Esarhaddon’s Claim of Legitimacy in an Hour of Crisis:
Sociological Observations

Izabela Eph'al-Jaruzelska

The Society for Near Eastern Studies in Japan
(NIPPON ORIENTO GAKKAI)
Esarhaddon’s Claim of Legitimacy in an Hour of Crisis: Sociological Observations

Izabela Eph‘al-Jaruzelska*

The article aims at a systematization of the evidence relating to Esarhaddon’s royal legitimacy in the various sources available, which include royal writings, letters, and chronicles. The discussion encompasses several facets of legitimacy discernible in the texts: characteristics of legitimate power, the role of administrative apparatus as an addressee of royal legitimizing rhetoric, and legitimization of power as an instrument of rule in contrast to physical and nonphysical coercion. The exceptional variety of legitimizing elements in the sources under consideration is understood as a response to Esarhaddon’s legitimacy crisis following his defeat in Egypt, which was compounded by constant opposition due to his irregular succession.

Keywords: Esarhaddon, royal legitimacy, officialdom, opposition

I. Introduction

The sources relating to King Esarhaddon of Assyria provide interesting evidence for an investigation into royal legitimacy in the ancient Near East. Particularly relevant are Esarhaddon’s writings such as the Apology, the Letter to the god Ashur and Esarhaddon’s Succession Treaty, which reflect basic features of the phenomenon of legitimacy of power. At the same time, there are other documents, such as chronicles and letters, exceptionally abundant in comparison with other reigns, which shed light on possible difficulties in maintaining the stability of his throne. For example, the Babylonian Chronicle yields information on Esarhaddon’s great failure in Egypt, which is known only from here (Chron. 1 iv 16).1 In addition, Esarhaddon’s correspondence with his officials furnishes rich evidence of opposition to his rule. The possibility of combining the two kinds of sources, those representing the royal point of view and those written from a relatively disinterested perspective, makes Esarhaddon’s case illuminating for the study of royal legitimacy. The king’s intensive literary activity to legitimize his right to reign vis-à-vis his Egyptian failure and vis-à-vis the opposition reveals that this activity is not merely a ceremonial façade but rather a political instrument for maintaining the stability of his throne. This mechanism will be investigated in the following pages.

II. Three Characteristics of Legitimacy in Esarhaddon’s Royal Writings

Although the ancient Near Eastern sources do not offer a conceptual definition of legitimacy of power, they provide rich evidence of this socio-political phenomenon, which can be analyzed with the help of tools from the social sciences. For the purpose of this study, I assume that the

* Associate Professor, University of Warsaw

1 For the view that Esarhaddon’s legitimatizing writings were created in reaction to this defeat, see Eph‘al 2014, 58–60.
legitimacy of political power consists of recognition of a ruler’s right to demand subjects’ obedience to fixed commands. Power may be considered legitimate when it is acquired and exercised according to accepted rules as well as recognized by subordinates. This definition comprises three elements: 1) rules for acquiring power, 2) standards of exercising power, and 3) consent of subordinates. These elements are typical of legitimate power in human societies through the ages and are attested in specific manifestations in Esarhaddon’s legitimizing writings.

The first criterion is developed in the so called Apology, included in the edition of Esarhaddon’s historical inscriptions (RINAP 4 1 = Nin. A). This text offers a rare example of a combination of direct dynastic succession from father to son with the principle that primogeniture confers the right to reign. It was the second component that was problematic in Esarhaddon’s case, since he was the youngest of his brothers. Through Sennacherib’s decision to appoint him as his successor, the questionable order of a younger son succeeding his father received the appearance of legality. Esarhaddon also uses another argument to legitimize his succession, which is very common in ancient Near Eastern sources, namely the claim to divine approval. Thus, Esarhaddon’s appointment is confirmed by the gods Shamash and Adad through a divination technique arranged by Sennacherib (RINAP 4 1 i 13-14). The idea that rulers are divinely chosen in its classical form, that is, the idea that divine election is a ruler’s only source of power, is typical of the charismatic type of authority, which rests on “devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him.” Usurpers, who were often founders of dynasties in the ancient Near East, usually resorted to divine election as their sole claim to power, given their lack of kinship to a royal house. Weber stresses that this charismatic authority tends to evolve into “routinization,” which means that a charismatic leader once elected on the basis of his particular talents may be succeeded by his sons and thus create a hereditary monarchy. In such a case, the charisma is conceived as attached to the dynasty and not to a particular king. In sum, divine election is an equivalent of royal descent in conferring a right to the throne. This is why the divine appointment of Esarhaddon is classified in this study within the category of “rules of acquiring power.”

The second criterion of legitimate power, ruling according to accepted standards, finds expression when Esarhaddon describes himself in the Apology as a “true shepherd” (rēʾûm

---

2 Rapp 1967, col. 25.
3 For this definition, see Eph’al-Jaruzelska 2009, 27, with the bibliography therein.
4 See also Beetham 1991, 3 and 16–18.
5 For examples of dynastic succession as a regular form of accession to power, see Eph’al-Jaruzelska 2009, 28.
6 For examples of eldership principle in dynastic succession, see Eph’al-Jaruzelska 2009, 28f.; see also Belshazzar, Nabonidus’s firstborn son, ruling over Babylonia during Nabonidus’s absence (Verse Account of Nabonidus, Schaudig 2001, 568, ii:18') and Cambyses, elder Cyrus’s son, appointed by him as his successor (and not Bardiya, the younger; Xenophon, Cyr.VIII.7.9-11). For preference of the younger over the elder, see Ashurbanipal’s appointment by Esarhaddon on the throne of Assyria (SAA X 185) and Xerxes’s nomination by Darius I (Herodotus VII 2-5).
7 For examples, see Eph’al-Jaruzelska 2009, 30.
The portrayal of a king as a shepherd symbolizes the features of good rule. A classic example is the presentation of King Hammurabi as a shepherd (*rēʾûm*) in the prologue and epilogue of his Code, where the metaphor signifies that he is the founder of the system of social justice and its guardian, a guarantor of economic prosperity, an organizer of religious ceremonies, a defender against enemies, and conqueror of them. The legitimizing function of rule according to accepted standards is implied in Hammurabi’s warning that any violation of his prescriptions by a future ruler will deprive that ruler of the throne. Another illustrative example is provided by the *Verse Account of Nabonidus*, which explains that this king lost the throne because he governed the country badly. Also noteworthy is the biblical story of the northern tribes’ rejection of Rehoboam as king as a result of his oppressive policies (1 Kgs. 12).

The title “shepherd” is used in the *Apology* simply to emphasize that Esarhaddon is a good monarch, without highlighting any specific aspect of his rule. The *Letter to the god Ashur*, in contrast, focuses on one specific feature of rule, namely royal military activity, which alone earned Esarhaddon the title “trustworthy shepherd” (RINAP 4 33 i 9). Identification of Esarhaddon’s shepherds*hip with his military efficacy is implied in the request for mercy addressed to him by the king of Shubria: “O, king, to whom abomination, untruth, plundering, (and) murdering are taboo; trustworthy shepherd (*rēʾû taklu*), who keeps safe his camp, the strength of his army, whose attack cannot be with[stood], knowledgeable in battle, war, (and) combat, capable in [all] deeds, for whom the god Ashur made mighty his weapons and whom he made greater than the kings, his ancestors…” (RINAP 4 33 i 8-11). This passage suggests that the military domain was perceived as the very essence of shepherdship, or rule. Military activity—a constant theme of ancient Near Eastern royal inscriptions—was especially valued by the Assyrian kings. While military efficacy in itself strengthens royal legitimacy, victory confirms

12 RINAP 4 1 i 4.
13 For examples with this metaphor, see Seux 1967, 243–250.
14 See also the norms of rule in the prologues to the laws of Ur-Namma and Lipit-Ishtar, in Roth 1995, 15–17 and 24–26; Sargon II’s proclamation, in Fuchs 1994, Cylinder Inscription, 39, lines 50–52 and 293; Sennacherib’s self-presentation, in RINAP 3 1 1–3 and Ashurbanipal’s phraseology, in RIMB 2 B.6.32.1 13–14.
16 Schaudig 2001, 563ff. Cf. Sargon II’s view about the forced labor imposed by Shalmaneser V on the city of Assur as a reason for his removal from the throne by the gods; Saggs 1975, 14:32–34.
17 See also the text known as *Advice to a Prince*, which contains warnings addressed to a ruler in case of oppressive policy towards the citizens of Sippar, Nippur, and Babylon in Lambert 1960, 110–115.
18 Military competence and effectiveness of the king are listed among the standards of exercising power in Hammurabi’s prologue. Cf. the various metaphors present*ing the king as a warrior: ii 55, 68; iii 7–9.
19 Cf. also Shalmaneser III’s inscription: “When Ashur, the great lord, chose me in his steadfast heart (and) with his holy eyes and named me for the shepherdship of Assyria (*ana rēʾût māt aššur*), he put in my grasp a strong weapon which fells the insubordinate” (RIMA 3 A.0.102.1 11–12). The conception of the military sphere as the very essence of rule is reflected in the proposition addressed to David by the tribes of Israel to become king for his military leadership during Saul’s rule: “You that led out and brought Israel” (*ʾth hyyt hmwyšʼ  whmbyʾ ʾt yśrʾl*; 2 Sam. 5:2a). For the military character of this expression, see Speiser 1956, 20–23.
21 Noteworthy are descriptions of royal military successes in which gods’ help is not even referred to as in Ur-Nanshe’s report on his victory over Ur and Umma (RIME 1 E1.9.1.6b, rev. i 1—vi 1) and in Rimush’s description of his victories (RIME 2 E2.1.2.1).
also divine support of the ruler. \(^{22}\) Campaigns organized by kings “on the gods’ command” and followed by offerings to thank the gods for victory reflect belief in divine involvement in warfare and constitute a very frequent theme in the sources. \(^{23}\) Esarhaddon’s *Letter to the god Ashur*, however, focuses on a rare motif, namely on direct, miraculous divine intervention bringing about the victory. \(^{24}\) Such a spectacular event might have produced the impression of particular support by the gods.

The third criterion of legitimate power, namely evidence of consent expressed by subordinates, stands out in Esarhaddon’s writings in comparison with its scarcity in ancient Near Eastern sources. \(^{25}\) Repeated references to his public approval testify to the importance this king attached to being recognized by his subjects as a legitimate ruler. The subjects demonstrated their compliance with Esarhaddon primarily through loyalty agreements. \(^{26}\) The *Apology* mentions the oath sworn to Esarhaddon by the people of Assyria and the king’s brothers before the gods at his nomination as Sennacherib’s successor. \(^{27}\) This public ceremony was intended to express submission and obedience to the king in a solemn way. This oath is invoked as the basis of the loyalty manifested by the people of Assyria when they refused to join the rebellion of those who opposed Esarhaddon’s accession to the Assyrian throne. \(^{28}\) It also furnished grounds for the homage the people of Assyria paid to Esarhaddon after his victory over the rebels. \(^{29}\) A public proclamation of Esarhaddon as king during his struggle with the rebels also manifests the people’s consent. \(^{30}\) A loyalty oath in 672 sealing the (problematic) nomination of Ashurbanipal as Esarhaddon’s successor to the throne of Assyria and of Shamash-shuma-ukin as king of Babylonia, provides further evidence of the importance attached by Esarhaddon to public recognition of a ruler. \(^{31}\)

The scope of public recognition of Esarhaddon as king—that is, whether extensive or limited

\(^{22}\) This principle was concisely expressed by Ashurnasirpal II: “When the gods Anu, Enlil, and Ea chose me and named me for the shepherdship of Assyria, granted to my dominion the weapon, the sceptre, the crown, and the staff, (and) sternly commanded me to rule and subdue all the lands insubmissive to Ashur” (RIMA 2 A.0.101.40 10b–12a). The connection between military success and divine election is clear in the Zakkur Stele. Here the god Baalshamayn promises victory to the king he has appointed: “Fear not ([ʾl tzḥl]), because it was I who made you king, [and I shall stand] with you, and I shall deliver you from all [these kings who] have forced a siege upon you” (Gibson 1975, 8–10, lines 9–15). Nathan’s prophecy to David also reflects the concept of divine election as a guarantee of future victory over the enemy: “Thus said the LORD of Hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the flock, to be ruler of My people Israel, and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut down all your enemies before you” (2 Sam. 7:8–9).

\(^{23}\) For examples of the divine component in descriptions of military enterprises, see Eph’al-Jaruzelska 2009, 98–104.

\(^{24}\) For the military miracles, see Eph’al-Jaruzelska 2009, 154–159.

\(^{25}\) Cf. Oppenheim 1979, 123. The biblical story of the revolt against Rehoboam offers an illustrative example. When this king refused to acknowledge the people’s request to diminish the corvée, they rejected him as king and founded the northern kingdom of Israel by splitting from the House of David (1 Kgs. 12:1–24).

\(^{26}\) Public consent to a ruler may be demonstrated through different actions in conformity with the conventions of the particular society, such as “concluding an agreement or entering into a contract with a superior party; swearing an oath of allegiance; joining in acclamation; voting in an election or plebiscite; and so on” (Beetham 1991, 12).

\(^{27}\) “Before the gods Ashur, Sin, Shamash, Nabu, (and) Marduk, the gods of Assyria, the gods who live in heaven and netherworld, he made them swear their solemn oath(s) concerning the safe-guarding of my succession” (RINAP 4 i 17–19); see also SAA II 3.

\(^{28}\) “The people of Assyria, who swore by oil and water to the treaty, an oath bound by the great gods, to protect my (right to exercise) kingship, did not come to their (the rebels’) aid” (RINAP 4 i 50–52).

\(^{29}\) “The people of Assyria, who had sworn by the treaty; an oath bound by the great gods, concerning me, came before me and kissed my feet” (RINAP 4 i 80–81).

\(^{30}\) “This is our king” (annû šarrani; RINAP 4 i 77). For popular approval in Esarhaddon’s accession to the throne, see Hurowitz 2009, 131 and 133.

circles of people were included in the ceremonies described above—is a difficult question. The loyalty oath referred to in the *Apology* included, in addition to Esarhaddon’s brothers, “the people of Assyria” (nišē māt Aššur). The use of this general term with the addition of the idiom TUR GAL (šeher u rabi), “small and great,” simply signifies the totality of Assyrians who were involved in the oath. According to Ashurbanipal’s Prism A, the ceremony on his behalf also involved “the people of Assyria, small and great” (nišē māt Aššur šeher u rabi). However, the following phrase, “from the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea” (ša tāmti elīti u šaplīti), suggests that in addition to all the inhabitants of Assyria proper, the entire population of the empire beyond Assyria’s borders was involved. The preamble to Esarhaddon’s *Succession Treaty* confirms this interpretation. Seven of eight separate copies found in Calah each list in this section a different city ruler who participated in the ceremony, with subjects in areas located mostly in Media. The recent publication of the Tell Tayinat version of Esarhaddon’s *Succession Treaty* provides further evidence that the ceremony was held in numerous locations within the Assyrian empire. The question as to whether this loyalty oath was sworn by a limited group of officials or by all the people of the country or even beyond it cannot be answered. But either way, the ceremony upholds the third criterion of legitimacy, since, as Beetham notes, “in most historical societies only some among the subordinate have been qualified to give consent.” Moreover, holding the oath-taking at multiple sites within the empire and binding all the people of Assyria by the oath reflects at least the idea that a ruler must be approved by all his subjects in order to be recognized as legitimate.

### III. Officials as Addressees of Esarhaddon’s Legitimizing Writings

Thus far, my discussion of the three characteristics of legitimate power in the royal writings has focused on the royal viewpoint, reflecting the king’s and royal scribes’ awareness of the most essential conditions for recognizing power as legitimate. In this section, Esarhaddon’s claims to divine election, divine support in his military victories, and consent of the Assyrians and non-Assyrians to his rule will be examined from subordinates’ perspective. The sources reflecting this stance are letters addressed to Esarhaddon by his officials on different occasions. An examination of references to Esarhaddon’s legitimacy in this material will attempt to show how deeply its three facets penetrated into royal officialdom.

The view that the king’s power is divine in origin is implied in the prayer of an official stressing that his intercession was accepted since Esarhaddon became king: “Bel, Nabu and Shamash heard (this) prayer for you, and they gave the king, my lord, an everlasting kingship (and) a long reign” (SAA XVI 29). Bel-ushezib, a Babylonian scholar specializing in astronomy

---

32 RINAP 4 i 15, 50, 80.
33 RINAP 4 i 15.
34 BIWA A i 18–19.
35 SAA II, xxix–xxx.
36 Lauinger 2012, 87–123. That such a vast territory was required to swear a loyalty oath should be examined *vis-à-vis* the large number of areas from which Esarhaddon expected rebellions as reflected in the queries to Shamash. Among them mention is made of various ethnic and territorial units throughout the empire (such as the Arameans, Hittites, Philistines, and Itua eans), on its borders, and even beyond them (such as the Elamites, Egyptians, and Nubians; SAA IV 139, 142, 144); cf. Eph’al 2014, 59.
37 Beetham 1991, 18f.
and astrology, invokes his prediction of Esarhaddon’s kingship as implying divine approval: “… the gods of the king of lands, my lord, be my witnesses that I said to the king, my lord, that the king will rule all the countries and that the [great gods] will give many years to the king, my lord” (SAA X 109). Belief in the gods’ assistance in Esarhaddon’s military victories is reflected in Bel-ushezib’s prediction of Esarhaddon’s victory over the Manneans with the help of Marduk: “Bel [has ordered] the destruction of the Manneans and is for the second time [delivering] them into the hands of the king, my lord” (SAA X 111). Similarly, another official assures the king that the gods will help him subdue his enemies: “You are (a) just (king). Thanks to the just policy that you have adopted, Shamash and Marduk have delivered (all the lands) from the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea to the king, my lord” (SAA X 168). 38 The connection between divine election and military victory is very clear in a letter of Itti-Shamash-balatu, an Assyrian official active in Northern Phoenicia: “Just as the king, my lord, is truthful to god and man, and the command of the king, my lord, is good to god and man (and) the ‘black-headed people,’ in the same manner the powerful gods of the king, my lord, who raised the king, my lord, from childhood till maturity, will fully carry out (these blessings) and render them to the king, my lord. And [they will bring]g all the enemies of the king, my lord, to submission before the feet of the king, [my lord]” (SAA XVI 126).

38 The notion of the gods’ support in military actions also finds expression in wishes, often addressed to Esarhaddon, for victory over their enemies: “[May they (the gods) march] in the presence of the king, my lord, and [bring] the enemies of the king, my lord, [quickly] to submission before the feet of the king, m[y] lord!” (SAA XVI 132); cf. SAA X 348 and XVI 127.

40 The evidence of the letters surveyed above shows that their writers were familiar with basic royal claims to legitimacy. 41 The correspondence quoted above cannot be taken at face value as an indication that the senders were convinced of Esarhaddon’s legitimacy,
but it indicates that his legitimizing rhetoric was embedded in commonly shared concepts of the period. Esarhaddon’s invocation of generally known criteria of legitimate power is consistent with the observation that “power is legitimate to the extent that the rules of power can be justified in terms of beliefs shared by both dominant and subordinate.” The fact that Esarhaddon’s efforts to present himself as the legitimate ruler are echoed in letters by his officials indicates that these officials comprised the main addressees of Esarhaddon’s legitimizing writings. The material discussed thus far supports Max Weber’s observation that both rulers and their administrative staff, but not the general population, must be the main parties involved in the legitimacy of power. It is no accident that these officials are the first addressees of the sovereign, since they are the intermediaries through whom he rules. A ruler would not be able to exert his power without the obedience of his administrative apparatus. Thus, the king must first concentrate his efforts on convincing these people of his legitimacy in order to win their compliance and loyalty. Noteworthy in this context are the obligations in Esarhaddon’s Succession Treaty for the circle of people closest to the king, namely the royal family and officials, as Liverani demonstrated.

A good illustration of this focus is the high proportion of officials as parties to the loyalty oath in its Tell Tayinat version: “The adê of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, son of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, with the governor (bêl pâḫiṭi) of Kunalia, with the deputy (šanē), the majordomo (rab bêti), the scribes (ṭupšarrē), the chariot drivers (mukîl appâti), the third men (tašlîšāni), the village managers (rab âlâni), the information officers (mutîr tême), the prefects (šaknûte), the cohort commanders (⁵⁴⁰ GAL-kišir.MEŠ), the charioteers (bêl narkabâti), the cavalrymen (bêl pêṭhallâti), the exempt (zakkuē), the outriders (kallâbâni), the specialists (ummânī), the shield bearers (?) (ša [rîtî]?), the craftsmen (kitkittû), (and) with [all] the men [of his hands], great and small, as many as there are.”

IV. The Defeat in Egypt

The intensive legitimizing effort that Esarhaddon’s writings represent appears still greater in light of their composition within a relatively short period of time. The earliest exemplars of the historical inscriptions (RINAP 4 1), which included the Apology, were created in Tammuz in Esarhaddon’s eighth regnal year (673 BCE). The Letter to the god Ashur was composed a few

---

42 Cf. Parpola’s remark on sharing by the elite, “a heavily emperor-centered ideology and world view,” in 2007, 263. Note also the references to royal claims to divine election and divine military support in prophetic messages addressed to Esarhaddon (SAA IX 1–3).
44 For an instructive explanation of the mechanisms by which royal messages presented in royal inscriptions might have reached royal officials, see Porter 1993, 109f., esp. n. 236. The officials’ familiarity with royal claims to legitimacy may be compared to their acquaintance with royal criteria of ideal self-representation that are reflected in consultations between Esarhaddon and his officials with regard to his preference concerning his image (SAA XIII 178; cf. SAA XIII 34); see Winter 1997, 367–368.
45 Weber 1978, 212f.
46 On the necessity of support from such a group for a ruler, see Mosca 1939, 51. See, similarly also Heinz 2007, 71.
47 Liverani 1995, 59. A few royal letters confirm the view that royal officials were summoned first and foremost to swear the loyalty oath (SAA X 199, 316; XVI 59–61, 71, 126, 150); note also the circle of people close to the court in the Zakuta Treaty (SAA II 8 3–8).
48 Lauinger 2012, 91f.: i 1–12. A similarly high proportion of officials appears in Esarhaddon’s queries to Shamash, e.g., SAA IV 139 and 142.
49 RINAP 4, 26. See also Eph’al 2014, 59.
months after the successful campaign to Shubria. The Babylonian Chronicle (Chron. 1 iv 19-20) dates the conquest of Uppume, capital of Shubria to the month of Tebeth in the eighth year (673) and the Esarhaddon Chronicle (Chron. 14:27) to the eighteenth of Adar of that year. However, the fact that the Assyrian siege ramp built against the walls of Uppume was already completed on the twenty-first of Elul, according to the Letter to the god Ashur, suggests that the campaign began no later than the beginning of that month. Esarhaddon’s Succession Treaty was composed on the sixteenth or eighteenth of Iyyar in the ninth regnal year (672), according to the colophons of its copies. In view of the above data, the king’s literary activity devoted to his legitimacy stretched over about ten months, between Tammuz of year 8 and Iyyar of year 9. Its magnitude is exemplified by the widespread, systematic dissemination of the Apology, which is extant in 33 copies dated between 673 and 672. The edition of historical inscriptions to which the Apology was appended (RINAP 4 1) does not contain any new important facts when compared with the previous edition (RINAP 4 2 = Nin. B). Hence, the issue of Esarhaddon’s legitimacy seems to be the main goal of RINAP 4 1. Moreover, during this period Esarhaddon organized the military campaign to Shubria, and at the beginning of the following year he held ceremonies for his two successors involving the loyalty oath sworn in Assyria proper and beyond its borders. Such tremendous activity, both literary and political, suggests that this project was intended to strengthen legitimacy that was weakened by a deep crisis. The chronological evidence shows that Esarhaddon started this project by composing the Apology only four months after his defeat in Egypt. This great failure, known only from the Babylonian Chronicle (“The seventh year, the fifth day of Adar, the army of Assyria was defeated in Egypt”, Chron. 1 iv 16) was the reason for the crisis. Leading the army to Egypt, including crossing the Sinai desert, was a tremendous logistical operation. Therefore, its ending in debacle must have been conceived as a great failure on the part of Esarhaddon. Comparison with Nebuchadnezzar’s defeat in Egypt in his fourth regnal year (601/600), following which he remained in Babylonia in order to rebuild his army and departed only to raid the Arabs in his sixth year—not a significant military achievement (Chron. 5 rev. 6’–8’)—sheds light on the immensity of the disaster.

In the ancient Near East in particular, military defeat posed a particular threat to royal legitimacy in that it was taken to indicate a lack of divine support. The motif of withdrawal of divine election manifested through military failure is noticeably absent in royal inscriptions.

51 On the problem of reconciliation between the data from the two chronicles, see Brinkman 1990, esp. 88–95.
52 For an estimate of the time necessary for building a ramp and preparations to breach the city walls, see Eph’al 2009, 84f., n. 156.
53 Eph’al 2014, 60.
54 RINAP 4, 26.
55 Eph’al 2014, 58.
56 For a connection between the nomination of Ashurbanipal by Esarhaddon as his successor and the campaign to Shubria, see Leichty 1991, 56f. and Pongratz-Leisten 1999, 240. However, such an interpretation of the campaign as “aimed at neutralizing the pretenders to the throne who escaped Esarhaddon in 680 B.C.E.” (so Leichty) in order to secure a safe succession lacks a solid evidence; see also footnote 75 below.
Nevertheless, some examples are evident in other ancient Near Eastern literary genres.

The idea that military defeat is a consequence of royal transgression against the will of the gods is explicit in the Weidner Chronicle: “Naram-Sin destro[yed] the population of Babylon. Twice he (Marduk) brought against him (Naram-Sin) an attack of the army of the Guti [=]. He (Marduk) gave his sovereignty to the army of the Guti” (Chron. 19 53–55). Likewise, Naram-Sin’s defeat by barbarian hordes is explained in the Cuthean Legend – a pseudo-royal composition – as a result of noncompliance with the omen given to him by seven gods. The defeat is interpreted as divine punishment through the following utterance, attributed to Naram-Sin himself: “What has god brought upon my reign? I am a king who has not protected his land and a shepherd who has not safeguarded his people. What has my reign brought upon me?”

Another example is the tablet K.4730 (+) Sm.1876, called The Sin of Sargon, allegedly attributed in the text itself to Sennacherib, which resembles the Naram-Sin epic in style and content. This text explains that Sargon’s death on the battlefield was a result of his sin: “Was it because [he honored] the gods of Assyria too much, placing them above the gods of Babylonia [ ......, and was it because] he did not [keep] the treaty of the king of gods [that Sargon my father] was killed [in the enemy country and] was not b[uried] in his house?”

In light, then, of this attitude about divine support, Esarhaddon must have been highly embarrassed by his military failure in Egypt, particularly as it followed a four-year period (from the end of 677 until around 673) devoid of military achievement.

The evidence of the Babylonian Chronicle on Esarhaddon’s defeat (kings usually do not report on their failures) allows for a better understanding of his urgent and massive legitimizing activity. A serious threat to Esarhaddon’s throne may explain his need to recall his divine election and the gods’ steady assistance in the Apology eight years after his accession to the throne. The pressing necessity of confirming this election by military victory led the king to promptly respond by conquering Shubria only six months after his failure in Egypt.

Esarhaddon’s choice of the genre of a letter to a god to convince his officials of the gods’ approval of him is not accidental. Such compositions appeared only on special occasions, to mark great military achievements, as in Sargon’s Letter to the god Ashur, which was written after his victory over the army of Urartu. In contrast, Esarhaddon’s conquest of Shubria, a small kingdom

59 A noteworthy example is the biblical story of Saul. Anointed by Samuel to defeat Israel’s enemies (1 Sam. 9:16), Saul achieved victories over the Ammonites (1 Sam. 11:1–11), the Philistines (1 Sam. 14:1–23), and the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:2–8). However, at a certain point in his career he lost divine favor (1 Sam. 13:14; 15:10–31) and was defeated and killed by the Philistines along with his sons in a battle at Mount Gilboa (1 Sam. 31:6). The kingship passed over to David through a new divine choice: “And Samuel said to him: The LORD has this day torn the kingship over Israel away from you and has given it to another who is worthier than you” (1 Sam. 15:28).

60 Westenholz Goodnick 1997, 317.
62 Tadmor, Landsberger, and Parpola 1989, 10, lines 17’–20’. This inscription is particularly significant in relation to the background of the Apology, since it has been dated to Esarhaddon’s reign. For different opinions concerning the exact date of this document in Esarhaddon’s reign, see Tadmor in Tadmor, Landsberger, and Parpola 1989, 31 and Parpola in Tadmor, Landsberger, and Parpola 1989, 47. For an argument that the purpose of the composition was to justify Esarhaddon’s policy towards Babylonia, which involved rebuilding Babylon (as opposed to his father’s hard measures regarding this city), see Parpola in Tadmor, Landsberger, and Parpola 1989, 45; Frame 1992, 71f.
63 Eph'al 2014, 59f.
64 For an argument that the aim of the Apology was to secure Ashurbanipal’s succession to the throne of Assyria, see Tadmor 1983, 38–45.
situated at the foot of the Taurus Mountains (Chron. 1 iv 19-20), was hardly a significant military achievement. Thus, Esarhaddon’s choice of this genre to report on his campaign indicates his interest in presenting it as a huge military success. The victory is attributed to Marduk, who at the most critical moment turned back a fire that had been set by the besieged Shubrians towards the Assyrian siege ramp, which had been built against the walls of the city of Uppume (RINAP 4 33 ii 5–9). Sargon’s Letter to the god Ashur also mentions a miraculous atmospheric event attributed to the god Adad, who annihilated the enemy with a thunderbolt (lit. “stones of heaven” <\textit{abnē šame}; TCL 3 147). Another common motif in both letters is the minimal loss to the Assyrians incurred during the campaign, which emphasizes the magnitude of the victory. This is formulated in exactly the same manner at the end of the two inscriptions: “One charioteer, two cavalrymen, (and) three scouts are dead” (TCL 3 426 and RINAP 4 33 iv 13’). Esarhaddon’s success provided evidence that despite his defeat in Egypt, Esarhaddon still enjoyed divine support and consequently was a legitimate king. Concern about the stability of the throne following the defeat in Egypt explains Esarhaddon’s almost immediate nomination of his sons as his successors to the thrones of Assyria and Babylonia, respectively, followed by the ceremony of taking the loyalty oath. Although most of the stipulations in Esarhaddon’s Succession Treaty relate to loyal behavior toward his successors, the topic of loyalty toward him also appears in this document. Instructions in case of rebellion against Esarhaddon and even in case of his assassination (SAA II 6 198–200, 303–317) reflect the seriousness of the threat. The report of a conspiracy sent to Esarhaddon justifying this denunciation by the treaty (SAA X 59–60) supports the view that the oath sworn in 672 also called for loyalty toward him. Moreover, numerous references to the loyalty oath sworn to Esarhaddon in the Apology and in the Letter to the god Ashur confirm the gravity of the threat. The king’s recollection of his ascension to the throne with his father’s and the gods’ approval as well as the loyalty oath sworn to him—that is, the events that took place eight years earlier—must have been intended to regain his officials’ support.

The role of Esarhaddon’s failure in Egypt as a catalyst of his deep crisis of legitimacy must be assessed in the wider context of his irregular succession. In other words, the defeat might have only deepened a persistent problem that existed throughout his reign. Esarhaddon’s case is a good illustration of the general rule that crises in legitimacy may reveal the very nature of political legitimacy. As Beetham puts it, “It is only when legitimacy is absent that we can fully appre-

\footnote{The same motif of an extraordinary change in the direction of the wind in the context of a siege and a fire set to destroy the enemy occurs in Josephus’s \textit{Jewish War}, VII 315–332. However, the motif fulfills a different function from Josephus’s point of view. While the miraculous change of wind direction in Esarhaddon’s inscription brings about victory and signifies Marduk’s favor toward the Assyrians, the same phenomenon causes a total defeat of the Jews, since the fire set by the Romans to burn the wall of Masada was first turned against them by a shift in the wind, which then again changed its direction “as if by divine providence” to consume the wall. Eleazar, the commander of the besieged fortress, in contrast to Esarhaddon, interprets this as evidence of divine wrath against his people. What is more, this disaster is seen as caused by God Himself (not by the Romans) to punish the Jews for their behavior. See also the same version in Shalmaneser IV’s \textit{Letter to the god Ashur} (RIMA 3 A.0.105.3 rev. 1’–2’).}

\footnote{Although the victorious campaign is depicted as achieved with the help of the god Ashur (RINAP 4 33 iii 31’), the miracle is surprisingly attributed to Marduk, who is given the title “the king of gods” (\textit{šar ilāni}) usually reserved to Ashur. On the ascendancy of Marduk in the hierarchy of gods as reflected in the Assyrian royal inscriptions of the ninth to eighth centuries, corresponding with the actual involvement of certain Assyrian monarchs in the affairs of Babylonia, see Tadmor, in Tadmor, Landsberger, and Parpola 1989, 25–26.}

\footnote{RINAP 4 1 i 15–19, 50–52, 80–81; 33 (K 7599) ii 1.}
vice its significance where it is present, and where it is so often taken for granted.”

V. Opposition to Esarhaddon’s Rule
The gravity of the failure in Egypt appears even greater in light of the abundant evidence on the opposition to Esarhaddon’s rule throughout all his reign, which he began to struggle with at the time of his problematic nomination as Sennacherib’s successor. According to the Babylonian Chronicle: “On the twentieth day of the month Tebet Sennacherib, king of Assyria, was killed by his son in a rebellion (ina sīḫi). For [twenty-four] years Sennacherib ruled Assyria. The rebellion continued in Assyria from the twentieth day of the month Tebet until the second day of the month Adar. On the twenty-eighth/eighteenth day of the month Adar Esarhaddon, his son, ascended the throne in Assyria” (Chron. 1 iii 34-38). The early royal correspondence reflects this long struggle, which lasted about two months. According to Bel-ushezib (see above, section III), Esarhaddon “evaded execution [by fleeing] to the Tower (URU.a-ši-t[i…])” (SAA X 109). Likewise, Mardi, probably a Babylonian, mentions in his letter to the king how he escaped to the tower (URU.i-si-ti) together with Esarhaddon (SAA XVI 29). These two early letters corroborate Esarhaddon’s reference to his asylum (RINAP 4 i 39). Bel-ushezib’s emphasis that plotting the murder of Esarhaddon and his officials continued “every day” (ūmussu SAA X 109 12’) implies persistent resistance by the opposition. Similarly, Bel-ushezib’s mention of his victory over another exorcist (who might have supported an alternative candidate) and his stress on his own decision to be loyal to Esarhaddon (SAA X 109 10’–11’) may also reflect a dispute over the throne. An additional letter, written just after Sennacherib’s murder (SAA XVI 95), again testifies to turbulence during this period. It describes how a governor (šaknu) of Assur or Nineveh entered the palace during funeral festivities in Assur and rescued his wife, who had been brought there by Sennacherib. Moreover, this same official appointed his eunuch as mayor (ḥazannu) and set up a ceremony during which his other eunuchs “stand in the presence of the mayor, dressed in festive robes and wearing golden rings, while the singer, Qisaya, and his daughters keep singing (hymns) before them” (SAA XVI 95 7–11). This significant administrative change immediately after Sennacherib’s murder was followed by another momentous incident, when the governor suddenly appeared with his troops (šābēšu) armed with swords. At the sight of this threat, the author of this letter called upon the vizier and another man, urging them to seize the governor. Although missing parts make interpretation of the letter difficult, the preserved details do not leave any doubt that the governor planned to take advantage of the funeral, as well as of Esarhaddon’s absence, to seize power in a coup d’état backed by the army.

70 Beetham 1991, 6. Cf. divine appointment in biblical historiography as legitimizing element marked only in cases of irregular enthronement (Saul: 1 Sam. 10:1; David: 1 Sam. 16:13; Jehu: 2 Kgs. 9:1-6), as noted by the Talmud: “A king who is the son of a king does not require anointing unless there is a claim (of another) to the throne,” Babylonian Talmud, Kerithoth 5b; Palestinian Talmud, Sheqalim 6:1.
71 For dating of this letter to the very beginning of Esarhaddon’s reign, see Parpola 1980, 179.
72 For the word tower related apparently to the idiom ana isīti ḫalāqu, in which it “may refer either to the northern, mountainous region, or a specific fort somewhere,” see SAA XVI, 28, n. 6.
73 For a discussion of this letter, see Frahm 1997, 184.
74 The description of the governor’s appearance in the vicinity of the palace accompanied by soldiers armed with swords evidently signifying his plan to seize the throne recalls the priest Jehoiada’s appearance with armed soldiers in the Temple with the intention to remove Athaliah and install Joash on the throne of Judah (2 Kgs. 11:4–12).
with the final passage of the *Apology*, which mentions soldiers (ṣābī) being involved in the rebellion against Esarhaddon (RINAP 4 i 8–11).

This survey of evidence concerning opposition to Esarhaddon at the beginning of his reign requires a note concerning his brothers’ fate. The context of the *Apology* seems to indicate that they escaped from Assyria, which corresponds with the biblical evidence (2 Kgs. 19:37). Moreover, Esarhaddon’s brothers are not listed with his executed opponents, referred to at the end of the *Apology*. If the annihilation of his brothers had occurred, one would expect to find it referred to. Hence, there is room for conjecture that his brothers, as rivals to the throne, threatened his power throughout his reign.

Esarhaddon’s opponents at the later stage are mentioned in the *Letter to the god Ashur* in connection with his campaign to Shubria (673). This expedition is presented as aimed to punish the king of Shubria for his refusal to extradite Assyrian fugitives. Some of these, at least those listed in Tablet 1, were political fugitives, opponents of Esarhaddon’s “[... who did not] keep the oath of the god Ashur, king of the gods, who did not fear my lordship, [...]”, robbers, thieves, or those who had sinned (ḫīṭu iḫṭû), those who had shed blood, [...of]icials, governors (pâḫâtu), overseers (ašlī), leaders (šāpiru), (and) soldiers (rēdû) who fled to the land Shubria” (RINAP 4 33 ii 1–3). They are accused of betraying the loyalty oath and are designated as “robbers,” “thieves,” “those who had sinned,” or “those who had shed blood”—terms used to describe rebels in other places.

Tablet 1, discussed above, which lists political fugitives who fled to Shubria (RINAP 4 33 ii 1–3), suggests that they reached this country before 673. Shubria is mentioned as a place of asylum for Assyrian political fugitives in Sargon’s royal correspondence (SAA V 35 and 52).

Esarhaddon’s high level of anxiety regarding the possibility of unexpected attack by his opponents is attested in his queries to Shamash regarding the loyalty of potential officials. One such example refers to Ashurbanipal as the crown prince and thus must be dated not earlier than 672 (SAA IV 150). In another query, the king is preoccupied with the possibility of rebellion: “[I ask you, Shamash], great [lo]rd, whether Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, (should) appoint the man whose name is written in this papyrus and placed before your great divinity, to the position which is written in this papyrus, and (whether) he will instigate an insurrection (sīḫu) and rebellion (bārtu) against Esarhaddon, king of [Assyria], and Ashurbanipal, the crown prince of

---

75 Leichty (1991, 52–57) associates these fugitives with those mentioned by Esarhaddon in the *Apology* as having escaped to an unknown land after the battle in Hanigalbat. In particular, he associates them with the murderers of Sennacherib, including Sennacherib’s son Arda-Mullissu, who, according to the Bible, took refuge in Urartu.

76 The *Letter to the god Ashur* is preserved in two cuneiform texts, a longer one (K.2852 + K.9662 [Tablet 2]) and a very short one (K.7599 [Tablet 1]) which, scholars agree, were not written by the same scribe and do not necessarily belong together; Leichty 1991, 52, nn. 2 and 3 with earlier literature.

77 Cf. *Esarhaddon’s Succession Treaty*, where the verbs ḥāṭī, “to sin,” and ụbâlu epšu bārtu, “to revolt” stand in parallelism (SAA II 6 66–67), and see also SAA XVI 59 4–5, in which sinning against the treaty means fomenting conspiracy.

78 In comparison, Tablet 2 in several passages uses only the term “fugitives” (ḫalqu munnabtu; RINAP 4 33 i 16, 19; iii 23’). In light of these passages, they appear to be people fleeing from their owners in search of asylum in Shubria, who must be returned, rather than Esarhaddon’s political opponents (RINAP 4 33 iii 23’–24’). Surprisingly, the political fugitives enumerated in Tablet 1 are not mentioned at all in Tablet 2. For identification of the fugitives mentioned in the *Letter to the god Ashur* as not only political deserters, see Eph’al and Tadmor 2006, 167.

79 For an interpretation of these letters, see Dubovský 2006, 46–49.
the Succession Palace, (or) will cause others to instigate it, (or) will act with evil intent against them?” (SAA IV 156).80

The most crucial piece of evidence of the opposition to Esarhaddon in the later years of his reign is the record in the chronicles: “The eleventh year: In Assyria the king put his numerous officers (rabûtišu mādūtu) to the sword” (Chron. 1 iv 29 and Chron. 14 27). This massive slaughter in 670 forms the basis of a consensus that a rebellion against Esarhaddon took place around 671 and, consequently, that plots against Esarhaddon discussed below were part of one broad upheaval.81 But while the royal correspondence indicates that three kernels of conspiracy were fomented in Harran, Nineveh, and Assur, there is no indication as to whether any cooperation existed among the leaders of these plots. Moreover, the assumption of a broad upheaval is based on the somewhat uncertain dating of the letters mentioning conspiracies to 671.82

As a matter of fact, only one of the above-mentioned conspiracies, namely that organized in Harran and reported to the king by Nabu-rehtu-uṣur, may be approximately dated (SAA XVI 59–61). The presentation of this conspiracy as a violation of both Esarhaddon’s father’s and Esarhaddon’s treaties suggests a terminus post quem of 672.83 The organizer of the plot was Sasi, the mayor of a city (ša muḫḫi āli), backed by his accomplices in the royal palace in Nineveh. Sasi acted with the support of Nusku’s word, imparted through a slave girl: “The kingship is for Sasi. I will destroy the name and seed of Sennacherib” (SAA XVI 59 rev. 4‘–5‘).84 This slave girl, owned by a certain Bel-ahu-uṣur, delivered her prophetic message in a suburb of Harran. The plotters planned to kill the king in his palace: “[The men o]f Sasi have [set] an ambush, [saying: ‘The moment the king] will speak with us, [w]e shall kill] him [before he g]ets ahead (of us)” (SAA XVI 60 18). Nabu-rehtu-uṣur’s request of the king, “Do not destroy your life, [do not let] the kingship [slip] from your hands” (SAA XVI 59 11), reflects the gravity of this conspiracy to deprive Esarhaddon of the throne. This official accuses the scribe Issar-nadin-apli of concealing the plot from the king and urges Esarhaddon to bring all the conspirators from Harran to Nineveh for execution. Moreover, Nabu-rehtu-uṣur strengthens his warning with Mullissu’s words, which he had received in a vision (SAA XVI 60 10 and 61 8–10). The letters indicate a relatively long time frame for the fomentation of this plot. The slave girl of Bel-ahu-uṣur started to speak in Sivan, while Nabu-rehtu-uṣur had his vision in Marchesvan. The events described in these letters, therefore, lasted several months, which suggests systematic preparations involving cooperation of officials of different ranks led by the mayor of Harran. Likewise, Nabu-rehtu-uṣur’s counsel addressed to Esarhaddon to rescue his life “[from the hands of the e]unuchs” (SAA XVI 60)

80 On the relationship between the treaty obligation to denounce suspected officials to the king and the number of denunciations addressed to the king, see SAA XVI, xxi.
82 See the dating of SAA XVI 59–61 between Tebet 671/670 and Nisan 670 and of SAA X 179 in Marchesvan 671 by Nissinen 1998, 128 and 135. For the dating of the conspiracy in Assur to 671, see Frahm 2010, 111.
83 It is reasonable to understand the first reference to a treaty as referring to the loyalty oath mentioned in the Apology and the second as referring to Esarhaddon’s Succession Treaty. Cf. Nissinen 1998, 117.
84 On the gods who, according to this official, revealed the conspiracy to him, namely the god Nusku, worshipped in Harran, and the goddess Nikkal (the consort of Sin), worshiped in Sasi’s city, see Nissinen, 1998, 122, n. 460 with the bibliography therein.
indicates that important royal officials were involved in this conspiracy.\textsuperscript{85} This warning is very suitable to the circumstances, since a eunuch, more accurately a chief eunuch, was involved in the conspiracy in Nineveh referred to in SAA X 179.

In this Nineveh letter, which cannot be dated, a Babylonian diviner named Kudurru writes to the king that he was requested by Nabu-killanni, the chief cupbearer (\textit{rab šāqê}), to perform a divination before Shamash in order to clarify whether the chief eunuch (\textit{rab ša rēši}) would take over the kingship (SAA X 179 5'). Kudurru, after performing the divination, confirmed that indeed “He will take over the kingship” (SAA X 179 11'). Kudurru was summoned by Nabu-killanni from the temple of Bel Harran, most likely in Nineveh.\textsuperscript{86} The four people presented at this ritual, besides Nabu-killanni, included an anonymous mayor of a city (\textit{ša muḫḫi āli}). The leader of this conspiracy was the chief eunuch, not mentioned by name,\textsuperscript{87} whereas the rebel planning to seize the throne in Nabu-rehtu-uṣur’s letter is Sasi, the mayor of Harran. Therefore, the plots described in SAA X 59–61 and 179 seem to be separate conspiracies, the former under the leadership of Sasi (\textit{ša muḫḫi āli}) and the latter under the leadership of the chief eunuch (\textit{rab ša rēši}).

A third plot attested by another letter was a conspiracy organized in Assur by Abda, the governor of the city (\textit{ša muḫḫi āli}), and by Sasi, another official whose function is not mentioned.\textsuperscript{88} In this letter, Nabu-ushallim, a royal informer “who tells the king everything that he sees and hears” (lines 5f.), writes to the king about two politically significant dreams of Abda.\textsuperscript{89} The governor saw a boy rising from a grave, holding a \textit{ḫuṭartu}-rod, which he handed to him, saying, “In the shadow of this \textit{ḫuṭartu}-rod you will become strong.”\textsuperscript{90} In another dream Abda saw a star (\textit{kakkubu}) in the middle of the body of the dead king Sennacherib. Nabu-ushallim, who is not attested in any other texts, is credited here with possessing dream-interpretation skills.\textsuperscript{91} For this reason, Abda probably summoned him as someone able to clarify his two visions. Although their details are obscure, the content of the first dream does not leave any doubt that the governor of Assur planned to seize the throne.\textsuperscript{92} Additional evidence of such a plan is the conclusion of the \textit{adê}-treaty by Abda with 120 elite officials, sealed with an oath and the slaughter of an ox, immediately following the consultation with Nabu-ushallim (lines 35f.).\textsuperscript{93} The plotters wanted Nabu-ushallim to join their conspiracy, but he refused because of his loyalty to the king. Therefore, the possibility cannot be excluded that they were interested in his backing Abda’s

\textsuperscript{85} Cf. also eunuchs as potential rebels mentioned in the Zakkutu treaty (SAA II 8 21).

\textsuperscript{86} Nissinen 1998, 134.

\textsuperscript{87} For a discussion concerning his identity with Ashur-naṣir (SAA X 377), see Nissinen 1998, 147f. and Mattila 2000, 62.

\textsuperscript{88} Frahm 2010, 89–137.

\textsuperscript{89} For a typology of dreams in the ancient Near East, see Oppenheim 1956, 181–217. For an assessment of this important typology of dreams and its limits, see Noegel’s introduction to Oppenheim 1956 (2008), iv*–vii*. For a classification of the first dream as a “symbolic-message” dream anchored in Oppenheim’s tradition, see Frahm 2010, 117; cf. Butler 1998, 15–20.

\textsuperscript{90} On the \textit{ḫuṭartu}-rod as a mark of royalty, see Frahm 2010, 101.

\textsuperscript{91} On interpreters of dreams in the ancient Near East, see Oppenheim 1966, 341–350, esp. 349–350. For interpreters of dreams in the correspondence during the Sargonid period, see Pongratz-Leisten 1999, 116–118.

\textsuperscript{92} Frahm 2010, 117.

\textsuperscript{93} For a discussion of offerings of animals in the context of swearing and concluding treaties, see Frahm 2010, 105f. See also Adoniah’s sacrificing sheep, oxen, and fatlings in presence of his protagonists to signify a \textit{coup d'état} (1 Kgs. 1:5, 10, 24–26).
claim of divine approval, because of his dream-interpretation ability. Following Nabu-usshallim’s refusal to be involved in this conspiracy, Abda and Sasi denounced him to Esarhaddon. This is why he explains in the letter to the king that the accusations of Abda and Sasi are false and advises that the plotters should be brought to Nineveh.\(^94\) This letter is very significant when read in light of the previously discussed SAA XVI 95, which describes an attempted rebellion by the governor (šaknu) of Assur following Sennacherib’s death. In both instances, the city of Assur appears as the kernel of opposition to Esarhaddon, with an important military force at the disposal of the conspirators, a crucial instrument for a successful coup d’état.\(^95\)

In addition to identifying Harran, Nineveh, and Assur as kernels of conspiracies against the king, some other letters refer to conspiracies without reference to their location. One such example is the letter of Urad-Nanaya, the chief royal physician, blessing the king for revealing a plot: “Ashur and the great gods bound and handed over to the king these criminals who plotted against (the king’s) goodness and who, having concluded the king’s treaty together with his servants before Ashur and the great gods, broke the treaty. The goodness of the king caught them up” (SAA X 316).\(^96\) Urad-Nanaya’s encouragement to the king, stating that the gods will not abandon him and the crown prince (rev. 9), allows us to date this letter to 672 at the earliest.

Another looming conspiracy, still without geographical identification, may be deduced from a letter of Adad-shumu-uṣur, one of the most important royal exorcists (SAA X 199). This scholar accuses his mother (and those with whom she shared the information about the plot) of concealing it from Esarhaddon. In condemning their conduct, he paraphrases the loyalty oath stipulation (SAA II 6 80–81 and 119–120): “Anyone who hears something (but) does not inform the king …” (SAA X 199 rev. 20’–21’).

There is also evidence of support given by the Babylonians to Esarhaddon’s opponents.\(^97\) Shuma-iddin, a member of the personnel of the Esagila temple in Babylon, writes to the king about two eunuchs (šūt rēši) who have escaped from Assyria to Babylon (SAA XIII 178). An anonymous royal delegate offered them shelter in his house and afterward sent them to Borsippa. Shuma-iddin advises the king to dispatch a messenger to Borsippa and bring them back “before they hear and go somewhere else” (rev. 14–15). He stresses that he does not have the ability to bring these eunuchs from Borsippa. The same official also mentions another eunuch (ša rēši) captured on Esarhaddon’s request and assures the king that he will bring him back to Nineveh on the first possible occasion.

The evidence presented throughout this section shows preparations of conspiracies in three important cities and identifies their different leaders. These plots, in combination with the evidence of other conspiracies whose locations and leaders cannot be identified, suggest that

---

\(^94\) Note the similarity to Nabu-rehtu-uṣur’s advice to bring the plotters from Harran to the capital in SAA XVI 59 6’–8’.

\(^95\) For some tensions between Esarhaddon and the citizens of Assur following suspension of their privileges, see SAA XVI 96 and RINAP 4 57 ii 27—iii 15. For the history of relations between Assyrian kings and the city Assur, see Machinist 2016 with an earlier bibliography.

\(^96\) For a possible reference in a letter to Esarhaddon’s annihilation of his many officials, see Nissinen 1998, 129; Frame 1992, 101; Parpola 1983, 238.

\(^97\) While opposition to Esarhaddon’s rule in Assyria was rooted in his election to the kingship against the accepted rules of succession, in Babylonia he was opposed as a foreign ruler. Attempted rebellions in this region were not due to concerns about his right to be the legitimate heir but to the desire to cast off the foreign yoke. This is why the issue of opposition to Esarhaddon’s rule in Babylonia is not discussed in this paper.
there were several separate attempts to seize the throne. This interpretation seems to correspond with the evidence of Chron. 1 iv 29 and Chron. 14 27, which record the annihilation of many of Esarhaddon’s officers (rabûtišu mādūtu) without any reference to a rebellion. One would expect that if such a great upheaval took place, there would be references to it, since important conspiracies are usually mentioned in the chronicles. The best example is the rebellion referred to as bārtu in the tenth year of Nebuchadnezzar, during which “he put to the sword his large [army]” or “his numerous leading persons/officials” (Chron. 5 rev. 21–22).\(^{98}\) In brief, the only information in Chron. 1 iv 29 and Chron. 14 27 is that Esarhaddon had opponents among his important officials and put many of them to death.\(^{99}\) The evidence regarding the opponents to Esarhaddon’s rule surveyed above indicates their affiliation with the central administrative apparatus and military hierarchy. Among them are mentioned officials such as the chief eunuch (rab ša rēši) and the chief cupbearer (rab šāqê), both of whom resided in Nineveh, as well as other eunuchs (šūt rēši), as involved in plots.\(^{100}\) Among the representatives of the local administration, the governor (šaknu) of Assur and several officials given the title of mayor of a city (ša mubhi āli) are listed as fomenting conspiracies.\(^{101}\) The plotters refer to prophets’ words, divinatory techniques, or dreams for this purpose, which illustrates the extent to which the motif of divine approval of a ruler was common among officials of the Assyrian administration and military commanders. Thus, Sasi backs his claim to the throne by the word of Nusku received through prophecy.\(^{102}\) The chief eunuch’s conspiracy is supported by a response to the question addressed to Shamash by a haruspex (bārû).\(^{103}\) And finally, Abda from Assur backs his claim to kingship by a politically significant dream related by him to Nabu-ushallim.\(^{104}\)

Prophetesses and other specialists are presented as particularly dangerous to the king. For example, it is written that the girl who conveyed the word of Nusku to Sasi should be brought to Nineveh.\(^{105}\) Likewise, Kudurru, conscious that the ritual he performed threatens the king, confesses his actions to Esarhaddon.\(^{106}\) Nabu-ushallim, like Kudurru, is afraid that his assistance to Abda will be construed as involvement in conspiracy and uses his letter to reaffirm his

---

\(^{98}\) For the reading GAL.MEŠ-šu mādūtu, see Wiseman 1985, 34. Wiseman’s reading is to be preferred for its parallel to Chron. 1 iv 29 and Chron. 14 27. See also the rebellion against Sennacherib (Chron. 1 iii 6–8) and the rebellions against the kings of Elam (Chron. 1 iii 13–14).

\(^{99}\) For an annihilation of royal officials several years after a successful coup took place, see 2 Kgs. 14:5 on Amaziah, king of Judah: “As soon as the kingdom was established in his hand, he slew his servants who had slain the king his father.”

\(^{100}\) SAA X 179 and XIII 178. On the central position of the chief eunuch (rab ša rēši) in the army and military functions of the chief cupbearer (rab šāqê), see Mattila 2000, 73–75 and 59; see also Grayson 1995, 91–97.

\(^{101}\) SAA XVI 95 and XVI 59; Frahm 2010, 92, lines 13 and 18.

\(^{102}\) SAA XVI 59 rev. 4’. Involvement of a prophetess is also cited in connection with the nomination of Damqi, the son of a temple administrator, as a substitute king in Babylonia in 671 (SAA X 288). Mar-Issar’s report on the funeral ceremonies following the death of Damqi contains a quotation from a certain prophetess addressed to Damqi earlier: “You will take over the kingship!” (SAA X 352). The formula suggests that Damqi planned to seize the throne, thereby justifying his claim in the prophecy. It cannot be excluded that he was chosen as a substitute king for his anti-Assyrian feelings (for political enemies of the king as suitable substitutes, see Parpola 1983, xxiv). The suggestion of Marduk-shakin-shumi, royal chief exorcist, to appoint a substitute king from among the Babylonians who were plotting against the king (SAA X 240) supports such a possibility (for dating of this letter to 671, see SAA X, 190). In this case, the procedure of appointing a substitute appears to be an effective way of removing a potential rebel.

\(^{103}\) SAA X 179 rev. 5’.

\(^{104}\) Frahm 2010, 92, lines 17–34.

\(^{105}\) SAA XVI 59 rev. 6’–8’.

\(^{106}\) SAA X 179 rev. 19’–23’.
loyalty to Esarhaddon.\textsuperscript{107} This presentation dovetails with \textit{Esarhaddon’s Succession Treaty}, which enumerates various kinds of diviners as dangerous to the king, whether as prophets, ecstasies, or inquirers of oracles, who should be denounced (SAA II 6 108–122). The claim to divine approval used by the opponents to Esarhaddon’s reign confirms that officials were generally familiar with the accepted criteria of royal legitimacy, discussed earlier in light of royal correspondence (see above section III). Still, these opponents also knew to transform this claim into support for their own practice. In other words, the claim to divine approval appears as an argument on both sides of a political struggle for power between the king and his opponents. The rich evidence of opposition to Esarhaddon in royal correspondence as well as the defeat in Egypt reported in the Babylonian Chronicle create a unique opportunity for considering the king’s intensive legitimizing effort as a policy intended to settle the legitimacy crisis. The concentration of arguments to convince the officials of his legitimacy based on all three criteria of legitimate power (rules of acquiring the power, standards of exercising power, and consent of subordinates, especially officials) and their crystallization within a short period of time seem to have been the outcome of a project involving considerable advance planning.\textsuperscript{108} Esarhaddon’s use of legitimizing rhetoric aimed at persuading the officials of his legitimacy in order to save his throne concurs with Weber’s view that recognition by subjects that a ruler is legitimate, meaning that he has a right to demand their obedience, strengthens the stability of political power.\textsuperscript{109} However, Esarhaddon’s struggle with the opposition until the very end of his reign indicates that the tremendous political and literary activity launched after his defeat in Egypt was only a partial success and that a number of his officials were not convinced of his right to reign. The strength of this opposition is attested by its continuation even after Esarhaddon’s victory in Egypt in 671. Esarhaddon’s annihilation of many of his officials in 670 indicates the limits of legitimization as a political instrument for maintaining stability of power. Esarhaddon ultimately saved his throne by military force, confirming Weber’s statement that legitimacy is effective for rulers but not essential, since they also have physical and nonphysical coercion at their disposal to ensure the execution of their will.\textsuperscript{110}

\textbf{VI. Conclusion}

1) The crisis of Esarhaddon’s legitimacy, which provoked intensive legitimizing literary and political activity, demonstrates that such a crisis may enable a better assessment of the very essence of the legitimacy of power.\textsuperscript{111} A survey of various sources relating to King Esarhaddon’s legitimacy written in this particular period offers a broad basis for reconstruction of its several elements. This variety of sources reveals royal legitimacy to be a socio-political phenomenon that mainly involves the king and his officials and is an object of struggle. These data supports a view of royal legitimacy as far more complex than simply following the accepted rules of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{107} Frahm 2010, 92, lines 5–8 and 94, lines 46–50.
\item \textsuperscript{108} According to Oppenheim (1979, 125, 132f.) the \textit{Letter to the god Ashur} was intended for the opposition in the city of Assur.
\item \textsuperscript{109} Weber 1978, 212f.
\item \textsuperscript{110} Weber 1978, 54.
\item \textsuperscript{111} Cf. Beetham 1991, 6.
\end{itemize}
acquiring power, which is how it is usually understood.\textsuperscript{112}

2) The evidence on the background of Esarhaddon’s legitimacy crisis, namely his defeat in Egypt in the context of his irregular succession and opposition to his rule, makes it possible to interpret Esarhaddon’s political and literary activity as aimed at maintaining the stability of his throne. This observation likewise fits Weber’s theory of legitimacy, according to which rulers cultivate belief in their legitimacy in order to maintain their power.\textsuperscript{113}

3) Esarhaddon’s case, which reveals the legitimacy of power as an instrument of rule, is unparalleled in the history of the ancient Near East. It indicates that this socio-political phenomenon must have existed, at least under particular conditions. Consequently, Esarhaddon’s case may serve as a heuristic tool useful for further studies on the legitimacy of royal power in the ancient Near East.

4) The use of modern theoretical constructs to understand socio-political phenomena in the ancient Near East turns out to be fruitful, and the conclusions of this study may be significant for sociology and political science.

\textit{Abbreviations}

Abbreviations are those of The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (CAD) with the following additions:


\textit{Bibliography}


\textsuperscript{112} See, for example, Seux 1980–83, 145–148; Garelli 1979, 320f.

\textsuperscript{113} Weber 1978, 213.


