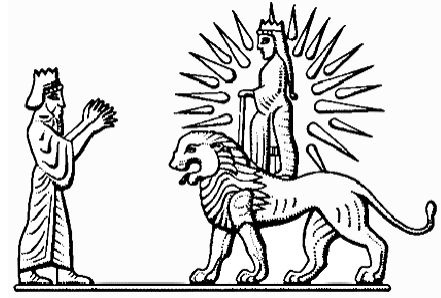


THE MELAMMU PROJECT

<http://www.aakkl.helsinki.fi/melammu/>



“Extracts from the Minutes of the Symposium”

SANNA ARO

Published in Melammu Symposia 1:

Sanna Aro and R. M. Whiting (eds.),

The Heirs of Assyria.

*Proceedings of the Opening Symposium of the Assyrian and
Babylonian Intellectual Heritage Project. Held in Tvärminne,
Finland, October 8-11, 1998* (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian
Text Corpus Project 2000), pp. xvii-xx.

Publisher: <http://www.helsinki.fi/science/saa/>

This article was downloaded from the website of the Melammu Project:

<http://www.aakkl.helsinki.fi/melammu/>

The Melammu Project investigates the continuity, transformation and diffusion of Mesopotamian culture throughout the ancient world. A central objective of the project is to create an electronic database collecting the relevant textual, art-historical, archaeological, ethnographic and linguistic evidence, which is available on the website, alongside bibliographies of relevant themes. In addition, the project organizes symposia focusing on different aspects of cultural continuity and evolution in the ancient world.

The Digital Library available at the website of the Melammu Project contains articles from the *Melammu Symposia* volumes, as well as related essays. All downloads at this website are freely available for personal, non-commercial use. Commercial use is strictly prohibited. For inquiries, please contact melammu-db@helsinki.fi.

Sanna Aro Helsinki

Extracts from the Minutes of the Symposium

The scholarly contributions of the opening symposium of the Melammu Project were interspersed with sessions during which the principal framework of the Project was created. The original initiative for this endeavor was provided by Simo Parpola, but he gathered a number of colleagues together to evaluate the problems and to elaborate the various suggestions into a well-founded enterprise. The minutes of these sessions are given here in an abridged form in order to give the reader an idea of what kinds of suggestions were made at the very early stages of the project. It goes without saying that some of the technical and other matters which were decided in Tvärminne have already been changed and others that were not resolved there remain unresolved. Although the basic outlines of the Project were created by Simo Parpola alone, he wanted the participants of the opening symposium to have a real say in the project's organization and future development.

At Tvärminne, the basic concept of the Project was presented by Simo Parpola and its technical aspects were set out by Robert Whiting. The goal of the proposed Project was to create a database of documented links between Assyro-Babylonian imperial culture ("the Empire") and the later inheritors of this culture in the neighboring regions and beyond that would be available both to the scholarly world and the general public through the medium of the World Wide Web. The sessions in Tvärminne proved to be very fruitful showing that the close collaboration of scholars with different backgrounds and different approaches

is necessary for the successful implementation of a project like Melammu.

Session 1

In the first session the scope and structure of the database was discussed. For this meeting Simo Parpola had prepared some general charts and tables as handouts and these immediately raised many general questions about the geographical and chronological limits of the Project. Whereas Parpola's intention was that the database should span multiple millennia and empires in various areas in the Near East and Europe, it was pointed out that the chart did not include, for example, such regions as Egypt, Punic and Arabic areas, as well as Central Asia and Western China. It was also noted that there is a difference between the diffusion of Assyrian political influence and its cultural impact. So it was agreed that there should not be in principle any geographical limits to the database so that all plausible traces of Assyrian influence in whatever parts of the world should be collected. However, a chronological limit was put so that some earlier periods like the Akkadian Empire and Bronze Age Crete should be included whereas, for example, the Mycenaean and all prehistoric periods excluded. A crucial terminological question was whether the title should only contain the designation "Assyrian" or if it should also include "Babylonian" and this was discussed at length. Despite a general feeling that it would be hairsplitting to divide Assyrian and Babylonian strictly, it also

seemed to be clear that Babylonia influenced Assyria and vice versa, so that the project should not give the impression that everything came from Assyria. The result of this discussion was that the name and title of the Project should be constituted as: MELAMMU — The Intellectual Heritage of Assyria and Babylonia in East and West.

In this session guidelines for the data collection were planned. Because the database intends to collect all the available evidence concerning the continuity, transformation and diffusion of Mesopotamian imperial culture in later times, it was self-evident that there should be a large number of contributors to deal with the vast amount of material. The ideal situation would be that specialists in various fields would be willing to submit information either in the form of database entries or in a format that could easily be transformed into database entries. In addition, obvious links already published in a number of studies such as the volume edited by Stephanie Dalley, *The Legacy of Mesopotamia*, would be extracted and worked up into entries.

There was a lengthy discussion about the nature of an entry in the database. Whereas it is clear that a link should be anchored in two periods, it is not always possible to give a plausible channel for the transmission because cross-influences, etc., are possible. Therefore it was thought, at this early stage of the project, to concentrate on collecting similarities. The interpretation of the collected data would follow later. Some disagreement existed concerning the term "similarity": whether the term itself should be defined more accurately and if different grades of similarities should be created in order to express the likelihood that the evidence reflects real influence between cultures. Some participants were of the opinion that defining similarities would result in censorship and that the primary responsibility for validating the link should lie with

the submitter of the data.

Session 2

In the second session Robert Whiting introduced his preliminary work and drafts dealing with the database format and options. For the start the participants were provided with a couple of model entries so that one could get an idea about the basic structure and contents of an entry. The technical proposals made by Whiting, i.e., an ASCII-based system of transliteration, creating the Project's own software using Perl, and taking advantage of the CGI built into existing Web servers, were accepted in principle, but there were again several questions and comments concerning the format and contents of an entry. Some of the participants stressed the importance of distinguishing the primary and secondary bibliographies, others that there should be a clear distinction between fact and hypothesis. The question about quality control was raised again and it was agreed that the editorial board should consult specialists before the publication of an entry in the database. Other general suggestions were made, for example, that the bibliography file could include contact data for individual scholars and that summaries from published studies and/or translations of relevant passages of original sources could be included in an entry as hypertext links. Links could also be made to already existing databases on the Web, such as the Perseus database of Greek and Latin inscriptions, etc.

Session 3

The third session dealt with the compilation and management of the database. Since it was agreed that a very large number of scholars are needed for writing the entries

on their own initiative, ideas of how to get colleagues around the world interested in contributing to the database were discussed. The suggestion that the contributors could, for example, receive books as rewards for participation was accepted in principle. However this raised general questions like what kind of books and who would finally receive the books and on the basis of what criteria.

Since it had become obvious in the previous sessions that the Project would need to consult specialists about the quality of the data they were receiving from the contributors, the necessary number and the level of competence required of the consultants were discussed. First, a survey was made of the most important disciplines which should be involved was made, resulting in the following list:

- Roman
- Greek
- Assyria/Babylonia
- Anatolia
- Iran
- Coptic/Gnosticism
- Syriac
- Egypt
- Old Testament/Judaic/Qumran/Jewish Mysticism
- New Testament
- Arabic/Islamic
- Hellenistic Near East
- Aramaic
- India
- Patristic studies
- Byzantine
- Numismatics
- Modern Assyrian traditions

All the participants were then asked to provide a list naming five colleagues from their own field who should be invited by the project to act as consultants.

It was also agreed that the Project needs a Steering Committee whose chairmanship would rotate annually among the members so that the work load would not discourage

colleagues from taking an active part in the management of the Project. The Steering Committee should consist of members from as many different disciplines as is feasible and would meet at the Project's annual symposium.

There were also general discussions about the time frame of the project, but as there were too many unknown factors involved (e.g., availability of funding and levels of collegial support), no conclusions were reached.

Session 4

Session four dealt with the organization of the Project and final composition of its hierarchy. Antonio Panaino nominated Simo Parpola as the first chair of the Steering Committee and Parpola accepted. The final composition of the Steering Committee for the first year of the project (subject to the agreement of non-present parties) was:

Simo Parpola (first chair) (Helsinki)
 Walter Burkert (not present) (Basel)
 Martti Nissinen (Helsinki)
 Antonio Panaino (Bologna)
 Kurt A. Raaflaub (not present) (Washington)
 Abdul-Masih Saadi (Chicago)
 Martin L. West (Oxford)
 Joan G. Westenholz (Jerusalem)
 Robert M. Whiting (Helsinki)

This was followed by further definitions of the duties of the consultants. It was agreed that the consultants would not act as a board but as individuals so that they could give their comments separately.

Session 5

In the last session of the opening symposium the next meeting and collaboration was settled. It was agreed that the meetings

would be arranged separately from the database. The suggestion was made that a meeting could consist of three days of seminars and one day would be for open lectures. Workshops could be arranged every year and a bigger conference every fourth year. In order that the participants could prepare themselves for the meetings, it was also suggested that the papers for the meetings should be submitted to participants a month in advance. The papers should also

include a bibliography for further reading. Each meeting would have a theme that would provide scope for defining the paradigms that would implement the Project's goals. The next meeting was set for October 4-7, 1999 at the Finnish Institute in Paris with a topic of "Mythology and Mythologies: Methodological Approaches to Intercultural Influences." The proceedings of this symposium will appear in *Melammu Symposia 2*.