



THE EPONYMS OF THE
ASSYRIAN EMPIRE
910–612 BC

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The Stelae from Assur

The German excavations at Assur found clusters of stone stelae in the southern part of the city, by the wall of Shalmaneser III. They lay in four groups at different levels, with stone bases for some in a group of their own.²⁹ Altogether, ninety-eight stones were recovered bearing inscriptions. Most are squared blocks, of greater width than thickness, with rounded tops, the inscriptions being engraved in a rectangular recess near the top of the stele. Three are re-used pillars and there is one statue. Some are so badly preserved that the inscriptions are illegible or obliterated. (There were thirty-nine uninscribed stelae or fragments of stelae and some stone sockets for the

²⁹ W. Andrae, *Die Stelenreihen in Assur*, WVDOG 24 (Leipzig 1913).

stelae.) Each monument represents an individual, an Assyrian king or person of high rank, ranging in date from the reign of Eriša-Adad I (c. 1390-1364 BC) to that of Aššurbanipal (668-627 BC). Apart from three royal ladies (Semiramis, a queen of Sennacherib and a queen of Aššurbanipal), all the stelae carry the names and titles of men who served as eponyms, but they do not mention that office. The excavator, W. Andrae, supposed that the stelae had originally been set in chronological order, creating a calendar for reckoning the years. Had that been so, there should be about 700 stelae, and, while it is possible that the majority were smashed in antiquity, or await recovery, the absence of any mention of their holding the eponymate in the men's titles, and the presence of stelae for three women, speak against it. It is clear that some stelae were already buried when others were deposited, some actually lying under the wall of Shalmaneser III, although all the royal stelae were kept together.³⁰ There was no time when all were visible at this site. It is likely, therefore, as Miglus has argued, that the place was a depository for monuments removed from a shrine or other building from time to time and placed respectfully in this position. Since, apart from Aššurbanipal's lady, the latest stelae belong to the mid-eighth century BC, that could have happened during the renovations carried out in Assur by the Sargonid kings during the last century of Assyria's life. The stones would have stood in a shrine as substitutes for the persons named, possibly commemorating them after their lifetimes, as well as during them, as did stelae of similar shape in the west.³¹

The names and titles add to the information about the eponyms given by the Lists and so the texts of the stelae for the Neo-Assyrian period are included in the Catalogue of Eponym Dates.³²

³⁰ See the study by P. A. Miglus, ZA 74 (1984) 133-40.

³¹ J. V. Canby had made this case in Iraq 38 (1976) 113-28, although Miglus had rejected it on the grounds that the stelae were neither posthumous nor beside burials and there is little evidence for western influences in Assur. The information about religious stelae at Mari in the Old Babylonian period (J.-M. Durand, J.-R. Kupper [eds.], *Miscellanea babilonica: Mélanges offerts à Maurice Birot* [Paris 1985] 79-84) suggests that related practices existed nearer to Assur and could have reached the city in the time of Šamši-Adad I, for whose reign the Mari texts supply the oldest Eponym Lists.

³² Abbreviated as St. For the Middle Assyrian stelae see C. Saporetto, *Gli eponimi medio-assiri*, *Bibliotheca Mesopotamica* 9 (Malibu 1979) and *Some Considerations on the Stelae of Assur*, Assur 1,2 (1974).