Clumsy or Talented?:
The Fluctuation between the First and Third Person in the Text on the Tell al-Rimāḥ Stela

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The fluctuation between the first and third person in the text on the Tell al-Rimāḥ Stela has been regarded either as a way, in which Nergal-ēreš takes to himself credit for the described achievements, or as a clumsiness of the scribe who conflated multiple source materials into the text. While the textual features may suggest that the inscription was copied from written source, it seems that the scribe deliberately omitted the description of entrustment of receiving tribute, which is supposed to be described in the source text. Another possibility is that in the original text, all the verbs are expressed in the first person, and in this case, our scribe intentionally changed the first person of the verb in the description of receiving tribute to the third person. The unusual use of the third person in the text might have been employed by the scribe so that the subject of the verb could alternatively be construed as Nergal-ēreš, instead of Adad-nērārī III. This scribal art, however, does not reflect the intention of Nergal-ēreš but of Adad-nērārī, the most possible commissioner of the inscription. The apparent clumsiness found in the change between the first and third person might alternatively be regarded as a scribal technique to achieve two purposes: to credit the king for the military exploits; and to lead the readers to alternatively see Nergal-ēreš as a possible candidate for the one who received the tribute.

**Keywords:** Tell al-Rimāḥ Stela, Adad-nērārī III, Nergal-ēreš, Neo-Assyria, Assyrian scribe

**Introduction**
A grammatical feature in the inscription on the Tell al-Rimāḥ Stela (RIMA 3, A.0.104.7), traditionally categorised as one of the summary inscriptions of Adad-nērārī III, has raised scholarly debates over the years. There are three verbs in the main part of the inscription, describing the king’s actions (lines 4-12), which are expressed in the third person, whereas all the other verbs in that part are in the first person, the standard style in the Assyrian royal inscriptions. This fluctuation between the first and third person in the text has been explained either by the intention of Nergal-ēreš, a mighty provincial governor who was allegedly the real author of the inscription, to record his achievements without damaging the style of a royal inscription, or by the clumsiness of the scribe who failed to change the verb forms to the first person when he conflated multiple sources. This article discusses this feature once again on the basis of comparisons with other Assyrian royal inscriptions from the same period, especially those which share similar stylistic features. Then the nature of the source text will be hypothesised, and finally a possible explanation of the fluctuation of the first and third person in the text will be offered. First, let us present the relevant part of the text and its translation.

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Text
4. GIŠ.GIGIR.MEŠ ÉRIN.HÁ.MEŠ KARAŠ.MEŠ lu ad-ki ana KUR hat-te DU-ka lu aq-bi ina 1-et MU.AN.NA
5. KUR.MAR.TU.KI KUR hat-te a-na si-hír-ti-šá ina GİR.II.MEŠ-ia lu ú-šak-niš GUN ma-da-tu
6. a-na EGIR u₄-me UGU-šū-nu lu ú-kin 2 LIM GUN KŪ.BABBAR 1 LIM GUN URUDU 2 LIM GUN AN.BAR
7. 3 LIM lu-bül-ti bir-me u TŬG.GADA.MEŠ ma-da-tu ša m.ma-reš ša KUR ANŠE-šú im-hur
8. ma-da-tu ša šu² KUR sa-me-ri-na-a-a KUR šur-a-a KUR ši-du-na-a-a
9. im-hur ana tam-tim GAL-te ša šul-me ²šam-ši lu a-lik ša-šam EN-ti-ia
10. ina URU ar-ma-di ša MURUB₄ tam-tim lu-u az-qu-pu ana KUR lab-na-₄
11. lu e-₄ GIŠ.ŪR 1 ME GIŠ e-ri-ni dan-nu-te hi-ši-ih-ti É.GAL É.KUR.MEŠ-ia
12. lu ak-kis ma-da-te ša MAN.MEŠ-ni ša KUR na-₄-i-ri DÛ.MEŠ-šū-nu lu-u im-hur

Translation
4-8) I verily mustered chariots (and) camps. I verily commanded the march to the land Hatti. In one year I verily submitted the land Amurru (and) the land Hatti at my feet. I verily imposed upon them tribute of obligation for the future. He received 2,000 talents of silver, 1,000 talents of copper, 2,000 talents of iron, 3,000 multicoloured clothing and linen — the tribute of Mari’ of the land Damascus. He received the tribute of Joash of the land Samaria, of the land Tyre, of the land Sidon.
9-12) I verily marched to the great sea of the setting sun. I verily erected the image of my lordship in the city of Arvad which in the middle of the sea. I verily ascended Mount Lebanon. I verily cut down 100 beams of strong cedar for the requirement of the palace and my temples. He verily received the tribute of all the kings of the land Na`iri.

The part of the text is divided in two sections in terms of the contents: (a) campaign to the land of Hatti and receiving tribute from the kings in the region (lines 4-8); (b) campaign to the Great Sea (the Mediterranean) and Mt Lebanon and receiving tribute from the kings of Na`iri (lines 9-12).

Theory of Deliberate Intent
The verb in the third person appears in lines 7, 9, and 12, in the description of receiving tribute. S. Page (1968, 145), who published the editio princeps of the text, stated that this is not an unusual feature, but rather is ‘characteristic of many Assyrian royal inscriptions.’ An example is Tukulti-Ninurta II’s annalistic inscription (RIMA 2, A.0.100.5), the original source of which was assumed by H. Tadmor (1973, 142) to be a ‘diary form report.’¹ A similar feature is also found in two of Shalmaneser III’s annalistic inscriptions: the texts of the Black Obelisk (RIMA 3, A.0.102.14) and of the Calah Statue (RIMA 3, A.0.102.16). The two texts describe the campaigns led by

¹ The original text was published by S. Page (1968, 139-153). For other editions, see Donner 1970, 50-51; Tadmor 1973, 141-144; Weippert 1992, 60-62; RIMA 3, A.0.104.7.
² On the transliteration of the name iu´a-su, see Malamat 1971, 37-39. Recently this reading was argued again and accepted. See Na`aman 1997, 19-20; Zadok 1997, 20. Page’s original transliteration was ia´a-su. For other views, see McCarter 1974, 5-6; Halpern 1987, 81-85.
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Shalmaneser himself and also the campaigns led not by the king, but by Dayyān-Aššur, turtānu, whom Shalmaneser entrusted to lead the army.

Why, then, does this feature appear in the text on the Tell al-Rimāḥ Stela, typically categorised as a summary inscription? Scholars have offered two explanations for this feature. The first explanation is to regard the fluctuation as the author’s intention. The second is to explain the interchange as a result of the conflation of different sources. Each explanation reflects a different view on the ability of the commissioner/scribe in composing the text: the first view estimates his talent to slide his implicit intention into the text, while the second view ascribes the fluctuation to the scribe’s clumsiness in conflating different sources, and thus irrelevant to the commissioner’s purpose for composing the text. These contrasting views inevitably lead us to question whether our scribe is talented or clumsy.

Before opening the discussion, it is appropriate to overview a similar feature found in the inscription on the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III, where the fluctuation between the first and the third person occurs more frequently. Analysing this feature in the text, S. Yamada (2000, 327-332) observed the following phenomena: In the accounts of the twenty-seventh to thirtieth palû, the verbs of motion, such as ittarad ‘he went down’ and iqṭirib ‘he approached,’ are mostly in the third person and attributed to Dayyān-Aššur, while the verbs of fighting and achievement, such as amdahhiṣ ‘I struck,’ amhur ‘I received,’ and aqqur ‘I destroyed,’ always appear in the first person and refer to the king. By contrast, in the thirty-first palû, not only most of the verbs of fighting and achievement but also the verbs in the description of the itinerary appear in the first person. Yamada suggested two possible reasons for this change: (1) ‘an attempt to show the king (Shalmaneser) as more closely in control of the action than he actually was’ (use of the first person for the king); (2) Dayyān-Aššur’s attempt to take full credit for the military achievements in order to commemorate his own eponymate in this palû (826 BCE) (use of the first person for Dayyān-Aššur). Both views belong to the first type of explanations for the feature – the intention on the part of the commissioner. Later, Yamada (2009, xxvii-xxviii) explained the fluctuation by the evolvement of the royal ideology expressed in Shalmaneser III’s palû annals, which was coined for describing the king’s res gestae. He explained the prima facie clumsy composition as reflecting the dilemma of the scribe who tried to meet two demands – the king’s prerogative of military expedition, for which the palû annals are designated, and the description of the expedition, which was actually led by Dayyān-Aššur.

J. Ruby (2001, 172) explained the alteration of the first and third person in the text on the Tell al-Rimāḥ Stela in a similar way. Ruby discussed the possibility that Nergal-ēreš deliberately employed the change of the subject to emphasise his role in that campaign. Receiving tribute

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3 For the use of third person for relating the achievements of the king in the Middle Assyrian royal inscriptions, see Tadmor 1973, 141-142. A similar feature is found also in another Assyrian non-royal inscription made by Adad-it ’i (RIMA 2, A.0.101.2004), who is thought to be the ruler of an independent dynasty in the Habur River region, probably during Aššurnaṣirpal II’s reign. This inscription consists of two texts from different periods: one (lines 1-18) earlier and the other (lines 19-38) later. In each text, Adad-it ’i begins to speak in the third person, but in lines 13 and 26 the text changes into the first person.

4 For the term palû and its connotation, see Yamada 2000, 66-67.


6 Changes in literary expression in the Assyrian royal inscriptions may reflect conflicting situations between the literary convention and historical reality, as suggested by H. Tadmor (1981).
was regarded as an important part of the campaign, and Nergal-ēreš dared to ascribe that deed to himself, who, instead of the king, actually conducted the campaigns to Damascus and received the tribute there. If so, his intention, similar to that of Dayyān-Aṣṣur, would have been to commemorate his own achievements, without totally distorting the royal prerogative, in the royal inscription he erected.

Ruby’s theory is hard to accept for the following two reasons. (1) Nergal-ēreš, known as the governor of Raṣappa, is never mentioned with military titles and, unlike Dayyān-Aṣṣur, whom the king entrusted is manifestly stated in the same inscription, no campaign accounts are known for Nergal-ēreš. Therefore it is doubtful that Nergal-ēreš ever played a major role in leading military campaigns as Dayyān-Aṣṣur did (Siddall 2013, 108).7 (2) Nergal-ēreš’s commissioning of the Tell al-Rimāḥ Stela has long been a working hypothesis; yet, L. R. Siddall (2013, 51-52 and 107) pointed out that the text does not actually indicate that Nergal-ēreš commissioned the stela but it should be viewed that the stela was commissioned by the king to bolster ‘Nergal-ēreš’s position as governor of the region, and thus, reflects his dependence of the king.’8 The text on the Tell al-Rimāḥ Stela lacks, unlike the text on the Saba’a Stela, a statement to ascribe the inscription to Nergal-ēreš. Both inscriptions have ‘circumstantial clauses’ concerning Nergal-ēreš and that on the Tell al-Rimāḥ contains a decree to Nergal-ēreš to conduct ‘a massive colonial project.’9 The function of the text as a whole is to support Nergal-ēreš as the manager of this project, and thus should not be categorised as summary inscription. Even if we assume Nergal-ēreš’s commissioning of the inscription, Ruby’s theory cannot explain why Nergal-ēreš should have engraved his own accomplishments in such a subtle way. He could have, as Dayyān-Aṣṣur did in the inscription on the Black Obelisk, explained that he was entrusted by the king for this achievement.

The comparison of the description of receiving tribute in our text with those describing the same action in the other royal inscriptions of Adad-nērārī III also excludes Ruby’s view that our text reflects Nergal-ēreš’s hidden intentions. There are two more texts of Adad-nērārī, which describe receiving the tribute from Mari’, king of Damascus. The text on the Saba’a Stela (RIMA 3, A.0.104.6), another inscription apparently dedicated by Nergal-ēreš,10 describes in brief the march of Assyrian army to Damascus and the subsequent subjugation of its ruler (lines 18b-20). The text is badly damaged, and it cannot be ascertained whether in the first or third person receiving the tribute is expressed there.11 Yet, receiving tribute from the kings of the land Hatti in the same text is expressed in the first person in the preceding part (line 18a).

Another text is the one on the Nimrud Slab (RIMA 3, A.0.104.8), which describes the submission of Damascus and the tribute from Mari’ in detail (lines 15-21). Here too, the description of receiving tribute is expressed in the first person. The only grammatical peculiarity

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7 Of course he might have played a military role as the other local governors did, but the extent of which is not at all clear based on available sources. For military activities of Assyrian local governors of this period, see Fales 2012, 124, 129, 133-134.
8 See also Fales 2012, 135-136.
9 This idea seems to be in line with the view in the recent scholarly works that Adad-nērārī III was never a powerless sovereign but the Assyrian officials were dependent on him. See Blocher 2001; Bernbeck 2008, 361-362; Fales 2012, 134-137.
10 For the commissioning of the inscription by Nergal-ēreš, see Siddall 2013, 107-108.
11 For the text and transliteration, see Hasegawa 2008.
in the text is EN-šu ‘his lord’ instead of ‘my lord’ in line 17. Since the use of the third person appears only here, this should be regarded as an error, for which the scribe is responsible.  

In addition, this assumed intention of Nergal-ēreš is not in line with the style of the text on the Saba’a Stela. I have discussed elsewhere (Hasegawa 2008) the possibility that Nergal-ēreš was indeed responsible for manipulating the text on the Saba’a Stela with two aims in mind: to conceal Adad-nērārī’s inactivity in the first regnal year on the one hand, and on the other, to exaggerate the king’s conquest of the ‘land of Hatti’ in a single year. Whether this reflects Nergal-ēreš’s intention or the result of copying from another royal inscription cannot be determined; but the text indicates an excellent technique employed to achieve these aims, which can be attributed to the scribe. The same tendency can be observed in the text on the Tell al-Rimāḥ Stela; the text emphasised, as in the inscription on the Saba’a Stela, the conquest of the land of Hatti had been accomplished ‘in one year’ (lines 4-5). The stress on the king’s military achievement in ideological and stereo-typical way conforms well to the style of royal inscription. Therefore, the theory to ascribe the fluctuation between the first and third person to the deliberate intent of Nergal-ēreš must be discarded.

**Conflation Theory**

Having discussed the improbability of the theory of deliberate intent, let us now turn to another perspective – conflation of different texts. In contrast to the two inscriptions of Shalmaneser III, where such interchanges occur in various verbs, the verb expressed in the third person in our text is limited to imhur ‘he received’ (lines 7, 9, and 12) in the description of receiving tribute. Based on this fact, H. Cazelles (1969, 114, n. 8) identified the third person as the god Adad, to whom the tribute was paid. Yet, there is no ground to identify the third person in this inscription as Adad, except for the fact that the stela was discovered in a temple of Adad. In other Assyrian inscriptions, it is usually the king who is narrated in the first person as the recipient of tribute, regardless of the divinity to whom the inscriptions are dedicated. In this regard, the text on the Saba’a Stela, commissioned by Nergal-ēreš, and that on the Nimrud Slab (RIMA 3, A.0.104.8), which was definitely erected by Adad-nērārī himself, are no exceptions. Therefore, it is quite anomalous that the description of receiving tribute is expressed in the third person.

Tadmor (1973, 142), while considering the possibility that Adad-nērārī sent his commanders to the battlefield, pointed out that the author of the Tell al-Rimāḥ Stela, as in other Assyrian

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12 After šēpīya in line 13, there are no nouns with pronominal suffix in the first person singular; before bēlīšu successive nouns with pronominal suffix are in the third person singular (imērīšu × 2 and šarrūtīšu) and one verb is with pronominal suffix with the third person singular (ēsiršu). These might have confused the scribe who eventually wrote šu sign after EN.

13 The terminology ‘one year’ should be understood as literary expression magnifying the king’s deeds, and its historicity must not be taken at face value. See Tadmor 1973, 143; Younger 1990, 122. Similar examples in the Assyrian royal inscriptions can be found in Tadmor (ibid., 143, n. 16).

14 This view was accepted by J. A. Soggin (1970, 366).

15 It is indeed possible that Assyrian royal inscriptions ascribe feats both to the kings and gods, but in that case context provides the clue to determine to whom the action is ascribed. Cf. Cogan (1991, 126).

16 The god Adad appears in the third person in the text on the Saba’a Stela (lines 1-5) and in that on the Tell al-Rimāḥ Stela (lines 1-2).

17 The only exceptions are found in the inscription of Tukultī-Ninurta (RIMA 2, A.0.100.5, line 94) and that of Calah Statue (RIMA 3, A.0.102.16, line 318'), where receiving tribute is expressed in the third person.
royal inscriptions, would still credit the king with this achievement and ‘would write amhur not imhur.’ Instead, Tadmor regarded this alteration as an indication that the text is derived from two different sources: one (lines 3-6a, 9-12) describing the conquest of Hatti, and the other (lines 6-8) enumerating the tribute from the countries. A. K. Grayson (1980, 165-167) similarly explained the fluctuation by the conflation of multiple sources, and that lines 6-8 derived from ‘booty lists.’ According to their views, the narrative of the conquest of Hatti was interpolated into the account of the maddattu, the tribute from the kings of Hatti.

One should also bear in mind that the text on the Tell al-Rimāḥ Stela is not an annalistic text, such as those on the Black Obelisk and the Calah Statue, but it shares a feature common in summary inscriptions, which were designed to present different aspects of the Assyrian royal ideology. A typical summary inscription is defined as summarising the earlier and later events in geographical arrangement (Tadmor 1973, 141), and thus compiled from various written sources. The scribe, either alone or together with the dedicator of the inscription, picked up what to be included.

Mentioning two regions as the objects of the royal conquest, as in summary inscriptions, it is natural to postulate that at least part of the text on the Tell al-Rimāḥ Stela is derived from another written source; yet, it is not absolutely necessary to assume two different sources. The text mainly commemorates Adad-nērārī’s two enterprises: his military achievements in the west and receiving tribute from the kings of Hatti and those of Naʿiri. From geographical point of view, it seems strange that the tribute of the kings of Naʿiri, located far north, suddenly appears in line 12. Compared with the description of the king’s deeds in the west, it occupies only a small proportion of the entire description of the king’s feats. Tadmor (1973, 144) suggested that this report on Naʿiri is a ‘space filler’ to start the paragraph with the phrase ina ūmesūma on a new line. The spelling of lū as lu-u, written in the other places in the same inscription as merely lu, may well support this hypothesis. Be that as it may, we may also suggest that the Naʿiri episode is also derived from the source material, in which the conquest of Naʿiri was also described as a major achievement of Adad-nērārī III. This source may have been either an annalistic one, or a typical summary inscription similar to the text on the Nimrud Slab, which was designated to display the extent of the Assyrian king’s conquests as geographical merismus.

Source Material
Actually, the theory of the conflation of two or more source texts raises another question: If the third person singular is derived from the source texts, why is the description of receiving tribute

\[18\] Generally speaking, royal inscriptions were no doubt composed using a variety of sources. See Cogan 1991, 122-123.

\[19\] Siddall (2013, 51-52) suggested that the described events are arranged in chronological order.

\[20\] The second motive for erecting the stela can be seen in the section, later erased, which enumerates the cities that Nergal-ēreš constructed by the king’s decree (lines 13-20).

\[21\] Tadmor (1973, 144) suggested that this campaign against Naʿiri can be dated to one of the three campaigns to north recorded in the Eponym Chronicles: to Hubškia (801 BCE), to Lušia (798 BCE), or to Hubškia (791 BCE).

\[22\] The description of receiving tribute from the kings of Naʿiri occupies only 9.4 per cent (twenty characters out of 213) in the entire description of the king’s feat, whereas the description of the king’s achievement in the west occupies 85.9 per cent (183 characters out of 213).

\[23\] Cody (1970, 332) suggested that the two campaigns, i.e. to Damascus and to Naʿiri, happened in one year but this assumption was based on the literal interpretation of the phrase ina tšēt šatti in the text on the Tell al-Rimāḥ Stela.
there, generally written in the first person, expressed in the third person?

The literary genre of the source material appears to be the key to answer this question. Grayson (1980, 165-167) assumed ‘booty lists’ as a source for lines 6-8. It is generally assumed that such inventories were made on clay tablets by Assyrian scribes when the spoil was enumerated, but we do not know whether those lists included the description of receiving tribute in the third person. In the light of a number of administrative inventories found in Nineveh (Fales and Postgate 1992, 59-136), dating to the seventh century BCE, it is rather assumed that such lists contain mainly the names and quantities of the tribute with their provenances and the date of receipt, but do not include the recipients. Recipients might not have been significant enough to be recorded because the tribute was, after all, brought to the Assyrian monarch. Also, to write down on tablets only the names and quantities of booty seems to be preferable in terms of speed. Of course, the possibility cannot be denied that booty lists were later assembled together to make official ‘booty report’ in literary sophisticated style with the mention of the recipient of tribute, which served as a source for composing royal inscriptions. However, since such a ‘booty report’ has not been found so far, it should be postulated that lines 6-8 and 12 in our text is derived not directly from booty lists but from other type of royal inscription, namely, annalistic or summary inscription.

Assuming that lines 6-8 and 12 derived from another royal inscription and not from booty lists, why in the original royal inscription is the description of receiving tribute expressed in the third person? Three explanations can be given. The first explanation is to assume a ‘diary form’ annalistic text as source, which describes the king’s receipt of tribute in the third person, as in the inscription of Tukultī-Ninurta II (RIMA 2, A.0.100.5). Our scribe took descriptions from such a source without changing the form of the verbs. Yet, this theory appears less likely for two reasons. (1) ‘Diary form’ annalistic text is quite rare. (2) In our text, only the description of receiving tribute is in the third person, while in the text of Tukultī-Ninurta, such an overall regulation cannot be found. Description of receiving tribute appears there nine times: eight times in the third person and once in the first person.

The second explanation is that the source material is a single text, in which the description of receiving tribute is expressed in the third person. It means that the source text acknowledges the role of this ‘someone’ in the third person, just as in the texts on the Black Obelisk and on the Calah Statue. When the scribe composed the text on the Tell al-Rimāḥ Stela, he took the whole accounts of campaigns from his source material, without changing the forms of verbs in the description of receiving tribute, but omitted the part describing the king’s entrusting the campaign (or receiving the tribute) to ‘someone.’ The extent to which the third person was

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24 A relief dating to the reign of Tiglath-pileser III in the British Museum (ME118882) depicts a scribe recording spoils on a clay tablet.
26 Grayson (1981, 42) doubted the existence and use of the ‘diaries’ for the composition of royal inscriptions.
27 Most of the verbs do not alter between the first and the third person. The following is a list of the verbs which do fluctuate: namāšu (seven times in the first person, thirty-three times in the third person); ṣabātu (twice in the first person, once in the third person); redû (twice in the first person, once in the third person).
28 The best candidate for this ‘someone’ was probably not Nergal-ēreš but Nergal-ilāya, the turtānu at that time (Fuchs 2008, 73). Nevertheless, it is impossible to determine whether this ‘someone’ led the whole campaign to Damascus instead of the king, or he was just sent to receive the tribute.
used in the original text is a matter of conjecture. Either all the verbs were expressed in the third person, or, as in the texts on the Black Obelisk and Calah Statue, only part of the verbs were in the third person. In the first case, our scribe changed all the verbs from the third person to the first and left only three *imhurs* as they were.

The third explanation is that all the verbs in the description of military achievements were expressed in the first person as in standard royal inscriptions, but our scribe deliberately changed the first person to the third only in the description of receiving tribute.

The integration of the description of receiving tribute into the description of military campaigns points to the ideal style of the ‘conquest account’ in the Assyrian royal inscriptions at that time. Receiving tribute is an integral part of the motif, which probably convinces the reader with concrete proof of subjugation and conquest of enemy, and thus creating the ideal image of an Assyrian king as conqueror of the vast and sometimes new land. The text on the Tell al-Rimāḥ Stela, while satisfying this demand by ascribing the action such as *adki, aqbi, ušakniš, ukīn, alilk, azqupu, ēli, akkas* to the king, creates an impression that the agent of receiving tribute is not the king. Why, then, is only the description of receiving tribute expressed in the third person? It seems to me that this is exactly the scribal technique employed to lead the readers to look for the true agent of this action.

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Nergal-ēreš’s intention to commemorate his own feat cannot be recognised in the text on the Tell al-Rimāḥ Stela. The text as a whole fits the Assyrian royal ideology, which indicates that the stela was probably not commissioned by Nergal-ēreš. On the contrary, if the original source narrates that the whole campaign was entrusted to someone by the king, it seems that the scribe, by changing the third person into the first in the description of military exploits in the assumed source material, credits the deed to Adad-nērārī III. Should this assumption be correct, the scribe deliberately gave the king the credit for the deeds of someone else who *de facto* achieved the deeds. This theory may suggest the existence of annalistic texts of Adad-nērārī III, which are yet to be found.\(^{29}\) It is also possible that already in the original text all the verbs were expressed in the first person and thus giving full credit for the deeds to the king. Then, our scribe deliberately changed the verb into the third person in the description of receiving tribute.

An interesting comparison could be made with the scribal art employed in Shalmaneser III’s inscriptions describing a murder of a hostile ruler in his sixth *palū*. W. M. Schniedewind (1996, 83-85) argued that in a later text the Assyrian king deliberately takes credit for killing Giammu, the ruler of a region on the Balih River, because in the earlier texts the same murder is ascribed to the inhabitants of the region.\(^{30}\) Actually, the text Schniedewind cited (*RIMA* 3, A.0.102.10, col. ii, lines 13-15a) uses the logogram GAZ for the verb *dâku* and it is unclear if Shalmaneser III really took credit for the murder. That the cited text leaves out the detailed account for the backdrop to the murder,\(^ {31}\) and that much later texts (*RIMA* 3, A.0.102.14, lines 54b-55; A.0.102.16, lines 28-

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\(^{29}\) The employment of the phrase ‘*ina* XX.MU.KÁM’ in the text on the Saba’a Stela may also suggest the existence of an annalistic text of Adad-nērārī III (Hasegawa 2008).

\(^{30}\) See Hasegawa (2011, 8) for earlier literature.

\(^{31}\) The Kurkh Monolith (A.0.102.2, col. ii, lines 78b-80a), dated to ca. 852 BCE, and the Ashur Clay Tablet (A.0.102.6, col. ii, lines 19b-21), dated to ca. 842 BCE, have full accounts on the background for the murder.
29a) employ GAZ-ku instead of GAZ alone may suggest that the use of logogram was aimed primarily at producing more space for the description of events especially in the latest years. Yet, the fact that the logogram can be alternatively construed as if the subject of the verb were the king, exactly as Schniedewind did, demonstrates the validity of this scribal technique to blur the subject of the verb.

The scribe responsible for the text on the Tell al-Rimāḥ Stela did not prefer this kind of ambiguity. He did not write with logogram (IGI) but wrote explicitly im-hur. This could be construed as another scribal technique which has eventually led some modern scholars to connect even the military accomplishments expressed in the first person to Nergal-ēreš. If Siddall is correct in his suggestion (2013, 52) that the purpose of the stela was ‘to support Nergal-ēreš in his role as governor,’ then the impression that somebody else than the king received the tribute by using imhur seems to conform well to this purpose, since Negal-ēreš is definitely the principal character in the text, second only to the king. Whether he really received the tribute on behalf of the king cannot be verified but the readers could easily associate it with Nergal-ēreš.

**Conclusion**

Based on the above assumptions, let us now reconstruct the process of composition of the text on the Tell al-Rimāḥ Stela. The scribe copied the description of military exploits and receipt of tribute from another inscription, probably an annalistic text of Adad-nērārī III, which is yet to be found. In the original text, the campaign was described as a deed entrusted to someone (Nergal-lāya?) by Adad-nērārī, but our scribe, while changing the third person to the first in the description of the military exploits, omitted the description of this entrustment and left imhur as it was. Or, all the achievements were expressed in the first person already in the original text, either an annalistic or a summary inscription, and our scribe changed the verb only in the description of receiving tribute from the first person to the third. The result creates an impression that the recipient of the tribute was not the king, and the readers’ eyes will consequently be set on another principal character in the text, namely Nergal-ēreš. With this technique, our scribe attempted to satisfy two demands: (1) to keep the style of the royal inscription by ascribing the military accomplishments to the king; (2) to present Nergal-ēreš as if he had been the true recipient of the tribute. That the recipient could only alternatively be construed as Nergal-ēreš may be indicated by the fact that this part was not effaced as was in the second part of the inscription, when, as has been suggested, Nergal-ēreš was disgraced later in his career. Should

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32 The Ashur Stone Tablet (A.0.102.10), which Schniedewind cited, is dated to ca. 839 BCE and the Black Obelisk (A.0.102.14) and the Calah Statue are both dated to ca. 828/827 BCE.

33 For the influential status of the ‘chief scribes’ and ‘palaces scribes’ and their work in the Neo-Assyrian period, see the detailed discussion by Luuko 2007. The scribe who was responsible for composing the text might have been at the same time an ummānu. For the active role of ummānu in composing the Assyrian royal inscriptions, see Tadmor 1981, 30-33.

34 It is also possible that the military exploits were already expressed in the first person in the original source. It seems that receiving tribute from the kings of Na’irî in line 12 reflects the information found in the source material, but the sentence itself might have been paraphrased by the scribe by employing two elements from the preceding two parts: lū from lines 4-6a, 9-12a; imhur from lines 6b-8. The scribe seems to have adjusted the verb form in accordance with the preceding part. Thus, it could be possible that the source text does not describe the scene of receiving tribute in the third person.
this tentative reconstruction be correct, our scribe was undoubtedly talented, commanding such skilful art without spoiling the Assyrian royal ideology. If so, what could seem to be a peculiar feature to the eyes of modern (‘western’) scholars in the text of the Tell al-Rimāḥ Stela might reflect the efforts of the scribe who ran after two hares.⁴⁵

We may gain more insights into this kind of scribal art and could determine if our scribe is indeed clumsy or talented, when, someday, the source text for the text on the Tell al-Rimāḥ Stela, possibly an annalistic text of Adad-nērārī III, is brought to light. Until that day, without possessing hard evidence, this theory should remain a conjecture, and thus our scribe must be satisfied with being called ‘clumsy.’

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### Abbreviation

RIMA = The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods. 3 vols. Toronto.

### Bibliography


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⁴⁵ Given its anomaly in the entire corpus of the Assyrian royal inscriptions, this feature should have had some importance to the contemporary readers. To look for logic behind it is thus not appropriate to be called modern way of thinking. The theory that the Assyrians would not care the fluctuation could be legitimised only when this feature appears in many texts.


