Some Text-Critical Issues in the Hebrew Bible from an Assyriological Perspective

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Biblical text critics are at odds over the attribution of the variant readings recovered from the textual witnesses of the Hebrew Bible. Were they "created in the course of the textual transmission... [or do they] derive from an earlier stage, that of the literary growth" of the text?[1] Phrasing the issue in this manner prompts one to think in terms of two stages—that of the text's progressive creation and that of its subsequent copying and dissemination; it also suggests that different processes were at work at each stage. Thus, Emanuel Tov asserts

> that large-scale differences displaying a certain coherence were created at the level of the literary growth of the books by persons who considered themselves actively involved in the literary process of composition... The majority of the small differences between textual witnesses... which cannot be combined into a coherent pattern within a biblical book were probably created later, by the first generation of scribes, who allowed themselves the freedom of inserting these elements.[2]

[1] E. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (2nd rev. ed.; Minneapolis/Assen: Fortress Press/Royal Van Gorcum, 2001) 290.

[2] Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 314. For a recent dissent from Tov's view, see A. van der Kooij, "Textual Criticism and the Hebrew Bible: Its Aim and Method," in *Emanuel: Studies in Hebrew Bible, Septuagint and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honor of Emanuel Tov* (ed. S. Paul et al.; VTSup 94; Leiden: Brill, 2003) 729–739.

A more unbridled approach to text variation, one that lumps together all the persons involved in text production, emerges from the remarks of Shemaryahu Talmon: "A collation of variants extant... results in the conclusion that the ancient authors, compilers, tradents and scribes enjoyed what may be termed a controlled freedom of textual variation." Accordingly, writers and copyists alike are not prejudged as having been lax or incompetent when producing their texts, but "our ignorance of literary standards and norms practised in the crucial period of the second half-millennium BCE, seems forever to proscribe any endeavour to restitute an assumed original of the biblical books."[3]

Unable as we are of breaking through the limitations of the physical world and of recovering the original manuscript of any biblical book, the following investigation of texts produced by Assyrian scribes during the seventh-century BCE may be of more than heuristic interest to text critics. For, I submit, though the Assyrian royal inscriptions inscribed on clay in cuneiform were a far cry in terms of material and script from the biblical scrolls written in alphabetic Hebrew that we postulate were produced in Judah, the habits of the Assyrian scribes in copying their texts, a reflection of their attitude towards the issue of fidelity of transmission, can shed light on obscure aspects of the scribal art in Israel.

I

The corpus of texts at the heart of the present study embraces the annal inscriptions of Ashurbanipal that appeared in at least eight editions over the span of twenty-seven years.[4] The authors of these texts are usually referred

[3] S. Talmon, "The Textual Study of the Bible—A New Outlook," in *Qumran and the History of the Biblical Text* (ed. F.M. Cross and S. Talmon; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975) 326.

[4] The earliest annal text, edition E, can be dated ca. 665 BCE; edition H, to year 639. In his new edition of the historical inscriptions of Ashurbanipal, Borger has provided an important tool for the present undertaking; see R. Borger, *Beiträge zum Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals. Die Prismenklassen A, B, C = K, D, E, F, G, H, J und T sowie andere Inschriften* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1996). All texts are cited according

to as 'royal scribes,' and while most of them remain anonymous, a few of their names and their compositions are known, e.g., Nabu-shalamshunu, "the chief scribe of the king" (*ṭupšar šarri rabû*), authored Sargon's 'Letter to the God Ashur.'[5] At the same time, 'royal scribe' seems too general a term to be useful, as it does not suggest that different groups of scribes were in the employ of the palace.[6] Indeed, it is highly likely that there were at least two groups responsible for the production of annal inscriptions. In the first group, the principal one with respect to creation of the texts, were the scribal authors; in the second, the copyists. The authors were guided by two principles in their work: (1) the charge to memorialize the king's activities in the most favorable light, and (2) the need to compose in line with literary tradition. The incorporation of these two principles within the personality of the individual author engendered the inscriptions.[7] Of course, when all

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to Borger; for the most part, his column and line numeration is that of the older *editio princeps* of each edition.

[5] See D.D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1927) 2.99, §178.

[6] Hayim Tadmor holds that the title *ummanû*, "literally 'master' designates the highest rank of a scholar of the scribal art… the *ummanû* were responsible for drafting the royal inscriptions"; see H. Tadmor, "Propaganda, Literature, Historiography: Cracking the Code of the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions," in *Asssyria 1995* (ed. S. Parpola and R.M. Whiting; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1996) 4. But as Oppenheim pointed out, the term *ummanû* was not limited to men of letters; other professions had their 'masters,' e.g., astrologers, haruspices, gold- and silversmiths, who oversaw the work of their subordinates; see A.L. Oppenheim, "Divination and Celestial Observation in the Last Assyrian Empire," *Centaurus* 14 (1969) 117–118.

[7] Mario Fales dealt with "overall scribal competence" and suggested a classification of the ideological and technical aspects of the profession; see F.M. Fales, "Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: Newer Horizons," *SAAB* 13 (1999–2001) 115–144, esp. 133–136. His terminology is based on the procedure outlined by L.D. Levine, "Preliminary Remarks on the Historical Inscriptions of Sennacherib," in *History, Historiography and Interpretation: Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Literatures* (ed. H. Tadmor and M. Weinfeld; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1983) 68–75.

was said and done, the authors were obliged to satisfy the desires of the "great king," who commissioned the texts.[8] As for the second group, the copyists, their job was to duplicate the text that was destined for burial in the foundations of a building or within a wall, or for display in the palace, or for distribution to various centers of the empire. The overwhelming majority of our texts are the products of these copyists.

Despite the large number of texts at our disposal, we are unable to identify any holographs, namely manuscripts written by the scribal authors. A few holographs do exist, for example, Sargon's 'Letter to the God Ashur' that by its very genre was written in a single copy; thus the extant text is the author's original manuscript. But the royal inscriptions of which the annals are a prime example belong to a different genre; they were reproduced numerous times and their holographs are indiscernible among the manuscripts at our disposal. And though hardly anything is known about the training of a royal scribe, it is still possible to resurrect certain aspects of the compositional techniques and the manner of copying these inscriptions by comparison and careful analysis of the many duplicates that are the handiwork of the trained scribes.[9]

[8] On a number of occasions we learn of an Assyrian king deciding upon the specific text to be inscribed, e.g., the various epigraphs prepared to accompany the wall reliefs "were read out to the king" Ashurbanipal (Borger, *Assurbanipal*, 306), ostensively for his approval; Esarhaddon was asked to send the text for the foundation stone of the city wall of Tarbiṣu (SAA XVI, no. 143, obv. 6–11).

[9] This is unlike the situation concerning the training of scribes in the Old Babylonian Period; for the contemporary view as expressed in OB texts, consult S.N. Kramer, "Schooldays: A Sumerian Composition Relating to the Education of a Scribe," *JAOS* 69 (1949) 199–215; A.W. Sjöberg, "The Old Babylonian Eduba," in *Sumerological Studies in Honor of Thorkild Jacobsen on His Seventieth Birthday June 7, 1974* (ed. S.J. Lieberman; Assyriological Studies 20; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) 159–179.

Returning to the Ashurbanipal annal texts themselves, the following examination focuses on editions B (649 BCE), F (646 BCE) and A (643 BCE).[10] The dates of the composition of these editions can be determined by the dates recorded in the colophons appended to each text; these dates include the day, month and year when the particular copy was completed.[11] Each edition belongs to a single year during which it was copied and recopied many times,[12] and in some cases, several dozen manuscripts are extant. It is this abundance that opens a window on work of the copyists.[13] Previous studies[14] have taken due note of literary questions[15] in the composition of

[10] A number of other editions (C, K) were prepared during the intervening years, but as they are very poorly preserved, they will not, for the most part, be considered here.

[11] The dates in the extant colophons indicate that at least three copies of edition B were prepared in the month of Abu 649; six copies of edition F between Aiaru and Dûzu 646; and four of edition A between Nisanu and Ululu 643. Cf. Borger, *Assurbanipal*, 75–76, 118.

[12] Edition D parallels edition B in its historical section, while deviating from B in its commemoration of the completion of the wall of the inner city, a year later. On the assignment of D to 648, see M. Cogan, "Ashurbanipal Prism Inscriptions Once Again," *JCS* 32 (1980) 149; for another view, see Borger, *Assurbanipal*, 87.

[13] The suggestion of Julian Reade that many of the texts were recovered from "a dump of unwanted foundation documents" where they had been thrown because of "scribal or other errors," or because they had been "broken during firing," or had become outdated, has not met with acceptance. In point of fact, the labors of the copyists were appreciated and their copies were not easily disposed of, as the correction of a divergent (not "erroneous") date on some manuscripts of edition F shows. See J. Reade, "Archaeology and the Kuyunjik Archives," in *Cuneiform Archives and Libraries* (ed. K.R. Veenhof; Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 1986) 213–222, esp. 218.

[14] During the last quarter-century, a number of *topoi* have been investigated, the focus of these studies being the differences in description and the ordering of the episodes in each edition of the annals; most included a suggested reconstruction of the historical sequence of events. See, for the Lydian episode, M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, "Gyges and Ashurbanipal: A Study in Literary Transmission," *Orientalia* 46 (1976) 65–85; the Arabian episodes, I. Eph'al, *The Ancient Arabs* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1982); also P. Gerardi, "The Arab Campaigns of Assurbanipal: Scribal

the annals, but left the question of copying and transmission of the text untreated. The main questions, then, that I pose are: How faithfully did the copyists pursue their work? Did they copy the inscriptions sign for sign, and word for word?

I begin with the most basic level of transcription, that of orthography. It is immediately observable that there is a great difference between the manuscripts and no two are exactly alike. This situation is the result of the syllabic nature of the cuneiform script. Thus, for example, a syllabic CVC (consonant-vowel-consonant) sign is sometimes written as two signs, CV and VC; at other times, the reverse appears, that is, two simple signs, CV and VC, are joined into a single complex one, CVC. A word (noun or verb) can be found written both syllabically, and by its logogram. These interchanges are random and their alteration is unfathomable if we hold to the assumption that the copyist set out to duplicate the text before him exactly as given.

Moving from the orthographic level to the word level, there is some evidence of scribal error, though the overall number of these slips of the stylus is negligible. They belong to the following categories:

(1) Dittography. In edition F i 20, an entire line is repeated after F i 21 in F26.

(2) Omission of a word. Edition B v 89 reads: *rēṣēšu ālik idišu pānuššu utīramma*; the word *pānuššu* is omitted in B/D31. In edition A viii 80: *ina mīlišina gapši*; the word *gapši* is omitted in A3.

(3) Interchange of similar signs. In edition A x 32, *ušappâ dannūssun* is written as *ušappâ enūssun* in A21, due to graphic similarity between the signs *dan* and *e*.

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Reconstruction of the Past," *SAAB* 6 (1992) 67–103; the Elamite episodes, P. Gerardi, *Assurbanipal's Elamite Campaigns: A Literary and Political Study* (University Microfilms, 1987); the Egyptian episodes, H.-U. Onasch, *Die assyrischen Eroberungen Ägyptens* (Ägypten und Alten Testament 27; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1994).

[15] That is, the "literary code," to use the felicitous term suggested by F.M. Fales, "A Literary Code in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: The Case of Ashurbanipal's Egyptian Campaigns," in *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: New Horizons* (ed. F.M. Fales; Rome: Istituto per l'Oriente, 1981) 169–202.

(4) Spelling error. In edition F i 22: *ib-bi-šu-ú* is written *bi-ib-šu-u* in F2; F ii 5: *ḫa-diš* is written as *ḫa-an-ṭiš* in F2.

(5) Difference in sequence. For the listing in F iii 43: *šunu nišēšunu alpēšunu ṣēnišunu* "them, their persons, their cattle, their sheep," A 8053 has: *šunu alpēšunu nišēšunu ṣēnišunu* "them, their cattle, their persons, their sheep."

Other differences that involve individual words and sometimes whole phrases are discernible in the manuscripts. Table 1 presents selected examples of these variations that appear within the individual editions. The manuscripts are arranged in majority/minority groupings, and there is no suggestion here as to the identity of the original or first text composed by the author.

Table l

EXAMPLES OF TEXTUAL CHANGE WITHIN A SINGLE ANNAL EDITION

Majority of MSS	Minority of MSS
(1) Change of verb tense	
Concerning the tribute of Baʿal king of Tyre	
ušēbila	*ūbila*
"he transferred to me"	"he brought me"
(F i 66)	(F2, F31, BM 134433)
The fate of Ahsheri, king of Mannai	
*ina sūq ālišu šalamtašu **iddû***	*ina sūq ālišu šalamtašu **ittaddû***
"they threw his corpse	"his corpse was thrown in the street
in the street of his city" (A iii 9)	of his city" (A5)
(2) Exchange of verbs	
The suicide of Nabu-bel-shumati and his retainer	
uptatteḫū aḫāmeš	*urassibū aḫāmeš*
"They stabbed one another"	"They smote one another"
(A vii 37)	(A5)
*puluḫti šarrūtija **isḫupšunūti***	*puluḫti šarrūtija **iktumšunūti***
"The splendor of my kingship	"The splendor of my kingship
overwhelmed them" (F iii 42)	enveloped them" (BM 127963)

(3) **The addition of a word or its exchange**

iṣbatū šēpēja	*iṣbatū šēpē* **šarrūtija**
"they grabbed my feet" (B iv 96)	"they grabbed my royal feet" (B16)
LÚ *nakria*	**bēl** *nakria*
"my enemy"	"my enemy"
(B vii 8)	(B/D20, B/D31, A 7992)
arki PN	**ṣēr** PN
"after PN" (A viii 93)	"towards PN" (A2)

(4) Deletion or shortening

Description of booty taken from Elam	
narkabāte ša šadādi ṣumbi	
ša iḫzušunu ṣāriru zaḫalû	
sisê parê rabûti ša tallultašunu	
ḫurāṣu kaspu ašlula ana māt Aššur	
"battle chariots, a royal chariot,	
wagons inlaid with reddish gold	
(and) silver, horses, many mules	
whose trappings were of gold	
(and) silver—I took back to Assyria	
as spoil." (F v 15–18)	Lacking in 6 MSS of edition F
The capture of Uate, king of the Arabians	
ultu mātišu alqāšu ana māt Aššur	
"I took him from his land to	
Assyria" (A x 23)	Lacking in 4 MSS of edition A
Ashurbanipal is named for rule in Assyria	
šī u ilāni abbêša tabbû šumi	
"She (the god Nanna) and the gods,	
her fathers, pronounced my name"	
(F vi 1)	Lacking in 6 MSS of edition F

In addition to the examples presented in Table 1, two textual variants in copies of edition F strikingly expose the practices of the copyists.

   (1) The report in F of the campaign against the Elamite king Ummanaldasi included the capture of 14 fortresses and other cities on the road to Susa. In the majority of F manuscripts, two of the cities are cited by name, Banunu and Bashimu, and the capture of each city is related separately in ten lines (F iv 55–64).

āl Banunu adi nagê ša āl Tasarra	Banunu along with the district of Tasarra
kalāmu akšud	I captured all together.
20 ālāni ina nagê ša āl H̬unnir	twenty cities in the district of Hunnir,
ina muḫḫi miṣri ša āl H̬idalu akšud	on the border of Hidalu, I captured.
āl Bašimu u ālāni ša limētišunu appul aqqur	I devastated and destroyed Bashimu and the cities in its environs;
ša nišē ašib libbišun kamaršunu aškun	I annihilated the people who lived in them.
ušabbir ilānišun	I broke (the images of) their gods.
ušapšiḫ kabitti bēl bēlē	I appeased the Lord of Lords (i.e., Marduk).
ilānišu ištarātešu būšašu makkuršu	Its gods (and) goddesses, its goods (and) its property,
nišē ṣeḫer u rabi ašlula ana māt Aššur	(its) people, young and old, I despoiled to Assyria

In four manuscripts, the story is shortened to four lines by joining the two cities into a single unit (F42; F47; F49; Assur 19397).

āl Bašimu āl Banunu adi nagê	Bashimu and Banunu along with the district
ša āl Tasarra kalāmu akšud	of Tasarra, I captured all together.
20 ālāni ina nagê ša H̬unnir	twenty cities in the district of Hunnir,
ina muḫḫi miṣri ša āl H̬idalu akšud	on the border of Hidalu, I captured.

Of particular note is the slip-up made by the scribe who wrote F42. After writing the short version, he seems to have forgotten that this was what he

had just done, and continued by writing out in full the capture of Bashimu a second time; six extraneous lines indeed![16]

  (2) In the opening lines of edition F, in the paean to the king, reference is made to the date on which Ashurbanipal assumed the crown princehood. Two different dates appear in edition F manuscripts. The attestation of the date is first found in the texts of Esarhaddon and many F texts of Ashurbanipal have this date:

> *ūmu 18 isinni ḫunti ša Šamaš qurādi*
>
> The 18th day (of Iyar), the *ḫuntu*-holiday
>
> of the god Shamash, the hero.[17]

Another date appears in other F texts, in some cases written over an erasure of the date just cited:

> *ūmu 12 ūmu šemû nadan akali ša Gula*
>
> The 12th day (of Iyar), a favorable day,
>
> the presenting of food for the god Gula.[18]

This latter date was the one preferred by the author of the next edition, A (A i 12).[19]

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[16] This seems to suggest that two different text-types were on the scribe's work table. I consider the longer version to be primary, and suggest that for reasons of taste or space, the scribe chose to adopt the shorter text; see my remarks in M. Cogan, "Ashurbanipal Prism F: Notes on Scribal Techniques and Editorial Procedures," *JCS* 29 (1977) 99–102, with which Borger, *Assurbanipal*, disagrees (51–52). Note, as well, that these particular lines were subject to other revisions in other manuscripts, cf. Cogan, op. cit.; Borger, loc. cit.

[17] See R. Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons Königs von Assyrien* (AfOB 9; Graz: [E. Weidner], 1956; repr., Osnabruck: Biblio-Verlag, 1967) 72, §43:40; for the Ashurbanipal texts, Borger, *Assurbanipal*, 14.

[18] See Borger, loc. cit.

[19] The difference in dates remains historically clouded; it may stem from ceremonies that took place in several centers (Calah and Tarbiṣu) over many days; see my earlier remarks in Cogan, "Prism F," 99.

Who is responsible for these assorted textual changes, the copyists or the author? Because this cannot be determined with any surety, I suggest comparing similar phenomena in texts that appear in more than one edition. For when a new edition of the annals was prepared, the authors often copied material from the previous edition(s) before adding the latest campaign reports. Thus, besides there being a close chronological relationship between editions B, F, and A—all having been composed over the short period of six years—these editions contain many parallel text units. Comparison of these parallel units discloses that the transfer of material between editions often involved rephrasing, i.e., textual change. In Table 2, I set out representative examples of such textual changes.[20]

Table 2

EXAMPLES OF TEXTUAL CHANGE BETWEEN ANNAL EDITIONS

Early edition(s)	Later edition(s)
(1) Exchange of noun by its parallel	
Description of the king's enemy	
*ittakil ana **ṭēm** ramaniš̌u*	*ittakil ana **emūq** ramaniš̌u*
"he relied on his own devices"	"he relied on his own strength"
(B i 56)	(A i 57; C ii 22)
The kings of Egypt plotted evil	
*ana **marê** māt Aššur*	*ana **ummanāt** māt Aššur*
"against the sons of Assyria"	"against the soldiers of Assyria"
(B ii 5)	(A ii 6)
Uate the Arab	
*uṣallâ **šarrūti***	*uṣallâ **bēlūti***
"implored my kingship"	"implored my lordship"
(B vii 96)	(C ix 93)

[20] The examples of change in Table 2 are adduced because of their similarity to those in Table 1; comprehensiveness is not intended. Others types of alterations made to "borrowed" texts are in evidence and they should be considered separately.

(2) Exchange of verb by its parallel

After the conquest of Egypt

*ina maškanišun **ulzissunūti***   *ina maškanišun **apqidšunūti***

"I set them (the kings)   "I appointed them (the kings) in
in their offices" (B i 91)   their offices" (A i 113)

Baal, king of Tyre

***iššâ** ana epeš ardūtija*   ***ušēbila** [ūbila] ana epeš ardūtija*

"brought (his son) to me to do   "sent (his son) to me to do
obeisance"   obeisance"
(B ii 56)   (F i 66 [F2, F31, BM 134433]; A ii 59)

The extent of the destruction of Mannai

*mālak 10 ūmê 5 ūmê **ušaḫrirma***   *mālak 10 ūmê 5 ūmê **ušaḫribma***

"I laid waste a distance of 10 days, 5   "I devastated a distance of 10 days, 5
days." (B iii 51)   days." (C iv 63; F ii 37; A iii 2–3)

Concerning the tents of the Arabs

*išātu ušaḫizū **ipqidū** ana girra*   *išātu ušaḫizū **iqmû** ana girri*

"They set fire (and) consigned   "They set fire (and) they burned
(them) to the flames."   (them) in the flames."
(B viii 11; C x 16)   (A vii 122)

(3) Exchange of name of country

Preference for literary term

*ana **māt Muṣur u māt Kūsi***   *ana **māt Makan u māt Meluḫḫa***

"to the land of Egypt and the land of   "to the land of Makan and the land
Ethiopia" (B ii 18; A ii 28)   of Meluhha" (F i 36)

(4) Literary expansions

Uate the Arab stops tribute payments

iklâ tāmarti   *iklâ tāmarti **mandattašu kabittu***

"He withheld his gifts from me."   "He withheld his gifts and his heavy
                                           tribute from me."

(B viii 3; C x 6)   (A vii 90)

Submission of the Phoenician and Anatolian kingdoms

Yakinlu šar māt Aruada

Muɡallu šar māt Tabala

Sandišarme šar māt Ḫilakka...

iknušū ana šēpēja

"Yakinlu king of Arwad, Mugallu king of Tabal, Sandisharme king of Cilicia... bowed down at my feet."	Each kingdom is treated separately and its submission is presented in a separate unit
(B ii 71ff.; C iii 102ff.; F i 70ff.)	(A ii 63–80)

(5) Parallelism

Ashurbanipal's prayer before his battle with the Elamite Tamaritu is received by the gods. A simple sentence or a parallel verse line alternates within the various editions, using similar elements.

tanēḫija imḫurū <u>išmû zikir šaptīja</u>

"They accepted my sighing; they heard the utterance of my lips." (B vii 53)

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išmû <u>unnīnija</u>

"They heard my supplication" (F iii 18)

<u>unnīnija</u> ilqû <u>išmû zikir šaptīja</u>

"They accepted my supplication,
they heard the utterance of my lips."
(C viii 43; A iv 10)

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(6) Exchange of details and/or introduction of new material

Concerning the outbreak of rebellion in Egypt

ēgugma iṣṣaruḫ kabatti	*ēgugma iṣṣaruḫ kabatti*
	aššî qātēja uṣalli Aššur u Ištar Aššuritu
adkêma emūqija ṣirāti	*adkêma emūqija ṣirāti*
"I was angry and my liver was hot.	"I was angry and my liver was hot.
	I raised my hands and prayed to Ashur and the Assyrian Ishtar.
I mobilized my outstanding troops."	I mobilized my outstanding troops."
(B i 65–66; C ii 33–34)	(A i 64–65)

Tanutamon the Kushite is	
"the son of the sister (*mār aḫātišu*) of Taharqa"	"the son of Shabaka"
(B ii 10; C iii 28)	(A ii 22)

In addition to the examples of textual change in Table 2, there a number of examples of textual revision, instances in which factual information, lacking in an earlier edition, was added in a later one.

(1) In edition C, a list of the 22 western vassal kings who were mobilized for Ashurbanipal's Egyptian campaign is given (C ii 37–59); the list was not presented in edition B that preceded it by three years, nor was it copied into the later edition A.

(2) In edition A, the names of the 20 kings of Egypt who had rebelled against Assyria are recorded (A i 90–109); only 5 were listed previously in C (C ii 86–90); and the list is completely absent from the even earlier B.

(3) According to edition F, the fortress city of Bit-imbi was captured during the Elamite wars and its residents severely punished (F iv 46–61). The author of A added the historical note that the "first" Bit-imbi had been destroyed by Sennacherib, the grandfather of Ashurbanipal, and it was he who had built another city, by that same name, in its place; this "second" Bit-imbi was captured by Ashurbanipal (A iv 126–132).

It stands to reason that in all these instances, the authors made use of earlier sources that in some cases were decades removed from the time of their work and was, in their estimation, of interest or importance.

II

I now return to the main question of my study: Did the Assyrian scribes copy their *Vorlage* rigorously? Can it be determined whether they considered the text closed, that is, unchangeable, requiring that each word of the first copy appear in all subsequent copies? The following assessments are advanced:

1) On the orthographic level, the overall impression is that the copyists sought to duplicate the text as given, and that they had no intention of

changing or correcting it, even though syllabic differences are discernible in all copies of a single edition. These differences might have come about under several imaginable circumstances. For example, the copyists might have sat in a hall and written the text as dictated to them (—was the reader the text's author?). The differences between texts would then represent the individual performance of each copyist who transcribed the dictation according to his particular learning and personality. Or perhaps we should imagine a different scenario. Each copyist worked in his own corner, with the text to be copied on his work bench. He read a line or two to himself, then moved to his tablet to write from memory what he had read; even when working in this manner, he did not feel constrained to copy the signs exactly as they appeared in his *Vorlage*.[21] In both of these suggested reconstructions, the text was not considered a closed entity, that is, there was not a single, prescribed fashion in which it could be represented.[22]

2) On the word level, the situation does not seem to have been much different, and in general one may conclude that the copyists endeavored to reproduce the given text. At the same time, they were not always scrupulous with regard to the words of their *Vorlage*. Though they had no intention of altering the text, the copyists introduced changes that, in many instances, resembled those made by the scribal authors in producing new editions of the annals. If we consider that by repeated copying of texts, a scribe would likely have acquired a working knowledge of the literary

[21] A.K. Grayson has collected a number of examples of the elision of a syllable, resulting in two words written as one, e.g., *šat-ra-na* for *šat-ra a-na*; *la-ma-ri* for *la a-ma-ri*, and speculates they are "the result of 'auto-dictation.' The scribe was muttering to himself the text he was copying—silent reading was unknown in ancient times—and wrote what his lips were repeating rather than what his eyes saw." See Grayson, "Old and Middle Assyrian Royal Inscriptions-Marginalia," in *Ah Assyria...Studies in Assyrian History and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography Presented to Hayim Tadmor* (ed. M. Cogan and I. Eph'al; ScrHier 33; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991) 264–266.

[22] As an aside, individual handwriting styles are observable; while one scribe wrote petite, upright signs, another used rather large signs that were inscribed on a slant.

formulae common to the annal corpus, it is not difficult to understand how the inadvertent exchange of a noun or verb by its equivalent occurred. This may also explain the cases of more significant changes, for example, the shortening of a list of captured cities or booty list; it seems to have mattered little whether each city was mentioned separately or all of them together within a single literary unit. There is no indication of any requirement that the copyist correct the text he prepared so as to bring it in line with the *Vorlage*.[23] All said, the sense of the text had not been subverted by the changes he introduced.[24]

Before concluding this section of the study, a few observations may be made concerning the work of the authors of the annals, though strictly speaking, their working procedures were defined by norms and concerns that differed from those of the copyists. New editions of the annals leaned heavily on earlier editions, and though the immediately preceding edition most often served as the base text, reference to editions of the annals and other texts, some of them removed from the new one by several decades, is demonstrable. In adopting a passage from an earlier edition, the author was not obligated to its wording. And while in many cases he simply transferred

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[23] The colophons of royal inscriptions only record the date of the copy (i.e., its completion), unlike colophons of other genres that include the formula: "written, reviewed and checked." On this matter, see the pertinent observations of S.J. Lieberman, "Canonical and Official Cuneiform Texts: Towards an Understanding of Assurbanipal's Personal Tablet Collection," in *Lingering over Words: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Literature in Honor of William L. Moran* (ed. T. Abusch, J. Huehnergard and P. Steinkeller; HSS 37; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1990) 332–333.

[24] Prof. M. Greenberg reminded me of the insightful discussion of Ibn Ezra concerning variations in wording of parallel passages in the Bible: "Understand that words are like bodies and meanings like souls, and the body is to the soul like a vessel; hence it is the custom of all wise men in (speaking) any language to preserve the meanings while not being concerned over changing the words, so long as their meaning is the same" (ad Exod 20:1 [long commentary]). See, too, I.L. Seeligmann, "Studies in the History of the Biblical Text," *Textus* 20 (2000) 21, for an elaboration of Ibn Ezra's remarks.

whole paragraphs from edition to edition without changing them, in others, he exchanged individual words with their equivalents. The "literary code"—that cliché-ridden collection of words and phrases that had become standard fare among the scribes[25]—served the author well. It appears that the choice of a particular turn of phrase was the author's way of stamping the new text with his own personal imprint.[26]

Further probing suggests that the matter of personal imprint may indeed have been a governing factor on the compositional level. Consider the following. Certain editions stand out as containing material drawn from official ledgers, e.g., itineraries, booty lists, etc.; such use lent the text an air of authenticity. The author of edition A made abundant use of these genres, and may point to his interest in realia. Yet caution advises against drawing hurried conclusions. Comparison of edition A with the earlier edition B reveals that A's author deleted several reports that appeared in B, e.g., the list of cities captured in Mannai and Media.[27] Why did he prefer a detailed list of sites in the north Syrian desert taken during the campaigns against the Arabian tribes?[28] Had he calculated the overall length of his inscription and the physical limitations of the prism? Edition A has about 1200 lines of text on 10 columns, and a decision certainly had to be made at various

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[25] See Fales, "A Literary Code."

[26] For literary studies of several episodes in the Ashurbanipal annals, see the works of Pamela Gerardi referred to in n. 14. For similar work on Sargon II's inscriptions, see J. Renger, "Neuassyrische Königsinschriften als Genre der Keilschriftliteratur. Zum Stil und zur Kompositionstechnik der Inschriften Sargons II. von Assyrien," *Keilschriftliche Literaturen* (ed. K. Hecker and W. Sommerfeld; Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1986) 109–128; for Sennacherib inscriptions, see E. Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften* (AfOB 26; Wien: Universität Wien, 1997) 245–266.

[27] Compare B iii 17–36 with A iii 126–129.

[28] See A viii 96–113; 120–121; ix 9–32. This new material did not appear in any edition prior to edition A, but was included in the 'Letter to the God Ashur' (Borger, *Assurbanipal*, 76–82). Clearly the author had at his disposal a variety of sources, even beyond those that are extant.

points as to which report would be included.[29] Apparently considerations other than an attraction to the authentic were at work here. May one speak of variety for variety's sake? If so, this would be further evidence of the author's desire to leave a personal imprint on the text.

Finally, if there were any expectations that official texts—and the Neo-Assyrian annals were official texts issued with the royal imprimatur—would appear in a single, standard version, they should be set aside. For as we have seen, each new copy of the original text—or copy of a copy—could part company from its *Vorlage*.[30]

<div align="center">III</div>

What is the potential relevance of these findings for biblical text criticism? Critics generally speak in terms of centuries during which textual variants developed, whether they deal with the period during which the 'original

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[29] At first glance, it looks like the author of edition F adopted a utilitarian approach; he shortened many of the earlier campaign reports in order to make room for new material concerning Elam. At the same time, he also condensed Elamite material that had appeared in the preceding edition B, which indicates that he did not intend to present a full picture of Elamite-Assyrian relations. Rather he chose to summarize Ashurbanipal's military history in six columns, with Elam the focal point. But edition F was not adopted as the model for the next edition, the extensive edition A.

[30] According to some, the variations I have been discussing should be credited to "provincial scribes" (Bauer), or to the scribes who worked outside of the capital Nineveh, for example, in the city Ashur (Weidner); see T. Bauer, *Das Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1933) 8; E. Weidner, "Assurbanipal in Assur," *AfO* 13 (1939) 207, 210. But this suggestion does not hold; for as it now turns out, the texts that Weidner assigned to Ashur hail from Nineveh, see Borger, *Assurbanipal*, 9.
In a discussion of textual differences between several inscriptions of Sennacherib similar to those I have noted, Ling-Israel suggested that they were the product of a scribe "who belonged to a different scribal center, or was educated in a different academy"; see P. Ling-Israel, "The Sennacherib Prism in The Israel Museum-Jerusalem," in *Bar-Ilan Studies in Assyriology dedicated to Pinhas Artzi* (ed. J. Klein and A. Skaist; Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan Press, 1990) 217, 220. But these speculations remain unfounded.

text' continued to develop[31] until its canonization and stabilization or the period of transmission.[32] On the other hand, the Assyrian texts studied above show that textual variants of the very kind biblical text critics encounter (e.g., additions and/or exchanges of words and phrases, shortening and/or lengthening of episodes) appear within a short time of the composition of the original text, just a few months at the most.[33] They resulted from the natural process of copying, as well as a mind-set among the scribes that did not call for conformity.

Furthermore, the model referred to at the outset of a well-defined two-staged process in the growth of the biblical text may have to be modified. The Assyrian annal texts show that though a line can be drawn between the stage of composition and the stage of copying and transmission, it is sometimes only a very tenuous line. Because the original wording of the text cannot be identified, and considering that the same types of variants appear both in copies of a single edition of the text, as well as in copies of parallel texts in different editions, the Assyrian scribal copyists turn out to have been creators after a fashion. This view, if adopted and applied to the

[31] The question whether reconstructing the 'original text' should be the object of text criticism is disputed; see the contrasting views of A. van der Kooij, "Textual Criticism," 730–731, and S. Talmon, "Textual Criticism: The Ancient Versions," in *Text in Context* (ed. A.D.H. Mayes; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 141–170. Note, as well, the strong reservations concerning "the working assumption of 'the (single) hypothetical original'" (220) expressed by M. Greenberg, "The Use of the Ancient Versions for Interpreting the Hebrew Text: A Sampling from Ezekiel 2:1– 3:11," *Studies in the Bible and Jewish Thought* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995) 209–225, esp. 217–222.

[32] See, for example, the somewhat simplistic description, now much outdated, in O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1965) 670; for a more nuanced approach, consult B.S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979) 100–103.

[33] See above, n. 11.

biblical text phenomena, may affect the distribution and evaluation of variants between the literary and textual stages.[34]

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[34] Talmon, "Textual Criticism," 147–148, now speaks of "four main stages in the early transmission of Hebrew Scriptures," beginning with the oral traditions of a particular book through its various written forms, until finally emerging as "a unified and stabilized text."