

The Assyrian Intelligence Activities during the Assyrian Empire §

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Abstract

The studies on the Assyrian intelligence activities (hereafter abbreviated as AIA) during the Assyrian empire are mere general comments. Consequently, a more objective study and thorough examination of the available evidence on the AIA are inevitable, especially in terms of the formal principles of conducting intelligence activities. This paper is an attempt at a more formal description and assessment of those activities during the Assyrian empire. The AIA can be classified into the following four categories: 1) the collection of intelligence; 2) the communication of intelligence; 3) the evaluation of intelligence; and, 4) the counter-intelligence. Generally speaking, the AIA were crudely organized; for instance, there was no specific branch in the central government to coordinate the AIA, nor was there a specific branch in the central government to deal with various intelligence reports. Thus, although the AIA were definitely extant and relatively successful, there are indications that they were not supervised by a special agency and, therefore, it may not be appropriate to recognize them as activities governed by a well-established system of intelligence.

Introductory Remarks

The history of the Assyrian intelligence activities can be tracked back at least to the ancient Assyrian period. A few letters in the reigns of Šamši-Adad I (1809-1776) and his son Išme-Dagan (1775-1748) indicate that intelligence activity was an indispensable part of psychological warfare in the Old Assyrian period.¹ The scarcity of sources in the Middle Assyrian period limits our ability

§ Author's Note:

This article is based on a section of my M.A. thesis titled *Neo-Assyrian Intelligence System: With Special References to the Conflicts between Assyria and Urartu* (Institute for the History of Ancient Civilizations of Northeast Normal University, Changchun, Jilin Province, People's Republic of China, 2000). I am grateful to my supervisors Professor WU Yuhong and Professor Farouk N. H. al-Rawi for their wise suggestions. Abbreviations follow those of the *Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (CAD)*, with the following additions and exceptions:

AOS 6 = W. Norman Brown, John K. Shryock and E. A. Speiser (eds.), *State Letters of Assyria: A Transliteration and Translation of 355 Official Assyrian Letters Dating from the Sargonid Period (722-625)*, New York, Connecticut: American Oriental Society, 1935 (reprint in 1983);

to accurately assess the AIA of this period systematically, but a large number of intelligence reports excavated in Dur-Šarruken and Nineveh affords a much better opportunity to examine and assess the AIA during the Neo-Assyrian period, especially in the Sargonid dynasty (721-612).

Based on the letters from the Urartian front, A.T. Olmstead concluded that Sargon II (721-705) had a good intelligence service and rumour soon began to come in.² R. Follet offered a primary survey of the Assyrian intelligence system according to the intelligence reports from the Urartu border.³ H.W.F. Saggs discussed several methods that the Assyrians retrieved intelligence and the contents of the Assyrian intelligence reports.⁴

Literally speaking, intelligence can be defined as evaluated information. While accurate information may not guarantee an optimum decision, incorrect or inadequate information has demonstrably caused disaster. Thus, it is not enough that accurate information exists in governmental files; such information must be properly interpreted by the right people at the right time. Although intelligence gathering, its analysis and the subsequent communication of information are important, counter-intelligence in the form of defensive and protective activities are equally important.⁵ In the next sections, the four categories of intelligence, as mentioned above, will be elaborated on.

1. The Collection of Intelligence

The collection of intelligence is the basis of the intelligence activities. The efficiency of intelligence activities depends to a large extent on the accuracy, and variety of intelligence, and all of them depend on the collection of intelligence. The collection of intelligence has direct relevance to the channels to gather intelligence. The Assyrians made a full use of all kinds of sources and adopted a variety of channels to collect intelligence. On the whole, the Assyrian intelligence mainly came from two kinds of channels: overt and covert.

SAA I= Simo Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II Part I: Letters from Assyria and the West*, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1987; SAA V= G. B. Landfranchi and Simo Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II Part II: Letters from the Northern and North-western Provinces*, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1990.

¹ See J. M. Sasson, *The Military Establishment at Mari*, Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, (Studia Pohl 3), 1969, 39-41.

² A.T. Olmstead, *History of Assyria*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1925 (reprint in 1975), 258ff.

³ R. Follet, Deuxième bureau et information diplomatique dans L'Assyrie des Sargonides quelques notes, *RSO* 32 (1957), 61-81.

⁴ H.W.F. Saggs, *The Might That Was Assyria*, London: Sidwick & Jackson, 1984, 256f.

⁵ See, Intelligence and counter-intelligence, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol.21, Chicago: *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Inc., 1985, 717.

1.1 Overt Channels

While the public sees the intelligence as a “cloak and dagger” secret agent, in fact most valuable intelligence comes from overt sources, that is to say, from sources accessible without resort to illegal methods. A great majority of Assyrian intelligence derived from overt channels, such as collecting information concerning the enemy’s activities, interrogating individuals returning from the enemy country, gathering reconnaissance intelligence by diplomatic personnel, and interrogating the deserters and captives from enemy country.

Army officials and members of the garrisons, having been on the line of defence, could acquire intelligence firsthand because of their proximity to enemy lines. This is well demonstrated in letter, AOS 6 16, written by Nabû-bēl-šumate, governor of sealand, to Ashurbanipal (668-627):

To the king, my lord, your servant Nabû-bēl-šumate: Good health to the king, my lord! May Aššur, Nabû and Marduk bless the king, my lord: happiness, health, and length of days may they grant to the king, my lord! As I have heard, the king of Elam is hard pressed and many cities have revolted against him, saying: We will not come under your power.” I am reporting to the king my lord according to what I hear. Since the time of Na'id-Marduk I have not lived in the Sealand. Sin-balatsu-iqbi seized the prisoners and deserters that had gone to the Gurasimmu, (some) five hundred of them, and casting them in fetters, gave them to Natanu, king of Uddai, their lord, whom the king had appointed over them. (broken)

Politically speaking, two countries, albeit hostile to one another, may receive visitors even if they may be of the enemy country. These people would observe the enemy’s activities, intentionally or unintentionally, and what they observed might be valuable intelligence. Some Assyrian intelligence came from individuals returning from enemy country. In the letter, SAA I 32, from Sennacherib, the crown prince, informs the king, Sargon II, of the Urartian defeat and other circumstances by interrogating an Itu’ean returning from Urartu:⁶

[To the king, my lord: yo]ur [servant S[ennacherib. Good health to the king, m]y lord! Assyria [is well], the temples [are well], all the [forts o]f the king [are

⁶ Itu was an Aramaean tribe occupying the west bank of the Tigris River during the Assyrian empire. The kings of the Assyrian empire, from Tukulti-Ninurta II (890-884) to Tiglath-pileser III (745-727), had fought with the Itu’eans. From at least the reign of Tiglath-pileser III until the reign of Esarhaddon (680-669), members of Itu’ean tribe served within the empire as permanent units of infantry and were allocated to provincial governors to act as military police and put down small disturbance. See J. N. Postgate, Itu’ (Utu’, Itu’āyu), *RIA*, vol.5, 221-222. The context of the Itu’ean is not clear and his action had much difference with the Assyrian spies, thus I treat him as a common people rather than a spy, the activities of the spies will be discussed below.

well; the king, my lord], can be glad indeed. [...] the Itu'ean [...] who [...] from the city of Ištahup⁷ has now been brought to me from [...]ratta. I inquired him [about the Urartians and he told me: "The Urartian [and his magnates were defeated] on their expedition [against] the Cimmerians, and they were very much afraid of the king, my lord. They trembled and kept silent like women, and nobody [...] the forts of the king, my lord. The situation is very good. (As to) [the new]s of the Urartians, [...] the departure of [...] the emissary of the Mannean (king) [...] oxen and sheep [...] (broken)

Although the Assyrian empire had hostile relations with other states, it did not sever diplomatic relations completely. On occasion, diplomatic personnel were sent to deal with incidents on the border. These individuals would acquire enemy's intelligence simultaneously with the incidents they were sent to handle. SAA V 2, is a letter from Lip-hur-Bel, Assyrian governor in Amidi, to Sargon II, which exemplifies the collection of intelligence by the Assyrian diplomatic personnel:

[To the k]ing, my lo]rd: [your servant Liphur-Bel. Good health t[o the king], my [lord!] [The land] of [the ki]ng is well; the for[t]s are well. The king, my lord, can be glad. As to the news of the Urartians, the messenger of mine [wh]om I sent to the governor opposite me has come back; he spoke to him as the king, my lord, wrote me, saying : "Why do you capture our forts while we are at peace?" He said: "What should I do? If I have trespassed on your territory or your forts, call me to account. "His troops are assembled with him; he is keeping watch in Harda. These were the news about them.

Enemy deserters, who sought refuge in Assyria, provided invaluable information as well. The Assyrians paid large attention to these deserters primarily for their input and perspective. An example of the nature of intelligence acquired from these refugees is illustrated in the following letter, AOS 6 15, from Aššur-ušallim, an Assyrian officer in Babylonia, to the king Esarhaddon (680-669), which documents how the Assyrians collected intelligence by interrogating deserters:

To the king, my lord, your servant Aššur-ušallim: Good health to the king, my lord. May Aššur, Šamaš, Bēl, Nabû, Nergal, Las, Išum, Adad, and Beir, the great gods of heaven and earth, bless most abundantly, bless even a thousand times the king my lord, the crown prince of Assyria, the crown prince of Babylon. In regard to the garrisons stationed in the fortresses (located) in Urartu, among the Manna, among the Medes, (and) the Hubškia, of which the king my lord wrote (me) thus: "Issue (this) order to them, confront them with it plainly: they must not neglect to stand their watches and they are to give heed to the deserters around them. As soon as a

⁷ Ištahup was an Urartu city.

deserter from the Manna, the Medes or the Hubuškia escapes over to them he is to be put at once in charge of your messenger, he is to be sent to the crown prince. Now if there is a report in his mouth, (tell him): 'You will talk in a friendly manner with the crown prince; you will communicate(?) to him the information (coming) from your side.' A scribe of the Manna ...shall be present when he speaks to write down (his information) from his lips; let him seal (it) with a Pilurtu seal. Let Ahu-dur-enši, the staff officer of the crown prince, send (it) quickly to me by the soldiers. " Now two deserters from the Manna have escaped (to us), an officer and a "bearded" one, there is a report in their mouths; I am sending them to the crown prince.

On occasion, deserters sought refuge in buffer states. When they passed through those states on their way to Assyria; they would be extradited by Assyrian messengers. The letter, SAA V 35: 1-30, from Ša-Aššur-dubbu, the Assyrian governor in Tušhan, to Sargon II, illustrates an attempt to extradite deserters from Šubria, a state in the northwest of Assyria:

[To the king, my lord: your servant Ša-Aššur-dubbu. The best health to the king, my lord!] [The forts and the land of the king, my lord, are well. The king, my lord, can be gl]ad. [...] [...] my messenger [...] my messenger [...] [...they s]tay [...] his [...] [...] day(s)] [...] they come [... has been se]rving [...] Now that my messenger wanted to make him (deserter) leave, they protected him with wood and [...] I asked the [Šubrian (ruler): "Why do you seize deserter [f]rom the Uruṛian (king) fleeing to Assyria, and [settle them in] the city? Why do you [protect deserter] and not give him to us?" His reply: "I fear the gods." A s[cout] commander of the Uruṛian [enter]ed [the town ...] with 50 mules. They took the mules from him, put iron shackles to his arms and feet and returned him to the [Uruṛi]an. I wrote [him]: "Why are you not afraid of the gods, (you) abati, calf of the Uruṛian]!"

Interrogating captives is an efficient and productive way to gather intelligence. An excerpt from a fragmentary letter, AOS 6 23: 1-23, concerning a counterattack in the vicinity of Uruk clearly demonstrates how the Assyrians collected intelligence by interrogating captives:

.....the Pukudu having come [into the neighbourhood] of Uruk, carried off ten people from the vicinity (of that city). When I marched forth against them, I slew a number of them and, having captured the commander of the troops, I asked him: Who sent you? He replied: "Sahdu, the brother of Nabu-ušzib, sent us with this order: 'Go and capture a man from the vicinity of Uruk in order that I may ask him how numerous are the forces of the Assyria that are collected there, and what is their objective.'"

1.2. Covert Channels

Spies are instrumental in covert intelligence activities, and the Assyrian spies were no exception. In Akkadian, spy was called *dajālu*.⁸ The Assyrian officials, from the governor to the royal delegate, palace herald, had their own spies.⁹ The chiefs of the scouts under the control of these officials were called *rab-dajālu*, who possibly administrated the spies' activities. The Assyrians also hired the people of vassal states to serve as spies. The letter, SAA V 105, is from an Assyrian official to the king, asking the king to check the deported Kummeans working in Dur-Šarruken because they were the Kummean spies for hire and needed in Urartu:

To the king, [my lord]: your servant [x x]. Good health t[o the king], my [lord]! As to what the king, my lord, wrote to me in the sealed order, I and Issar-duri, the royal bodyguard, told them every word that was in it and let them hear the sealed order [which] came concerning them. They say: "The king, our lord, is the lord of all; what can we say? The king, our lord, may take all the Kummeans who hold houses in (other) countries to wherever is appropriate." But the Kummean scouts who went from Kumme for hire have not yet returned but are still there! The king, [my] lo[rd], should inquire and investigate: may[be] they are getting deported with those (other Kummeans). The king, my lord, should return them to Kumme. The king, my lord, knows that they are needed in Urartu, and that they are in Assyria for hire (only). As to the saplings about which the king, my lord, wrote to me, there is much snow and ice, so they cannot be picked up yet; they will pick them up and bring them to Dur-Šarruken at the beginning of the new moon of Adar (XII), I shall (then) come and give my report.

One important task given to the spies was to be sent to enemy country to gather intelligence. The Assyrian spies were often sent to Urartu for this purpose. The Assyrian spies worked so well that they even entered the Urartian capital, Turuṣpâ. The fragmentary letter, SAA V 85, from Aššur-reṣuwa, the Assyrian royal delegate in Kumme, to Sargon II, illustrating the nature of the spying incurred by the Assyrians on the Urartian capital Turuṣpâ:

To the king, my lord: your servant Aššur-reṣuwa. Good health to the king, my lord! As to what the king, my lord, wrote to me: "Sending your scouts to the environs of Turuṣpâ, let them to learn a detailed report!" (broken) [Fo]ur governors are coming down to [Turuṣpâ] to do service (in the temple).

⁸ See CAD D s.v. *dajālu*, 27-28.

⁹ SAA I, 30; SAA V 3, 12, 13, 24, 40, 83, 85, 87, 91, 215, 246.

Another task was to capture an “informer” (*ša lišānu*);¹⁰ this was the direct way for the Assyrians to get timely, accurate intelligence. Sometimes the Assyrian spies hid in the direct path of the enemies’ messengers in order to ambush them. The fragmentary letter, SAA V 55, from Aššur-dur-paniya, the Assyrian governor of Šabirešu, informs Sargon II, of how the Assyrian spies ambushed the Urartian “informer” (*ša lišānu*) in the mountain:

[To the ki]ng, [my] lord, [your servant] Aššur-dur-paniya. [Good] health to the king, [my] lord! My [sco]uts in the m[ountain] have captured an informer [who] was g[oi]ng from A[rgistiani] t[o Ar]jiye, over the moutain. [I as]ked him about. [the news] of Urartian], and he informed me... ..(broken)

Securing ‘informers’ (*bātiqū*)¹¹ in the enemy land was another secret channel for the Assyrians to collect intelligence. The letter, SAA V 164, a letter from Bel-iddina, king of Allabria in east of Assyria, to Sargon II, clearly illustrates that the information about the Urartian came from an informer (*bātiqū*):

[To] the king, my lord: your servant Bel-iddina. As to the news of the Urartians, a messenger of the Andian (ruler) and a messenger of the Zikirtean (ruler) have gone to the city of Waisi and told him: "The king of Assyrian is upon us." The day he saw the messengers he set out to Zikirtu, he himself with his troops. The Hubušian too went with him, for five stages. (Then) he turned back and ordered his magnates: "Organize your troops, I shall array myself against the Assyrian king." This news is from [in]formers; this information concerning the arraying is from informers.

Some Assyrians gathered intelligence under the false pretence of engaging in trade, as is clearly illustrated in the letter, AOS 6 34, from Marduk-nasir, an Assyrian official to the vizier:

Your servant Marduk-nasir. May I come to the vizier my lord. May Anu and Ishtar bless the vizier my lord. This is my message to the vizier my lord. On the 13th of Tammuz a caravan went up from the city of Lahiru. The sons of Ina-ešti-etir, the son of Sululu, brought wool from Bit-Imbia. They reported as follows: "At present the palace overseer and the troops of Upper Elam are all in bit-Imbia. A ford of the river Abani has been crossed." I am sending (this information) to the vizier my lord; may lord report it at court. Forces should be stationed over against them in Der, (to remain there) until the king attains his wish

¹⁰ *ša lišānu* is person (captured) able to give information, see CAD L s.v. *lišānu*, 214.

¹¹ *Bātiqū* is accuser or informer, see CAD B s.v. *bātiqū*, 126.

2. The Communication of Intelligence

Since the enemy's situation changed quickly, once intelligence, especially those requiring urgent attention, had been gathered, it must be communicated to a decision-maker or a field commander in time, otherwise the value of accurate and useful intelligence might be discounted. Therefore, the communication of intelligence is a key link in the intelligence activities. The Assyrians knew well the importance of communicating intelligence.

The swift communication of intelligence by the Assyrians is well demonstrated in a part of the letter, SAA I 29: 1-21, from Sennacherib, the crown prince, to Sargon II:

[To] the king, my lord: [your servant] Sennacherib. Good health to the king, my lord! [Assyria is well, [the temp]les are well, all the [king's forts] are well. The king, my lord, can be glad indeed. They are working on [the fort in Kummu; their [work [... is mak[ing [good progress]. A messen[ger of Arij] has come [into] m[y presence] (with the following message): [The (ruler) of Ukku has written to [the Urar[ian king [that the govern[ors of the king of Assyria are building [a fort in Kumme], and the Urar[ian king has [give]n his governors the following order: "Take your troops, go and capture the governors of the king of the Assyria alive from the Kummeans, and bring them to me." I do not have the full details yet; as soon as I have heard more, I shall write by express to the crown prince that they should rush troops to me.

In this letter, Sennacherib forwarded an urgent report of Arij, ruler of Kumme, concerning the Urar[ian raid, while the concerned Assyrian governors were building a fort in Kumme. The ruler of Ukku betrayed the Assyrian empire and revealed the Assyrian activities to the Urar[ian king. The Urar[ian king decided to take advantage of the Assyrian negligence of precaution, and sought to capture the Assyrian governors alive. When Arij received this intelligence, he took at least two steps to ensure that it would be communicated in time: one measure was that he sent Sennacherib the intelligence immediately rather than waiting for the full details, the other was that he sent the full intelligence by express.

The first step in guaranteeing that intelligence was communicated quickly is well demonstrated in the letter, SAA V 87, from Aššur-rešuwa, the royal delegate in Kumme, to the king concerning the Urar[ian troops concentration in Waisi:

[To the king, my lord: your servant Aššur-rešuwa. Good] health to the king, [my] lo[rd]! [Five] governors of the Urar[ian] have ent[ered] Waisi: Setinu, the governor o[ppo]site us; Kaqqadanu, the one opposite the Ukkeans; Sakuatâ of Qaniun; Siplia of Alzi; Tuki of Aemiraliu: these are their names. They have entered Waisi with three unit commanders. Now, after their (arrival), they have raised the levies of the country, and are

keeping the army in readiness. The king has moved out of Turuš[p]â and gone to Wazaun. As to the king, my lord, wrote to me: “Send out scouts!” I have sent them twice: the first have come back and told me these things; the others have not yet come back.

An efficient communication system was instrumental if information was to be transferred in a speedy and timely fashion. Information, like people and goods, could be moved from one part of the empire to another through a network of roads. The relative importance the Assyrian administration imposed on developing an effective communication system can be gauged by the way it developed the road system. Added to the old network of commercial and local roads was a highway called “the king’s road” (*hûl Šarri*), traversing the empire from east to west and from north to south. At regular intervals on this highway were garrisoned road stations serving as resting places for the royal army and relay points for the imperial messengers. Each station was to keep, on hand, a fresh team of mules plus a chariot and a driver. The messengers passing through would exchange their tired team, thus being able to continue the journey at full speed and without interruption. By the relay system, military and administrative messengers could be rushed from capital to any part of the empire and vice versa in a matter of a few days.¹²

3. The Evaluation of Intelligence

Once intelligence is collected it must be evaluated. Evaluation is essential because of the wide variety of sources, many of them of doubtful reliability. The Assyrians took several measures to confirm the reliabilities of the intelligence reports.

In some letters, the sender always mentioned that the king ordered them to send a detailed report. It is obvious that the king wanted to know the full details, so he could judge the truth and value of the intelligence. This is well demonstrated in the fragmentary letter, SAA V 128, from Nabû-le’i, the governor of Birate, to the king:

[T]o the king, [my lord]: your [servant] Nabû-le’i]. Good health to the king, [my] l[ord]! The forts are well; the land of the king, [my] lord, is well. As to the order which the king, my lord, ga[ve me]: “Send your messenger to Bi[rate] and send me a detailed repo[rt on] the [Urarṭian]!” (broken)

¹² See, *SAA* I, xii-xiv. K. Kesser, however, doubted the reliability of Simo Parpola’s description on the Assyrian road system, See K. Kesser, Royal Roads and other questions of the Neo-Assyrian Communication System, in S. Parpola and R. M. Whiting (Hrsg.), *Assyria 1995. Proceedings of the 10th Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Texts Corpus Project*, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1997, 129-136.

Another way to evaluate the intelligence that the Assyrians acquired was to compare the intelligence from different sources. In SAA I 31, a letter from Sennacherib, the crown prince, to Sargon II, three full reports were forwarded concerning the defeat of Urartu from different senders though the contents of the three reports were almost the same:

To the king, my lord: your servant Sin-ahhe-riba. Good health to the king, my lord! Assyria is well, the temples are well, all the king's forts are well. The king, my lord, can be glad indeed. The Ukkaean has sent me (this message): "The troops of the Urartian king have been utterly defeated on his expedition against the Cimmerians; eleven of his governors have been eliminated [with] their troops; his command-in-chief and two of his governors [have been taken prisoners]. He (himself) came to take [the road to...] came [... the pr[efects of his country [...] stationed [in ...].]" [Thi]s was the report of Ukkaean. Aššur-rešuwa has written to thus: "The previous report which I sent about the Urartians was that they had suffered a terrible defeat. Now his country is quiet again and each of his magnates has gone to province. Kaqqadanu, his commander-in-chief, has been taken prisoner, the Urartian king is in the province of Wazanu." This was the report of Aššur-rešuwa. Nabû-le'i the governor of Birate has written to me: "I have written to the guards of the forts along the border concerning the news of the Urartian king and (they tell me this): 'His troops have been utterly defeated on his expedition against the Cimmerians. Three of his magnates along with their troops have been killed; he himself has escaped and entered his country, but his army has not arrived (back).' This was the report of Nabû-le'i. The (king) of Mušašir and his brother and son have gone to greet the Urartian king, and the messenger of the (king) of Hubuškia has also gone to greet him. All the guards of the forts along the border have sent me similar reports. They have brought me from Tabal a letter from Nabû-le'i, the major-domo of Aha-tabiša. I am herewith forwarding it to the king, my lord.

This is a letter that Sennacherib, the crown prince probably in Nineveh, wrote to Sargon, his father, who probably left capital and fought somewhere else. The crown prince reported to the king the intelligence gathered through different sources: the vassal state, the royal delegate, and the Assyrian governor. The main ideas of the three reports he forwarded were almost the same. However, not only did the crown prince forward the three full reports, but he also mentioned the garrisons of the forts along the border sending similar reports. The main purpose of the crown prince was possibly to show the king that the intelligence concerning the defeat of Urartu was reliable.

Issuing false information or spreading rumour is an efficient way to confuse the opponent. The enemies of Assyria, such as Urartu, possibly implemented this tactic to disturb the Assyrian intelligence activities. When the Assyrians had no way to verify the validity of a rumour, they would send their spies to check its

veracity. This is well demonstrated in the letter SAA V, 246, from Bel-emuranni, the Assyrian governor (?), to Sargon II:

To the king, my lord: your servant Bel-emuranni. Good health to the king, my lord! As to the rumor lit. tongue about which the king, my lord, wrote me, I have sent out scouts but they have not yet come back. While waiting for them, [I am submitting] the ki[ng, my lord], this report. (broken) They should give it and b[ring it to me]. Or if it is not to be ...and there happens to be a man in his company he can dispense with, let them give it to him, and let him bring it. A cavalryman should be there to guard him.

4. The Counter-Intelligence

Counter-intelligence activities are instrumental in protecting one's own information and secrecy of one's own intelligence operations. While the Assyrians collected enemy intelligence, its enemies also collected intelligence. The Assyrians took measures to guard against enemy intelligence activities, such as securing their own intelligence, preventing the activities of the enemy scouts and keeping watch over traitors' activities.

Securing agents within the enemy's ranks was an effective measure for the Assyrians to gather intelligence. However, if the agent's identity was exposed or compromised, the channel to collect intelligence would be severed. Therefore, the Assyrians tried to protect the agent's identity being divulged. The fragmentary letter, SAA I, 13: r.1-14, illustrates that the Assyrians protected the agent's identity from being exposed by contacting him secretly:

[If ...] to [...], they should kill [him]; they should [also gather intelligence about the enemy and [co]me and tell it to you. Should this agent [...] come to you in person or should he send his messenger [to you, he should] not be allowed in; speak to him outside the camp. You [know th[at he is a traitor, he considers you [...]. I[if a]ny bargaining [‘ wh]ich in the area of [...] to you [.....]

Not only did the Assyrians acquire intelligence from the informers, so did the enemies of Assyria. The Assyrians usually deported the conquered people to another location within the empire, although, there might have been informers of the enemy among the deportees. The Assyrians took care of these deportees. The letter, SAA V, 172, from Abat-šarri-usur to the king, indicates that the unreliable people were secretly watched:

To the king, my lord: your servant Abat-šarri-ušur. Good health to the king, my lord! As to the Chaldean Nabû-ereš about whom the king, my lord, wrote to me: “He should be watched secretly.” The very moment the king,

my lord, wrote me, I sent (word), and they have been watching him secretly.

The Assyrians sent their spies to enemy territory to retrieve intelligence as did its opponents.¹³ The Assyrians took measures to deal with their enemy's spies, as can be seen in the following letter, SAA V 12:

(broken) [As to the ... of] [Hubu]škian, the sc[outs whom I sent] have r[eturned] from his presence. [As to the Ur[ar]ian scouts about whom the king], my lord, wrote me : "Has the[comman]der of the fort [not] held [them] back?" [...] the Hubuškian [] said: "Whichever scout[s sa]ved themselves [have entered]the towns; we [are sending]fire (signal) [in my country.]"

This fragmentary letter indicates that the Assyrians had at least two lines of defence to hold back Urartian spies. The first line of defence of the Assyrian empire consisted of the garrisons on the border, who possibly prevented the enemy's spies from entering by investigating the people entering the Assyrian empire. The other line of defence was composed of the vassal state, they signalled to the Assyrians the Urartian spies' entry by sending fire.

Summary

The reconstruction above indicates that the Assyrian intelligence activities were successful: the various channels to gather intelligence ensured the abundance of intelligence, the steps taken to communicate intelligence in a timely manner, the steps taken to evaluate intelligence assured its reliability, and measures of counter-intelligence were also effective. The deficiencies of the Assyrian intelligence work, however, were also obvious: first, no definite evidence indicates that there was a specific branch in the central government to coordinate the intelligence work in the whole empire. The "chief of scouts" (*rab-dajālu*) was mentioned in some letters, who possibly administrated the scouts in their respective provinces. The activities of the spies were only part of the intelligence activities, quite a high proportion of intelligence personnel had to act unintentionally, and the efficiency of the intelligence activities would be reduced. Second, the ways that the Assyrians dealt with intelligence were crude. An "information officer" (*mu-tir-ṭè-me*) was mentioned in the troops of the province of Mazamua,¹⁴ who possibly was responsible for dealing with the intelligence of

¹³ SAA V, 11, 12.

¹⁴ SAA V, 215: 20. *mu-tir-ṭè-me*, agent, see, CAD M, Part II s.v. *mu-tir-ṭè-me*, 299.

the troops of the governor of Mazamua. However, most of the intelligence reports were sent to the king directly, the others were forwarded by the crown prince or high officials to the king. Therefore, it was the king himself, who had to deal with various intelligence reports. Thus, the value of some intelligence might be discounted. It seems that the Assyrian intelligence activities had not worked under a well- organized system, and therefore may not be regarded as the Assyrian intelligence system.
