

## III. THE KING:

## A RECONSIDERATION OF THE PERSON OF ESARHADDON

The conclusion of chapter II B3 necessitates a reconsideration of an essential part of the portrait of Esarhaddon. The hitherto established opinion is that he was an extremely superstitious man, and largely only an instrument in the hands of his courtiers. Cf., e.g., A.T. Olmstead, *History of Assyria* (1923), p. 347: "The new régime [of Esarhaddon] . . . was to be under ghostly control of the priestly advisers"; W. von Soden, *Herrscher im alten Orient* (1954), p. 125: "Die Briefe bezeugen uns ferner, wie groß der persönliche Einfluß bestimmter Astrologen und Priester auf den offenbar nicht immer einen klaren Linien folgenden König war"; R. Labat, *Fischer Weltgeschichte* 4 (1967), p. 81: "Asarhaddon war schon von Natur aus ein Zauderer. Unentschlossen, abergläubisch, ängstlich und nicht selten der Spielball in den Händen seiner Ratgeber, lebte er in ständiger Furcht vor ungünstigen Vorzeichen, Krankheit oder dem Zorn der Götter." This label of "superstitiousness" and "susceptibility" is, as we have seen, certainly justifiable to some extent: *but it is out of place and untrue, if, as has hitherto been done, it is used in contrast to his contemporaries or other Assyrian kings.* The current opinion is clearly influenced by the fact that the main part of the letters of scholars, and reports of astrologers and haruspices belongs to (or has been dated to) Esarhaddon's reign; however, this very fact should warn of hasty conclusions, for the present distribution of the material does in no way represent the original one but is only a small fraction of the large correspondence once covering the whole reigns of Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal (see below, p. 49). With regard to the intimate character of the matters discussed above all in the letters of the physicians, the references to the king's anger (LAS 224:13, 306 r4 etc.), fears (40:6, etc.), moping (51 and 143), sadness (141) and complaints (246 and 247) should be interpreted as *commonly human traits* rather than explicit characteristics of Esarhaddon. Similar characteristics would be found in letters addressed to other kings too<sup>1</sup>. Study of the inscriptions of Esarhaddon does not suggest a weak ruler; on the contrary, his reign was generally perhaps the most successful one of all Sargonids<sup>2</sup>. Since *the portraits of most Assyrian kings are formed solely on the basis of their inscriptions*, it would be hazardous to claim that Esarhaddon was inferior in ability to the other kings.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See below, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> Note especially his swift and determinate action after the murder of his father, the conquest of Egypt and other military successes (Mannaeans, Subria), the quelling of a revolt in 670 B.C., the extensive building operations in Babylon and other cities of Akkad, the preparations for the transport of the statue of Marduk to Babylon, and the political treaties intended to guarantee the security of the empire.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. von Soden, *Herrscher*, p. 119: "Asarhaddon war offenbar nicht aus dem harten Holz seines Vaters geschwitzt und diesem wohl auch an Begabung durchaus nicht ebenbürtig"; p. 131: "Assurbanipal muß als Politiker und auch als Mensch seinem Großvater Sennacherib viel ähnlicher gewesen sein als seinem Vater Asarhaddon."

Furthermore it can be demonstrated that superstitiousness was no *special* trait of Esarhaddon and that scientific experts (astrologers, diviners, exorcists, physicians, and "appeasers") functioned as the king's advisors in other courts too. Two kings are usually contrasted with Esarhaddon, his father Sennacherib and his son Assurbanipal (see the preceding footnote). No letters, astrological reports or extispicies addressed to Sennacherib have been preserved; we get, however, a revealing glimpse to his court through a Neo-Babylonian letter sent to Esarhaddon, ABL 1216 (see R. Labat, RA 53 [1959] 113-118, and for translation of the crucial passage, note on LAS 41:6 ff). According to this text, astrologers and diviners, headed by the "chief scribe" Kallbu, sent regularly reports to the king, just as in the reign of Esarhaddon, but censored all the evil omens which they thought might frighten their superstitious lord; only after "a devil" (what sort of omen is meant?) had appeared, the king found out the deception and urged that all omens, whether good or bad, should be reported to him. From LAS 125: 15-16<sup>1</sup> it appears that the exorcist Adad-šumu-ušur had been a servant of Sennacherib too (on the dating of this letter see notes on LAS 121). As for Assurbanipal, sufficiently many letters and reports addressed to him have preserved to show that *no change* in the position of the scholars *took place after the death of Esarhaddon*, and that *the new king was as concerned about the supernatural as his predecessor* (see LAS 60, 96-98, 108-110, 114, 298-299, 301-302, 309 and 324, ABL 1113, RMA 68, 70, 187-189, 191A, 193, 210, 233, 236G, 264, 272A, 274F [cf. Appendix 2B], AGS 147-154, and PRT 101-140). This is only natural in view of the careful education of Assurbanipal (see p. 8 ) which introduced him into the Mesopotamian sciences; according to LAS 34 r6-9, one of his teachers was Esarhaddon's astrologer Balasī. All Esarhaddon's counselors seem to have retained their offices under the new king; cf. LAS 60, RMA 70 and 236G (from Nabū-ahhē-erība, year 667 B.C., RMA 68 (from Balasī, 667 B.C.), LAS 298 and RMA 272A (from Akkullānu, 667 and 666 B.C.), RMA 264 (from Ištar-šumu-ereš, 657 B.C.), ADD 448 = AR 443 (mentions Ištar-šumu-ereš, chief [scribe], Adad-šumu-ušur, chief [exorcist] and [Marduk-]šakin-šumi; for the dating on the document (666 B.C.) see footnote 1 on p. 28 ), and ADD 444 = AR 445 (mentions Ištar-šumu-ereš, chief scribe, and Marduk-šakin-šumi, chief exorcist; dated 660 B.C.). Later on (c. 650 B.C.) they became replaced by other scholars (see ADD 851). The superstitiousness of Assurbanipal is well enough witnessed by the fact that he too let perform the substitute king ritual (see LAS 298), and several texts betray in him similar human traits as in Esarhaddon, including fear and anxiety (see, e.g., WAB 7 248 ff and ABL 1367-1368); we must not dwell on those questions longer here. Just to make it quite clear that superstition was a common trait of Mesopotamian monarchs, two well-known personages will be taken as examples: Nebuchadnezzar, whose superstitiousness and scholarly advisors are described in the book of Daniel, and Alexander the Great himself, whose last days (as the king of Babylon) are described by Plutarch as follows: "Alexander, then, since he had now become sensitive to indications of the divine will and perturbed and apprehensive in his mind, converted every unusual and strange occurrence, were it never so insignificant, into a prodigy and portent; and sacrificers, purifiers and diviners filled his palace." (Loeb Classical Library, Plutarch's *Lives* VII, Alexander LXXV).

Some indications suggest that also the assertion of Esarhaddon's lack of ability is overdrawn. *At least he seems to have been able to read and write.* Cf., above all, LAS 318 and the pertinent notes; the "glosses" added to the letters of Nabū-ahhē-erība to facilitate the reading of the cuneiform signs were not meant for Assurbanipal only (so A. Schott, ZA 44 [1938] 194 ff) but also for Esarhaddon (see p. 33 ). See also LAS 198 which speaks about a "writing" (*ša-ta-a-ri*) of the king. That the letters were normally read to the king by a scribe was merely a practical and conventional arrangement and does not testify to the illiteracy of the king.

## IV. ON THE DATING OF THE LETTERS

The basic premise for a sound study and interpretation of all epistolary texts is their correct chronological classification. Since the Assyrian scribes themselves dated their letters only exceptionally<sup>1</sup>, the dates must now be deduced from the chronological evidence present in the letters. It is self-evident that the degree of accuracy and certainty in which this can be done varies depending on the case. Though an exact dating is even theoretically possible only on special occasions, it is important that the best result is striven for in each letter, for chronologically fixed letters can, naturally, more appropriately be evaluated and used as historical evidence than isolated ones.

It has to be emphasized that utmost care and criticism are necessary to eliminate faulty datings which, especially in the present case, are prone to result from a superficial study of the material. Though the letters were sent to different Assyrian kings, these were always addressed similarly, "the king (my lord)", the name of the king never being mentioned. Operating only with analogies and other circumstantial evidence, letters are easily assigned to a completely wrong reign. If such wrongly dated letters are used as evidence in arguing about the person of a given king or about a given historical period, the result is necessarily untrue or at least distorted. The dating must under no circumstance lead to this end, which would be of greater disadvantage to the study than leaving the letters undated.

The only method to achieve lasting results is to start from absolutely certain facts and, by applying only absolute criteria, to weave a "chronological net" until the general picture is to be seen. Only then it is possible to apply circumstantial criteria to obtain a more precise dating for individual letters.

*The absolute time limits of all letters under study are 722 and 612 B.C., during which time Nineveh (where the letters were found) was the capital of Assyria. These limits can, however, be considerably narrowed on prosopographical evidence. It appears that the letters originate from a limited number of authors who were all approximately contemporaries<sup>2</sup> and served the same kings: their names occur in each other's letters, or as witnesses in same legal documents dating from 671 to 660 B.C.<sup>3</sup>; many of them even wrote joint letters. Since a man's active career hardly exceeds a generation, or 30 years, all letters were most probably written between 680 and 650 B.C., with a theoretical margin of safety of 15 years in both directions. These margins are, however, really only theoretical: it has hitherto not been possible to assign a single Assyrian letter of the Kuyunjik-collection to the reign of Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.), except possibly some to the beginning of this reign, and only*

<sup>1</sup> Thus only four letters published in the present edition were dated in the antiquity (see LAS 96-98 and 286: in the former the dates do not originate from the writer, but were added by the palace archivist).

<sup>2</sup> Ištar-nādin-apli and the authors of LAS 108-110 form an exception: their letters are about 20 years later than the bulk of the edition. But all in all this does not make more than slightly over two per cent of the whole lot.

<sup>3</sup> ADD 448 = AR 443, mentioning Ištar-šumu-ereš, Adad-šumu-ušur, [šum]jānu son of [Nabû-zēru-īšar] and [Marduk-šāk]in-šumi, dates from 666 B.C.; ADD 444 = AR 335, mentioning Ištar-šumu-ereš and Marduk-šāk-in-šumi, bears the date 660 B.C.; for more dates in documents see Chapter II C.

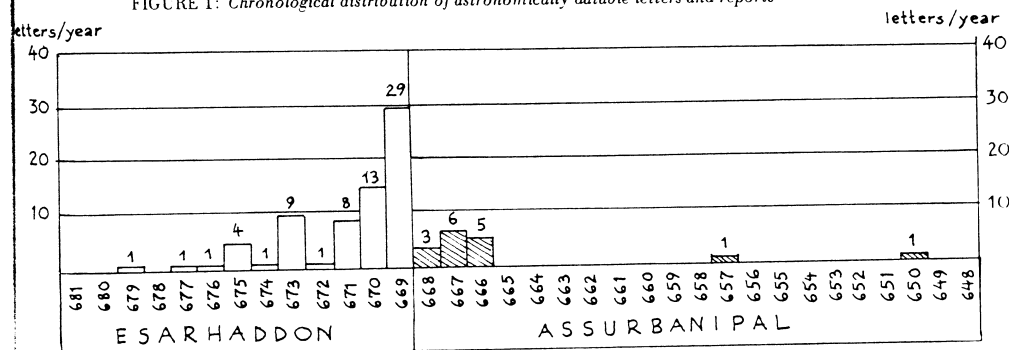
one letter from the whole archive (ABL 469, probably addressed to Aššūr-etelli-ilāni) seems to date from the time after 646 B.C., the latest date found in all letters and reports from Nineveh<sup>1</sup>.

It is a priori clear that the letters are not distributed evenly over this period of 30 years. Statistical probability suggests that the number of letters and reports streaming in a year to the Sargonid kings may well have exceeded the figure which is the grand total of all epistolary texts found in Nineveh<sup>2</sup>. The filing of the accumulating material would have been cumbersome and hardly rewarding by means of the archival techniques of that time, and it is throughout possible that large numbers of letters were destroyed on purpose already by the ancient archivists: the sack of Nineveh and ravages of time have caused additional losses, and lastly, modern excavators may have spotted only a portion of the extant material. Whatever the causes affecting the preservation of the available body of texts be, it is theoretically most probable that it consists of coherent groups coming from relatively limited spans of time, with long intervening periods virtually blank. The determining of this statistical distribution would be of immense importance to the dating and classification of letters which contain no tangible dating criteria. It is the purpose of this chapter to collect and discuss the evidence available for identifying these chronological groups, whereas the treatment of individual datable letters is reserved to the commentary.

Naturally, it is possible to detect these groups, and determine them with certainty, only by means of cumulative evidence. I have therefore not restricted myself to the present letters, but taken into consideration the whole Sargonid epistolary material, including the reports of scribes and haruspices. The latter (totalling to approximately 1000 texts) are particularly important, because they contain a great wealth of astronomical and historical information which makes their chronological classification possible throughout: in the event of the letters, this can be done only partially. As will be seen, the chronological distribution of the reports does not differ from that of the letters, a fact that adds to the general reliability of the emerging picture.

I begin with the chronological evidence that can be extracted from the letters and reports datable on astronomical grounds. Since a complete list of texts so dated is to be found in Appendix 2B, and the dating of individual letters is discussed fully in the commentary, I will not go into the method and problems involved but shall only present a survey on the results achieved. About one-third of the letters and reports containing astronomical information are datable with certainty (I have been able to date 84 texts, but in a more thorough analysis this figure would no doubt become higher); out of these, only 16 (= 19%) belong to Assurbanipal's reign, the rest (= 81%) being sent to Esarhaddon. Their distribution over different years of the two reigns can be visualized as follows:

FIGURE 1: Chronological distribution of astronomically datable letters and reports

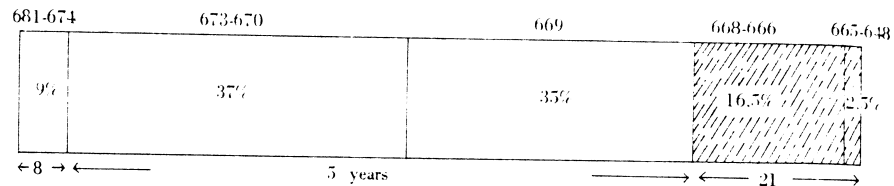


<sup>1</sup> Cf. below, p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> The grand total is about 4500 texts (= 3500 letters + 600 astrological reports + 400 reports on extispicies). As

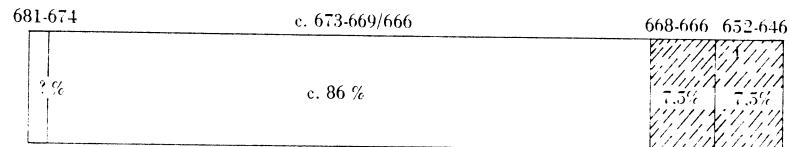
It appears that practically all texts come from the latter part of the reign of Esarhaddon (i.e., the years 675-669 B.C.) and the beginning of the reign of Assurbanipal (years 668-666). Sporadic texts are datable to the years 679, 677, 676, 657 and 650 B.C. A clear centre of gravity is in years 673-669, especially 669, thus:

FIGURE 2: Distribution of astronomically datable texts in percentages



The evidence gathered from Assyrian letters datable on historical grounds points to the same direction (the Babylonian letters of the archive, of which I have no exact statistics, have a divergent, though parallel distribution<sup>1</sup>). Out of the c. 700 letters (published and unpublished) which were certainly addressed to either Esarhaddon or Assurbanipal, only 70 (= 14%) can be definitely assigned to the reign of the latter: approximately 500 can be dated on historical and prosopographical grounds to Esarhaddon's reign (or perhaps to the beginning of the reign of Assurbanipal). Again it is evident that the bulk of the letters sent to Esarhaddon date from the latter part of his reign (only ABL 442 can, with a fair degree of certainty, be placed to his first regnal years), whereas about half of the letters sent to Assurbanipal belong to a few years after his accession (see the comments on LAS 60), and the other half to the years 652-646 (see the comments on LAS 109). In percentages, this distribution may be presented as follows:

FIGURE 3: Chronological distribution of historically datable letters

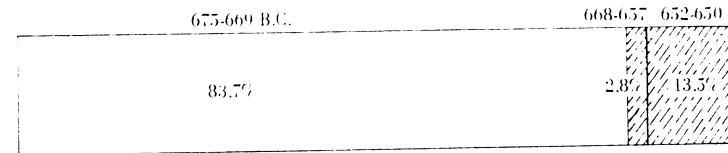


I now proceed to the oracle queries of the haruspices. In these texts the name of the king on whose behalf the queries were made is always mentioned, and it is therefore easy to assign the texts to definite reigns. Out of the 294 published texts, 246 (= 83.7%) were written in the reign of Esarhaddon, and only 48 (= 16.3%) in the reign of Assurbanipal. All queries made by order of Esarhaddon date from the time after 676 B.C., predominantly from the last years of this king (see J. Aro in *La divination en Mésopotamie ancienne*, p. 112 ff); whereas 8 queries date from the beginning of Assurbanipal's reign (up till 657 B.C.), and the rest from the years 652-650.

will be shown in detail in the commentaries on LAS 70 and 174, some scholars wrote as many as 6 letters to the king within half a month. This rate would make about 150 letters a year for each author. But even if one counts with only 10 letters per author in a year, the figure 3500 (letters) would have been reached by 350 correspondents. Taking into account the daily requests for an audience and the diplomatic, administrative and military correspondence (partly – but certainly not exclusively – written on perishable materials) steadily flowing into the palace, this figure may have been even higher.

It seems that the Neo-Babylonian letters addressed to Assurbanipal are more numerous than those addressed to Esarhaddon; this may well result from a desire to preserve documents relating to the civil war in 652-646 B.C.

FIGURE 4: Chronological distribution of the reports of haruspices



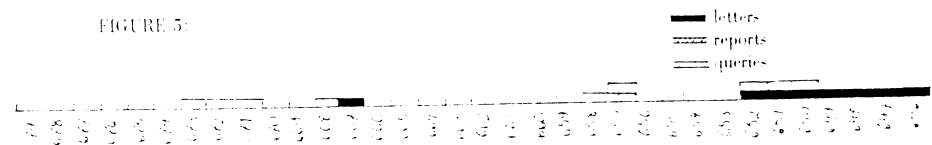
There remains the meagre evidence to be derived from the letters and reports dated already in the antiquity. Before evaluating this evidence, a prefatory remark must be made. Since only few of the numerous texts from Esarhaddon's time (cf. above) bear a date, and since this is relatively often found in texts connected with the civil war between Assurbanipal and Šamaš-šumu-ukin (which are relatively few in number), it is clear that the accumulation of dates around certain years cannot be in true proportion to the number of texts actually preserved from these years. It seems that the dates found on texts from the years 652-646 B.C. were added by a palace archivist for archival purposes (cf. p. 48, footnote 2).

The following dates are attested (the asterisk precedes texts written in Babylonian characters):

a) Letters:	B.C.
83-1-18.847	667
ABL *301, *944, 1210	652
LAS 96	651
LAS 97, ABL *289, *517	650
ABL *1151	649
LAS 98, ABL *1170	648
BM 132980	647
ABL *518, 879, 1222, 1262	646
b) Astrological reports:	
RMA 264	657
c) Oracle queries:	
AGS *51	673 or 671
AGS 99	672
AGS *149	668
AGS 153	658
Ki. 1904-10-9.10	657
PRT *102, * 103	652
PRT *105-*119	651
PRT *120-*124	650

Put on a chronological ordinate, the distribution of dates appears as follows:

FIGURE 5:



On the ground of the foregoing analysis, some general conclusions about the distribution of the whole body of the epistolary texts preserved from Esarhaddon's and Assurbanipal's time can be drawn, and these conclusions should be directly applicable to the dating of the present letters too:

1. *The material consists of three separate groups.*
  - a) from the years 675-666 B.C. (a lot of texts);
  - b) " " " 658-657 " (few texts);
  - c) " " " 652-646 " (several texts).

Sporadic texts may be found from the period 679-676, but the years 665-659 and 656-653 seem to be blank.

2. *Eight texts out of 10 belong to Esarhaddon's reign.*

3. *Texts from Esarhaddon's reign are focused on years 671 ff, especially 669; whereas those from Assurbanipal's time date either from the beginning of his reign or from years 652-650 B.C.*

These conclusions must be observed in the dating of letters when no absolute criteria (dates, sufficient astronomical or historical evidence) are available. Circumstantial criteria present in the letters may be used for the dating, on the premise that the restricted spans of time to which the letters might belong are taken into consideration. In several cases these criteria not only enable attributing a text to a definite reign or a definite group, but also, when connected with other indications, give an exact date.

*Circumstantial criteria pointing to the reign of Esarhaddon are:*

- 1) Reference to the treaty (*adē*) by which Esarhaddon regulated his succession in Ajaru 672 B.C. (see the comments on LAS 1).
- 2) Reference to the crown prince (*mār šarri*) = Assurbanipal. All letters mentioning him belong to 672-669 B.C., i.e., between the treaty just mentioned and the death of Esarhaddon (Araššamna, 669). Assurbanipal's reign does not come into consideration, since the crown prince does not occur in the letters certainly datable to the years 652-646.
- 3) Reference to the crown prince of Babylon (*mār šarri Bābili*) = Šamaš-šumu-ukīn.<sup>1</sup>
- 4) References to other children of Esarhaddon (see the note on LAS 129:25-26).
- 5) Reference to the queen mother (*ummi šarri*) = Naqia. All letters mentioning her are addressed to Esarhaddon, since in Assurbanipal's reign Naqia was entitled "the Lahirite queen" (MÉ.É.GAL URU *La-ḫi-ra-aḫa*, AR 101 r16).
- 6) Reference to Esarhaddon's Egyptian campaign (Nisannu-Du'ūzu, 671 B.C.).
- 7) Reference to the statue of Marduk (see B. Landsberger, BBEA p. 17 ff and 66 ff.).
- 8) Reference to the conspiracy or rebellion quelled in 670 B.C. (see notes on LAS 247 and 284).

*Criteria pointing to the reign of Assurbanipal are:*

- 1) Reference to the king of Babylon (*šar Bābili*) = Šamaš-šumu-ukīn.
- 2) Reference to extensive building operations in Babylon (cf. Streck, VAB 7, p. 252 ff).

Other, less obvious criteria are discussed in the commentary in appropriate connections.

As stated on p. 47, the scholars working for Esarhaddon remained in their offices also under Assurbanipal. Since the letter group 1 covers both the last years of Esarhaddon and the first years of Assurbanipal (see above), it is not always possible to decide to which reign a given letter belongs, if no decisive criteria are

found in the letter itself. In such cases I have always passed the dating in silence. External evidence (shape of the tablets, script, colour etc.) cannot be used as criteria within such a limited span of time. The registration numbers of the texts do not help either<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> One could a priori suppose that the letters addressed to Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal were filed in different places, say, in different rooms of a palace or even in different palaces, and that this difference might have been taken into consideration in registering the tablets. This however is not the case: not only were the archives mixed in the antiquity as a result of the building operations of Assurbanipal and the sack of Nineveh, but the excavators of the 19th century also did not record carefully where each tablet was found. Thus, even texts excavated in Calah were incorporated into the Kuyunjik-collection. Letters dating from the reign of Sargon, Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal are found in all subdivisions of the Kuyunjik-collection (though the collections Sm., Rm.2, 79-7-8 and 81-7-27 seem to contain mostly letters from Sargon's time, whereas the letters found in the collections 83-1-18, Bu. and Ki. belong nearly exclusively to Esarhaddon's and Assurbanipal's time).

## V. HISTORICAL PROBLEMS: THE SUBSTITUTE KING RITUAL

Ten per cent of the letters under study<sup>1</sup> in a way or another bear witness of a strange ritual of "the substitute king" (*šar pūhi*) practiced in the court of the Sargonic kings. A proper understanding of this ritual, with its important historical and religious implications, is hampered both by the difficult and fragmentary documentation offered by the letters and by the lack of sufficient external evidence<sup>2</sup>. Thanks to several studies devoted to the subject during the past decades<sup>3</sup>, significant progress in this respect has been made, and two fundamental things, the purpose and the idea of the ritual, are now well established. The performance of the ritual was considered necessary to save the king from death portended by evil ominous signs: the personality of the king being transferred to a substitute, it was believed that the senders of the signs, i.e., the gods, would be content with the death of the substitute and leave the true king in peace. Though also the understanding of the details has been advanced on a large scale, there are still so many uncertainties and riddles left that one feels at a loss to combine the unconnected pieces of evidence into a sensible whole<sup>4</sup>. The present chapter, based on a detailed analysis of the old and new material, hopes to contribute to the clarification of certain central points. At the same time, without striving for exhaustiveness, I try to provide the reader with all the facts essential to understanding the ritual as a whole<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. below, lb. where 33 pertinent letters are listed; these include letters a) mentioning the substitute king and b) addressed to the "farmer", as well as c) those dealing with the ritual in general terms.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. W. von Soden, *Beiträge zum Verständnis der neuassyrischen Briefe über die Ersatzkönigsriten*, Fs Christian (1956), p. 100 ff. Note that many of the sources listed below have become available only after 1956.

<sup>3</sup> The most important contributions are W. von Soden, *Texte zum assyrischen Begräbnisritual*, ZA 43 (1936) 254 ff, esp. p. 255 f. and the article mentioned in the preceding note; R. Labat, *Le sort des substituts royaux en Assyrie au temps des Sargonicides*, RA 40 (1946) 123-142; A. Schott, *Vier Briefe Mār-Ištar an Asarhaddon über Himmelserscheinungen der Jahre -670/668*, ZA 47 (1941-2) 89 ff, esp. p. 112 f; F.M.Th. de Liagre Böhl, *Opera Minora* (1953), p. 384 ff; B. Landsberger, *Brief des Bischofs von Esangila an König Asarhaddon* (1965), p. 38 ff; and H. Kummel, *Ersatzrituale für den hethitischen König* (1967), esp. p. 169 ff. Cf. also W. von Soden, ZA 45 (1939) 42-61 and E. Dhorme, RA 38 (1944) 57-66. A survey on the work done so far has recently been given by H. Kummel, *loc. cit.*, and can be omitted here.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. von Soden, Fs Christian, p. 106: "Hoffentlich helfen einmal neue Quellen zur Aufhellung der vielen Unklarheiten, die wegen der Ersatzkönigskulte unter Asarhaddon heute noch bestehen"; B. Landsberger, BBBA (1965), note 64: "Wir können nur unterschreiben, was von Soden 192 über diesen Brief sagt: 'Leider bleibt in diesem sehr wichtigen Brief mancherlei unklar'; the many remaining unclarities are especially evident in the recent (1967) contribution of Kummel.

<sup>5</sup> In doing this I will not present systematically the suggestions put forth by other scholars, but will rather cite primary texts; nor will I, in general, repeat observations to which I have nothing to add.

## 1. Sources

## a) Ritual tablets

- 1) Akkadian: W.G. Lambert, A Part of the Ritual for the Substitute King, AfO 18 (1957-58) 109-112; additions 19 (1959-60) 119;
- 2) Hittite: H.M. Kummel, Ersatzrituale für den hethitischen König (StBoT 3, Wiesbaden 1967).

## b) Texts attesting the performance of the ritual

- 1) Chronicles: L.W. King, *Chronicles Concerning Early Babylonian Kings*, II (London 1907), p. 12;
- 2) Letters: LAS 4, 25-28, 30-31, 77, 134-140, 166-167, 171, 179, 185, 205, 235-236, 249, 257, 278-280, 292, 298-299, 317, 334; ABL 735, 1006;
- 3) Administrative texts: ND 3483 = D.J. Wiseman, Iraq 15 (1953) 148, pl. XV (cf ND 3414, *ibid.* p. 139);
- 4) Classical authors:  
Berossus, *Babyloniaca* I 15 (see P. Schnabel, *Berossos*, p. 256; the passage is here cited according to the synthesis of R. Labat, RA 40 [1946] 125);  
Plutarch, *Vitae*, Alexander LXXIII-IV (cf Th. Jacobsen, ZA 52 [1957] 139, note 115);  
Arrianus, *Anabasis* VII 24;  
Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliothèque* XVII 116 (cf H. Kummel, *op.cit.*, p. 184 ff);  
Herodotus, *Historiae* VII 15;  
Suetonius, *Vitae*, Claudius XXIX.

## 2. On the popularity of the ritual

The simple question as to how wide use of the ritual was made, has long, so to say, hung in the air, owing to the lack of clear-cut positive evidence. In addition to the Sargonic letters, which seemed to bear witness of three performances of the ritual in the reign of Esarhaddon<sup>1</sup>, only a single performance in the early Old Babylonian time was known. This meagre evidence led to the – still widely spread – assumption that the ritual was a kind of relic temporarily revived in Esarhaddon's time, and otherwise rarely practiced<sup>2</sup>, though the possibility of a continuous tradition was also taken into consideration<sup>3</sup>. Meanwhile, the relevant material has considerably increased<sup>4</sup>, making it possible to reconsider the matter on a broader basis. On the other hand, detailed analysis of the Sargonic letters necessitates a partial revision of the earlier conceptions about that period (for details see the commentary). The list of actually attested performances of the ritual would now appear as follows:

PERIOD	DATE	RULING KING	SOURCE
1. OB	1860 B.C.	Erra-imitti	King, <i>Chronicles</i> II
2. MB	c. 1300 B.C.		Hittite ritual tablets
3. NA	783 B.C. <sup>5</sup>	Adad-nērārī III	ND 3483
4. "	672 B.C.	Esarhaddon	LAS 334 (cf LAS 300)
5. "	671 B.C.	"	LAS 249
6. "	671 B.C.	Kamūna 15-	LAS 185, 278-280
7. "	669 B.C.	Simānu 14-	LAS 25, 136; ABL 100
8. "	666 B.C.	Nisannu 15-	LAS 298-299
9. Macedonian	323 B.C.	Alexander	Plutarch, <i>Lives</i> ; etc.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. W. von Soden, Fs Christian, p. 106: "Damit wären also für die Zeit Asarhaddons nicht mehr als drei Fälle bezeugt, in denen man bei einer Mondfinsternis einen Ersatzkönig eingesetzt hat." The later studies of

→ Assur  
Börger  
6 + 1

To this list might be added (30th) Arahšamna, 670 B.C., at which date a substitute should have occupied the throne according to LAS 136; since, however, the solar eclipse which could have motivated the ritual actually did not occur, no obvious reason for its performance can be found, and this case has therefore to be regarded uncertain.

It is plain that the list contains only a fraction of actually performed rituals: the large gaps in documentation make only few cases apparent. LAS 166 tells explicitly that the ritual had been performed repeatedly in Assyria before the time of Esarhaddon ("as our fathers had done to their lords, and as the farmer has done once and twice", obv. 13-16); also LAS 280 makes an allusion to earlier performances. The evidence strongly suggests that the ritual had an *institutional* character. This conclusion is supported by the account of Berossus implying that the royal substitution was a yearly recurrent event, and above all by the factors causing the ritual (see next paragraph). A reflection of this "substitute-institution" may be seen in the epistolary formula *ana dinān bēlīja lullik* "I would gladly die as a substitute for my lord"; attested from the Old Babylonian period onwards, though this polite phrase certainly no more retained its original meaning.

The idea of the royal substitution (and its popularity) is vividly illustrated by Herodotus, *Historiae* VII 15. There, in fact, is an account of a substitute king ritual performed in the court of the Persian king, however with an unusual purpose, namely to give the king's counselor Mardonios a chance to see a dream that the gods had repeatedly sent to the king. The passage reads: "Hence, if its sender is a god and his will is that the campaign against Greece takes place, this very dream will appear to you too, giving you the same order as to me. And I think *this would happen, if you took all my clothes, put them on, sat upon my throne and thereupon went to sleep in my bed.*"

There is even a possibility that a performance of the substitute king ritual can be traced in the Roman court which, as is well known, housed Chaldean astrologers and exorcists. In the biography of Claudius, Suetonius in three different contexts describes the way in which the emperor got rid of his perfidious wife Messalina: after letting her marry her lover Gaius Silius, he put both to death. Suetonius' description of the incident is inconsistent, for her apparently did not understand the underlying idea, but he makes a revealing remark (Chapter XXIX): "The marriage was only seeming, its sole purpose being to *ward off and turn aside the danger which, on the ground of certain portents, was thought to threaten the emperor.*"

### 3. Factors necessitating the enthronement of a substitute

Since the letters dealing with the substitute king ritual regularly are linked with eclipses, it has long been suspected that these were the primary cause of the ritual. This hypothesis was fully confirmed by the discovery of the ritual tablet which defines the matter as follows: "[In the evil of evil and untoward forces and signs [of heaven and earth that occurred before me, in the eclipse of the Moon, in the eclipse of the Sun, in the eclipse of Jupiter, in the eclipse of Venus, in the eclipse of planets [which] took place [in the month so-and-so, on

Landsberger and Kümmel conform to this conclusion.

<sup>2</sup> Cf., e.g., W. von Soden, *Herrscher im alten Orient* (1954), p. 124f; and recently R. Labat, *Fischer Weltgeschichte 4* (1967), p. 81: "Um das Schicksal nicht herauszufordern, hatte er sogar die alte Sitte des 'Ersatzkönigtums' wiederbelegt."

<sup>3</sup> See R. Labat, RA 40 (1946) 139; H. Kümmel, *op.cit.*, p. 180.

<sup>4</sup> The most important discoveries are the Akkadian and Hittite ritual tablets and the Greek accounts of the ritual performed for Alexander the Great.

<sup>5</sup> The tablet ND 3483 is dated after an otherwise unknown eponym Nabū-nāser; taking into consideration the archaeological context in which the tablet was found, the emendation Ninurta(-nāser, suggested by M. Falkner, AfO 17 (1954-56) 190 ff. seems inevitable.

the day so-and-so" (col. A, 9-13). So far only rituals performed on account of a lunar eclipse have been identified<sup>1</sup>. However, it seems possible that we now have an example of a "planetary eclipse" too. This term probably refers not only to occultations of planets behind the moon, but behind the sun as well (that is, also to cases when a planet remains *abnormally long* invisible behind the sun). The latter incident is namely attested in LAS 334, addressed to the farmer and referring to a late rise of Mars<sup>2</sup>. If the restorations of the broken letter LAS 28 are correct, we have now evidence of a solar eclipse, too, starting the ritual.

Not every eclipse, however, raised the need of a substitute: certain eclipses were interpreted as harmless, and it would have been both cumbersome and senseless to perform the complicated ritual if the king was not in danger.<sup>3</sup> However, it has hitherto not been clarified which cases precisely were considered dangerous and which not. No clear-cut answer can be sought for in the omen literature, for the performance of the ritual is not prescribed in any apodoses. Notwithstanding, a particular omen is frequently cited in letters dealing with the ritual<sup>4</sup>: "If the Moon is eclipsed and the planet Jupiter is present in the eclipse, the king will be well (and) a famous noble will die in his stead" (ACh 2 Spl 29:14). Similar omens derived from eclipses of the sun are also known, e.g., "If the Sun is eclipsed in the month Tebētu, and Venus and Jupiter are visible, the king of the world will lengthen his reign; during that year somebody will die in his stead: a distinguished person will die" (ACh Šamaš IX 39: Spl XXXI 50)<sup>5</sup>. Instead of directly suggesting the performance of the ritual, these omens portend the *natural death of a dignitary in lieu of the king*<sup>6</sup>, though they at times quite obviously, were used as "evidence" to convince the ruler of the necessity of the ritual<sup>7</sup>, to "help" the providence. In any case, the possibility that the planet Jupiter's presence in the eclipse might have been relevant to the performance of the ritual must be excluded, since this condition was fulfilled in practically every lunar eclipse<sup>8</sup>. One is consequently left with the conclusion that the decision about the ritual was in every case made solely on the ground of the analysis of the eclipses themselves.

To find out how this was done, it is necessary to have detailed information of three kinds. Firstly, the Mesopotamian system of interpreting lunar eclipses must be known; secondly, the eclipses which occurred during the given period must be reconstructed; and thirdly, a sufficient amount of chronologically fixed performances of the ritual must be available for study. Fortunately all these requirements can be met with the necessary

<sup>1</sup> Cf. above, p. 55, note 1, and H. Kümmel, *op.cit.*, p. 171 f.

<sup>2</sup> See the pertinent comments: since no lunar eclipses were connected with this late rise of Mars, it seems to have been the cause of the ritual (taking into account especially the omen cited in LAS 300, referring to the same incident, and predicting the death of the king). For evil omens derived from occultations of planets see, e.g., RMA 192:1-3 (likewise predicting death of the king).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. Schott, ZA 47 (1941-42) 112: "Aus diesem Tatbestand kann man doch wohl nur schließen, daß je d e s m a l wenn eine Sonnen- oder Mondfinsternis bevorstand, *šar pūhi* . . . eingesetzt wurde." The opinion of Schott has justly been criticized by others.

<sup>4</sup> See LAS 298 r10-11; ABL 1006 r3-4; RMA 272 r11.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. also RMA 277R:10-11, "If on the 28th of Nisannu [a solar eclipse takes place, the king will be well], the king's daughter [will die] in his stead".

<sup>6</sup> See R. Labat, RA 40 (1946) 134 ff; W. von Soden, Fs. Christian, p. 106; H. Kümmel, *op.cit.*, p. 178 f; and above all LAS 298 r13' ff which explicitly states that the performance of the ritual was unnecessary after the natural death of a high official.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. ABL 1006 r1 ff, "the king should change and dismiss from his office one of the magnates of Chaldea, Aram, (or) [ . . . ]; this man will take the omen on himself, (and) the king will be happy"; the writer then cites the omen mentioned above, and goes on: "The king should rely much upon this prediction, until somebody tells the king that he is well . . . may the gods Bēl and Nabû give the whole world as substitute for the king, my lord" (r5-11). Cf. also RMA 272-6, "'a famous noble' (in this context) means [that . . . ] upon somebody else", explaining the aforementioned omen (quoted on r11).

<sup>8</sup> On the meaning of the astronomical technical term "to be present" see the note on LAS 61:8 ff.

precision. The Neo-Assyrian praxis of interpreting eclipses can be worked out on the ground of the contemporary astrological literature and reports<sup>1</sup>; for a synthesis of the system see Appendix 3C. The eclipses can be reconstructed by astronomical calculations; see Appendix 3B for a graphic presentation. Referring to the list of the rituals given above, I proceed to the analysis of 8 subsequent lunar eclipses between 673 and 666 B.C.

TABLE 1: Eclipses necessitating the ritual

YEAR B.C.	MONTH AND DAY	ECLIPSED QUADRANT	"CLEARING" QUADRANT	WATCH	PLANETS PRESENT
671	Du'ūzu = Subartu 14th = Elam	total	West = Amurru	I = Akkad	Jupiter Saturn
671	Kanūnu = Elam 15th = Amurru	total	West = Amurru	II = Subartu	Jupiter Venus Saturn
669	Šimānu = Amurru 14th = Elam	South = Subartu	South = Elam	III = Elam	Jupiter Venus Saturn
666	Nisannu = Akkad 15th(?) = Amurru	South = Subartu and West = Akkad	West = Amurru	I = Akkad	Jupiter Saturn

TABLE 2: Eclipses which apparently did not necessitate the ritual

YEAR B.C.	MONTH AND DAY	ECLIPSED QUADRANT	"CLEARING" QUADRANT	WATCH	PLANETS PRESENT
673	Addaru = Subartu	North = Amurru and East = Elam	North = Akkad	I = Akkad I	Jupiter Venus Saturn
670	Kislimu = Akkad	North = Amurru	North = Akkad	III = Elam	Jupiter Venus Saturn
667	Ajaru = Elam	total <sup>2</sup>	West = Amurru	I = Akkad	Jupiter Venus
667	Tašritu = Subartu	total <sup>3</sup>	West = Amurru	III = Elam	Jupiter Venus Saturn

This analysis leaves no doubt as to what was considered decisive for the performance of the ritual. Obviously all other factors (month, day, watch, planets) except the eclipsed quadrant of the moon were irrelevant in this respect. In other words, *the king was*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. ABL 1006:3 ff. "The evil of an eclipse pertains to the lord of the (relevant) month, the lord of the day, the lord of the watch, (and) the lord of the (beginning); (the quadrants) where the eclipse begins and where it shifts and is 'cast' to these take the evil upon themselves."

<sup>2</sup> The beginning of this eclipse was not visible in Mesopotamia.

<sup>3</sup> The end of this eclipse was not visible in Mesopotamia.

"afflicted" only when the respective quadrant – in the case of king of Assyria, that of Subartu<sup>1</sup> – was darkened. Hence we can count with a substitute king ritual in Assyria every time the southern part of the moon's disc was eclipsed, and conversely in Babylonia every time the western part was dark<sup>2</sup>. In case of total eclipses the ritual was obviously always performed.

The classical accounts of the substitute ritual performed for Alexander the Great mention all kinds of bad omens preceding the ritual, but no eclipse; we must nevertheless assume that a lunar eclipse had taken place, and that the other omens only reinforced the conviction of the exorcists that the ritual was necessary. It belonged to the normal practice that the substitute king took upon himself all pernicious omens threatening the king, not only that of the eclipses<sup>3</sup>.

#### 4. The length of the ritual

Occasional remarks in the letters make it clear that the reign of the substitute king was, at least in some cases, due to last a 100 days: cf. "if it suits the king, my lord, he may complete the 100 days" (LAS 135), "as [regards] the substitute king about whom [the king, my lord, wrote to me]: 'Let him sit (on the throne) a 100 days'" (LAS 292, and "until he has completed the 100 days . . ." (LAS 249). This span of time has generally been accepted as the normal length of the ritual<sup>4</sup> but, as far as I know, *nobody has ever tried to explain why precisely this period was adopted*. The explanation is, in fact, quite simple: a hundred days was the "term" (*adan=nu*) of the lunar eclipses, i.e., the period of time during which the evil portended by an eclipse of the moon was thought to be valid. Cf. (RMA 270 r10), "the term of an eclipse occurring at evening is 3 months 10 days", and see the comments on LAS 135. It is perfectly conceivable that a substitute had to spend the full 100 days on the throne, if the omen predictions were expected to come true (e.g. if one hoped for a natural realization of the prediction "a noble will die instead of the king").

Whether or not the term of a 100 days represented the *normal duration* of the ritual is another matter. It would certainly have been rather inconvenient for the true king to have a substitute repeatedly occupying his throne for such a long period, even if the existence of the "coregent" was made as unnoticeable as possible<sup>5</sup>. The ritual tablet, which prescribes the death of the substitute king at the end of the ritual ("the person who was given as a substitute for the king, will die, (and) the bad forces will not approach the king", col. A 6-7), actually gave free hands to terminate the ritual already earlier, since with the death of the substitute king the prediction was realized, and the substitute took the evil omens with him to the netherworld (cf. ritual tablet, col. B 4). There is ample evidence that extensive use was made of this license. In the ritual performed after the 'Nisannu-eclipse' of 666 B.C., the reign of the substitute lasted only 20 days (cf. "as regards the substitute statue about which the king, [my lord], wrote to his servant: 'It sat (on the throne) from 14th Du'ūzu to 5th Abu in the city of Akkad'" LAS 298, and see the notes on this letter); the reign of the substitute king enthroned on account of the 'Kanūnu-Eclipse' of 671 B.C. lasted also less than 100 days (see the notes on LAS 280). Cf., furthermore, LAS 135: "As regards the substitute king about whom the king, my lord, wrote to me: 'How many days should he sit?' We waited for a solar eclipse, but the Sun did not make an eclipse. Now, if the gods are seen in opposition on the 15th

<sup>1</sup> Cf. RMA 62:4 *a-ni-nu* SU.BIR<sub>4</sub> KI "we are Subartu" (a report from Nabû-ahhê-erība). Unlike Assurbanipal, Esarhaddon was at the same time also king of Akkad (= Babylonia), and in his case the darkening of the quadrant of Akkad too had apparently to be taken into account.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. LAS 298:20-21 "when an omen concerning [Assyria appears, the ritual should be performed here], (and) when an omen concerning [Babylonia appears, it should be performed there]"; for the restorations cf. the pertinent notes.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. LAS 30:6 ff. "I wrote down the signs of heaven and earth and of malformed births, as many as there were, . . . the substitute king of Akkad took the omens on himself"; similarly LAS 26 r1 ff and 279:11 f.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. R. Labat, RA 40 (1946) 130; W. von Soden, Fs. Christian, p. 100 and 106; H. Kimmelf, *op.cit.*, p. 176.

<sup>5</sup> In Esarhaddon's reign the ritual was repeatedly performed not in the capital Nineveh, but in the city of Akkad in Babylonia; see below, paragraph 7.

day, he may go to his fate on the 16th. Or, if it is acceptable the king, my lord, he may complete the 100 days.<sup>1</sup> In this case the performance of the ritual would have lasted about a month. Apparently it was, in any case, considered necessary to wait for at least till the beginning of the next month before the substitute was done away with. The reason for this is quite obvious: A solar eclipse which, according to the knowledge of that time, could theoretically occur half a month after any lunar eclipse and whose non-occurrence was not predictable with certainty, would have necessitated the enthroning of another substitute. But it was more convenient to push both eclipses upon the same substitute. Furthermore, if it was reckoned that the moon and the sun would be in opposition on the next 15th day, the reign could be prolonged even over that date, for the said event was also a bad omen, though not directly relating to the king<sup>2</sup>. But there was no real need to continue the ritual longer, for the next eclipse was to be expected only after 5 months at the earliest, that is to say long after the term of the eclipse had been over<sup>3</sup>.

It seems that, at least in Sargonid times, the substitute was usually enthroned already before the eclipse took place; see LAS 25, 28 and 77, addressed to the 'farmer' before the eclipse, and see also LAS 185. As appears from the latter text, this measure was taken to make sure that the substitute was "afflicted" by the eclipse. Nevertheless all omens were recited over the substitute once more on a later occasion (see below, p. 63).

### 5. On the initiators of the ritual

The preponderance of the attested performances of the ritual in Esarhaddon's reign might, despite the uneven distribution of the sources<sup>4</sup>, be interpreted to give a reflection of the character of this ruler<sup>5</sup>. Such a generalization, however, cannot be made. In all cases of which we have information, the initiative came from the counselors of the king: all that the king had to do was to give his consent. See ABL 1006 obv. 18 ff: "[Let] the chief exorcist [act] as he con[siders the best]; and let the king change and dismiss one noble among the magnates of Chaldea, Aram and [ . . . ] from his office: this one will take the omen upon himself, and the king can be at ease. If Jupiter is present in the eclipse, the king is well, in his stead a prominent noble will die." The king should have much confidence in this prediction!" (the letter deals with the 'Simanu-eclipse' of 669 B.C.<sup>6</sup>). Cf. LAS 185, a letter from the chief exorcist Marduk-šakin-šumi (dealing with the 'Kanūnu-eclipse' of 671 B.C.). Note also the following passages in the letters: 'An order should be given concerning the enthronement of the substitute king of Akkad' (LAS 134, from the king's personal exorcist Adad-šumu-ušur): "[as regards the substitute [king] about whom the king, [my lord, wr]ote to me: 'I am told that [he should sit until the 2]6th of Ulūlu'" (LAS 136, from Adad-šumu-ušur). The decisive role the counselors appears in true light especially in the Greek accounts of the ritual performed for the benefit of Alexander the Great: it was initiated even without the king's knowing of it. Plutarch describes the course of events as follows: "As he was on his way to enter Babylon, Nearchus told the king that certain Chaldeans had met him and advised that Alexander should keep away from" Babylon. Alexander paid no heed to this — —. And one day after he had undressed himself to be anointed, and was playing at ball, just as they were going to bring his clothes again, the young men who played with him perceived a man clad in the king's robes with a diadem upon his head, sitting silently upon his throne. They asked him who he was, to which he gave no answer a good while; at last coming to himself, he told them his name was Dionysios, that he was of Messenia, that for some crime of which he was accused he was brought thither from

the seaside, and had been kept long in prison, that Serapis appeared to him, had freed him from his chains, conducted him to that place, and commanded him to put on the king's robe and diadem, and to sit where they found him, and to say nothing. Alexander, when he heard this, by the direction of his soothsayers, put the fellow to death" (Alexander LXXIII). This account reveals with all desirable clarity the real concern the king's counselors felt over the life of their lord. The predicted danger was obviously taken to be very concrete, and the performance of the relevant apotropaic ritual was therefore nothing extraordinary — as would seem from the modern point of view — but quite in conformance with the commonly accepted practice.

### 6. The substitute king

#### a) The fate of the substitute king

The crucial question as to what happened to the substitute king after his reign had come to an end, is still without a definite answer. The extant evidence suggests that he was always killed. Most important is the testimony of the ritual tablet, col. A 6': "The person given as substitute for the king will die." Cf. also the Alexander-biography of Plutarch, cited above ("Alexander, by the direction of his soothsayers, put the fellow to death"), and the Šakaia-account of Berossus: "But, after the five days were over, he was deprived of his royal garments, whipped, and hanged or flayed." The letters avoid speaking directly of death, and use the euphemism "to go to one's fate". It is, however, certain that this fate was nothing but death, for the letter LAS 280 explicitly equates these two expressions: "[Damqî] and his queen [d]ied on the night of the . . . th day" as substitutes for the king, my lord: — he went to his fate in order to ransom them" (obv. 5 ff). This gloomy fate is prescribed in three other letters too: LAS 135 ("he may go to his fate on the 16th day"), 166 ("let the substitute king go to his fate on the 15th") and 249 ("as regards the substitute king, he said: [he should go] to his fate [ . . . ]"). According to LAS 166, the execution of the substitute king had been a custom "before". LAS 179, dealing with burial rites, attests the death of the substitute king indirectly.

However, it has to be pointed out that we have direct evidence only of cases when the ritual was terminated before the period of a 100 days was over. The statement of the ritual tablet is in fragmentary context, and we do not know for certain whether the death of the substitute king was prescribed in all instances. It seems a priori possible that his life could have been saved if, e.g., the natural death of an official took place during the term of the eclipse, in accordance with the Jupiter-omen cited above, (p. 57). But, on the other hand, the fact that the substitutes were mostly selected from among criminals sentenced to death (see below) suggests that no mercy was known.

#### b) The background of the substitutes

The little that is known about the persons used as substitutes, is in accordance with their gloomy end and the institutional character of the ritual: they seem to have been mostly criminals or 'simple' persons. Cf. the testimonies of the Alexander-biographers: "He told them that his name was Dionysios, that he was of Messenia, that for some crime of which he was accused he was brought thither, and had been kept in prison" (Plutarch: the substitute king speaking); "Then one of the ordinary people — according to others, a prisoner, but without chains — had ascended the throne and sat upon it" (Arrianus): "A native prisoner freed himself from his chains, . . . went to the throne, dressed in royal robes, put on the diadem, sat upon the throne and remained quiet" (Diodorus). The account of Berossus runs quite parallelly: "A person condemned to death was dressed in royal garments . . .". It is true that these examples are from late, partly non-Mesopotamian sources, but I think the internal evidence justifies regarding this practice the normal one. Note that LAS 280 speaks of taking the substitute king from among ordinary men as an established custom (see rev. 13 ff).

<sup>1</sup> The omen runs: "If on the 15th day the Moon and the Sun are seen in opposition, a powerful enemy will raise his weapons against the country, (and) the enemy will tear down the gates (var. the sanctuaries)" (see, e.g., RMA 157D:1-5). This very omen was interpreted to the king's advantage in K.1353:5 ff (M. Dietrich, WO 1 (1968) 234 f).

<sup>2</sup> The interpretation of the meaning of the opposition following an eclipse, offered by H. Kummel, *op.cit.*, p. 175f, is based on misunderstandings and cannot be accepted.

<sup>3</sup> See above, paragraph 2.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. p. 56, note 2.

<sup>5</sup> Or 673 B.C.? Cf. Appendix 3B.



But sometimes the ritual seems to have been used as a means to get rid of political adversaries too: after all, the executors had free hands to choose their candidates. Thus we know from LAS 280 that the substitute king, put to death because of the 'Kanánu-eclipse' of 671 B.C., was the son of a Babylonian bishop; from LAS 185 we know that the purpose of this action was to give a shock to the conspiring Babylonians. According to LAS 280 r7-9, the shock was indeed so effective that the writer suggested returning the next time to the normal practice again. This reaction seems to prove that the use of well-known, influential persons in the role of the substitute was extremely seldom.

All classical sources agree in that the substitute king did not know the purpose of the ritual: it was apparently kept secret from the people outside the palace and the learned circles. However, not all substitutes were unaware of their fate. Cf. LAS 30 where the substitute king, having taken the omens on himself, cries: "On account of what unlucky omen have you enthroned a substitute king?" It is strange that he, probably well knowing the fate which was threatening him, nevertheless goes on informing the king about rebellious actions in Babylonia. Did this happen in order to gain mercy in the eyes of the king, or was it a sign of resignation before the fate?

### 7. On the course of the ritual

Owing to the fragmentary state of preservation of the ritual tablet<sup>1</sup>, one cannot follow in detail the way in which the ritual was usually performed: a reconstruction of the events is rendered difficult also by the general nature of most of the relevant sources. However, it is definitely possible to do more in this respect than has been done so far<sup>2</sup>. Since a systematic reconstruction of the course of the ritual has not been attempted at before, it seems desirable to summarize the evidence here.

#### a) The role of the substitute king

The principal phases of the part played by the substitute king may be distinguished as follows:

1. Coronation.
2. Affliction.
3. Reign.
4. Burial.

These points will now be discussed briefly in the above order.

1. The "coronation" was necessary in order to make sure that the person of the true king was transferred to the substitute<sup>3</sup>. There is ample evidence showing how this was achieved<sup>4</sup>: the substitute was clad in the royal clothes, equipped with the royal diadem and other insignia<sup>5</sup>, and eventually seated upon the throne. This procedure reflects the well-attested dogma according to which the king's person was present in his clothes even if he himself was absent<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Parts of four columns are left, two of which contain less than 9 lines: "the complete tablet was certainly of not less than six columns, and may even have embraced eight." (W.G. Lambert, AIO 18, p. 109).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. H. Kümmel, *op.cit.*, p. 174.

<sup>3</sup> The idea was to "change the roles" of the king and the substitute; this becomes especially evident from the account of Herodotus quoted above, at the end of paragraph 2.

<sup>4</sup> See LAS 134 and 317, but especially the classical accounts listed above, paragraph 1 b 4; cf. also ritual tablet, col. A 14 ff.

<sup>5</sup> LAS 134 mentions the golden necklace and the sceptre of the king; cf. also the ritual tablet, col. B 6', where a royal "weapon" is mentioned.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. e.g. LAS 271 12 ff. and 272 13 ff.

At least two kinds of preparations were carried out before the coronation. A figurine of the substitute king, given to the Netherworld, was made and likewise clad in the royal garments<sup>1</sup>, and a virgin was given to the substitute king as his queen<sup>2</sup>. The ritual tablet, column A, lines 14 ff. deals with these preparatory ceremonies. Unfortunately the text breaks off after a couple of lines and one is left in uncertainty whether or not other preparations followed<sup>3</sup>.

2. The coronation was accompanied — immediately or several days afterwards<sup>4</sup> — by a ceremony bringing about the "affliction" of the substitute king. All evil omens threatening the king were written down and recited to (or by) the substitute king (and his queen) "before" the Sun<sup>5</sup>. In the presence of this divine judge, the substitute king was thought to "take the omens upon himself". LAS 30 adds to these ceremonies also a banquet resembling the ones taking place on other important occasions such as treaties and negotiations<sup>6</sup>.

3. Excepting the unreliable account of Berossos<sup>7</sup>, nothing is known about the "reign" of the substitute king, but taking into account the length of the ritual (see above, p. 59f.) one may assume that he had a small-scale court which, naturally, was under a strict control<sup>8</sup>. There is no reason to believe that he had any real power during his reign; on the contrary.<sup>9</sup>

According to LAS 299 the substitute king had theoretically to be enthroned in the residence of the ruling king, in that case Nineveh<sup>10</sup>; if another city was chosen, the ritual was — at least according to the doctrine represented by the author of LAS 299 — considered to be not valid.<sup>11</sup> Actually the ritual was in Esarhaddon's reign repeatedly performed not in the king's residence Nineveh, but in the Babylonian city of Akkad<sup>12</sup>. The case of Esarhaddon was, as stated also in LAS 299, something exceptional: he was, at the same time, king of both Assyria and Babylonia, and it was necessary to perform the ritual also in his Babylonian residence if the

<sup>1</sup> See LAS 134:10 ff. and ritual tablet, col. A 18f. Cf. also LAS 299 r5 ff. "(the ritual) 'to give a man's substitute (figurine) to the Queen of the Netherworld' should be performed: (as for) you, you stay in your palace, let them perform (the ritual) in another region". On the distinction between the terms *šar pūhi* and *šalam pūhi* see Kümmel, *op.cit.*, p. 172 ff. One should, however, point out that the gardener Enlil-bāni, the substitute of the king Erra-imitti of Isin, was called "the substitute statue" (NU NIG.SAG.GIL-e) in King, *Chronicles*, II 12; the "substitute statue" (*ša-lam pu-u-ū*) mentioned in LAS 298 may therefore likewise have been a living person, as suggested by W. von Soden, Fs Christian, p. 101 (against Kümmel, *loc.cit.*).

<sup>2</sup> See ritual tablet, col. A 20. The queen of the substitute king is also mentioned in LAS 280 and, indirectly, in LAS 30.

<sup>3</sup> The oracle delivered by a prophetess before the performance of the ritual described in LAS 280 was probably no integral element of the ritual, but specifically designed *ad hoc* to "motivate" the choice of the substitute.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. LAS 26, 30 and 279.

<sup>5</sup> On the meaning of this expression see the note on LAS 187:11'.

<sup>6</sup> "They (= the substitute king and his queen) had wine to drink, were washed with water, (and) anointed with oil: I cooked those birds (and) made them eat." LAS 30:10-12. Cf. *ina* KEŠDA (var. *ri-k[is]*) GĪŠBANŠUR Ša-te-e GU.ZI (var. *ka-si*) *ni-pi-iš* dGĪŠ.BAR AMEŠ 1MEŠ *ši-bit tu-le-e* VTE 154-155. Note that anointment with oil was also an integral part of the Hittite substitute king ritual (see Kümmel, *op.cit.*, p. 28 f.).

<sup>7</sup> "He could issue any orders he liked, eat, drink, amuse himself and sleep with the concubines of the king."

<sup>8</sup> Cf. LAS 249 which proves that the agents of the king were the whole time present when the substitute king was reigning in Akkad.

<sup>9</sup> An argument *e silentio* is that the true king (frequently entitled "the king, my lord" even during the ritual) kept taking care of the administrative affairs of Babylonia regardless of the substitute king residing in Akkad (cf. LAS 292). This leaves the substitute king the role of a puppet king at the most.

<sup>10</sup> The question mark put after Nineveh by Kümmel, *op.cit.*, p. 172, is quite unnecessary.

<sup>11</sup> "Had they performed it in your father's home town where you yourself reside, it would have removed the evil from you." LAS 298:11-12.

<sup>12</sup> See LAS 134, 249, 279, 280 and 292; cf. also LAS 30 and 317. For the possible identity of Akkad and Babylon see the comments on LAS 275:4B.

relevant quadrant of the Moon was darkened<sup>1</sup>. Out of purely practical reasons it was certainly more convenient for the ruler to have the substitute king "rule" somewhere else but not in his own palace: as a matter of fact, after the total eclipse in 671 B.C. the substitute king, enthroned in Nineveh, was soon sent on a journey and enthroned, for a second time, in Akkad only 5 days after the eclipse had occurred<sup>2</sup>.

4. LAS 280 gives a detailed account of the burial ceremonies which took place after the execution of the above-mentioned substitute king of 671 B.C. The building of a mausoleum and the decoration and public display of the corpses make the impression of a veritable royal burial<sup>3</sup>; one may, of course, ask whether such a publicity was normal or restricted to this case only<sup>4</sup>.

The royal insignia used by the substitute king were burnt and the ashes buried besides the substitute and his wife (see the ritual tablet, col. B 1' ff). For other magical rituals following the burial see below, under C.

#### b) The role of the king

During the reign of the substitute king the true king was, in conformity with the theory of the "Rollentausch", often entitled "the farmer"<sup>5</sup>. As a measure of safety it was recommended that he should stay in his palace and avoid leaving for open country before the term of the eclipse was over<sup>6</sup>. Otherwise, however, there seem to have been no special rules to be observed by the king during the substitute's reign. The nail-cutting ceremony referred to in LAS 137-138 has probably nothing to do with the substitute king ritual but belongs to the apotropaic ritual against earthquake<sup>7</sup>; again, the "shaving" referred to in LAS 139-140 most probably forms part of cleansing rituals for which see presently.

After the death of the substitute, the king had to perform a ritual<sup>8</sup> whose purpose, according to the ritual tablet, col. B 8', was to cleanse the king and the palace. The way in which this was done is not specified in the ritual tablet. LAS 4, which very probably deals with the burial of the substitute king, prescribes a purification of the king by means of a censer and a torch (see the pertinent notes). It is, naturally, possible that various methods could be applied, e.g., the "shaving" prescribed in LAS 139-140.

#### c) The role of the officiants

It is evident that the performance of the complicated ritual required the co-operation of many, if not the ensemble of the scholars working in the palace. According to LAS 31 and 280, scribes, exorcists, appeasers

and a representative of the king participated, and even the chief physician seems to have been involved<sup>1</sup>. However, the most important officiants were certainly the exorcists for whom the ritual tablet was written and who were concerned with the performance of the ritual from the beginning to the end.<sup>2</sup>

Following the burial of the substitute king certain magical rites, described in the ritual tablet, col. B 9 ff. and LAS 179, were performed by the exorcists. They included burying several kinds of prophylactic figurines at different gates and rooms of the palace. One may assume that such devices were basically not so much needed to counteract the evil forces which were enumerated in the spells inscribed on the figurines than to calm down the bad conscience of the king.<sup>3</sup>

Whether or not still other rituals followed cannot be made out, since the text of the ritual tablet breaks off again; what remains from columns C and D suggests that much of the actual ritual is not lost: these columns contain the wording of individual incantations spelled in the course of the ritual and no more deal with ritual instructions.

<sup>1</sup> See above, paragraph 3.

<sup>2</sup> Note also that in ND 3483 the substitute king is connected with the little-known city of Uarihumba.

<sup>3</sup> See W. von Soden, ZA 43 (1936) 254 ff.

<sup>4</sup> The publicity given to burial of the substitute king in this particular case may well have been intentional (cf. paragraph 6 b). On the other hand, the account of Berossos suggests that a considerable publicity was rather a rule than an exception.

<sup>5</sup> This title was, however, by no means used consistently; see Kümmel, *op.cit.*, p. 173, note 53.

<sup>6</sup> Journeys on the open country were considered particularly dangerous; see the comments on 280 r11-13.

<sup>7</sup> See the comments on LAS 137; it is, in my opinion, necessary to distinguish these clearly apotropaic rites from the obviously purificatory shaving referred to in LAS 139-140 (for a different interpretation see Kümmel, *op.cit.*, p. 179f).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. LAS 166:6 ff. "As regards the 15th day [about which our lord] said: 'The substitute [kin]g should go to his fate! I will perform my ritual on the 16th, as before.'"

<sup>1</sup> See LAS 249 and 257 (written by Urad-Nanâ).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the evidence cited above, in paragraph 5.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the spells inscribed on the capricorns and kneeling figurines (col. B 21-29): "Go out, evil [of the palace]! Enter, fortune of [good] dreams!", and "Go out, evil of [bad] dreams! Enter, fortune of the palace!" Note, furthermore, the psychological effect that the ritual obviously had on Alexander the Great: "Alexander, when he heard this, by the direction of his soothsayers, put the fellow to death, but he lost his spirits, and grew diffident of the protection and assistance of the gods, and suspicious of his friends." (Plutarch, *Lives*, Alexander LXXIV).