



## **Mar-Issar, the deputy of king Aššur-Aḥi-Iddina in Babylon (680-669 B.C)**

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### **Abstract**

This article aims to study the character of Mar-Issar, one of most prominent political and administrative figures during the reign of king Aššur-Aḥi-Iddina (680-669 B.C.) and who held the position of the king's deputy in Babylon and the southern cities of Mesopotamia. He enjoyed a special significance in the royal court due to his administrative and professional experience. Therefore, king Aššur-Aḥi-Iddina assigned to him many official duties. His duties were identified through the various letters and reports he sent to the king, which addressed issues such as the administration of Babylonian temples, building and renovating temples, the construction of the statues of gods, his major duty of astrology and the interpretation of astronomical phenomena, and managing the security file in the cities of Babylon and submitting his detailed reports and observations to the King.

**Keywords:** Mar-Issar, Aššur-Aḥi-Iddina, Astrology and Divination, statues of god

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## مار - ايشار وكيل الملك اشور - آخ - آدن ( ٦٨٠-٦٦٩ ق.م ) في بلاد بابل

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الملخص:

يعدى البحث بدراسة شخصية Mar-Issar (مار - عشتار) الذي عده الباحثين احد اهم الشخصيات السياسية والادارية البارزة في عهد الملك اسرحدون (أشور-آخ-إدن- Aššur-Ahi-Iddina) (٦٨٠-٦٦٩ ق.م)، والذي كان وكيله ونائبه في بلاد بابل ومدن جنوب العراق والمهام الإدارية التي اوكلت اليه، فقد كان لهذا الشخص مكانة خاصة في البلاط الملكي الآشوري بسبب خبراته الإدارية والمهنية لذا كلفه الملك اشور-آخ-إدن بعده مهام رسمية. وقد تم التعرف على وظيفته ومهامه من خلال رسائله وتقاريره المتذوقة المرسلة إلى الملك والتي تداولت مواضيع عدة اهمها ادارة المعابد في بلاد بابل ومتابعة مشاريع بناء وتجديد المعابد المقدسة وصداعنة التماثيل الإلهية فضلا عن مهمته الأساسية في التذجيم وتفسير الظواهر الفلكية وإدارة الملف الأمني في مدن بابل وتقديم تقاريره المفصلة وملحوظاته بهذا الشأن إلى الملك اشور-آخ-إدن.

الكلمات المفتاحية: Mar-Issar ، اشور-آخ-إدن ، التذجيم والعرفة، ترميم المعابد ، تماثيل الآلهة.

### Introduction

The Assyrian kings depended on deputies in their administration of regions and cities of the kingdom. Mar-Issar was among the trusted deputies who were assigned official duties in Babylon. He is considered by researchers as one of the important figures in the administrative system of the Assyrian empire during the reign of Aššur-Ahi-Iddina <sup>(1)</sup>, who enjoyed the king's trust. He was chosen by the king to be his deputy and representative during the period (671-669 BC) due to his diverse experiences in the fields of writing, astrology, and supervision of temples. The letters and reports he sent to the

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king clearly demonstrate his honesty in conveying news and information and executing orders, in addition to his experience in managing the tasks the king entrusted to him. He received his orders and instructions directly from the king. Most of his letters concerned administrative information about the officials and employees in the cities of Babylon, astrology and the construction of holy sites in the cities of Babylon, Borsippa, and Uruk. Due to the importance of the subject and the variety of works Mar-Issar carried out the study is divided into several sections that deal with his personality, position, and the duties assigned to him such as following up on the administrative affairs of the cities of Babylon and southern Iraq, and the officials, collecting offerings, and his duties in astrological issues, which included interpreting astronomical phenomena, supervising the establishment of rituals accompanying astronomical phenomena, and supervising urban projects such as renovating temples and making statues of the gods. Among the important sources of this study is the administrative letters published in the volume (10) of the "State Archives of Assyrian" (SAA).

### **Mar-Issar's Character and Position**

The distinction and accuracy that characterized the administrative system of the Assyrian Kingdom over the centuries often represent the most prominent qualities of the kingdom. This was reflected in the Assyrian kings' keenness to follow up on the various affairs of their kingdom, in addition to the essential tasks assigned to certain royal officials who held multiple posts in the management of the kingdom. This shows their great administrative abilities and their clear dedication to implementing their king's orders. Among the important figures who left their mark on the political and administrative system of the Assyrian Kingdom is Mar-Issar, the deputy of King Aššur-Ahi-Iddina, who held many administrative posts and dealt with special issues in Babylon during period (671-669 BC) of this king's reign <sup>(2)</sup>.

Mar-Issar was a learned man, skilled in astrology and professional writing, with a background in administration. He reported directly to the king and was accountable only to him <sup>(3)</sup>. All correspondence and reports to the king listed him as ("<sup>m</sup>DUMU-<sup>d</sup>15), as seen in the following letter:

" a-na LUGAL EN-iá ARAD-ka <sup>m</sup>DUMU-d15 lu-u DI-mu a-na MAN EN-iá<sup>d</sup>PA u <sup>d</sup>AMAR. UTU a-na MAN EN-iá lik-ru-bu" <sup>(4)</sup>

"To my lord the king, your servant Mar-Issar. May good health be granted to my lord the king! May Nabu and Marduk bless my lord the king" Given the position of Mar-Issar in the Assyrian royal court and the nature of his diverse administrative and professional experiences, the Assyrian king Aššur-Ahi-Iddina entrusted him with many responsibilities in Babylon. The contents of many of Mar-Issar's administrative letters sent to King

Aššur-Ahi-Iddina that his duties were largely related to the management of the Babylonian temples by following up on construction and renovation projects, making statues of the gods, crafting, offering sacrifices, astrology, reading horoscopes, interpreting natural phenomena, reporting to the king on special issues that affect the security of the king and the country, and performing religious rituals related to astrological reports <sup>(5)</sup> . His duties and the nature of the work he carried out were determined on the basis of the content of his letters to King Aššur-Ahi-Iddina, which are as follows:

#### I. His duties in following up on the administrative affairs of the cities of Babylon

Deputies of the kings played an important role in managing the tasks assigned to them by the kings. Their role was mostly represented by being the king's deputies and a link between the king on the one hand and the residents and officials of those cities on the other. They played a prominent role in conveying to the king news and information, writing reports, and letting the king know about the employees' problems. Mar-Issar was one of Aššur-Ahi-Iddina's trusted deputies. He was entrusted with numerous duties in Babylon, such as supervising the king's work, implementing his instructions, and uncovering all forms of corruption, whether involving leaders and officials in cities, oppression of the population, or violations against temples. These tasks include:

##### A. Monitoring the performance of officials and employees

One of Mar-Issar's first responsibilities was to oversee the work of the officials in charge of the cities of Babylon. His reports to the king often included issues related to security breaches, as well as issues of administrative corruption and the oppression of citizens. His reports, which were sent directly to the king, included his recommendations and viewpoints on these issues. In one of the letters, he talks about the acts of violence and administrative corruption that the people of the city of Babylon were subjected to by its governor. He talks about that governor's lying in claiming that the people of the city assaulted him and threw lumps of clay at him while he was collecting the large silver taxes that burdened the citizens. He also detained a number of men under the pretext of assaulting him, including Judge Ṭabī, which necessitated the intervention of Mar-Issar and the dispatch of a military unit to investigate this matter. The letter states:

"LÚ\*.GAR-UMUŠ KÁ.DINGIR.KI a-na MAN EN-iá i-šap-pa-ra ma-a DUMU.MEŠ KÁ.DINGIR.KI ina kur-ba-ni iš-še-e-u-ni si-il-a-te ši-na ina te-ki-i-ti ša a-na LÚ\*GAR-UMUŠ.MEŠ iq-bu-u-ni ma-a re-eš GIŠ.GIGIR.MEŠ-ku-nu iš-ša KUG.UD ma-a-du ina UGU DUMU.MEŠ KÁ.DINGIR.RA.KI BÁR.SIPA.KI ù GÚ.Du<sub>8</sub>.A.KI ú-tu-uš-si-ku it-tah-ru DUMU.MEŠ KÁ.DINGIR.RA.KI muš-ke-e-nu-te ša me-me-e-ni-šu-nu la-áš-sú-u-ni ki-il-lu is-sa-ak-nu ib-ti-ki-i-ú LÚ\*GAR-UMUŠ

LÚ.ERIM.MEŠ TA\* ŠÀ-bi-šú-nu uš-šab-bit ma-a LÚ\*A-KIN.MEŠ-e-a ina kur-ba-ni ta-aş-še-'a-a ù a-na DAM <sup>m</sup>DÙG.GA-I LÚ\* da-a-a-nu i-sap-ra ma-a mu-ut-ki ina pa-ni-ki lu pa-qid KÁ la ú-şa-a: a-se-me ma-a a-na LÚ\* ERIM.MEŠ ša ib-ki-i-u-ni <sup>m</sup>DÙG.GA-i LÚ\*da-a-a-nu ú-sa-ad-bi-ib-şú-nu ki-i an-ni-i šu-ú tè-e-mu MAN be-lí lu-u ú-di" <sup>(6)</sup>

"Perhaps the commander of Babylon will write to my lord the king, saying, 'The citizens of Babylon have thrown lumps of clay at me,' but that is a lie. In fact, it was necessary to inform the commanders to prepare their chariots. They had imposed much silver due from the people of Babylon, Borsippa, and Kotha and collected it. The citizens of Babylon, the poor ones who had received nothing, wailed and protested. (Then) the commander imprisoned some of the men (the soldiers), claiming, 'They threw lumps of clay at my messengers.' He also wrote to Judge Tabî's wife, saying, 'Keep your husband in your charge, and he is not allowed to go out into the open air! I have heard that Judge Tabî is inciting the protesting men. This is the incident, may my lord the king know.". The content of the letter shows Mar-Issar's empathy and solidarity with the Residents of Babylon, his defence of them in their protest against the city ruler who lied in his claim, and his denunciation of the rampant corruption among officials, which could negatively affect Assyrian Kingdom.

Aššur-Ahi-Iddina had given some privileges to the cities of Babylon, including exempting them from some taxes <sup>(7)</sup>. In another letter he tells the king about a orders he received from Nrgal-sarru-usur, the envoy of the tax deputy to the city of Lahiru to expel some of the temples' deputies at Sippar, Kutha, Dilbat and Horsag-Kalama and appoint others in their positions after the king (Aššur-Ahi-Iddina) himself issued a decree saying:

" ma-ḥir-u-ni le-e-pu-šu <sup>md</sup>U.GUR-MAN- PAB [LÚ\*].qur-bu-tú TA\* LÚ\*.2-I ša LÚ\*.URU. la-ḥi-ra-a-a it-tal-ka a-bat LUGAL iz-zak-ru LÚ\*.qe-e- pa-a-ni ša É-DINGIR.MEŠ ša sip-par.KI GÚ.Du8.A. KI HUR.SAG.KALAM.MA.KI dil-bat.KI up-ta-at-ti-i-u šá-ni-i-u-te" <sup>(8)</sup>.

"The bodyguard Nrgal-sarru-usur, the representative of the tax collector of the city of Lahiru, came, stating the king's order: Dismiss the representatives of the temples of Sippar, Kutha, Horsag-Kalama, and Dilbat, and appoint others. May my lord the king know this." Based on his job and with reference to the King's order, these people must be punished by expelling them from their jobs, mostly because of job negligence <sup>(9)</sup>.

## **B. Supervising the offering of sacrifices and taxes collection**

Among other duties assigned to Mar-Issar during his service in Babylon is his supervision of offerings and sacrifices and tax collection which is consistent with the Assyrian kings' interest in following up offering and sacrifices presented to the gods, paying their dues and inform the king

about any delay or problem in paying these dues based on the fact that this is part of the king's religious duties. In one of his letters, he tells the king about a bribe paid by the shepherds of Borsippa and Babylon to the ruler and to the priest of the city in order not to conduct a census of bulls and sheep of the god, Nabu among the citizens' properties which consequently led to not offering sacrifices (even the king's sacrifices) to the gods. He also informs the king that the priests sacrificed an ox with one kidney to the goddess Nanaya in violation of the conditions of sacrifices offered to the gods leading to the population's great concern that the gods may not be pleased with them. He says:

" KA-áš-DU ina pa-a[n MU.AN.NA MAN be-lí IÚ\* qu]r-bu-tú TA\*LÚ\*GAR-UMUŠ u LÚ\* [ŠA.TAM ša] bar-sip.ki i-sap-ra ma-a NÍG.ŠID ša GUD.NITÁ. [MEŠ U] DU.HI. A.MEŠ ša <sup>d</sup>PA ep-šá ù UDU.NITÁ.MEŠ gi-né-e ki-I ša [ina la]-bi-ri ina É DUMU.MEŠ bar-sip.KI pa-[aq]-qi- da UDU.NITÁ.MEŠ kab-ru-tu a-na <sup>d</sup>PA [u'-qa-a]r-ri-bu LÚ\* SIPA.MEŠ šul-ma-nu a-na LÚ\*GAR-UMUŠ [u LÚ\*] Š[À.TAM] it-tan-nu a-du-na-kan-ni NÍG.ŠID [ša] GUD.NITÁ.MEŠ ù UDU.HI.A.MEŠ la ep-šú ù UDU.NITÁ.MEŠ gi-né-e la ú-pa- qi-du ina ITI.BARAG GUD.šak-la-lu-te SISKUR. MEŠ Ša MAN la e-pu-šú IGI.2 ša LÚ\*SIPA--GUD.NITÁ. MEŠ i-dag-gu-lu GUD.šak-la-lu-tú ša ka-ri-bi TA\* pa-an KÁ ú-sa-ḥa-ru-u-ni ina UGU-ḥi GIŠ.BANŠUR ša <sup>d</sup>PA ú-se-li-i-u TA\* ŠÀ-bi GUD.šak -lu-lu ša ka-ri-bi ša pa-an <sup>d</sup>na-na-a e-piš-u-ni a-se-me m-a"<sup>(10)</sup>  
 "In [spring, my lord, the king], sent a guard to the commander and [priest] of Borsippa (with the following orders): "Take a census of the bulls and sheep belonging to the god Nabu. Equip them, as in former times, with the regular ram offerings from the property of the inhabitants of Borsippa! The fat rams must be [delivered to the god Nabu!] (However) the herdsmen bribed both the commander and the priest. As yet the bulls and sheep had not been counted, nor had they made the regular ram offerings. They had not sacrificed (even) the king's uncastrated offerings, in the month of April (the first), (but) they carried out the orders of the herdsmen. They brought back the consecrated castrated bulls from the (temple) gate and offered (such bulls) on the table of the god, Nabu. The consecrated bull that was sacrificed before the goddess Nanaya, I heard that its right kidney was missing. And all the inhabitants of Borsippa complain, saying, "The bulls and sheep of the god Nabu have disappeared from the country!" Why do they let the herdsmen go free?". This act was considered as a violation of the temples' sanctity and a theft of the possessions of the gods by the ruler of the city and one of the priests in collaboration with the herdsmen. Therefore, they deserve to be punished. For this reason, Mar-Issar asserts in another segment of the text the river test punishment for the those who participated in the theft as was the case in earlier times when such incidents took place in Babylon. He says:

"[lu-u] ú-di i-[su-ri a-n]a MAN EN-iá i-qab- bi-i-u ma-a TA\* la-bi-r[i NÍG .ŠID.MEŠ] la ú-pu-šú i-sa-na-li-i-[u ina ŠA ti]-il-ti ša ḥur-sa-an š[a "burna-<sup>d</sup>bu-r]i-ia-áš MAN K[Á.DINGIR.Ki q[a-bima-ah]ur-sa-an L[Ú].SI[PA.MES NÍG.ŠID.MEŠ]"<sup>(11)</sup>

"they may tell the king, my lord, the following: in the past, there were no punishments for the (bulls and sheep). If so, then, they had lied about the river test. The returner, bur-nabu-ri-ash, the king of Babylon. It is said that the time of reckoning is the river test for the herdsmen". Since the temples had high sanctity and nobody may offend them and steal their properties, Mar-Issar in another letter tells the king about the reality of the stolen properties and sacrifices from the gods of the city of Akkad whenever the taxmen of the city of Laḥiru refused to submit the sacrifices that belonged to the gods of Akkad ever since he (Mar-Issar) was appointed as the king's deputy in the city. He asked the king to appoint taxmen from Assyria who work in the Assyrian palace to collect the taxes of the gods. In the same letter, he renews his loyalty and his keenness to tell the king about anything and asks him to decide about collecting sacrifices and the properties that belonged to the temple in the city saying:

"UD-me ár-ku-te ḥu-ub UZU u ḥu-ud ŠA-bi [DINGIR.MES GAL].MEŠ a-na MAN EN-iá liš- ru-ku ki-I <sup>d</sup>GAŠAN ša URU.ak-kad a-na KUR.NIM.MA.KI tal- lik-u-ni NÍG.ŠID-šá [i]t-ta-Šu A.ŠÀ.MEŠ UN.MEŠ Ša É-DINGIR MEŠ šá pal. [xx].MEŠ e-tar-bu ki-I MAN be-lí URU.ak-kad [ú-še]-ši-bu-u-ni un-qu ina UGU LÚ\*.2-I LÚ\*.GAL-É [ša] URU.la-ḥi-ri MAN be-lí i-sap-ra [ma-a gi]-nu-u [ša DINGIR] di-i-na ina URU.ak-kad li-iq- r[i-ba] [xx] MU.AN.NA.MEŠ it-tan-nu ù ú-ba[t-tu- q]u [a-du-na]-kan-ni la id-di-nu TA\* bé-et [MAN] [be-lí a]-na URU.ak-kad ú-še-ri-ban-ni-[ni] [XXXXXXXXXX] É-DINGIR. [MEŠ x x] [XXXXXXXXXX]x-ti lu-bil-u-ni bat-t[a'-ta-a-a] [xxxxxx lu-šá]-aş-bi-tu šum-ma pa-an [MANEN-iá ma-ḥir ina URU].ak-kad lip-qi- du šum-ma LÚ\*.SAG [xxxxxx]-du si-mi-in dul-lu an-ni-I [xxxxxx]ù né-pe-še lid-di-nu [xxxxxxx-n]i ù i-ta-bu-u-ni [xxxxxxx]-me ú-la-a ki-I [xxxxxx ša] la šá-mi-I ú-šá-áš-ma [MAN be-lí ú-da ki-i] kal-bu ša MAN EN-iá [a-na-ku-u-ni TA\* MAN] EN-iá ke-na-ku-u-ni [ú-ma-aan-nu-rig a-n]a MAN EN-iá a-sap-ra [MAN be-lí ki-i] ša ina pa-ni-šú ma-ḥir-u-ni [l]e-pu-uš a-du NÍG.ŠID Ša É--DINGIR.MEŠ i-pa-ḥa-ru-né-en-ni"<sup>(12)</sup>.

"when the gods of Akkad went to Elam, their properties were taken. The fields and employees passed under (...). When my lord, the king, restored stability to the city of Akkad, he sent a sealed order to the taxman of the city of Laḥiru saying: submit the regular sacrifices of the gods. You must offer to Akkad. For (...) years, they have been offering, but (now) they stopped. Till now they have not submitted them, since my lord, the king appointed me in the city of Akkad. (...) the temple (...). Let them bring

(...) during this appointment (...). If this pleases my lord, the king, let them appoint royal court's employees in Akkad (or ...). Let them prepare for the sake of (... sacrifices) and rituals, and (when the god ...) and leaves (...), on the other hand. When, (...), I would report before he hears of it (my lord, the king knows that I am) no more than a dog of my lord, the king and that I am loyal (to the king) my lord, I wrote to my lord the king. Let (my lord, the king) do what he wills until the properties of the temple are collected (once again)"

## II. His duties in astrology and divination

Mar-Issar's duties in Babylon as the king's deputy were not confined to follow up and monitor administrative and economic affairs, but he also excelled in as one of the king's experts in observing celestial constellations and astrology. Astrological reports have always been present in all Babylonian and Assyrian administrative details which was reflected in the king's interests in reports related to astrological prophecies, which affected his policies, especially the administration of the city of Babylon. Big astrologists and diviners were influential in the kingdom and held high positions and were consulted in important decisions. The purpose of astrology was to know the will of the gods and to predict future events in the state since natural phenomena have a supernatural cause dependent on the will of the gods. Therefore, astrologists had to explain those phenomena and to perform the different rituals to avoid the ill omens<sup>(13)</sup>.

Based on the king's interests, Mar-Issar's reports in this respect were present in his letters and his keenness on telling the king of the gods' will because his job is consistent with this type of duties, he was all aware of astrology and diviner and could tell the fortune depending on the stars' movement within celestial constellations and link that with knowing the gods' will in embarking on any enterprise, starting construction projects, Setting a specific celebration date, or knowing if the celestial omens indicate a danger that were to befall the country and the king. Mar-Issar's duties in this respect were:

### A. Explaining astrological phenomena

Astrological phenomena, especially the lunar and solar eclipses and star movements, were of special interest to the king, Aššur-Āhi-Iddina, as such phenomena, in the ancient Iraqi beliefs, indicate ill omens that were to befall the country and the king. Therefore, they represented a source of concern for the king<sup>(14)</sup> and required him to take some measures and make some rituals that we will mention later. Therefore, report sent by Mar-Issar to the king had strong effect on the king's policies. Mar-Issar was keen to explain all astrological phenomena and the related events and to tell the king of their effects on Babylon, Assyria and the neighboring cities. In a letter sent by Mar-Issar to the king in response to a previous query from the

king, he expresses his keenness to follow the king's orders and to fulfill his duties of monitoring the solar and lunar eclipses that took place in areas adjacent to the kingdom, explaining them, and showing the extent of their danger to the country. One letter reads:

"[ša iš-kun]-u-ni pi-ši[r-šú xxx] ša ina tup-pi sa-ṭir-[u-ni xxx] at-ta-as-ḥa TA\* e-gír-ti an-ni-ti a-na MAN EN-iá ú-s[e-bi-la] ù ki-i ša LUGAL be-lí iš-pur-an-ni ma-ṣar-tú ša AN.MI <sup>d</sup>UTU a-na-ṣar šúm-ma is-sa-kan šúm-ma la iš-kun mi-i-nu ša ši-ti-i-ni a-na MAN EN-iá a-ṣap-pa-ra AN.MI <sup>d</sup>30 an-ni-i ša iš-kun-u-ni KUR.KUR ul-tap-pi-it lu-um-an-šú gab-bu ina UGU KUR-MAR. TU.KI ik-te-mir KUR-a-mur-ru-u KUR-ḥa-at-tu-u šá-ni-iš KUR.kal-du" <sup>(15)</sup>.

"I extracted the relevant interpretations, recorded them on the tablet, and sent them with this letter to my lord, the king. In addition, I shall watch the solar eclipse as required by my lord the king and I shall write to him whether or not it occurs. I shall write to my lord, the king, about anything in this respect. The eclipse that took place covered all areas, but its wickedness has befallen the western areas, western areas mean the Hittites or, according to another interpretation, Chaldea"

The date of this script indicates that some of the population in the western areas under the rule of king, Aššur-Ahi-Iddina, were in rebellion and in 671 BC the king was invading Egypt. Therefore, the king was badly in need of some good divinations and interpretations. The message is a reassurance to the king that this eclipse brings no danger to the state and that its danger is limited to the Hittites. He asks the king to perform some rituals to expel its ill omens <sup>(16)</sup>.

In another letter, he describes to the king the feelings of horror and panic that struck the people of Akkad and Babylon following the solar eclipse, which stands for an ill omen according to the beliefs. He interprets the danger behind this phenomenon and warns the king against leaving the borders of the country for any reason. He also asks the king to appoint a person in the place of the king by priestly conventions who will accept all the ill omens, Aššur-Ahi-Iddina, and perform the ritual instead of the king until the danger of that eclipse clears saying:

" LÚ\*ak-kad-u'-a ip-tal- ḥu ŠÀ nu-sa-áš- kin-šú-nu it-tu- ḥu ù a-se-me ma-a LÚ\*.ŠÀ.TAM.MEŠ LÚ\*.qe-pa-a-ni ša KUR-URI.KI ip-tal- ḥu-ma EN u <sup>d</sup>PA DINGIR.MEŠ ka-li-šú-nu UD-me Ša MAN EN-iá ú-'sa'-ri-ku ù ina<sup>1</sup> ŠÀ du-ri AN.MI <sup>d</sup>30 TE- ḥe-e DINGIR.MEŠ i-ba-áš-ši a-na ka-qi-ri la il-lak šúm-ma pa-an MAN EN-iá ma- ḥir ki-i ša ina pa-ni-ti LÚ.sa-ak-lu a-na LÚ\*.ŠÀ.TAM-u-ti lu-u pa-qi-di ina pa-an BARAG gi-nu-u lu-qar-rib ina UD ÈŠ.ÈŠ ina šá-lam É ina UGU NÍG.NA [a-na] <sup>d</sup>GAŠAN ak-kad.KI lis-ru-qu ki- m[a] [AN.MI] i-sa-kan KUR-URI.KI il-ta-[pat] [šu-u a-na] di-na-ni MAN EN-iá lil-l[ik'] (xxxxx]-uṣ-šú li-zi-zi [0] [xxxxxx]ša MAN EN-

iá liš-li-m[u] [xxxxxxxx UN.MEŠ lu né-e-[ ] hu] (xxxx].MEŠ-ŠÚ  
ŠEŠ.MEŠ-Š[u] [xxxx] i -ba-áš-ši man-[nu]"<sup>(17)</sup>.

"The Akkadians panicked but we reassured them, and they felt safe. In addition, I heard that the leaders and deputies of Babylon also panicked. May the god, Bill (Murdoch), Nabu and all the gods to make my lord, the king live longer. However, during the eclipse and the approach of the gods, he should not enter open land. And if appropriate, a man from the public must be appointed, like before, by priestly conventions to offer sacrifices at the platform, on the day of Esšešu<sup>(18)</sup> and in the celebration of "the salute of the temple" to spray incense for the lady of Akkad on the incense burner. When the eclipse which affects Babylon takes place, he will serve in the place of my lord, the king and stand (...). He will manage (...) the king, my lord (...) the people will be calm. Let my lord, the king appoint any person in his place (...) who is acceptable to the king, my lord, from among (...) his brothers (and ...)"

In another letter, he gives a precise interpretation of the movement of the planets and stars within the celestial constellations, their disappearance and the extent of their effect and danger to the neighboring cities and countries. He explains the movement of each constellation and star and show extent of their danger whether to the state or the king or even the kingdom's economy and security. He also asks the king to strengthen his security and to perform atonement rituals to keep danger away:

"[šad-daq-diš] UD-22-KÁM Ša ITI.GUD ina ŠÀ MU[L.ŠU.GI] [i]t-ta-mar ina ITI.BARAG ſa MU.AN.N[A an-ni-ti] UD-29-KÁM it-ta-bal MUL.SAG.ME.GAR [xx x] šúm-ma a-na 20 UD.MEŠ šúm-ma a-na 30 UD.ME[Šxxx] ú-ma-a 1 ITI 5 UD.MEŠ ina AN-e ú-tu hí-'ir UD 6KÁM Ša ITI SIG<sub>4</sub> ina kaq-qar MUL.SIPA.ZI.AN.NA MUL.SAG.ME.GAR it-ta-mar 5 UD.MEŠ ina UGU e-da-ni-[i-šú] u-se-ti-iq ki-i an-ni-i pi-šir-šú 1 MUL.SAG. ME.GAR ina ITI.SIG<sub>4</sub> IGI-ir šal-pu-ut-ti KUR iš-šak-kan ŠE-im iq-qir 1 MUL.SAG.ME.GAR ana MUL. SIPA.ZI.AN.NA TE DINGIR ik-kal 1 MUL.SAG.ME.GAR a-na ŠÀ MUL.SIPA.ZI.AN.NA i-ru-ub DINGIR.MEŠ KUR ik-ka-lu 1 MUL. SAG.ME.GAR ina KASKAL šu-ut <sup>d</sup>a-num IGI-ir DUMU- LUGAL AD-Šú i-ba-ar-ma GIS.GU.ZA iş-şab-bat KASKAL šu-ut <sup>d</sup>a-num KUR.NIM.MA.KI a-na KUR.NIM.MA.KI id- da-gi-il ù a-na EN.NUN NAM.BÚR.BI-e-šú le-e-pu-šu ù 5 UD.MEŠ ſa ina UGU e-da-ni-i-šú ú-še-ti-qu-u-ni Ki-ma ú-tu-uk-kiš 40 UD.MEŠ un-tal-li ki-i an-ni-i pi-šir-šú 1 MUL.né-bi-ru iš-du-ud-ma DINGIR.MEŠ i-ze-en-nu-ú me-še-er ib-ba-áš-ſi nam-ra-a-ti iš-şá-a za-ka-a-ti id-da-al-la- ha A.AN.MEŠ u A.KAL.MEŠ ip-par-ra-su şam-nu im-mah - ha-as KUR.KUR id-da-al-la- ha DINGIR.MEŠ Şu- l[e-e] ul (i)-še-mu-ú taş-li-ti ul i-m[ah - ha-ru] te-re-e-te LÚ\*H AL.MEŠ ul i-t[a-nap-pa-lu] ki-i ſa ina tūp-pi şá-[tir-u-ni pi-şir-şú] [at]-ta-as-ha ana MAN E[N-iá ú-se-bi-la) [xx a-n]a NINA KIX[...]"<sup>(19)</sup>.

"did not appear, and today (...). (last year) it could be seen on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May (the second) in the constellation (Star of Orion)<sup>(20)</sup>. It disappeared last April (the first) of this year on the 29<sup>th</sup> day. Jupiter [may continue to be hidden] from 20 to 30 days. Jupiter now has distanced itself from the sky for five days. It appeared on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June (the third) in the Gemini region exceeding its time by five days. The interpretation for this is: if Jupiter appears in April, the country will be demolished, and barley will be high-priced. If Jupiter approaches Gemini, the disease will devour the god (the country). If Jupiter enters Gemini region, the gods will devour the earth. If Jupiter is seen within the Anu stars path, the heir will rebel against his father and seize the throne. Anu stars path (means) Elam. It concerns Elam. However, they must strengthen security and perform atonement rituals. In addition, when it moved for 5 days (the same amount of time) which it exceeded, it completed 40 days. The relevant interpretation for this is: if mercury slows down, the gods will be angry. The upright person will be embarrassed (a revenge position) and the bright things will be indefinite, and the clear things will be blurry. Rain will stop, grass will be stricken, and the cities will be in turmoil. The gods will not listen to supplicants and will not accept their supplications. They will not answer the queries of diviners [this is the interpretation I could deduce] and [I sent] to the king [my lord] exactly as it was written on the tablet. (...). Nineveh (...)".

From the full explanation of the movements of the stars and planets and the subsequent interpretations, the expertise of Mar-Issar in the field of astronomy and divination has become evident and that he was an excellent deputy to the king who enjoyed multiple experiences.

#### B. Supervising atoning and religious rituals

Diviners' reports about astrological phenomena had two functions: the first function is warning the king against an eminent danger threatens the king and the kingdom; the second function is performing rituals to evade the bad omens in those reports<sup>(21)</sup>. It is believed that those rituals is one kind of atoning rituals performed by humans for gods' sake<sup>(22)</sup>. Therefore, the ancient Iraqis faced the natural phenomena by atoning and religious rituals directed to the gods believing that such phenomena are signs of the gods' wrath. Therefore, Mar-Issar's duty, as the king's diviner, astrologist and protector, was to follow up and supervise the exorcism rituals, purification rituals, performing religious prayers and invocations to the gods, and to offer sacrifices to avoid evil omens during the rituals of the burial of the surrogate king who took it upon himself on behalf of the king, Aššur-Ahi-Iddina to keep out the danger of the eclipse saying:

"É-KL.MAH né-ta-pa-áš šu-u MÍ.É.GAL-Šú dam-mu-qu ka-an-nu-u tak-li-ta-šú-nu kal-lu-mat qa-ab-ru ba-ki-i-u šu-ru-up-tu šar-pat GISKIM.MEŠ DÙ-ši-na pa-áš-šá NAM.BÚR.BI ma-a-du-te É-rin-ki É-sá-la-me-e né-pe-

e-še ša a-ši-pu-tú ÉR.ŠA.Ḫ UN.GÁ.MEŠ na-qa-ba-a-te sa ṭup-šar-ru-tú ú-sa-li-mu e-tap-šú MAN be-lí lu-(u) ú-di " <sup>(23)</sup>

("We have prepared the burial chamber. He and his queen were decorated, treated, displayed, buried, and mourned. Burnt offerings were made, all vows were abolished, and many Namburbi rituals <sup>(24)</sup>, the rituals of Bit rimki and Bit sala mē <sup>(25)</sup>, exorcism rituals, and the omen of supplications were fully performed".

In another letter sent by Mar-Issar to Aššur-Ahi-Iddina related to the solar eclipse, he asks the king to perform atoning rituals, some religious hymns and rituals against diseases. He also asks him to strengthen security measures to avoid any danger resulting from this eclipse.

"ù MAN be-lí lu-u e-ti-ik-ma EN. NUN lu-u dan-na-at NAM.BÚR.BI. MEŠ ÉR.ŠA.HUN.GÁ. MEŠ [né-p] e še ša di-ḥu mu-ta-a-ni a-na MAMA [EN-ii] áù DUMU. MEŠ-MAN EN. MEŠ-e-a lu-[bal-1] i-tu" <sup>(26)</sup>

"Despite all this, my lord, the king should be under heavy protection. Rituals of atonement, hymns and rituals of repentance against malaria and epidemics must be performed for the sake of the lives of my lord the king and my lords the princes"

### III. Supervising construction projects

The kings of the Sargonian dynasty (721-612 BC) were keen to make Babylon a complementary part of their kingdom. Thus, that country was run directly by them. This was probably due to political and economic considerations, because that country was the link between Assyria and the ports of the Arabian Gulf and a defensive line against Elam, east of Assyria. Therefore, the Assyrians adopted a policy that alternated between using force represented by demolishing its walls and burning down its buildings and a reconciliatory and appeasing policy with its population. Therefore, some Assyrian kings carried out construction work focused on the religious aspect. They reconstructed and renovated temples and made statues in Babylon and its cities because of their historical and cultural status especially the religious side, in order to win the hearts and minds of the country's population to accept their rule. Their policy was successful to some extent <sup>(27)</sup>. King Aššur-Ahi-Iddina witnessed reconstruction and renovation of many temples in Babylon and southern cities <sup>(28)</sup> after his father, Sin-Ahi-Erība (704-681 BC), demolished cities and temples and looted statues of their gods following the Babylonian king's alliance with the Elamites and his rebellion against the Assyrians <sup>(29)</sup>. King Aššur-Ahi-Iddina's choice of Mar-Issar to supervise the reconstruction of the holy sites and make and repair the statues of the gods in Babylon was a sign of the degree of the king's trust in Mar-Issar. Some of the Babylonian cities that witnessed such work were:

## 1. The city of Babylon

### a. Supervising the restoration of the Esaggil Temple

This is one of most important projects in Babylon entrusted to Mar-Issar. For the Babylonians, reconstruction of the Esaggil temple is a great thing because it is one of the most important temples specified for its national god, Murdoch<sup>(30)</sup>. In order to honor the gods of Babylon, gain their approval, and legitimize his rule, King Aššur-Ahi-Iddina began restoring this temple and entrusted the task of the restoration project to Mar-Issar, his deputy in Babylon, who supervised the work in the temple and distributed silver allocations to the Babylonian delegates responsible for the restoration process and handed wages in silver to the Babylonian delegates responsible for the restoration process. It appears that he worked continuously to complete the reconstruction of the temple. In a letter to king Aššur-Ahi-Iddina, Mar-Issar tells him about the construction of the temple according to certain measurements dictated by the gods, along with religious rituals and sacrifice performed during construction. The text also refers to concluding treaties with their ally (probably the ruler of Babylon) under the supervision of Mar-Issar and making a pledge not to change what was stated in that treaty. The letter reads:

"" [a-na MAN E]N iá liš-ru-ku LÚ\*.um-ma-a- ni ša is-se- e-a [il]-lik-u-né-en-ni KUG.UD ni-id-dan-áš- Šú-nu BARAG.MEŠ [ša] É.ZI.DA ki-i ša MAN be-lí iq-bu-u-ni [u]h -hu-zu NA4.e-lal-lum a-na man-za-al-ti MAN EN-iá sa É.sag-gil re-e-šú liš-ši-i-u lu-bil-u-ni is-qa-a-te ša is-se-e-a na-aş-şa-ku-u-ni a-na-ku ù "id-ri-a-ha-a-ú LÚ\*.GAL-ki-şir a-na LÚ\*.qe-e-pa-a-ni ša KUR-URI.KI ni- it-ti-din ù ša MAN be-lí iq-ban-ni ma-a is-se-e-šú-nu [du-ub-bu ki]-i an-ni-i aq-ti-ba-áš-şú-nu [nu-uk x in]a 1 KUŠ-a-a 7 pu-la-a-ni [x x x x] KAB i-şak-ku-nu UDU.NITÁ ina UGU-hi [i-şa-ab-b]u- u da-a-mu ú-la-ab-bu-şu [ina şA uş-še i-ş]ak-ku-nu a-na şa-a-ti UD- me [i-kar-ru]-ru nu-uk ú-ma-a MAN be-lí [xxx ş]a AN-e [ş]a lai-şá-an-nu-u-ni[ina IGIDINGIR.MEŠ[ina] pu-ut BA[RA]G a'-de-el [is-se-k]u-nu is-sakan ut-ta-am-me-ku-nu [ma-a şúm-maxx] dib-bé-e-a tu-şá-áš-na- a-ni [xxxx] ù LÚ\*.hu-u[b]-tu ša [...]"<sup>(31)</sup>.

"We give silver to the gentlemen who came with me to paint the shrines of the Temple of Izida as ordered by my lord the king. Limestone must be quarried for the statue of my lord to the king in the Esaggil temple. I gave the shares that I took to the representatives of Babylon myself with Idri-ahā'u, the commander of the military division. Since my lord the king told me to talk to them, I have told them the following: Seven foundation stones, each (width) cubits, are placed (...), right and left, and the ram is sacrificed on them. It is covered with blood and placed [in the foundations] forever continuously (with ...) unchanged heavens (...). The treaty was concluded [with you] before the shrine which, (before) the gods and your

ally, and I appealed to him: do not change (...) my words". The text also refers to the building of the king's statue and the use of limestone. It also addresses the painting of the shrines of the Temple of Izida.

### **b. Making gods' statues**

In his letter to king Aššur-Ahi-Iddina, Mar-Issar also mentioned his supervision on making and reconstruction of some gods' statues in Babylon which belongs to Esaggil temple explaining the stages of making each statue out of the 6 statues besides one god whose name is not mentioned because of due to a fracture in the tablet. This indicates Mar-Issar's interest in making major and minor gods. His letter reads:

"a-na LUGAL EN-iá ARAD-ka [<sup>m</sup>DUMU-<sup>d</sup>15] lu-u DI-mu a-na MAN EN-iá [<sup>d</sup>PA u <sup>d</sup>AMAR. UTU] a-na MAN EN-iá lik-ru-bu UD-m[e ar-ku-te] tu-ub UZU ù ȳu-ud ŠA-bi [DINGIR.MEŠ GAL MEŠ] a-na MAN, EN-ia liš-ru-ku dul-lu ū[a] <sup>d</sup>[x] IB.KAD-an-ni-e re-e-[šú it-ta-šu] <sup>d</sup>šar-ra-ḥi-i-ti [g]a-mir[ xx x xxx] ša MAN EN-iá <sup>d</sup>NIN. É.GAL la [ga-am-ru] a-ni-nu dul-lu ša <sup>d</sup>Z.A.BA4.BA4 [né-ep-pa- áš] <sup>d</sup>IB <sup>d</sup>I[R.R]A.GAL [<sup>d</sup>]LUGAL.[MARAD.DA] ina ŠU.2 LÚ\* um-ma-ni [xxx xxx] am-mar ina É.sag-[gil]xxxxx]" (32).

"To the king, my lord. This is your servant (Mar-Issar). May there be peace upon my lord the king. May Nabu and Murdoch bless my lord. May [the great gods] grant long days, well-being and joy to my lord the king. The building of god (...) have (started). The god, Šarrhitu which belongs to (...) is built, my lord, the king. The god, Belet-ekalli is not yet finished. Now we are building gods zababa , Uraš (33), Eragal and (marada) Lugal is being made by the craftsmen. All (...) woodworking was made in (...) the temple of Esaggil."

### **a. In Borsippa**

#### **a. Construction of the Ezida Temple Pier**

Mar-Issar supervised the reconstruction of the Ezida temple and harbor in Borsippa city. This temple is one of the most important shrines in the city and it is the center of the worshipping of the god Nabu, a major god in Babylon. The floods that swept through the city weakened the bridge and water has risen to the walls of the temple After the water level increased during the reign of king Sargon the second (721-705 BC). Therefore, one of Mar-Issar's duties was to protect the temple from floods. He states in his letter to king Aššur-Ahi-Iddina that:

"[is]-sap-ra ma-a [xxxxxxxxx] [in]a UGU ÍD BÁR.SIPA.KI GIŠ.M[Á.MEŠ sa-ad-ra] ina ŠA UD.MEŠ ša <sup>m</sup>MAN--GI.NA AD-šú ša M[AN EN-iá] ki-i ÍD BÁR.SIPA.KI sa-qu-u-ni ti-[tur-ru] ina UGU-ḥi ik-tab-su la iš-li-im 'ú'-[ma-a] tar-[š]i MAN EN-iá ÍD a-dan-niš ir-ti-pi[š ti-tur-ru] 'ú'-[t]ib-bu la i-šal-lim gi-iš-r[u] ša

[GIŠ].MÁ.MEŠ ki-i ša ša-bit-u-ni lu-u ša-bit ki-[ma] MAN be-lí it-tal-ka tam-li-ti ú-ma- al-lu-u ú-[t]a-ab-bu MAN be-lí ina ŠÀ GIS.GIGIR- šú ina UGU-ḥ i e-ti-iq šat-‘tu’ an-ni-tú A.MEŠ id-dan-nu ina UGU É.SIG<sub>4</sub> É.ZI.DA e-te-li-i-u LÚ\*.še-er-ki ša ḫALAD i-‘ba’-áš-ši šúm-ma pa-an MAN EN-iá ma- ḫir e-bir-tú liš-ḥu-ṭu ka-a-ri É.ZI.DA li-ir-ṣi-pu mu-šar-ru-u ša MAN EN-iá ina ŠÀ-bi la-áš-kun”<sup>(34)</sup>.

"(...) wrote. (...) there are ships that sail up the Borsippa river. In the time of Sargon, father of my lord, the king, when the Borsippa river was narrow, they rode on the bow of ships, (but) it did not stay in good condition. Now, in the age of my lord, the king the river level increased a lot. They have improved the quality of boats' bows. However, it did not stay in good condition. Let the bridge of ships as it is. (when) my lord, the king comes, they will put in an improved filling. And Thus, my lord the king can cross it by his vessel. This year, water has risen and reached the walls of Ezida. There are sacrifices for the god, Išum<sup>(35)</sup>. If my lord the king will, let them glisten bricks burnt by furnace and place Ezida's harbor stone. Let me put the words of my lord there: they must cut water"

Burnt bricks and stones were used to fortify it and to tab flood water and the king's name was inscribed on the stones used in the reconstruction. Since the bridge has become narrow because of water high level, Mar-Issar had to fortify and reconstruct the bridge because of its negative effect on the temple on the one hand, and because this is the bridge through which the king's chariots and ships pass when visiting the city.

b. Making the crown of the god Nabu

In addition to his duty of building and decorating statues of gods in Borsippa, Mar-Issar was also entrusted with the task of following up on the manufacture of the crown of the god Nabu for which jewelry - some of which belongs to the Assyrian Aššur-Ahi-Iddina and the Queen the pure mother, Zakuto, was used which gives an indication of the sanctity of this god and his status among the Babylonian gods in the hearts of the Assyrian kings who assumed power over the Babylonian cities. in a letter he sent to the king, he mentions the jewelry and gemstones he received through his envoy to the palace. They will be used in making the crown of the god Nabu:

" a-na MAN EN –iá liš-ru-ku ina UGU NA<sub>4</sub>.gu-si-gu Ša a-na MAN EN-iá áš-pur-an-ni nu-uk la na-aş-ṣu-u-ni 30 NA<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ kan-ku ina ŠU.2 LÚ\*.A-KIN-e-a ša a-na É.GAL áš-pur-an-ni ú-se-bil-u-ni ina še-e-di ša MAN EN-iá UD-2-KÁM na-aş-ṣa NA<sub>4</sub>- KIŠIB-e-ṣú šal-mu at-ta-ḥar-ṣú ù 26NA<sub>4</sub>.IGI.2.MEŠša NA<sub>4</sub>.MUŠ.GÍR ša MAN EN-iá 1MA.NA KUG.GI ša

AMA-LUGAL GAŠAN-ia <sup>md</sup>PA-ZU LÚ\*. qur-bu-tú UD-2-KÁM Ša ITI.NE na-aş-şa NA4.KIŠIB šal-mu at-ta-ħar-šú ki-I ša MAN be-lí" <sup>(36)</sup> .

"as for the jewelry gusīgu about which I wrote to the king my lord saying: thirty sealed jewels were not sent. You sent them to me with my messenger to the palace. He brought them to me the next day and I received them with proper seal. Thank you to the goblin of my lord the king. In addition to this, on the second day of August (the fifth), the bodyguard, Nabû-le'i, brought eye stones "green" from my lord the king, one manna of gold from my lady the mother queen. I received them with a proper seal. They shall be used in making the crown of the god Nabu as dictated by my lord the king" He was determined to carry out the King's orders and directives and the instructions that the King gave him regarding this matter.

### 3. In Uruk

#### a. Making statues of gods

The city of Uruk located to the south of Babylon witnessed restoration and maintenance work by order of King Aššur-Ahi-Iddina and under the supervision of Mar-Issar who followed up on the renovating, and manufacturing of the statues of gods in the city's temples and decorating them with gold and silver jewelry. It seems that gold was used in making the statues of the goddess Nanaya and the god Usur-amatsa which are the major gods in temple of Uruk whereas silver was used in making the secondary gods in the temple of Mummu according to the orders of the king and as mentioned in Mar-Issar's report about the work which states that:

" a-na MAN EN-iá liš-ru-ku ša MAN be-lí iš-pur-an-ni ma-a <sup>mit-ti-</sup>  
<sup>d</sup>AMAR.UTU-TI.LA LÚ\*.UNUG. KI-a-a is-sap-ra ma-a KUG.GI i-ba-áš-  
 ši ina 'É" \_ DINGIR.MEŠ ip-tu-ħur ù bat-qu ša ša-ba-t[i i-b]a-áš-ši ina pa-  
 ni-ti ki-i ud-di-ni MAN be-lí a-n[a URU.s]u -ur-mar-ra-te la il-lak-an-ni ina  
 URU.kal-ħ a M[AN be-lí is-sa]-al-an-ni ma-a mi-i-nu i-ba-áš-ši dul-lu [ša  
 DINGIR. MEŠ m]a-at-ti a-na MAN EN-iá ú-sa-áš-me nu-uk [šá-kut- tú ša  
<sup>d</sup>n]a-na-a ma-aṭ-ṭi-ia-at ù pa-ni ŠU.[2.MEŠ ša <sup>d</sup>ú- şur]-a-mat-sa KUG.GI  
 uħ-ħ u-zu la-a-nu 'ù" [ḠIR.2.MEŠ] KUG.GI la uħ -ħu-zu TÚG.la-[ma-ħ  
 uš-šu-u lab]-šá-at a-gu-ú KUG.GI šak-na-at 2' [šu-un-gal-li ša KUG.GI ga-  
 am-ru 15 u 150 [Ina UGU ki- gal-lil-šá iz-za-zu TA\* KUR-a-š-şur.KI a-na  
 UNUG. [KI] ú-se-bi-la-áš-ši ù dul-lu [ša <sup>d</sup>UNUG.K]I -i-ti <sup>d</sup>a-nu-ni-tum ù  
<sup>d</sup>IGI.DU [ša É-<sup>d</sup>]mu-um-mu dul-li LÚ\* NAGAR ù LÚ\*.KAB.SA[R ga-  
 a]m- mur ù KUG.GI la uħ -ħu-zu 'nu'-uk" KUG.UD ni-it-ti-din KUG.GI i-  
 laq-qu-u-ni nu-uk ki-ma dul-lu ša <sup>d</sup>ú-sur-a-mat-sa ù ša É <sup>d</sup>mu-um-mu nig-  
 da-mar É is-si-li-im ha-ra-ma-ma šá-kut-tú ša na-na-a né-e- pa-áš ú-ma-a  
 40 MA.NA KUG.GI qur-bu LÚ\*.ŞÁ.TAM LÚ\*.qe-e-pu ù LÚ\*.DUB.SAR  
 É-DINGIR ša UNUG.KI pa-an LUGAL EN-iá šu-nu la e-mu-qa-a-a ba-la-  
 tu-us-šú-nu re-eš KUG.GI la a-na-áš-ši ki-ma is-su-uh -ru-u-ni a-na  
 UNUG.KI al-lak šúm-ma KUG.GI ut-ru e-tar-ba ina pa-ni- šú-nu re-eš

KUG.GI a-na-áš-ši ù mi-i-nu ša bat-qu-un-ni a-mar ha-ri-iş-tu a-na LUGAL EN-iá a-şap-pa-ra ina UGU KUG.GI ù bat-qu ša <sup>m</sup>it-ti-<sup>d</sup>AMAR.UTU-TI.LA LÚ\*.ŠA.TAM a-na MAN EN-iá iš-pur-an-ni ma-a ba-a-si KUG.GI ina ŠU.2-ia lu-ra-am-mì-i-u" (37).

"concerning the king, my lord's message, Itti-Marduk-balaṭu wrote to me from Uruk: gold is accumulated in the temples, and there are constructions that must be already carried out before my lord the king. He went to Surmarra. My lord the king asked me: which work (on the gods) is not finished? (Then) I told my lord the king the following: the decoration of Nanaya is not complete. In addition, while the face and hands of Uşur-amatsa were gilded, the shape and (feet) are not complete. She was wearing a lamahuššu robe and decorated with a golden crown. The two golden dragons are ready and standing to the right and left (above) (its base) I sent them from Assyria to Uruk. In addition, the work in the god (ayituArk), the goddess Anunitu and the god Palil of the Mummu temple: carpentry and metalwork (are finished), but they did not gild them. We have given them silver, but they still take gold from me. After we finish the work in the goddess Uşur-amatsa and in the temple of Mummu, the temple is finished, and we shall make the decorations of the goddess Nanaya. Now, there are 40 manna of gold. However, the priest, the envoy and the registrar of Uruk temple visit my lord the king. Without them being here, I have no authority to inspect the gold. When they are back, I shall go to Uruk. If extra gold arrives, I shall inspect it in their presence. I shall also inspect the actual construction work and send a detailed report to my lord, the king about the gold and the reconstruction work reported by Itti-Marduk-balaṭu. my lord, let them submit the gold to me and let me do as I wish."

It is clear that the manufacture and reconstruction work was not confined to statues of gods, but also it included both Uruk main temple and the Mummu temple in the city, which means that reconstruction and renovation campaign was extensive in the city. This shows Mar-Issar's care about following up on the reconstruction and renovation of holy sites and making statues of gods day by day in the cities of Babylon, sending reports and answering the king's queries, it also refers to king Aššur-Ahi-Iddina's interest in the holy sites of Babylon.

The full overview of Mar-Issar's duties in the cities of Babylon shows his care to tell the king about news of these cities and sending him reports of all types whether they come from officials, leaders, administrators, or citizens. One letter sent by him to the king mentions news he received from a citizen of Babylon whose name and position are not mentioned telling him about the visit of the king of Elam to Babylon saying:

"[i-qab]-bu-niš-šú DUMU KÁ.DINGIR.RA.KI [ ki-i] an-ni-i iq-ṭi-bi-a m[a-a ú-ma-a] [an-n]u-rigLUGAL KUR.NIM.MA.K[IXXX][ina

KÁ].DINGIR.RA.KI il-la-ka ma-[axxx] [LÚ\*Š]A.TAM-mu-ti šum-ma LÚ\*.ŠÀ.T[AM xx]"<sup>(38)</sup>.

"a citizen from Babylon called (x) told me (as follows): Now after (that) the king of Elam comes (...) to Babylon (concerning) the priests"

Elam is well-known for its hostility to Assyria, and it always instigated rebellion of those who rejected the presence of the Assyrians in Babylon<sup>(39)</sup>. Possibly, this person is an informant whose job is to communicate information about the activity of their enemies, but because of a fracture in the text the real identity of the person, and the reason of the visit are not known.

Despite the political and administrative position of Mar-Issar, and his multiple duties, sometimes his powers were limited to the cities of Babylon. He could not take any action except by referring to the king and under the supervision of the Babylonian officials. This is evident from a letter sent by Mar-Issar to the king talking about waiting for the return of the envoy and priest of Uruk who were visiting the king in order for Mar-Issar to inspect the available gold in the city temple designated for construction and restoration work. The letter reads:

" ú-ma-a40 MA.NA KUG.GI qur-bu LÚŠA.TAM LÚ\*qe-e-pu ù LÚ\*DUB.SAR É-DINGIR ša UNUG.KI pa-an LUGAL EN-iá šu-nu la e-mu-qa-a-a ba-la-tu-us-šú-nu re-eš KUG.GI la a-na-áš-ši ki-ma is-su-uh -ru-u-ni a-na UNUG.KI al-lak šum-ma KUG.GI ut-ru e-tar-ba ina pa-ni- šú-nu re-eš KUG.GI a-na-áš-ši ù mi-i-nu ša bat-qu-un-ni a-mar h a-ri-is-tu"<sup>(40)</sup>.

"Now, there are 40 gold manna. However, the priest, the envoy and the registrar of Uruk temple visit my lord the king. Without them being here, I have no authority to inspect the gold. When they are back, I shall go to Uruk. If extra gold arrives, I shall inspect it in their presence. I shall also inspect the actual construction work and send a detailed report to my lord, the king."

It is believed that during the reign of king Aššur-Ahi-Iddina, Aden The king and priests jointly controlled the financial affairs of the temple, and the funds allocated for the construction and renovation of the holy sites were also subject to strict control by the King<sup>(41)</sup>.

#### Conclusions and findings

The following conclusions are evident from the letters and reports sent by Mar-Issar to King Aššur-Ahi-Iddina:

1. Mar-Issar was one of the prominent Assyrian figures who played a fundamental role in the administrative system of the Assyrian Kingdom during the reign of King Aššur-Ahi-Iddina. Because of his diverse administrative experience, he was appointed by the king to be his deputy and representative in the cities of

Babylon. It is clear from his letters that he was following up on many local affairs in the cities of Babylon.

2. He often sought to expose and punish corrupt officials and stand by citizens who were being exploited by imposing heavy taxes on them that burdened them.

3. Mar-Issar was not only a politician, but he was one of the astrologers trusted by King Aššur-Ahi-Iddina. His role was clear in explaining astronomical phenomena and observing celestial constellations. His astronomical reports were present in all aspects of administration in Babylon, such as predicting what might happen in the future and informing the king of the measures taken. In addition to carrying out religious atonement rituals accompanying the astronomical phenomena and supervising religious celebrations on behalf of the king.

4. It is concluded from presenting official letters and correspondence between the King and Mar-Issar that the latter's duties included supervising the follow-up of the work of officials and employees in the cities of Babylon and sending administrative reports to the King about the manifestations of administrative corruption prevalent among employees.

5. One of the most important duties assigned to him is supervising reconstruction projects in a number of Babylonian cities. Most of these projects were related to the religious sites, which included restoration of temples and the manufacture and renovation of statues of the Babylonian gods.0

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- (1) The meaning of his name is (the god Assyria gave a brother). He is one of the kings of the modern Assyrian Empire. He ruled during the period between (680 -669 BC.m). He assumed the throne after his father was killed by one of his brothers. For more, see: Al-Fatlawi, Ahmed Habib Sanid, Esarhaddon (680-669 BC.M), unpublished master's thesis, Wasit University, 2006 AD, pp. 21-25
- (2) BUYLAERE, G.V. and LUKKU, M, The Political Correspondence Of Esarhaddon, Helsinki University ,2002, p. 35
- (3) Hardy, E, Mar-Issar and the Restoration of Babylonian Sanctuaries, Thesis of Master, Lunds Universitet, 2014, p.13
- (4) ABL,744= SAA, Vol. 10, NO. 363, Obv.1-5
- (5) Hardy, E, ibid, p. 43-44
- (6 )ABL, 340=SAA, Vol.10, NO. 348, E, 23, Rev. 1-23
- (7) Al-Fatlawi, previous source, p. 153
- (8) ABL,1214= SAA, Vol.10, NO. 364, Rev. 4-8
- (9) Saeed, Safwan Sami. Temples in the Neo-Assyrian Kingdom between sanctity and desecration. Adab Al- Rafidain Journal, Issue (59), 2011, p. 550

(10) ABL,1202=SAA, Vol.10, NO. 353, Obv.14-24, E, 25-27, Rev.1-2

(11) *ibid*, Rev.10-15

(12) ABL,746=SAA, Vol. 10, NO. 359, Obv. 3-13, Rev. 1-15

(13) Hardy, E, *Ibid*, p.12

(14) Al-Fatlawi, Ahmed Habib Sanid, previous source, p. 100

(15) ABL, 337= SAA, Vol. 10, No. 347, Rev.3-16

(16) Patricia F. O'Grady, *Thales of Miletus: The Beginnings of Western Science and Philosophy*, Routledge, 2017, p135

(17) ABL,437=SAA, Vol.10, NO.352, Rev.7-23, E, 24-25

(18) Esšešu: This holiday is pronounced "ÉŠŠÉ" in Sumerian. It is a monthly holiday celebrated every month and means "sacrifice" See: Al-Naimi, Rajiha Khader Abbas, *Holidays in the Civilization of Mesopotamia*, First Edition, Damascus, 2011, p. 55

(19) Ach2, spl62=SAA, Vol.10, NO. 362, Obv.3-17, Rev.1-13

(20) See: Al-Naimi, Shaima Ali Ahmed' *Astronomy in ancient Iraq from the seventh century to the late fourth century BC.M*, Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Mosul, 2006, previous source, pp. 107-111

(21) Sachs, Harry, *The Power of Assyria*, translated by Amer Suleiman, Baghdad, 1999, p. 317

(22). See: Al-Hadidi, Reem Muhammad Saleh Mustafa, Al-Hadidi, *Obsessions of fear and anxiety among the Assyrian kings during the first millennium BC*, unpublished master's thesis, University of Mosul, 2020, p. 21.

(23) ABL,437=SAA, Vol.10, NO.352, Obv.13-21

(24) Namburbi: It is a religious ritual of a magical nature that means in the Sumerian language "dissipating him, expelling him, and deporting him." It was invented by the priests of the Ašipu and involved people in its implementation to protect them from the evil vows that they see in their lives before they happen. See: Suleiman, Nabil Khaled Sheet, *Prayer Literature in Ancient Iraq in Light of Cuneiform Texts*, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Mosul, 2012, pp. 132-133.

(25) These are rituals that are linked to each other and mean purification or washing rituals. They are performed by the priest of the funeral to expel evil spirits from the bodies of the sick. They were performed according to specific times and these rituals were accompanied by the reading of religious incantations. See: Ismail, Khaled Salem.Qasim, Luqman Mahmoud, *Types of Spells and Ruqyah in Mesopotamia*, Journal of Humanities, University of Zakho, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2022, p. 320

(26) ABL,629=SAA, Vol10, NO..351, Rev.12-16

(27) Al-Husayni, Khalid Musa Abd, and Sulayman Jabr Kazim, *construction and renovation of temples in Babylon by the kings of Assyria during the Sargonid dynasty (721-612 BC.M)* According to what was stated in the cuneiform texts, Al-Qadisiyah Journal of Humanities, Vol. 11, No. 2-1, 2008 AD, p. 266

(28) Sachs, Harry, previous source, p. 150

(29) Sachs, Harry, previous source, p. 150

(30) Hosseini, Khaled Musa Abdel, and Suleiman Jabr Kazem, previous source, p. 270

(31) CT,5375=SAA, Vol.10, NO.354, Obv.5-24

(32) CT,53106=SAA, Vol.10, NO.368, Obv.1-12

(33) The god Uraš: This is the name given to the god of the city of Dilbat in Babylon. His name means (land) in the Sumerian language. See: See: Adzad, and others. Previous source, p. 106

(34) ABL,1214=SAA, Vol.10, NO.364, Obv.2-16

(35) Išum: An Akkadian god who is considered an advisor to the gods Nergal and Ira. He was known for his love of humans and is described in Sumerian sources as the hero of Sumer and the protector of the regime. See: Adzad, and others, previous source, p. 69

(36) ABL,340=SAA, Vol.10, No.348, Obv.5-15

(37) ABL,476=SAA, Vol.10, NO.349, obv.5-29, Rev.1-10

(38) CT,53121=SAA, Vol.10, NO.367, Obv.2-6

(39) For more, see, Al-Fatlawi, Ahmed Habib Sanid, previous source, p. 120

(40) ABL,476=SAA, Vol.10, No.349E27-29, Rev.1-6

(41) Dubovský, P. The Building of the First Temple. A Study in Redactional, Text-Critical and Historical Perspective. Volume 103. 2015.p,26.

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