

... מִפְּנֵי מֶלֶךְ אַשּׁוּר

The Imitators of the King and the Empire

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Scholars of the ancient Near East divided by their languages of expertise often forget that it was one world, which did not yet have a single “imperial” language. Peoples of this world interacted actively through wars and trade, as well as through alliances and treaties. Small states looked up on their overlords and imitated their fancy habits and the overlords often borrowed skills from their subjects.

But foreign habits were followed not only for their fanciness but also for their efficiency. The Assyrian Empire and Assyrian kingship created an administrative, ideological and political system, which remained a model for copying long after the fall of Assyria. Assyrian administrative apparatus, was employed by the Neo-Babylonian court and administration as Michael Jursa has demonstrated.² The Persian Empire copy-pasted the Assyrian one in almost everything, from the programmatic palatial imagery and pictorial motives, military system, system of royal roads and royal post, provincial structure with the use of Aramaic as its administrative language and Assyrian system of receiving taxes and tribute on the New Year occasion to the places and ways of executing rebels.³ Present paper deals with the imitations of the Assyrian king and Empire not by its mighty successors in the South and the East, but by its humble vassals in the West.

The imagery proves that the imitations started instantly with the beginning of the Assyrian expansion under Assurnasirpal II in the NA period.⁴ The stele of Kulamuwa, the 9th century king of Sam'al, which he calls Y'dy, is inscribed with the Phoenician inscription. It bears the image of this otherwise unknown ruler. The representation upon this stela reproduces not only the headgear of the Assyrian kings but their entire outfit in every small detail (fig. 1). The very gesture of the local ruler is the typically Assyrian adoration gesture, *ubāna tarāšu*, stretching of a finger toward the symbols of the gods. These symbols are depicted in the upper part of his stele in exactly the same manner as they are depicted on Assyrian

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² Nebuchadnezzar's “Hofkalender” Jursa, 2010: 97–99.

³ About Assyrian influences on Persian Empire, see e.g., Dandamaev, 1997; Root, 1979: 215–216, Calmeyer, 1994; Lanfranchi, 2010.

⁴ A. Edmonds have recently demonstrated other effects of Assyrian influence on it Aramean subjects in these early stages of the empire (Edmonds, 2021).



Fig. 1: Stele of Kulamuwa, king of of Y'DY (Sam'al), 9th century BCE, found in Zincirli; 1a. Detail. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kilamuwa_Stela#/media/File:Pergamon_museum_-_Vorderasiatisches_Museum_046.JPG.



royal steles. The Anatolian chieftain does not try to hide that he is imitating his mighty Assyrian sovereigns; on the contrary – he stresses it. The inscription upon his stele reads as follows:⁵

⁵ See Tropper, 1993: 29–30 for previous editions and photographs. The most recent edition in Bekins, 2020: 56–64.



Fig. 2: Stele from Zincirli (Sam'al) with a representation of a ruler in Assyrian royal attire accompanied by an attendant. Attributed to Kulamuwa. <https://www.worldhistory.org/image/7155/prince-kilamuwa/>.

¹*nk. klmw. br. hy* ²*mlk. gbr. 'l. y²dy. wbl .p[¹l]* ³*kn bnh. wb[l]. p¹l wkn.* ⁴*b¹[y²]. 'l h¹y² wbl. [p]¹l. wkn. 'h* ⁵*š²l. wb¹l¹ p¹l. w¹n²n[k]. k[l]mw. br. t¹ml¹.m²š. p¹lt* ⁶*bl. p¹l. hlpny<<h>>m. kn. bt* ⁷*by bmtkt. mlkm. 'd* ⁸*rm wkl. šlh yd l<h>l[h]m. wkt. byd. ml¹k¹m. k²š. 'klt* ⁹*zqn w[km]* ¹⁰*š. 'klt. yd. w²dr* ¹¹*l<<.>>y mlk dn[n]ym wškr. 'nk. 'ly. mlk. 'šr*

¹I am Kulamuwa, the son of Hayya. ²Gabbar reigned over Y²dy, but did nothing. ³And also BM⁽¹⁾H, and he did nothing. And (then) also my father Hayya, and he did nothing. And also my brother, ⁴Ša'il, and he did nothing. And I, Kulamuwa, son of TML; what I did, ⁵my predecessors had not. My father's kingdom (lit. – house) was beset by powerful kings, ⁶and each stretched out the hand to fight. But I was in the hand of the kings like a fire ⁷consuming the beard and like a fire consuming the hand. And the king of Danunians overpowered me; and I hired ⁸the king of Assyria ...

Reiner Maria Czichon compared the image of Kulamuwa to that of the throne room relief of Assurnasirpal II and the Tell al-Rimah stele of Adad-nērārī III and

pointed to the similarities and differences in their representation.⁶ Indeed, the stele Adad-nērārī III is the rare, but not unique, case when the Assyrian monument of this kind displays the king in a view from the right, similar to the way Kulamuwa is represented. Another uninscribed stele from Sam'al attributed to Kulamuwa also displays the same details of Assyrian royal attire worn by a local ruler (fig. 2): the tiara with the pointed top and hanging tassels and wrapping garment with fringes. Kulamuwa's index finger is again stretched out toward the divine symbols in a profoundly Assyrian gesture of adoration. Despite the differences in details pointed out by Czichon, the whole composition is clearly taken from the Assyrian milieu. Already the steles of Assurnasirpal II⁷ show the same arrangement of the adoration scene and the same attire. Kulamuwa ruled presumably in 840–830 BCE, the late reign of Shalmaneser III, the successor of Assurnasirpal. As an Assyrian tributary he certainly visited Kalḫu and could see the Banquet Stele, the square form and the wrapping layout of the inscription of which reminds that of his own most of all. Upon his uninscribed stele he is represented attended, like Assyrian kings, by a young beardless courtier. The youth's dress and hairstyle are Assyrian as well. The imagery of the Zincirli steles leaves no space for doubts that the local rulers imitated the habits of the Assyrian court.

Not only the visual similarity of Kulamuwa's steles to the Assyrian imagery, but the wording of his inscription is most striking. It states that only he, Kulamuwa, managed to do what none of his predecessors, including his own father and brother could. This *topos* is well known in Assyrian royal inscriptions from the Middle Assyrian period on.⁸ The entire Kulamuwa's inscription revolves around this statement. The laughable helplessness of the Phoenician scribe in the elaborating on the topic, resulting in the multiple repetitions of *bl. p'l.*, “did nothing,” contrasts with embellishment of this *topos* in Assyrian inscriptions and with the more developed local idioms⁹ in Kulamuwa's text and betrays that this idea was new to the Phoenician milieu and consequently not enough verbally developed.¹⁰ The translation of the verbal language needs immensely more experience, time and skill than that of the visual one, but the strive to imitate it is obvious.

⁶ Czichon, 1995.

⁷ The Banquet Stele (Wiseman 1952: pl. 3) and Kurkh Monolith (BM 118805, e.g., Börker-Klähn, 1982: no. 136).

⁸ E.g., Tiglath-pileser I A.0.87.1: vi 101–104, but even more explicitly *ibid.* vii 17–30. This *topos* is well known in Southern Mesopotamia too, but there is no evidence of the direct contact between Anatolia and Babylonia in this period. The *topos* is found also in the bilingual Luwian-Phoenician inscription of the later Anatolian ruler Azatiwata (KA-RATEPE 1 §§25–29, Hawkins, 2000: 52).

⁹ E.g., 𐤀𐤍 𐤏𐤍𐤔 𐤗𐤍𐤕 𐤏𐤍𐤔 𐤏𐤍𐤔, “like a fire consuming the beard and like a fire consuming the hand.”

¹⁰ Rather large number of mistakes in comparison to the contemporary Assyrian royal inscriptions suggests that the very format of a monumental inscription was new in the region. Indeed, the inscription of Kulamuwa is one of the earliest known.

This is exemplified by the Tell Fekheriyeh Akkadian-Aramaic inscription: its Aramaic text is translated into Akkadian; the Aramaic itself does not use Akkadian idioms, but displays a sufficient number of Akkadian loan words.¹¹

There are other monuments from the West that imitate Assyrian royal imagery and inscriptions. These are steles of the rulers of Sūḫu, a country in the middle Euphrates. As proposed by Nadav Na'aman,¹² “the governors of Sūḫu took advantage of Assyria’s weakness during the second quarter and the beginning of the third quarter of the 8th century BCE” and got rid of the Assyrian domination. The statements of their freedom from the Assyrian yoke found expression in claims for descentance from no less than Ḫammurabi himself and for the governorship of Sūḫu and Mari – the latter geographical name clearly anachronistic and intentionally archaizing in their time. But despite the declaration of independence or probably as a part of it, local ruler Šamaš-rēša-ušur and his son Ninurta-kudurri-ušur are depicted upon their steles clad in the garb and headgear of Assyrian kings (fig. 3a, b). The crowns and attire of Ištar, Adad and the third god on the stele of Šamaš-rēša-ušur, the ruler’s adoration gesture – *appa labānu* –, as well as the very fact that the gods are represented in full scale and anthropomorphically, are, however, in the stream of the Babylonian tradition. Obviously, the geographical location as well as the long-term cultural influence of the mighty south-eastern neighbour, made their impact on Sūḫu as well. Nonetheless, the inscription of the son and heir of Šamaš-rēša-ušur, Ninurta-kudurri-ušur, contain clear evidence of him being well acquainted with the Assyrian royal inscriptions and imitating their distinctive features. Similarly to the inscription of Kulamuwa and Assyrian royal inscriptions, the inscriptions of Ninurta-kudurri-ušur claim that his achievements surpassed that of his predecessors: *šá mam-ma ina lib-bi <AD^{meš}-e-a> la GAZ*

¹¹ See Greenfield and Shaffer, 1983 for discussion and Dušek and Mynářová, 2016 with further references for the latest overview of various theories concerning the date of the inscription, the editorial process and the process of translation from Akkadian into Aramaic. J. Greenfield and A. Shaffer point out that the dialect of Akkadian in the inscription is Babylonian (i.e., Standard Babylonian), although with Assyrianisms (ibid.: 110). Note that already in this inscription, which is the one of the earliest known Aramaic inscriptions, the king is described as the provider of water to his country (*gwill nhr klm* “irrigation master of all rivers” l. 3), similar to his god Hadad (*gwill šmyn wʾrq*, “the irrigation master of heaven and earth,” l. 1–2; cf. pp. 177–178 with fnn. 17–18 below), where *gwill* is the Akkadian loanword. J. Greenfield and A. Shaffer point to at least one Aramaic calque in Akkadian translation (ibid.). Of course, appearance of the *topos* of exceeding his ancestors in Kulamuwa’s inscription could result from the influences of the imperial Hittite inscriptions (cf. Suppiluliuma II KBo 12.38 ii 11–16, ii 17–21), and not Assyrian examples. But the time gap and the very naivety of Kulamuwa’s articulation of the matter, which betrays that the subject was new to his scribe, suggests that the borrowing was made from the closest neighbour and contemporary – Assyria.

¹² Na’aman, 2008: 223.

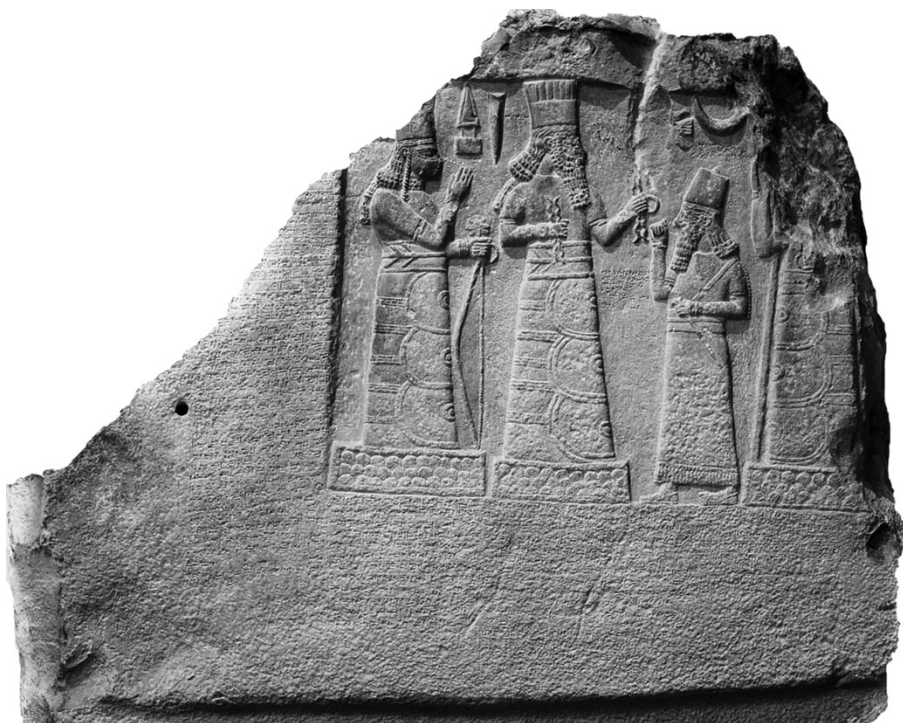


Fig. 3a

Fig. 3: Steles of Šamaš-rēša-ušur (a) and his son Ninurta-kudurri-ušur (b); 8th century BCE(?).

(a): https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shamsh-res-usur,_governor_of_Mari_and_Suhi.jpg; (b): https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Assyrian_stele_from_Anat,_al-Anbar,_Iraq._Stele_of_Ninurta-kudurri-usur_dedicated_to_Anat._Iraq_Museum.jpg.



Fig. 3b

ana-ku a-duk AD^{mes}-ú-a 10-šú^{lú} KÚR GAZ-ma ma-lu-ú-a ul ú-šam-šu-ú *ana-ku 1-et di-ik-ti a-duk-ma a-na la* AD^{mes}-e-a ú-šá-tir_x(DIR), “I inflicted such a defeat as none among <my ancestors> had inflicted. My ancestors had defeated the enemy ten times, but they did not achieve as much as I.”¹³ Here, however, this is most probably the continuation of the Babylonian tradition.

But since the inscriptions of Ninurta-kudurri-ušur are written in Akkadian, their similarity to the Assyrian prototypes is even more obvious than that of Kulamuwa inscription. Ninurta-kudurri-ušur of Sūhu describes his atrocities towards his defeated enemies, which is the characteristic feature of Assyrian royal inscriptions. He does it in a typically Assyrian style using typically Assyrian expressions, such as: KUŠ-šú *ki-ma* KUŠ UDU.NÍTA *aš-ši-ma ina pa-an* KÁ.GAL šá URU-*Gab*-ba-ri-Dù áš-kun*, “I *stripped off* his skin like the skin of a sheep and set (it) in front of the gate of Āl-gabbāri-bānī,”¹⁴ ÚŠ^{mes}-šú-nu *ki-ma* A^{mes} [D ú-šá-aš-bit *har-ra-nu*] *ina* AD^{mes}-šú-nu *a-ru-ú* ʾu¹ [zību *in-na-at-tal*], “I made their blood run like the water of a river. Eagles and vultures *hovered* over their corpses.”¹⁵ Description of atrocities, a common place in Assyrian writings, is unusual for Babylonia.

The richest source for studying the Assyrian influence in the West is of course the Hebrew Bible. Assyrian royal rhetoric in the Bible was extensively explored by many scholars.¹⁶ All this research, however, concentrates on intertextuality in such a way that the biblical text is treated as reflecting the Assyrian royal propaganda. It seems that nobody wanted to see the evidence of a deliberate imitation of the Assyrian institutions by the Judahite kings described in the Bible. The only exception is an attempt by Elnathan Weissert to draw a parallel between Sennacherib’s water enterprises and those of Hezekiah’s.¹⁷ Intriguingly, water works of both the Assyrian and the Judahite kings are predated by the statement in the aforementioned inscription of Ninurta-kudurri-ušur of Sūhu, who boasts of building a well.¹⁸

¹³ RIMB 2 Ninurta-kudurri-ušur 1002.2: ii 27b–29.

¹⁴ RIMB 2 Ninurta-kudurri-ušur 1002.2 ii 26–27. The aforementioned statement that none of his predecessors had inflicted such a defeat to an enemy immediately follows (*ibid.* ii 27–29). Cf. e.g., RIMA 2 A.O.98.1: 40–41 (Aššur-dān II), A.O. 101.1: 67–68, 89, 92, 110 (Ashurnasirpal II).

¹⁵ RIMB 2 Ninurta-kudurri-ušur 1002.3 ii 18’–19’. See the parallel in 1002.6 ii 18’–20’ for restoration. Cf. e.g., RIMA 3 A.O.103.1: 28–29 (Samši-Adad V).

¹⁶ Hom, 2013; Machinist, 1983, 2016, 2018; Radner, 2006; Aster, 2009, 2017.

¹⁷ Weissert, 2011: 308–309; he dates the passage of the biblical narration, which he is discussing (*ibid.*: 306 with n. 74; II Kings 19: 9b–35, particularly 2 Kings 19:24/Isa 37: 25) as post-exilic.

¹⁸ RIMB 2 Ninurta-kudurri-ušur 1002.2 iii 10’–12’ followed by the statement that he built a town in a place that nobody built it before him (*ibid.*: iii 12’–14’). Ninurta-kudurri-ušur monuments as well as the Hebrew Bible share other common places with the Assyrian royal inscriptions, among them cutting down fruit trees (RIMB 2 1002.3 i 16’ where it is

Ancient Israel and Judah were not special cases as they are often seen,¹⁹ but just small parts of a larger ancient Near Eastern world, dominated by the Assyrian superpower. Judahite kings did imitate their Assyrian overlords too, starting with the one who was the first to voluntarily subjugate Judah to Assyria – Ahaz –, and ending with that who tried to restore the “united monarchy” – Josiah. In the Bible the kings of Israel are all sinners, while the kings of Judah can be pious and impious, depending on their devotion to their tutelary deity. Intriguingly, starting with Assyrian expansion in the region, the two most pious kings – Hezekiah²⁰ and Josiah – attempted at overthrowing foreign sovereignty over Judah, but the first to bow to the yoke of Assyria was Ahaz, one of the most impious kings, who eagerly imitated Assyrians (II Kings 16: 7–18):²¹

ז וישלח אחז מלאכים אל-תגלת פלסר מלך-אשור לאמר עבדך ובגדך אני עלה
והושעני מכף מלך-ארם ומכף מלך ישראל הקומים עלי: ח ויקח אחז את-הכסף ואת-
הזהב הנמצא בית יהוה ובאצרות בית המלך וישלח למלך-אשור שחד: ט וישמע
אליו מלך אשור ויעל מלך אשור אל-דמשק ויתפשח ויגלה קירה ואת-רצין
המית: י וילך המלך אחז לקראת תגלת פלסר מלך-אשור דמשק וירא את-המזבח
אשר בדמשק וישלח המלך אחז אל-אוריה הכהן את-דמוות המזבח ואת-תבניתו לכל-
מעשהו: יא ויבן אוריה הכהן את-המזבח ככל אשר-שלח המלך אחז מדמשק בן
עשה אוריה הכהן עד-בוא המלך-אחז מדמשק: יב ויבא המלך מדמשק וירא המלך
את-המזבח ויקרב המלך על-המזבח ויעל עליו: יג ויקטר את-עלתו ואת-מנחתו ויסד

posed as a thread by an adversary; Deut 20:19–20) or cedar for luxury constructions (RIMB 2 1002.3 iv 19'–23'; II Sam 7: 2; I Kings 5: 20–25, 6: 29–36, 7: 2–12; 2 Chron. 2: 2; Ezra 3: 7 and so forth). Both *topoi* are, however, older than the first millennium, not originally Assyrian and spread far beyond Mesopotamia. For the destruction of orchards by an enemy in Mesopotamia, see the selection in Cole, 1997 and May 2022: 233–236 and 246 with n. 94. As has been shown by Cole, this motive is already attested in the OB period (Cole 1997: 31). For the HB, the topic of demolishing fruit trees was exhaustively treated by N. Wazana (Wasana, 2008). For precious woods decorating luxury constructions in the ANE, see Hurowitz, 1992: 174, 195–196, 200–222.

¹⁹ Weeks: 178. They are rather a well-documented(?) case.

²⁰ It is highly disputable, if the alleged reforms of Hezekiah (II Kings 18: 4) took place indeed. The incense burners on the Lachish relief (fig. 4) are the proof that the cult was performed at the local temple by the time of the siege of Lachish by Sennacherib. Thus at least one cultic centre other than Jerusalem – the temple at Lachish functioned in the reign of Hezekiah.

²¹ This annalistic passage, particularly vv. 10–16, is related to P source (see Weinfeld, 1976: 182) and is no doubt CBH (Classical Biblical Hebrew). For dating of P as pre-exilic on linguistic grounds, see Hurvitz, 1988: 2000), thus I take this passage as a contemporarily or nearly contemporarily to the events pre-exilic text. The translations of the Biblical quotes in this article follow Cogan and Tadmor, 1988 with emendations by the present author.

אֶת־נִסְכּוֹ וַיִּזְרַק אֶת־דַּם־הַשְּׁלָמִים אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: יָד וְאֵת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ הַנְּחֹשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר
לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וַיִּקְרַב מֵאֵת פְּנֵי הַבַּיִת מִבֵּין הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וּמִבֵּין בֵּית יְהוָה וַיִּתֵּן אֹתוֹ עַל־יָרֵךְ הַמִּזְבֵּחַ
צָפוֹנָה: טו וַיִּצְוֵהוּ הַמֶּלֶךְ־אָחָז אֶת־אֹרִיָּה הַכֹּהֵן לֵאמֹר עַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ הַגָּדוֹל הַקָּטָן אֶת־
עֹלֹת־הַבֶּקֶר וְאֶת־מִנְחַת הָעֶרֶב וְאֶת־עֹלֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאֶת־מִנְחָתוֹ וְאֵת כָּל־עֵם הָאָרֶץ
וּמִנְחָתָם וְנִסְכֵּיהֶם וְכָל־דָּם עֲלֶיהָ וְכָל־דָּם־זֶבַח עָלָיו תִּזְרַק וּמִזְבֵּחַ הַנְּחֹשֶׁת יִהְיֶה־לִּי,
לְבָקָר: טז וַיַּעַשׂ אֹרִיָּה הַכֹּהֵן כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה הַמֶּלֶךְ אָחָז: יז וַיִּקְצָץ הַמֶּלֶךְ אָחָז אֶת־
הַמִּסְגָּרוֹת הַמְּכֻוֹנֹת וַיִּסָּר מַעְלֵיהֶם וְאֶת־הַכִּיר וְאֶת־הַיָּם הוֹרֵד מֵעַל הַבֶּקֶר הַנְּחֹשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר
תַּחְתֶּיהָ וַיִּתֵּן אֹתוֹ עַל מַרְצֶפֶת אֲבָנִים: יח וְאֶת־מִסַּךְ הַשֹּׁבֵת אֲשֶׁר־בָּנוּ בְּבֵית, וְאֶת־מְבוֹא
הַמֶּלֶךְ הַחִיצוֹנָה הַסָּבִיב בֵּית יְהוָה מִפְּנֵי מֶלֶךְ אֲשׁוּר:

⁷Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria: "I am your servant and your son. Come and rescue me from the hand of the king of Aram and from the hand of the king of Israel who are attacking me."⁸Ahaz took the silver and the gold stored in the House of YHWH and in the palace treasury, and sent a bribe to the king of Assyria.⁹The king of Assyria responded to his plea; the king of Assyria proceeded against Damascus. He captured it and exiled its population to Qir, and put Rezin to death.¹⁰Now when King Ahaz went to Damascus to greet Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, he saw the altar in Damascus; whereupon King Ahaz sent a model of the altar and a plan with all details for its construction to Uriah the priest.¹¹Uriah the priest built the altar, according to all that King Ahaz had sent him from Damascus; Uriah the priest completed it by the time King Ahaz returned from Damascus.¹²When the king returned from Damascus and saw the altar, he approached the altar and ascended it;¹³he offered his burnt offering and his meal offering; he poured out his libation, and he dashed the blood of his offering of well-being against the altar.¹⁴As for the bronze altar which (had stood) before YHWH, he moved (it) from the front of the House, from between the altar and House of YHWH, and placed it on the north side of the (new) altar.¹⁵King Ahaz then ordered Uriah the priest: "On the great altar, offer the morning burnt offering and the evening meal offering and the king's burnt offering and his meal offering and the burnt offering of all the People of the Land, and their meal offerings and their libations. All the blood of the burnt offerings and the blood of the sacrifices you shall dash against it. The bronze altar will be for me to frequent."¹⁶Uriah the priest did just as King Ahaz ordered.¹⁷King Ahaz stripped off the frames of the wheeled stands and removed the basin from them; he took down the Sea from the bronze oxen that supported it and placed it on the stone pavement.¹⁸And he turned about the House of YHWH the closing

walk of the resting hall that they built in the House and the king's outer entrance, because²² of the king of Assyria.

First of all, the political situation described in this passage is exactly the same as the one known to us from the Kulamuwa's inscription: a local ruler, in this case the king of Judah, is unable to resist his more powerful adversaries. He pleads for help of the Assyrian king and pays the latter for it. The Bible implies the term שֶׁחָדַר translated by Cogan and Tadmor as "bribe"²³ and Kulamuwa's inscription uses the verb *škr*, "hired." Bottom line, both Western rulers paid the Assyrian king for protection. Vassaldom to Assyria, that could yet turn out temporary, was preferable over an immediate thread of consumption by a powerful predatory neighbour.

But this passage implies at least two more testimonies that Ahaz imitated Assyrian rites and realia. First of all, he undertakes a tremendous enterprise of dramatical changes in the temple of his god. As is stated at the end of the passage, he does it מִפְּנֵי מֶלֶךְ אַשּׁוּר. The most common translation of this expression is "because of the king of Assyria." Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor discussed all other possible variants, such as "on account of ...," "by the order of ...," "to satisfy ... the king of Assyria." But it is clear that Ahaz imitates religious habits of his overlord and does it entirely on his own initiative,²⁴ no traces of imposition of Assyrian cult can be found in this passage. Thus "because of" or "for the sake of" remains the preferable translation that indicates the intention of Ahaz to adopt the customs of the Assyrian metropolis.

²² Cogan and Tadmor, 1988: 190 suggest: "on account of." They reject translations "by the order of," "in deference to" or "to satisfy" because, as they postulate, "Assyrian kings ... did not interfere with the native cultic practices of their vassals." Not only that this statement is notwithstanding with the evidence of the sources (May, 2020), but the vassals themselves fancied and eagerly imitated cultic practices of their mighty sovereigns not waiting for the latter to impose them.

²³ Cogan and Tadmor, 1988: 184; see, however, Kalluveetil, 1982: 122–124, 127–135) who relates this expression together with מִפְּנֵי מֶלֶךְ אַשּׁוּר to the "covenant language."

²⁴ Cogan and Tadmor, 1988: 192–193 admit that the "voluntary innovation of Ahaz was thus the first wave in the larger movement of acculturation to the practices of the Assyrian empire" and suggest that it was "motivated rather by a spirit of assimilation to the current international fashions." They try, however, to prove that the altar was Syrian (for which there is no evidence what so ever) and not Assyrian.



Fig. 4: Lachish relief of Sennacherib. Assyrian soldiers carrying away the Assyrian-style incense burners from the local temple. After Barnett / Bleibtreu / Turner, 1998: pl. 336, fig. 432c.

Most important of all the changes that Ahaz has done in his temple is building the new altar. It has been discussed at length, if the altar was of an Assyrian or Syrian type.²⁵ Cogan rejected the possibility of Ahaz' altar being of the Assyrian type, basing on his own statement that Assyrians did not impose imperial cults on their vassals. As has been proven this statement does not hold water.²⁶ The description of the altar is not given in the passage, however, and offering tables, to which Cogan relates as the "Assyrian altar" were not the only kind of an altar in Assyria but existed in Syria too.²⁷ On the other hand, the incense burners plundered by the soldiers of Sennacherib from Lachish are profoundly Assyrian²⁸ (fig. 4), which

²⁵ Cogan, 1974: 73–77.

²⁶ See May, 2020 for detailed discussion.

²⁷ E.g. Börker-Klähn, 1982: 302 that may also imitate the Assyrian offering tables, since at least on this stela the dress of the deceased is Assyrian, and elsewhere on Aramaic funerary stelae. Ahaz' altar could be a copy of an Assyrian crenelated altar (Barnett, 1976: pl. XXIII; North Palace of Assurbanipal, Room H). Further statement of Cogan, 1974: 75 that "‘blood consciousness’ is not paralleled in Mesopotamia" is not correct since Assyrians did offer the blood to their gods (SAA 20 15 i 9' the king UDU.SISKUR *i-na-saḥ* MÚD^{meš} *ina šà e-ni ú-šam-ḥar* "performs the sheep offerings and offers blood to the spring").

²⁸ Compare with the local "Judahite" ones, e.g., Herzog and Singer-Avitz, 2016: fig. 25.8.

additionally proves that Assyrian-type cultic utensils were used in Judah.

The second and more striking testimony of adoption of Assyrian cultic practices in this passage is that in verses 12–13, the king is explicitly said to personally perform sacrifices and libations. This was the habit and duty of the kings of Assyria, as is evidenced by many ritual texts as well as by the multiple representations.²⁹ The libations performed by the king himself are particularly characteristic of Assyrians. It is also a media event in Assyria: the king performs libations and appears to the public.³⁰ In I Kings 8: 62–65 Solomon although is said to offer sacrifices on occasion of the inauguration of the newly built temple and altar, but the wording does not permit to assume that he did it personally, especially in light of chiasmic appearance of expression וְהַמֶּלֶךְ וְכָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל עִמּוֹ, “and the king, and all Israel with him” at the beginning and the end of this passage.

In case of Ahaz, it is clear that the king inaugurates the new altar by performing the sacrifice, the offering, and the libation himself (II Kings 16: 12–13). Moreover, nowhere else is a Judahite king said to make a libation, which was a distinct role of Assyrian kings in the religious rites.³¹ It is also evident that he did so imitating the Assyrian royal cultic performance. It does not mean, of course, that Ahaz made this worship for the Assyrian gods. Contrarily, this was the fashionable addition to his own local cult of his local god. Another cultic practice borrowed by the Judahite kings from Assyrians, about which we learn from II Kings 23: 11, were the famous horses dedicated to the sun and its chariots. Moshe Weinfeld³² pointed out that the habit of passing sons through fire, as did Ahaz,³³ could be Assyrian as well.

I will further argue that the most striking act of imitating Assyrian sovereigns, was the most pious and praised act recorded in II Kings, the so-called Deuteronomistic reform of Josiah – the most pious of the kings of Judah. This Judahite king was the contemporary of the late reign of Assurbanipal and of his successors. For a short period, Judah regained independence and even captured Samaria from the weakened hands of its former sovereign. Like the rulers of Suḫu before him, Josiah tried to use the moment and like them he imitated his recent mighty oppressors. The political situation was suitable for Judah to expand its territory, which apparently seeded in the former vassal hope to create his own “empire.”

²⁹ E.g., SAA 20 15 (the *akītu*-house ritual of Nisannu) i 9', 17', 44', 51'–53'; ii 4'; rev. iii 5, and elsewhere in Assyrian royal rituals (SAA 20).

³⁰ E.g., SAA 20 15 ii 4', 10', and elsewhere in Assyrian royal rituals (SAA 20). Royal libation as the media event is also reflected in palatial reliefs (e.g., the White Obelisk, register VII [Börker-Klähn, 1982: no. 132a]; reliefs of Assurnasirpal II [Paley, 1976: pls. 4, 5, 18b, 19b, c and elsewhere], and of Assurbanipal, rooms I and S¹ [Barnett, 1976: pls. XXV, LVII]). See May, 2012 for the discussion of this phenomenon.

³¹ See above, this page with fn. 30.

³² Weinfeld, 1976: 216, n. 1.

³³ II Kings 16: 3.

The empire, however, needed imperial structure and imperial ideology. Assyria created mechanisms and technologies of power that lasted longer than the memory of its name. Persia, which succeeded it, overtook many of these achievements of the hated suppressor. So tried Judah.

Josiah's reform starts³⁴ with the king gathering all his subjects and announcing them the new covenant (ברית) with the state tutelary deity – YHWH (II Kings 23: 1–3):

א וישלח המלך ויאספו אליו כל־זקני יהודה וירושלם: ב ויעל המלך בית־יהוה וכל־איש יהודה וכל־ישב־יְרוּשָׁלַם אתו והכהנים והנביאים וכל־הָעָם לְמִקְטָן וְעַד־גָּדוֹל ויקרא באזניהם את־כָּל־דְּבַר סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית הַנִּמְצָא בְּבֵית יְהוה: ג ויעמד המלך על־הַעֲמֹד ויכרת את־הַבְּרִית לִפְנֵי יְהוה לָלֶכֶת אַחֵר יְהוה וְלִשְׁמֹר מִצְוֹתָיו וְאֶת־עֲדוּתָיו וְאֶת־חֻקֹּתָיו בְּכָל־לֵב וּבְכָל־נֶפֶשׁ לְהִקִּים אֶת־דְּבַר הַבְּרִית הַזֹּאת הַכְּתוּבִים עַל־הַסֵּפֶר הַזֶּה ויעמד כָּל־הָעָם בְּבְרִית:

¹And the king sent, and they gathered unto him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem. ²And the king went up to the house of YHWH, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, from young to old; and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of YHWH. ³And the king stood on the pillar, and he concluded the covenant before YHWH, to follow YHWH, and to keep his commandments, and his injunctions, and his laws, with all heart, and all soul, to uphold the words of this covenant that were written in this book; and all the people committed themselves to the covenant.

This covenant, in a form of an inscription (סֵפֶר)³⁵ was aimed to replace the covenant with the Assyrian kings implied on their vassals by the so-called vassal treaties.³⁶ The covenant with his local god, by whom the vassal treaties with

³⁴ All verses of II Kings 23 cited below are Dtr 1 and thus pre-exilic ("Josian" redaction), i.e. contemporary to the events they describe. For details of redaction history and discussion of dating, see Eynikel, 1996: 241–355, esp. p. 352. Concerning his attribution of וְלִשְׁמֹר וְאֶת־חֻקֹּתָיו וְאֶת־עֲדוּתָיו in II Kings 23: 3 to postexilic Dtr 2 (pp. 345, 351) based on parallels in II King 23: 25, it should be rejected in light of the clear parallels to this particular expression in Assyrian Vassal treaties (SAA 2 6: 387), see below, p. 186 with fn. 52.

³⁵ See Cogan and Tadmor, 1988: 285 comment on this word meaning an "inscription" with the reference to the Sefire treaty, which calls the inscription on its stele *spr*. This inscription (סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית) could be actually a scroll similar to Assyrian vassal treaties written on tablets.

³⁶ Frankena, 1965: 152–153. For Assyrian vassal treaties, see SAA 2 and Radner, 2019 for the texts of the treaties published since SAA 2 and for the treaties mentioned in other kinds

Assyria were sworn, also granted Josiah the exemption from being punished by his deity for violating the vassal oath.

As is clear from the text of the Tell-Tayanat copy of the Vassal or Succession Treaties of Esarhaddon, the place of find and the unique form of tablets³⁷ upon which it was written, tablets with the Assyrian covenant were installed in local temples for worship. In Kinalūa (at least), the covenant tablet was not installed alone, but was surrounded by the images of the Assyrian king and his sons:³⁸

šá ṭup-pi¹ a-de-e an-ni-e ṭup-pi Aš+šur MAN ṬDINGIR^{1meš} u DINGIR^{1meš}
 GAL^{meš} EN^{<meš>1}-ia ú-na-kar-u-ma ša-lam ^mAš+šur-PAP-ṬAŠ¹ MAN KUR
 Aš+šur Ṭša-lam ^mAš+šur-DÛ-A DUMU MAN¹ GAL ša É UŠ-Ṭte¹ lu ša-lam
 ṬŠEŠ^{meš1}-šú DUMU.NITA^{meš}-šú ša Ṭina UGU¹-ḥ[i-šú] ú-na-kar-u-ni ^{na4}KIŠIB
 <NUN> GAL-e an-ni-e šá a-de-e šá ^mAš+šur-DÛ-A DUMU MAN GAL ša É
 UŠ-te DUMU ^mAš+šur-PAP-AŠ MAN KUR Aš+šur EN-ku-nu ina ša ša-ṭir-u-ni
 ina ^{na4}KIŠIB šá MAN DINGIR^{meš} ka-nik-u-ni ina IGI-ku-nu šá-kin-u-ni ki
 DINGIR-ku-nu

Whoever ... discards this *adê*-tablet, a tablet of Aššur, king of the gods, and the great gods, my lords, or discards the image of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, the image of Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designated, or the images of his (Assurbanipal's – N.N.M) brothers, (and) his (Esarhaddon's – N.N.M) first-born sons which are (imposed) over him; (whoever among you) should not protect this seal(ed tablet) of the great ruler (= Aššur) of the *adê*-(document) of Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designated, son of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, your lord, in which it is written that this document has been sealed by the seal of Aššur, king of the gods, and presented before you, as your own god

This text unequivocally indicates that the tablet of *adê* was turned into a local god. The tablet from Tell Tayanat was found in the cella of the local temple.³⁹ The Tell Tayanat tablet as well as the Nimrud copies of Esarhaddon's Succession Treaties are large tablets, which have to be rotated not around their horizontal axis, like regular clay tablets, but around the vertical one.⁴⁰ The latter feature is a clear proof that the treaty tablets were installed for worship so that the worshipers could observe their both sides. It was suggested that this tablet was worshiped in all regions

of texts.

³⁷ The tablet was found in the cella of the local temple (Harrison and Osborne 2012, 137).

³⁸ Lauinger, 2012: 98, lines T v 63–72 = 400–409; § 35; May, 2020: 204–205. Imposing apparently revered royal image (May, 2020: 205–206) on occasion of the vassal treaty is paralleled by one of the earliest documents of this kind – the treaty between Narām-Sîn, the deified king of Akkad, and the king of Elam (Hinz, 1967: 92, 94 section VIII).

³⁹ Harrison and Osborne, 2012, 137.

⁴⁰ Lauinger, 2012: 90.

of Assyrian domination not only by Assyrians, but also by their vassals who swore the *adê*-oath.⁴¹

Assyrians considered breaking the covenant with them by vassals as a sin. The verb *ḥaṭū* generally meaning “to commit crime,” is used in NA texts exclusively to indicate the apostasy from the vassalhood and is translated as “to sin.”⁴² Esarhaddon’s Succession Treaty contain an expression *ina šà-bi a-de-e-ku-nu la ta-ḥa-ṭi-a* “do not sin against your treaty.”⁴³ In Hebrew the same root חטא, “to sin” in II Kings describes apostasy of the Judahite kings from the cult of YHWH, from the covenant with their god.

Yet before the discovery of the Tell Tayanat copy of Esarhaddon’s *adê*-treaties, Karen Radner pointed out to the historical circumstances and features of Assyrian imperial administration, due to which the Assyrian vassal treaties should have been known in Judah and could serve the prototype for Deut 28, 22–44.⁴⁴ Radner has shown,⁴⁵ against Hayim Tadmor,⁴⁶ that the practice of imposition of vassal treaties was known starting with Tiglath-pileser I and was not of Aramaic origin. Disregarding the origin of this practice,⁴⁷ it is clear that in 7th century Judah it was perceived as Assyrian and that Josiah followed the Assyrian model. There is little doubt that Judah as an Assyrian vassal was obliged to revere its treaty with Assyria just as any other vassal state. The wording in Deut 28, 20–44 confirms the direct Assyrian influence. Moshe Weinfeld wrote “the resemblance is at times

⁴¹ Watanabe, 2015: 207; see also May, 2020: 204–206.

⁴² CAD H 157b–158a; see especially Esarhaddon’s succession treaties (SAA 2 6: 66, 105), which forbade sinning against Assurbanipal.

⁴³ SAA 2 6: 292, similar II. 513–517 and 555, 612 speak about sinning against the treaty, but compare I. 626 where a sin against Bēl is mentioned.

⁴⁴ Radner, 2006: 374–375.

⁴⁵ Ibid.: 352–353.

⁴⁶ Tadmor, 1987, 1990, 2011.

⁴⁷ Priestly and Deuteronomistic (Josiah’s) covenants are discerned in the Bible, as have been already shown by Weinfeld (1976: 126; see below, next page with fnn. 49–50). Typically, neither Assyrian treaties nor the Deuteronomistic covenant include sacrifice, as do Gen 15: 9–10 and Mari texts (ARM 2 37, 11–12; ARM 4 78 rev. 16’; ARM 33 293: 11, 17–18; OBTR 1: 11–12; rev. 38–40; A.230: 4’; A.1056: 6, 9–12; A.2094: 9–11; A.2226: 17–18; ARM 26/1 24: 12, 25; ARM 26/1 199: 35; ARM 26/2 329: 52’; ARM 26/2 404: 12–13, 32–33, 50–51; ARM 26/2 428: 4’; ARM 28 50: rev. 20’; ARM 28 66: 6–7; M. 6009: 37, 44–45). Parallel between earlier practices of the Amorite nomads – Mari sacrificial “donkey of peace” – and the priestly covenant is broadly discussed (e.g., Weinfeld, 1976: 102; Tadmor, 2011: 214–216; 109; Weeks, 2004: 118–125; Charpin, 2019: 255–264). Starting with Mendelhall, 1955 and until the most recent Charpin, 2019, comparative studies of ANE treaties constitute a pile even bigger than those dedicated to the influence of Assyrian royal rhetoric on the Hebrew Bible. For the comparisons with the Hittite treaties, see Beckman, 2006: 298 with n. 85 referring to Mendelhall; for the summary of information on ANE treaties with regard to the Bible, see Weeks, 2004, especially pp. 170–173.

so striking that it is difficult to escape the impression that Deuteronomy borrowed directly from outside sources.”⁴⁸ He further juxtaposes the parallel passages in Deut 28 and Esarhaddon Succession treaties, analyses them⁴⁹ and concludes: “the difference in character of the priestly and deuteronomic maledictions lead us to infer, then, that the deuteronomic covenant, by contrast with the priestly covenant was drafted by scribes who were chiefly influenced by Assyrian treaty formulae.”⁵⁰ Similarity of formulas is not limited to Deut 28, 20–44.⁵¹ The expression בְּכָל-לֵב ... וְלִשְׁמֹר מִצְוֹתָיו in the passage quoted above is taken from Esarhaddon’s Succession Treaties *ta-me-tu ta-tam-ma-a-ni ina gu-mur-ti*¹ ŠÀ-ku-nu “you shall swear the oath with all you heart” meaning that the oath cannot be not a pretence but must be sincere.⁵² Likewise the observance of the laws and commandments of YHWH sworn in II Kings 23: 3 must be sincere. The same expression is found in Assyrian treaties starting with the OA period⁵³ – more than millennium prior to the earliest Biblical texts. Most recent studies consider Deut 28, 22–44 as well as Sefire treaties to be translations of Assyrian treaties.⁵⁴

The first step of Josiah’s reform and his first step to independence was replacing the covenant with Assyria by the covenant with his own local god. Josiah was, however, not the only king to conclude covenant with his god. Esarhaddon did it before him, as is clear from SAA 9 3, a prophecy which describes the covenant of Aššur (*adê ša Aššur*) with this king of Assyria.⁵⁵ As is clear from its title – *adê ša Aššur* – Aššur imposes covenant on his subject king.⁵⁶ The prophecy

⁴⁸ Weinfeld, 1976: 116. See also Frankena, 1969: 148–149.

⁴⁹ Ibid.: 117–126.

⁵⁰ Weinfeld, 1976: 126.

⁵¹ The other widely discussed passage is Deut 13 (Weinfeld, 1976: 100 and elsewhere). Weinfeld, discusses parallels between Deut 28, 53–57 (ibid.: 127) and other Deuteronomistic writings (ibid.: 127–135) and Esarhaddon’s succession treaties.

⁵² SAA 2 5: 387. The expression *ina gu/amurti libbikunu*, “with all your heart, wholeheartedly” appears also in SAA 2 6: 53, 169, 310); it should be restored in SAA 2 7 rev. 5’ as well. Earlier, in the vassal treaty of Adad-nērārī V, it appears as *ana gamarti libbišu* (SAA 2 1 iv 3) interpreted there as “with all his loyalty.”

⁵³ Eidem, 1991: 197 iii 2–3 *li-b^aa-am gám¹-ra-am* “(with) all heart.” Frankena, 1969: 141 points also to Hittite and Ugaritic analogies. In Hittite treaty the expression sounds even closer to Hebrew *ina kul libbišu*.

⁵⁴ Crouch and Hutton, 2019: 229–296.

⁵⁵ Interestingly, both covenants – the Assyrian one and the Judahite, where delivered by the respective deities through prophet(esse)s: male La-dāgil-ilī in the Assyrian case and female Huldah in Judah (II Kings 22:14–20). Unlike in Judah uttering divine will through a prophet/prophetess was in Assyria rather rare in comparison to extispisy and celestial divination (cf. Handy, 1994, who compares Huldah consulting Josiah with the oracle queries of Esarhaddon and Nabonidus). Huldah’s prophecy is, however, *vaticinium ex eventu* and thus later than the reform itself.

⁵⁶ This is clear from the working: *tup-pi a-de-e an-ni¹-u šá^d Aš+šur*, “this tablet of (the

describes the rites and the festive meal arranged by Ištar of Arbela on the occasion of this covenant between Aššur and his king. Simo Parpola suggested that these festivities should have been arranged on occasion of the coronation of Esarhaddon on 28th Addaru 681, few days before the New Year, the *akītu* of Nisannu. As an Assyrian vassal, the king of Judah could have been present at this occasion. Whether these suggestions are correct or not, SAA 9 3 strongly resembles the covenant of Josiah followed by the Passover celebrations. In any case, as has been shown, Josiah's covenant and the way of its imposition verbally followed the Assyrian models. Typically, it is claimed that סֶפֶר הַבְּרִית was found in the Temple. The king of Assyria as the overlord is replaced by the God of Israel. This was Josiah's statement of independence.

Longing for independence and further territorial expansion needed the centralisation of power. This centralisation turned into elevation and strengthening of the status of Jerusalem not only as administrative but as a cultic centre. The essence of religious part of Josiah's reforms along with the eliminations of cults of gods other than YHWH was elimination of all the cultic places of YHWH other than the Jerusalem Temple. The centralisation of the cult in the Jerusalem Temple and the desecration of all the alternative cultic sites, such as the famous "high places," and alternative cultic personnel are described at length in II Kings 23: 4–20, 24.

Josiah centralized the cult in Jerusalem and made it the only place of worship in his kingdom. For this purpose, he not only desecrated the alternative cultic places but uprooted and physically exterminated their priests (II Kings 23: 8, 20), destroyed the idols and all alternative cult performers (II Kings 23: 24) and by this ended up with the peripheral cults. His model obviously were again the Assyrian practices. Although Assyrians maintained the sanctuaries of their ancient cultic centres, such as Nineveh and Arbela and even built new temples in the administrative capitals Kalḫu and Dūr-Šarrukīn, Assur always remained the only religious capital of the Empire and the exclusive seat of the Assyrian state tutelary deity – the god Aššur.⁵⁷ The attempt of Tukultī-Ninurta I to move the cult of Aššur to Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta by building there the new temple of Assur failed due to the

god) Aššur" (SAA 9 3: 27); cf. SAA 2 6 (l. i 1) or SAA 2 6 (l. 1), which are called *adê* of Esarhaddon, SAA 2 8, *adê* of Zakūtu (l. 1), SAA 2 11 and 12 (ll. 1) *adê* of Sîn-šarru-iškun. Obviously, the treaty was "named" after the one who imposed it.

⁵⁷ The colophon of the Khorsabad King List, iv 34–35 reads: ŠU ^mKan-dāl-a-nu ^{lū}DUB.SAR É DINGIR *qī-rib* ^{umu}LIMMÚ–DINGIR^{ki}, "hand of Kandalānu, the scribe of the house of the god inside Arbela." (Gelb, 1954: 222). "The god" can only be Aššur, but we know nothing about the temple of Aššur at Arbela from any other source. The tablet is dated to 738 BCE and it is not improbable that some concurrent sanctuary of Aššur existed at Arbela before Sargonids, similar, e.g., to the sanctuaries of YHWH of Samaria and YHWH of Teman (Na'aman 2017). But in the period of the maximal centralisation of power in the times of Sargon and after there was a single temple of Aššur – at Assur.

abandonment of the place after the murder of the king. While making Nineveh his capital, Sennacherib renovated its existing temples and built new ones, but did not built a temple for Aššur at Nineveh, as his father Sargon II did not build one in his new capital, Dūr-Šarrukīn. Instead Sennacherib rebuilt the Aššur Temple at Assur.

Only one temple of Aššur existed in Assyria itself, that at Assur. As Assyrian vassals yearly bringing tribute to Assyrian temples, the Judahites could not be not aware of this distinctive feature of the cult of Aššur. Likewise only the Jerusalem Temple was made by Josiah the only temple of YHWH. The very idea of the single temple for the tutelary deity in Jerusalem was inspired by the Assyrian example. Assyrians, however, did not need theological basis for having only one Temple for their tutelary deity because this was their tradition for centuries. Contrarily, Josiah's concentration of the cult of YHWH was an innovation, which needed justification. The Book of Law "found" in the Jerusalem Temple⁵⁸ provided this justification.

Similarly to Assyrians,⁵⁹ Josiah imposed the covenant upon all his subjects *כָּל-הָעָם לְמִקְטָן וְעַד-גָּדוֹל*, "all the people, from young to old"⁶⁰ or in JPS translation "small and great." Zakūtu, Esarhaddon's mother, made all Assyrians, UN^{meš} KUR *gab-bu*, "all people of the land" swear loyalty to her grandson Assurbanipal. Her treaty detailly lists categories of population, starting from Šamaš-šumu-ukīn, Assurbanipal's "equal" brother, down to "Assyrians high and low"⁶¹ exactly as II Kings 23: 2 lists the categories of the population of Judah starting with the highest – the king and the priests. The same arrangement of the list of sworn vassal population from the local ruler down to "the men in his hands, young and old, as many as there are from sunrise to sunset,"⁶² (^{lú}ERIM^{meš} ŠU^{II}-šú *gab-bu* TUR (u) GAL *ma-la ba-šu-u* TA* *na-pa-ah* ^{lú}UTU-ši *a-di ra-ba* ^dŠam-ši) is found also in Esarhaddon's Succession treaties.⁶³ The geographical definition further stresses that the entire vassal country with all its people was sworn the covenant with Assyrian.

⁵⁸ II Kings 22: 8–13.

⁵⁹ Contra Cogan and Tadmor, 1988: 297.

⁶⁰ Cogan and Tadmor, 1988: 278 translate just "young and old" disregarding the prepositions.

⁶¹ SAA 2 8 3–9a: TA* ^{m.d}GIŠ.ŠIR–MU–^rGI^l.NA PAB *ta-li-me-šú* TA* ^{m.d}GIŠ.ŠIR–UG⁵.GA–TI.LA *ù re-eḫ-te* PAB^{meš}-šú TA* NUMUN LUGAL TA* ^{lú}GAL^{meš} ^{lú}NAM^{meš} ^{lú}šá-ziq^l-ni ^{rú}l^lSAG^{meš} ^{lú}GUB–IGI TA* ^{lú}r^lzak^l-ke-e *ù* ^{lú}TU–KUR *gab-bu* TA* DUMU^{meš} KUR Aš+šur LÚ ^rqa^l-lu LÚ *dan-^rnu^l*, "with Šamaš-šumu-ukīn, his equal brother, with Šamaš-mētu-uballit and the rest of his brothers, with the royal seed, with the magnates and the governors, the bearded and the eunuchs, the royal entourage, with the exempts and all who enter the Palace, with Assyrians, high and low."

⁶² Parallel appearance of "young and old" in II Kings 23: 2 and I. 5 of vassal treaties was noticed already by Weinfeld, 1976: 101.

⁶³ SAA 2 6: 3–6.

Even the unborn sons and grandsons of the sworn men were subjects to it.⁶⁴ Not only the wording of Josiah's covenant but the very procedure of its imposition is taken from Assyria.

After the description of demolition of the cults concurrent to that of the Jerusalem Temple, the narrations of the Josiah reform turns to the cultic duties to be performed in Judah's central and now the only sanctuary and ends⁶⁵ with the imposition of the obligation to celebrate Passover (II Kings 23: 21–23), which as the Deuteronomist states, was not celebrated since the days of the judges:

כא ויצו המלך את כל־העם לאמר עשו פסח ליהוה אלהיכם בכתוב על ספר הברית
הזה: **כב** כי לא נעשה בפסח הזה מימי השפטים אשר שפטו את־ישראל וכל ימי
מלכי ישראל ומלכי יהודה: **כג** כי אם־בשמנה עשרה שנה למלך יאשיהו נעשה
הפסח הזה ליהוה בירושלם:

²¹And the king commanded all the people, saying: “Keep the Passover unto YHWH your God, as it is written in this book of the covenant.” ²²For there was not kept such a Passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah; ²³but in the eighteenth year of king Josiah was this Passover kept to the YHWH in Jerusalem.

II Kings 23: 1–3 and 21–23 are two blocks of once single Dtr 1 text separated by the later Dtr 2 interpolation of vv. 4–20. Typically, this Dtr 1 text describes originally Assyrian rites, since Passover is the New Year of Nisannu – exactly the *zgmukku arḥi rešti* when the Assyrian kings received the tribute and dedicated it together with their annual booty to Aššur. Annual tribute was delivered by the vassals to the Assyrian gods in their temples in Assyria. As a part of this practice the procession of emissaries of Egypt, Gaza, Judah, Moab and Ammon entered Kalḫu (*ina Kalḫi etārbūni*) on the 12th day of a feast with their tribute, as we learn from the letter of the city governor to his king Sargon II.⁶⁶ Provinces had to provide the Assyrian gods with the *sattukku* and *ginû* offerings; vassals sent their “gifts” to Assyrian temples. All of them pulled the “yoke of Aššur.” The delivery of the annual tribute was one of the most important aspects of the Assyrian New Year festival. Esarhaddon prays in his *Schlußgebet* ending the Nineveh cylinder:⁶⁷

⁶⁴ SAA 2 9–10.

⁶⁵ II King 23: 24, which E. Eynikel considers a “gloss impossible to date” (Eynikel, 1996: 355) from the last sixth phase of redaction history. In my eyes it belongs together with II Kings 23 4–20. The latter passage was interpolated between vv. 1–3 and vv. 21–23, which initially was a solid text, while v. 24, thematically belonging to vv. 4–20 was moved to the end of the reform description. It is indeed impossible to establish when it happened.

⁶⁶ SAA 1 110 rev. 4–13.

⁶⁷ RINAP 4 25 vi 58–62.

ina zag-muk-ki ITI *reš-ti-i kul-lat* ANŠE *mur-ni-is-qí* ^{anše}KUNGA ^{meš} ^{anše}GAM.
MAL ^{meš} *til-li ú-nu-ut* MÈ *gi-mir* ERIM ^{bi.a} *šal-la-at na-ki-ri šat-ti-šam-ma la*
na-par-ka-a lu-up-qí-da qé-reb-šá qé-reb É.GAL *šá-a-tu*

On the New Year (feast) of the first month may I review in it, in this palace,
all the war horses, mules, camels, weaponry, battle gear, all of the troops,
spoils of (my) enemy every year unceasing!

The purpose of the Assyrian annual campaigns was to bring booty and tribute to the gods of Assyria on the New Year festival.⁶⁸ The vassal tributaries were to participate in the triumphal *akītu*-procession, to observe the great king offering his loot to the Assyrian gods, and to learn the fear of the god and the king. As a part of this procession, they run at the wheel of the chariot of the Assyrian king. These were the successors of Kulamuwa, Panamuwa II of Sam'al and his son Bar-Rākib,⁶⁹ the loyal vassal of Tiglath-pileser III, the other – Ahaz of Judah.

Thus, Josiah's reform is nothing else but an attempt of the local Judahite king to use the political moment and the vacuum caused by the fall of Assyria in order to create his independent kingdom. He did this by applying the Assyrian political patterns, technologies and even religious models upon his own soil, exactly as did his more successful and powerful Eastern colleagues. He made himself and his people the vassal of his tutelary deity – his only and unique overlord, thus rejecting claims of any other power to impose itself over his kingdom. Paradoxically, the Assyrian world order triumphally continued to rule the world long after the fall of the Empire overtaken by its former vassals.

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⁶⁸ See May, 2012, especially 469–470, 485 and May, 2020: 229–230 on connection of *akītu* and Assyrian triumph.

⁶⁹ Donner and Röllig, 1962: 40, no. 216: 8–11. The *topos* of superseding one's predecessors is also found in Bar-Rākib's Sam'al orthostat (Donner and Röllig, 1962: 40, no. 216: 12–16). His attire is not imitating the garb of the Assyrian kings, unlike that of his predecessor Kulamuwa, but the divine symbols are arranged similarly.

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Contents

Introduction	
<i>Johannes Bach / Sebastian Fink</i>	7
The King as the Source of Public Health: An Analysis of the Marduk-Ea Incantation Structure	
<i>Amar Annus</i>	13
Similes as a Literary Means of Narrative Identity Construction in Neo-Assyrian Royal Narrative Texts	
<i>Johannes Bach</i>	29
Beards as a Marker of Status during the Neo-Assyrian Period	
<i>Ellie Bennett</i>	81
Warrior Kings: The Changing Facets of Heroic Kingship in Assyria	
<i>Hannes D. Galter</i>	107
The Assyrian King and His Enemies According to the Verb <i>saḫāpu</i> in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions	
<i>Mattias Karlsson</i>	129
On the Family and Social Background of the Elite in Assyria	
<i>Raija Mattila</i>	161
מִפְנֵי מֶלֶךְ אֲשׁוּר ...: The Imitators of the King and the Empire	
<i>Natalie Naomi May</i>	171
The King as Priest	
<i>Simo Parpola</i>	195
The Epiphany of the King and the Configurational Impact of Architecture in Neo-Assyrian Palaces	
<i>Beate Pongratz-Leisten</i>	225
To Be Assyrian Residents: A Reflection on the Integration of the Subjugated People into the Assyrian Empire	
<i>Shigeo Yamada</i>	273
Index	295