

13. HISTORICAL EPIC

Sources, Textual Evidence and General Features

Historical or royal epics are poetic narratives of a ruler's activities. The historical epic seems to be an Akkadian "invention" after the Old Babylonian period: this literary genre is not known in any other Ancient Near Eastern language.⁸⁹² Texts with literary patterns, such as the Legends of Sargon (103ff.⁸⁹³), the Legends of Narām-Sîn (109 ff.),⁸⁹⁴ accounts by Nebuchadnezzar I (290 ff.), are important sources of historical information.⁸⁹⁵ Contributing to our knowledge about events in 2nd millennium Mesopotamia are the **Kurigalzu Epic**, the **Adad-šuma-ušur Epic**, the **Epic of Adad-nīrārī I**, the **Tukultī-Ninurta Epic** (209 ff.), and the **Chedorlaomer tablets** (283ff.).⁸⁹⁶ The Tukultī-Ninurta Epic is the best preserved and longest of these.⁸⁹⁷ The distinction between historical epic and other epic literature is the former's focus on historical heroes without mythological aspects (GRAYSON [1975] 41). The 2nd millennium BC historical epics have all been intensely studied, and so will be only discussed here briefly. They refer to events of the latter part of the millennium and therefore are not of much help in clearing up the chronological problems caused by the Mesopotamian Dark Age; but they do add valuable historical evidence.

Historical Relevance and Value for Absolute Chronology

13.1. Kurigalzu Epic⁸⁹⁸

One of the epics dealing with the Kassite period is the badly preserved Kurigalzu Epic, which records

battles attributed to Kurigalzu II and seems to be largely based on **Chronicle P**. The theme of this epic is apparently the on-going hostilities between the Kassites and Elam. Unfortunately only one fragment of a four-column tablet of the epic is preserved, in total less than a quarter of the original text. Thus the nature of the story is not quite clear, but it has similarities with the Adad-šuma-ušur epic (→ **13.4**). As in all the other Babylonian historical epics, one of its main motifs is Marduk's supremacy over all other gods.

13.2. Adad-nīrārī I Epic

The Epic of Adad-nīrārī appears on five tablet fragments dating to the Middle Assyrian period. It deals with the conflict between Adad-nīrārī I, who is introduced with hymn of praise, and the Kassite king Nazi-Maruttaš.⁸⁹⁹ Similar accounts of the battles between these two rulers appear in the **Synchronistic History**. The text's story starts with Arik-dēn-ili, father of Adad-nīrārī I, and presumably was written from a pro-Assyrian point of view.

13.3. Tukultī-Ninurta Epic⁹⁰⁰

The Tukultī-Ninurta Epic probably dates to the end of the 13th cent. and reports on conflicts between Tukultī-Ninurta I and Kaštiliašu IV. This piece of political propaganda offers an historical account of Assyrian-Babylonian relations (KRECHER [1975] 26), dwelling on Babylonian violations of a treaty between Assyria and Babylonia.⁹⁰¹ As FOSTER (1996) 211 stated:

⁸⁹² RÖLLIG, *Literatur*, RIA 7 (1987–1990) 52. FOSTER, *GMTR* 2 (2007) 19 carefully considers the royal epic's tradition to have started already in the last quarter of the 3rd millennium. In contrast to the Assyrian historical epics, the Babylonian ones have no parallels in commemorative inscriptions and portray the ruler as a human being rather than a "superhuman warrior" characteristic for the Assyrian tradition (FOSTER, *GMTR* 2 [2007] 19).

⁸⁹³ These page numbers refer to the edition by FOSTER (1996).

⁸⁹⁴ See in RIA 7 (1987–1990) 52 sub "pseudo-autobiographies" (belonging to the *narû*-literature), whereas the historical epic proper appears after the Old Babylonian period.

⁸⁹⁵ GRAYSON (1980) 185. For further sub-divisions of these literary accounts see REINER, in: W. RÖLLIG (ed.), *Neues Handbuch der Literaturwissenschaft* 1, *Altorientalische Literaturen*, Wiesbaden (1978).

⁸⁹⁶ The publication of the Zimri-Lim epic by M. Guichard is

still awaited. For preliminary notes and citations see DURAND – GUICHARD, *FM* 3 (1997) 21¹⁶.

⁸⁹⁷ More fragments on the Kassite period can be found in RÖLLIG, RIA 7 (1987–1990) 52 (without useful historical information).

⁸⁹⁸ GRAYSON, *Babylonian Historical-Literary Texts*, Toronto and Buffalo (1975) 42 and 47ff.

⁸⁹⁹ WEIDNER, *AJO* 20 (1963) 113–116 (with a text documenting battles between Enlil-nīrārī and Kurigalzu II), WILCKE, *ZA* 67 (1977) 187–191.

⁹⁰⁰ THOMPSON, *AAA* 20 (1933) 126–135, LAMBERT, *AJO* 18 (1957/8) 38–43, MACHINIST (1978) and CHANG (1979). For a chart of the epic's events in chronological order see GALTER, *AJO* 36/37 (1989–1990) 142.

⁹⁰¹ Two letters depict the situation before the actual battle between the antagonists (CANCİK-KIRSCHBAUM, *AOAT* 247 [1997] 72–73).

“... The text ... is a product of a mature and learned master steeped both in Babylonian and Assyrian tradition. The idioms of treaties and diplomacy, penitential psalms and laments, heroic tales, hymnography, and commemorative inscriptions are freely used. ...”⁹⁰² Kaštiliašu IV was defeated and brought to Aššur. The Assyrians plundered Babylonia, carrying off the Marduk statue as booty → **Chronicle sub 7.3**. The text paints the two main figures in moralistic colors, the Babylonian ruler as sinful and the Assyrian king as righteous.

13.4. Adad-šuma-ušur Epic

The Adad-šuma-ušur epic⁹⁰³ is an account of the revolt of Babylon against the Assyrians describing Adad-šuma-ušur’s take-over of Babylon during the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I.⁹⁰⁴ (see also **Chronicle P**; see WALKER [1982] 407 in connection with the events mentioned in **Chronicle BM 27796**). GRAYSON (1975) initially interpreted the text as an account of a rebellion against Adad-šuma-ušur which he survived. From the **Synchronistic History** it is known that Adad-šuma-ušur supported Ninurta-apil-Ekur’s bid to take over Assyria.⁹⁰⁵ The epic also deals with the restoration of the cults of the gods of Babylon, Borsippa and Cutha. More evidence on Adad-šuma-ušur’s life and reign comes from Chronicle BM 27796 (WALKER [1982] 402ff.), which mainly deals with Adad-šuma-ušur’s victory over Enlil-kudurri-ušur before ascending the throne of Babylonia.⁹⁰⁶ The battle between Enlil-kudurri-ušur and Adad-šuma-ušur is also described in the Synchronistic His-

tory. As in the Kurigalzu epic, part of Babylon’s problems was due to its neglect of the cult of Marduk and its temple, both of which the new Babylonian king restored.

13.5. Chedorlaomer Tablets

The so-called Chedorlaomer⁹⁰⁷ texts consist of two literary texts and one letter, all first published by PINCHES, *JTVI* 29 (1897).⁹⁰⁸ All tablets date to the Late Babylonian and Persian (Achaemenid) periods and recount the invasion of Babylonia (in particular attacks upon Nippur, Borsippa and Babylon itself) by the Elamites in conjunction with the decline of the **Kassite dynasty** and subsequent rise of the **Isin II dynasty**. In the course of the attack Kutir-Nahhunte took Marduk with him back to Elam.⁹⁰⁹

In the letter **BM 35404**⁹¹⁰ to Kutir-Nahhunte by the Babylonian king Enlil-nādin-aḫi, the Elamite ruler reaffirmed his legitimate claim to the vacant throne of Babylonia through the female line in “Berlin letter” **VS 24, 91**.⁹¹¹ The beginning of the VS 24, 91 letter by Kutir-Nahhunte⁹¹² to the Babylonian king, which is only fragmentarily preserved, most probably contained references to earlier marriages between Babylonia and Elam (→ below). The Elamite ruler claimed the Babylonian throne for himself on the basis of his alleged descendant from the daughter of Kurigalzu I.⁹¹³ He asserted that some of the Babylonian rulers unjustly held the throne. In his article of 1986 van Dijk discussed dynastic marriages between Kassites and Elamites during the period based on VS 24, 91. BM 35404 was obviously the

⁹⁰² On Tukulti-Ninurta I see WEIDNER, *AJO* 13 (1939–1941) 109–124 and id., ITN.

⁹⁰³ The text was first edited by GRAYSON, *Babylonian Historical-Literary Texts*, Toronto and Buffalo (1975) 56–77.

⁹⁰⁴ See BRINKMAN, MSKH 19–21 with a summary on the discussions concerning the chronology from Tukulti-Ninurta I to Adad-šuma-ušur, including the vassal kings Enlil-nādin-šumi and Kadašman-Ḫarbe II. For a new interpretation see YAMADA (2003) 153–177 and → **Chronicles sub 7.3**.

⁹⁰⁵ WALKER (1982) 406 noted that there is no good evidence for the interpretation of GRAYSON (1975). One would expect the statue of Marduk, which had been removed by Tukulti-Ninurta I, to be returned by Ninurta-apil-Ekur when he visited Karduniaš (Babylonia).

⁹⁰⁶ On the synchronism with Aššur-nirāri III see BRINKMAN, MSKH 91 and WALKER (1982) 409.

⁹⁰⁷ These texts are named after Chedorlaomer (or Kedor-Laomer) king of Elam, who is mentioned in Genesis 14 and to be identified with Kutir-Nahhunte. See FOSTER (1996) 283¹ for further literature and BRINKMAN, PPKB

80f. This identification is doubted by LAMBERT (1994) 67 and considered obsolete by FOSTER, GMTR 2 (2007) 21.

⁹⁰⁸ BM 35404 (pp. 84–85), BM 34026 (pp. 86–89) and BM 35496 (pp. 82–83). BM 34026 was reedited by LAMBERT (1994) 67–72. Note the bibliography in FOSTER (1996) 289.

⁹⁰⁹ See POTTS (1999) 237 for a short description of the content of these tablets.

⁹¹⁰ FOSTER, GMTR 2 (2007) 22 considers this letter a “clearly literary fabrication”.

⁹¹¹ See VAN DIJK (1986) 160 (Kutir-Nahhunte calls himself *mār mārti* “son of the daughter”).

⁹¹² VAN DIJK (1986) 159–170 (the sender was identified with Šutruk-Nahhunte or Kutir-Nahhunte), STEVE – VALLAT (1989) 223–238, POTTS (1999) 207–208 and 235.

⁹¹³ On the social system of the Elamite rulers, namely the *ruhušak* (“sister’s son”), see for example VALLAT (1996) 299–301. See POTTS (1999) 164–165 on the “filiations” of the Sukkalmah dynasty and POTTS (1999) 207 on the Igi-halki family.

answer by the Babylonian king to VS 24, 91 defending his legitimacy. The following synchronisms were reconstructed by van Dijk on the basis of VS 24, 91: Kurigalzu I⁹¹⁴ & Pahir-iššan, and Meli-Šipak & Šutruk-Nahhunte.

The Chedorlaomer tablets suggested to BRINKMAN (PHPKB 80ff.) the possibility of an Elamite interregnum. Elamite control over Babylon is a well established fact (note also **III R 38, 2** below), but no interregnum can be deduced from the texts describing it. BRINKMAN, PHPKB 82 stated that “neither overlap nor consecution nor interregnum has been demonstrated; nor have any of these been ruled out”. Later in MSKH 29 and 33 and RIA 5 (1977) 184 he argued for a slight overlap.

13.6. Elam and the Kassites

The Chedorlaomer tablets depict the time of the collapse of the Kassite dynasty caused by the Elamites under the rule of Kutir-Nahhunte. The texts also mention the destruction of Nippur (**BM 34026**). Other towns, including Borsippa and Babylon, were attacked as well. Finally Marduk’s anger turned against the invaders (**BM 35496**). The letter **VS 24, 91** documents the line of descendants of Kurigalzu I in order to press Kutir-Nahhunte’s claim to the Babylonian throne. According to VAN DIJK (1986) 169 the Chedorlaomer letters preceded the fall of the Kassite dynasty, which he regarded as the second most dramatic event in Babylonian history after the fall of the Ur III dynasty. **Chronicle BM 27796** reports on the transition of Kassite power to the **Isin II dynasty**. **VS 24, 91** contradicts the accounts of **Chronicle P** (II, 1–III, 19) on the campaigns of Kurigalzu II, saying that the latter fought Untaš-Napiriša of Elam, which is impossible according to the chronicle. Since the Chedorlaomer texts do not contradict the letter VS 24, 91, Chronicle P,

which is a later compilation, must be wrong (→ **7.3.** for more errors).

In the third chapter of PHPKB 86–90 BRINKMAN analyzed the rise of Elam and the downfall of the Kassite dynasty. After the Assyrian interregnum of Tukulti-Ninurta I and his three Babylonian vassals Babylonian power revived under Adad-šuma-ušur and a new dynasty, the Šutrukids, seized the throne of Elam. (During the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I, Kidin-Hutran III, the last ruler of the Igiḥalkid dynasty, had returned to Babylonia, as reported in **Chronicle P**.) Important rulers followed in Babylonia, Meli-Šipak and Marduk-apla-iddina I. But during the reign of Zababa-šuma-iddina, the renaissance of Babylonia came to an end. Babylonia was smitten first by the Assyrian Aššur-dān I and later by the Elamite Šutruk-Nahhunte (see **Synchronistic History** and the literary text **III R 38, 2**⁹¹⁵). Šutruk-Nahhunte passed the Elamite throne on to his eldest son Kutir-Nahhunte. Enlil-nādin-aḫi, the last Kassite king, fought three years against Elam before being defeated and carried off as prisoner (described in detail by **III R 38, 2**). The details of the transition from the Kassite to the Isin II dynasty remain obscure, but Elamite influence continued under Šilhak-Inšušinak, a contemporary of Aššur-dān I. Although the transition from one dynasty to another is the subject of **BKL A** (on the beginning of the Isin II dynasty) and **Chronicle BM 27796**, this period remains in the dark.⁹¹⁶ The list of conquered sites within Assyrian and Babylonian territories in the inscriptions of Šilhak-Inšušinak suggests that the early Isin II rulers might have been vassals of the Elamites.⁹¹⁷ Although there exists no proof for this suggestion, Šilhak-Inšušinak obviously took advantage of the weakened Assyrian empire of Aššur-dān I and the end of the Kassite dynasty.⁹¹⁸ Only the 4th king of the Isin II dynasty, Nebuchadnezzar I (1125–1104), managed

⁹¹⁴ According to Brinkman’s 1977 chart, his reign ended in 1375, which means that the marriage must have taken place before then. Van Dijk (1986) 165 pointed out that Chronicle P did not differentiate between Kurigalzu I and II.

⁹¹⁵ This text (*narû*-literature or poetic autobiography?) describes events in the late Kassite period (GRAYSON and LAMBERT, *JCS* 18 [1964] 8, TADMOR [1958] 137–139 and POTTS [1999] 233) reporting a conflict between Enlil-nādin-aḫi of Babylon and Kutir-Nahhunte of Elam. According to TADMOR, an interregnum between the Kassite and Isin II dynasty must have taken place because of the total destruction of Babylon by the Elamites. The name of the Isin II king, who at first fled from the Elamites, is unknown.

See also VAN DIJK (1986) 169–170 and STEVE – VALLAT (1989) 228–229 on this text.

⁹¹⁶ BRINKMAN, PHPKB 91ff. and POTTS (1999) 252f.

⁹¹⁷ POTTS (1999) 242–247.

⁹¹⁸ On the absolute chronology of the “Post-Kassite period” see BRINKMAN, PHPKB 68ff., who stressed that “the absolute dating for Babylonia is entirely dependent on synchronisms with the Assyrian chronology of the time.” Brinkman lists Assyro-Babylonian synchronisms of the Post-Kassite period, starting with Ninurta-nādin-šumi and his contemporary Aššur-rēša-iši I (cited sources: chronicles, annals and treaties). On pp. 78ff. he mentions the problem of an Elamite interregnum and the **Distanzangaben** related to the absolute dating of this period.

to defeat the Elamite Hutelutuš-Inšušinak in the battle of the Ulai river. With Hutelutuš-Inšušinak the Šutrukid dynasty came to an end.⁹¹⁹

Since the reign lengths of Elamite kings are unknown it is impossible to establish any absolute dates. An approximate date can be established by synchronizing them with the Assyrian and Babylonian sovereigns. Still, mostly we lack exact synchronisms or links to specific years of Assyrian or Babylonian rulers. Little is known on the circumstances which lead from one Elamite dynasty to another (especially the Kidinuids, which date to the Dark Age of Mesopotamia and the transition to the better documented Igihalkid

dynasty) and genealogical information is too scarce for this period. Thus, Elamite chronology by no means can be decisive for absolute chronological questions, even though it has been postulated that the written evidence in combination with archaeological data (especially from Susa, Ville Royale A⁹²⁰) accords with a low Mesopotamian chronology.⁹²¹

An overview of Elamite rulers⁹²² with their contemporary Babylonian rulers is depicted in Table 33.

For difficulties with reign length assigned to Adad-šuma-ušur in **BKL A** and the data given in **Chronicle P** see WALKER (1982) 409. It is not sure whether the 30 years assigned to him in the BKL include the six

Elam	Dynasty	Babylonia	Assyria
Puzur-Injuinak	Awan Simaški ⁹²³	Ur-Nammu (Ur III)	
Girname		Šulgi	
Tazitta		Amar-Sin Š ¹ -Sin	
Iabrat I	Sukkalmaḫ ⁹²⁴	Š ¹ -Sin	
Kindattu		Ibbi-Sin (Ur III) Iḫbi-Era (Isin I)	
Kuk-Našur I		Gungunum (Larsa)	
Atta-huḫu		Gungunum (Larsa) Sumuabum (Babylon I)	
Siruktuh		Zamb ² ya (Isin I)	Šam ² -Adad I
Siwe-palar-huppak		Hammu-r ² piy ² (Babylon I)	
Kudu-zuluḫ I		Hammu-r ² piy ² (Babylon I)	
Kuk-našur II		Ammi, aduqa	
Tepti-ahar		Kadaḫ-man-zi arbe I	
Paḫir-iḫjan		Kurigalzu I (Kassite)	
Untaḫ-Napiriša	Burna-Burša II		
Kidin-Hutran III	Enlil-n ² ḫin-ḫumi Adad-ḫuma-iddina		
Šutruk-Nahhunte	Šutrukids ⁹²⁶	Meli-Šipak Zababa-ḫuma-iddina	
Kutir-Nahhunte		Enlil-n ² ḫin-aḫ	
Šilhak-Injuinak			Aḫḫur-d ² ḫin I
Hutelutuḫ-Injuinak		Nebuchadnezzar I. (Isin II)	

Table 33

⁹¹⁹ POTTS (1999) 253. Nebuchadnezzar, who did not occupy Elam, returned the Marduk statue to Babylon, which had been carried off by Kutir-Nahhunte (→ **Distanzangaben** on the limits of their usefulness for chronological purposes). See BRINKMAN, MSKH 9⁵ and 33⁹¹ and PHPKB 108⁵⁸⁵.

⁹²⁰ According to GASCHE *et al.*, *Dating ...* 20 continuity can be observed between the Old and Middle Elamite period. For the different levels connected with the Elamite rulers mentioned in the texts see pp. 21ff. On pp. 23–24 it is mentioned that the information on the Kidinuids is scarce and that their sequence cannot be determined (see esp. fn. 23).

⁹²¹ VALLAT (2000) 14–16. As can be seen in the table in GASCHE *et al.*, *Dating ...* the Elamite chronology with its sequence of rulers is tied to the Babylonian one, which is based on the

evaluation of the astronomical data (namely via Ammišaduqa, who is a contemporary of Kuk-Našur II).

⁹²² For a reconstruction of the Elamite dynasties including important text-quotations see VALLAT (2000) 8–17. For the approximate dates of the rulers of the Igihalk dynasty see STEVE-VALLAT (1989) 234.

⁹²³ For the Simaškian KL see POTTS (1999) 144–148.

⁹²⁴ See POTTS (1999) 164–165 on a tentative sequence of the Sukkalmaḫs. On their relations with Assyria and Babylonia (including Mari) see pp. 166–171.

⁹²⁵ For a tentative family-tree of the Igihalkids see POTTS (1999) 207.

⁹²⁶ POTTS (1999) 231–258.

years of his predecessor assigned to Adad-šuma-iddina or their reigns overlapped, as indicated by Chronicle P. The latter states that the revolt of Adad-šuma-ušur took place after Tukultī-Ninurta I had reigned for seven years in Babylonia through Babylonian vassals. “For chronological purposes the interval between Kashtiliash and Adad-shuma-usur could be regarded as seven years however one interprets the King List’s data for the intervening kings. For the present, however, the question cannot be answered.” According to YAMADA (2003) 165–168, the 30 years are to be reckoned from the point of time when Adad-šuma-ušur put an end to Tukultī-Ninurta’s I seven-year reign in Babylonia. This means that Adad-šuma-ušur’s reign over southern Babylonia ran parallel to the Assyrian reign over Babylon until Enlil-kudurri-ušur, whom he defeated (→ **AKL** sub **2.2.1.3.** and **Chronicles** sub **7.3.**).

Though they provide vivid reports on the political situation, one should not expect too much historical or even chronological accuracy from historical epics “where literary creativity and theological interpretation play an important role” (BRINKMAN, PPKB 33.). They can serve as additional material, and approach their material in a completely different manner from the KLS, ELs, and chronicles: but their historical statements must be cross-checked with other sources. Most of these texts do not have such a long history of editing and redaction as the text material, which mostly stems from the first millennium BC (KLS, ELs, and chronicles).

Links

BKL, Chronicles, Distanzangaben, Isin II Dynasty, Kassite Dynasty, Royal Inscriptions, Synchronistic History

