

An Important New Early-Middle-Assyrian Letter

Maynard P. Maidman
(York University, Toronto)

§1. Introduction

§1.1. In October 2013, the author and Jeanette Fincke found themselves at the British Museum at the same time, each engaged in distinct and unrelated research projects. In a dazzling instance of serendipity, Christopher Walker, noting the presence of two students of the Nuzi texts, brought our attention to four items, not heretofore noticed, that might qualify as Nuzi or Kirkuk tablets.¹ Three of these are indeed Nuzi/Kirkuk texts.² The fourth, BM 103203, also has affinities with other Nuzi texts, and Walker had good reason to suspect its Nuzi or Kirkuk origin. However, the largely well-preserved letter exhibits a number of what would constitute anomalies in a Nuzi text. We concluded that the letter was Middle Assyrian but with some Nuzi-like elements. It is a unique and important item.

§1.2. The joint study of the Middle Assyrian letter was beset with difficulties. Although each of us benefited from the criticisms of the other, it became clear that our interpretations of this artifact were sufficiently different and irreconcilable so as to preclude a common edition

of this text.³ Fincke intends to publish elsewhere a hand copy of the text and perhaps photographs and an edition as well. The present edition is based on my own autopsy, on photographs supplied by the British Museum, and on Fincke's several copies based on our joint study. It is proffered because of the aforementioned differences of interpretation, and especially because of the important historical implications for the understanding of Late Bronze Age history that, I believe, inhere in this document. The historical implications are unaffected by any differences of interpretation. In the course of studying this text, I approached Dr. Jaume Llop, who specializes in Middle Assyrian letters, and requested from him his unmediated impressions of this peculiar text. He responded promptly and with acumen. I am very grateful for his cheerful response to an unexpected imposition.

§2. Text Apparatus

§2.1. BM 103203

Transliteration

Translation

Obverse

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| 1. <i>a-na¹ut-hi-ia</i> | <i>To Utbiya</i> |
| 2. <i>qi₂-bi-ma um-ma</i> | <i>say! Thus</i> |
| 3. <i>¹ki-di_x(TE)-ku-be-ma</i> | <i>Kidin-kūbe:</i> |
| 4. <i>anše-kur-ra ša us-^Γbu^Γ-ni</i> | <i>"The horse that was stabled</i> |
| 5. <i>¹ki-pa₂-ia</i> | <i>Kipaya</i> |
| 6. <i>u₃^{lu₂}tu-US-ra-hu-šu</i> | <i>and the t.-man</i> |
| 7. <i>^Γiš^Γ-x [x x] ^Γtu^Γ-x-x</i> | <i>(have) ...-ed;</i> |
| 8. <i>x [x x x] x x</i> | <i>...</i> |

Reverse

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. <i>^Γsu₂^Γ-hi-ir</i> | <i>give back!</i> |
| 2. <i>ša anše-<kur²-ra²>
u₂-ku²(KI)-^Γlu^Γ</i> | <i>The provender² of the
horse²,</i> |
| 3. <i>3(ban₂) zi₃-da</i> | <i>3 seahs of flour,</i> |

¹ I heartily thank Walker for isolating these tablets and for exploring the circumstances whereby one of them especially (BM 103203) was acquired by the British Museum. For details of his findings, see Fincke's forthcoming comments on this text. I would also like to thank Jonathan Taylor, Assistant Keeper, Cuneiform Collections, for his generous help in expediting this work and especially for supplying photographs of BM 103203. These photographs were entered to CDLI by the kind permission of the Trustees of the British Museum. Finally, I wish to thank J. N. Postgate for his careful reading of this article and for correcting several errors. Except where otherwise noted, abbreviations follow those of the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary.

² The tablets are BM 86005, 95280, 95463.

³ Where readings of this text in the present article stem originally from Fincke and do not reflect our collaborative effort, I happily acknowledge her insights.

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| 4. <i>im-ta₂-ši</i> | <i>he has (sic) forgotten;</i> |
| 5. 5 ma-na dabin | <i>5 minas of coarse flour</i> |
| 6. 2 ma-na šar-ta | <i>(and) 2 minas of goat hair</i> |
| 7. di-na-aš-šu-nu | <i>give to them!</i> |
| 8. tu-še-še-x-šu ² | ... |
| 9. ar- <i>hi-iš</i> tu-x-x- ¹ in ² | <i>quickly, ...</i> |
| 10. a ¹² (ZALAG ₂)-na šī im ² /
¹ sar ² ¹ i-lu ¹² -šu | ...;" |

Left Edge

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. ¹ iti ¹ ¹ ša-ke-na-te ₉ | <i>month: "Ša-kēnāte,"</i> |
| 2. ¹ u ₄ 16 ² ¹ kam ₂ ¹ li ¹ -mu
¹ ki-di _x (TE)- ¹ ku ¹ -be | <i>16th day, eponymy: "Kidin-kūbe."</i> |

§2.2. *Comments*

§2.2.1. As noted at the start of this article, C. B. F. Walker considered that BM 103203 looked as if it might be a Nuzi or Kirkuk text, and—as also noted—he had good grounds for this supposition. The tablet, at first blush, looks very much like a Nuzi text. It is a letter-order, roughly square-shaped as is characteristic of Nuzi documents of this category. (J. Llop observes that Middle Assyrian letter-orders are usually longer than they are wide.) The ductus, as far as the signs are preserved, would be at home at Nuzi. The personal names “*Uthiya*” (obv. 1) and “*Kipaya*” (obv. 5) are attested Nuzi hypocoristica of Hurrian names.⁴ The verb form at line rev. 4 would be at home in the Nuzi texts, but not, on the other hand, in Middle Assyrian texts.

§2.2.2. However, it was equally apparent that BM 103203 exhibits distinctly non-Nuzi characteristics and, indeed, resembles a Middle Assyrian document in both language and, it transpires, even in part of its contents. Rev. 1 and especially rev. 9 have language unattested at Nuzi: *subhuru* (for Nuzi *turru*) and *arhiš* (for Nuzi *hammutta*). Both terms, especially the latter, are present in Middle Assyrian usage. The subjunctive at obv. 4 (as observed by Fincke) and the imperative form of the verb at rev. 7 and its pronominal suffix are conspicuously Assyrian. These linguistic elements are unambiguous⁵ and alone justify a search for further Assyrian elements, perhaps not as readily apparent, as noted above. Indeed, on the basis of some of these elements, Fincke ingeniously restored l.e. 1-2 as an Assyrian eponym date formula.

⁴ Neither name, be it noted, is an agent in this text. The former is the letter’s recipient, and the latter an object of the letter’s interest.

⁵ This recognition led to a reexamination of the circumstances of the British Museum’s acquisition of BM 103203 (this number is embedded among non-Nuzi, non-Kirkuk items). Walker identified the artifact as vaguely associated with some Middle Assyrian objects.

Although key signs are broken and/or are unusual in form, and although the second line of the formula seems to end with what, at first glance, seems the continuation of rev. 10, despite these obstacles (and others), the reconstruction of an eponym formula here seems reasonable.⁶ It makes sense in a letter at least partially written in an Assyrian dialect of Akkadian. And it yields a PN that is identical to the PN at obv. 3, an identity I do not consider coincidental. Thus, I conclude that the eponym official sent this letter, and, given the Assyro-Hurrian features of the document, he might well have been an Assyrian governor (likely the first) of the province of Arrapha in the Middle Assyrian period.⁷

§2.2.3. In sum, this text is an isolate with a Nuzi ductus, tablet shape, verb form and a partially Arraphan onomastic, on the one hand, and Middle Assyrian vocabulary, date formula and other administrative data, and some grammatical elements, on the other. It is not only an unusual letter, but an opaque one, bristling with problems. Though very well preserved in most places, five of the 20 lines (obv. 7-8, rev. 8-10) are all but intractable and others remain ambiguous.⁸ Happily, the clearest lines, at the start and at the end, turn out to be the most significant. For some historical implications of these comments, see further below, “further comments.”

§2.3. *Notes*

Obverse

l. 1: ¹ ut-*hi-ia*. *Uthiya*, a Hurrian PN, variant of *Ithiya*, is a well-attested name at Nuzi. For this hypocoristicon, see, for

⁶ Extra caution regarding interpretation of the signs as a date formula seems justified in any case, since such a date formula is unexpected and bears unusual historical weight. Such caution is particularly apposite on my part, since acceptance of the reading is to my scholarly benefit, supporting the events as I reconstructed them from circumstantial evidence as laid out in Maidman 2011: *passim*. For explication of the historical implications of this text, see below, “further comments.”

⁷ For the judgment that this letter probably comes from Arrapha City (i.e., Kirkuk) and not Nuzi or Assur, see below, “further comments.” The similarity of this text to Nuzi texts is so striking to me, that I consider it highly unlikely that the document comes from western Mitanni.

⁸ The present reconstruction of the body of the text leans toward assigning one subject to the whole: a horse, its location, and provender. The shortness of the letter-order also points in this direction. The horse (obv. 4, rev. 2?) is to be returned (rev. 1) and its forgotten provender (and equipment?) quickly to be restored (rev. 3-9 [or 10]). The themes of returning, giving, and sending are ubiquitous in letter-orders.

example, *NPN* 75b sub ITH₃IA; *AAN* 72a sub ITH₃IA. This name is borne by a king of Arrapha, but, for chronological reasons (he ruled much earlier than any possible start of Assyrian control; other reasons could be mustered), that individual cannot be meant here.

l. 3. For this PN, see also l.e. 2 and the note to that line.

l. 3: *di_x*(TE). On TE as *di_x/de_x*, compare Eichler 1973: 102 with 105.

l. 5: *¹ki-pa₂-ia*. Kipaya is a common Hurrian name at Nuzi. For this hypocoristic, see, for example, *NPN* 86b sub KIPAIA; *AAN* 82b sub KIPAIA.

ll. 7-8. One of these lines should contain a verb.

Reverse

l. 1: $\lceil su_2 \lrcorner \text{-} \text{bi-ir} \rceil$. The tablet is lightly abraded after the last sign. There is probably no loss of text here. Indeed, there would be preserved space available for more wedges were such space required. The last sign is written broadly. *subhuru*, though relatively rare, yields a semantic element typical in letters. See *CAD* S 49a for an early Middle Assyrian instance. The present tablet is early Middle Assyrian. See below, note to l.e. 2 and my “further comments.” In Nuzi letters, *turru* expresses the same idea. See, for example, *JEN* 495 obv. 9; *HSS* 14, 32 rev. 3; cf. *HSS* 9, 36 obv. 7-9. A logical (though hypothetical) sense results: “Kipaya and the t.-man have [neglected / left behind] the horse that was added. Return it (to the rest of the herd / the military unit)!”

l. 2: *ša*. This is difficult syntactically. If *su₂-bi-ir* (rev. 1) were to be considered a substantive, then it would be in the construct state and, therefore, should not be followed by *ša* in this line as a relative particle. I assume here an anticipatory relative particle linking *ukullû* and *anše- \langle kur²-ra² \rangle* .

l. 2: *anše- \langle kur²-ra² \rangle* . If the scribe indeed meant *anše*, then the admittedly tentative, unified meaning ascribed to this letter fails.

l. 2: *u₂-ku¹²*(KI)- $\lceil lu \lrcorner \rceil$. It would make good sense if the last word represented food or fodder of some sort; and an agreeable reading from the root $\sqrt{\text{KL}}$ seems possible. But *ukullû*, the closest candidate, can be read only by assuming an anomalous *ku¹* for the KI-sign. *u₂-ki-lu*, on the other hand, yields no word recognized by the lexica.

ll. 5-6. These lines should describe recompense, or the like, for the “forgotten” provender of rev. 3-4. But the interpretation adopted here is not without problems. The amounts on rev. 5-6 seem disproportionately large relative to the amount noted on rev. 3. Furthermore, J. Llop brings my attention to the disturbing fact that *dabin* is elsewhere (but not in Middle Assyrian texts) measured by units of dry volume, not by weight, as proposed here.

l. 5: *dabin*. This processed grain (Akk. *tappinnu*) is attested in Middle Assyrian, if only barely (and never at Nuzi). See *CAD* T 183b sub *tappinnu* 1b (*KAR* 61 obv. 11) and 2 (*KAR* 90 obv.

9). But note that, even there, the grain is not meant for animals.

l. 6. Goat hair would be employed for horse trappings. Cf. *HSS* 14, 254 rev. 2-4 (also weighed in minas). Alternatively, goat hair might be employed to pay for fodder. Cf. *HSS* 13, 227 rev. 3 with rev. 7, 10.

l. 7. This is an Assyrian imperative with 3mp Assyrian dative suffix. *-šu-nu- \langle ti \rangle* is also possible, realizing an alternative dative in Assyrian.

l. 8. This line should contain a substantive.

l. 9: *ar-bi-iš*. This is a common term in Assyrian (for Middle Assyrian, see *CAD* A/2 256b sub *arbiš*f), but seemingly totally absent at Nuzi. *hamutta* is the equivalent term in Nuzi letters. See *JEN* 495 obv. 8; *HSS* 14, 525 rev. 3; *EN* 9/1, 135 obv. 8; and *passim*. After *arbiš*, if a verb appears in Middle Assyrian, it should be an imperative (again, see *CAD* A/2 256b sub *arbiš*f). But perhaps this line ends with a substantive. See further, note to rev. 2.

l. 10. The sense of this line eludes me. If its contents are syntactically related to rev. 9, then the end of the line should be a verb in the imperative.

l. 10: *a¹²*(ZALAG₂). This follows a suggestion of Llop, who correctly assigns the sign to this place rather than to l.e. 2, after *ki*.

Left Edge

l. 1: $\lceil iti \lrcorner \rceil$. The form appears to be unusual. Cf. *JEN* 475 obv. 15 for the Nuzi form (Chiera is here accurate). More important, cf. *KAJ* 29 rev. 11 for the Middle Assyrian form (from the *limu* of Kidin-kūbe!).

l. 2: *¹ki-di_x*(TE)- $\lceil ku \lrcorner \text{-} be \rceil$. The same PN appears at obv. 3. It is possible, but highly unlikely, that the writer and the eponym are two different individuals. Kidin-kūbe is an attested Middle Assyrian eponym (Freydank 1991: 148).⁹ As is the case here, the /n/ of “Kidin” is not represented in the eponym formula of *KAJ* 29 rev. 12. This eponym’s patronymic, Bēr-nādin-aḥḥē, cannot have been written on this line. On the effaced surface after the PN, there is space for only one or two signs. Further on, the end of this line, undamaged, is blank.¹⁰

§2.4. Further Comments

§2.4.1. BM 103203 is an Assyrian letter suffused with

⁹ His eponymate takes place during the reign of Aššur-uballiṭ I (Freydank 1991: 148). This is precisely what would have been deduced based on the characteristics of the tablet coupled with Maidman’s reconstruction of the political history of Aššur-uballiṭ’s reign (Maidman 2011: 98-100).

¹⁰ This poses no problem for the date formula, since patronymics may be omitted in this type of context. It is preferable to associate this PN with a known eponym, Kidin-kūbe, than to assume another, heretofore unattested eponym, *Kitti-kūbe (the first element of whose name proves difficult to interpret).

Hurrian features characteristic of Nuzi texts. This text most likely reflects Assyrian contact with its eastern neighboring region, a region with Hurrian presence during the period of Mittanian domination, at the very end of that period of domination. The Hurrian presence evaporates during the course of Assyrian control over Arrapha, and so this letter may well appear as a witness to recently achieved Assyrian control over that kingdom, before the obliteration of the Mittanian Hurrian presence. It should not be dated earlier, for no similar document is attested in the entire Nuzi or Kirkuk corpora. It should not be dated later than the reign of Aššur-uballiṭ, since it has been demonstrated indirectly that it was Aššur-uballiṭ's early aggressiveness that resulted in the downfall of Arrapha (Maidman 2011: 98-100, 124-125).¹¹ The formula naming Kidin-kūbe as the *limu* turns that case for Aššur-uballiṭ I into an absolute certainty, since it was precisely during Aššur-uballiṭ's reign that Kidin-kūbe¹² served as *limu* (see Freydank 1991: 148, 193). This text could have been written in Arrapha either after the Assyrian victory or, much less probably, in the latter stages of the war.¹³

§2.4.2. Kirkuk (i.e., Arrapha City) seems a better candidate than Nuzi itself for the origin of this letter,¹⁴ and this for several reasons. First, hundreds, if not thousands, of administrative texts have been found at Nuzi. Most of

these are from Nuzi's final period. None suggests Assyrian control of the town. Second, this letter should not be from Nuzi in any case, since stratum II was destroyed by Assyria, not captured and administered.¹⁵

§2.4.3. Conversely, we know very little (except for some military rosters) of the administrative archives of Kirkuk, and the fate of the capital is as yet unknown. Arrapha's archives might reveal Assyrian presence, and the present text might have been at home in that context. If BM 103203 does come from Arrapha, then it shows that Assyrian administration was present in the wake of the Assyrian victory over her nearest eastern neighbor (see Maidman 2011: 87-93; cf. Maidman 2010: ch. 1). Therefore, Assyria did not destroy this center during the Assyria-Arrapha War. It occupied it.

§2.4.4. BM 103203 is an unusually important document for the history of the Late Bronze Age, for it extends the political and chronological horizon of the upper Tigris. It adds to our knowledge of Assyria's aggressive activity early in the reign of Aššur-uballiṭ I. As for the history of Hurrian Arrapha, it may well constitute, as Speiser once characterized a Nuzi text (Chiera & Speiser 1927: 59 re *JEN* 525), a "swan song," not of one family of Nuzi (as Speiser opined), but of the world of Nuzi itself.

¹¹ On the other hand, the text contributes nothing regarding the question of whether Assyria captured Arrapha before (as I believe I have demonstrated [see Maidman 2011: 121, 124, 127]) or after Šuppiluliumaš's defeat of Mittani.

¹² Only one "Kidin-kūbe" is attested as an Assyrian eponym.

¹³ It appears logical that the capture of Arrapha City occurred as the final event of the war (see Maidman 2011: 90). If so, and if the letter was written in Arrapha City (see immediately below), it cannot have been written before the end of the war. For the conflict and its textual witnesses, see Maidman 2010: ch. 1.

¹⁴ Unless weight is given to the Assyrian connection of the catalogue number "BM 103203" perhaps hinting at the letter's origin in Assur (but why such a long-distance misssive on such a petty, mundane topic of purely local significance?).

¹⁵ Note that there is possibly some evidence of Middle Assyrian period occupation at Nuzi. See Starr 1939: 122.

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