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MARDUK IN THE NEO-ASSYRIAN ROYAL INSCRIPTIONS FROM ADAD-NĀRĀRĪ II TO SENNACHERIB *

Jinyan Wang

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Abstract

Marduk appeared in the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions since the reign of Adad-nārārī II. From the reign of Adad-nārārī II onwards, his status in royal ideologies began to be increased, and he gradually acquired various roles in Assyrian imperialism and kingship. During the early reign of Tiglath-pileser III, Marduk's prominence was still visible. Sargon II continued this trend and elevated Marduk to a new level. Sargon II's policies were deemed as "too Babylonian" by his son, Sennacherib, who reversed course in order to de-Babylonianise Assyria. After about a decade of almost total silence on Marduk (and Bēl) in his royal inscriptions, Marduk began to be mentioned after 691 BC, which is the year that Sennacherib fought the battle of Ḫalule against the Babylonians and their allies, followed by the capture of Babylon and the destruction of Marduk's statue in 689 BC. A detailed examination of Marduk's character and status in the royal ideologies from Adad-nārārī II to Sennacherib serves to better contextualize Sennacherib's policies to erase Marduk and de-Babylonianise Assyria.

1 Introduction

Assyria's interaction with, and conquest of Babylonia led to various impacts on Assyrian culture and religion.[1] One way to understand such impacts is to look at how Assyrian kings viewed and dealt with the city god of Babylon, Marduk, in their royal inscriptions. It is well known that from the Old Babylonian period onward, there were seats of Marduk under his names Marduk and Asalluhi in the temple of Aššur.[2] A temple of Marduk in Assur is first attested during the reign of Aššur-uballiṭ I in the Middle Assyrian period.[3] Towards the end of the 13th century, the Assyrian king Tukultī-Ninurta I captured Babylon and took the statue of Marduk to Assur, where it remained for no fewer than 106

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1. For example, Assyrian royal inscriptions used the Babylonian literary dialect and Babylonian script and the Assyrian elites participated in the Babylonian culture and scholarship (Frame 1999, 19; Frame 2008, 24). For Babylonian influence on Assyrian religion in general, see Maul 2017, 336.
2. George 1993, 72, no. 120, and 107, no. 564.
3. Sommerfeld 1987–2000, 367.

years.[4] Marduk was also worshipped in the Nabû temple at Nineveh, which was built by Adad-nārāri III (810–783 BC). While it is unclear when Marduk was added to this temple, it is certain that Marduk was worshipped in it during the reign of Sargon II (721–705 BC). Marduk's name first appeared in official Assyrian inscriptions after the reign of Nebuchadnezzar I.[5] Since that time, Marduk was regularly mentioned by Assyrian kings, until several centuries later, when Sennacherib (704–681 BC), who destroyed Babylon and smashed the statue of Marduk in 689 BC,[6] almost completely omitted Marduk's name from his inscriptions.

While many scholars have examined Sennacherib's treatment of Marduk, as well as his alternative name Bēl,[7] in myths, royal inscriptions, and cultic practices,[8] the policies of his predecessors concerning Marduk's role in the empire have yet to be sufficiently analysed.[9] A detailed examination of Marduk's character and status in the royal ideologies from Adad-nārārī II (911–891 BC) to Sennacherib should serve to better contextualize Sennacherib's policies.

2 General Remark on References to Marduk (Bēl) in Neo-Assyrian Royal Inscriptions

Beginning with Shalmaneser III (858–824 BC), Marduk was mentioned in passages describing campaigns in Babylonia and other locations in which Marduk was locally worshipped. For example, Marduk (sometimes along with Aššur) is mentioned in Shalmaneser III's inscriptions that record his effort to assist the Babylonian king Marduk-zākir-šumi (c. 851–824 BC), suppress a revolt, as well as his campaign against the Chaldeans and Namri.[10] References to Marduk are very frequent in the inscriptions of Sargon II in the context of his campaigns against Marduk-apla-iddina II, a Chaldean ruler. According to Sargon II's inscriptions, these campaigns are commanded by Marduk to remove the

4. Weidner 1939–1941, 120; Zaia 2015, 28, n. 33.
5. Sommerfeld 1982, 193–195.
6. For Sennacherib's descriptions of the event (the Bavian Inscription [RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 223] and the *bīt akīti* Inscription [RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 168]) and the Babylonian reaction, see Zaia 2015; Levavi 2021. For the relationship between Assyria and Babylonia during the reign of Sennacherib, see Brinkman 1973; Brinkman 1984, 54–67; Frame 1992, 52–70; Frahm 2017; Grayson & Novotny 2012, 11–14.
7. The name Bēl refers "to the god in his specific role as the patron deity of the city of Babylon, and to the primary cult image of the god in that role in Babylon's Esagil temple" (Heath-Whyte 2023, 188). For a discussion on the uses of Marduk and Bēl in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, see Heath-Whyte 2022.
8. For example, Machinist 1984–85; Frahm 1997, 282–288; Frame 2008, 26–28; Vera Chamaza 2002, 71–167; Maul 2017, 352; Robson 2019, 75–77; Novotny 2023, 407–411; Zaia 2023, 617 and 2024; Frahm 2023, 225–232; Ponchia & Lanfranchi 2024, 465–467.
9. Short and summarized descriptions: Sommerfeld 1987–2000, 367; Tadmor, Landsberger & Parpola 1989, 25–28; Frame 1999, 14–18; Zaia 2024, 104f.
10. RIMA 3 A.0.102.14, 188. Namri was located at the foot of the Zagros, in the area of the Diyala valley, near Dēr (see Kessler 1998–2001). The lands of Chaldea, Elam, Namri, and Aram were the sources of the troops mustered by Marduk-balāssu-iqbi, the Babylonian king, to fight against the Assyrian king Šamšī-Adad V (823–811 BC) in one inscription (RIMA 3 A.0.103.1, iv 37–39). Therefore, Namri fell in the sphere of Babylonian influence.

Chaldeans from Babylonia.[11] Marduk is also mentioned by Shalmaneser III, Adad-nārārī III, Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BC), and Sargon II in passages that describe the Assyrian king making offerings in Babylon, Borsippa, and Cutha, and imposing tax for sanctuaries in Babylonia, as well as his participation in religious rituals in Babylonia.[12] Certain inscriptions of Sargon II commemorating building activities in Babylonia conventionally invoke Marduk,[13] just like inscriptions commissioned by native Babylonian kings.

There are five primary roles attested for Marduk in contexts that are not directly connected either to Babylonia or to his cult outside of Babylonia:

(1) *Representative of the Assyrian pantheon*. There are two ways in which the divine representatives of the Assyrian pantheon were presented: (I) the introductory list of gods and goddesses that appears at the beginning of an inscription (the introductory list of gods and goddesses henceforth)[14] and (II) the group of divine symbols on stelae and rock reliefs. These gods were variously referred to as "the gods and goddesses who dwell in Assyria",[15] "the gods who dwell in Assyria",[16] and "the gods of Assyria" in royal inscriptions.[17] As the national god of Assyria, Aššur had limited acceptance outside of the Assyrian heartland, which posed a considerable problem for the legitimacy of its expansionist ambitions.[18] A pantheon consisting of Aššur and other gods whose prominence was universally acknowledged made Assyria more familiar to the subjected peoples in the peripheries.

(2) *Guardian of stelae marking boundaries between political entities*. During the reigns of Adad-nārārī III and Shalmaneser IV (782–773 BC), four stelae marking boundaries were established in Turkey and Syria, marking the border of Assyrian influence.[19] At the

11. E.g., RINAP 2 Sargon II 1, 268–269.
12. In the inscription of Bēl-Ḫarrān-bēl-uṣur, the palace herald, commemorating the establishment of his city Dūr-Bēl-Ḫarrān-bēl-uṣur, the gods Marduk, Nabû, Šamaš, Sîn, Ištar-kakkabī are listed as the gods worshipped in the city (RIMA 3 A.0.105.2). For the discussion whether this stele was established during the reign of Tiglath-pileser III or Shalmaneser IV, see May 2015, 108, n. 152.
13. RINAP 2 Sargon II 123–125.
14. These gods and goddesses are said to determine destinies and appoint the king to his position. This practice was already adopted in the Middle Assyrian period. For example, one inscription of Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 BC) has this kind of list featuring Aššur, Enlil, Sîn, Šamaš, Adad, Ninurta, and Ištar (RIMA 2 A.0.87.1, i 1–14). This practice of listing the great gods probably continued to the end of the Empire, but the relevant inscription types are not attested for the last rulers. The latest attested example is from the reign of Ashurbanipal (e.g., RINAP 5/2 Ashurbanipal 113, obv. 1–15).
15. For example, RINAP 2 Sargon II 2, 483: DINGIR.MEŠ ⌜*ù*⌝ [d]IŠ.TAR.MEŠ *a-ši-bu-*⌜*ut* KUR⌝*–aš-šur*.KI.
16. For example, RINAP 2 Sargon II 2, 489: DINGIR.MEŠ [*a*]-⌜*ši-bu*⌝-[*ut*] ⌜KUR⌝*–aš-šur*.KI.
17. For example, RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 168, 7: DINGIR.MEŠ KUR*–aš-šur*.KI.
18. For more discussion, see Maul 2017, 351f. For the near total absence of Aššur in Babylonian cult, see Frame 1999. However, there was a cult of Aššur in Uruk after the fall of Assyria (Beaulieu 1997). In order to make up for this limitation, the Assyrians implemented various religious policies. The equation of Aššur to Enlil is one such example. The Assyrians also equated Aššur with Anšar, one of the primordial entities at the beginning of the cosmos (Maul 2017, 352; Frahm 2023, 373f.; Ponchia & Lanfranchi 2024, 464 and 466f.). Stephanie Dalley is currently working on this issue.
19. Adad-nīrārī III: RIMA 3 A.0.104.2 (Antakya); A.0.104.3 (Pazarçık); A.0.104.5 (Dūr-katlimmu / Tell Sheikh Hammad); A.0.104.6 (Saba'a). Shalmaneser IV: RIMA 3 A.0.105.1 (Pazarçık); the stele of the Palace Herald Bēl-Harrān-uṣur (RIMA 3 A.0.105.2 [Tell Abta]) was either established during the reign of Tiglath-pileser III or Shalmaneser VI. It is excluded for the discussion, because it does not

end of the text, a group of gods are invoked in the curse section as the guardians of these stelae marking boundaries.

(3) *Commander of the Assyrian expansion*. In Assyrian royal ideology, territorial expansion was a mission granted by Aššur in his role as the national god of Assyria. In a royal ritual of Tukultī-Ninurta I during the Middle Assyrian period, the king was commanded by Aššur: "Expand your country with your just sceptre!".[20] This command was also issued by the collective of Aššur and the great gods in the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 BC).[21] Throughout the Neo-Assyrian period, this role was always attributed to Aššur,[22] sometimes together with Mullissu,[23] and the great gods.[24] For example, Ashurnasirpal II claimed that "the great gods of heaven and netherworld chose me, in their steadfast hearts, and my kingship, dominion, (and) power came forth by their holy command. They sternly commanded me to rule, subdue, and direct the lands and mighty mountains".[25] Other than Aššur and the great gods, various combinations of Aššur and other deities or divine symbols were given the role of commander of imperialism. They were often invoked in the format "at the command of DN" in context of war.

(4) *Issuer and guardian of decisions of international hierarchy during the reign of Sargon II*. There is a series of terms related to such decisions: divine decisions (*adê* and *māmītu*),[26] command (*zikru*), design (*gišḫurru*), limit (*itû*), and judgement (*dīnu*). The insubmissive rulers were accused to disregard (*mêšu*), sin against (*ina … haṭû*), overturn (*abāku*), and transgress (*etēqu*) the *adê* and the *māmītu* of the great gods.[27]

(5) *Divine helper* (tiklu) *of the Assyrian king during the reign of Sargon II*: Divine helpers of the king were described as granting support and might to the king, making the royal weapons prevail, marching at the side of the king, granting victories, and making

fit the definition of the stelae in question. For this stele, see footnote 12.

20. SAA 20 7, ii 34–35.
21. E.g., RIMA 2 A.0.87.1, i 46–49: "The god Aššur (and) the great gods who magnify my kingship, who granted (me) power and strength as my lot, commanded me to extend the border of their land".
22. There are several campaign reports directed to Aššur by the king, showing Aššur as the commander for their expansions (Maul 2017, 350).
23. In one inscription of Adad-nārārī III, Aššur and Mullissu were the commanders to conquer foreign lands (RIMA 3 A.0.104.2010, 13).
24. In one case, Anu, Enlil, and Ea held this role: "When the gods Anu, Enlil, and Ea chose me and named me for the shepherdship of Assyria, granted to my dominion the weapon, the sceptre, the crown, and the staff, (and) sternly commanded me to rule and subdue all of the lands insubmissive to (the god) Aššur" (RIMA 2 A.0.101.40, 10–12).
25. RIMA 2 A.0.101.2, 24–25.
26. The translation of *adê* has been debated. Scholars translate the term variously as "treaty", "covenant", "pact", "loyalty oath", and "the supernatural power of an oath". For the discussion about the debate between (treaty-)oath and supernatural power of an oath, see Fales 2012, 153, n. 125. For discussions of various translations, see Parpola 1987, 180–183; Tushingham 2023, 44f. I would argue that *adê* were believed to originate from the gods, who were, at the same time, also the guarantors. Meanwhile, *adê* were merely imposed by the Assyrian king on Assyrian subjects, rather than originated from the king. Therefore, the term can be interpreted as divine decisions imposed by the Assyrian king or the Assyrian state. The term *māmītu* has the same sense. I plan to examine the function and meaning of the term *adê*, as well as its etymology in a future paper.
27. E.g., RINAP 2 1, 68, 72, and 264–265; 65, 309.

the enemies bow down to the king.

An important aspect for understanding Marduk's status in Assyrian royal ideology is the use of the title "the Enlil of the gods" for Aššur and Marduk. Beginning in the Old Assyrian period during the reign of Šamšī-Adad I, Aššur was equated with Enlil, who was the supreme god of southern Mesopotamian pantheons since the third millennium BC, in order to promote Assyrian imperialism.[28] The city of Assur was promoted as the new Nippur in upper Mesopotamia, adopting the epithet of Nippur: šà-uru (Sum.) / *Libbi-āli* (Akk.), "inner city", and Aššur's temple was given the original name of Enlil's temple in Nippur, Ešarra.[29] Aššur was also paired with Enlil's wife, Mullissu.[30] Based on this syncretism, the royal epithet "the appointee of Enlil (*šakin Enlil*)" is frequently used in inscriptions from the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods.[31]

The Babylonians likewise syncretised Marduk with Enlil using similar strategies. For example, Babylon was equated with Nippur and was given epithets and various topographical names of Nippur. By the end of the second millennium, Marduk took over the supreme status of Enlil.[32] In the inscriptions of the Neo-Babylonian dynasty, Marduk is called "the Enlil of the gods", "the king of the gods", and "the lord of lords".[33] These three titles are also used for Aššur in Neo-Assyrian inscriptions. However, the title "the Enlil of the gods" for Aššur is only employed by a few kings — Tiglath-pileser III,[34] Sargon II,[35] Sennacherib,[36] and Ashurbanipal.[37] However, Sargon II only used this title for Aššur once, and all the other occurrences of this title are exclusively for Marduk.

These roles and epithet were attributed to or taken away from Marduk at different stages from the reign of Adad-nārārī II to Sennacherib, and his status in the Assyrian pantheon varied from period to period. I conduct a detailed examination in this respect in a chronological order, thus contextualising Sennacherib's policies with his predecessors.

3 From Adad-nārārī II to Šamšī-Adad V

In the ninth century, several Assyrian kings conducted campaigns in Babylonia and visited Babylonian sanctuaries (Babylon, Borsippa, and Cutha) and made offerings there.[38]

28. Grayson 1987, 47; Vera Chamaza 2002, 124f.
29. Maul 1998, 191f.; Maul 2017, 342–344; also see Pongratz-Leisten 2015, 141f. Note that this temple went by a different name before that time, as clear from texts of Erišum I and inscriptions of Šamšī-Adad I (Eamkurkurra and Rīmu).
30. Mullissu was added as the consort of Aššur-Enlil in the Middle Assyrian period (Maul 2017, 348).
31. On Assyrian titulary, see Cifola 1995 and Sazonov 2017.
32. Lambert 2013, 273f.
33. For "Enlil of the gods," see e.g., RINBE 1/1 2, ii 44, iv 8 (Nebuchadnezzar II). For "king of the gods", see e.g., RINBE 1/1 2, iii 35; 36, i 15‴. For "lord of lords", see e.g., RINBE 1/1 2, iii 35; 11, v 9′. Marduk is also called "the Enlil of the gods" in *Enūma Eliš*, tablet vii, line 149 (Lambert 2013, 132).
34. E.g., RINAP 1 35, i 1, and 34–35; RINAP 1 37, 1.
35. Sargon II used this title for Aššur "the Enlil of the gods" in RINAP 2 65, 121 (*Letter to to the god Aššur*).
36. E.g., RINAP 3/2 159, 5.
37. E.g., RINAP 5/2 186, 4; Hymn to Aššur (SAA 3 1, 2–3).
38. For details, see Frame 2008, 22–26; Nielsen 2023, 547–556. Furthermore, Edmonds (2023) provides a more complete reconstruction of the reigns of Adad-nārārī II and Tukultī-Ninurta II based on five newly attributed early Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions.

Šamšī-Adad V (823–811 BC) used the title "king of Sumer and Akkad" in Assyrian inscriptions, though his rule in Babylonia is not acknowledged as legitimate in any Babylonian sources.

Marduk's appearance in the introductory list of gods and goddesses and the group of divine symbols on stelae and rock reliefs was not consistent during this period. While the number of gods present in the lists varies, there is a standard order, consisting in six categories of gods,[39] and the order of gods in each category varies:[40]

The Supreme God of the Pantheon:	Aššur (1)[41]
Triad of the Most Ancient Gods:	Anu (13); Enlil (12); Ea (14)
Triad of the Moon, Storm, and Sun God:	Sîn (2); Šamaš (3); Adad (4)
Pair of Babylonian Gods:	Marduk (7); Nabû (8)
Warrior Gods:	Ninurta (11); Nergal (9); Nusku (16); Sebettu (6); Amurru (10)
Goddesses:	Mullissu (15); Ištar (5);[42] Gula (18)

During the reigns of Adad-nārārī II and Tukultī-Ninurta II (890–884 BC), there are five inscriptions that employed this introductory list, one from the reign of Adad-nārārī II[43] and four from the reign of Tukultī-Ninurta II.[44] These inscriptions are found in Assur and inscribed on clay foundation tablets deposited (or displayed) in buildings (e.g., temples and palaces), on which there are no divine symbols. All the lists are the same, invoking gods 1–5, 7 (Marduk), 9, 11–16.[45] Marduk is always called "sage of the gods, lord of oracles", titles associated with wisdom.[46]

From the reign of Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BC) onwards, the introductory list of gods and goddesses was almost exclusively employed on stone stelae/slabs and rock reliefs which feature a royal figure and a group of divine symbols.[47] Some of the stelae/slabs

39. Although not all of them are always present.
40. Note that this pantheon is essentially a copy of the Babylonian pantheon with a different head. For example, in the curse section of the *adê* between Šamšī-Adad V and Marduk-zākir-šumi, the list of gods begins with Marduk and Nabû, the two highest gods of the Babylonian pantheon, followed by Anu, Enlil, Mullissu, Ea, Šamaš, Sîn, Adad, Zababa … (SAA 2 1).
41. The number in the bracket represents the deity's presence in the list and the group of divine symbols in tables below. The number follows Reade 1977, 39f.
42. Also RINAP 2 103 (Sargon II).
43. RIMA 2 A.0.99.2.
44. RIMA 2 A.0.100.2–5.
45. This is similar to the annals of Tiglath-pileser (RIMA 2 A.0.87.1).
46. This connection seems to be derived from his syncretism with Asalluhi, the son of Ea. See Johandi 2018, 557–562. In the hymn *Asalluhi A*, which is presumably dated to the Larsa period, Asalluhi is called "authoritative son of the Abzu, fully equipped with pure wisdom, Marduk, the bringer of advice" (Johandi 2018, 561). In one inscription of Sargon II, Marduk is referred to by the name Asari (RINAP 2 125, i 27), an alternative name of Asalluhi. For the role of Marduk in incantations from Assyria, see Frame 1999, 15.
47. For the divine images or symbols in the practice of Assyrian imperialism, see Liverani 2017, 220–222.

from the reign of Ashurnasirpal II to Šamšī-Adad V are located in the heartland of the empire, while others in the peripheries (Table 1).[48]

King	*Inscription*	*Material*	*Provenance*	*List*
Ashurnasirpal II	RIMA 2 A.0.101.8	Stone slab	Northwest Palace, Kalhu	1–5, **7**, 9, 11–16
	RIMA 2 A.0.101.30	Stone slab	Northwest Palace, Kalhu	—
	RIMA 2 A.0.101.17 (Nimrud Monolith)	Stone stele	Ninurta temple, Kalhu	1–5, **7**, 9, 11–16
	RIMA 2 A.0.101.18 (White Obelisk)	Stone stele	Nineveh	missing
	RIMA 2 A.0.101.47	*Clay tablet*[49]	Nineveh	1–4, 12–14
	RIMA 2 A.0.101.19 (Kurkh Monolith)	Stone stele	Kurkh	1–5
	RIMA 2 A.0.101.20	Stone stele	Babil	1–5, **7**, 9, 11–16
Shalmaneser III	RIMA 3 A.0.102.2 (Kurkh Monolith)	Stone stele	Kurkh	1–3, 5, 12–14
	RIMA 3 A.0.102.4	Stone slab	Til-Barsip	1–3, 5, 12–14
	RIMA 3 A.0.102.17	*Clay tablet*	Sultantepe	1, 3, 5, (**7**, 13)[50]
	RIMA 3 A.0.102.21 and 22	Rock relief	The source of the Tigris	1–5
	RIMA 3 A.0.102.6	*Clay tablet*	Assur	1–3, 5, 12–14
	RIMA 3 A.0.102.10	Stone foundation tablet	Assur	1, 4, 5, **7**, 11–14
	RIMA 3 A.0.102.11	Stone slab	Assur	. . . 3, 9, 15–16
	RIMA 3 A.0.102.14 (Black Obelisk)	Stone stele	Kalhu	1–5, **7**, 9, 11–16
Šamšī-Adad V	RIMA 3 A.0.103.1	Stone stele	Nabû temple, Kalhu	—

Table 1. The lists of gods and goddesses from the reign of Ashurnasirpal II to Šamšī-Adad V.

During the reigns of Ashurnasirpal II, Shalmaneser III, and Šamšī-Adad V Marduk was never present in the group of divine symbols and not always present in the lists. During the reign of Shalmaneser III, he only appeared for three or four times out of eight inscriptions. Ashurnasirpal II elevated his position in two inscriptions and kept him in a standard order in the remaining one. Shalmaneser III lowered his position in one inscription and kept him in a standard order in the other (Table 2).

48. For a brief survey of stelae and rock reliefs marking Assyrian territorial delineations, see Shafer 2007. For a discussion of the local variants in the visual imagery, see Porter 2000. For the divine symbols, see Reade 1977.
49. It is a copy of an inscription originally inscribed on a royal statue.
50. The name Bēl and Anu appear in a sentence describing them entrusting the distant mountains to a certain god or person, but not in the usual format — invocation of the divine name, followed by the epithets.

	Ashurnasirpal II		*Shalmaneser III*	
Inscription	RIMA 2 A.0.101.8 and 17	RIMA 2 A.0.101.20	RIMA 3 A.0.102.10	RIMA 3 A.0.102.14
Provenance	Kalhu	Babil	Assur	Kalhu
Marduk's position	Aššur Anu Ea Sîn **Marduk** Adad Ninurta Nusku Mullissu Nergal Enlil Šamaš Ištar	Aššur Anu Enlil Ea Sîn Adad Šamaš **Marduk** Ninurta Nergal Nusku Mullissu Ištar	Aššur Anu Enlil Adad Ninurta Ištar Ea **Marduk**	Aššur Anu Enlil Ea Sîn Adad Šamaš **Marduk** Ninurta Nergal Nusku Mullissu Ištar

Table 2. Marduk's positions in the lists.

The inscriptions in which Ashurnasirpal II elevated the position of Marduk are from Kalhu, his newly established royal city. The higher status of Marduk may have had a connection with the city as a religious centre. Kalhu is described as a cult centre, *māhāz bēlūtīya*, "cult centre of my (the king's) lordship", in the inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal II,[51] containing sanctuaries for various deities, such as Enlil, Ea(-šarru), Sîn, Adad, Nabû, Bēlet-Kidmuri, Šarrat-niphi, Damkina, Gula, Šala, and the Sebettu,[52] as well as the temple of the patron god, Ninurta. The religious characters of the king were emphasized in the inscriptions from Kalhu: the theme of the wise king is only used in royal epithets from Kalhu and the epithet "purification priest" is particularly common in the inscriptions from Kalhu.[53] It is possible that in the introductory list of gods and goddesses, gods are arranged according to certain religious reasons connected to the city.

4. From Adad-nārārī III to Tiglath-pileser III

Adad-nārārī III used the title "king of Sumer and Akkad" in Assyrian inscriptions.[54] Although he was not acknowledged as king of Babylonia in Babylonian sources, he, along with Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II, boasted in his inscriptions that the people of Babylon brought him the leftover of the sacrificial meals for Marduk, a right reserved to the king of Babylon.[55]

Tiglath-pileser III had more involvements in Babylonia than his predecessors.[56] He removed Nabû-mukīn-zēri, a Chaldean, from the Babylonian throne in 729 BC, and took

51. RIMA 2 A.0.101.30, 53.
52. RIMA 2 A.0.101.30, 53–59.
53. Karlsson 2016, 273.
54. For details about the period from Adad-nārārī to Tiglath-pileser III, see Nielsen 2023, 556–568.
55. Brinkman 1979, 229.
56. For the strategies of Tiglath-pileser III concerning Babylonia, see Brinkman 1979, 229; Brinkman 1984, 39–44; Brinkman 2008, 23–26; Frahm 2017, 292; Nielsen 2023, 560–568. The *Eponym Chronicle* records the events of the reign of Tiglath-pileser III. For the chronicle, see Grayson 1987, 17f.

the throne for himself. He participated in the *akītu* festival and gave gifts[57] and offerings to Babylonian sanctuaries (Babylon, Borsippa, Cutha, and others).[58] He was the first Assyrian king who was acknowledged as king of Babylon in Babylonian tradition, since he is mentioned as Pūlu in Babylonian king lists.[59]

During this period, Babylonian influence increased in Assyrian court and royalty. For example, there is a text (K 8663) written by one of Adad-nārārī III's physicians in which the physician makes reference to the temples of Marduk and Nabû, Esagil, and Ezida, and its colophon mentions the wife of Nabû, Tašmētu and ends with a pray to Nabû: "Do not let shame come to the one who trusts in you, O Nabû".[60] Adad-nārārī III also constructed an Ezida temple at Nineveh and worked on the Ezida temple at Kalhu.[61]

4.1 Introductory List of Gods and Goddesses

Beginning in the reign of Adad-nārārī III, all the presently-attested stelae and rock reliefs bearing the introductory list and the divine symbols appear in the peripheries. A list featuring these great gods and their consorts (except for Aššur) is also used as the punishing agents of the *adê* of Aššur-nārārī V (754–745 BC) imposed on Mati'-ilu, king of Arpad. While Aššur-nārārī V's *adê* is from a clay tablet in Nineveh, it is known that *adê* was also displayed in the area that was the other partner of the *adê*.[62]

King	*Inscription*	*Material*	*Provenance*	*List*	*Divine symbols*
Adad-nārārī III	RIMA 3 A.0.104.5	Stone stele	Dūr-Katlimmu	—	3–5, others?
	RIMA 3 A.0.104.6 (Saba'a Stele)	Stone stele (boundary marker)	Saba'a	—	1–**7**, 8–9, 17
	RIMA 3 A.0.104.7	Stone stele (boundary marker)	Tell al-Rimah	—	1–**7**, 8
	RIMA 3 A.0.104.2010	Stone lions	Til-Barsip	1–2, 5, 7–8, 12–14, 18	—
Aššur-nārārī V	SAA 2 2	*Clay tablet*	Nineveh	1–9, 11–16, 18, others	—
Tiglath-pileser III	RINAP 1 35 (Iran Stele)	Stone stele	Western Iran[63]	1–10, 14	2–6, 8, others?
	RINAP 1 37 (Mila Mergi Rock Relief Inscription)	Rock relief	Mila Mergi	1–10, 14	1–5, **7**, 8, 10, others?

Table 3. Lists of gods and goddesses and divine symbols from Adad-nārārī III to Tiglath-pileser III.

57. Porter 1993, 78, n. 180.
58. E.g., RINAP 1 47, 11.
59. His son Shalmaneser V (726–722) was also acknowledged as king of Babylon, although he ruled for few years only. Notably, he appears not to have participated in the *akītu* festival (Porter 1993, 78, n. 180) — there is no record of his participation in the *akītu* festival in the *Eponym Chronicle* and in the *Babylonian Chronicle*. For the two chronicles, see Grayson 1987, 17f. Tiglath-pileser III (Pūlu) and Shalmaneser V (Ulūlāyu) are listed as king of Babylon in the *Babylonian King List A*. See Fales 2014.
60. Siddall 2013, 174.
61. For more discussion, see Siddall 2013, 174.
62. One copy of the so-called *Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty* was found being displayed in a temple at Tell Tayinat (Lauinger 2011).
63. Possibly from Luristan or the region of Kermanshah.

We can see that the divine symbols of Marduk and Nabû appear for most of time, an innovation compared to the predecessors of Adad-nārārī III. Marduk and Nabû also appeared in the introductory lists of gods and goddesses more consistently than in the reigns of Adad-nārārī III's predecessors.

It is notable that Marduk, with Nabû, appears higher than usual in the inscriptions of Adad-nārārī III and Tiglath-pileser III (Table 4), while remained in a standard position in the *adê* of Aššur-nārārī V:

	Adad-nārārī III	*Aššur-nārārī V*	*Tiglath-pileser III*	
Inscription	RIMA 3 A.0.104.2010	SAA 2 2	RINAP 1 35	RINAP 1 37
Provenance	Til-Barsip	Nineveh	Near the mountains (Iran)	Mila Mergi
Marduk's position	Aššur Anu Enlil Ea **Marduk** Nabû Sîn Ištar Gula	Aššur Anu and Antu Enlil and Mullissu Ea and Damkina Sin and Nikkal Šamaš and Nur Adad and Šala **Marduk** and Zarpanitu Nabû and Tašmetu Ninurta and Gula Uraš and Ninegal Zababa and Babu Nergal and Laṣ Madanu and Ningirsu Humhummu and Išum Girra and Nusku Ištar, Lady of Nineveh Ištar, Lady of Arbela Adad of Kurbail (the rest is omitted)	Aššur **Marduk** Nabû Nergal Šamaš Sîn Adad Ea Ištar Sebetti Amurru	Aššur **Marduk** Nabû Šamaš Sîn Adad Ea Ištar Sebetti Amurru Sumuqan

Table 4. Marduk's Position in the Lists of Gods and Goddesses.

It is interesting that Ea, Marduk, and Nabû are listed in a row to construct a triad of direct three generations (father, son, and grandson) in the inscription of Adad-nārārī III. Furthermore, in RINAP 1 35 (Tiglath-pileser III), Nergal is also elevated up to form a triad of Babylonian gods,[64] whose order follows the mention of cult centres in which offerings are generally made: Babylon, Borsippa, and Cutha.[65] It is important to note that Tiglath-pileser III's elevation of Marduk took place long before he became king of Babylon. RINAP 1 37 is from 739 BC and RINAP 1 35 is from 737 BC, almost a decade before Tiglath-pileser III became king of Babylon in 729 BC.

64. For Nergal in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, see Ponchia & Luukko 2013, xli–lxiii.
65. E.g., RIMA 3 A.0.102.6, II 50 (Shalmaneser III); RIMA 3 A.0.104.8, 23 (Adad-nārārī III). Tiglath-pileser III made offerings in Sippar, Nippur, Babylon, Borsippa, Cutha, Kish, Dilbat, and Uruk (e.g., RINAP 1 51, 9).

In the three lists in which Marduk is elevated, Marduk also acquired a new title. Adad-nārārī III added "the commander of all" to his usual title "sage of the gods, lord of oracles".[66] Tiglath-pileser III abandoned Marduk's traditional epithets, instead giving him the title: "the one who formulates designs, creator of mankind, the one who inspects … the one who makes firm the foundations of the land".

Although Tiglath-pileser III increased the status of Marduk in the lists, he also emphasized the supremacy of Aššur by applying the title "the Enlil of the gods" for Aššur in the very same inscriptions.[67] In contrast, the title "the Enlil of the gods" is almost exclusively applied for Marduk in Sargon II's inscriptions (I discuss this in detail in section 5.4, below).

4.2 Stelae Marking Boundaries between Political Entities

During the reigns of Adad-nārārī III and Shalmaneser IV, stelae marking boundaries were established in the peripheries, some of which bear divine symbols like other stone stelae (see Table 3, above). In the texts inscribed on them, four gods were regularly invoked in the curse section: Aššur, Marduk, Adad,[68] and Šamaš. Sîn is also invoked frequently, although less than the standard four. The addition of Sîn is because of his importance in the Balikh region as the god of Ḫarran.[69]

King	*Inscription*	*Provenance*	*Gods in the curse section*
Adad-nārārī III	RIMA 3 A.0.104.2	Antakya	**Aššur** **Adad** and Ber the Assyrian Enlil the Assyrian Ninlil Sîn
	RIMA 3 A.0.104.3 (Pazarcık Stele)[70]	Pazarcık	**Aššur** **Marduk** **Adad** Sîn **Šamaš**
	RIMA 3 A.0.104.6 (Saba'a Stele)	Saba'a	**Aššur** **Marduk** **Adad** **Šamaš**
	RIMA 3 A.0.104.7	Tell al-Rimah	The great gods
Shalmaneser IV	RIMA 3 A.0.105.1 (Pazarcık Stele)	Pazarcık	**Aššur** **Marduk** **Adad** Sîn **Šamaš**

Table 5. Stelae marking boundaries in the reigns of Adad-nārārī III and Shalmaneser IV.

66. RIMA 3 A.0.104.2010, 5.
67. RINAP 1 35, i 1, 34–35; 37, 1.
68. For a discussion about Adad in Neo-Assyrian royal ideology, see Zaia 2018.
69. For the prominence of Sîn in Neo-Assyrian period, see Hätinen 2021, especially 384–415 for his cult in Ḫarran.
70. This stele is inscribed with two inscriptions from Adad-nārārī III and Shalmaneser IV.

A royal decree was made and preserved in the presence of the statue of Mullissu in the reign of Adad-nārārī III in order to establish the border of the province of Raṣappa and assign the land Ḫindānu to its jurisdiction.[71] Aššur, Šamaš, Nabû, Marduk, Enlil, Ninurta, Nergal, and the Assyrian Ištar were invoked to protect this provincial division.[72] It is worth noting that Marduk alone was invoked earlier in this inscription, probably because of his prominence in the region of Sūhu.[73]

4.3 Gods as Commanders of Assyrian Expansion

During the reigns of Adad-nārārī II, Ashurnasirpal II, and Shalmaneser III, four combinations of gods were invoked in the format "at the command of DN" in context of war: Aššur and Ištar; Aššur and Ninurta; Aššur and the divine standard (*urigallu*); Aššur, Šamaš,[74] and Adad. From the reign of Šamšī-Adad V, the list began to be standardized. In his reign, Aššur, Šamaš, and Adad were regularly invoked for the role as the commander of expansion.[75] For example, Šamšī-Adad V was commanded to impose tribute and tax on all the kings of the Naʾiri lands.[76] In another case, these three gods (Aššur, Šamaš, Adad), along with Ištar, were invoked commanding all the foreign rulers to submit to the Assyrian king.[77]

From the reign of Adad-nārārī III onwards, Marduk was invoked consistently along with Aššur as a commander of imperialism. For example, in one inscription of Adad-nārārī III, Aššur, Marduk, Adad, and Ištar command the kings of Ḫatti to grasp the feet of (*i.e.*, submit to) the Assyrian king.[78] During the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, Adad was dropped from this divine grouping.[79] For example, in RINAP 1 47, 3, only Aššur, Šamaš, and Marduk were invoked as the commanders of Assyrian imperialism (Table 6).[80]

71. Using this method to mark off provincial administrative boundaries was a sign of political decentralization in Assyria (Shafer 2007, 135).
72. RIMA 3 A.0.104.9, r.27–29.
73. RIMA 3 A.0.104.9, r. 17.
74. The royal epithet "sun-god of all peoples" has been assumed by Assyrian kings since the Middle Assyrian period and continued to be used during the Neo-Assyrian period. However, it has few clear references to the judicial function of the king. For more discussions, see Johnson 2022, 41f.
75. Adad gained prominence in the Assyrian pantheon and kingship since the Old Assyrian period (Zaia 2018, 236f.).
76. RIMA 3 A.0.103.1, iii 64–65.
77. RIMA 3 A.0.103.1, ii 13–14.
78. RIMA 3 A.0.104.6, 15.
79. In the aforementioned inscription of Bēl-Ḫarrān-bēl-uṣur, the gods Aššur, Šamaš, Marduk, and Adad are said to have the authority to name a person "to be in charge of the land for its benefit" and they are invoked to protect the inscription (RIMA 3 A.0.105.2, 17 and 29). For more discussion, see fn. 12, above.
80. Adad's attestations in royal inscriptions start to decline from the reign of Tiglath–pileser III (Zaia 2018, 236).

Šamšī-Adad V		*Adad-nārārī III*			*Shalmaneser IV*	*Tiglath-pileser III*
RIMA 3 A.0.103.1	RIMA 3 A.0.103.1	RIMA 3 A.0.104.6	RIMA 3 A.0.104.6	RIMA 3 A.0.104.3	RIMA 3 A.0.105.1	RINAP 1 47
Aššur Šamaš Adad	Aššur Šamaš Adad Ištar	Aššur **Marduk** Adad Ištar	Aššur **Marduk** Adad Šamaš	Aššur **Marduk** Adad Sîn Šamaš	Aššur **Marduk** Adad Sîn Šamaš	Aššur Šamaš **Marduk**

Table 6. Standardized list of gods as commanders of the Assyrian expansion.

5 The Reign of Sargon

While Marduk appeared in royal inscriptions since the beginning of the Neo-Assyrian period, his status was elevated from the reign of Adad-nārārī III onwards. Coincident with this was the increased popularity of Nabû in the Assyrian court and royalty. Marduk's prominence was still visible in the first decade of Tiglath-pileser III's reign, continuing the trend started under Adad-nārārī III. This trend was considerably expanded during the reign of Sargon II, who further intensified the Assyrian involvement in Babylonia.[81] In his Assyrian inscriptions, he called himself the governor of Babylon, the king of Sumer and Akkad, and the governor appointed by Nabû and Marduk.[82] Sargon also introduced himself as "(the one) who reveres the gods Nabû (and) Marduk" in the *Letter to the god Aššur*[83] and became the first Assyrian king to use the title "provider of Esagil and Ezida", a traditional Babylonian royal title, in his Babylonian inscriptions.[84] According to Sargon II's royal inscriptions, during his 710 BC campaign against Marduk-apla-iddina II, a Chaldean ruler who seized the throne of Babylon, he received the support of the citizens and temple personnel of Babylon and Borsippa.[85] This is also confirmed by letters from Babylon to Sargon II, inviting him to assume the Babylonian throne.[86] After the defeat of Marduk-apla-iddina II, Sargon lived in Babylon for five years, leaving the Assyrian heartland in the hands of his crown prince, Sennacherib.[87] He participated in the *akītu* festival[88] and carried out building activities at Babylon, Uruk, and likely Kish and Tell Had-

81. Brinkman 1979, 229; Brinkman 1984, 45–54; Brinkman 2008, 26–32; Frahm 2017, 292f.; Frame 2021, 23–30.
82. E.g., RINAP 2 92, 1, and 95, 1. After the conquest of Babylonia, Sargon II as king of Babylon appeared in the "triple dating" formula invented by his scribe Nabû-zuqup-kēnu in the colophons. This "triple dating" formula consists of the *limmu* year, the regnal year of the king of Assyria, and the regnal year of the king of Babylon, an attempt to strengthen and centralize the power of the king (May 2015, 98).
83. RINAP 2 65, 156.
84. RINAP 2 123, 9.
85. E.g., RINAP 2 1, 371–374.
86. SAA 17 20–23.
87. For the details, see Vera Chamaza 2002, 43–59, and Frame 2021, 28–30. Note that the information comes from chronographic texts, all of which are edited in Frame 2021, 37–41.
88. E.g., RINAP 2 1, 384–388. Also see the *Eponym Chronicle* and the *Chronicle concerning the period from Nabû-nāṣir to Šamaš-šumu-ukīn* (Frame 2021, 40f.).

dad.[89] He became the first Assyrian king to commission building inscriptions for Babylonia.[90] He also granted exemptions for obligations to certain cities.[91]

Sargon II made considerable efforts to Babylonianise Assyria.[92] He invited Babylonian scholars to the Assyrian court[93] and initiated the mass production of the scholarly Neo-Assyrian texts.[94] In the same vein, he called Aššur "the city of wisdom and understanding" in his inscriptions, trying to mimic Babylon.[95] The rise of the court scholarship under Sargon II elevated the status of Marduk and Nabû in the royal ideology,[96] since scholars viewed Marduk and Nabû as the gods of their profession.[97] Sargon's *Letter to the god Aššur* contains the first extant reference of scholarly omens determining military activities, thus, connecting the court scholarship to Assyrian kingship in official royal ideology:

> At the exalted command of the gods Nabû (and) Marduk, who had moved on a path in a station of the stars indicating the mobilization of my weapons, and with a propitious sign for seizing power — Magur, lord of the corona, remained eclipsed for more than one watch, portending the defeat of the land of the Gutians — (and moreover) with the valuable approval of the god Šamaš, the warrior, who had trustworthy omens written on a (sacrificed sheep's) liver (indicating that he would) go at my side.[98]

Sargon II also modelled his new capital, Dūr-šarrukīn, on Babylon [99] and established Nabû as the patron deity of this city, in whose temple Marduk was also worshipped. Furthermore, Sargon II rebuilt the temple of Nabû and Marduk at Nineveh.[100]

89. Frame 2021, 36. For more discussion about the bricks inscribed with Sargon II's inscription from Babylon and Kish, see Pedersén 2023.
90. See RINAP 2 123 and 124 for the city walls of Babylon; RINAP 2 125–128 for the Eanna.
91. Sippar, Nippur, Babylon, and Borsippa's privileged status was reinstituted and Dēr, Ur, Uruk, Eridu, Larsa, Kullab, Kissik and Nemed-Laguda were granted with freedom from obligations (*andurāru*) in the times of Sargon II (e.g., RINAP 2 7, 5–10).
92. Maul points out that during the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods, "Assyrian rulers consciously attempted to give, at least outwardly, a Babylonian appearance to their systems of government, their institutions, their ceremonies, and their piousness", and there were two possible reasons for that. The first was "to make Assyria appear more familiar to the kingdoms and principalities of the Near East"; the second was to dissociate "the symbols of Babylonian culture" from the city Babylon and "transfer them to Assyria" (Maul 2017, 336).
93. See Fincke 2014, 269f.
94. May 2015, 92 f.
95. RINAP 2 65, 113.
96. Robson 2019, 68 f.
97. The letters sent to Assyrian king by the scholars typically open with invocation of Nabû and Marduk (Robson 2019, 39) and they often used Nabû and Marduk as the theophoric element in their names. For Assyrian royal attitudes to court scholarship and the god Nabû, see Robson 2019, 49–97 and Rubin 2021, 292–481.
98. RINAP 2 65, 317–319.
99. Novotny 2023, 402–407, and most recently Yamada 2025. For the city plan, see Frame 2021, 30–34.
100. RINAP 2 92.

There are six common categories of references in the inscriptions of Sargon II:

(1) in the introductory list of gods and goddesses;
(2) in contexts directly dealing with Babylon or Babylonia. For example, Marduk was mentioned as commander of campaigns in Babylonia and as receiver of offerings and beneficiary of tax impositions. While Sargon II's Babylonian campaign against Marduk-apla-iddina II was usually said to be commanded by Marduk, the pair of Aššur and Marduk as divine commanders of this campaign is also attested.[101] Sometimes, Šamaš is also mentioned alongside the pair of Aššur and Marduk in this context.[102] Nabû also appears with Aššur and Marduk in some cases as the commander of Sargon II's Babylonian campaigns;[103]
(3) as the name of an army unit;[104]
(4) as the issuer and guardian of decisions concerning international relationships;
(5) as the divine helper of the king;
(6) as the Enlil of the gods.

Among the inscriptions of Sargon II, there are five inscriptions in which Marduk is mentioned more than five times, and the categories of references to Marduk in these inscriptions are listed in Table 7:

Inscription	*Genre and location*	*References to Marduk (and Bēl)*	*Categories of reference*
RINAP 2 1	Annals in the royal palace of Dūr-Šarrukīn	7+2	2, 4–6
RINAP 2 2		9+4	2, 5–6
RINAP 2 7	Summary inscriptions in the palace of Dūr-šarrukīn	6+1	2, 5–6
RINAP 2 65	Letter to Aššur	11+1	3–6
RINAP 2 103	Cyprus Stele	5+1	1–2, 5–6

Table 7. Inscriptions of Sargon II containing most references to Marduk.

Of particular significance for this study are categories 1, 4, 5–6.

5.1 Introductory List of Gods and Goddesses

During the reign of Sargon II, the introductory list and symbols of gods and goddesses only appear on stone stelae and rock reliefs in the empire's peripheries (Table 8).[105]

101. E.g., RINAP 2 Sargon II 7, 124.
102. E.g., RINAP 2 Sargon II 1, 408 and 2, 384.
103. E.g., RINAP 2 Sargon II 74, vi 43.
104. E.g., RINAP 2 Sargon II 65, 10 and 407. See this practice, see Larsen 1999, 153.
105. For the study of the stelae and rock reliefs from Sargon II's reign, see Frame 2006.

Inscription	*Material*	*Provenance*	*List*	*Divine symbols*
RINAP 2 103 (Cyprus Stele)[106]	Stone stele	Larnaca	1–**7**, 8	1–**7**, 8
RINAP 2 116 (Urāmārāt Relief)[107]	Rock relief	Tang-i Var	1–3, 5–8	unrecognizable[108]
RINAP 2 117 (Najafabad Stele)	Stone stele	Najafabad	1–3, 7	1–3, others?

Table 8. Introductory List and Symbols of Gods and Goddesses in Sargon II's Inscriptions.

	RINAP 2 103	*RINAP 2 116*	*RINAP 2 117*
Provenance	Larnaca	Tang-i Var	Najafabad
Marduk's position	Aššur Sîn Šamaš Adad **Marduk** Nabû Ištar Sebetti	Aššur **Marduk** Nabû Sîn Šamaš Ištar Sebetti	Aššur **Marduk** Sîn Šamaš [...]

Table 9. Marduk's position in the list of gods and goddesses in Sargon II's inscriptions.

While Marduk's position in the Cyprus stele is standard, as in for example, RIMA 2 A.0. 101.20 (Ashurnasirpal II) and RIMA 3 A.0.102.14 (Shalmaneser III), the other two inscriptions elevated Marduk in the second place right after Aššur. This follows Tiglath-pileser III, Sargon's father (see Table 4, above). It is possible that the reason for the high position of Marduk in these two texts is their geographical positions — both of them are located in the east, more proximate to Babylon than Cyprus.

Sargon II did not refer to Marduk by the epithet "sage of the gods, lord of oracles", or Tiglath-pileser III's title for him, instead giving him two new epithets: "lord of all, who provides all people with food and revives the dying …" in RINAP 2 116, and "the lord […], who provides all people with food, […] … […], (and) grants pl[ants …]" in RINAP 2 103 and 117.

5.2 Issuer and Guardian of Decisions of International Relationships

Aššur is sometimes attested as the sole issuer and guardian of decisions of international relationships.[109] In other cases, Aššur, Marduk, Šamaš, and Nabû are invoked as the issuers and guardians of such decisions, although they did not always appear together (Table 10):[110]

106. It is called Larnaca Stele or Kition Stele.
107. Or Tang-i Var Rock Relief.
108. Frame 2006, 57.
109. In the inscriptions of Sargon II, Aššur continue to act alone as the commander of Assyrian expansion during the reign of Sargon II. For example, Aššur was said to command Ullusunu, a Mannean ruler, to come to submit to Sargon (RINAP 2 82, v 47′–54′).
110. This coincided with the increased status of Nabû in Babylonia during the first millennium. Nabû was promoted as the co-ruler of the world with Marduk, possibly holding an even higher status than the latter. T. Oshima (2014, 474) suggests that Nabû "assumed the active role as the divine ruler, while Marduk continued to enjoy the highest authority". A discussion about the rise of Nabû during the Neo-Babylonian period can be found in Oshima 2014, 473–480.

Aššur (Enlil)	*Marduk*	*Šamaš*	*Nabû*	*Inscription*	*Genre*
adê				RINAP 2 65, 310	Letter to Aššur
māmītu		—		RINAP 2 1, 149	Annals (stone wall slabs, Dūr-šarrukīn)
māmītu	*itû*		—	RINAP 2 65, 148	Letter to Aššur
zikru	—			RINAP 2 65, 346–347	Letter to Aššur
zikru	*māmītu*		—	RINAP 2 82, vii 34″–35″	Annals (clay prism, Nineveh)
zikru		*zikru; gišḫurru*	—	RINAP 2 65, 92[111]	Letter to Aššur

Table 10. Issuers and guardians of decisions of the Assyrian dominion.

Marduk is paired twice with Aššur (*māmītu*; *zikru*), twice with Šamaš (*itû*; *māmītu*), and once with Aššur, Šamaš, and Nabû (*adê*). Apart from the formulas cited in Table 10, there are also attestations of the combination of the decision (*māmītu*) of the great gods and the judgement (*dīnu*) of Šamaš.[112]

5.3 Divine Helper of Sargon II

Both Aššur and other gods were chosen for the role as the divine helper of the king during the Neo-Assyrian period. For example, Ashurnasirpal II claimed that Aššur is "the one who made my (the king's) kingship surpass the kings of the four quarters".[113] Furthermore, Aššur and Šamaš are called "his helpers"[114] and they are said to have "cut down like marsh reeds fortified mountains and rulers who are hostile to him (and) subdued all their lands" in his inscriptions.[115] During the reign of Ashurbanipal, Ištar of Nineveh and Ištar of Arbela were especially promoted as his personaldivine helpers.[116]

Sargon II typically viewed Aššur and Marduk as his divine helpers.[117] Sargon II attributed his successful reign and far-reaching reputation to them,[118] claiming that his "accomplishment of victories and conquests" were granted by Aššur and Marduk.[119] These two gods were also said to have granted him might and made his weapons prevail.[120]

In some cases, Sargon II added Nabû to the pair of Aššur and Marduk to form a triad.[121] Sargon II also stated that he had subjugated all the people "with the support of the gods Aššur, Nabû, and Marduk", calling them his "helpers".[122] Aššur, Nabû, and Marduk were

111. The command (*zikru*) of Aššur and Marduk is further followed by the decision (*māmītu*) of the lord of lords (RINAP 2 65, 92).
112. RINAP 2 63, ii′ 13′.
113. E.g., RIMA 2 A.0.101.1, i 41.
114. RIMA 2 A.0.101.17, i 17.
115. RIMA 2 A.0.101.17, i 17–18.
116. Porter 2004.
117. He claimed the title "offspring of the gods Enlil and Marduk" in RINAP 2 89, 13 (*nadušu Enlil Marduk*).
118. E.g., RINAP 2 1, 2.
119. E.g., RINAP 2 1, 453.
120. RINAP 2 65, 60.
121. The personal relationship between Sargon II and the gods Nabû and Marduk is also examined by Robson 2019, 68.
122. RINAP 2 103, iv 48–49.

also said to mobilize his weapons[123] and make his enemies bow down at his feet.[124] In reference to the kings of Dilmun and Meluḫḫa, it is said that the fear of the might of Aššur, Nabû, and Marduk led them to submit to Sargon II.[125] Šamaš is mentioned with the other three gods, Aššur, Nabû, and Marduk supporting Sargon II's campaign against Urarṭu and the city Muṣaṣir.[126] The supporting role of these four gods in Sargon's ruling is expressed by the following introduction of the king himself:

> I, Sargon (II), who protects justice (and) does not transgress against the limits set by the gods Aššur (and) Šamaš, who is always humble, (and) who reveres the gods Nabû (and) Marduk, attained my heart's desire with their (the gods') firm approval and stood in triumph over the proud one who was hostile to me.[127]

5.4 The Enlil of the Gods

As I mentioned above, four Neo-Assyrian kings, Tiglath-pileser III,[128] Sargon II,[129] Sennacherib,[130] and Ashurbanipal[131] used the title "the Enlil of the gods" for Aššur. However, Sargon II used this title for Aššur only once, all the other occurrences of this title are exclusively for Marduk. It was used in his Assyrian inscriptions, though usually only in Babylonian contexts. The most frequent use is to call Babylon "the city of the Enlil of the gods".[132] The epithets of Marduk used in Babylonian contexts also include "king of the gods",[133] "lord of lords",[134] and "lord of the gods".[135]

In the *Letter to the god Aššur*, Sargon II gives Marduk the title "Enlil of the gods" in the context of a campaign against Muṣaṣir in Urarṭu (*i.e.*, not in a Babylonian context):

> … the god Aššur … to whom, in the distant past, the Enlil of the gods, the god Marduk, granted the gods of (all) the (low)land and mountain regions of the four quarters (of the world) in order that they, without any exception, might constantly render honour to him (Aššur) (and) that he might bring (them), with their accumulated riches, into Eḫursaggalkurkurra.[136]

According to this passage, it was Marduk who placed all the gods under the jurisdiction of Aššur. In other words, Aššur possessed the active role as the divine ruler, while Marduk

123. RINAP 2 8, 21.
124. E.g., RINAP 2 2, 467–468.
125. E.g., RINAP 2 7, 145 (Dilmun) and 111 (Meluhha).
126. RINAP 2 65, 13.
127. RINAP 2 65, 156–157.
128. E.g., RINAP 1 35, i 1 and 34–35; RINAP 1 37, 1.
129. Sargon II used this title for Aššur "the Enlil of the gods" in RINAP 2 65, 121.
130. E.g., RINAP 3/2 159, 5.
131. E.g., RINAP 5/2 186, 4; *Hymn to Aššur* (SAA 3 1, 2–3).
132. E.g., RINAP 2 1, 267 and 374; 2, 356.
133. RINAP 2 125, ii12. This is an inscription commemorating Sargon II's work on the Eanna of Uruk.
134. RINAP 2 7, 122 in the context of the campaigns against Marduk-apla-iddina (II).
135. RINAP 2 1, 384 in the context of the *akītu* festival. Nabû is called the king of the totality of heaven and earth in this passage.
136. RINAP 2 65, 314–316.

held the highest authority.[137] Accordingly, Aššur was given the executive power over the gods. This resembles a line from the prologue of Hammurabi's *Law Code*, where Anu and Enlil give Marduk the "*illilūtu* over all peoples".[138] In other words, Aššur was the one who was actually in charge of the gods and Marduk's leadership was nominal.

6 *The Reign of Sennacherib*

Sargon continued the earlier tradition to promote Marduk in the royal ideology and further expanded upon it. He spent five years in Babylon, fulfilling the duties as the king of Babylon. Furthermore, he made considerable efforts to Babylonianise Assyria. Marduk's status was increased significantly under such historical circumstances. Sargon's policies were deemed by Sennacherib as "too Babylonian", a threat to Assyria's own identity, therefore, he reversed his father's policies once he became the king of Assyria.

As a part of his strategy to de-Babylonianise Assyria, Sennacherib completely omitted Marduk's name from his inscriptions at the beginning of his reign.[139] Around his campaign against the Babylonians and their allies, at the end of which Babylon was destroyed (689 BC), he began to mention Marduk in the introductory lists of gods and goddesses on stone stelae and rock reliefs (see Tables 13–14, below). Likewise, most occurrences of the name Bēl (twelve inscriptions) and the god Nabû (thirteen inscriptions) appeared after 691 BC. There are four contexts for references to Bēl and Nabû (Table 11):

Context	*God*	*Other gods listed together*	*Year*
Curse formula on artifacts from the palace	Bēl	Aššur, Sîn, Šamaš, Adad, (…) Ištar, **Bēl**, […][140]	—
	Nabû	Aššur, Sîn, Šamaš, Adad, …, **Nabû**, and Uraš[141]	
Sennacherib praying to gods for the battle of Ḫalule	Bēl and Nabû	Aššur, Sîn, Šamaš, **Bēl, Nabû**, Nergal, Ištar of Nineveh, and Ištar of Arbela[142]	After 691
Babylonians misusing treasure of Esagil in the context of the battle of Ḫalule	Bēl	**Bēl** and Zarpanītu[143]	After 691
In the introductory list of gods and goddesses	Nabû	See Tables 12–14 below[144]	One is from ca. 702–701 and the other two are after 691

Table 11. The attestations of Bēl and Nabû in the inscriptions of Sennacherib.[145]

Sennacherib established stone stelae and rock reliefs in both the heartland and peripheries of the empire. All of the inscriptions on stelae and rock reliefs start with the introductory

137. Ponchia and Lanfranchi's (2024, 464) interpretation of this passage is in contrast with mine: Aššur has the role of creator and Marduk that of the holder of the executive power.
138. Col. i, 11: *illilūt kiššat nišī*. Roth 1997, 76. For the meaning of *illilūtu*, see CAD I–J, 85f.
139. For the attestations of various gods in his inscriptions, see Gansell *et al.* 2024, 251f. (Table 3).
140. RINAP 3/2 117, 8; 126, 5′; 128, 3′.
141. RINAP 3/2 104, 7; 115, 6; 129, 3′.
142. RINAP 3/1 18, v 6′; 22, v 63; 23, v 53; RINAP 3/2 144, i 8′; 148, 7′; 230, 59.
143. RINAP 3/1 22, v 32; 23, v 24; RINAP 3/2 146, 10; 147, 10; 230, 13.
144. RINAP 3/1 36, 10 (without Marduk); RINAP 3/2 153, 18 (with Marduk); 223, 1 (with Marduk); 230, 1 (with Marduk).
145. The belonging of 1019 is not certain, so I do not include in the table.

list of gods and goddesses.[146] The lists in the inscriptions and divine symbols before 691 BC consistently omit Marduk, while those after 691 BC (one from Sūr-marrati and three concerning the Nineveh water network) almost always make reference to Marduk (see Tables 12–14). In two cases, Marduk's position follows the standard order, while in one case it was lowered slightly, with Ištar's name appearing before his.[147]

The list of the inscription RINAP 3/2 36 is very peculiar, as Šamaš appears twice: in the first instance, his name appears in the standard order, while in the second instance, it takes the position typically held by Marduk in the standard order. This shows that this replacement was done intentionally to erase Marduk from the list and the strategy to erase Marduk was implemented at the beginning of his reign.

Inscription	*Material*	*Provenance*	*Year*	*List*	*Divine symbols*
RINAP 3/1 36	Stone foundation tablet	Nineveh	ca. 702–701	1–6, 8, 11–14	—
RINAP 3/2 222 (Judi Dagh Inscription)	Rock relief	Judi Dagh	ca. 697	1–5, 11	1–5, 11
RINAP 3/1 38 (Inscription from the Royal Road)	Stone stelae	Nineveh	—	—	1–6, 12–14

Table 12. Sennacherib's inscriptions on stone stelae/tablets and rock reliefs before 691.[148]

Inscription	*Material*	*Provenance*	*Year*	*List*	*Divine symbols*
RINAP 3/2 230 (Baltimore Inscription)[149]	Stone foundation tablets	Possibly Sūr-marrati	690	1–9, 12–14	—

Table 13. Sennacherib's inscriptions on stone stelae/tablets and rock reliefs after 691 BC.

Inscription	*Material*	*Provenance*	*Year*	*List*	*Divine symbols*
RINAP 3/2 223 (Bavian Inscription)	Rock relief	Khinnis	ca. 688	1–**7**, 8–9, 12–14	1–**7**, 8–9, 12–14
— (Maltai rock reliefs)	Rock relief	Maltai	—	—	1–5, **7** or 8, 15[150]
RINAP 3/2 153–155	*Clay tablet*[151]	Prob. Nineveh	—	1–**7**, 8–9, 11, 13, 15, Palil	—

Table 14. Inscriptions concerning the water network in the vicinity of Nineveh.[152]

Marduk reappeared in the list of gods and goddesses and the group of divine symbols in Sennacherib's inscriptions and reliefs after 691 BC, the year in which Sennacherib fought

146. Grayson & Novotny 2014, 15f.
147. RINAP 3/2 153.
148. RINAP 3/2 1023 is a draft or archival copy of a text inscribed on stone stele or rock relief. It is uncertain whether it was belonging to Sennacherib. However, the tablet is very broken and the introductory list is not complete.
149. It is also called Waters Inscription, Washington Inscription, and Sūr-marrati Inscription.
150. The identification of the god who stands on the *mušhuššu* dragon is uncertain. Reade 1987–90, 321, suggests identifying it with Anu or Enlil; Morandi Bonacossi & Qasim 2022, 24, identify this god as Nabû. Since the *mušhuššu* dragon is the symbol for both Marduk and Nabû, the option of Marduk cannot be ruled out. Note that the relief was altered later, probably during the reign of Esarhaddon or Ashurbanipal (Morandi Bonacossi & Qasim 2022, 31f.).
151. An archival copy or a draft.
152. There is another inscription mentioning Marduk, RINAP 3/2 1019; however, it is not certain whether it belonged to Sennacherib. Therefore, I do not include it here.

the battle of Ḫalule against the Babylonians and their allies, followed by the capture of Babylon and destruction of Marduk's statue in 689 BC.[153] Destroying the statue of Marduk was not consistent with the Assyrian convention of kidnapping enemy's gods after defeating them;[154] usually, the divine statues were settled in Aššur's temple in Assur or in other temples, and provided with a cult.[155] It is unclear why Sennacherib reversed his previous policy of omitting Marduk in the introductory list and the group of divine symbols, especially in the Bavian Inscription which commemorates the destruction of Babylon and Esagil.[156] One possible scenario is that he intended to show Marduk's support for his campaign against Babylonia. He did not mention that this campaign was commanded by Marduk as Sargon II did. The role of commander of Assyrian imperialism was solely attributed to Aššur in his inscriptions.[157] Sennacherib started the narration of his campaign against Babylonia by describing the evil deeds of the Babylonians against Marduk: the Babylonians took the treasury from Esagil to bribe the Elamites. In this way, his campaign was presented as vengeance on behalf of Marduk. As I mentioned above (Table 11), in the context of the battle of Ḫalule, Sennacherib stated that he prayed to a group of gods including Bēl and called them his helpers. Furthermore, he did not specify in his inscriptions that Marduk's statue was destroyed, only using phrases like "gods living inside Babylon" and "its (Babylon) gods", perhaps to avoid taking blame for its destruction:[158]

> My people seized and smashed the gods living inside Babylon.[159]

> After I destroyed Babylon, smashed its gods, (and) put its people to the sword, I removed its earth in order to make the site of that city unrecognizable and I had (it) carried to the sea by the Euphrates River.[160]

Sennacherib had a strategy to replace Marduk with Aššur. He inserted Aššur in the place of Marduk in rituals and literature originally associated with Marduk,[161] for example, in *Enūma Eliš*.[162] He also restructured Aššur's temple in Assur to make it more like the

153. Although he did not specify the statue of Marduk (RINAP 3/2 223, 47–48 and 168, 36–39). For the event and the Babylonian reaction, see Zaia 2015; Levavi 2021. For the relationship between Assyria and Babylonia during the reign of Sennacherib, see Brinkman 1973; Brinkman 1984, 54–67; Frame 1992, 52–70; Frahm 2017.
154. For this practice, see Holloway 2002, 123–144; Zaia 2015; Liverani 2017, 222–227.
155. Sometimes, the divine statue was instead returned to its original location, in which case it would be inscribed with the phrase "the might of the god Aššur" (*danān Aššur*) and accompanied by a royal inscription (Zaia 2015, 34–35). The purpose of this "godnapping" was to rebrand these previously foreign gods as Assyrian (*aššurû*) (CAD A/2, 471).
156. For the details of Bavian Inscription, see Dalley 2025.
157. E.g., the battle of Ḫalule, RINAP 3/2 223, 36, and 230, 66.
158. Liverani 2017, 224, notes that there is a difference in languages concerning deportation of gods from other regions and Babylonia in the inscriptions of Sennacherib: while Sennacherib named himself as the actor for the former, he attributed the latter to his soldiers.
159. RINAP 3/2 223, 47–48.
160. RINAP 3/2 168, 36–39.
161. For the details of Sennacherib's religious reform, see the bibliography in fn. 8, above.
162. Assyrian scholars produced a version of the *Enūma Eliš* in which Marduk's name is replaced by that of Aššur (Lambert 1997, 2013, 4–5; Kämmerer & Metzler 2012, 26–32).

Esagil and built an *akītu* house outside Assur, which contained gates depicting Aššur preparing to fight Tiamat.[163] Furthermore, Sennacherib replaced gods that he deemed to be "too Babylonian" with gods that were "more Assyrian" or "non-Babylonian" in the Assyrian pantheon.[164] Sennacherib also limited the divine association with Assyrian imperialism and kingship primarily to Aššur. This is made evident by the frequency of the divine names attested in his royal inscriptions. Among the gods mentioned in Sennacherib's inscriptions, Aššur accounts for 54.68% of all divine names. In contrast, in the royal inscriptions of Sargon II, Aššur accounts for only 35.45%.[165]

The policies of Sennacherib to de-Babylonianise Assyria were short-lived, and were overturned right away by his son Esarhaddon. In the text *The Sin of Sargon*, composed during the reign of Esarhaddon,[166] Sennacherib's policies are anachronistically attributed to Sargon and taken as the reason why Sargon II died during a campaign and his body could not be brought back to Assyria.[167] His policies are described as "he esteemed the gods of Assyria too much, placing them above the gods of Babylonia".[168] In order to distance himself from Sennacherib, Esarhaddon initiated a series of steps to remedy the damage his father had inflicted on the cult of Marduk and his city, Babylon.[169]

7 Conclusion

Marduk's ascension in the Assyrian royal ideology started in the reign of Adad-nārāri III and continued all the way through the reign of Sargon II. He gradually acquired various roles in Assyrian expansion and kingship, and gained an increasingly important status in the Assyrian pantheon. This trend ceased during the reign of Sennacherib, who adopted various policies to erase Marduk and replace him with Aššur. Sennacherib's policies concerning Marduk (and Nabû) represented a complete breakdown of the Assyrian tradition of incorporating other people's gods into its own pantheon and was an attempt to distance himself from his father, whose policies he deemed too "Babylonian". The aim of his policies was to bring Assyria to the fore, as it had long been in the shadow of Babylonia in terms of religious and cultural influence.

163. RINAP 3/2 160, 5–18; Novotny 2023, 407–411. In the inscription, Sennacherib also claims that the gates contained a description of Tiāmat's capture by Aššur. For the details of these building activities in Assur, see Grayson & Novotny 2014, 18–22.
164. For example, Ḫaya for Nabû, Zababa for Ninurta. For details, see Zaia 2024, 108–112.
165. See Gansell *et al.* 2024, 251f. (Table 3).
166. SAA 3 33.
167. RINAP 2, 37.
168. SAA 3 33, 17′–18′.
169. Zaia 2024, 113–115.

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