

Research Article

# Features of Monarchical Rules and Succession in the Ancient Near East

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## Abstract

Features of kingship in the Ancient Near East manifested in the use of titles which expressed the relationship between the King and the Divine. The titles in later usage were developed, formulated, promulgated and finally became the royal ideology. The features, therefore, revealed that the concept of Kingship in the Ancient Near East is of divine origin. This paper argues that those features were conceived and nurtured by the Kings, the royal court and palace traditions in order to subject and subdue the opposing voices among their followers especially the opposition group who might have contested for the throne during the succession. The features were used to benefit the rulers and their palace officials. The approaches used in this research to arrive at this argument include historical, descriptive and comparative. Historical approach had been used because the terms 'features' and 'monarchy' seems to be historical terms. Descriptive approach had been used because grammatical relationship of words were examined. Thirdly, comparative approach had been used to point out how the two kingdoms though years apart but had similarities in terms of their royal ideologies. This research concludes that the features as used by the kings were an oppressive means used by the rulers over their subjects through exaggerating the powers of gods to manipulate the minds of their followers even though the King's ruthlessness can be seen in the open, especially in enacting decrees and harsh policies on taxations and corvee.

## Keywords

Features, Kingship, Near East, Titles, Divine and Ideology

## 1. Introduction

Monarchy as a system of rule in the Ancient Near East presents us with certain features. These features were the conceptions of the King, the royal court elders, as well as the vassal states under the Empire and how these conceptions were formulated, developed, nurtured, promulgated and finally became the royal ideology. "Kings, wherever they have appeared in history, have been understood to mediate between, and so to partake in some way of the human world they govern and the divine world that furnishes the ultimate

authority over the created order". [19] The fundamental factor that is inherent in the royal ideology of the Ancient Near East was the relationship between the King and the Divine. A pertinent question to ask is how did the king move in the divine circle? How does the King balance his position as king ruler in the human world and as well relate to the divine world? While a brief attempt will be made to look at the historical background of the development of these conceptions, our focus will be on the Neo-Assyrian period and that of

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Ancient Israel.

## 2. Features of Monarchical Rule

The most prominent and probably oldest features of the monarchical rule are the tripartite titles attested for the Assyrian Kings from the second millennium B. C, thus: *išši-ak>iššak* <sup>d</sup>*Aššur*, *Šakin/Šakni/Šakan/Šaknu* <sup>d</sup>*Enlil* and *Šangû*. These titles were originally not of Assyrian origin but of Sumer-Babylonian South. The terms, however, entered Assyria at different points in the second millennium: *išši-ak/iššak* <sup>d</sup>*Aššur*- this title was the first in the early old Assyrian period prior to Šamšī-Adad 1 (1726-1694 B. C); *Šakin* <sup>d</sup>*Enlil* is the second title and happened to emerge in Assyria about same period when Šamšī-Adad 1 was still reigning. The third title *Šangû* emerged during the Middle Assyrian period and was attested during the reign of Aššur-Uballit All the titles are translated as “Administrator/representative of the gods”. [20]

These titles further gave the following expressions to describe the responsibilities of the King as the representative of gods on earth. The King as *Šangû* is saddled with the provision and maintenance of sanctuaries as ordained by the gods. In sum, the King is regarded as the chief Priest to all the sanctuaries in his land. *Šangû* – in later usage further developed other meaning of expression such as *ina šurru šangûtiya* [*SANGU-ti-ia*] “at the beginning of my *šangû*”. This expression is found in the inscriptions of Shalmaneser I, indicating his accession and it corresponds to *ina rēš šarrūtiya* “at the beginning of my kingship”. [5] In the contemporary Babylonian world, the King is seen as the steward of the gods especially the national god *Aššur*. The king in this regard, therefore, serves as the earthly administrator while *Aššur* remains the ultimate King. The human king is the servant, mediator, and administrative representative who is responsible for all earthly possessions of the gods.

In the Middle Assyrian period, Kings used an elaborate rhetoric to describe themselves in their official inscriptions. It reached its climax during the reign of Tukultī-Ninurta 1 (1243-1207 B. C). [8] Titles such as *šakin* <sup>d</sup>*Enlil*, *iššak* <sup>d</sup>*Aššur* and *šangû* as well as epithets were found on inscriptions to indicate directly how close the King is to the deity. The King is also called *migru* “favourite” and *narāmu* “beloved” of a particular god or gods. The scribes whose responsibilities were to report the King’s achievements bring his military prowess into focus to top all of his achievements. This is followed by chains of phrases to celebrate the King’s global influence and contacts, military ambitions, political influence and many other achievements. The King is described as one having an unequal status before the gods. He exercises his ability as a warrior like the two principal warrior gods, Adad and Ninurta. The King is also described as one radiating like the gods.

## 3. Divine Attributes Describing the Power of the King

As the use of the titles continued over the years, they generated the use of divine attributes to describe how powerful and revered is the King and his office in the eyes of his people. Thus:

### 3.1. Image of the Gods

The king is said to have been created in the image of the gods. He was created in a divine womb by gods and was poured out like the metal statue. He is the flesh of the gods whose birth was divine. Although the Middle Assyrian period was fully characterized by the influence of the Babylonians especially old Akkadian and Ur III period, yet they did not deify their Kings. The deviation could be credited uniquely to the Middle Assyrian period and it maintained their traditional assertion to the King as god’s administrator and representative on earth.

### 3.2. Supreme Judge

The king is pictured as the final judge of the land and his judgment is as equal as that of the gods. The fear of his judgment led all cases to be settled before the lower Judges of the land.

### 3.3. The Great Shepherd (Nagid)

The claims of the kings to this title/attribute is to portray them before their subjects as the caring kings. The king, therefore, sees himself as the custodian of providing the required care for his people. He is the best protector of the people as the only representative of the gods [7].

The legacies of what Tukultī-Ninurta 1 started in Middle Assyrian period found its way into the neo-Assyrian period. For instance epithets like *migru* “favourite” *narāmu* “beloved” of gods, the divine birth of the King and nurturing by gods, the king’s creation in his mother’s womb among others were used by the kings in the Neo-Assyrian period. This is mostly found during the reign of the Sargonid Kings, with its climaxed usage during the reign of Ashurbanipal:

*ul i-di aba u um-me ina! ʾbur! ʾ-ki! ʾIštarāti!-ia ar-ba-a ana-ku it-tar-ru-un-ni-i-ma ilāni rabû kima la-) e-e* <sup>d</sup>*be-lit* <sup>uru</sup>*ni-na-a um-mu a-lit-ti-ia*

*taš-ru-ka šarru-u-tu ša la ša-na-a-ni*  
*be-lit* <sup>uru</sup>*arba-il* <sup>ba</sup>*!l-[ni]-ti-ia taq-ba-a balāti da-ra-a-te*  
*I knew no (human) father or mother, I grew up on the knees of my goddesses (Ishtar of Nineveh and Ishtar of Arbela).*

*The great gods brought me up like a baby.*

*The Lady of Nineveh, the mother who bore me, endowed me with unparalleled kingship.*

*The Lady of Arbela, my creator, ordered everlasting life (for me).*

The features that emanated from the legacies of Tukultā-Ninurta include the following;

### 3.3.1. Divine Son

The King is described as a divine son of gods. Ashurbanipal claims that the gods fathered the King and the King was born by the goddess as well as nurtured and raised by her.

### 3.3.2. The Representative of Gods

The King is the representative of the gods expressed through the titles previously discussed above. The King is not only an exalted man but also has a place in the divine world of the gods.

### 3.3.3. The “Radiance” or “Effulgence” - Melammu of Gods

The King radiates like the gods. The Akkadian word *melammu* often refers to overwhelming power, without implying radiant phenomena. [1] But in a general sense is translated as “radiance” or “splendor”. These words did not give the full meaning of *melammu*. The term can refer to both physical object and abstract concepts. It can, therefore, be said *melammu* is a terminology used to describe the powerful gods, kings, and beings. Its usage also connotes the designation of terror that these powerful beings elicit in others. (For more details on *melammu*, see Aster). This is seen in the declaration of Adad-Nērārī II.

*ar-ki ilāni rabūti i-ši-mu-ma<sup>gis</sup> [aṭṭa m[r-te-’a-at] [nišē] a-[na] qa-ti-ia ú-me-el-lu-ú eli šarrāni [šu]-ut a-ge-e iš-šu-u-ni me-lam-me šarru-ti i-pi-ru-ni---*

*After the great gods had decreed (my) destiny, had put into my hands the sceptre for shepherding the people, had raised me above crowned kings, (and) had put on my head the radiance of kingship... [17]*

### 3.3.4. The Likeness of Gods

The King is perceived as one reflecting the character and capacity of gods as his image. In line with the use of “image” the King can be equated with Šamaš or be called “Šamaš” of all people. In this regard, the king can show anger or mercy as Marduk and Šamaš does. Esarhaddon also contends that Šamaš is the only sovereign god. He made this expression when denouncing his enemies as shown in the two texts below:

*<sup>d</sup>bēlu re-mi-nu-ú qar-rad<sup>d</sup> Marduk ina mūši i-zu-uz-ma ina še-eri it-tap-šar šar kiššati ša-lam<sup>d</sup> Marduk at-ta a-na libbi urdu-ni-i-ka ki-i tar-’u-ú bu ru-’u-ub-ti ša šarri bēli-ni ni-il-ta-da-ad u šu-lum-mu-u ša šarri ni-ta-mar*

The merciful Lord, the warrior Marduk, was angry at night but relented in the morning. O King of the World! You are the very image of Marduk: you were angry with your servants; we suffered the anger of the king our lord, (but) we (also) saw the king relent. [12]

*Ul-tu qe-reb tam-tim nakruti-ia ki-a-am iq-bu-(u)-ni um-ma šēlebu la-pa-an<sup>d</sup> Šamaš e-ki-a-am il-lak; from the midst of the sea my enemies said: ‘Where can the fox go from before Šamaš (= the King)?’ [26]*

The long history of using the features marked its importance to the Assyrian Kingship. The features are often recalled into use in the quest of a successor to reaffirm his legitimacy to be King and to secure his throne. The features also kept the royal court in an exalted position and honour in the eyes of its subjects and outsiders. The King, the royal court and palace traditions might have imposed such assertions upon its subjects and outsiders so that these features will continue to serve the interest of the King and the royal court and not necessarily benefiting the subjects of the land. Though the existence of Mistry cults and its worship cannot be divorced in the Assyrian kingdom, the power wielded by the King and its attribution to the gods as presented in the use of features can be considered as nothing more but an over-exaggeration and propaganda of palace politics.

Having observed briefly the features of monarchical rules in the Ancient Near East, we move on to look at the features of monarchical succession in the region.

## 4. Features of Monarchical Succession Antecedents

The antecedents to the succession of both Solomon of Ancient Israel and Esarhaddon of Assyria present us with certain features or trends of succession for our assessment in the stories of the two kings.

Monarchical succession by higher officials as was the case before Tiglath-Pileser III.

Succession through overthrow attributed to the gods as in the case of Sargon II’s succession of Shalmaneser V.

Succession by hereditary dynastic designation upon the death of the incumbent as in the case of Sennacherib’s succession of Sargon II.

Pre-eminence of a younger sibling over the elders by choice and designation as in the cases of Esarhaddon and Solomon.

The assertion of suitability by talent and endowments – charisma, declarative confirmation of the gods, acclamation and acceptance of the people.

Having listed the features, it is pertinent to look at them one by one.

### 4.1. Monarchical Succession by Higher Officials

Before the emergence of Tiglath-Pileser III Assyria suffered from internal weaknesses in the Kingdom, though from outside it appears to be strong. This happened during the Middle Assyrian period, as they regained their independence after the death of Mittani. The tribal wars and internal strife that weakened the kingdoms surrounding Assyria at that time led to the collapse of the superpowers in the region. The war

did not only lead to the collapse of the kingdoms but also the economy of the entire region. As a result of this economic hardship, many abandoned their homelands and moved to other areas. Assyria within this period kept striving to expand its kingdom despite the harsh conditions. Aššur-dan II (934-12 BC) wrote in his annals:

I brought back the exhausted people of Assyria who had abandoned their cities and houses in the face of want, hunger, and famine and had gone up to other lands. I settled them in cities and houses that were suitable and they dwell in peace. I constructed palaces in various districts of my homeland. I hitched up ploughs in the various districts of my land and thereby pile up more grain than ever before. [9]

Though this was the assertion of the King, the economic situation still remained a problem since some parts that had been the source of production of food and other economic crops were devastated by the war. More trouble loomed in Assyria when the reign of Shalmaneser III was entangled by economic hardship such that he granted partial autonomy to the governors who were the strong source of economic support to the Empire. The governors, therefore, increased in power and control which resulted in forming “dynasties”, as the office of the governor was passed from father to son, with the middle Euphrates province of Suhu as an example. As long as they kept sending their tributes to Assyria, the Assyrian King did not bother them. Another obstacle that affected the Assyrian king’s power at the time was the extensive bureaucracy of his palace. Although the King was personally responsible for the proper functioning of the state, he was subjected to relying on the palace bureaucrats. The higher administrators and top brass military officers became increasingly powerful and bold such that some of them became independent towards the last days of Shalmaneser III. For instance, Shalmaneser III stopped leading the army himself, leaving that role to the highest military general, the commander-in-chief (the turtanu) Dayyan-Aššur. The campaign was successful in that spoils of war were brought back to the empire from Urartu. The commander led the troop as far as to the distant lands of Zagros and he met the Medes and the Menneans without the King’s knowledge. [22, 6, 23] The victory of the Turtanu during this expedition emboldened him the more such that he (Dayyan-Aššur) openly led military campaigns starting in 832 BC onwards without consulting the King. In 827 BC, a rebellion broke out involving the heartland of Assyria. Princes felt aggrieved at Dayyan-Aššur’s increased power as he was planning to usurp the throne. The unrest turned into internal conflict as the contenders attacked each other for the right of succession. Though Shamshi-Adad V gained control of the throne with the help of Babylon, confusion and unrest lasted several years later.

The internal strife continued throughout the thirteen-year reign of Shamshi-Adad V (823-811 BC). This weakened the power of the Assyrian King and the local governors, with the high officials continuing to wield power to themselves such

that they virtually became independent. The governors began to commission inscriptions, some of them were the bilingual Assyrian and Aramaic, in which they portrayed themselves as Kings. The dynasty of governors on the middle Euphrates around ancient Mari left royal-stele inscriptions without acknowledging the King of Assyria. Instead, they claimed descent from Hammurabi of Babylon. The governors of Kalhu and Aššur arrogated royal powers to themselves. These among others were the characteristics that overshadowed the Empire of Assyria at that time.

Due to the high competition for power, as well as the body language of the high officials who wanted to usurp power at all cost, Queen-Mother Sammuramat, the queen and wife of Shamshi-Adad V and mother of Adad-Nirari III (810-783), stood firm to defend the legitimacy of her son to the throne and she remained influential throughout her time in the palace of her son supporting his rule. Eventually, however, the royal power slipped out of hand and the high officials became dictators of who becomes the king. Though the dynasty survived with rule passing from father to son, bribing the officials became paramount at that time by the King if he wanted to remain in power. [22]

## 4.2. Succession Through Overthrow Attributed to the Gods

Sargon II’s coming into power has generated an unprecedented argument among scholars. This is because the manner in which Sargon II ascended the throne was not recorded in the normal practice of the Assyrian Empire. The hint to his accession to the throne comes from the Babylonian chronicler named Chronicle 1 by Grayson. He noted that the Babylonian Chronicler reported that Tiglath-pileser III died in his second year of rule over Babylon which is his eighteenth year of rule over Assyria. The successor Shalmaneser V is named and “he ravaged Samaria”. This source revealed that Sargon ascended to the throne of Assyria in the twelfth of the month Ṭebētu (X) in the fifth regnal year of Shalmaneser V, that is in the year 722/21 BC. Furthermore, Sargon ascended the throne in Assyria while Maraduck-Baladan ascends the throne in Babylon. [10] The question that comes to mind is that, if Shalmaneser V was in control of both Assyria and Babylon as his father was before his death, how did Maraduck-Baladan get to the throne of Babylon? And if the pre-supposition that Sargon overthrew his brother Shalmaneser V, why did he not overthrow Maraduck-Baladan at the same time?

The reasons for the suppositions of scholars that Sargon II overthrew his brother’s regime and usurped his throne came from the fragment text labelled K. 1349 which originated from Assyria, recording the events of Sargon II’s accession and his claims to the throne. On this fragment tablet, Sargon states that:

*ša ša-nin-š ú la i-su-u ša ul-tu u[l-l] a il-ku tup-šik-ku la i-du-u UN. MEŠ-š ú<sup>ld</sup> [SILIM-ma-nu-MAŠ]*



*la pa-lih LUGA[L] gim-ri a-na URU šu~a-tú šu-su a-na HUL-ti ú-bil-ma iš-t[a-kan.....]*

*UN. MEŠ-šú il-ku tup-šik-ku mar-ši-iš [UŠ-m] a i[m-t] a-ni ER Ń. MEŠ hup-šiš i-[.....]*

*EN. L Ĺ DINGIR. MEŠ ina ug-gat ŠĀ-šú BALA-[š] ú i[š-kip i] a-a-ti <sup>1</sup>LUGAL-GI. NA MAN [KUR-aš-šur] ša-[i\_im]*

- 1) Such, that nothing exists like it, whose people have ne[ve] r known the compulsory work and the corvée. But Sh[almaneser,]
- 2) Who did not fear the king of the world, whose hands have brought sacrilege in this city, pu[t on...]
- 3) on his people [he] impo[sed] the compulsory work and a heavy corvée and paid them like a working class [...]
- 4) The Illil of the gods, in the wrath of his heart, overthrew [hi] s rule, and [appointed] me, Sargon, as king [of Assyria].

From the above text, a hint has been dropped that points to the fact that Sargon was in the know of what caused the death of Shalmaneser V since he accused him of not fearing the King of the World. His reasons for deposing Shalmaneser include the abolition of the tax exemption policy, the relevant introduction of new corvées, and compulsory works and taxations in the city of Aššur. These points led Sargon to feel that the city was under disaster and probably in need of an urgent solution. The claims of Sargon blaming Shalmaneser V for introducing wrong policies which imposed hardship on the city were actually the policies initiated by their father Tiglath-Pileser III, whose revolution brought change in the Empire. Shalmaneser V made some additions, this caused a counter-revolution from the side of the Priesthoods and the nobles of Aššur and Harran who felt discriminated and deprived of power within and this ended with the assassination of Shalmaneser V. [3] The terms “kidinnu” or “kidinnūtu” (Privilege status) which is ‘exemption’ of the city of Aššur and Harran in this context, also means the exemption from ilku and tupšikku which is tax and corvée (imposed hard labor). The expression here indicates that the two cities are to experience special favour and special protection from a King.

The inscriptions of Sargon II on K. 1349 did not provide us with clear details in relation to the abolition of privileges in the city of Aššur. Rather they blamed Shalmaneser V solely for the policy. Other inscriptions by him revealed that he made references to what had happened in the past and therefore used the past to justify his actions.

*za-kut BAL. TIL. KI ù URU. har-ra-na ša ul-tu U4. MEŠ ul-lu-u-ti im-ma-šu-ma ki-dan-nu-us-su-un ba-til-ta ú-tir áš-ru-uš, "I restored the exemption from taxation in the cities of Assur and Harran, which had fallen from distant past in oblivion, and their privileges which had been cast aside". [3]*

The above text implies that Sargon used a historical argument to justify his actions of deposing Shalmaneser V. In other development, Sargon used the historical argument to attack Urzanâ King of Mušasir for what he called a violation of oath of the god Aššur when king Urzanâ withheld “greeting-presents” and the payment of tribute to Assyria. [4] The

historical argument used by Sargon to justify his actions actually point back to the reign of Shalmaneser III, when the kingdom became weak, king Mušasir as other vassal kings in the kingdom might have freed himself earlier from the Assyrian yoke. [22] The matter of tax exemption or enjoying certain privileges by a particular city depends on the generosity or non-generosity of the King. This fact is demonstrated by the request of the elders of the city of Aššur when Esarhaddon became King and he granted their request thus;

*<sup>1</sup>a-na LUGAL E[N-i-ni] <sup>2</sup>[I] R. MEŠ LÚ. h[a-za-na-te (ù)] <sup>3</sup>[LÚ. pa] r-šú-mu-te š[a URU. ŠĀ.-URU] (...) <sup>13</sup>ú-ma-a ša É LU. <sup>14</sup>GAR? <sup>15</sup>LÚ. qe-ba-a-ni <sup>16</sup>ina UGU URU. ŠĀ.-URU <sup>17</sup>ip-ta-aq-du <sup>18</sup>ŠE. nu-sa-hi i-na-su-<sup>19</sup>hu<sup>20</sup> <sup>21</sup>ŠE. ši-ib-še i-šab-bu-<sup>22</sup>šu<sup>23</sup> (Rev.) <sup>24</sup>at-ta NUMUN. MEŠ GIN <sup>25</sup>ša <sup>26</sup>30-PAP. MEŠ-SU <sup>27</sup>at-ta DUMU-ka <sup>28</sup>DUMU. DUMU-ka li-bu <sup>29</sup>a-na le-e-bi <sup>30</sup>aš-šur <sup>31</sup>UTU ik-tar-bu-ka <sup>32</sup>LUGAL-u-tú ina muh-hi-ni a [t-ta] <sup>33</sup>tu-pa-áš ina ti-ir-š[i-ka] <sup>34</sup>ŠE. nu-sa-hi-ni i-š[i-i] <sup>35</sup>ŠE. šib-še-ni i-š[i-i], "To the king [our] lo[rd], your [ser]vants the m[ayors (and) El] ders o[f the city of Assur]. (...) Now, from the house of the [governor], they have appointed officials over the Inner City; they are exacting corn (and) straw taxes. You are the true seed of Sennacherib; Aššur and Šamaš have blessed you, your son, your son's son, generation to generation: you exercise kingship over us. So, by your goodness, re[move] our corn taxes from us, re[move] our straw taxes from us". [3]*

Other examples on the earlier existence of taxation and corvée policies prior to Shalmaneser V, include the reign of Adad-Nirari III which heralded that the provincial governor, the city prefect, the city mayor and the foreman had calls for corvée and service and that, this had taken place in the city of Aššur. Based on the above examples, it could be argued that Tiglath-Pileser III and Shalmaneser V did not introduce tax and corvée as a new policy into the Empire but rather followed what had been there as normal practice.

Sargon observed that his people who were disadvantaged like the Priesthood and the nobles mentioned earlier were tired under the hard labour and needed change through relief from taxation. He, therefore, took advantage of the situation and the disadvantaged group supported the new conspiracy. Text K. 1349 revealed Sargon's excited claims when he called the city of Aššur as a “privileged city of his reign”. Line 12 *URU ki-di-ni šu-bat pa-le-e qu-du-um da-ád-me NUN-e EN-ŠÚ LUGAL-GI. NA ENS Í KUR-<sup>d</sup>a-š[ur<sub>4</sub>], lines 28-29 áš-šú šá zik-ri p[i-ia iš-mu-u-ma...] il-li-ku re-šú-ti, “... the privileged city, the seat of dynastic kingship, the abode of the prince from of old, and its lord Sargon, governor of Assy[ria],...and because she [has heard] the word of [my] mou[th and...] she has come to help me,...” [3]*

Sargon's desire of inclining himself with the priesthood presented him as being different from his predecessors. This is revealed by the way he carried out his political ambitions and policies. He constantly presented gifts to the gods, temples and Priests. He acquired for himself extensive religious epithets as follows: *migir iliini rabūti, iššak Aššur, šangū,*

*mupiq dēn Šamaš, palih ilūti, palih Nabû Marduk, palih mamit Nabû Marduk, la mupparkū ipalah Nabû Marduk, naŠir zikri Aššur, naŠir Illil Marduk, naŠir kitti, nadušu Illil Marduk, na'id Aššur.* [4] The motive behind the choice of the epithets is not clear, but it might be a political ploy to exploit the support of the aggrieved priesthood and the nobles which was advantageous to Sargon's ambition to rule. The emphasis he cultivated on religious pity was also a ploy to bury his conspiracy of assassinating his brother as well as putting blame on him and for an old existing policy that he himself continued to use on other cities in the Empire. With all his propaganda and exaggerated pity, he remained the only king of the great Empire of Assyria to have died on the battlefield without his body retrieved for proper burial. The gods he so much praised and worshipped did not bring him back to his home from the battlefield.

### 4.3. Succession by Hereditary Dynastic Designation

Upon the death of the incumbent a successor is named. This was what happened after the death of Sargon II, Sennacherib was named the successor. This tradition had been in practice in the Assyrian Empire at least from the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta II (911-891 BC) to Sargon II. Successions in the Assyrian kingdom had been that of hereditary dynastic succession, but not without palace conflict which is always associated with the claims of legitimacy to the throne. The peak of the violence for succession was after the death of Shalmaneser III when the contending princes fought each other until Shamshi-Adad V seized the throne. Throughout his reign, palace conflict continued and it weakened the power of the King such that governors no longer submit their tributes. This weakness continued under Shalmaneser IV (782-773 BC), Aššur-dan III (772-755 BC), Aššur-Nirari V (754-745 BC), until the coming of Tiglath-Pileser III (744-727 BC) who managed to stabilize power and reform the rules which reduced the power of the vassal state governors. But still succession conflicts did not stop, his death caused another new dimension to palace succession conflict. Conspiracy methods were used to assassinate the named successor and Sargon II became the king. [2, 22] The accession of Sennacherib to the throne looks exceptional as there were no reports of internal strife in the palace as usual. He was named the successor after the death of the king but only had to deal with the rebellion of the vassal states.

### 4.4. Pre-eminence of a Younger Sibling Over the Elders by Choice and Designation

The pre-eminence considerations given by the King to a younger sibling over the elder have been the most dangerous path chosen by the monarchs of the Ancient Near East. Such choice was the major reason for competition among the royal princes supported and abetted by the queen mothers. The

good examples of such choice by the incumbent are the choice of Esarhaddon and Solomon by their respective fathers. Esarhaddon was chosen and designated as crown prince over his elder brothers. The actions of Sennacherib did not go well with the brothers of Esarhaddon, leading to the King's assassination and civil war ensued. Esarhaddon fought back fiercely and overpowered his brothers. He secured his throne by wiping out the families of his brothers while the rest escaped into exile. [15] There are no reasons given to us for such kind of choice that brings tragedy, but Sennacherib might have been enticed by the younger queen Naqia and he changed his mind in choosing his successor. Naqia's political prowess might also be at play in the choice of her son. Her strategic educational background which is evident in the letters she wrote may also be another catalyst that aided the choice of Esarhaddon. [21] On the choice of Solomon, he had a similar or rather a double advantage that supported his choice over his elder brothers. First, he was a son of a woman that captured the heart and attention of the ageing King (Bathsheba's beauty) (2 Sam. 11). Secondly, the struggle among his elder brothers for the throne which ended in great tragedy (Amnon and Absalom) aided his choice (2 Sam. 13, 18-19). Thirdly, his mother Bathsheba and Nathan the prophet stood their ground to demand and defend the claims of Solomon to the throne as the right candidate to succeed David, when Adonijah planned secretly to take over the throne from the ailing King through the back door (1 Kings 1-2).

### 4.5. Suitability by Talents and Endowments

Talents and endowments are characteristics that manifest in the life of an individual as they develop into full maturity. These characteristics also show themselves in an individual through the following:

#### 4.5.1. Charisma

This is an ability in someone to carry the people around him alone. It is demonstrated by taking a lead in every aspect of life such as taking decisions, determination, will to do among others. Those in leadership positions as in the monarchical system of the Kings in particular, led their army while going to war. King Saul of Ancient Israel demonstrated his charisma when he led the people to defeat the Philistines, orchestrating his choice to be King on political grounds. [14] Esarhaddon demonstrated the skill of being a charismatic leader when he returned to face his brothers during the battle for the throne. Though he was perceived to be sick and weak, yet his will to face his brothers boosted his support among his supporters that they fought vigorously to secure his seat. Solomon's first demonstration of charismatic skills in leading the Ancient Israel was when he took the decision to silence his opposition by getting rid of them (1 Kings 1 & 2).

#### 4.5.2. Declarative Confirmation of the Gods

This particular manifestation of endowment (the declara-

tive confirmation of the gods/God) is one of the common features that the Ancient Near Eastern kings use in support of their claims to the throne. Sennacherib writes on one of his Bull inscriptions that, “The mistress of the gods, the mistress of creation, looked at me favorably in the womb of the mother who bore me...,” [18] Esarhaddon says ‘the gods chose a particular woman to help produce an heir to the throne’. [24] Solomon of Israel says “... as surely as the LORD lives...he who has established me securely on the throne of my father David and has founded a dynasty for me as he promised...Adonijah shall be put to death today!” (1 Kings 2: 24).

### 4.5.3. Acclamation and Acceptance of the People

The subjects of the King in various kingdoms of the Ancient Near East make their acceptance of their Kings publicly. The claims of their kings to the throne is further strengthened by their support as they affirm their loyalty to the king and to his throne during the coronation ceremony. For Esarhaddon, Assyrians swore multiple oath of allegiance to him beginning with his coronation as crown prince, to the time of his coronation and investiture as king of Assyria and during the rebellion close to the end of his reign. [15, 25] Solomon of Israel, after the first coronation and investiture led by Zadok and the prophet Nathan where he was anointed a second time by the people of Israel confirming their allegiance and support for him and his throne (1 Kings 1: 32-35; I Chron. 29: 22b). [13] Having observed and discussed the features of monarchical rule and succession in the Ancient Near East, it is pertinent to look at succession eligibility to kingship which almost all the claimants to the throne exhibit. It is also a determining factor of acceptability of the candidate in the wake of the run towards accession.

## 5. Succession Eligibility for Kingship

Succession eligibility to kinship on normal grounds pertains to two aspects: the customary norms and the prevalent practice. In the Ancient Near East, the period between the Tenth (10<sup>th</sup>) and sixth (6<sup>th</sup>) century B. C, seems to have a clear custom of succession (as well as inheritance) by the right of male-primogeniture (the elder son in the family). This contrast between the expected customary norms/values and real practice has been the source of conflict and violence among siblings in both Ancient Israel<sup>1</sup> and the Assyrian Kingdom. Studies have shown that in almost all of the Ancient Near Eastern cultures, monarchical succession “so far as our sources indicate, were hereditary monarchical from the start” [14].

The primary concept which permeated all Ancient Near East kingship succession principles was the ideological belief that kingship was divine in origin. “The great civilizations in the Ancient Near East were of one mind on the basic

idea that a monarchy originating in the divine realm was a fundamental institution of their society”. Therefore since kingship was of divine origin, the authority of the King was derived from divine election. Although this was very basic to all succession eligibility, there were other important principles that were evidenced in the legitimization of a contender to the throne. This included; their assertion claims, belonging to a royal lineage (naming their mothers specifically) was both crucial and supplementary to divine election. This principle became the criteria in the Books of kings by which faithfulness to the Davidic throne was assessed. Most of the Assyrian kings boast of their royal ancestral descent in support of their choice and succession [11, 21]

However, the “divine election was practically the sole basis of the authority of usurpers like Sargon II...and remarkably some Assyrian kings apparently attached more importance to the divine election than to the royal lineage, even when they undoubtedly belonged to the royal house” [11]. This is because the royal family mostly had a large number of contenders coming from different mothers in the royal harem and therefore “the right of primogeniture was not regarded as the absolute basis for the royal succession” [11]. It is also evident from the Royal Archives of both Ancient Israel and Assyrian kingdoms that successful contenders to kingship often times claim the possession of outstanding talents, valour, capabilities and intelligence or these were attributed to them by their subjects. Together with these elements, popular acceptance by the people usually played a final decisive role in ascension to kingship.

## 6. Solomon’s Eligibility to Kingship

Like Esarhaddon, Solomon became king in an established kingdom when the monarchical political leadership in Ancient Israel was in place. As discussed above, hereditary dynasty can be seen playing itself in the situation of David and Solomon. Solomon was anointed two times and in all, he was affirmed as a king as well as allegiance to him and the throne. Solomon did not enjoy the status of being a crown prince as did Esarhaddon. He was named as the heir and immediately was taken to the coronation shrine and was put on the horse of King David, led through the town and proclaimed long live the King! (1 Kings 1: 34, 39, 45). The succession principles used during the enthronement of Solomon continued as a practice for the later Kings of the Judean Kingdom. The reigning King designated his first-born or eldest surviving son as his successor. The formula of the principle is *וַיִּמְלֹךְ רַחֲבֵעַם בְּנוֹ תַחֲתָיו* “And so-and-so his son reigned in his stead” (1 Kings 11: 34; 14: 31; 15: 8). The reigning king designation of his heir is specially mentioned only when the principle of primogeniture or the priority of the surviving eldest son was over-ruled. The case of David and Solomon is a typical example, as David overruled the approval of Adonijah and announced Solomon as the heir designate (1 Kings 1: 35) [13]. The eligibility of Solomon,

<sup>1</sup>Ismael and Isaac (Gen. 19), Esau and Jacob (Gen. 27), Reuben and Judah (Gen. 49), David and his brothers (1 Sam. 16).



therefore, can be said to be through the designation by the reigning King and divine election. This latter assertion will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. Solomon's eligibility for kingship is of royal descent since he had been designated by David as his heir. This followed the fundamental principles of the conception of monarchy as a hereditary dynasty.

## 7. Esarhaddon's Assertion of Kingship Succession Eligibility

The above principle of kingship succession eligibility applies to Esarhaddon. Based on the principles above Esarhaddon's claims is a clear illustration of claim to succession on the basis of divine election of a royal otherwise disqualified by the custom of the right of primogeniture. He held that:

É GAL <sup>md</sup>aš-šur-ŠEŠ-SUM. NA LUGAL GAL-ú LUGAL dan-nu 2) LUGAL kiš-ša-ti LUGAL KUR aš-šur. KI G R. N ÍTA KÁ. DINGIR. RA. KI 3) LUGAL KUR EME. GI<sub>7</sub> u URI. KI LUGAL kib-rat L ÍMMU-ti 4) re-'u-um ke-e-nu mi-gir DINGIR. MEŠ GAL. MEŠ 5) ša ul-tu še-je-ri-šú <sup>d</sup>aš-šur <sup>d</sup>UTU <sup>d</sup>EN u <sup>d</sup>AG 6) <sup>d</sup>15 ša URu. ni-nu-a <sup>d</sup>15 ša URU. L ÍMMU-DINGIR 7) a-na LUGAL-ti KUR aš-šur. KI ib-bu-ú zi-kir-šú 8) ša ŠEŠ. MEŠ-ia GAL. MEŠ ŠEŠ-šú-nu še-ej-ru a-na-ku 9) ina q íbit <sup>d</sup>aš-šur <sup>d</sup>30 <sup>d</sup>UTU <sup>d</sup>EN ù <sup>d</sup>AG 10) <sup>d</sup>15 ša URU. ni-nu-a <sup>d</sup>15 šš URU. L ÍMMU-DINGIR AD ba-nu-u-a 11) ina UKKIN ŠEŠ. MEŠ-ia SAG. MEŠ-ia ke-ni-š ul-li-ma 12) um-ma an-nu-ú ma-a-ru ri-du-ti-ia 13) <sup>d</sup>UTU u <sup>d</sup>ÍŠKUR ina bi-ri i-šal-ma an-nu ke-e-nu 14) i-pu-lu-šu-ma um-ma šu-ú te-nu-u-ka 15) zi-kir-šú-nu kab-tu it-ta-'i-id-ma UN. MEŠ KUR aš-šur. KI TUR GAL 16) ŠEŠ. MEŠ-ia NUMUN É AD-ia iš-te-ni-š ú-pa-ħir 17) ma-ħar <sup>d</sup>aš-šur <sup>d</sup>30 <sup>d</sup>UTU <sup>d</sup>AG <sup>d</sup>AMAR. UTU DINGIR. MEŠ KUR aš-šur. KI 18) DINGIR. MEŠ a-ši-bu-te AN-e u KI-tim áš-šu na-šar ri-du-ti-ia 19) zi-kir-šú-un kab-tu ú-šá-az-ki-ir-šu-nu-ti 20) ina ITI šal-me u<sub>4</sub>-me še-me-e ki-i q íbi-ti-šu-nu šir-ti 21) ina É ri-du-ú-ti áš-ri šug-lud-di ša ši-k ñ LUGAL-ti 22) ina lib-bi-šú ba-šu-ú ħa-diš e-ru-um-ma

I am my older brothers' youngest brother (and) by the command of the gods Assur, Sin, Shamash, ... Ishtar of Nineveh, Ishtar of Arbela, my father, who engendered me, elevated me firmly in the assembly of my brothers, saying, 'This is my son who will succeed me.' ... He made them swear a solemn oath(s) concerning the safeguarding of my succession. ... In a favorable month, on a propitious day, I joyfully entered the House of Succession, an awe-inspiring palace within which the appointing to kingship (took place) [16].

Even though Esarhaddon laid more claims to the divine election, it is obvious also that "authority was derived not from divine election alone but also from royal lineage" [15] He made the assertion to the royal lineage even in an unparalleled manner by making far reference to his ancestry from the traditional founder of the dynasty; "I am Esarhaddon, king of the world, king of Assyria, ... son of Sennacherib,

king of the universe, king of Assyria, son of Sargon, victorious of Babylon, king of Summer and Akkad; descendant of the eternal dynasty of Bel-bani, founder of the kingdom of Assyria." [15] In effect, his claim to legitimacy has been asserted by divine election and genuineness of royal lineage.

Esarhaddon preceded to extol his natural talents to further substantiate his claims to the throne; "I ... desired by the gods, capable, able, intelligent, learned, the one whom the great gods raised to be king in order to restore the great gods and to complete the shrines of all the cult centres ... reconstruct the Temple of Assur." [16] Esarhaddon extended his architectural endowment to botanical gardens, irrigation skills and "Ešgalšiddudua, 'The Palace that administers everything.'" [16] Therefore it may be said that the benevolent predestined election of the gods, the assertion of royal lineage as well as natural talents factored the succession of Esarhaddon to kingship in Assyria.

## 8. Conclusion

This section is to be concluded by saying that the features of monarchical rule and succession in Ancient Near East are marked by the conception of the relationship between the earthly king and the divine realm. This concept developed through the use of titles over the years became an ideological royal principle and was made to become a practice for accession to the throne. The sole concept of kingship in Ancient Near East is that it is of divine origin. Based on this concept, the king is said to be the administrator/representative of gods on earth. In later development of this concept, the king claimed to be the divine son of gods, the radiance and the image of gods. It is noted and argued that the concept was a ploy by the kings, the royal court, and the traditions of the palace they imposed such assertions with high exaggerations upon their subjects in order to defraud them. The assertions were made to serve the interest of the kings and not necessarily benefiting the subjects. This is demonstrated by the often recall of the features in the quest of the successor to legitimize his claims to the throne. This is common with those termed as usurpers of the throne. The emphasis on the enormous power of the gods in my view was over exaggerated by almost all the kings as a lot of things went messy in their policies using the name of gods to oppress their subjects such as unnecessary war, corvée and taxes just to extort the poor for their personal gains.

## Abbreviations

AHW: Akkadisches Handwörterbuch  
CAD: The Assyrian Dictionary  
LAS: Letters from Assyrian Scholars  
RIMA: The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia  
RINAP: Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period  
SAA: State Archives of Assyria



## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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