III. THE KING:
A RECONSIDERATION OF THE PERSON OF EASHARADON

The conclusion of chapter II B1 necessitates a reconsideration of an essential part of the portrait of Easharadon. The hitherto established opinion is that he was an extremely superstitious man, and largely only an instrument in the hands of his courtiers. Cf., e.g., A.T. Olmstead, History of Assyria (1923), p. 347: "The new régime [of Easharadon], ... was to be under ghastly control of the priestly advisors." W. von Soden, Herrscher im alten Orient (1934), p. 125: "Die Bände bezeugen uns ferner, wie groß der persönliche Einfluß bestimmter Astrologen und Priester auf den offenbar nicht immer einen klaren Linien folgenden König war." R. Labat, Fischer Weltgeschichte 4 (1967), p. 81: "Easharadon war schon von Natur aus ein Zauberer, Unheilzweck, unangenehm, nie selten der Spitzel in den Händen seiner Ratgeber, lehrte er in ständiger Furcht vor ungünstigen Vorzeichen, Krankheit oder dem Zorn der Göter." This label of "superstitiousness" and "susceptibility" is, as we have seen, certainly justifiable to some extent: but it is out of place and untrue, if, as hitherto been done, it is used in contrast to his contemporaries or other Assyrian kings. The current opinion is clearly influenced by the fact that the main part of the letters of scholars, and reports of astrologers and haruspices belongs to (or has been dated to) Easharadon's reign; however, this very fact should warn of hasty conclusions, for the present distribution of the material does in no way represent the original one but is only a small fraction of the large correspondence once covering the whole reigns of Nineveh, Easharadon and Assyrian (see below, p. 49). With regard to the intimate character of the matters discussed above all in the letters of the physicians, the references to the king's anger (LA 224:11, 306:6, etc.), fear (440:6, etc.), mourning (140:1), sadness (141:1) and complaints (216:247) should be interpreted as commonly human traits rather than explicit characteristics of Easharadon. Similar characteristics would be found in letters addressed to other kings too. Study of the inscriptions of Easharadon does not suggest a weak ruler; on the contrary, his reign was generally perhaps the most successful one of all Assyrians. Since the portraits of most Assyrian kings are formed solely on the basis of their inscriptions, it would be hazardous to claim that Easharadon was inferior in ability to the other kings. 1

Furthermore it can be demonstrated that superstition was no special trait of Easharadon and that scientific experts (astrologers, diviners, even physicians, and "apartains") functioned as the king's advisors in other courts too. Two kings are usually contrasted with Easharadon, his father Sennacherib and his son Assurbanipal (see the preceding footnote). No letters, astrological reports or extispices addressed to Sennacherib have been preserved; we get, however, a revealing glimpse to his court through a Neo-Babylonian letter sent to Easharadon. BM 1216 (see R. Labat, RA 51 [1959] 113-118, and for translation of the crucial passage, note on Litt 1:6 11). According to this text, astrologers and diviners, headed by the "chief scribe" Kallon, sent regular reports to the king, just as in the reign of Easharadon, but everything is not so in Easharadon's court, the king might even dream of his ancestors. In the case of Sennacherib, the letter says that Sennacherib knew what had happened, that the king thought of his ancestors nagging him to do certain things. Easharadon's letter of 1310 (as noted in the next chapter) was addressed to the king, and he complicated his situation by casting a spell on his wife, saying, "The spell has been cast on me and my wife, and I have yet to break it." 

1 See below, p. 47.
2 Note especially his swift and determinate action after the murder of his father, the conquest of Egypt and other military successes (Manasseh, Zabara, the quelling of a revolt in 670 B.C., the extensive building operations in Babylon and other cities of Babylonia, the preparations for the transport of the crown of Manasseh to Babylon, and the political treaties intended to guarantee the security of the empire.
IV. ON THE DATING OF THE LETTERS

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

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

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

The absolute time limits of all letters under study are 722 and 612 B.C., during which time Nineveh (where the letters were found) was the capital of Assyria. These limits can, however, be considerably narrowed on prosopographical evidence. It appears that the letters originate from a limited number of authors who were all approximately contemporaries and served the same king; their names occur in each other's letters, or as witnesses in same legal documents dating from 671 to 660 B.C.1; many of them even write joint letters. Since Sennacherib's active career hardly exceeds a generation, or 30 years, all letters were most probably written between 680 and 650 B.C., with a theoretical margin of safety of 15 years in both directions. These margins are, however, really only theoretical; it has hitherto not been possible to assign a single Assyrian letter of the Kuyunjik-collection to the reign of Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.), except possibly some to the beginning of this reign, and only one letter from the whole archive (AHL 469, probably addressed to Šarrukin-lāri) seems to date from the time after 640 B.C.; the latest date found in all letters and reports from Nineveh.

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

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

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

\[\text{FIGURE 1: Chronological distribution of astronomically datable letters and reports}\]

\[\text{letters/year}\]

\[\text{16}\]

\[\text{14}\]

\[\text{12}\]

\[\text{10}\]

\[\text{8}\]

\[\text{6}\]

\[\text{4}\]

\[\text{2}\]

\[\text{1}\]

\[\text{0}\]

\[\text{ESARHADDON}\]

\[\text{ASSURBANIPAL}\]

2. The grand total is about 1900 texts: 1500 letters + 600 astrological reports + 100 reports on exorcisms. As
It appears that practically all texts come from the latter part of the reign of Esarhaddon (i.e., the year 675 B.C. and the beginning of the reign of Assurbanipal (years 664-660 B.C.). Specific texts are datable to the years 679, 677, 676, 675, and 674 B.C. A clear center of gravity is in year 673 B.C., especially 670 B.C. Thus:

**FIGURE 2: Distribution of astronomically datable texts in percentages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>676-674</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>675-670</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>669</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>668-666</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>665-641</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The evidence gathered from Assyrian letters datable on historical grounds points to the same direction (the Babylonian letters of the archive, of which I have no exact statistics, have a divergent, though parallel distribution). Out of the 700 letters (published and unpublished) which were certainly addressed to either Esarhaddon or Assurbanipal, only 70 (14%) can be definitely assigned to the reign of the latter; approximately 300 can be dated on historical and prosopographical grounds to Esarhaddon's reign or perhaps to the beginning of the reign of Assurbanipal. Again it is evident that the bulk of the letters sent to Esarhaddon date from the latter part of his reign (only ABL 1142 can, with a fair degree of certainty, be placed to his first reign). However, about half of the letters sent to Assurbanipal belong to a few years after his accession (see the comments on LAS 60), and the other half to the years 652-646 (see the comments on LAS 169). In percentages, this distribution may be presented as follows:

**FIGURE 3: Chronological distribution of historically datable letters**

- 681-656: 86%
- 668-666: 652-646: 14%

I now proceed to the oracle queries of the haruspices. In these texts the name of the king on whose behalf the queries were made is always mentioned, and it is therefore easy to assign the texts to definite reigns. Out of the 294 published texts (217 or 82.1%) were written in the reign of Esarhaddon and of the 81 (or 27.9%) assigned to the reign of Assurbanipal. All queries made by order of Esarhaddon date from the time after 676 B.C., predominantly in the last years of the king (see J. de La donation en Néoplatonisme antique, p. 112 f.; whereas 8 queries date from the beginning of Assurbanipal's reign (up till 657 B.C.), and the rest from the years 652-650.

---

**b) Astrological reports:**

| RMA 264 | 657 |

---

**FIGURE 4: Chronological distribution of the reports of haruspices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Letters</th>
<th>Oracle queries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>675-660 B.C.</td>
<td>664-57</td>
<td>652-45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83/7%</td>
<td>23/7</td>
<td>13/3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There remains the vague evidence to be derived from the letters and reports, already adduced above, for a date and for the number of years. Only very few of the numerous texts from Esarhaddon's time (cf. above) bear a date, and since this is relatively often found in texts connected with the internal warfare between Assurbanipal and Šamaš-šumu-ukin, whose number (i.e., few, see above), it is clear that the accumulation of dates does not correspond to the number of years actually preserved in these texts. It seems that the dates found on texts from the years 652-646 B.C. were added by a palace archivist for archival purposes (cf. p. 18, footnote 2).

**The following dates are attested:**

- **a) Letters:**
  - 83.1-8: 847
  - ABL 901, 944, 1210
  - LAS 96
  - LAS 97. ABL 988, 819
  - ABL 1154
  - LAS 98. ABL 1710
  - B14 15828
  - ABL 918, 879, 2222, 2622
  - 646

- **b) Astrological reports:**
  - 657

---

**FIGURE 5:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Letters</th>
<th>Oracle queries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>675-646 B.C.</td>
<td>667-57</td>
<td>652-45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

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

**FIGURE 5:**

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

1. The material consists of three separate groups.
   a) from the years 673-666 B.C. (a lot of texts);
   b) * * * 658-657 = (few texts);
   c) * * * 652-646 = (several texts).

Sporadic texts may be found from the period 679-670, but the years 665-659 and 656-653 seem to be blank.

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

3. Texts from Esarhaddon’s reign are focused on years 671 ff., especially 669, whereas those from Assurbanipal’s time date either from the beginning of his reign or from years 622-650 B.C.

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

Circumstantial criteria pointing to the reign of Esarhaddon are:

1) Reference to the treaty (adad) by which Esarhaddon regulated his succession in Arzû 672 B.C. (see the comments on LAS I).

2) Reference to the crown prince (mar Erru) = Assurbanipal. All letters mentioning him belong to 672-669 B.C., i.e., between the treaty just mentioned and the death of Esarhaddon (Arzûmanna, 669). Assurbanipal’s reign does not come into consideration, since the crown prince does not occur in the letters certainly datable to the years 652-646.

3) Reference to the crown prince of Babylon (mar Erru Bēbili) = Šamaš-suma-akin. 1
4) References to other children of Esarhaddon (see the note on LAS 129-25-26).
5) Reference to the queen mother (summum Erru) = Nāṣiṣ. All letters mentioning her are addressed to Esarhaddon, since in Assurbanipal’s reign Nāṣiṣ was entitled “the Lahiturite queen” (MIF.GAL. URU Laḫurī-nāṣi, AR 101 r16).
6) Reference to Esarhaddon’s Egyptian campaign (Ninūm-Du-ūm, 671 B.C.).
7) Reference to the statue of Marduk (see B. Landsberger, BBEA p. 17 ff. and 86 ff.).
8) Reference to the conspiracy or rebellion quelled in 670 B.C. (see notes on LAS 247 and 284).

Criteria pointing to the reign of Assurbanipal are:

1) Reference to the king of Babylon (baru Bēbili) = Šamaš-suma-akin.
2) Reference to extensive building operations in Babylon (cf. Steck, V 187, p. 252 ff.).

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

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

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

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

1. Sources

a) Ritual tablets

b) Texts attesting the performance of the ritual
4) Classical authors:
Berosus: Babylonian 15 (so P. Schrabel, Berosus, p. 256, the passage is here cited according to the edition of R. Labat, RA 40 (1946) 125).
Denker: Texte Beibl. XV 25 (so H. Kâmmel, op.cit, p. 184 ff).
Herodotus: Histories VII 15.
Strutonius: Vita, Claudius XXII.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERIOD</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>RULING KING</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. OB</td>
<td>1880 B.C.</td>
<td>Eäa-summa</td>
<td>King Chronicles II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. MB</td>
<td>1308 B.C.</td>
<td>Eäa-summa</td>
<td>Ritual tablets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. NA</td>
<td>764 B.C.</td>
<td>Aššur-šarrī III</td>
<td>ND 3438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. }</td>
<td>672 B.C.</td>
<td>Aššur-šarrī III</td>
<td>ND 3438 (cf. ND 349)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. }</td>
<td>671 B.C.</td>
<td>Aššur-šarrī III</td>
<td>ABR 735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. }</td>
<td>669 B.C.</td>
<td>Aššur-šarrī III</td>
<td>ABR 735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. }</td>
<td>666 B.C.</td>
<td>Aššur-šarrī III</td>
<td>ABR 735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. }</td>
<td>660 B.C.</td>
<td>Aššur-šarrī III</td>
<td>ABR 735</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Introduction

3. Factors necessitating the enthronement of a substitute

Since the letters dealing with the substitute king ritual regularly are linked with eclipses, it has long been suspected that those were the primary cause of the ritual. This hypothesis was fully confirmed by the discovery of the ritual tablet which defines the matter as follows: "In the evil of evil and antikos forges and signs of heaven and earth that occurred before me, in the eclipse of the Moon, in the eclipse of the Sun, in the eclipse of Jupiter, in the eclipse of Venus, in the eclipse of planets which [took place] in the month so-and-so, on the day so-and-so" (vol. A, 9:13). So far only rituals performed on account of a lunar eclipse have been identified. However, it seems possible that we may have an example of a "planetary eclipse" too. This term probably refers not only to eclipses of planets behind the moon, but behind the sun as well (that is, also to cases when a planet remains abnormally long invisible behind the sun). The latter incident is actually attested in LAS 334, addressed to the farmer and referring to a late rise of Mars. If the restorations of the broken letter LAS 28 are correct, we have now evidence of a solar eclipse, too, starting the ritual.

Not every eclipse, however, raised the need of a substitute; certain eclipses were interpreted as harmless, and it would have been both cumbersome and pointless to perform the complicated ritual if the king was not in danger. However, it has hitherto not been clarified which cases precisely were considered dangerous and which not. No clear-cut answer can be sought for in the omens literature, for the performance of the ritual is not prescribed in any apodosis. Notwithstanding, a particular omen is frequently cited in letters dealing with the ritual: "If the Moon is eclipsed and the planet Jupiter is present in the eclipse, the king will be well (and a famous noble will die in his stead)" (ACh. 2: Sp. 29:14). Similar omens derived from eclipses of the sun are also known, e.g., "If the Sun is eclipsed in the month Tebu, and Venus and Jupiter are visible, the king of the world will lengthen his reign: during that year somebody will die in his stead: a distinguished person will die" (ACh. Šamaš IX: 39: 3: 31). Instead of directly suggesting the performance of the ritual, these omens portray the natural death of a dignitary in lieu of the king, though they at times quite obviously, were used as "evidence" to convince the ruler of the necessity of the ritual, to "help" the providence. In any case, the possibility that the planet Jupiter's presence in the eclipse might have been relevant to the performance of the ritual must be elucidated, since this condition was fulfilled in practically every lunar eclipse. One is consequently left with the conclusion that the decision about the ritual was in every case made solely on the ground of the analysis of the eclipses themselves.

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

1 Cf. above, p. 55, note 1, and H. Kümmel, op.cit., p. 171 f.
2 See the pertinent comments: since no lunar eclipses were connected with this late rise of Mars, it seems to have been the cause of the ritual (taking into account especially the omen cited in LAS 300, referring to the same incident, and predicting the death of the king). For evil omens derived from eclipses of planets see, e.g., RMA 192:13-14 (predicting the death of the king).
3 Cf. A. Schott, ZA 47 (1941-42) 112: "Aus diesem Tatbestand kann man doch wohl nur schließen, daß j e - d e s m a 1 wenn eine Sonnen- oder Mondfinsternis bevorsteht, lát púthus gezogen werden." The opinion of Schott has justly been criticised by others.
4 See LAS 298:10-11: "If on the 28th of Nisannu [a solar eclipse takes place, the king will be well," the king's daughter [will die] in his stead]."
5 See R. Labat, RA 40 (1946) 134 ff.; W. von Solien, Fr. Christan, p. 106; H. Kümmel, op.cit., p. 178 f.; and above all LAS 290:11 ff which explicitly states that the performance of the ritual was unnecessary after the natural death of a high official.
6 Cf. R. Labat, RA 40 (1946) 134 ff.; W. von Solien, Fr. Christan, p. 106; H. Kümmel, op.cit., p. 178 f.; and above all LAS 290:11 ff which explicitly states that the performance of the ritual was unnecessary after the natural death of a high official.
7 See R. Labat, RA 40 (1946) 134 ff.; W. von Solien, Fr. Christan, p. 106; H. Kümmel, op.cit., p. 178 f.; and above all LAS 290:11 ff which explicitly states that the performance of the ritual was unnecessary after the natural death of a high official.
8 Cf. LAS 290:11 ff.; "the king should change and demons from his office one of the marattes of Chaldean, Xaram, and [he]: this man will take the omen himself, and the king will be happy." The writer then cites the omen mentioned above, and goes on: "The king should rely upon this prediction, until somebody tells the king he is to be well, that the gods Ešur and Nabiš give the whole world as substitute for the king, my lord." (61:11). Cf. also RMA 272:6, "a famous noble in this context means that [the king] upon someone else, explaining the aforementioned omen quoted on l.11.
9 On the meaning of the astronomical technical term "to be present" see the note on LAS 61:4 ff. 
precision. The Neo-Assyrian practice of interpreting eclipses can be worked out on the ground of the contemporary astrological literature and reports. For a synthesis of the system, see Appendix 31. The eclipses can be reconstructed by astronomical calculations; see Appendix 31 for a graphic presentation. Referring to the list of the rituals given above, I proceed to the analysis of 8 subsequent lunar eclipses between 673 and 666 B.C.

### TABLE 1: Eclipses necessitating the ritual

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>MONTH AND DAY</th>
<th>ECLIPSED QUADRANT</th>
<th>&quot;CLEARING&quot; QUADRANT</th>
<th>WATCH</th>
<th>PLANETS PRESENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>671</td>
<td>14th = Elam, 15th = Subarti</td>
<td>total</td>
<td>West = Amsuru</td>
<td>I = Akkad</td>
<td>Jupiter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>671</td>
<td>15th = Amuru</td>
<td>total</td>
<td>West = Amsuru</td>
<td>II = Subarti</td>
<td>Saturn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>669</td>
<td>11th = Elam, 14th = Amuru</td>
<td>South = Subarti</td>
<td>South = Elam</td>
<td>III = Elam</td>
<td>Jupiter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>666</td>
<td>11th (?) = Amuru, 15th (?) = Akkad</td>
<td>South = Subarti</td>
<td>West = Amsuru</td>
<td>I = Akkad</td>
<td>Saturn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 2: Eclipses which apparently did not necessitate the ritual

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>MONTH AND DAY</th>
<th>ECLIPSED QUADRANT</th>
<th>&quot;CLEARING&quot; QUADRANT</th>
<th>WATCH</th>
<th>PLANETS PRESENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>673</td>
<td>North = Amuru, East = Elam</td>
<td>total</td>
<td>North = Akkad</td>
<td>I = Akkad</td>
<td>Jupiter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>670</td>
<td>North = Amuru</td>
<td>total</td>
<td>North = Akkad</td>
<td>III = Elam</td>
<td>Venus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>667</td>
<td>North = Elam</td>
<td>total</td>
<td>West = Amuru</td>
<td>I = Akkad</td>
<td>Venus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>667</td>
<td>North = Elam</td>
<td>total</td>
<td>West = Amuru</td>
<td>III = Elam</td>
<td>Jupiter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

1. Cf. ABL 1006:11f. "The end of an eclipse pertains to the lord of the relevant month, the lord of the day, the lord of the watch (and) the lord of the beginning (the quadrant) where the eclipse begins and where it ends is to say, these take the evil upon themselves."

2. The beginning of this eclipse was not visible in Mesopotamia.

3. The end of this eclipse was not visible in Mesopotamia.

The classical accounts of the substitute ritual performed for Alexander the Great mention all kinds of bad omens preceding the ritual, but no eclipse; we must nevertheless assume that a lunar eclipse had taken place, and that the other omens only reinforced the conviction of the exorcists that the ritual was necessary. It belonged to the normal practice that the substitute king took upon himself a 119 penurious omens threatening the king not only of the eclipses 2.

4. The length of the ritual

Occasional remarks in the letters make it clear that the reign of the substitute king was, at least in some cases, due to last 100 days; cf. "if it suits the king, my lord, he may complete the 100 days" (LAE 135). "as regards the substitute king about whom (the king, my lord, wrote to me): ‘Let him sit (on the throne) a 100 days’ (LAE 291a); and until he has completed the 100 days...’ (LAE 249). This span of time has generally been accepted as the normal length of the ritual 2. but, as far as I know, nobody has ever tried to explain why precisely this period was adopted. The explanation is, in fact, quite simple: a hundred days was the "term of residence" of the lunar eclipse, i.e., the period of time during which the evil portended by an eclipse of the moon was thought to be valid. Cf. (RMA 270:10), "the term of an eclipse occurring at evening is 3 months 10 days," and see the comments on LAE 135. It is perfectly conceivable that a substitute had to spend the full 100 days on the throne, if the omens predictions were expected to come true (e.g. if one hoped for a natural realization of the prediction ‘a noble will die instead of the king’).

Whether or not the term of a 100 days represented the normal duration of the ritual is another matter. It would certainly have been rather inconvenient for the true king to have a substitute repeatedly occupying his throne for such a long period, even if the existence of the "coregent" was made as unnoticeable as possible 3. The ritual tablet, which prescribes the death of the substitute king at the end of the ritual ("the person who was given as a substitute for the king, will die. (and) the bad forces will not approach the king," col. 6-7), actually gave free hands to terminate the ritual already earlier, since with the death of the substitute king the prediction was realized, and the substitute took the evil omens with him to the netherworld (cf. ritual tablet, col. B 4). There is ample evidence that extensive use was made of this license. In the ritual performed after the "Vassal-vassal" eclipse of 666 B.C., the reign of the substitute lasted only 20 days (cf. "as regards the substitute statue about which the king, [my lord], wrote to his servant: ‘It sat (on the throne) from the 14th Day of the 5th Month in the city of Akkad’," LAS 298, and see the notes on this letter); the reign of the substitute king is based on account of the "Kanduma-Eclipse" of 671 B.C. lasted also less than 100 days (see the notes on LAS 280). Cf. furthermore, LAE 135. "As regards the substitute king about whom the king, my lord, wrote to me: ‘How many days should he sit?’ We waited for a solar eclipse, but the Sun did not make an eclipse. Now, if the gods are seen in opposition on the 15th..."

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1. Cf. RMA 62:4 "son of the king, [my lord] of the sublime king, that of Subarti" (a report from Nahid-oba-riba). Unlike Asurbanipal, Esarhaddon was at the same time also king of Akkad at Babylon, and in his case the darkening of the quadrant of Akkad too had apparently to be taken into account.
2. Cf. LAS 280:20-21 "when an omen concerning [Akkad] appears, the ritual should be performed here. (and) when an omen concerning [Babylon] appears, it should be performed there"; for the explanations of the pertinent notes.
3. Cf. LAE 30:1 ff. "I wrote down the signs of heaven and earth and of malformed births, as many as there were, the substitute king of Akkad took the omens on him-himself, similarly LAS 291a II and 270b II"; for notes on these aspects.
5. In Esarhaddon's reign the ritual was repeatedly performed in the royal Vashdraw, but in the city of Akkad in Babylon, see below paragraphs 7.
day, he may go to his fate on the 16th. Or, if it is acceptable to the king, my lord, he may complete the 100 days. In this case the performance of the ritual would last about a month. Apparently it was, in any case, considered necessary to wait for at least till the beginning of the next month before the substitute was done away with. The reason for this is quite obvious. A solar eclipse, according to the knowledge of that time, could theoretically occur half a month after any lunar eclipse and whose occurrence was not predictable with certainty, would have necessitated the election of another substitute. But it was more convenient to push back eclipses upon the same substitute. Furthermore, if it was reckoned that the moon and the sun would be in opposition on the next 17th day, the reign could be prolonged even over that date, for the said event was also a had omen, though not directly relating to the king. But there was no real need to continue the ritual longer, for the next eclipse was to be expected only after 5 months at the earliest, i.e. to say long after the term of the eclipse had been over.

It seems that, at least in Sargonid times, the substitute was usually enthroned already before the eclipse took place. See LXX 25, 30 and 77, addressed to the “Father” before the eclipse, and see also LXX 185. As appears from the latter text, this measure was taken to make sure that the substitute was “afflicted” by the eclipse. Nevertheless, all omen were related to the substitute once more on a later occasion (see below, p. 63).

5. On the initiators of the ritual

The preponderance of the attested performances of the ritual in Esarhaddon’s reign might, despite the uneven distribution of the sources, be interpreted to give a reflection of the character of this ruler. Such a generalization, however, cannot be made. In all cases where we have information, the initiates came from the counsellors of the king. In all cases where he had to give his consent. See AXI 1006 obs. 10 ff. [In the chief executer [act] as he concludes the last], and let the king change and dismiss one noble among the magnates of Chaldaia, Aram [and...] from his office: this one will take the omen upon himself, and the king can be at ease. If Jupiter is present in the eclipse, the king is well, in his stead a prominent noble will die. The king should have much confidence in this prediction.” (the letter deals with the “Simma-a eclipse” of 669 B.C.) cf. LXX 185, a letter from the chief executer Marduk-Sîkin-Sûnu (dealing with the “Kalmu-a eclipse” of 671 B.C.). Note also the following passages in the letters: “An order should be given concerning the enthronement of the substitute king of Akkad (LXX 134 from the king’s personal executer Adad-Sîkin-umur): “As regards the substitute king [among the] king, my lord, write to me: I am told that [he should sit until the] 26th of Ululu” (LXX 130, from Adad-Sîkin-Sînu). The devine role the counsellors appear in true light especially in the Greek accounts of the ritual performed for the benefit of Alexander the Great; it was initiated even without the king’s k nowi ng of it: Plutarch describes the course of events as follows: “As he was on his way to Babylon, Alexander heard that the king certain Chaldæans had left him and advised that Alexander should keep away from Babylon. Alexander paid no heed to this. And one day after he had undressed himself to be anointed, and was playing at ball, just as they were going to bring his clothes again, the young men who played with him perceived a man clad in the king’s robes with a diadem upon his head, sitting silently upon his throne. They asked him who he was, to which he gave no answer a good while; at last coming to himself, he told them his name was Dionysios, that he was of Messenia, that for some crime of which he was accused he was brought thither from the seaside, and had been kept long in prison, that Seleucus appeared to him, he had freed him from his chains, conducted him to that place, and commanded him to put on the king’s robe and diadem, and sit where they found him, and to say nothing, Alexander, when he heard this, by the direction of his sages, put the fellow to death” (Alexander XIII). This account reveals with all desirable clarity the real concern the king’s counsellors felt over the life of their lord. The predicted danger was obviously taken to be very concrete, and the performance of the relevant apotropaic ritual was therefore nothing extraordinary – as would seem from the modern point of view – but quite in conformity with the commonly accepted practice.

6. The substitute king

a) The fate of the substitute king

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

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

b) The background of the substitutes

The little that is known about the persons used as substitutes is in accordance with their gloomy end and the institutional character of the ritual: they seem to have been mostly criminals or ‘simple’ persons. Cf. the testimonies of the Alexander-biographies: “He told them that his name was Dionysios, that he was of Messenia, that for some crime of which he was accused he was brought thither, and had been kept in prison” (Plutarch, the substitute king speaking). “They were one of the ordinary people – according to others, a prisoner, but without chains – had ascended the throne dressed in royal robes, put on the diadem, sat upon the throne and remained quiet” (Diodorus). The account of Berosus runs quite parallel: “A person condemned to death was dressed in royal garments...” It is true that these examples are from late, partly non-Mesopotamian sources, but I think the internal evidence justifies regarding this practice the normal one. Note that LXX 280 speaks of taking the substitute king from among criminals set as an established custom (see rev. 13 ff).
But sometimes the ritual seems to have been used as a means to get rid of political adversaries too; after all, the victors had free hands to choose their candidates. Thus we know from LAs 290 that the substitute-king, put to death because of the "Kannu-slip-up" of 671 B.C., was the son of a Babylonian bishop. From LAs 185 we know that the purpose of this action was to give a shock to the competing Babylonians. According to LAs 280 v.7-9, the shock was indeed so effective that the writer suggested repeating the next time to the normal practice again. This reaction seems to prove that the use of well-known influential persons in the role of the substitute-king was extremely seldom.

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

V. Historical problems. The substitute-king ritual

1. On the course of the ritual

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

a) The role of the substitute-king

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

1. Coronation.
2. Affiction.
3. Reign.

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

1. The "coronation" was necessary in order to make sure that the person of the true king was transferred to the substitute.³ There is ample evidence showing how this was achieved⁴; the substitute was clad in the royal clothes, equipped with the royal diadem and other insignia⁵, and eventually seated upon the throne. This procedure reflects the well-tested dogma according to which the king's person was present in his clothes even if his body was absent.

2. The coronation was accompanied immediately or several days afterward⁶ by a ceremony bringing about the "affliction" of the substitute-king. All evil omens threatening the king were written down and recited to (or by) the substitute-king (and his queen) "before" the Sun. In the presence of this divine judge, the substitute-king was thought to "take the omens upon himself." LAs 30 adds to these ceremonies a banquet resembling the ones taking place on other important occasions such as treaties and negotiations.

3. Excepting the unreliable account of Berossos,⁷ nothing is known about the "reign" of the substitute-king, but taking into account the length of the ritual (see above, p. 391) one may assume that he had a small-scale court which, naturally, was under a strict control.⁸ There is no reason to believe that he had any real power during his reign on the contrary.⁹

According to LAs 299 the substitute-king had theoretically to be enthroned in the residence of the ruling king in that case Nineveh.¹⁰ If another city was chosen, the ritual was - at least according to the doctrine represented by the author of LAs 299 - considered to be not valid.¹¹ Actually the ritual was in Eshnunna's reign repeatedly performed not in the king's residence Nineveh, but in the Babylonian city of Akkad.¹² The case of Eshnunna was, as stated also in LAs 299, exceptional; he was, at the same time, king of both Babylon and Babylon, and it was necessary to perform the ritual also in his Babylonian residence if the Ritual Table is not attested. A substitute-king would have been necessary in that case, considering the nature of the ritual.

1. See LAs 134-10 ff and ritual tablet, col. A 188. Cf. also LAs 299 v.7 ff. "The ritual" to give a man's substitute (figure) to the Queen of the Netherworld should be performed: (as for you, you stay in your palace, let them perform the ritual in another region. On the distinction between the terms far pābbu and sūlam pābbu see Kimmel, op.cit., p. 172 ff. One should, however, point out that the gardener Enlil-bani, the substitute-king of the king Erra-mutti of Isin, was called "the substitute-king" (NI NIG.NA.GI.LU) in King Chronicles, II 12; the "substitute-king" (as len pass-im) mentioned in LAs 298 may therefore likewise have been a living person, as suggested by W. von Soden, Fs Christian, p. 101 (against Kimmel, loc.cit.).
2. See ritual tablet, col. A 20. The queen of the substitute-king is also mentioned in LAs 280 and, indirectly, in LAs 30.
3. The oracle decreed by a prophetess before the performance of the ritual described in LAs 280 was probably an integral element of the ritual, but specifically designed ad hoc to motivate the choice of the substitute.
4. Cf. LAs 26, 30 and 279.
5. On the meaning of this expression see the note on LAs 187.17
6. "They (= the substitute-king and his queen) had wine to drink; were washed with water; (and) anointed with oil; I cooked those birds; and made them eat." LAs 30, 10-12. Cf. on KT 30A (var. 7-[a]u) GIS.BAN.SUK.RA.GI.ZU 7 (var. kaša) at-pi-sp 7GIS.BAR.TUK.KAD.BAB.TUK.7UU (var. vite, vit, vit, vit, vit) 154-155. Note that anointment with oil was also an integral part of the liturgy substitute-king ritual (see Kimmel, op.cit., p. 28 f.)
7. "He could issue any orders he liked, eat, drink, assume his position and deep with the concubines of the king." Cf. LAs 299 which proves that the agents of the king were the whole time present when the substitute-king was reigning in Akkad.
8. An argument in evidence is that the true king (frequently entitled "the king, my lord") even during the ritual - kept taking care of the administrative affairs of Babylonia regardless of the substitute-king residing in Akkad. (cf. LAs 292) This leaves the substitute-king the role of a puppet-king at the most.
9. The question mark put after Nineveh in Kimmel, op.cit., p. 172 is quite unnecessary.
10. "Had they performed it in your father's home town where you yourself reside, it would have removed the evil from you." LAs 298 11-12.
11. See LAs 131, 141-299, 280 and 292; cf. also LAs 30 and 317. For the possible identity of Akkad and Babylonia see the comments on LAs 275-280.
relevant quadrant of the Moon was darkened. Out of purely practical reasons it was certainly more convenient for the ruler to have the substitute king "rule" somewhere else but not in his own palace; as a matter of fact, after the total eclipse in 671 B.C., the substitute king enthroned in Nimphe, was soon sent on a journey and enthroned, for a second time, in Waskud only 5 days after the eclipse had occurred.

1. LAS 290 gives a detailed account of the burial ceremonies which took place after the execution of the above-mentioned substitute king of 671 B.C. The building of a mausoleum and the decoration and public display of the corpse make the impression of a veritable royal burial; one may, of course, ask whether such a publicity was normal or restricted to this case only.

The royal insignia used by the substitute king were burnt and the ashes buried beside the substitute and his wife (see the ritual tablet, col. B 15 ff.). For other magical rituals following the burial see below, under C.

b) The role of the king

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

After the death of the substitute, the king had to perform a ritual whose purpose, according to the ritual tablet, col. B 5, was to cleanse the king and the palace. The way in which this was done is not specified in the ritual tablet. LAS 4, which very probably deals with the burial of the substitute king, prescribes a purification of the king by means of a censer and a torch (see the pertinent notes). It is, naturally, possible that various methods could be applied, e.g., the "shaving" prescribed in LAS 139-140.

c) The role of the officiants

It is evident that the performance of the complicated ritual required the cooperation of many, if not the entire of the scholars working in the palace. According to LAS 31 and 290, serics, exorcists, appeasers

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1 See above, paragraph 3.
2 Note also that in ND 3483 the substitute king is connected with the little-known city of [?]alpamba.
3 See W. von Soden, ZA 43 (1936) 254 ff.
4 The publicity given to burial of the substitute king in this particular case may well have been intentional (cf. paragraph 6 ibid.). On the other hand, the account of Berossus suggests that a considerable publicity was rather a rule than an exception.
5 This title was, however, by no means used consistently; see Kimmel, op. cit., p. 173, note 73.
6 Journeys on the open country were considered particularly dangerous; see the comments on col. B 11-13.
7 See the comments on LAS 137; it is, in my opinion, necessary to distinguish these clearly apotropeic rites from the obviously purificatory shaving referred to in LAS 139-140 (for a different interpretation see Kimmel, op. cit., p. 179).
8 Cf. LAS 166.6 ff. "As regards the 15th day [about which our lord] said: The substitute [king] should go to his fate; I will perform my ritual on the 16th, as before."

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1 See LAS 249 and 257 (written by Usur-Nanda).
2 Cf. the evidence cited above, in paragraph 5.
3 Cf. the spells inscribed on the caparisons and kneeling figurines (col. B 21-29). "Go out, evil of [the palace]. Enter, fortune of [good] dreams," and "Go out, evil of [bad] dreams. Enter, fortune of the palace." Note, furthermore, the psychological effect that the ritual obviously had on Alexander the Great: "Alexander, when he heard this, by the direction of his scribes, put the fellow to death, but he lost his spirit, and grew diffident of the protection and assistance of the gods, and suspicions of his friends." (Plutarch, Lives, Alexander XIX).