

SARGON II'S ASCENT TO THE THRONE: THE POLITICAL SITUATION

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The Assyrian Annals do not deal with the political situation by which Sargon II ascended to the throne of Assyria in 722 B.C. The only hitherto known documentation is the fragment K. 1349, which H. Winckler published in cuneiform and which he partially edited¹. H.W.F. Saggs published a new elaboration, with a better copy of the cuneiform text². The fragment offers a brief but clear representation of the internal political situation of Assyria during Sargon II's ascent to the throne. To avoid unnecessary repetitions, we shall present here again only the passages of the fragment relevant to our analysis. The texts will be transcribed and translated in such a way as to take account of the cuneiform copies of both the above mentioned authors.

K 1349 (= SKT Pl. 1 = Iraq 37, Pl. IX)

Transliteration

4. *la uš-ta-en-nu-ú eš-ret*³ EŠ.BAR *la uš-tam-sa-ku*⁴ DINGIR *ma-nam-ma kab-tu ša*
I[.....]
5. AN-ú KI-tu₄ *ul-tu-nap-šá-qu-ma* KUR.MEŠ ù A.AB.BA *i-he-el-[l]u* LUGAL LUGAL.LU[GAL
.....]

¹) Cuneiform copy in H. Winckler, *Sammlung von Keilschrifttexten*, II: *Texte verschiedenen Inhalts*, Leipzig 1893-4, Pl. 1 (here = SKT). Partial edition in *Altorientalische Forschungen*, I (= AOF I), Leipzig 1897, pp. 403ff.

²) H.W.F. Saggs, *Historical Texts and Fragments of Sargon II of Assyria. I. The "Aššur Charter"*, Iraq 37 (1975), pp. 12-16. Copy on Pl. IX.

³) Cf. Saggs, *cit.*, p. 12.

⁴) In this context understood as stative of *nasāku*; the same expression in E. Ebeling, *Die Akkadische Gebetsserie "Handerhebung"* (DAWBIO 20), Berlin 1953 (here = Ebeling, AGH), p. 92, 2.

6. *la ip-par-ra-su-ma i-du i-ti-šú la in-net-ti-qu a-gu-ú ez-zu šu-ga-r[i-u⁵]*
 7. *mu-sa-hi-ip⁶ kul-lat la ma-gi-ri mu-lit-ti šak-ši u₄-mu na-an-du-ru šá a-na la na-[sa-ki⁷]*
 8. *muš-te-en-ni GIŠ.HUR-i-šú i-kan-na-ku za-mar ^dDANNA šá ina pa-rak LUGAL-ti-šú⁸ GIŠ.[G]U.Z[A-šú⁹]*
 9. *i-šal-la-lu ma-ti-tan e-til EN EN.EN la-biš na-mur-ra-ti sa-kip rag-gi da-iš [na-ka-ri⁹]*
 10. *mu-dip ge-e-ri [m]uš-ta-lu ra-a'-im te-ne-še-e-ti¹⁰ šá nu-ug-gat-su ra-bat-ma ša[m-r]u [...]*
 11. *a-ši[b] É.HUR.SAG.GAL.KU[R].KUR.[R]A ki-iš-ši pu-un-gu-li GIŠ.HUR ad-na-a-ti reš-ti-tu₄ EN BAL.TIL.[KI]*
 12. *URU ki-di-ni šu-bat pa-le-e qu-du-um da-ád-me NUN-e EN-šú LUGAL-GI.NA ENSÍ KUR-^da-š[ur₄]*
 13. *SIPA ke-e-nu na-du-[š]u ^dEN.LÍL ^dAMAR.UTU ìr-ka šá a-na ud-du-uš šip-ri É.GAL šuk-lul ki-du-de-[e]*
 14. *nu-mur ma-ha-zi i-na nup-har šal-mat SAG.DU ki-niš IGI.BAR-ni-ma ul-la-a re-ši-ia KUR-aš-šur a-na wa-[a-ri]¹¹*
 15. *ù šá-pa-ri ina ŠU.2-ia ú-mal-li [U]GU kib-ra-a-ti 4-i ú-šam-ri-ra GIŠ.TUKUL.MEŠ-[ia]*
 (...)
27. *[.....KUR.a]-mur-re-e¹² a-na GÌR.2-ia ú-šak-ni-[iš šal-la-ti¹³]*
 28. *a-n[a U]RU-ia URU.a-šur ub-la-ma áš-šú šá zik-ri p[i-ia iš-mu-u-ma¹⁴]*
 29. *il-lí-ku re-šu-ti BAL.TIL.KI URU ki-di-ni BA[LA-ia URU]¹⁵ la-bi-ru¹⁶ [.....]*

⁵) A similar expression appears as divine epithet in Ebeling, AGH, p. 72, 1.

⁶) Here to be read as participle D *musahhip*.

⁷) Saggs, *cit.*, p. 12, integrates *na-[a²-di² xxxxx]*.

⁸) Saggs, *cit.*, p. 12, hence reads *ina* GIŠ. Unfortunately, I cannot recognize any sign for *ina*, in either copy. The text is destroyed at this point, and it is not possible to assess its meaning from the context.

⁹) For this word combination see AHW., p. 168; CAD D, p. 121b. Saggs, *cit.*, p. 12, on the contrary integrates *[kul-lat a-a-bi]*.

¹⁰) *te-ne-še-e-ti* < *teneštu* is translated "Menschen" in AHW., p. 1347.

¹¹) Saggs, *cit.*, p. 14, reconstructs *pi-[qit-ti]*, "Übergabe/Belieferung/Überprüfung/Inspektion/Beauftragung/Verwaltungs-, Betreuungsbereich" (AHW., p. 865 A). Since the following word in l. 15 is also an infinitive, which is linked by a conjunction with the preceding word, one would rather expect the infinitive at the end of line 14. For this form in Neo-Assyrian, see AHW., pp. 1471f.

¹²) Saggs, *cit.*, p. 14, integrates at the beginning *[UN[?].MEŠ[?]]*, which I consider not certain on the basis of lines 23-25.

¹³) On the contrary, Saggs, *cit.*, p. 14, reads only *-[iš ...]*.

¹⁴) Cf. AHW., p. 1527b, and Saggs, *cit.*, p. 14.

¹⁵) Saggs, *cit.*, p. 14, reconstructs *BAL[A.MEŠ]*. In the first place, a trace of the sign MEŠ is not visible, and secondly, in his own cuneiform copy, the sign for URU can be clearly read.

¹⁶) A further *-tu* (so Saggs, *cit.*, p. 14) is no more legible, even if I would not rule it out.

30. *ma-ha-zu ši-i-ru šá^d a-šur₄ EN-šú a-na kib-r[a]-a-ti is-su-qa-šú mar-ka-[as LUGAL-ti]*
 31. *ša šá-nin-šú la i-šu-u šá ul-tu u[l-l]a il-ku tup-šik-ku la i-du-u UN.MEŠ-šú^{Id} [SILIM-ma-nu-MAŠ]¹⁷*
 32. *la pa-lih LUGA[L] gim-ri a-na URU šu^a-a-tú ŠU-su a-na HUL-ti ú-bil-ma iš-t[a-kan]*
 33. *UN.MEŠ-šú il-ku tup-šik-ku mar-ši-iš [UŠ-m]a¹⁸ i[m-t]a-ni ERÍN.MEŠ hup-šiš i-[.....]¹⁹*
 34. *EN.LÍL DINGIR.MEŠ ina ug-gat ŠÀ-šú BALA-[š]ú i[š-kip]²⁰ i]a-a-ti¹ LUGAL-GI.NA MAN [KUR-aš-šur] šá-[i-im]²¹*
 35. *ul-la-a SAG-ia GIŠ.GIDRI GIŠ.GU.ZA AGA ú-šat-me-ha-an-[ni]*
 36. *áš-šú šur-šud <<-ud>> kar-ri kun-ni BALA-ia za-k[u-s]u-nu [šá-ka-ni]²²]*
 37. *qé-reb É.ŠÁR.RA i-tal-lu-ki ma-har-šú áš-šú ba-lat ŠÀ-[bi-šú-nu]*
 38. *šá DUMU.MEŠ KUR šu-nu-ti za-ku-su-nu uš-ta-bil [k]a-bat-[ti]*
 39. *di-ku-ut KUR ši-si-ti LÚ.NIMGIR ina mi-ik-si ka-a-r[i]]*
 40. *É.KUR.MEŠ gab-bu šá KUR-aš-šur ú-zak-ki-šú-nu-ti AN.ŠÁR be-lí-[ia šal-ma-šú]²³*
 41. *ú-se-pis-ma ha-as-bu KÙ.BABBAR 20 [M]A.NA É sum-[k]u[?]-[t]a²⁴ [.....]*
 42. *UG[U]-šú áš-šur-ma ú-kín ma-ha[r]-šú [š]á šip-ru šá-a-tu iš-[tu áš-ri-šú i-tab-bal]²⁵*
 43. *[mu-sah]-hu-u²⁶ ši-ma-a-te AN.ŠÁR EN GAL-u iz-zi-iš li-[iš-i-im-šú]²⁷*

¹⁷) For the reconstruction of the personal name, see Winckler, AOF I, pp. 404-405.

¹⁸) Winckler, AOF I, p. 404 reads *mar-š[i-iš u[?]]*; Saggs, *cit.*, p. 14, *mar-š[i-i]š i[š-kun]*. The lacuna is rather too small for both of these integrations. Cf. also CAD I, p. 77a.

¹⁹) Saggs, *cit.*, p. 14, integrates further *i-[nu[?]-mi[?]-šú[?]]*. This reconstruction is quite uncertain.

²⁰) Here the cuneiform copies diverge: in Winckler's copy one can clearly read the signs *lam du du*, whereas in Saggs' copy only the first sign is recognizable (see. Pl. IX). For the unusual graphic form *iš-* instead of *is-*, when, as in this case, it pertains to the verb *sakāpu*, cf. other cases in AHW., p. 1011, *s.v. sakāpu* B5.

²¹) The verb *šāmulšīāmu* is used to mean a royal decision: cf. AHW., p. 1225. Furthermore, in Winckler's copy, the sign for *šá*, which Saggs reads as *iá*, is still clearly legible. He himself integrates *[k]a-iá-n[u xxxxx]*. In view of the breaks in the text, it is not possible to decide definitively which of the two copies bears the right reading.

²²) *zakūtu* + *šakānu* is a well attested combination: see AHW., p. 1507. The infinitive is integrated from the context. Saggs, *cit.*, p. 16, on the contrary, reconstructs *[tu[?]-ur[?]-ri[?] ...]*.

²³) Here Saggs, *cit.*, p. 16, foregoes any reconstruction.

²⁴) For this see Saggs, *cit.*, p. 16.

²⁵) Winckler, AOF I, p. 404, integrates *ittabal*, although this verbal form is not suitable for this context, since a state of affairs regarding the present or the future is expressed here. Saggs, *cit.*, p. 16, reconstructs only *iš-[li ...]*.

²⁶) In both copies it is possible to read the signs for the last two syllables clearly, and furthermore it is possible to recognize without difficulties two vertical wedges of the sign SAH, so that one may integrate the participle *musahhū*. Saggs, *cit.*, p. 16, on the other hand, reconstructs *[m]u^{1?}-šim^{1?}*.

²⁷) This reconstruction is based on the fact that the word combination *šāmu/šīāmu* + *šimatu* occurs very often: see AHW., p. 1225. It would be also very suitable for this context. Saggs, *cit.*, p. 37, on the contrary: *[i-ik[?]-kil[?]-mu[?]-šú[?]]*.

Translation

4. ... (he) who does not allow the sanctuaries to be altered (and whose) decisions are not hindered. The god, the exalted one, who [...]
5. sky (and) earth are caught in difficulty, lands and sea are in labour. The king of king[s ...]
6. not to be separated, whose borderstone cannot be crossed, whose rage is (as) a flood, [the *šugarrû*,]
7. he who puts down the disobedient and crushes the ones who gaze angrily, the storm, the aggressive one, who for those who [do not cast themselves in front of him? ... he who]
8. seals up rapidly whoever alters his plan. The god *Bēru*, whose royal sanctuary (and) whose t[hrone?, he who]
9. plunders all lands. The man, the lord of lords, who is clad in a terrible splendour, who pushes back the wicked, and tramples down [the enemy ...]
10. he who knocks down the opponent, who is judicious, who loves the people, but whose rage is great, the [ra]g[ing ...]
11. the dweller of *Ehursaggalkurkurra*, the very mighty sanctuary, the Archetype of the storeroom, the most noble, the lord of the city of Assur,
12. the privileged city, seat of dynastic kingship, abode of the prince from of old, and its lord Sargon, governor of Assy[ria],
13. the faithful shepherd, offspring of Illil (and) Marduk, your servant — for the renewal of the building-work of the palace (and) the fulfilment of the rituals,
14. to render pleasant the cultic city among the totality of the human race whom he looks upon faithfully, he raises my head; to rule the land of Assyria
15. and to administer (it), he handed it over in my hands. Over the four parts of the world he has made [my] weapons bitter.

(...)

27. [... the land of A]murru I subjugated to my feet [and the booty
28. I brought [into] my city, the city of Assur. And there she [has heard] the words [of my] mou[th and
29. has/have come to help; Assur, the privileged city of [my] king[ship], the old [city,
30. the main cultic city, the one which the god Aššur, its lord, has chosen for the wor[l]d as *marka[su* of his kingship,]
31. such, that nothing exists like it, whose people have ne[ve]r known the compulsory work and the *corvée*. But Sh[almaneser,]
32. who did not fear the king of the world, whose hands have brought sacrilege in this city, pu[t on ...]

33. on his people [he] impo[sed] the compulsory work and a heavy *corvée* and paid them like a working class [...]
34. The Illil of the gods, in the wrath of his heart, overthrew [hi]s rule, and [appointed] me, Sargon, as king [of Assyria].
35. He raised my head; he let [me] take hold of the sceptre, the throne (and) the tiara [...]
36. To place the foundations of the throne on a firm basis, to stabilize my rule and [to renew] their ta[x]-exemption [...]
37. to walk in front of him in the middle of the Ešarra, for the life [of its] hear[t ...]
38. inside which I have brought to the inhabitants of this city their tax exemption [...]
39. (From) levy of the land, proclamations of the herald, from taxes on yield and contribution[s ...]
40. I freed all these temples of Assyria. For the god Aššur, [my] lord, [...]
41. I had [a statue] made. A statue of silver, 20 minas (in weight), *šum*[*kutu*-building ...]
42. on it I wrote and presented (it) to him. Whoever [takes away] this work [from its place and]
43. vio[lates it], for him, may the god Aššur determine a fate of death.

The fragment was written down immediately after Sargon's seizure of power, since in l. 16 he reports on the military campaign against Elam²⁸, which he dates to the second year of his reign: *i-[na] 2-e BALA-ia šá ina GIŠ.GU.ZA LUGAL-ti ú-ši-bu-ma a-ge-e be-lu-ti an-na-[ap-ru-ma]*²⁹, "In the second year of my reign, after which I [had] sat on the royal throne and [had] put on the tiara of power, [...]" In this respect, K.1349 describes the outcome of the first two regnal years of Sargon. According to the Assyrian-Babylonian Chronicle, Sargon ascended the throne of Assyria in the twelfth day of the month *Ṭebētu* (X) in the fifth regnal year of Shalmaneser (V)³⁰, that is in the year 722/21 B.C. Interestingly enough, neither this text nor the eponym lists report disturbances in the region in relation to Sargon's seizure of power, a fact which allows the supposition that the new king did not emerge through major internal difficulties³¹.

Sargon indicates as reason for deposing Shalmaneser V the abolition of the tax exemption and the relevant introduction of new *corvées*, compulsory works and taxations in the city of Assur, to the extent that he feels they represented a disaster for this

²⁸) Probably meaning the Babylonian-Elamite coalition.

²⁹) For the reconstruction see AHW., p. 75, N1.

³⁰) A.K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles (Texts from Cuneiform Sources 5)*, Locust Valley 1975, Chron. 1, I, 29-31.

³¹) As more or less suggested by H. Donner, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel und seiner Nachbarn in Grundzügen* (ATD Ergänzungsreihe 4/2), Göttingen 1986, p. 317 (= *Geschichte*).

assume that not all social levels of the city were favoured by such privileges. The sources report on this mostly with a sweeping statement, without differentiating groups of persons: "The people of this/each city"⁴⁵, "the sons of the city of Assur"⁴⁶, "the sons of Babylon"⁴⁷, "the sons of Babylon and Borsippa"⁴⁸, "the sons of Sippar, Nippur (and) Babylon"⁴⁹. The inscriptions deal only sporadically with matters concerning groups of persons⁵⁰, such the *nāgīru*, the *šākin māti*, the *ša muhhi āli*, the *hazannu*, the *rāb ešerti*⁵¹, the *ramku*-priests⁵², and the *Ekurru*-institutions⁵³ with the personnel belonging to it⁵⁴.

It is clear, on the other hand, that the inscriptions of Sargon II do not provide a unitary picture in relation to the abolition of privileges in the city of Assur; whereas in K. 1349 he holds Shalmaneser V personally responsible for this policy, in other inscriptions he refers to a distant past: *za-kut BAL.TIL.KI ù URU.har-ra-na ša ul-tu U₄.MEŠ ul-lu-ú-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"⁵⁵.

At this point, it may be asked: to what extent has the fragment remained adherent to the historical facts? Are we dealing here with the factual cause for the overthrowing of Shalmaneser or rather with a justification of Sargon's ascent to the throne? On the part of Sargon, such a plot, based on historical arguments, is not unknown. In the same way, he justifies the attack against Mušasir: "Urzanâ, king of Mušasir, violated the oath of the god Aššur and trusted in Rusa of Urartu. Furthermore, he withheld from me the greeting-present and the tribute"⁵⁶. In reality, Mušasir had already, for a long time—probably since the last years of the reign of Shalmaneser III or under his successors—freed itself from Assyrian subjugation⁵⁷.

Furthermore, various pieces of information make us aware of the fact that the

⁴⁵) K. 1349, 31.

⁴⁶) *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁷) RAcc 130, 32.

⁴⁸) VS 1, 37, III, 24.

⁴⁹) VS 1, 37, 11. See also BA 6, 137, 4; YOS 1, 38, III, 28; Thompson, Iraq 7 (1940), 86, 1; BBS 35, 13; ABL 878, 10, rev. 7.

⁵⁰) I.M. Diakonoff, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, Moscow 1969, pp. 173ff., calls them "nobles", and determines from the evidence of the texts from Tello that this class-system existed more or less around 2500 B.C.. Also the ruler's family, palace officials and priests were included in it.

⁵¹) See Weidner, *cit.*, p. 40.

⁵²) See UET 1, 187, 7. See also ADD 640, 12 and ND 3413 (= Wiseman, Iraq 15 [1953], Pls. XI and XVIII), 1.

⁵³) See K. 1349, 39-40.

⁵⁴) See Weidner, *cit.*, p. 40.

⁵⁵) See also Weissbach, ZDMG 72 (1918), 176; Winckler, *Sg.*, 138.

⁵⁶) TCL 3, 309-312.

⁵⁷) For this point, see my article *Der VIII. Feldzug Sargons II. von Assyrien*, AMI Ergänzungsheft 2, in press.

introduction or respectively the abolition of tax exemption or of certain privileges for a particular city or group of persons were basically dependent on the generosity or non-generosity of the king. In addition to this, the sources confirm that such privileges were not always in existence in the city of Assur. In this connection, ABL 442, a letter addressed to Esarhaddon, is very illuminating: Obv. ¹*a-na* LUGAL E[N-i-ni] ²[i]R.MEŠ LÚ.h[a-za-na-te (ù)] ³[LÚ.pa]r-šú-mu-te š[a URU.ŠÀ-URU] (...) ¹³ú-ma-a ša É LÚ.ΓGAR²⁷ ¹⁴LÚ.qe-ba-a-ni ¹⁵ina UGU URU.ŠÀ-URU ¹⁶ip-ta-aq-du ¹⁷ŠE.nu-sa-hi i-na-su-Γhu¹⁸ ¹⁸ŠE.šib-še i-šab-bu-Γšú¹⁷ (Rev.) ¹at-ta NUMUN.MEŠ GIN ²ša ^{Id30}-PAP.MEŠ-SU ³at-ta DUMU-ka ⁴DUMU.DUMU-ka li-bu ⁵a-na le-e-bi ⁶aš-šur ^dUTU ik-tar-bu-ka ⁷LUGAL-u-tú ina muh-hi-ni a[t-ta] ⁸tu-pa-áš ina ti-ir-š[i-ka] ⁹ŠE.nu-sa-hi-ni i-š[i-i] ¹⁰ŠE.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.”⁵⁸.

It is a plea we are dealing with here, on the part of the servants of the king, the city mayors and elders, to Esarhaddon to reintroduce the abolished privileges in the city of Assur. This plea was really carried out by Esarhaddon: ŠE.nu-sa-hi šib-še mi-ik-si ka-a-ri né-še-ri ša KUR-ia ú-zak-ki-šú-nu-ti, “I freed them from corn tax and straw tax, from quay and ferry toll of my land”⁵⁹. Equally, we learn from the time of Adad-nirāri III that the herald, the provincial governor, the city prefect, the city mayor and the foreman had calls for *corvée* and service, all types announced in Assur through criers.

On the basis of the above presented material, the statement of Sargon concerning the abolition of privileges in Assur should be considered with caution. In this context, therefore, one should at least take into account the possibility that Tiglath-pileser III and Shalmaneser V had not actually introduced the *corvée* and service in the city of Assur, but rather that a policy which had already become customary was continued, as might be inferred from Winckler, *Sg.*, Pl. 40, V, 9-11. In this way, one might explain why

⁵⁸) Published in Waterman, RCAE, p. 308; re-edited in Postgate, TCAE, pp. 276-277 (cf. p. 181).

⁵⁹) Borger, *Ash.*, Ass. A, III, 8-11 (§ 2). The introduction of this policy is likewise attested in connection with other cities: see Unger, PKOM 3, IV, 21-22: ²¹UN.MEŠ a-šib lib-bi-šù il-ku tup-šik-ku la em-di, “*corvée* and forced labour are not imposed on the people who live in its midst”. This privilege introduced by Shalmaneser IV for the city Bēl-Harran-bēlu-ušur would later on be confirmed by Tiglath-pileser III. For this point, see Postgate, TCAE, p. 79. In addition to this, see also VA 3295 (= VS 1, 69), 12, an inscription of Shalmaneser IV: KUR-šù ki-din-na [a]z-qu-pa-am-ma; Streck, *Asb.*, p. 242, 29; 240, 10; 244, 48 (the reestablishment of the privileges in Babylon by Ashurbanipal); see also ND 3413 (Iraq 15 [1953]), n. XVIII, 1, Pl. 11), on which cf. *ibid.*, p. 139, and Postgate, TCAE, p. 70. This policy of privileges for particular cities can well be followed back to the beginning of the II millennium B.C.; in fact Išme-Dagan (1953-1935) relates that he has freed the citizens of Nippur from obligations and tribute: see Oates, *Babylon*, p. 66.

the inscriptions of both these kings are totally silent on the abolition of all privileges in the city of Assur.

This means, consequently, that Tiglath-pileser and Shalmaneser, in relation to the ancient cultic city Assur, as well as in relation to the temple-politics, preserved the old but the still existing order, despite their highly praised internal and foreign political reform or probably also for the sake of their “popular revolution”⁶⁰. Truly this must have been felt by the disadvantaged groups of people as a very deep change, and it led gradually to a general discontent and protest against the existing *régime*. This, in fact, could well have been the internal political situation in which Sargon ascended to the throne of Assyria. He knew all too well that the time had come to push through a new “reform” or “counter-reform” in his country. A “reform” that would restore to the hitherto disadvantaged priesthoods and notables—who with good reason totally supported the new conspiracy—their temporarily existing privileges. On this background, it is easier to understand K. 1349, 28-29, *áš-šú šá zik-ri p[i-ia iš-mu-u-ma ...] il-li-ku re-šu-ti*, “and because she⁶¹ [has heard] the word of [my] mou[th and ...] she has come to help me, ...”. This apparently is the reason why Sargon considered the ancient capital as the “privileged city” of his reign⁶². Even if this city had lost the seat of kingship in the later part of Sargon’s reign, and the latter had founded his own royal residence Dūr-Šarruken⁶³, it was at least able to retain its cultic and religious standing⁶⁴. The city remained the cultic capital⁶⁵, and was under the protection of this Assyrian king, so that he could proudly state that he was the *kašir kidennut Aššur baṭiltu*⁶⁶.

In addition, Sargon boasts in different occasions on the newly introduced privileges in the cities of Assur and Harran: *ka-a-šir ki-din-nu-te BAL.TIL.KI ba-ṭil-ta ša UGU URU.har-ra-na AN.DÜL-la-šú⁶⁷ it-ru-šu-ma ki-i ša-ab^da-nim u^dda-gan iš-ṭu-ru za-kut-sún*, “he who has re-established the abolished privileges of the city of Assur, who gave his protection to the city of Harran, and wrote their tax exemption according to the will of Anu and Dagan”⁶⁸; *ka-šir ki-din-nu-tu BAL.TIL.KI ba-ṭi-il-tu ... li-'i DÜ mal-ki ša UGU URU.har-ra-na AN.DÜL-la-šú it-ru-šu-ma ki-i ša-ab^da-nim u^dda-gan iš-ṭu-ru za-kut-su*, “he who has re-established the abolished privileges of the city of Assur ... the most capable of all princes, he who devoted his protection to the city of Harran and wrote its

⁶⁰) For this point, see Winckler, *Sg.*, II, Pl. 40, V, 9-11.

⁶¹) To indicate the city of Assur, here personified.

⁶²) See K. 1349, 12, 29.

⁶³) For this point, see Tadmor, *JCS* 12 (1958), pp. 85, 94.

⁶⁴) For the historical, political and cultic role of the city of Assur see B. Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel*, Roma 1981, pp. 34ff..

⁶⁵) *Ibid.*, p. 34, and vol. 2, fn. 362.

⁶⁶) See Borger, *BAL* I, p. 59, 4-9, and Lyon, *Sg.*, Pl. 1, 5; Pl. 20, 9-10.

⁶⁷) Winckler, *Sg.*, p. 146, IV, 11 has *šalu-la-šú* instead of *AN.DÜL-la-šú*.

⁶⁸) Winckler, *Sg.*, II, Pl. 38, 9-13; see *ibid.*, p. 146, IV. Cf. Weissbach, *ZDMG* 72 (1918), pp. 176ff..

tax exemption according to the will of Anu and Dagan⁶⁹. Here one must also compare Lyon, Sg., Pl. 13, 8-10; furthermore, 3R, Pl. 66, IV, 1-8⁷⁰, where the predicate URU UBARA surely refers to the city of Assur⁷¹, is relevant here⁷².

We have no reason to discount this policy of privileges by Sargon, especially in regard to Assur and Harran, or to consider them simply as pure propaganda. In fact, it belongs to the fundamental part of his political program, and it may be detected for the whole period of his reign. About this we are informed not only by the Annals, but also by a letter of Ṭāb-šill-Ešarra, who complains to him because of taxes (ABL 99, Rev. 6' *ú-ma-a ki-i LUGAL EN URU.ŠÀ-URU* 7' *ú-za-ku-ni il-ku ša URU.ŠÀ-URU* 8' *ina UGU-hi-ia ka-ri-ru-u-ni*, "Now that the king, my lord, has exempted the Inner City and the *ilku*-duty of the Inner City has been imposed on me").

With this particular consideration of the city of Assur and of Harran, and his politics inclined toward the priesthood, Sargon clearly veers away from his predecessors. But he did not confine this policy only to the above mentioned cities. It concerned all sacred places of the country and in addition—surely after 710 B.C.—Babylon⁷³. The constantly repeated presentations of gifts to the gods or to the temples and priests⁷⁴ are likewise connected to these politics. His inscriptions relate, with epical amplitude, that he brought his royal offerings in the temple and placed them before Aššur and the gods of Assyria⁷⁵, before Marduk and Nabû⁷⁶, before Marduk, Šarpanitum, Nabû and Tašmetum, the great gods of Šumer and Akkad⁷⁷, or before Sibittum⁷⁸. These facts could, on the other hand, be evidence that his religious politics were not motivated by some chauvinistic nationalism, like, in some ways, the ones of his successor. In fact, his decisions embraced his whole empire.

A further feature are the extensive religious epithets which he acquired for himself and which are surely to be explained in the context of the very same politics: *migir ilāni*

⁶⁹) Lyon, Sg., Pls. 1-2, 5-6.

⁷⁰) See also 3R, Pl. 66, VIII, 3-13: see Winckler, Sg., p. 146, IV.

⁷¹) See edition of the text in Frankena, *Takultu*, p. 6.

⁷²) Frankena, *Takultu*, pp. 1ff., 128, dates the text between 717 B.C. and the reform of Sennacherib. Most probably it belongs rather to the time of Sargon, since Sennacherib, as suggested both by ABL 442 and Borger, *Ash.*, Ass. A, III, 8-11 (§ 2), had again revoked the privileges in the city of Assur. Moreover, the use of such a predicate (URU UBARA = *āl kidinni*) for the city of Assur is attested in Sargon's texts: see K. 1349, 12, 29.

⁷³) See Winckler, Sg., II, Pl. 30, no. 73, 7, and the duplicate Iraq 7 (1940), p. 86, 1.

⁷⁴) These were mostly of the war-booty type: see Winckler, Sg., pp. 429 ff., 172, 18; TCL 3, 316.

⁷⁵) See the Annals, Winckler, Sg., pp. 430-1; the Display Inscriptions (Winckler, Sg., pp. 130-132, 167-174; pp. 154-156, 123-130; TCL 3, 316).

⁷⁶) Cf. Winckler, Sg., 310-313 (Annals).

⁷⁷) Cf. Weidner, AfO 14 (1941/4), p. 51, 1-12; Winckler, Sg., p. 126, 143-144; pp. 178-179, II, 5-22.

⁷⁸) Cf. RA 12 (1915), p. 187.

*rabūti*⁷⁹, *iššak Aššur*⁸⁰, *šangū*⁸¹, *mupiq dēn Šamaš*⁸², *palih ilūti*⁸³, *palih Nabû Marduk*⁸⁴, *palih mamit Nabû Marduk*⁸⁵, *la mupparkū ipalah Nabû Marduk*⁸⁶, *našir zikri Aššur*⁸⁷, *našir Illil Marduk*⁸⁸, *našir kitti*⁸⁹, *nadušu Illil Marduk*⁹⁰, *na'id Aššur*⁹¹.

Such epithets are surely not only limited to propaganda; rather, they show the favour accorded by Sargon to the cultic personnel. From the beginning, he was politically committed to the priesthood of Assur, but also to the one of Harran. One could understand the *Sitz im Leben* of these epithets⁹² in the context of the privileges reintroduced by him, for all the temples and sacred places of his kingdom⁹³. In other words, the following may be singled out: if the god Aššur does not want the privileges of protection and the cultic traditions of his sanctuaries to change, he only needs a tool, whereby his will may become reality. This "tool" could only have been represented by the king and priests. Here the king's always emphasized duty as *našir* of the *zikri Aššur*, of the *mamit Nabû u Marduk*, and of the *kitti*, would find explanation, and correspondingly his description as *palih* of the *mamit Nabû u Marduk*, or more simply, of the *ilāni*⁹⁴.

Who was then this man, who understood how to cope with the internal and foreign political problems of Assyria by a master strategy? Sargon has gone down in the secondary literature as an "usurper"⁹⁵, an opinion that is based on the programmatically assumed name *Šarru-kēnu* and on the silence of the sources on his origins. In fact,

⁷⁹) In the Annals and in the Display Inscriptions: Winckler, *Sg.*, p. 80, 1; 96, 3; 146, 4; 158, 4; 164, 2; 174, 4; also Borger, BAL I, p. 59, 2; 60, 4. In the Nimrud prism: Gadd, Iraq 16 (1954), p. 175, 5-6; in the stone-inscription: Lyon, *Sg.*, 40; in a bronze-inscription: *ibid.*, p. 48.

⁸⁰) Winckler, *Sg.*, p. 164, 1; 168, 1; 193, no. 7a and b, 2; 195, no. 11; Borger, BAL I, p. 59, 1.

⁸¹) TCL 3, 5.

⁸²) TCL 3, 112.

⁸³) TCL 3, 5; furthermore Postgate, NRGD, p. 64, 62. *ilūti* mostly refers to the god Aššur.

⁸⁴) TCL 3, 156.

⁸⁵) Winckler, *Sg.*, p. 188, 37.

⁸⁶) TCL 3, 156.

⁸⁷) Winckler, *Sg.*, p. 188, 37f..

⁸⁸) TCL 3, 112.

⁸⁹) TCL 3, 156.

⁹⁰) K. 1349, 13.

⁹¹) Cylinder Inscription: Lyon, *Sg.*, p. 30, 1.

⁹²) Here the epithets are not listed completely.

⁹³) K. 1349, 40. All this took place from the very beginning of his reign, as reported in the same text.

⁹⁴) Another expression, utilized almost schematically, is to pray the god (Aššur) for a godly response through some concrete action: TCL 3, 124-125; 161; 162; Winckler, *Sg.*, p. 8, 43; 10, 47; 16, 76; 132, 174-175; 156, 125; 172, 19f..

⁹⁵) See A. T. E. Olmstead, *Western Asia in the Days of Sargon II of Assyria, 722-705 B.C.*, New York 1908, p. 33; B. Meissner, *Könige Babylonien und Assyrien*, Leipzig 1925, p. 174; W. von Soden, *Herrscher im alten Orient*, Berlin 1954, pp. 94ff.; Donner, *Geschichte*, 2, pp. 316ff..

nowadays, this assumption must not be viewed without doubts. This personal name could find quite probably explanation as a phonetic reproduction of the contracted pronunciation of *Šarru-ukīn* to *Šarrukīn*; so that it should be interpreted not as “legitimate/just king” but as “the king has obtained/established order”⁹⁶. The form *Šarru-ukīn* is well attested in private documents⁹⁷.

In 1933, Unger⁹⁸ published a small inscription, which he had found under the fayences in the Istanbul Museum. It dealt with the filiation of Sargon, who indicates himself as son of Tiglath-pileser III: É.GAL ¹MAN-ú-ki-in MAN GAL MAN *dan-nu* MAN ŠÚ MAN KUR-aš-šur A ¹TUKUL-ti-A-É.ŠÁR.RA MAN KUR-aš-šur-ma, “Palace of Sargon, great king, powerful king, king of the world, king of Assyria, son of Tiglath-pileser (III), king of Assyria too”. This inscription is the only known piece of evidence for the filiation of Sargon⁹⁹. Interestingly enough, Sargon is not the only Neo-Assyrian king whose patronymic remains unmentioned. The same feature may be found also for Tiglath-pileser III: his official annals are totally silent concerning his origin, apart from a three-line brick inscription in which the name of his father is specifically mentioned: É.GAL ¹TUKUL-ti-A-É.ŠÁR.RA / MAN KUR-aš-šur A ¹<^d>U-ÉRIN.TAH MAN KUR-aš-šur ša ki-gal-li ša É ^daš-šur, “Palace of Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, son of Adad-nirāri (III), king of Assyria: from the plinth of the Aššur temple”^{99,100}. Likewise, Sennacherib does not present himself as son of Sargon: we learn that he was a legitimate son of Sargon only from texts composed during the reign of his son Esarhaddon¹⁰¹.

Summing up the evidence, the old opinion that Sargon was an usurper cannot be supported without doubts. He could have been, just as well, a son of Tiglath-pileser III and brother of Shalmaneser V; correspondingly, he would not have been the founder of a new dynasty. At least since Šamši-Adad II (1722-1714 B.C. ca.) to the end of the Assyrian empire members of the same dynasty sat on the throne of Assyria¹⁰². The peculiar silence on his father could as well be a sign of the fact that he wanted to begin a new period, with a new political program, or that he actually was in conflict with his dynasty — an element in part traceable through the immediate re-introduction of the privileges. What role Sargon played under Shalmaneser V, or what office he held,

⁹⁶) Winckler, *Sg.*, pp. XIV-XV, and E. Unger, *Sargon II. von Assyrien der Sohn Tiglatpilesers III* (IAMN 9), Leipzig 1933, pp. 17f..

⁹⁷) 3R, Pl. 3, no. 12; 4R, 53, 1; VA 209 (a borderstone) and Kudurru no. 69 (a stone mason); Winckler, *Sg.*, p. 174, 1; Schrader, KB II, pp. 34ff..

⁹⁸) Unger, *cit.*, pp. 16ff..

⁹⁹) The skepticism of the scholars is based exactly on this uniqueness.

¹⁰⁰) KAH 1, 21; earlier editions: Schwenzner, AfO 9 (1933-34), p. 47; cf. Weidner, AfO 3 (1926), p. 1, fn. 2.

¹⁰¹) In Esarhaddon's Royal Inscriptions, his filiation appears in the titular section, and in the *Sin of Sargon*, which was composed in his reign (S. Parpola - B. Landsberger - H. Tadmor, *The Sin of Sargon and Sennacherib's Last Will*, SAAB 3 [1989], p. 10, Obv. 10').

¹⁰²) Weidner, AfO 9 (1933-34), p. 79.

remains uncertain, because of the lack of sources¹⁰³. Nonetheless, it cannot be ruled out that he carried out some kind of priestly function or that he was active in this area, exactly because of his affection for this institution.

¹⁰³) The hypothesis advanced by Thompson, *Iraq* 4 (1937), p. 42, that Sargon had been the governor of Assur under Shalmaneser V, and that his name would have been preserved in Ptolemy's Canon as *Arkeanou*, has no documentary base.