to cope with the rampaging official on his own (the reproach is underlined):

obv. <sup>12'</sup>*a-šab-bar muk a-le-e mi-li[k-ka]* <sup>13'</sup>*ṭe<sub>3</sub>-mu-ma la i-šak-kan* LU<sub>2</sub>.*kal-[la-bu]* <sup>14'</sup>*ša ina IGI-ia*  
LUGAL *ip-q[i-du]-ni* <sup>15'</sup>*3-šu<sub>2</sub> 4-šu<sub>2</sub> TA LU<sub>2</sub>.A.KIN-ia<sub>2</sub> [a-sa-bar]* <sup>16'</sup>*ba-ši-i' ṭe<sub>3</sub>-mu-ma la [iš-*  
*kun]* <sup>17'</sup>*a-na LU<sub>2</sub>.A.KIN-ia<sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-ti-[ra]* <sup>be18'</sup>*ma a-ša-bat ina ŠA<sub>3</sub> si-<sup>r</sup>bar<sup>1</sup>-[ri]* <sup>be19'</sup>*e-si-ip-ka*

complaint: obv. <sup>12'.</sup><sup>be.19'</sup>I write to him: ‘Where is [your] sense?’ (and yet) he does not offer explanation. Three or four times [I have sent] the cavalrymen whom the king ap[ointed] to me together with my messenger (...) (but still) he did not explain himself (and only) returned my messenger, saying: ‘I will capture you and put in iron chains!’

The reproach is therefore completely ineffective. Not only does not the Assyrian official stop persecute the sender, he even resorts to threats.

Finally, in SAA 19 195 (Luukko 2012b, 195–196) the sender recounts his conversation with an unnamed eunuch (?). In the reproach, the sender enquires about the eunuchs at the disposal of his interlocutor (rev. 18.-19.). The unnamed interlocutor reports that there is no cause for offence as he is in the process of bringing them over (rev. re20.-21.)

The reactions to the remaining 21<sup>308</sup> reproaches can be categorised as follows:

1. excuse 6x (SAA 5 114, SAA 5 126, SAA 5 215, SAA 15 100, SAA 15 156, SAA 19 169)
2. rejection of responsibility 4x (SAA 1 123, SAA 5 256, SAA 15 24, SAA 19 192)
3. denial of offence 9x (SAA 1 124: obv. 8.-17., SAA 1 152, SAA 1 179: obv. 24.-rev. 13, SAA 1 233, SAA 1 235, SAA 1 236, SAA 5 227, SAA 15 30, SAA 15 223)
4. justification 2x (SAA 1 124: obv. 21.-rev. 4., SAA 5 199)

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states directly in the royal inscriptions, but the wild mountain donkeys are used as a simile of an animal that is easy to frighten (Marcus 1977, 90) For all the above reason, I am translating *mūru* as ‘(donkey) foal’.

<sup>308</sup> SAA 5 117 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 92) is too damaged, although a reproach was certainly present, The sender seems to be making an excuse at first, blaming his delay (?) on the amount of work – larger than in the case of his colleagues. Also damaged but worth mentioning is SAA 5 293 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 207) – the royal reproach pertains the unfinished state of *šupur agappi* (winged hoof?) – the sender counters this with the claim that obv. <sup>10</sup>*lu ina IGI LU<sub>2</sub>.aš-šur-a-a šu-u-tu<sub>2</sub> rev. <sup>1</sup>ni-iš-luḥ-šu-nu <sup>2</sup>ar<sub>2</sub>-ḥi[š ni-i]g-mu-ru* – ‘Had it been at the disposal of the Assyrians, we would have retrieved (?) it (and) finise[d] quic[kly].’. Unfortunately, the following passage is completely lost.



When faced with an offence, a speaker/writer has therefore four options. He can make an excuse for his offensive conduct or justify his conduct as the optimal choice given the circumstances and therefore not an offence at all. The latter choice is apparently not made lightly. The other options are to deny that an offence was committed in the first place – the facts of the matter would likely be the strongest factor here, although one can never dismiss the possibility of deceit – and the Assyrian kings must have faced a similar dilemma. In this group of letters this happens 9 times and is therefore the most common strategy – in as much as this can be a strategy when one is indeed innocent. Finally, the sender can admit that the alleged offence took place but at the same time deny that he is the person responsible.

The excuses are already analysed in the preceding section, so I will not be discussing them again. The reactions in which the sender denies his responsibility or denies that an offence was committed at all are in a sense a single category: in both cases the sender maintains his innocence in the face of direct reproaches.

Some common elements in these protestations of innocence, both in the case of a rejection of culpability and the denial that an offence was committed, include:

1. denials often formulated as questions
2. requests for verification
3. challenges
4. oaths
5. counterclaims, often with accusations

The denials of culpability are often questions. In answer to the royal accusation in SAA 1 179 (Parpola 2015, 140–141), the sender produces a question:

obv. <sup>21</sup>*ma-a* URU.*ḥu-za-za a-na* URU LU<sub>2</sub>.DAM.GAR<sub>3</sub> <sup>22</sup>*te-ta-<sup>r</sup>ap<sup>1</sup>-ša<sub>2</sub>* *ma-a* AN.BAR UN.MEŠ *a-na* <sup>23</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.*ar-ba-a-a ina kas-pi i-tan-di-nu* <sup>24</sup>[*man-n*]u *šu-nu* LU<sub>2</sub>.DAM.GAR<sub>3</sub>.ME *ša i-na* ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bi* <sup>25</sup>[*i-d*]*i-nu-ni*

reproach: obv. <sup>21-22</sup>‘You have turned Huzaza into a merchant town!’

reproach: obv. <sup>22-23</sup>‘The people have been giving iron for silver to the Arabs!’

denial: obv. <sup>24-25</sup>[Wh]o are these merchants who have been selling in there?

The implication of asking about the identity of the merchants is of course that as far as the sender is concerned, there are no such persons. The sender then follows up with his own counterclaims regarding what is really sold to whom, and an oath (rev. 3.-5.), both meant to underscore his innocence. The presence of the oath makes it very likely that the sender is indeed telling the truth (see below). This is

followed by an argument from the presence of a customs collector. The sender once again deploys rhetorical questions to emphasise his innocence:

rev. <sup>10</sup>(...) *a-na-ku* <sup>11</sup>*a-mar* LU<sub>2</sub>.*ma-ki-se-e* TA LUGAL EN-*ia* <sup>12</sup>*la ke-nak* 1 'GIN<sub>2</sub>' KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR  
<sup>13</sup>*ša il-ki-ka ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi* <sup>13</sup>*a-na-ga-ra*

protestation of innocence (with an argument from an extreme case?):

rev. <sup>10-12</sup>.Am I less loyal to the king than a toll collector<sup>309</sup>?

protestation of innocence: rev. <sup>12-13</sup>.Have I *demande*<sup>310</sup> (as much as) one shekel of silver from the state service for this?

Rejection of culpability or denial of having committed an offence is also formulated as a question in SAA 1 236 (denial of offence), SAA 15 24 (rejection of responsibility), and SAA 19 192 (rejection of responsibility). It can, however, also be a declarative clause: in SAA 1 233 (Parpola 2015, 182–183) the sender, Mannu-kī-Aššūr-lē'i (governor of Guzana, Jursa 2001), denies the offence completely. In answer to the command from the king with a reminder to fulfil a previous royal order Mannu-kī-Aššūr-lē'i counters that no order was previously given. Nonetheless, he is now immediately following the royal command:

obv. <sup>19</sup>*ma-a* A.ŠA<sub>3</sub>.GA *ša te<sub>3</sub>-e-[mu aš<sub>2</sub>]-ku-[nu-ka-ni]* <sup>20</sup>*a-na* m.EN-BAD<sub>3</sub> *di-i<sup>1</sup>-ni la-a-šu i-t[i-ma-li]* <sup>21</sup>*ina* <sup>21</sup>*ša<sup>1</sup>-al-š[i U]<sub>4</sub>-me* LUGAL EN *te-e-mu* <sup>22</sup>*la-a* [i]š-k[u-na]-ni *u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a* LUGAL EN *i-sa-[par]* <sup>23</sup>*ki-i* [š]a *ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub> *e-gir<sup>1</sup>-te* *ša* LUGAL EN-*ia* <sup>24</sup>*ša<sup>1</sup>-[ti-r]u-ni e-ta-pa-aš<sub>2</sub>* A.ŠA<sub>3</sub><sup>1</sup>  
*a-ti-din*

royal command (with a reminder):

obv. <sup>19-20</sup>.‘The field, about which [I] (already) [g]ave you an or]der – give it to Bēl-dūri!’

denial: obv. <sup>20-22</sup>.No, the king, my lord, did not give me (such an) order p[revi]ously<sup>311</sup>.

report of carrying out the command:

obv. <sup>22-24</sup>.Now, the king, my lord, wro[te (to me)] (and) I have done according to the message of the king, my lord. I gave (him) the field.

<sup>309</sup> Literally, the construction used is ‘Am I not as loyal as a customs collector’. Nothing indicates that the customs collectors were considered paragons of loyalty, so I translated the clause more idiomatically. On the other hand, this should not be taken to mean that the toll collectors were particularly reviled. In the preceding passage, the sender mentions the customs collectors that were installed at the gate of the towns of Šupat and Huzaza. The comparison should be understood as being quite concrete.

<sup>310</sup> Parpola 2015, 141 translates the verb *nagāru* as ‘appropriate’. CAD N, 108 proposes no translation for the verb, although the translation of this passage also uses the verb ‘demand’, while AHW 710, *nagāru* II as ‘ansagen’. Since the meaning of D-stem seems to be reasonably certain (‘to denounce’, see Landsberger 1955, 123) it would follow that the meaning of the G-stem has also to do with speech.

<sup>311</sup> Literally: ‘neither yesterday, nor before three days’.

This report is followed by a list of the land holdings of Bēl-Dūri, including the field given by the sender following the royal letter.

Another interesting case in which the sender denies any wrongdoing is SAA 15 30 (Fuchs and Parpola 2001, 21–22), in which the sender<sup>312</sup> first declares that he could not possibly be disobedient and then elaborates on the pain this accusation causes him:

obv. <sup>5</sup>*ma-a ina* UGU *dul<sub>6</sub>-li š[a x x x]* <sup>6</sup>*bir-ti* IGI.2.MEŠ-*ka u[n-ta-di-i]d* <sup>7</sup>*ma-a la ta-šam-ma[n-ni]*  
<sup>8</sup>*ša a-na* LUGAL EN-*ia la a-šam-[m]u-ni* <sup>9</sup>*a-na man-ni-ma aḫ-ḫur la-aš<sub>2</sub>-me* <sup>10</sup>*an-nu-rig 3-šu<sub>2</sub>*  
<sup>11</sup>*LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> a-ki an-ni-<sup>1</sup>ie<sup>1</sup>-e* <sup>12</sup>*i-ša<sub>2</sub>-pa-ra a-ke-e la-ab-laṭ* <sup>13</sup>*a-li ni-kit-ti da-me-e-a*  
<sup>14</sup>*ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi-ia e-tab-lu* <sup>15</sup>*ina qa-ni mi-iḫ-re-e-a* <sup>16</sup>*dul<sub>6</sub>-lu ep-pa-aš<sub>2</sub>* <sup>17</sup>*la a-ša<sub>2</sub>-ri-du-um-ma*  
<sup>18</sup>*ša ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu a-na-ku* <sup>19</sup>*[l]a ma-ki-iu-u<sub>2</sub> a-na-ku* <sup>20</sup>*[a]-ki ša ša-šu-nu ep-pa-šu<sub>2</sub>-u-ni* <sup>21</sup>*[a-n]*  
*n]a-ku ep-pa-aš<sub>2</sub>*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*[ki] ma-ši a-na* LUGAL EN-*ia* <sup>2</sup>*[la] <sup>1</sup>a<sup>1</sup>-šam-mu-u-ni* <sup>3</sup>*[am]-mi<sub>3</sub>-ni* LUGAL *be-li<sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-ba-<sup>1</sup>a-an-*  
*ni*

royal rebuke: obv. <sup>5-7</sup>‘I made it perfectly [clear] to you with regards to the work o[f...]. You didn’t listen!’

denial: obv. <sup>8-9</sup>‘If I were to disobey the king, whom else would I obey?’

reproach: obv. <sup>10-12</sup>‘Now the king has written to me like that several times<sup>313</sup> (already).’

protestations of innocence (arguments from the suffering caused by the accusations):

obv. <sup>12-14</sup>‘How am I to live? Where is my pulse<sup>314</sup>? The blood has dried out in my heart.’

argument (from equal treatment that is deserved when one does the same work as one’s equals):

obv. <sup>15-21</sup>‘I work together with my colleagues. I am not the first among them, (but) [nei]ther am I the worst. I do the work [a]s they do it.’

reproach (based on the argument made in the preceding move):

rev. <sup>1-3</sup>‘[W]hy is the king, my lord, seek me out [a]s if I [dis]obeyed him<sup>315</sup>?’

<sup>312</sup> The letter is attributed to Nabû-bēlu-ka’ in on the basis of the scribal hand, but as usual, such attributions pose a risk. A scribe could be able to write in more than one hand. If this attribution is correct, the letter could be considered very powerful evidence for the highest officials assuming a very submissive tone (on Nabû-bēlu-ka’ in, see Mattila 2001).

<sup>313</sup> Literally: ‘three or four times’.

<sup>314</sup> *nikittu* is translated by CAD N2, 223 as ‘fear, worry, concern’ or alternatively ‘damage, disrepair’ or ‘crisis, dangerous situation’. These are, however, the semantic extensions of the basic sense of the verb *nakādu*, which is ‘to beat, throb, palpitate’ (CAD N1, 153).

<sup>315</sup> Literally, ‘the king my lord’.

Following the complaint about the suffering caused by the lack of the royal trust, the sender makes an argument against being singled out. This is based on the fact that he does the same work as his colleagues<sup>316</sup> - and the fact that the sender phrases the argument in this way suggests that he presumes that equal treatment is a reasonable expectation.

Another way to protest one's innocence is to request verification that one did not commit an offence. This happens in SAA 1 124, SAA 1 235, and SAA 5 227. There exists no discernible pattern in what follows the request for verification: it can be either a counterclaim (SAA 1 179, SAA 1 235), a challenge for the addressee to punish the sender if the verification proves his crimes are true (SAA 1 124) or a move providing further information (SAA 5 227). On the other hand, none of the moves that can follow the request for verification must necessarily be preceded by a request for verification only. They can also occur in different constellations. SAA 1 152 (Parpola 2015, 121–122), for instance, contains a challenge (rev. <sup>9</sup>*šum<sub>2</sub>-mu ŠEŠ.MEŠ-šu<sub>2</sub> ša m.gid<sub>2</sub>-gi-da-a-n[i]* <sup>10</sup>*[š]a ina IGI-ia dul-lum ep-pa-šu<sub>2</sub>-u-ni* <sup>11</sup>*[šu]<sub>2</sub>-mu 1-en TA ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>12</sup>*[KA<sub>2</sub>].GAL ša URU.BAD<sub>3</sub>-MAN-GIN it-tu-uš-ši* <sup>13</sup>*[a-na ZA]G KAB it-ta-la-ak* <sup>14</sup>*[LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> l]u-u la u<sub>2</sub>-bal-la-ṭa-an-ni* – ‘If the brothers of Gidgiddānu who have been doing work for me, [i]f (even) one of them has left the [ga]te of Dur-Šarrukīn and has gone [to the sou]th or to the north – may [the king, my lord,] not let me live.’). The following passage of the letter is broken, but it must have comprised at least an oath (rev. 18.(?)–re22.).

In fact, SAA 5 227 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 164–165) is a rather interesting case. The sender, Šamaš-bēlu-ušur (governor of Arzuhina, Baker 2011a) is called to account for the lack of express service under his jurisdiction. Šamaš-bēlu-ušur plots his apology in several moves, but the key point is the avoidance of direct admission of guilt. In the first place, he insists that he prepared enough mules for the express service at various stages of the journey. After a short, damaged passage, however, he also mentions that his province lies at the crossroads and that one of the stages if the express service is very hard for the animals. This is followed by advice how to solve the problem (by adding more animals):

obv. <sup>4</sup>*ina UGU ka-li-e ša LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>* <sup>5</sup>*ŠU.2 m.URU.arba-il<sub>3</sub>-a-a iš-pur-an-ni* <sup>6</sup>*ma-a a-ta-a ka-li-  
iu-u la-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>7</sup>*ki-i TA m.SUHUŠ-KASKAL LU<sub>2</sub>.qur-bu-te* <sup>8</sup>*i-li-kan-a-ni a-na-ku ina URU.ur-  
zu-ḫi-na* <sup>9</sup>*i-pa-na-tu<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu 2 ANŠE.ku-din* <sup>10</sup>*ina KI.TA m.SUHUŠ-KASKAL ar-ta-kas* <sup>11</sup>*ina  
URU.arrap-ḫa i-ša-bat 2 ANŠE.ku-din* <sup>12</sup>*ina KI.TA m.URU.arba-il<sub>3</sub>-a-a ir-ta-kas* <sup>13</sup>*a-na  
KUR.ma-za-mu i-ta-lak*

introduction (with a royal reproach):

obv. <sup>4-6</sup>As to the mule express about which the king, my lord, wrote to me through Arbailāyu:  
‘Why is there no express mule service?’

<sup>316</sup> For this comparison with one's equals suggesting the presence of objective bureaucratic standards, see Baker and Groß 2015, 83–84.

denial or not? (with an explanation of events):

obv. <sup>7-13</sup> When he came with the companion of the king, Ubru-Ḫarrān, I harnessed two mules before them in Arzuḫina for the use of Ubru-Ḫarrān. He took them to Arrapha (and) harnessed two mules for the use of Arbailāyu. (Then) he went on to Mazamua.

This is the explanation about the mules being sufficient at two stages of the journey made by Ubru-Ḫarrān and Arbailāyu. The following move is a request for verification – for the king to check if there were no mules in the next two stages. If one takes the contents of this letter very literally, the sender does not actually address the question posed by the king directly. The question refers to no express mule service without conditions, the answer explains how there was express mule service in a particular case for the two individual travellers. Since the last sequence of moves on this topic is a pseudo-reminder about a particular stage being very hard (rev. 4.-10., the stage is from Arzuḫina to Arrakdi) for the animals and a request for additional mule, perhaps there were indeed problems with the express service, especially if one combines the (admittedly not very strong) evidence of the request with the indirect answer to the royal reproach.

The counterclaims occur in SAA 1 179, SAA 1 235, SAA 1 236, SAA 5 256, SAA 15 24, and SAA 15 30. The sender blames somebody else for the offence and, not rarely, requests a royal intervention (SAA 1 235, SAA 1 236<sup>317</sup>, and SAA 15 24). However, the minimal version of a counterclaim may well end with the shifting of the blame only, as in SAA 5 256 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990, 183–184):

obv. <sup>4'</sup> [ma-a] ṽa<sup>1</sup>-ta-a ṽUDU<sup>1</sup>.MEŠ TA Š[A<sub>3</sub> x x] <sup>5'</sup> [t]a-ka-la-ṽšī<sup>1</sup> LUGAL be-[li<sub>2</sub>] <sup>6'</sup> [U]DU.MEŠ a-na DINGIR.MEŠ-ni-šu ik-[ta-la] <sup>7'</sup> [š]um<sub>2</sub>-ma ina UGU-ḫi la u<sub>2</sub>-ra-ṽda<sup>1</sup> <sup>8'</sup> re-ṽi-šu-nu-u a-kal-la

reproach: obv. <sup>4'.-5'</sup> ‘Why do [y]ou withhold sheep from (...)?’

counterclaim: obv. <sup>5'.-8'</sup> The king, [my] lord, has been with[holding] [sh]eep from his gods<sup>318</sup>. [I]f he does not add (to them), can I hold back their shepherds?

For the sender of the letter<sup>319</sup> blaming the king for the issue at hand seems to have been par for the course and not grounds for an offence at all.

A more typical example of a counterclaim topped with a request for royal intervention can be found in SAA 1 235 (Parpola 2015, 183–184):

obv. <sup>6</sup> ma-a TA UGU LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL-ki-šir-u<sub>2</sub>-te <sup>7</sup> tu-up-ta-ti-šu ma-a a-ta-a taq-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu <sup>8</sup> ma-a 1 GU<sub>2</sub>.UN KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR us-ḫa la-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu <sup>9</sup> la-a u<sub>2</sub>-pat-ti-šu LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL-ki-šir šu-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>10</sup> m.du-gul-

<sup>317</sup> Both SAA 1 235 and 236 are attributed to the same sender, Taklāk-ana-Bēl.

<sup>318</sup> Although the crucial part of the royal reproach is broken and the letter is unassigned, the mention of ‘withholding the sheep from the gods’ of the king might refer to the system of provisioning the temple of Assur. According to Postgate 1992, 251, although the system is best attested for the reign of Tiglath-pileser I, evidence suggests that it remained in operation until the seventh century BCE.

<sup>319</sup> The name of the sender is completely broken away and no attribution is attempted by the editors.

IGI-DINGIR *ina* IGI LUGAL EN-*ia*<sub>2</sub> LUGAL *be-li*<sub>2</sub> <sup>11</sup>*liš-al-šu šum<sub>2</sub>-mu la-a* LU<sub>2</sub>.GAL-*ki-šir*  
*šu-tu<sub>2</sub>-ni* <sup>12</sup>*ki-i m.du-gul-IGI-DINGIR a-na gi-zi il-lik-u-ni* <sup>13</sup>*šu-u<sub>2</sub>-tu EŠ<sub>2</sub>.GAR<sub>3</sub>-šu up-ta-ii-iš*  
<sup>14</sup>*a-na gi-zi la e-ru-ub iḫ-ti-liq* (eras. *ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub>) <sup>15</sup>*ina* ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bi* E<sub>2</sub>.KUR *it-ti-it-zi a-sa-ap-ra* <sup>16</sup>*us-*  
*se-ri-du-ni-eš-šu nu-uk* EŠ<sub>2</sub>.GAR<sub>3</sub>-*ka* <sup>17</sup>*lu-ri-ma-ka nu-uk* LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ *i-ša al-k[a]* <sup>18</sup>*dul-*  
*lum* *ina* URU.BAD<sub>3</sub>-MAN-GIN *e-pu-u[š]* <sup>19</sup>*meš-li* LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ *na-ša meš-lu-ma la n[a-*  
*ša]* <sup>20</sup>*pi-il-ka-šu-nu na-mar-ku aq-t[i-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu-nu]* <sup>21</sup>*nu-uk a-ta-a pi-il-ka-ku-nu na-[mar-ku]*  
<sup>22</sup>*u<sub>3</sub> ŠE.IN.NU GI.ap-pa-ru š[a dul-li]* <sup>23</sup>*la ta-di-n[a x x x x x x x x]* <sup>24</sup>*ma-a ma-nu [x x x x x x*  
*x x x]* 25. [...]

(Approximately 17 lines broken away)

rev. <sup>1</sup>*[x x u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a] an-nu-<sup>r</sup>ig a-na LUGAL<sup>1</sup> EN-*ia*<sub>2</sub>* <sup>2</sup>*[a-sa-ap-ra šum<sub>2</sub>-mu] a-na ḫu-ru me-me-ni*  
<sup>3</sup>*du[l-lum u<sub>2</sub>-ra-am-ma] LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub> li-ir-u<sub>2</sub>-ba-šu-nu* <sup>4</sup>*d[ul-lum le-pu-šu] ki-ma dul-lu e-*  
*tap-šu* <sup>5</sup>*[x x x is-s]i-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu lu-ki-nu-ni*

reproach: obv. <sup>6-8</sup>. ‘You released him from the post of a cohort commander! Why did you tell him to extract a talent of silver?’

denial of offence: obv. <sup>8-9</sup>. No, I did not remove him. He is still a cohort commander.

request for verification: obv. <sup>10-11</sup>. Dugul-pān-ili is with the king. May the king, my lord, ask him if he (Ilu-pīya-ušur who is the topic of the letter) is a cohort commander!

counterclaim: obv. <sup>12-15</sup>. When Dugul-pān-ili went to the shearing, he (=Ilu-pīya-ušur) stole (?) his dues. He did not go to the shearing (but) fled and took refuge in a temple.

post-complaint (own attempt to mitigate the situation, with an offer):

obv. <sup>15-18</sup>. I sent a man to bring him down, (and) told him: ‘I will pardon your state service dues. (Just) take your men and do (your) work in Dur-Šarrukīn.’

post-complaint (failure to assure compliance):

obv. <sup>19-20</sup>. He took half of the men, and half (of the men) he did not. Their work assignment was delayed.

post-complaint (own attempt to mitigate the situation, with a reproach):

obv. <sup>20-23</sup>. I t[old them]: ‘Why is your work assignment de[layed] and why have you not given the straw and reeds for [the work]?’

The following reported dialogue is too broken to allow an interpretation, and the first 17 lines of the reverse are completely broken. The next comprehensible passage, albeit with some restorations, begins only in the latter part of the reverse. It clearly still belongs to the same topic:

request: rev. <sup>1'-4'</sup> [Now] then, I [have written] to the king, my lord. [If] any of them later [abandons his] work, may the king, my lord, become angry with them<sup>320</sup>, [so that they do their wo]rk.

Finally, oaths only occur twice in the protestations of innocence in this part of the corpus (SAA 1 152, and SAA 1 179). As already mentioned, if the sender is willing to risk an oath, it is more than likely that he is telling the truth and should not be blamed for the alleged offence<sup>321</sup>.

The most common strategy when faced with own offensive conduct in the letters is to dissociate oneself from the offence, either by making an excuse or by directly denying one's involvement, or in some cases denying that the offensive conduct took place at all. There is no reason to believe that the senders lied and that this avoidance tactics were anything but the truth, especially in cases in which there are oaths involved<sup>322</sup>.

The reactions to the reproaches in letters written by scholars present a different picture, although perhaps the total number of reactions to offences is too small to allow a real generalisation. Only 8 reproaches from this part of the corpus are cited by the sender. As many as 5 of these are followed by excuses<sup>323</sup>.

Ištar-šumu-ēreš, he sender of SAA 10 8 (Parpola 1993, 8–10), when faced with a reproach from the king, can only protest his innocence. Although the passage is very damaged, it is still worth citing:

obv. <sup>6</sup>ma-[a am-me-ni ina] ma-te-me-e-ni <sup>7</sup>[ke-e-tu is-si-i]a la ta-ad-bu-ub <sup>8</sup>[a-na ma-a-ti mi-i-nu] ša<sub>2</sub> šī-ti-ni ta-qab-bi-a <sup>9</sup>[aš-šur d.30 d.UTU d.E]N d.AG <sup>10</sup>[d.SAG.ME.GAR d.dil-bat d.UDU.ID]IM.SAG.UŠ <sup>11</sup>[d.UDU.IDIM.GUD.UD d.šal-bat-a-nu M]UL.GAG.SI.SA<sub>2</sub> <sup>12</sup>[x x x x x x x x x x] <sup>13</sup>[šum-ma ina ma-te-me-ni l]a ina ke-ti-ia

reproach: obv. <sup>6-8</sup> [Why] have you [n]ever told [m]e [the truth]? [When] will you tell me [what] this is?

protestation of innocence (with an oath):

obv. <sup>9-13</sup> [Assur, Šin, Šamaš, Bē]l, Nabû, [Jupiter. Venus, Sa]turn, [Mercury, Mars, S]irius (and) (...) know indeed [that] I have [never] untruly (...).

<sup>320</sup> The verb *ra'ābu*, 'be angry with someone', usually occurs with the preposition *itti*. Some tokens with enclitic pronouns only, however, crop up every now and then, see CAD R, 2, *rā'bu* A 1b.

<sup>321</sup> As with river ordeals, cases in which the persons engaged in legal procedures decline to take an oath or to undergo an ordeal are known (for persons refusing the river ordeals, see Kataja 1998, and also SAA 18 125: rev. 14.-15., likely also SAA 15 295: obv. 9-13; for turning away from an oath in the Neo-Assyrian period, see Faist 2015, 65–66 and Jas 1996, 41-42 and 71-73 – turning away from an oath as well as turning away from a river ordeal is expressed with the verb *tāru*). This illustrates that swearing an oath was not a matter undertaken lightly, which is also evident from numerous magical texts dealing with the consequences of perjury. In fact, in the Mesopotamian tradition lying under oath was deemed a cause of misfortune and disease, and could be even committed unknowingly (Maul 2019, 14–17).

<sup>322</sup> Some evidence for avoidance tactics that might be associated with lying can indeed be found (more on this below the discussion on SAA 18 125).

<sup>323</sup> SAA 10 92, SAA 10 93, SAA 10 103, SAA 10 202, SAA 10 315.

The following passage is unfortunately almost completely broken.

The unknown sender of the Babylonian letter SAA 10 172 (Parpola 1993, 131–132) offers a correction, and thus an indirect justification of his conduct, together with a promise of redress:

obv. <sup>1</sup>MUL.šal-bat-a-nu <sup>2</sup>it-tan-mar mi-na-a <sup>3</sup>la taš-pu-ra <sup>4</sup>MUL.šal-bat-a-nu ina ITI.NE <sup>5</sup>a-mir  
en-na it-ti <sup>6</sup>MUL.ZI.BA.AN.NA <sup>7</sup>(eras.) 150 u<sub>2</sub>-tu (eras.) <sup>8</sup>iq-ṭe-ru-ub

rev. <sup>1</sup>aš<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub> iṭ-ṭe-ḫu-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>2</sup>ṛpī<sup>1</sup>-ši[r<sub>3</sub>]-šu<sub>2</sub> a-na <sup>3</sup>LUGAL be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia <sup>4</sup>a-šap-pa-ra

reproach: obv. <sup>1</sup>·<sup>3</sup>·‘Mars has become visible. Why have you not written?’

counterclaim with a correction:

obv. <sup>4</sup>·<sup>8</sup>·Mars was visible in the month of Abu. Now it has approached within two spans of the constellation Libra.

promise of redress (indirect apology?):

rev. <sup>1</sup>·<sup>4</sup>·As soon as it has come close to it (the constellation), I will write its inter[pre]tation to the king.

Finally, Banî, the sender of SAA 10 333 (Parpola 1993, 268) reacts to the royal reproach with protestations of innocence. Although one letter is certainly not enough to suggest a pattern, it is certainly remarkable that unlike the senders of the administrative letters, Banî finishes his denials of culpability with something akin to a blessing:

obv. <sup>11</sup>a-na mi<sub>3</sub>-i-ni ta-sa-al-li <sup>12</sup>a-na LUGAL-e EN-ia <sup>13</sup>a-sa-al-li

rev. <sup>1</sup>[d.EN] d.AG DINGIR.MEŠ <sup>2</sup>ša u<sub>2</sub>-tak-kil-(u)-ka-ni <sup>3</sup>šu-nu ub-tal-li-ṭuš-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>4</sup>d.be-lit-TI.LA  
<sup>5</sup>DINGIR-ka dam-qu <sup>6</sup>ša UD.MEŠ GID<sub>2</sub>.DA.MEŠ <sup>7</sup>ši-bu-tu lit-tu-tu <sup>8</sup>DI-mu TI.LA a-na  
LUGAL <sup>9</sup>EN-ia ta-da-nu-u-ni <sup>10</sup>ši-i ŠU.2-su <sup>11</sup>ta-ša-bat ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi <sup>12</sup>DINGIR u d.ALAD ša  
LUGAL <sup>13</sup>EN-ia ib-ta-laṭ

reproach: obv. <sup>11</sup>·‘Why do you lie?’

rejection of culpability: obv. <sup>12</sup>·<sup>13</sup>·Would I lie to the king, my lord?

denial of offence (?): rev. <sup>1</sup>·<sup>3</sup>·[Bel] (and) Nabû, the gods who make you confident, it is them who healed him.

reassurance: rev. <sup>4</sup>·<sup>11</sup>·Bēlet-balāti (‘The Lady of Life’), your benevolent goddess<sup>324</sup>, who bestows upon the king, my lord, long days (of life), old age, attainment of longevity, health and vigour – it was she who grasped his hand.

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<sup>324</sup> Literally, ‘your benevolent god’.



reassurance or flattery (or both?):

rev. <sup>11-12</sup>He recovered thanks to the god and the protective spirit of the king, my lord.

This sequence is a bit difficult to interpret, since it is not entirely clear what it was that Banî lied about. It should be the recovery of the unknown patient – after the sender denies lying, he declares that the patient did indeed get well. For a lie to be possible in the first place, however, the king must have been physically absent, since the lack of recovery would likely be immediately evident upon inspection – or perhaps the recovery was less than full, so that doubts could persist? In any case, following the denial of culpability and likely a denial of the offence occurring at all, the sender bases his argument on the help of the gods who favour the king. While this certainly must have been also meant as a reassurance, the component of flattery is doubtless also present: after all, it is the king who enjoys the divine favour.

The small number of quoted reproaches in this part of the corpus can be attributed both to the contents of the scholarly correspondence as well to the position of the scholars themselves. On the one hand, the scholars provide the king with information, while on the other, they carry out the necessary rituals whose course depends on rules which the scholars themselves know best. Under those circumstances, there is little opportunity for deviating from the correct course of action and for these deviations being detected – not to mention being pointed out directly in writing. The position of the scholars also fundamentally differs from that of the higher officials and governors who are powerful in their own right. When a scholar did something that the king was unhappy with, his fate was certainly not enviable – as illustrated by the petition written by Urad-Gula, SAA 10 294 (Parpola 1993, 231–234). As clients (Radner 2015, 66–67), the scholars had to manoeuvre much less directly and certainly had less leeway when they did finally make a mistake.

A similar picture emerges from the priestly letters gathered in SAA 13. Out of 7 reproaches, 3 are emitted by the sender and thus are not followed by the reactions<sup>325</sup>. Of the remaining 4, 1 is followed by an excuse, one is cited from a quasi-conversation, and while it does not include a direct reaction, the fact that the sender must seek the intervention of the highest instance should speak for itself. In one letter the reproach is only followed with a promise of compliance, and in one the reaction to the reproach is very strong protestations of innocence, coupled with an attempt to blame the addressee for his inappropriate conduct instead.

The reproach in the dialogue comes from SAA 13 20 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 21–22), which on the whole is a letter of complaint. The exchange included in the sequence of accusations illustrates how the sender, Dadî (a high official from the Aššur temple in Assur, Mattila 1999, 361), attempts to resolve the issues with the temple shepherds on his own:

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<sup>325</sup> These occur in SAA 13 31, SAA 13 144, and SAA 13 190.

rev. <sup>4</sup>*u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a as-par-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>5</sup>*mu-uk a-ta-a* LUGAL <sup>6</sup>*la ta-pal-la-ḫa* <sup>7</sup>10 LU<sub>2</sub>.ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ *is-si-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu* <sup>8</sup>KUŠ.til-li<sub>3</sub> *ta-lu-lu* <sup>9</sup>*i-du-lu ma-a man-nu* <sup>10</sup>*ša ina* UGU-ḫi-ni *il-lak-ni* <sup>11</sup>*ina* GIŠ.PAN *ni-ka-ra-ar-šu<sub>2</sub>*

complaint (own attempt to find a solution):

rev. <sup>4-5</sup>Now I have written to them saying:

reproach (as an attempt to achieve compliance):

rev. <sup>5-6</sup>‘Why do you not fear the king?’

complaint (with additional information and a quoted threat):

rev. <sup>7-9</sup>Ten men run around with them; their bows drawn, saying: ‘Whoever comes against us, we will crush them with (our) bows!’

Dadī’s reproach is apparently not successful in making the shepherds recognise their offence and ensuring their compliance. Their aggressive behaviour cannot be curbed, although it seems that the threat is not a direct reaction to the reproach emitted by the sender. In any case, the sender manages thus to present himself as a diligent servant of the king who, however, has no other way to safeguard the smooth deliveries of cultic meals other than asking for a royal intervention.

Excuse after a reproach occurs in SAA 13 66 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 58–59), a petition for the appointment of an exorcist and a physician in order to cure the sender. This plea is preceded by an introduction with a quoted royal reproach:

obv. <sup>17</sup>[*ma-a a*]-*ta-a a-na* URU.ŠA<sub>3</sub>-URU *la tal-lik* <sup>18</sup>[*ta-tu<sub>2</sub>*]-*a-ra la al-lak mar-ša-ku* <sup>19</sup>[*mu-u*]k *al-lak ina šid-di* KASKAL *a-mu-at*

reproach: obv. <sup>17-18</sup>‘[W]hy did you not go to the Inner City (but) [tu]rned back?’

admission: obv. <sup>18</sup>I did not go,

excuse: obv. <sup>18-19</sup>(because) I am sick. [I thought to] myself: ‘(If) I go, I will die on the way.’

The following passage is damaged, but it begins with a predicted royal question that starts with *man-nu at-ta* [ša x x] x *la i-da-gal-an-ni* (obv. 20.-21.), ‘who are you [that/to x x] x does not wait upon me’. This expression means more or less ‘who do you think you are’, as already mentioned above, and occurs in insulting passages, provocations, and rebukes, so this is likely what the sender imagined would be the royal reaction to his excuse. In line 22. of the obverse one can still read [x x aš-šur] DINGIR-*ka lu-u u<sub>2</sub>-di*, so the reaction on the projected rebuke was a protestation of innocence, likely in form of an oath. The rest of the obverse is broken, although much more is missing from the reverse, whose upper part is completely broken away. The first line with more than one sign legible is rev. 4’, where one can still read *be-li<sub>2</sub> (li)-iš-al* and then *ki-i ša<sub>2</sub> ‘a?’-[ba]t’-‘u?’-ni?’* in rev. 5’, suggesting a request for verification.

This is followed by a rather hesitant request – quite understandable in a situation in which the sender expected to be censured.

The remaining two reproaches are followed by singularly interesting reactions. The sender of SAA 13 35 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 37–38) is perhaps the most evasive person in the entire corpus. Faced with a reproach from the king, he does not address it but only offers a promise of compliance:

obv. <sup>5</sup>[*ma a-t*]a-a ša la pi-k[a] <sup>6</sup>[m.d.x]-še-zib SAG m.aš-šur-AD-P[AB iš-ši] <sup>7</sup>[*ma-a* LU<sub>2</sub>].SANGA.MEŠ *am-ma-la dul-lu* <sup>8</sup>[*le-pu-šu*] *ne<sub>2</sub>-pa-aš<sub>2</sub>*

reproach: obv. <sup>5-6</sup>.‘Why did [x]<sup>326</sup>-šēzib sum[mon] Aššūr-abu-u[šur] without yo[ur] authorisation?’

command: obv. <sup>7-8</sup>.‘[Let] the priests [perform] the ritual completely.’

promise (compliance): obv. <sup>8</sup>.‘We will perform (it).’

It is hard to say what this lack of excuses can mean. In other letters, the senders also provide excuses for their subordinates, so the absence of personal responsibility (although it should be assumed that one is also responsible for the misdeeds of his subordinates) should not be a reason. Perhaps the sender is simply unwilling to make excuses for a colleague? On the other hand, in view of the other examples, especially those which recount conversations, it is likely that the function of a reproach was not an elicitation of an excuse – although from the point of view of the person to whom the reproach was addressed, the excuse was sometimes necessary – but rather ensuring the compliance or cooperation of the addressee. If that is so, the king was certainly successful.

The unknown sender of SAA 13 158 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 128–129), on the other hand, has no compunction about making his displeasure known. In answer to a reproach from the crown prince, he does not mince words and complains about his treatment at the hands of the his patron:

obv. <sup>3</sup>‘(...) m]a-a a-na am-mi<sub>3</sub>-ni an-na-ka at-ta <sup>4</sup>[*ma-a*] e-[*ti-i*]q a-lik a-na URU.ŠA<sub>3</sub>-URU an-nu-rig 2-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>5</sup>[*a-n*]a ar<sub>2</sub>-hiš DUMU-MAN i-šap-pa-ra la-a si-min<sub>3</sub> UDU.SISKUR.MEŠ <sup>6</sup>[*l*]a-a dul-lu la me-me-e-ni ša u<sub>2</sub>-dal-laḥ<sub>3</sub>-u-ni <sup>7</sup>i-šap-par-u<sub>2</sub>-ni-ni a-na am-mi<sub>2</sub>-i-ni <sup>8</sup>is-se-niš tu-u<sub>2</sub>-ra DUMU-MAN lu u<sub>2</sub>-ši-a pa-ne<sub>2</sub>-e-šu <sup>9</sup>šu-la-an-šu lu a-mur is-si-ia<sub>2</sub> lu ta-ad-bu-ub <sup>10</sup>te<sub>3</sub>-e-mu lu taš-kun-an-ni ḥa-ra-am-mi-ma <sup>11</sup>[*ina*] ‘E<sub>2</sub>?’<sup>1</sup> al-lak-u-ni lu al-lik u<sub>3</sub> 1-et [a-b]u-tu<sub>2</sub> <sup>12</sup>[a-na DUMU-MA]N [*l*]a aq-bi

reproach: obv. <sup>3</sup>.‘Why are you here?’

command: obv. <sup>4</sup>.‘M[ov]e on and come to the Inner City!’

<sup>326</sup> The editors restore the name as Nabû-šēzib.

counter-reproach: obv. 4'.-7'. It is now the second time that the crown prince [sud]denly writes to me (like this). It is not the time of the offerings, and there is [n]o ritual or nothing (other that would require to) send for me so hurriedly.

reproach: obv. 7'.-8'. Why the same thing again?

complaint: obv. 8'.-12'. The crown prince should have come out (so that) I could have seen his face and his health. You should have spoken with me and given me orders – and then later I would have gone [wh]ere I had to go and would [no]t have said a single w[or]d [to the crown prin]ce.

The sender does not shy away from making his displeasure known but what is more, he also switches between terms of address he uses. In obv. 5'. , 8'. and in the beginning of line 9'. the crown prince is systematically addressed in the third person (verbal forms and enclitic pronouns), while in the second half of line 9'. and in line 10'. second person is used (*lū tadbub*, *lū taškun*). Since the scholars occasionally also use the second person when writing to the king, I would suggest this switch in address forms is meant to express the friendly character of the advice and thus soften the blow of the otherwise very direct rebuke.

The background of the directness and the somewhat dramatic tone must be sought in the expectations the scholar had for his relationship with the crown prince as a client to a powerful patron (Radner 2015, 67).

The relatively few reactions to the reproaches that can be gleaned from the priestly letters suggest that their place in the imperial hierarchy as that of the scholars. Arguably, the priests were scholars in their own right, even if their position was perhaps strengthened by the support that they could find in the temple structures. Nonetheless, when they felt they were treated unfairly, they did not stay silent, as shown by SAA 13 158.

There are 9 reproaches among the political correspondence gathered in SAA 16. However, as many as 6 of them are either attributed to the senders or quoted without the reaction<sup>327</sup>. Of the remaining 3, two are potential reproaches introducing excuses (discussed in the chapter on apologies and excuses) and one is a reproach followed by protestations of innocence.

SAA 16 6 (Luukko and van Buylaere 2002, 8) are especially interesting for a number of reasons. The sender of the letter is king Esarhaddon himself, and the person making the reproach is addressing him in the second person:

obv. 1'. (...) *ma-a e-gir<sub>2</sub>-tu<sub>2</sub>* 2'. *ša ina UGU-ḫi-ka [aš<sub>2</sub>-pur-u-ni]* 3'. *la ta-as-si ma-[a la tap-ti]* 4'. *a-ke-e ana-ku an-ni-[tu<sub>2</sub> la e-pu-uš]* 5'. *ki-ma e-gir<sub>2</sub>-tu<sub>2</sub> š[a ta-šap-par-an-ni]* 6'. *ina UGU EN-ṭe-e-[mi<sub>3</sub>-*

<sup>327</sup> These reproaches are in SAA 16 28, SAA 16 33, SAA 16 48, SAA 16 62, SAA 16 64, SAA 16 105.

*ia ta-tal-ka* <sup>be7'</sup> [*qa*]*r-bat-te-šu<sub>2</sub> e-gi[r<sub>2</sub>-tu<sub>2</sub> i-pa-ti* <sup>be8'</sup> [*te*]-en-šu<sub>2</sub> [*u<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub>-aš<sub>2</sub>-man-ni* <sup>be9'</sup> [*a-k*]*e-  
e e-gir<sub>2</sub>-tu<sub>2</sub> [lu-u<sub>2</sub> as-si* <sup>be10'</sup> [*pa*]-ni-ia ina UGU-*hi-ia-m[a e-gir<sub>2</sub>-tu<sub>2</sub>*

rev. <sup>1</sup>*a-mar la a-pa-ti la as-s[a-as-si]*

reproach: obv. <sup>1'-3'</sup> ‘You did not read [nor open the letter] that [I sent] to you.’

denial: obv. <sup>4'</sup> ‘Why [would] I [not do] this?’

explanation: obv. <sup>5'-be9'</sup> ‘When a letter wh[ich you have written comes] to [my] secret[ary], he  
[per]sonally [opens it] (and) [informs me] (about) its con[tents].

boastful excuse: obv. <sup>be9'</sup> -rev. <sup>1</sup> ‘[W]hy [would I read] a letter? I am busy with [my]self. I see [a letter]  
(and) I do not open it, nor do I r[ead it].

Although the following passage of the letter is even more damaged, it is likely that some more excuses or protestations of innocence followed. The editors make no educated guesses about the context of the letter or its addressee, but the tone is reminiscent of some diplomatic correspondence of Assurbanipal, in which the king denies any responsibility or even any knowledge of the offences his partners complain about.

The correspondence of Assurbanipal edited in SAA 21 does include 9 reproaches, but predictably the majority of them (6)<sup>328</sup> are uttered by the king as means of ensuring compliance with his commands and thus do not include reactions – which would arrive in the tablets with their answers.

Of the remaining 3 letters, in one the potential reproach is followed by an excuse (SAA 21 110, already discussed in the section on apologies and excuses) and two are reproach-like questions quoted from letters to the king. Together with the letter from Esarhaddon (SAA 16 6), they provide a unique insight into how the king dealt with his correspondents questioning his behaviour. While the epistolary partner of Esarhaddon, however, cannot be identified, this is not the case in the letters addressed to Assurbanipal.

SAA 21 65 (Parpola 2018, 59–60) is addressed to the elders of Elam. Their reproachful question about the unjust treatment they receive at the hands of Assyria is immediately met with a repudiation – although the kind does not forget to make promises of leniency should they change their offensive conduct:

obv. <sup>4</sup>*ma-a ina UGU mi<sub>3</sub>-ni ki-i an-ni KUR.AN.ŠAR<sub>2</sub>.KI* <sup>5</sup>*te-ep-pa-aš<sub>2</sub>-an-na-ši la tu-da-ma* <sup>6</sup>*ina UGU mi<sub>3</sub>-i-ni ša<sub>2</sub> ki-i ha-an-ni-i ep-ša<sub>2</sub>-a-ka-nu-ni* <sup>7</sup>*u u<sub>2</sub>-ma-a ta-as-sa-na-'a-la* <sup>8</sup>*ina UGU m.d.PA-EN-MU.MEŠ m.d.PA-ŠU.2-ša-bat m.ki-rib-tu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>9</sup>*ki-i ha-an-ni-i ep-ša<sub>2</sub>-ku-nu* <sup>10</sup>*ki-i m.um-man-i-gaš il-lik-an-ni* <sup>11</sup>*GIR<sub>2</sub>.2.MEŠ-ia iṣ-bat-u-ni u<sub>3</sub> e-mu-qī<sub>2</sub>-ia* <sup>12</sup>*is-si-šu<sub>2</sub> aš-pur-u-ni il-li-ku-u-ni* <sup>13</sup>*ina ŠA<sub>3</sub> m.te-um-man im-maḥ-ṣu-u<sub>2</sub>-ni* <sup>14</sup>*A<sub>2</sub>.2-in-ni-i ina ŠA<sub>3</sub> E<sub>2</sub>.KUR.MEŠ ina*

<sup>328</sup> The reproaches with no reactions include SAA 21 23, SAA 21 24, SAA 21 45, SAA 21 58, SAA 21 124 (from the Urartian king Sardūri), SAA 21 156 (from the *ša-pān-ekalli*, palace overseer, to his ‘sons’.)

ŠA<sub>3</sub> URU.MEŠ <sup>15</sup>lu-u ina ŠA<sub>3</sub> me-me-ni ni-it-tu-bil <sup>16</sup>ḫu-ub-tu-u<sub>2</sub> ni-iḫ-tab-ta I<sub>3</sub>.ME ina UGU  
UŠ<sub>2</sub>.ME <sup>17</sup>la ni-id-di-bu-u<sub>2</sub>-ku a-na EN MUN <sup>18</sup>la ni-tu-u<sub>2</sub>-ru-u

reproach: obv. <sup>4-5</sup>. ‘Why does Assyria treat us like this?’

rejection of the question:

obv. <sup>5-6</sup>. Do you not know why you are treated like this?<sup>329</sup>

rejection of the question:

obv. <sup>7</sup>. And now you (dare to) ask!

justification: obv. <sup>8-9</sup>. It is because of Nabû-bêl-šumāti, Nabû-qati-šabat (and) Kiribtu that you have been treated this way.

justification (account of one’s proper conduct):

obv. 10.-18. When Ummanigaš came to me (and) grasped my feet, and (when) I sent my forces with him, (and when) they went and routed Teumman, did we lay our hands on (your) temples or cities, or whatever else? Did we plunder? Did we not pour oil on the blood and turned into allies?

This argument is likely developed further, when Assurbanipal described his later campaign in the following lines – unfortunately around five lines of the bottom of the tablet are broken. The reverse, when it is legible again, begins with the repetition of the initial reproach:

rev. <sup>1</sup>ma-<sup>1a</sup> [ina UGU mi<sub>3</sub>-i-ni ki-i] <sup>1a</sup>an-ni-i<sup>1</sup> ep-ša<sub>2</sub>-<sup>1a</sup>[ni] <sup>2</sup>ina Š[A<sub>3</sub> aš-šur DINGIR.MEŠ-ia<sub>2</sub> at-t]a-ma šum-ma la ina U[G]U <sup>3</sup>m.d.[PA-EN-MU.MEŠ L]U<sub>2</sub>.<sup>1</sup>EN<sup>1</sup>-ḫi-<sup>1</sup>iṭ<sup>1</sup>-ṭi ša<sub>2</sub> is-si-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>4</sup>ki-i ḫa-[an-n]i-e ep-ša<sub>2</sub>-ka-nu-ni

reproach: rev. <sup>1</sup>. ‘[For what reason] are we treated [lik]e this?’

justification (with an oath):

rev. <sup>2</sup>.-<sup>4</sup>. [I s]wear b[y Aššūr (and) my gods]: it is because of [Nabû-bêl-šumāti (and) the] criminals (who are) with him that you are treated li[ke thi]s.

Assurbanipal continues with a very interesting argument, in which he asserts that he has no other reason to go against Elam, since it is not a trading centre, it has no horses or mules, and no silver or gold or even things suitable for kingship (rev. <sup>11</sup>. (...) mu<sup>1</sup>-uk <sup>12</sup>.si-ma-a-te ša LUGAL-u-te ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi i-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-šī), and thus there is no reason to wage war. This is not the way the reasons for war are usually formulated

<sup>329</sup> Parpola 2018, 59 translates this clause as ‘You know perfectly well’ and I would agree that this is exactly this kind of emphasis that is expressed by a question with a negated verb. In view of the following sentence, his translation makes far more sense in English.

in royal inscriptions, where the military action is typically at least implied to be a form of punishment, although the Assyrian kings do not also hesitate to list the riches they plunder. What one can observe here is an almost astounding sincerity about one's own motives<sup>330</sup>.

The letter ends with a command and a threat (formulated as a promise):

rev. <sup>14'</sup>(...) *an-nu-ri* <sup>15'</sup>*as-sap-rak-ku-nu* m.d.PA-EN-MU.MEŠ *ša<sub>2</sub> is-si-šu<sub>2</sub>* <sup>16'</sup>*še-bil-a-ni bi-is ana-ku* DINGIR.MEŠ-*ku-nu lu-še-bil-ak-ku-nu* <sup>17'</sup>*u su-lum-mu-u la-aš<sub>2</sub>-kun u<sub>2</sub>-la-a tu-rak* <sup>18'</sup>*la ta-aš<sub>2</sub>-me-a ina ŠA<sub>3</sub> aš-šur* DINGIR.MEŠ-*ia<sub>2</sub> at-ta-ma* <sup>19'</sup>*šum-ma ina GISSU ša<sub>2</sub>* DINGIR.MEŠ *ur-ki-u a-na pa-ni-i* <sup>20'</sup>[*l*]a *u<sub>2</sub>-sam-ma-ak-ka-ku-nu-ni*

offer (with a command): rev. <sup>14',-17'</sup>Now I am writing to you: bring me Nabû-bêl-šumāti (and) those who are with him and I shall bring you your gods and establish peace.

threat (with an oath): rev. <sup>17',-20'</sup>However, if you keep disobeying me, I swear by Aššūr (and) my gods that with their help I will make your future even more difficult than your past.

SAA 21 66 (Parpola 2018, 60–61) is another letter from the king that also demands that Nabû-bêl-šumāti be extradited to Assyria. The beginning is completely broken, but after offering some choice insults for Nabû-bêl-šumāti, Assurbanipal reacts to the reproachful question from the addressee:

obv. <sup>7'</sup>*ma-a mi-i-nu e-pu-uš a-na* MAN KUR.AN.ŠAR<sub>2</sub>.KI <sup>8'</sup>*u ki-i an-ni-i e-pu-uš-an-ni* <sup>9'</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.LUL-MU : *ša<sub>2</sub> ina IGI-ka še-bi-la* <sup>10'</sup>[x<sup>1</sup> a mat : *sak-ku-uk-ku-tu<sub>2</sub>* m.d.PA-EN-MU.MEŠ <sup>11'</sup>[x x x]x *šu-u am-mar an-ni-i gab-bu* <sup>be12'</sup>[x x]-*ta-ku-nu ina UGU-ḫi-šu<sub>2</sub>*

reproach: obv. <sup>7',-8',-4'</sup>What did I do to the king of Assyria that he treats me this way?

command (with an insult?): obv. <sup>9'</sup>Bring me this traitor who is in your presence, the (...) idiocy, Nabû-bêl-šumāti!

The following, badly damaged passage can only be a further justification: it is Nabû-bêl-šumāti who is the reason for the misfortune experience by the addressee and the group he belongs to (obv. <sup>be12'</sup>[x-x]-*ta-ku-nu* is the plural suffix) and the reason for their treatment by the Assyrian king.

In no part of the corpus is that perhaps more evident than here: the reproaches from the persons with a lower position in hierarchy are often formulated in such a manner that they emphasise the innocence or the undeserved suffering of the sender/speaker. The reproaches from the persons higher in the hierarchy are clearly meant to effect compliance with the wishes of the person writing. Although a similar function is also sometimes evident in the petitions to the king, in which the senders recount their failures in ensuring the cooperation of the equals or superiors, Assurbanipal hardly needs to present himself as a

<sup>330</sup> Fink 2018 compares the image of the king as traceable from the royal inscriptions and from the royal letters. It is a pity that he compared the inscriptions of Sennacherib with the scholarly letters to Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal. The inscriptions of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal do assume a different tone than those of Esarhaddon, and I think there are also differences in style in the letters from different kings.

bedraggled sufferer, ever patient with his subjects and neighbours. If anything, he rather seems to imply that the Elamite elders are ingrates who do not properly appreciate his benevolence.

### Neo-Babylonian letters in the Neo-Assyrian royal correspondence

The oldest item from this part of the corpus is SAA 19 136 (Luukko 2012b, 139–140), dated to the reign of Tiglath-pileser. The sender, Nabû-balāssu-iqbi, a tribal leader from Babylonia, is reproached for not sending messages to the king. The reproach is interesting, as it does emphasise the mutual nature of the relationship between the king and his correspondent:

obv. <sup>7</sup>(...) *um-ma* LU<sub>2</sub>.A-KIN-*ka* <sup>8</sup>u<sub>3</sub><sup>1</sup> [f]e<sub>3</sub>-en-<sup>9</sup>ga<sup>1</sup> ul-tu pa-ni-ia <sup>9</sup>p[e-e]s-<sup>10</sup>nu um<sup>1</sup>-ma mi-nam-ma  
<sup>10</sup>š[i]-p[ir-t]i a-šap-pa-rak-kam<sub>2</sub>-ma <sup>11</sup>g[ab-r]i la <sup>12</sup>tu<sup>1</sup>-šeb-<sup>13</sup>bi<sup>1</sup>-[l]a

complaint: obv. <sup>7-9</sup>‘Your messenger and your [re]ports remain c[on]cealed from me.’

reproach: obv. <sup>9-11</sup>‘Why do I keep sending you my m[essa]ges (but) you sen[d] me no r[epl]y?’

Thus called to account, Nabû-balāssu-iqbi hastens to assert his innocence:

obv. <sup>12</sup>(...) *ši-pir-[ta]-*‘a<sup>1</sup> <sup>13</sup>a-na pa<sup>1</sup>-an ‘LUGAL<sup>1</sup> LUGAL.‘MEŠ?‘<sup>14</sup>[l]u? ‘a<sup>1</sup>-šap-pa-ra <sup>15</sup>mam-  
ma LU<sub>2</sub>.A-KIN.[ME]Š-<sup>16</sup>[i]a <sup>16</sup>a<sup>1</sup>-na ḥa-an-ṭiš ‘a<sup>1</sup>-na pa-an <sup>17</sup>[L]UGA[L] ‘ul<sup>1</sup> u<sub>2</sub>-š[e-t]i-iq

rev. <sup>1</sup>u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-še-<sup>2</sup>ša<sup>1</sup>-šu<sub>2</sub>

protestations of innocence: obv. <sup>12-14</sup>I [d]o [inde]d send [m]y messages to the king of king[s].

counterclaim: obv. <sup>15-17</sup>(But) somebody has not pe[rmi]tted my messenge[rs] to face the  
[k]ing with due haste (but) sends them away.

It seems that the only way to claim innocence was by accusing somebody else.

8 reproaches could be identified in among the Babylonian correspondence of Sargon II and Sennacherib edited in SAA 17, but as many as 5 are either emitted by the senders themselves or, when quoted, do not include reactions<sup>331</sup>. Of the remaining three, all dated to the reign of Sargon II, SAA 17 21 was already discussed in the preceding section.

In SAA 17 68 (Dietrich 2003, 64–65), the relevant passage is not completely preserved, but a sufficient part is preserved to identify the reaction as an excuse:

obv. <sup>13</sup>[um]-ma mi-nam-ma ul-tu [re-eš-šu] <sup>14</sup>[a-di] a-kan-na a-na 5-šu<sub>2</sub> a-na 6-[šu<sub>2</sub>] <sup>15</sup>ši-pir-ta-ka  
am-mar u<sub>3</sub> e[n-na] <sup>16</sup>ul-tu E<sub>2</sub> f.bar-si-pi-t[i] <sup>17</sup>a-na pa-ni-ku-nu tal-li-ka 1-[en] <sup>18</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.A-šip-ri-  
k[u-nu] ‘a<sup>1</sup>-ta-mar ina UD-1-[KAM<sub>2</sub>] <sup>19</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> ITI.ZIZ<sub>2</sub> f.bar-si-pi-ta u m.d.AG-M[U-SUM] <sup>20</sup>a-  
na pa-ni-ni i-ter-bu-ni UD-16-KAM<sub>2</sub> <sup>21</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> [ITI.ZIZ<sub>2</sub>] <sup>21</sup>KASKAL.2 a-na GIR<sub>3</sub>.2 <sup>22</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.A-

<sup>331</sup> These are located in SAA 17 21, SAA 17 105, SAA 17 117, SAA 17 133, SAA 17 139.



KIN.MEŠ *ša*<sub>2</sub> LU[GAL] <sup>22</sup>*be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia al-[t]a-kan* *u*<sub>3</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.A-KIN.[MEŠ-*a-ni*] <sup>23</sup>*it-ti-šu<sub>2</sub>-n[u] a-na*  
*šul-mu* LUGAL *b[e-li<sub>2</sub>-ia]* <sup>24</sup>*al-tap-r[a*

reproach: obv. <sup>13-18</sup>. ‘Why is that from the [beginning until] now I have seen five or six of your messages, but n[ow] that Barsipītu has come to you, I have (only) seen on[e] of your messengers?’

denial of offence: obv. <sup>18-24</sup>. Barsipītu and Nabû-šu[mu-iddin] arrived to us on the fi[rst] day of the month of Šabātu. On the 16<sup>th</sup> day of [Šabātu], I sent the messengers of the ki[ng], my lord, on their way, and I sent [my] messenger[s] with the[m] to greet the king, [my] l[ord].

The reaction to the reproach in SAA 17 158 (Dietrich 2003, 141–142) is much better preserved:

obv. <sup>3</sup>(...) *um-ma* ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ-*ka ki-i taš-pu-ru* <sup>4</sup>*ni-ka-si a-na* ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bi* URU *ki-i u<sub>2</sub>-nak-ki-su* <sup>5</sup>*šil-ta-ḥu* E<sub>2</sub>.SIG<sub>4</sub> E<sub>2</sub>-DINGIR.MEŠ *un-del-lu-u<sub>2</sub>* <sup>6</sup>ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ-*ia* *ša<sub>2</sub> ṭe<sub>3</sub>-e-ma a-ḥa-meš iš-ku-nu um-ma mam-ma* <sup>7</sup>*mam-ma la i-maḥ-ḥaš* *u*<sub>3</sub> NIMGIR<sub>2</sub> *mam-ma la i-de-ek-ku* <sup>8</sup>*ul a-na* MU-<sup>1</sup>*i* <sup>9</sup>*ša<sub>2</sub>* DINGIR.MEŠ *ip-la-ḥu-ma ṭe<sub>3</sub>-e-[m]a* <sup>9</sup>*a-ḥa-meš iš-ku-nu mi-nam-ma a-na* UN.MEŠ [x x x] <sup>10</sup>*u šil-ta-ḥu a-na* E<sub>2</sub>.SIG<sub>4</sub> E<sub>2</sub>-DINGIR.MEŠ [x x] <sup>11</sup>*šu<sub>2</sub>-u<sub>2</sub>* ERIN<sub>2</sub>.MEŠ-*ia* *ša<sub>2</sub> iš-ḥi-ṭu-ma it-ti* E<sub>2</sub>.S[IG<sub>4</sub> E<sub>2</sub>-DINGIR.MEŠ] <sup>12</sup>*iz-zi-zu i-na* ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bi u<sub>2</sub>-še-zi-z[u]* <sup>13</sup>*ak-ka-a-a-i* GIŠ.PAN *a-na* E<sub>2</sub>.SIG<sub>4</sub> E<sub>2</sub>-[DINGIR.MEŠ] <sup>14</sup>*li-iš-ba-tu*

royal accusation:

obv. <sup>3-5</sup>(...) saying: ‘The troops you sent, when they breached into the city, they completely coated the temple wall with arrows!’

explanation: obv. <sup>6-7</sup>. My soldiers who gave each other orders, said (to each other): ‘Nobody is to strike anybody, and the herald may not draft anybody!’

argument: obv. <sup>8-9</sup>. Did they not give each other (such) orders (because) they fear the name of the gods?

denial of offence (?):

obv. <sup>9-10</sup>. Why would (?) they [...] to the people and why would there be arrows<sup>332</sup> on the temple wall?

denial of offence (with an argument):

<sup>332</sup> The Akkadian pattern of use of the noun *šiltāḥu* includes many instances in which a singular form could stand for a collective noun and the English translation with a plural form would certainly be closer to the meaning intended by the ancient scribe, see especially CAD Š/III, 449, sub *šiltāḥu* 1b.2’. Additionally, the combination of *šiltāḥu* with *mullū* in obv. 4. of SAA 17 158 makes any other translation impossible: one cannot, after all, ‘fill’ a wall with a single arrow. If the singular form of ‘arrow’ in obv. 10. were introduced with the meaning ‘(not even) one arrow’, I believe the presence of the numeral would be necessary.

obv. <sup>11-14</sup> The men of mine who attacked (and) who stood by the wall – I assigned them there myself. How could (a single?) bow hit the wall of the t[emple]?

The sender, Marduk-aplu-iddina is identified by the editor with the Babylonian king (Dietrich 2003, 141, n. 158). His protestations of innocence (for his soldiers) are fascinating for the arguments he uses to support his claims. His men could not commit the sacrilege they are accused of because they fear the gods. In the second place, it was Marduk-aplu-iddina who stationed them near the temple, and it seems that it is implied that his reputation should protect his subordinates from accusations.

Only 6 reproaches could be identified among the Babylonian correspondence of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal edited in SAA 18. 4 of them are either attributed to the sender or do not include a reaction<sup>333</sup>. The remaining two both refer to potential situations and are discussed in the preceding section.

### Early Neo-Babylonian governor's archive from Nippur

Compared with the Babylonian letters from the Neo-Assyrian archives, the number of the reproaches in the archive of the governor of Nippur is much higher – more than one third of all letters includes at least one.

The situation with which one is immediately confronted, however, is that the reproaches are written for the most part by the senders and not quoted from previous letters written by the addressees: there are only three such letters in this group. This is in line with the overall writing style in this archive: both partners in an epistolographic exchange devote relatively little place to recounting previous messages they received. Topics, as a rule, are only introduced with a simple *aššu* + noun phrase, usually accompanied by a relative clause (typically *ša TOA išpura*).

No. 78 (Cole 1996b, 168–169) is a letter to a brother, which begins with a reproach from the addressee:

obv. <sup>5</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> ŠEŠ-u<sub>2</sub>-a iš-pur um-ma <sup>6</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>-u<sub>2</sub>-tu<sub>2</sub> am-me-ni taḥ-liq <sup>7</sup>a-<sup>1</sup>na<sup>1</sup>(eras.)-kan-na-ka aš<sub>2</sub>-bat  
<sup>8</sup>d.EN u<sub>3</sub> d.AG lu-u<sub>2</sub> i-du-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>9</sup>U<sub>8</sub> NU-BAD-ta ina IGI-ia <sup>10</sup>i-pet-tu ki-i il-lik <sup>11</sup>um-ma m.nu-um-  
mur a<sup>1</sup>-na <sup>12</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.ḫa-bi-i' iš-pur-an-na <sup>13</sup>ar<sub>2</sub>-ka a-na-ku mi-nu-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>14</sup>lu-u<sub>2</sub>-uq-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>  
ZID<sub>2</sub>.DA.KASKAL <sup>15</sup>a-na ku-lu-ku-šu<sub>2</sub> at-ta-du <sup>16</sup>u<sub>3</sub> a-na LU<sub>2</sub>.ḫa-bi-i' it-ta-lak-ka

reproach: obv. <sup>5-7</sup> As to what my brother wrote to me: 'Why did the slave run away (and) settle there?'

protestation of innocence (with an oath):

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<sup>333</sup> These include SAA 18 3, SAA 18 70, SAA 18 177, and SAA 18 181. The case of SAA 18 70 (Reynolds 2003, 53–55) might be slightly more complex – the reaction of the Nippur governor and the citizens of Nippur towards the reproaches from other lands for allying themselves with Assyria (obv. 16.-17.) is their unwavering loyalty – or at least so they imply.

obv. <sup>8-12</sup>Bēl and Nabû know indeed (that) they will open an unopened ewe<sup>334</sup> before me if he did not come to me, saying: ‘Nummur has sent me to the Ḫabi’ people.’!

protestation of innocence (with a declaration of helplessness):

obv. <sup>13-14</sup>What was I to say after that?

admission: obv. <sup>14-16</sup>I gave him provisions for his storehouse, and he went to the Ḫabi’.

The sender is declaring his innocence and using an oath with a rather gruesome apodosis to argue that he should not be blamed as he was lied to. Apparently, it is enough that one fell victim to deceit – being kept in ignorance, especially if this is due to someone’s dirty machinations – absolves one of responsibility. Based on what he knew, the sender had no choice but provide supplies to the fugitive and let him pass. That the sender does not admit any responsibility is also evident from the fact that he does not offer any kind of redress.

No. 109 (Cole 1996b, 220–221) is a letter sent to a ‘brother’. The reproach is for giving silver to somebody who has already been paid:

obv. <sup>6</sup>um-ma mi-nam-ma <sup>7</sup>ša<sub>2</sub>-la-nu-u<sub>2</sub>-a KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR a-na m.ib-na-a <sup>9</sup>ta-nam-<sup>r</sup>di-na<sup>1</sup>-[aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub>]  
<sup>10</sup>i-na ŠU.2-šu<sub>2</sub> n[a(?) -din(?)] <sup>11</sup>r<sup>2</sup> ½ <sup>r</sup>MA<sup>1</sup>. [NA]

rev. <sup>1</sup> KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR<sup>1</sup> at-tan-na-ši <sup>2</sup>en-na ŠEŠ-u<sub>2</sub>-a <sup>3</sup>la im-mi-rik-ki <sup>4</sup>lil-li-kam<sub>2</sub>-ma <sup>5</sup>di-i-nu it-ti-  
šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>6</sup>nid-bu-ub ia-a<sup>7</sup>-nu <sup>7</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.aḫ-la-mu-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>8</sup>u UR.GIR<sub>15</sub> 1-en ša<sub>2</sub> <sup>r</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.sar<sup>1</sup>-[ru-ti]

reproach: obv. <sup>6-9</sup>‘Why are you giving silver to Ibnâ without my authorisation?’

complaint: obv. <sup>10</sup>‘It [has been] gi[ven?] to him (already).’

explanation: obv. <sup>11</sup>-rev. <sup>1</sup>‘I gave him 2½ mi[nas] of silver.’

compliance (with a pre-request and a request):

rev. <sup>2-6</sup>Now, may my brother not dither and come, so that we can go to court against him.

argument (?): rev. <sup>6-8</sup>There are no Aḫlamû nor a single dog-of-a-cri[minal] (here).

The reproach is accompanied by a complaint and information, presumably new to the sender of the present letter, that the silver has already been paid. In his reaction, the sender only tacitly admits that the addressee was right by asking him to come so that together they can recover the unjustifiably paid silver.

<sup>334</sup> According to Cole 1996b, 168-169, n. to line 9. this implies an act of bestiality.

The remaining reproaches are either not quoted or quoted without a reaction. However, the moves following the reproaches are complex enough that thanks to the relatively large number, one can form a picture of what they were used for, at least in this part of the corpus.

A good example of what occurs here is No. 2 (Cole 1996b, 40–42), a letter exchanged among ‘brothers’. The sender quotes a previous request from the addressee – for a certain Šalim to be detained and isolated. The addressee must have been unsatisfied with the reaction of the sender since he writes again to emphasise that nobody else may confine him (= Šalim) and that he should wait until the sender can personally take him away. To this, the sender reacts with protestations of innocence, particularly interesting for the patterns of argumentation they employ. Nonetheless, in the following part of the letter it becomes clear that the quotations from previous correspondence with the addressee, as well as the emphasis on the proper conduct of the sender serve to prepare the ground for a complaint:

obv. <sup>21</sup>(...) 1-en-šu<sub>2</sub> 2-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>be22</sup>la kit-ta-a <sup>be23</sup>aḥ-tar-ša-a

rev. <sup>1</sup>en-na a-šap-pa-rak-kam<sub>2</sub>-ma <sup>2</sup>ul <sup>1</sup>ta<sup>1</sup>-qi<sub>2</sub>-pan-ni <sup>3</sup>ina maḥ-<sup>1</sup>ri<sup>1</sup>-i L[U<sub>2</sub>].sar-ru-ti-<sup>1</sup>ia<sub>5</sub> <sup>4</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> LU<sub>2</sub>.tu<sub>2</sub>-<sup>1</sup>ka<sup>1</sup> ki-i u<sub>2</sub>-šab-bit <sup>5</sup>1-en 5 KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR ta-an-da-ḥar-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu-tu <sup>6</sup>ina ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi an-<sup>1</sup>ni<sup>1</sup>-i MUN.HI.A-a <sup>7</sup>ḥu-su-u[s] am-me-ni LU<sub>2</sub>.ḥal-qu <sup>8</sup>tu-tir-ram-ma a-na LU<sub>2</sub>.be-li<sub>2</sub>-KUR<sub>2</sub>-ia <sup>9</sup>ta-nam-<sup>1</sup>din<sup>1</sup> ki-i mi-nam-ma <sup>10</sup>te-ri-<sup>1</sup>ša<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>-an-ni šup-ram-ma <sup>11</sup>lu-še-bi-lak-ka u<sub>3</sub> ki-i <sup>12</sup>ku-tal-<sup>1</sup>lu<sup>1</sup>-ta šu<sub>2</sub>-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>13</sup>tu-kal da-ša<sub>2</sub>-an-ni <sup>14</sup>šup-ru AD.MEŠ-u<sub>2</sub>-nu <sup>15</sup>a-ḥa-meš ku-ul-lu <sup>16</sup>u<sub>3</sub> 1-en <sup>1</sup>a<sup>1</sup>-na a-a-li <sup>17</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>2</sub>-ni-i u<sub>2</sub>-šu-uz-zu

protestation of innocence: obv. <sup>21-be.23</sup>Have I made an unjustified withdrawal<sup>335</sup> (even) once or twice?

criticism: rev. <sup>1.-2</sup>Now I am writing to you (because) you did not believe me.

argument (from previous events):

rev. <sup>3.-5</sup>Before, when I captured my [ab]ductors of your slaves, you have received them for (only) five (shekels) each.

demand of gratitude:

rev. <sup>6.-7</sup>On this basis, rememb[er] my generosity!

reproach: rev. <sup>7.-9</sup>Why are you giving the runaway to my enemy?

promise of reciprocation (with a request):

rev. <sup>9.-11</sup>If you need anything, write to me, (and) I will send it to you.

request: rev. <sup>11.-14</sup>If it is reserve duty that you are detaining him for, send rings/bracelets!

<sup>335</sup> On the meaning of the verb *ḥarāṣu* in this archive, see Cole 1996b, 42, n. to line 23.

argument (from common affiliation):

rev. <sup>14.-17</sup>Our fathers hold (their offices) together, and one comes to the help of the other.

The reproach (underlined above) is one of the two central parts of the letter. In the first place, the sender reminds the addressee about his previous letters – the act of quoting two letters after each other likely already serves to imply displeasure. This he follows with assertion of innocence by means of a rhetorical question and criticises the addressee by naming his offence (rev. 2. *ul<sup>1</sup> ta<sup>1</sup>-qi<sub>2</sub>-pan-ni*, you did not believe me). The criticism is further emphasised by a reminder of a previous favour with an explicit demand to recognise the favour for what it was. Underlying the sender's point is his expectation that relations between 'brothers' have to be mutually beneficial, and every favour has to be returned<sup>336</sup>. The reminder also serves as an argument for the following reproach: although the sender's conduct is irreproachable, and further, he also granted favours to the addressee before, the addressee did not fulfil the obligation of reciprocity and is giving the runaway to the sender's enemy. Following the reproach, the sender promises to send anything that the addressee may want – as a further means of persuading the addressee to do his bidding.

A further hint about the function of reproaches can be found in Nos. 38 (Cole 1996b, 107–109) and 57 (Cole 1996b, 136–137). In both letters, the questions with reproaches are uttered in the context of legal proceedings, thus suggesting that they served to demand accountability (No. 57):

obv. <sup>15</sup>(...) m.nu-<sup>r</sup>um<sup>1</sup>-mu-ru <sup>16</sup>DUMU m.IR<sub>3</sub>-GIR<sub>4</sub>.KU<sub>3</sub> E<sub>2</sub> di-ni it-<sup>r</sup>ti<sup>1</sup> <sup>17</sup>m.la-qi<sub>2</sub>-pu i-dab-bu-ub  
um-ma <sup>18</sup>mi-nam-ma ANŠE.KUNGA.MEŠ <sup>be19</sup>a-na <m.>gu-lu-šu<sub>2</sub> ul ta-a[d-din] <sup>be20</sup>ul a-na-  
ku-u<sub>2</sub> ANŠE.KUN[GA.MEŠ]

rev. <sup>1</sup>a-bu-ka ḫa-tu u mi-reš-t[i<sup>1</sup>] <sup>2</sup>be-li<sub>2</sub> ki-i u<sub>2</sub>-še-bi-li ANŠE.KUN[GA.MEŠ] <sup>3</sup>ul-tu  
KUR.NIM.MA.KI in-da-ḫar u m.nu-[um-mu-ru] <sup>3</sup>a-na be-li<sub>2</sub> <sup>1</sup>di<sup>1</sup>-ni ša<sub>2</sub> be-li<sub>2</sub>-ia it-tu-r[u]

report (with a reproach):

obv. <sup>15</sup>- rev. <sup>1</sup>Nummuru, son of Arad-Nergal, is suing Lāqīpu, (saying): 'Why did you not g[ive] the mules to Gulūšu? Did I not bring the mu[les] myself?'

explanation: rev. <sup>1.-3</sup>When my lord had sent the payment and the consignment, he received mu[les] from Elam (and) becam[e] the adversary of my lord in court.

It is even more striking in No. 38 – here the reproachful questions are being asked by the person who will hear the case:

rev. <sup>3</sup>aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> di-ni ša<sub>2</sub> m.mu-šeb-ši <sup>4</sup>DUMU m.da-bi-bi ša<sub>2</sub> be-li<sub>2</sub> iš-pur <sup>5</sup>di-in-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu a-na ITI.BAR<sub>2</sub>  
<sup>6</sup>a-na KA<sub>2</sub>.DINGIR. 'RA.KI' a-na pa-an <sup>7</sup>m.TUK-ši-DINGIR DUMU m.ga-ḫal 'ša<sub>2</sub>-kin' <sup>8</sup>um-

<sup>336</sup> One could argue that this is but an instance of the expectation of equal treatment, so present in the entire correspondence.

ma m.TUK-ši-DINGIR DUMU m.<sup>9</sup>ga-ḫal<sup>9</sup> LU<sub>2</sub>.mu-kin-na mi-nam-ma<sup>10</sup> m.NIG<sub>2</sub>.BA-ia  
 'DUMU' m.ina-PA.ŠE.KI-U<sub>3</sub>.TU<sup>11</sup> ina UNUG.KI i-<sup>1</sup>dab-bu<sup>1</sup>-ub um-ma<sup>12</sup> 1 GU<sub>2</sub>.UN  
 KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR m.mu-šeb-ša<sub>2</sub>-a-a<sup>13</sup> LU<sub>2</sub>.<sup>1</sup>ŠA<sub>3</sub>.TAM LU<sub>2</sub>.AD.AD<sup>1</sup>-ka<sup>14</sup> a-na maš-ka-at-<sup>1</sup>ta ki<sup>1</sup>-  
 i iš-kun<sup>15</sup> m.mu-šeb-ša<sub>2</sub>-a-a ki i-mu-u<sub>2</sub>-ti<sup>16</sup> 1 GU<sub>2</sub>.UN KU<sub>3</sub>.BABBAR a-na ram-ni-šu<sub>2</sub><sup>17</sup> it-ta-  
 šu<sub>2</sub> en-na ID<sub>2</sub>.ḫ[ur]-<sup>1</sup>ša<sub>2</sub>-na<sup>18</sup> pa-ri-si INIM.M[EŠ]

introduction of the topic:

rev. <sup>3-4</sup>. As to the case of Mušebši, son of Dābibī, about which my lord wrote me:

report: rev. <sup>5-7</sup>. their case (is to be) submitted to Rāši-ili, son of Gaḫal, in Babylon at the beginning of the month of Nisannu.

report (with an accusation and a reproach):

rev. <sup>7-16</sup>. Thus Rāši-ili, son of Gaḫal: ‘Why is Qīštiya, son of Ina-Isin-alid, speaking (maliciously)<sup>337</sup> about the witness in Uruk: ‘After Mušebšâya, the temple steward (and) your grandfather, deposited one talent of silver in the storehouse, (and) after Mušebšâya died, he took the one talent of silver for himself.’ Now the river o[rd]eal will decide the matte[rs].’

The question seems not to be directed at the person spreading the rumours, at least if the message cited by the sender is to be treated as a verbatim quotation, and since the accusations refer to a witness, a more complex case must be at least hinted at here. Nonetheless, it seems to be clear that a person with sufficient authority and power is allowed to ask questions that presume the guilt of the other party (other parties) and expects to be satisfied with an answer. There is nothing that would formally differentiate this kind of question from the why-questions asked by subordinates or equals, suggesting that the context must have played the decisive role.

The remaining 23 reproaches, 3 are too broken to be of any use<sup>338</sup>. Twice the reproaches feature in or directly after protestations of correct conduct<sup>339</sup>. One is a potential reproach from the king, not present during the exchange, used as an argument to reject a transaction the speaker deems to be unprofitable<sup>340</sup>. The remaining 17, however, are all located in letters of complaint<sup>341</sup>. These include complaints about lack of messages or messengers, and can be almost entirely expressed by the reproaches themselves, as in No. 104 (Cole 1996b, 214–215):

<sup>337</sup> Cole 1996b, 109, in commentary to line 32 points out that in this context *dabābu* should be translated ‘to spread rumours about someone’. While I agree that *dabābu* here is more than just ‘speaking’, I think ‘rumours’ might be too specific. The translation in CAD (‘to devise a plot, to conspire against’, CAD D, 11) is also accurate, but the underlying meaning in all these cases is ‘to speak maliciously’.

<sup>338</sup> Nos. 20, 28, and 110.

<sup>339</sup> Nos. 23 and 98.

<sup>340</sup> No. 56.

<sup>341</sup> Nos. 2, 3, 11, 26, 31, 36, 37, 64, 65, 69, 71, 79, 87, 90, 103, 104, 107.

obv. <sup>4</sup>am<sup>1</sup>-me-<sup>r</sup>ni<sup>1</sup> ul-<sup>r</sup>tu<sup>1</sup> <sup>5</sup>a-na LU<sub>2</sub> E<sub>2</sub>-a-<sup>r</sup>ram<sup>1</sup> <sup>6</sup>tal-<sup>r</sup>lik<sup>1</sup> te<sub>3</sub>-en-<sup>r</sup>ga<sup>1</sup> <sup>7</sup>u<sub>3</sub> šu-lum-<sup>r</sup>ga<sup>1</sup> <sup>8</sup>la<sup>1</sup> a-šem-  
<sup>r</sup>mu<sup>1</sup> <sup>9</sup>na-kut-ti ar<sub>2</sub>-<sup>r</sup>šik<sub>2</sub>-ku<sup>1</sup>

reproach: obv. <sup>4-8</sup>.Why don't I hear your news or your greeting after you went to the people of Bīt-Aram?

complaint: obv. <sup>9</sup>.I have been worrying about you.

In this case, the complaint is followed with a report about the sender's own messenger and urging him to come personally, but there can also be a request to send a tablet (No. 107, obv. 12.-rev. 3.)<sup>342</sup>.

Several complaints refer to broken promises (Nos. 26, and 36) – they must be categorised as such based on the reproachful reaction of the senders, who certainly seem to be taking them seriously, as in No. 26 (Cole 1996b, 87–88):

obv. <sup>5</sup>ul<sup>1</sup> ki-i pi-i an-<sup>r</sup>ni<sup>1</sup>-i <sup>6</sup>[Š]EŠ-<sup>r</sup>u<sub>2</sub>-a<sup>1</sup> iq-ba-a<sup>1</sup> <sup>7</sup>um-ma<sup>1</sup> a-na pa-an <sup>8</sup>[LU<sub>2</sub>] <sup>r</sup>bi<sup>1</sup>-ri-ta a-ne<sub>2</sub>-eḫ-  
 ḫi-si <sup>9</sup>[en-na] <sup>r</sup>am<sup>1</sup>-me-ni ŠEŠ-u<sub>2</sub>-a <sup>10</sup>[la il]-lik-ma u<sub>2</sub>-šib

reminder (with a promise):

obv. <sup>5-8</sup>.Did not my brother tell me as follows: 'I will return to [the people] of Birītu.'

reproach: obv. <sup>9-10</sup>.[Now], why did my brother [not g]o (but) stayed?

Finally, the distribution of the terms of address in letters with reproaches is certainly interesting. Reproaches occur in the context of complaints in 17 letters, and while one of them is a message to be passed on to a third party only mentioned by name (in No. 69), of the remaining 16, 13 are located in letters addressed to 'brothers'. Of the remaining 3, two occur in letters from a 'father' to a 'son' – but in both cases the father is the owner of the archive, Kudurru. The last letter, No. 103, is addressed to a 'lord'. Since as many as 30 out of 113 letters in this corpus are addressed to 'lords', this distribution seems to be more than an accident of preservation.

## Neo-Babylonian institutional correspondence

There is again a relatively high number of reproaches in this part of the corpus, but the overwhelming majority is not quoted. Before taking a look at the reproaches uttered by the senders, I shall comment on the reproaches that include reactions.

No. 99 (Levavi 2018, 346–348) is a letter to a 'father', but the reproach cannot be attributed to the addressee. It was instead sent by the temple administrator:

obv. <sup>be15</sup>.LU.ŠA<sub>3</sub>.TAM il-tap-ra

<sup>342</sup> Similar reproaches about the lack of messages and messengers are Nos. 26, 64, and 71.

rev. <sup>1</sup>um-ma mi-nam-ma <sup>2</sup>GIŠ.DA ša<sub>2</sub> ŠE.BAR *tup-pi* <sup>3</sup>ša<sub>2</sub> UDU.NITA<sub>2</sub>.ME ša<sub>2</sub> ina ŠU.2 LU<sub>2</sub>.na-qid<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ <sup>4</sup>ab-ku-nu it-ti-ia <sup>5</sup>la taš-kun-šu d.UTU ki-i <sup>6</sup>m.d.INNIN.NA-NUMUN-TIL it-ti-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>7</sup>la iš-ku-šu<sub>2</sub>-nu-tu a-mur <sup>8</sup>a-ḥa-ri-ma<sup>1</sup> ina ŠU.2 mam-ma <sup>9</sup>a-na EN-ia<sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-še-bi-la <sup>10</sup>d.UTU ki-i a-kan-na la u<sub>2</sub>-ba-<sup>1</sup>a-u<sub>2</sub> <sup>11</sup>a-mur-ra

introduction of a topic (with a reproach):

obv. <sup>be15</sup>.-rev. <sup>5</sup>The temple administrator wrote to me: ‘Why did you not deposit with me the writing-board of the barley (and) the tablet of the sheep that were taken from the shepherd?’

protestation of innocence (with an oath):

rev. <sup>5-7</sup>By Šamaš, Innin-zēru-šubši did deposit them with him!

promise of redress:

rev. <sup>7-9</sup>Look, I will prepare them and send to my lord with a messenger.

protestation of innocence (with an oath):

rev. <sup>10-11</sup>By Šamaš, (I swear that) I looked for them here and did not find them.

The reaction of the sender is to deny his offence by means of an oath and then to promise to send the tablet again, nonetheless. The temple administrator is referred to as ‘lord’, and in this sense the letter is reminiscent of the Neo-Assyrian administrative correspondence, with the subordinates being made accountable for their misconduct. There seem to be two parallel issues at hand here: although the sender believes himself personally not responsible for the non-delivery of the tablet and the writing board, he still promises to send them again. As already seen in the preceding chapter, sometimes the innocence was not everything.

No. 174 (Levavi 2018, 443–445) is an entirely different kind of a letter: a complaint about the actions of a third party with a petition for intervention to the royal resident, temple administrator, and the scribe of Eanna, after the sender exhausted all possibilities of solving the issue on his own. The reproach is uttered by the sender himself to the person who is the reason for all his trouble:

rev. <sup>5</sup>GIŠ.GEŠTIN ki-i iq-tu-pu <sup>6</sup>it-ta-ši a-qa<sub>2</sub>-ba-aš<sub>2</sub>-šu<sub>2</sub> <sup>7</sup>um-ma LU<sub>2</sub>.UMBISAG E<sub>2</sub> i-ta-mar <sup>8</sup>mi-nam-ma ša<sub>2</sub> la LU<sub>2</sub>.UMBISAG E<sub>2</sub> <sup>9</sup>GIŠ.GEŠTIN a-ga-a ta-qaṭ-ṭap <sup>10</sup>iṭ-ṭe-ta<sup>1</sup>-an-ni ši-la-ni-ia<sub>2</sub> <sup>11</sup>ul-te-bi-ir

complaint (with a claim and a reproach):



rev. 5.-9. When he was picking the grapes and taking them away, I told him: ‘The temple scribe has already inspected it<sup>343</sup>. Why are you picking (the grapes) without the permission of the temple scribe?’

follow-up (lack of compliance):

rev. 10.-11. He beat me up (and) broke my ribs.

Although the situations of both letters are completely different, it is evident that in both of them the function of the reproach is to ensure cooperation of the other party. In No. 99 the temple administrator can use his own authority to force compliance, while in No. 174 the sender tries, without result, to borrow the power of the temple scribe.

Of the remaining 24 reproaches, the context of two is too unclear to allow further interpretation<sup>344</sup>, but the remaining 22 appear to be predominantly complaints. In 6 letters the reproaches are entirely on their own and no further moves are undertaken within the same topic (Nos. 44, 82, 88, 191, 148, 157) – however, in 4 of these letters the object of the reproach is the lack or delay of communication from the sender – either *šipirtu* (Nos. 88, 101 and 157) or *ṭēmu* (No. 148)<sup>345</sup>. Additionally, twice the reproaches are included in longer complaints about the delays in communication (Nos. 111 and 154).

The subject of the other complaints is either the lack of actions that the sender expected to be carried out by the addressee or the fact that the addressee has undertaken different actions than what the sender wishes – in the latter case, the sender might include a reminder with his previous request (No. obv. 12.-rev. 1.). Especially in the former case it is also quite evident that the sender means to ensure the cooperation of the addressee.

The relatively high number of reproaches related to the absence of communication, be it reports or commands, is interesting in view of the fact that what little excuses are present in this part of the corpus, they refer to the lack of messages or lack of personal visits. Although the data is meagre, it does suggest a pattern in which communication was expected and if reports, orders and letters were not forthcoming, at least the subordinates and equals had to make their excuses.

## Late Babylonian private correspondence

There are fewer reproaches in the private correspondence of the Late Babylonian period – only some 24, and only a single one quoted<sup>346</sup>. This is, however, not a significant enough difference to be explained by the difference between the private and institutional context.

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<sup>343</sup> *amāru* in this context means ‘to inspect in order to establish the imposts’, see Jursa 1998, 28.

<sup>344</sup> Nos. 145 and 208.

<sup>346</sup> With 26 reproaches per 217 letters in the institutional corpus and 24 reproaches per 242 letters in the private corpus, the difference is not very significant.

The single reproach cited together with a reaction is No. 40 (Hackl et al. 2014, 152–154):

rev. <sup>14</sup>(...) *um-ma mi-nam-ma* <sup>re15</sup>LU<sub>2</sub>.KIN.GI<sub>4</sub>.A-*ma la ta-aš<sub>2</sub>-pur* <sup>re16</sup>u EDEN *ta-an-di-ti* <sup>re17</sup>ina  
ŠA<sub>3</sub>-*bi ma-am la aš<sub>2</sub>-pu-rak-ka-ma*

e. <sup>1</sup>1-*en* LU<sub>2</sub>.KIN.GI<sub>4</sub>.A-*ka at-tu-ka li-il-li-ki u li-iḫ-ḫi-is*

reproach: rev. <sup>14.-re16</sup>‘Why didn’t you send a messenger and (why) did you make yourself scarce  
in the countryside?’

justification: rev. <sup>re16</sup>-e. <sup>1</sup>‘Did I not send you anybody so that your messenger can come (to me) and  
go back (to you)?’

The sender<sup>347</sup> refuses to recognise his offence and instead argues that his conduct was in fact, if not the better choice, than at least a good enough one.

The rest of the reproaches is emitted by the senders. They are usually directed at the addressees themselves, although in two cases (Nos. 213 and 224) the persons responsible are third parties. No. 213 (Hackl et al. 2014, 322–324) is a petition sent by a woman to her ‘father’, whom he has to ask for an intervention in view of her own inability to make her partners pay her out the dates that belong to her. Although she tries to negotiate with the persons she complains about, during the recounting of the first conversation she does not include her own words, and in the second conversation he only utters a demand that her property be returned to her. A third party is also responsible of in No. 224, although the complaint of the sender is partially broken and thus not entirely clear.

Even more of the reproaches from the private correspondence refer to the lack of communication: 9 items in total<sup>348</sup>. In this case the communication seems to have taken place between travelling merchants and their families, as evident for instance from No. 210 (Hackl et al. 2014, 319–320), a letter written to the wife of the sender:

obv. <sup>4</sup>(...) *ik-ki-bi ša<sub>2</sub>* DINGIR.MEŠ <sup>5</sup>*mi-nam-ma te<sub>3</sub>-e-mu-ku-nu* <sup>6</sup>*ul aš<sub>2</sub>-me*

complaint (with a value judgement):

obv. <sup>4</sup>‘This is a sin against the gods!’

reproach: obv. <sup>5.-6</sup>‘Why don’t I hear your (pl.) message?’

Again, it is likely not accidental that almost all excuses from this corpus refer to lack of or delays in communication – either messages not coming or persons not arriving although they should.

<sup>347</sup> Madān-bēlu-ušur, one of the most important slaves of the Egibi family (Hackl et al. 2014, 110).

<sup>348</sup> Nos. 19, 22, 96, 127, 195, 209, 210, 213, 224.

Although the reproaches together with reactions in the Neo- and Late Babylonian corpus are quite rare, the analysis of the unquoted reproaches helps to place them in their social context. Regardless of institutional or non-institutional milieu they seem to be above all aimed at achieving cooperation or compliance of the other party. The persons to whom the reproaches were addressed do sometimes assert their innocence or deny that any wrongdoing at all took place but based on the instances in which the sender recounts his conversation or letter exchanges with third parties who offer their excuses, it is evident that this was not deemed to be enough. When a sender cannot ensure the cooperation or compliance on their own, they describe their attempts to do so to a higher authority and wait for help. No. 99 from the institutional corpus demonstrates also that even when one was innocent, a redress had sometimes to be made.

## Literary Texts

A number of reproaches that are followed by reactions to them is attested in literary texts. They are all belong to the type used to ensure the cooperation of the other party and function as rebukes.

In Tablet VII of the epic of Gilgameš, Enkidu in despair calls out to the god Šamaš and proceeds to curse first the hunter and then Šamḥat, the harlot, who helped to civilise them – although Šamḥat clearly gets the shorter end of the stick (lines 93.-131.). The curse is heard by Šamaš, who is most certainly not impressed (George 2003, 640–643):

134. *am-me-ni d.en-ki-du<sub>3</sub> ḥa-rim-[t]i f.šam-ḥat ta-na-an-za-ar*

135. *ša<sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-ša-ki-lu-ka [NI]NDA.HI.A si-mat DINGIR-u<sub>2</sub>-ti*

136. *ku-ru-un-na iš-qu<sub>2</sub>-ka si-mat LUGAL-u<sub>2</sub>-ti*

137. *u<sub>2</sub>-lab-bi-šu-ka lu-ub-ša<sub>2</sub> ra-ba-a*

138. *u dam-qu d.GIŠ-gim<sub>2</sub>-maš tap-pa-a u<sub>2</sub>-šar-šu-ka ka-a-ša<sub>2</sub>*

139. *[e-n]in-na-a-ma d.GIŠ-gim<sub>2</sub>-maš ib-ri ta-li-me-ka*

140. *[uš-n]a-al-ka-a-ma ina ma-a-a-li GAL-i*

141. *[i-n]a ma-a-a-al tak-ni-i uš-na-al-ka-ma*

142. *[u<sub>2</sub>-še]š-šeb-ka šub-ta ne<sub>2</sub>-eḥ-ta šu-bat šu-me-li*

143. *[ma-al-k]a ša<sub>2</sub> qaq-qa-ri u<sub>2</sub>-na-aš<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub>-qu GIR<sub>3</sub>.2-ka*

144. *[u<sub>2</sub>-šab-k]ak-ka UN.MEŠ ša<sub>2</sub> UNUG.KI u<sub>2</sub>-šad-ma-ma-ak-ka*

145. *[šam-ḥa-ti] UN.MEŠ u<sub>2</sub>-ma-al-lak-ka dul<sub>6</sub>-la*

146. *[u<sub>3</sub> šu]-<sup>1</sup>u<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup> ar-ki-ka u<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub>-aš<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>2</sub>-a ma-la-a pa-gar-<sup>1</sup>šu<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>*

147. [*il-tab-bi-i*]š *maš-ki lab-bi-im-ma i-rap-pu-ud* E[DIN]

reproach: <sup>134.</sup>Why are you, Enkidu, cursing Šamḥat the harlot?

praise (for Šamḥat):

<sup>135.-138.</sup>She nourished you with bread, worthy of the gods. She poured you wine, worthy of kingship. She clothed you with a great robe and gave you Gilgameš for a friend.

reassurance: <sup>139.-147.</sup>[N]ow, Gilgameš, your beloved friend, [will] lay you on a great bed; he will lay you [o]n a bed of honour. He [will] set you on a seat of rest, on a seat to (his) left. [The prin]ces of the earth will kiss your feet. He [will make] the people of Uruk weep for you; he will make them sob for you. He will fill the [beautiful] people with misery. [And] after you (are gone), [h]e will carry on his body the matted hair (for mourning). [He will put o]n the skin of a lion and roam the c[ountryside].

Šamaš reproaches Enkidu for cursing Šamḥat and instead praises her civilising efforts: the bread is after all good enough for the gods (i.e. the divine offerings), and the wine fit for a king is objectively a luxury article. In the following move, Šamaš reassures Enkidu that his friend – whom he also owes to Šamḥat's cunning – will provide him with a proper funeral and mourn him correctly. As a result of this sequence, Enkidu calms down somewhat and provides Šamḥat with a blessing in addition to the curse (lines 151.-161.).

The second reproach from the epic of Gilgameš occurs in the rebuke chastising Enlil for causing the deluge (Tablet XI, (George 2003, 714–717):

183. *at-ta* ABGAL DINGIR.MEŠ *qu-ra-du*

184. *ki-i ki-i la tam-ta-lik-ma a-bu-bu taš-k[un]*

185. *be-el ar<sub>2</sub>-ni e-mid ḥi-ṭa-a-šu<sub>2</sub>*

186. *be-el gi<sub>l</sub><sub>2</sub>-la-ti e-mid gi<sub>l</sub><sub>2</sub>-lat-[su]*

187. *ru-um-me a-a ib-ba-ti-iq šu-du-ud a-a i[r-mu]*

188. *am-ma-ku taš-ku-nu a-bu-ba*

189. UR.MAH *lit-ba-am-ma* UN.MEŠ *li-ša-aḥ-ḥi-i[r]*

190. *am-ma-ku taš-ku-nu a-bu-ba*

191. UR.BAR.RA *lit-ba-am-ma* UN.MEŠ *li-ša-a-[ḥi-ir]*

192. *am-ma-ku taš-ku-nu a-bu-ba*

193. *ḥu-šaḥ-ḥu liš-ša<sub>2</sub>-kin-ma* KUR *liš-[giš]*

194. *am-ma-ku taš-ku-nu a-bu-ba*

195. *d.Er<sub>3</sub>-ra lit-ba-am-ma KUR li[š]-[giš]*<sup>1</sup>

196. *a-na-ku ul ap-ta-a pi-riš-ti* DINGIR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ

197. *at-ra-ḥa-sis šu-na-ta u<sub>2</sub>-šab-ri-šum-ma pi-riš-ti* DINGIR.MEŠ *iš-me*

198. *e-nin-na-ma mi-lik-šu<sub>2</sub> mil-ku*

reproach: <sup>183.-184.</sup>You, the wise one, the hero, how could you send the deluge without (any) counsel?

rebuke: <sup>185.-195.</sup>On one who commits an offense, impose his misdeed! On one who is guilty, impose [his] (own) crime! Slacken, lest it comes apart! Pull taut, lest is co[m]es slack! Instead of the deluge you sent, a lion could rise and dimini[sh] the people! Instead of the deluge you sent, a wolf could rise and dimi[nish] the people! Instead of the deluge you sent, a famine could strike and slaug[hter] the land. Instead of the deluge you sent, Erra could rise and slau[gh]ter the land!

declaration of innocence (partially by shifting the blame):

<sup>196.-197.</sup>I did not reveal the secrets of the great gods! (It was) Atra-ḥasis whom I showed a dream – he heard the secrets of the gods.

advice: <sup>198.</sup>Now, let us deliberate about his fate!

Ea proposes the usual enemies of humanity to take care of it next time – wild animals, famine and pestilence. Despite the Š-stem form in the declaration of innocence, the order of the clause, with the name of Atra-ḥasis placed in the prominent initial slot, feels like an attempt to deny responsibility. After all, *he* heard it, *I* wasn't even there. While no direct verbal reaction on the part of Enlil is recorded, he does not argue any further and proclaims instead the divine status of Ūta-napišti and his wife.

The final reproach accompanied by a reaction is attested in the Tablet I of the epic of Erra (Cagni 1969, 68–69):

102. *be-lum* <sup>1</sup>*d<sup>1</sup>.er<sub>3</sub>-ra min<sub>3</sub>-su a-na* DINGIR.[MEŠ HU]L-*tim<sub>2</sub> tak-p[u-ud]*

103. *a-na sa-pan* KUR.KUR *ḥul-lu-uq* [UN.MEŠ-*šin* HUL]-*tim tak-pu-ud-ma* [*l*]a t[*a-tur ana a*]*r-ki-ka*

reproach: <sup>102.-103.</sup>Lord Erra, why have you pla[n]ned ev[il] against the god[s]? You have schemed the complete destruction of the lands (and) [evi]l (against) [the people].

request: <sup>103.</sup>[Will] you [n]ot [turn ba]ck?

In the following lines, Erra demand Išum's attention, boasts of his power, and then seems to recount his conversation with Marduk. Išum's intervention is at this point unsuccessful.

All three reproaches, as reactions to them sufficiently prove, are meant as rebukes whose communicative goal is to ensure compliance with the wishes of the speaker. While Šamaš additionally follows his reproach with a lengthy reassurance, both he and Ea are successful, while Išum must wait for a more opportune time.

## Conclusions

The evidence is thus as follows: when the senders discover conduct that they find unacceptable, they for the most part do not seem to expect an excuse or an apology – or at least an apology is not enough. What they want is the redress for the offence. Only in the relatively minor cases are the excuses brought out: when senders apologise for not sending letters, not coming (also in answer to the royal summons), or in cases of extreme differences in relative social position, when they feel they must justify or excuse themselves for speaking up and writing in the first place. Sometimes the reproaches are met with a complete lack of understanding on the part of the recipient, who then answers with protestations of innocence. The claims of ignorance might be quite practical, if ignorance was deemed a sufficient excuse (as some letters might suggest, note also the ignorance of the great gods about Tīāmat's scheme in *enūma eliš*) or serve to present the sender as a kind of innocent sufferer, who did nothing to deserve the royal displeasure, while at the same time elevating the king to the divine position of utter ineffability.

Reproaches, or questions about why persons did what they did, regularly appear in complaints or in passages concerned with legal matters. In complaints, as some reactions show, they must serve as rebukes, while in the legal proceedings they seem to function as accusations. It is certainly interesting that the guilt seems always assumed in the question – although if the evidence of the letters is to be trusted, one can still deny any involvement.

Remarkably enough, the Old-Babylonian type of an apology/excuse, with the request not to be angry at the sender, does not seem to occur after a reproach. However, this may have to do with the relatively low number of letters written to social equals, 'brothers', analysed here, especially from the larger, Neo-Assyrian corpus. When more letters are published, the overall picture could turn out to be quite different.

Epistolography has its own focus and certain topics remain out of its scope. Outside of letters, the incantations and prayers offer insights in other possibilities for admitting one's offences and begging for forgiveness. The incantation series *Šurpu* includes, for instance, a wide-ranging list of actions considered offensive by the gods (Tablet II, lines 5.-128., Reiner 1958, 13–16), followed by a supplication to the gods to 'release' the sufferer (Tablet II, lines 129.-192., Reiner 1958, 16–18). In prayers, the gods are often called 'merciful', and the sole focus of incantations such as *diĝir-ša<sub>3</sub>-dib-ba* is achieving the granting of forgiveness by the gods. In fact, the admission of guilt in this text assumes an already familiar form (Lambert 1974, 274–275):

23. EN<sub>2</sub> DINGIR-GU<sub>10</sub> *ul i-di še-ret-[ka dan]-na-at* Incantation: ‘My god, I did not know the severity of your punishment.’
24. *niš-ka kab-tu qa-liš [a]z-za-kar* I lightly spoke a solemn oath by your name,
25. *me-e-ka am-te-eš ma-gal al-lik* I despised your orders, I went too far (?),
26. *ši-pir-ka ina dan-na-ti aš<sub>2</sub>-te-e’-ir* I ... your work in distress,
27. *i-ta-ka ma-gal e-te-te-eq* I greatly overstepped your border,
28. *ul i-di-ma ma-gal A[N ...]* I did not know, greatly [...],
29. *ma-a-du ar<sub>2</sub>-nu-u-a e-ma e-pu-šu<sub>2</sub> ul i-di* Many are my wrongdoings
30. DINGIR-GU<sub>10</sub> *pu-us-si pu-tur pu-šur ki-šir ŠA<sub>3</sub>-bi-k[a]* My god, obliterate, release, overcome your anger!
31. *me-e-ša<sub>2</sub> gil-la-ti-ia<sub>2</sub> le-qe<sub>2</sub> un-ni-ni-ia* Forgive my missteps, accept my prayer!
32. *šu-kun ši-ta-ti-ia<sub>2</sub> a-na dam-qa-a-ti* Turn my misdeeds into goodwill<sup>349</sup>.

In the incantation, the speaker admits his wrongdoings, while at the same time professing utter ignorance. The god is then asked to release his anger. Thus, in the most literal sense, the incantation fulfils the role of an apology towards a divine figure whose cultic orders – and whatever else the speaker might have done wrong, which possibility he freely admits – were transgressed. Human offence against a god is here conceptualised as something almost inevitable but potentially incomprehensible to the person committing it. A similar concept seems to be present also in the earlier composition *ludlul bēl nēmeqi*: for all his protestations of innocence, the righteous sufferer seems to recognise in the end that it was him who was at fault (see Lambert 1996, 50-51, lines 59-60 and the commentary in Annus and Lenzi 2010, xxiii). Bricker 2000 considers the ‘innocent’ sufferers of Mesopotamian literature rather ‘ignorant sufferers’ for a reason<sup>350</sup>. Although the concepts present in the incantations and *ludlul bēl nēmeqi* belong to the realm of Mesopotamian theology, they certainly were not unknown to the writers of the letters, especially not the scholars. One could also speculate about a feedback loop from daily routines, in which the guilt was so often assumed, to the theology, which was at least to an extent modelled on the patterns which one already knew, and back into daily communication.

<sup>349</sup> Lambert 1974, 275 translates here ‘Turns my sins into virtues’. However, this interpretation clearly goes too far. It is evident from the preceding sample of offenses that the *hītati*, the misdeeds, are not meant to be understood in the modern sense of ‘morality’ that is so closely associated with the modern word ‘sin’. At the same time, nothing in the Mesopotamian literary tradition indicates that the word *damqāti* should be understood as ‘virtue’ (see CAD 66-67, *damqātu* 2). The translation is far too specific.

<sup>350</sup> On the other hand, Bricker’s entire approach is marred by his underlying modern theological thinking. When one translates *hītu* as ‘sin’, it is no wonder that one immediately expects it to have a moral dimension in the modern, Eurocentric sense. On page 203 in his discussion of ‘wisdom’ it is especially evident that either the ‘morals’ are what a modern westerner understands them to be, or they do not exist at all.

## CONCLUSIONS

Conflict and trouble have proven a rich source of data, ensuring that the speech actions could be considered together with reactions they provoke.

Threats in first millennium Akkadian were a show of power or a testament to utter despair of the letter writers, while their place in literature seems to be ambiguous. Kings threaten their subjects with being impaled in the middle of their houses (SAA 1 22) if their commands are not fulfilled, and the head of a household threatens death to anybody who neglects his work (No. 224 in the private Babylonian corpus). Goddesses threaten when they cannot ensure obedience by more direct means. Desperate officials borrow the power of their superiors to force the compliance of their colleagues (No. 172 in the institutional corpus of Babylonian letters).

Warnings, meanwhile, are rarely deployed to save the addressee from actual peril. Most warnings serve to ensure that the addressee knows about the negative consequences of his actions – or inaction. Gods provide implicit warnings – by telling humans listeners what they should do, without explicating the imminent danger, both in letters (SAA 16 59 and SAA 16 60) and in literary texts.

Promises are attested in the context of explicit declarations of obedience after royal commands, but also in the context of requests made between equals (or virtual equals) whose cooperation is based on the trade in mutual favours (in the archive of the Nippurian governor). It is here that the expectation of reciprocity is most easily perceptible – but its more implicit form is also present in the declarations of the Assyrian subjects and clients that they have served their king diligently and loyally (and therefore deserve to be rewarded), as well as in similar declarations made to other ‘lords’. Promises made by gods and kings assume the form of commands – the words of the gods just as the words of kings are sufficient to reshape reality in quite a literal sense.

In the Assyrian corpus, both Assyrian and Babylonian complaints are attested above all in the course of petitions, and in addition to forming the nucleus of the petitions, they serve as means of persuasion, additional arguments whose function is to illustrate the depths of misery the sender has found himself in. They are surrounded by a variety of other arguments: the majority of them is in some way based on the expectations of reciprocity. This is evident in the mentions of relationships between ‘fathers’, ‘brothers’, and ‘sons’. It is also implicitly referred to when the senders make arguments based on their diligent and meritorious service to the king – the nature of the relationship between a king or a ‘lord’ and his faithful servant presumes that the servant is to be rewarded for his hard work and loyalty. It seems that there were clear expectations about the roles that one needed to play within the society, associated with one’s position. Although the expectations are typically not stated explicitly, the strongest rebukes are used when they are not met: the senders of the letter to the temple management (No. 125 in the institutional Babylonian corpus) complain of being treated badly by a ‘no-lord’ just as Assurbanipal



calls his rebellious brother a ‘no-brother’, *lā-aḫu* (SAA 21 2, SAA 21 3, SAA 21 5, SAA 21 69 – all letters to third parties, no direct rebuke seems to be preserved in the correspondence).

The party with higher position in the social hierarchy can also be flattered, and there seems to be almost no limits to the flattery – as when the senders of SAA 16 127 and SAA 18 181 do not balk at the prospect of equating the king with a god (‘a god’ in SAA 16 127, the god Marduk in SAA 18 181). The flattery can be realised either by praising the other party’s positive qualities, or by noting the blessings they are enjoying thanks to the grace of the gods. The scholars writing to the Assyrian kings additionally exploit literary allusions in order to both flatter the rulers and emphasise their own misfortune – here the most striking example is that of Urdu-Gula in SAA 10 294 (the texts he alludes to are Advice to a Prince, The Poor Man of Nippur, The Righteous Sufferer and an unknown literary composition). But the sender of SAA 18 181 is, as far as can be said, an official – nonetheless, he or his scribe manage to rework a quotation from a prayer in such a way that it flatters the king.

The senders do not hesitate to convey the depths of their misfortune. While the recurring mentions of hunger and famine should not, as already discussed, be always understood literally, hunger must have been a constant companion for the ancient inhabitants of Mesopotamia (see especially Oppenheim 1955; Richardson 2016). To illustrate this somewhat, both words for ‘hunger’ and ‘famine’, *bubūtu* and *sunqu*, are attested 28 times among the correspondence edited in the SAA volumes (2 times *sunqu*, 26 times *bubūtu*). The word for ‘food’ or ‘bread’, *akalu*, is attested 32 times, but even the most cursory glance at the attestations shows that in the majority of cases the context is still that of hunger – the word is accompanied by *bubūtu* (*bubūtu ša akali* (NINDA.HI.A), in SAA 18 187, rev. 10’ and re22’), with negated verbs of eating (NINDA.HI.A *ul alḫim* in SAA 19 130, obv. 12’), with a verb denoting starvation (*berû*: NINDA.‘HI.A’... [UN.MEŠ-š]<sub>u2-nu</sub> *ki-i* [*i*] *b-ru-u2*, SAA 17 7, obv. 9.-14.), or in the context of a complaint about complete lack of sustenance (all the 16 attestations in SAA 18 121, SAA 18 122, and SAA 18 123).

The same can be said of the images of dying and living or reviving – with the help of one’s ‘lord’. Already some of the letters hint at an alarming level of violence. The sender of SAA 10 163, obv. 5.-11. complains that his brothers were driven away by the governor – while the method chosen by the governor is not specified, it is hardly plausible that this was accomplished with mere persuasion. The governor of Nippur in SAA 18 202 complains about a person (name broken away) who is capturing, beating (*naṭû*) and selling the nobles or free citizens of Nippur (rev. 11.-16.), against which the governor himself appears to be powerless. The sender of No. 174 from the corpus of institutional letters complains about a third party seizing his field and his grapes, while reporting an altercation that ended with broken ribs and moaning day and night from pain (for the sender, obv. 4.-rev. 13.). The slaves that are to be ransomed – or not – by the slavers and other associates of the governor of Nippur in the early Babylonian period hardly found themselves in this situation of their own free will – the abductions occasionally mentioned in the texts must have been a violent act. The kings threaten with horrible punishments for the addressees

and their families if royal commands are not carried out with sufficient haste (the disobedient soldier is to be impaled and his children killed by his own order, SAA 1 22)<sup>351</sup>. Although much is exaggerated in the letters, clearly exaggeration cannot account for everything.

In the apologies, the senders above all try to avoid the consequences of offending somebody: apologies are thus realised as excuses, requests for the offended party not to give vent to their anger, or the rare compliment suggesting that the offending party is above such things as rage. The senders, on their part, frequently formulate their missives as something potentially less offensive – a reminder instead of instructions or a rebuke. The reactions the senders typically have to reproaches, especially from their superiors, make it absolutely clear that apologies were not considered to be a sufficient follow-up.

The literary texts offer speech actions that are similar enough to the ‘real-life’ conversations to be recognisable, but it is evident that they serve very different purposes. It is difficult, however, to compare the speech of the goddesses with the speech of women who are almost completely missing from all the epistolographic corpora.

Tracing any kind of diachronic developments was impossible, as the letters from different periods were also exchanged between completely different kinds of senders and addressees. An administrative letter from a powerful governor can hardly be compared with a letter written by a Babylonian scholar to his patron – even if both letters were addressed to the king.

If I were to sum up the rules governing communication in first millennium BCE Akkadian, I would propose the following set of stratagems – in the form of a list, as is, in the end, most appropriate in Mesopotamia:

1. Do not restrain your feelings
2. If you have power – show it
  - a. – it is better when they know that they might die
3. Make your expectations clear
  - a. – as far as it is safe for you
  - b. – it need not be safe for your subjects
4. Make a show of deferring to the source of power
  - a. – there is no such thing as too much flattery
  - b. – but rebukes are sometimes necessary
    - i. – only as long as they do not turn into questioning the authority of your lord.

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<sup>351</sup> On the violence in Late Babylonian times, see Jursa 2014c. Fuchs (2009) discusses violence above all in the Neo-Assyrian propaganda. That responsibility for crimes could sometimes be shared by entire communities also in legal practice is evident from one of the cases discussed by Roth (1987) – the whole village is to guarantee that compensation is paid to the family of murder victim if it claims it.

These were the operating principles that I believe guided the authors of the letters in the first millennium Akkadian, until the last wedge was impressed into clay.

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