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Concept of Crown Prince in The Assyrian Political Life

Asurluların Siyasal Yaşamında Velihtlık Anlayışı

ABSTRACT

Assyrians had a monarchical structure in which a king, who came to power through inheritance from a specific family, held absolute authority. At times, this form of governance manifested as a theocratic monarchy, where every political action found its legitimacy on religious grounds. Regarding succession, it is evident that practices were carried out with divine approval and request as guiding principles. The heir in question could be any of the king's natural children, but children born to kings from their second wives or slaves could not ascend to the throne through conventional means. Periodically, kings appointed their children as administrators in various cities, including Babylon, to gain experience in state affairs. The permanence of the designated heir's position and their ascension to the throne upon the king's death were not guaranteed. Additionally, historical records reveal instances where kings changed the crown prince for various reasons. These changes might be attributed to the inadequacy of the crown prince or could result from the influence of queens, as the mother of the chosen crown prince held a significant position within the Assyrian hierarchy. In this study, which is based on cuneiform texts and modern works, the objective is to comprehensively examine the role of the heir apparent in the Assyrian state system, providing insights through periodic examples. Additionally, it seeks to unveil the complex relationships between heirs, kings, queens, and other princes.

Keywords: Assyrians, Succession, Crown Prince, mār šarri, bīt rēdūti.

ÖZ

Asurlular, yönetsel açıdan belli bir aileden kalıt yolu ile başa gelen bir kralın tüm gücü elinde bulundurduğu monarşik bir yapılanmaya sahipti. Bazı dönemlerde bu yönetim anlayışı teokratik monarşi biçiminde de kendisini göstermekteydi. Siyasal yaşamda gerçekleştirilen her faaliyetin dini bir gerekçeyle meşruiyetinin sağlanması bir gelenektir. Velihtlık açısından bakıldığında ise yine tanrısal bir onay ve istek çerçevesinde uygulamalarda bulunulduğu görülmektedir. Söz konusu veliaht kralın aslı çocuklarından herhangi biri olabilmekteydi. Kralların ikincil eşlerinden ya da köle/cariye kadınlardan doğan çocuklarının normal yollarla tahta çıkması mümkün değildi. Krallar çocuklarını devlet işlerine dair deneyim kazanabilmeleri amacıyla zaman zaman Babil de dâhil olmak üzere farklı kentlere yönetici olarak atamaktaydılar. Belirlenen veliahtın bu makamı sürekli surette elde tutması ve kral öldüğünde tahta çıkması mutlak değildi. Zira krallar tarafından belirlenmiş olan veliahtın bazı dönemlerde çeşitli gerekçelerle yine krallar tarafından değiştirilmiş olduğu da görülmektedir. Bu değişiklikler veliaht prensin yetersiz görülmesinden kaynaklanabileceği gibi kraliçelerin etkisi neticesinde de olabilmekteydi. Çünkü veliaht seçilen prensin annesi Asur hiyerarşisinde önemli bir pozisyona yükselmekteydi. Çivi yazılı metinler ve modern eserlerden hareketle oluşturulan bu çalışmada, Asur devlet sisteminde görülen veliahtlık makamının her yönüyle ele alınması ve dönemsel örneklerle açıklanması; veliahtlar ile krallar, kraliçeler ve diğer prensler arasındaki ilişkinin ortaya koyulması amaçlanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Asurlular, Veraset, Velihtlık, mār šarri, bīt rēdūti.

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Introduction

The Semites, who began to settle in Mesopotamia during the 3rd millennium BC, significantly influenced the region's political, economic, and cultural life, leading to the creation of powerful states. One of the most notable among these was Assyria (Gökçek, 2020: 31). Changes in the region's political landscape over time enabled the Assyrian State to evolve from a regional kingdom into an imperial power. Consequently, scholars have divided the political history of Assyria into distinct periods: the Old Assyrian Period (2000-1600 BC), the Middle Assyrian Period (1500-1000 BC), and the Neo-Assyrian Period (1000-612 BC). It is accurate to assert that Assyria emerged as a state under the leadership of Šamši-Adad I between 2000-1600 BC (Gökçek, 2020: 35; Sever, 1987: 421; Topaloğlu and Uslu, 2020: 292). After establishing their state, the Assyrians pursued an expansive policy in the 1st millennium B.C. that extended beyond Mesopotamia, encompassing a significant part of Ancient Asia Minor and Egypt.

The characteristics of the dynasty undeniably played a significant role in maintaining the Assyrian State's authority in the ancient Mesopotamian world for centuries. There were no strict rules governing the continuity of the Assyrian dynasty. Selecting the next king was not limited to a straightforward succession from father to son or the eldest son of the current king. Candidates for the throne could include not only the sons of the reigning king but also his brothers, cousins, nephews, nieces, and even more distant relatives. Therefore, it is evident that Assyria had no uniform succession system. This flexible approach to succession contributed to the preservation of the royal line. Moreover, the sitting king had the authority to designate a successor. The primary reason the incumbent king appointed a successor was to avert potential turmoil and a power vacuum that might emerge in the country after his passing (Radner, 2003: 166.). The key criterion when selecting the crown prince was ensuring that he possessed the knowledge and skills expected of a king (Toptaş and Akyüz, 2020: 53).

The sun god Šamaš, recognized as the deity responsible for exposing crimes in ancient Mesopotamia, held a significant position within the Assyrian succession system. Cuneiform texts reveal that Šamaš was consulted through priests, who posed various inquiries about the future. These questions often included matters related to the designation of the heir by the king. According to the beliefs of the time, Šamaš served as a guiding authority for the nation's future, providing "yes" or "no" responses to these inquiries. As such, Šamaš was considered the divine arbiter of the crown prince, who represented the future of the Assyrian State, and this choice carried a religious sanctity that was beyond question (Kuhrt, 2010: 162; Pekşen, 2019: 780). It was also believed that Šamaš provided diverse responses to questions to safeguard the health and well-being of the crown prince. Examining the foundation of the method employed by the king for selecting and announcing the crown prince, we find it rooted in the divine. After choosing the crown prince he deemed suitable, the king sought the god Šamaš's approval. This approach not only established a divine basis for the designation of the crown prince but also provided a concrete justification for the acceptance of the crown prince by members of the dynasty and the populace.

To legitimize their authority, the kings asserted that they were selected and safeguarded by the gods. This practice, an integral part of the state ideology in ancient Mesopotamia, resulted in the rule of the Assyrian State by kings purportedly chosen by the gods, a notion deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness of the people (Parpola, 1997: XXXIX; Toptaş, 2019: 404). Just as the kings justified their reign through divine empowerment, this divine authority was similarly

invoked in securing the acceptance of the crown prince by members of the dynasty, other state officials, and the general populace.

It is documented that princes born into the Assyrian dynasty were entrusted to the care of the temple of the goddess Ištar. Assyrian princes were nurtured in these temples during their infancy by individuals known as “hierodules”, who embodied the maternal attributes of Ištar. The ideological foundation for this practice can be traced back to narratives found in the Enuma Elish. In Enuma Elish, it is recounted that Marduk, prior to becoming the king of the gods, was breastfed in his infancy by goddesses and cared for by temple attendants endowed with divine attributes. Over time, this practice became a part of the succession process in Assyrian history. In fact, during the succession of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal, two of the most significant kings in Assyrian history, the goddess Mulliššu (Ninlil) (Black and Green, 2004: 140) was regarded as the mother of these kings. In Ashurbanipal’s prophecy text, it is mentioned that he was raised in the temple, under the embrace and wings of the goddesses, and he referred to Mullissu as “the mother who gave birth to me”. The Assyrian royal inscriptions characterize the goddess Mulliššu as “rimtu” or “wild”. However, this characterization encompasses the dual meanings of “purity” and “holiness”. Additionally, the goddess is associated with the moon and is sometimes referred to as the “Daughter of the Moon” or “Ištar of Wisdom”, emphasizing her connection with the superior Goddess Ištar. Kings were perceived as individuals who embodied a unique fusion of humanity and the “Holy Spirit”. In this divine role, the kings were viewed as the earthly representatives of the divine, often regarded as the “Good Shepherd” entrusted with the governance of the people. Consequently, the selection of the crown prince carried a “messianic” dimension, echoing the themes found in the Enuma Elish narrative. Crown princes in the ancient Mesopotamian world were also acknowledged in the realm of the gods. It was believed that, in order to end the chaos, establish justice, and bring about a new era, the crown prince was required to vanquish various foes and ensure peace. Within ancient Mesopotamian mythology, the celestial crown prince found embodiment in the form of the god Ninurta (Parpola, 1997: XXXIX-XLI), often described as the son of the god Enlil (Black and Green, 2004: 142).

The expression “*mār šarri*” in Assyrian documents is thought to be the equivalent of “*crown prince*” (Yalvaç, 1963: 55). However, it should not be forgotten that “*mār šarri*” also has the meaning of “son of the king” in this equation. No comprehensive study has been carried out to determine whether the word is equivalent to “prince” or “crown prince”. In the administrative texts, letters, and reports in which the term “*mār šarri*” appears, it seems to have been used as the title of the prince who was chosen as the successor to the throne. In addition, the other sons of the current king are recorded by name in these documents. The expression “*mār šarri*”; Babylonian king of Aššur-nādin-šumi in 699 BC, Assyrian crown prince of Arda-Muliššu (Arad/Urdu-Mullišši) in 698 BC, Babylonian crown prince of Nergal-šumu-ibni in 694 BC, In every document recording the appointment of Esarhaddon as Assyrian crown prince in 693 BC and Sin-nadin-apli as Assyrian crown prince in 676 BC, the term “crown prince” is used (Kwasman and Parpola, 1991: XXXIV). In these cases, however, it was generally understood from the context whether the princes were crown princes or not. Because the expression *mār šarri*, “son of the king,” was also used ambiguously by scholars as a descriptor for normal princes. This usage continued until the reign of Ashurbanipal, the crown prince of Esarhaddon. However, during the reign of Ashurbanipal, we find the phrase “*Ashurbanipal, the crown prince of the Heir/House of the Throne (Aššur-ban-apli mār šarri bīt rēdūti)*” used explicitly to

describe the crown prince. This phrase perfectly defines the role of the crown prince in the modern sense. Thus, the term “*bīt rēdūti*” refers to an important political institution within the Assyrian monarchy. This definition is essential for understanding the succession system. Moreover, the term “*bīt rēdūti*” was used beyond its literal meaning as a term to describe the crown prince who would succeed to the Assyrian throne (Toptaş, 2023: 380). The crown prince (*mār šarri*), a prince elevated to the position of crown prince, was assigned the administration of specific territories. Typically, these territories included buffer states, cities requiring supervision, or regions strategically crucial for the defense of the capital against potential attackers (Hunt, 2015: 30).

In the Assyrian State’s dynasty, the practice of selecting a crown prince became a tradition during the reign of Sargon II. The king, when choosing the crown prince, sought the endorsement of this choice from the gods Šamaš and Adad through the assistance of priests. Following these steps, the crown prince would transition to a designated succession house known as the “*bīt rēdūti*” to prepare for assuming the throne (Toptaş, 2023: 374-377). At this point, the crown prince had the option to adopt a different name as per his preference. It’s worth noting that the future king Esarhaddon, upon his selection as the crown prince, was referred to as “*Aššur-etel-ilāni-mukin-apli*”, meaning “*Aššur, the prince of the gods, has named an heir*” (Toptaş, 2021: 27-28). It’s also important to recognize that the crown prince appointed by the reigning king could change. For instance, Sennacherib initially designated his son Arda-Muliššu as the crown prince. However, in a subsequent period, he removed Arda-Muliššu from this position and appointed his other son Esarhaddon as the crown prince. It is believed that his mother Naqīa (known as Zakūtu in Akkadian) influenced Esarhaddon’s succession (Coşkun, 2022a: 61). This example illustrates that the crown prince’s designation could be subject to change even after the initial selection.

1. Relations Between The Queens And Crown Princes

Assyrian Kings ruled a great empire between 900-600 BC. The Assyrian kings, who became rich due to the expansion of lands, had cities, palaces, and temples built to show this wealth. When the sources of the period are analysed, it is seen that men dominated politics, religion and trade. However, it is seen that dynasty women had a significant influence in the design of politics and the determination of heirs. For this reason, it would be appropriate to mention the important women of the Assyrian dynasty within the scope of the subject. Identifying the royal women in Assyrian history and determining their social life and status is quite challenging. In the clarification of this issue, women groups expressed with different adjectives may be the source. These groups are MÍ.ERIM.É.GAL (*šekret ekalli*, “concubine”), MÍ.GAR (*šakintu*, “manager of the women's quarter”), DUMU.MÍ. LUGAL (marat šarri, “sister of the king”), MÍ.NIN LUGAL (*ahat šarri*, “daughter of the king”), MÍ.É.GAL (*išši ekalli / šegallu*, “wife”) and AMA LUGAL (*ummi šarri*, “mother of the king”) (Melville, 2004: 38). The examination of personal items such as various jewellery and bowls revealed women bearing these titles. The names of nine women bearing the title E.GAL have survived to the present day.

The social or ethnic backgrounds of queens in Assyria when they were chosen remain uncertain. For instance, MÍ.É.GAL (*išši ekalli / šegallu*, “wife”), is believed to refer to the first wife of the king. The woman who entered the Assyrian palace and eventually became queen typically married the future king before his ascension to the throne. Within this context, let’s consider Queen Semiramis (Šammu-ramat) (Melville, 2004: 43). Semiramis was the mother of Adad-nirari III, the wife of Šamši-Adad V, and the daughter-in-law of Shalmaneser III, often titled the

“lord of the four quarters” (Kertai, 2013: 113). The fact that a stele was directly dedicated to Semiramis suggests her significant role in the patriarchal history of Assyria (Erten, 2018: 52). Adad-nirari III, who was considered the crown prince of Assyria, was a minor when his father Šamši-Adad V passed away. As a result, his mother, Semiramis, governed Assyria for a period of five years (Leick, 2010: 155). However, contentions also suggest that Semiramis may not have held such extensive power (Melville, 2004: 44-45).

Semiramis’ origin has been a subject of debate, with different suggestions ranging from Assyria, the Mediterranean, Armenia, Bit-Adini, Bit-Gabbar, Carchemish, Que, Gurgum, Namri, Pattin, Šubria, but it is more widely accepted that she may have had Babylonian roots. As queen, she played a crucial role in integrating elements of Babylonian culture into Assyria. Nevertheless, Babylonian culture had already influenced Assyria prior to her reign. During Semiramis’ influential period, Assyria engaged in conflicts with neighboring principalities in what is now present-day Syria, the Urartians in Anatolia to the north, and the Medes in the east, in addition to regions west and south of Mesopotamia. In one of his inscriptions, Adad-nirari III claimed to have faced various enemies during this time. However, an analysis of the Saba stele, another inscription attributed to him, suggests that his statements may be more relevant to the period when he ruled alone. The Saba stele records his earliest military activities around 805 BC, including an expedition that extended as far as the Mediterranean Sea. The Pazarcık stele, on the other hand, mentions a campaign that Semiramis and Adad-nirari III jointly organized. The stele implies the queen’s personal involvement in the expedition, as suggested by the statements on the inscription (Donbaz, 1990: 9; Hawkins, 1995: 92-94; Hawkins, 2000: 250, 331; Erten, 2018: 49; Duymuş Florioti, 2015: 16).

Semiramis was known as the powerful and famous queen of the Ancient Mesopotamian period and was mentioned in the first book of the ancient writer Herodotus’ *Historia*. Herodotus mentioned two queens, Nitocris and Semiramis, who significantly contributed to the temples and fortresses in Babylon. It is also stated that Semiramis lived five generations before Nitocris. Herodotus mentioned that Semiramis built dykes on the plains (Herodotos, I, 184). Another remarkable piece of information about the queen in question is that Herodotus mentions a structure called the “*Semiramis Gate*” in the third book of Herodotus when describing the Babylonian campaign of Darius (Herodotos, III, 155). There are different opinions regarding this matter. According to Lenschau, the gate in question is actually the cult structure known as the “*Ištar Gate*” (Erten, 2018: 52).

Another queen from the Sargonid period is Naqīa. Although Sennacherib declared his son Ardamuliššu as the crown prince, Naqīa is believed to have intervened in this situation and secured the position of crown prince for her son, Esarhaddon; (Svärd, 2012: 510-511; Šašková, 2016, 154-155; Coşkun, 2022a, 61; Toptaş, 2021, 54). Naqīa played a significant role in the Assyrian dynasty for an extended period. After her son Esarhaddon, she witnessed the reign of her grandson Ashurbanipal. Her military unit participated in battles against Elam. Naqīa is depicted in a gold relief from this era, where she is seen holding a mirror and is portrayed alongside the king. This depiction of Naqīa as both king and queen marked a first in Assyrian history (Svärd, 2015: 39-48; Coşkun, 2020: 8).

There is no conclusive evidence that the queen was Sennacherib’s first wife. It is believed that the queen’s sphere of influence expanded after her son, Esarhaddon, became the crown prince. With her son’s crown prince status, Naqīa became a property owner. The title deed of land belonging to the queen was recovered in a damaged state. In this title deed, the queen is referred

to as “AMA-šu ša DUMU.LUGAL ša É re-[du-ti],” which translates to “*mother of the crown prince of the house of succession.*” It is noteworthy that Naqā is not mentioned as É.GAL, the king’s wife; nevertheless, she is honored as the mother of the crown prince. Esarhaddon had to struggle for the throne before ascending it. This struggle for the throne began when his father, Sennacherib, was killed by his brother(s). After Esarhaddon ended the confusion and reclaimed the throne from his brother Arda-Muliššu, the divine power of the new king was consolidated. Esarhaddon was the crown prince appointed by Sennacherib with the approval of the god Šamaš and had restored peace in Assyria. In addition to Esarhaddon being recognized as the legitimate heir, his mother, Naqā, is described as a pure and innocent person. This situation demonstrates that Esarhaddon restored order in Assyria as a result of a divinely inspired responsibility (Melville, 2004: 45-46, 57). Ešarra-hamat is mentioned as the wife of Esarhaddon. It is believed that Ešarra-hamat is the mother of the crown prince, Ashurbanipal. The year of death shown as 672 BC on the tombstone believed to belong to Ešarra-hamat is consistent with the Babylonian chronicles (ABC 1, iv 22).

In addition, there are blessings in a document for her death. Ashurbanipal wrote a letter for his mother, who died after his succession was announced. In this letter, he emphasized his election as the crown prince with the words, “*Aššur and Šamaš have chosen me to be the crown prince of Assyria due to my righteousness*”. Evidently, he claimed to have been divinely elected as the crown prince and sought to give religious legitimacy to this situation. Libali-šarrat is mentioned in the sources as the wife of Esarhaddon’s son, Ashurbanipal, whom he declared as the crown prince. Ashurbanipal married Libali-šarrat when he was the crown prince. In Assyria, the crown prince was not considered the most authoritative figure after the king. In a letter to his father, Sargon II, Sennacherib mentions the collection of tribute and gifts, listing the creditors according to their ranks. According to the resulting list, the king’s wife held the foremost position. The king’s wife is followed by the crown prince. Consequently, in Assyrian history, three mother and crown son pairings emerge: Semiramis with Adad-nirari III, Naqā with Esarhaddon, and Ešarra-hamat with Ashurbanipal. Among these mothers of crown princes, Semiramis and Naqā stand out. Nonetheless, women were selected to help determine the heirs of the gods. This trust in the mothers of the king and the crown prince stemmed from their role in giving birth to heirs. As a result of this prevailing understanding in Assyria, dynastic women were considered more significant when they bore an heir and when that heir ascended to the throne (Melville, 2004: 46-57). In the Assyrian dynasty, there existed a parallelism between the sons and their mothers. Whichever of the king’s sons was declared the crown prince, his mother’s sphere of influence expanded. In some cases, as with Naqā, a mother played a pivotal role in enabling her son to become the crown prince.

2. Crown Princes Assigned To Babylon Throne

Šamši-Adad I is considered the most influential king of the Old Assyrian Period (2000-1600 BC), also known as the Assyrian Trade Colonies Period, which is regarded as the first period of Assyrian political history. It is known that Šamši-Adad I had two sons, Ishme-Dagan and Yasmah-Adad. One of the king’s most significant political achievements was the capture of the city of Mari. After bringing this city under Assyrian rule, he granted it to his son Yasmah-Adad and renamed the city Shehna (Chagar-Bazar) as Shubat-Enlil (House of God Enlil / Tel Leilan), making it his administrative center (Kmal, 1978: 186; Gökçek, 2020: 41; Yıldırım, 2018: 203). Šamši-Adad I declared his other son Ishme-Dagan the crown prince and appointed him as the ruler of Ekallatum, a city believed to be located on the banks of the Tigris River. During his

succession, Ishme-Dagan took charge of the administration of the eastern region of the Assyrian Empire. The crown prince held the title of king just like his brother Yasmah-Adad. Šamši-Adad I, who occupied the throne, was referred to as the “great king”. Ishme-Dagan appears to have been more successful in city administration than his brother Yasmah-Adad. In his letters to Yasmah-Adad, the younger son of Šamši-Adad I, the king expressed his frustration with Yasmah-Adad's frequent mistakes, stating, “*Not a single man escaped. The entire land of Ahazim was captured that day. This issue is of great importance to the nation. Rejoice! You are lying there among women, while your brother is here slaying the Dâvidûm. Now, when you go to Qatanum with the army, be a man!*” (ARMT 1, 69, 5-15). These statements clearly reveal the comparisons being drawn between Yasmah-Adad and Ishme-Dagan, the heir apparent (Gökçek, 2020: 41-44; Oates, 2015: 67). An example of such a comparison in cuneiform texts includes the following statements:

“You’re still young, not yet a man, and your chin lacks a beard! How much longer will you delay taking charge of your own household? Shouldn’t you be supporting your brother, who leads mighty armies?” (ARMT 1, 108, 5-10).

When considering Šamši-Adad I’s statements, it becomes evident that Yasmah-Adad lacked the leadership qualities expected of a crown prince. Without a doubt, Yasmah-Adad's deficiency in leadership attributes and Ishme-Dagan's military prowess, along with his successful governance of the region under his charge, played a pivotal role in his selection as the crown prince and the subsequent retention of this position.

Šamši-Adad I incorporated historical information into some of his letters. Additionally, in military operations, fires were lit in elevated areas, serving as signals to facilitate communication among different groups. These fire signals played a crucial role in disseminating information across the entire region. To ensure the system’s effectiveness, a pre-established understanding of the meaning of each signal was essential. However, Yasmah-Adad’s activation of all the established warning methods for a minor attack led to confusion. Due to these events, the prince received a reprimand from his elder brother Ishme-Dagan, the crown prince. Cuneiform texts provide the following account of this incident:

“Perhaps the entire nation is mobilizing in response to the two fires lit during the night. Send letters to all regions and dispatch your fastest messengers, composing the message in the following manner: Two fires were ignited due to a large-scale attack. There is no need for your assistance.” (Oates, 2015: 75).

In another letter, written by Ishme-Dagan, he reproached Yasmah-Adad for his negligence, stating, “*Why are you making such a fuss? It is not appropriate!*” Mari, the commercial city governed by Yasmah-Adad, held a strategic position in the Middle Euphrates region. This city played a pivotal role in controlling trade routes between Mediterranean ports and Mesopotamia. Consequently, the efficient administration of the Mari region held great significance for the political and economic interests of the Assyrian State. In response to his father’s criticisms, Yasmah-Adad included the following statements in his letter (Gökçek, 2020: 44; Oates, 2015: 68):

“Concerning the view that Adad [sent me]. How much longer will we continue to govern [you incessantly]? You are still young, not yet a man! How much longer will you delay taking control of your household? Adad wrote this to me once, twice. Am I not capable of managing my household and my servants?” (ARMT 1, 113, 5-10).

In Ancient Mesopotamia, family letters served as valuable sources of information about the political conditions of the period. Additionally, the practice of adding gifts to letters exchanged between kings was considered a symbol of friendship. When these exchanges ceased, it

indicated a weakening or termination of diplomatic relations between the two kingdoms. It was crucial to treat messengers responsible for delivering letters and gifts with respect. As a result, it was a significant duty to guide messengers arriving at the local administrators of Assyria to the central location where the king was situated. According to information from cuneiform texts, Yasmah-Adad was found lacking in this regard. In one of his letters to his father, Šamši-Adad I, Yasmah-Adad reported a chariot breakdown in his region that hindered an envoy's journey, to which he received a rather stern response. The phrase “*Can't he even ride a donkey?*” (ARMT 1, 21, 10) in Šamši-Adad I's reply clearly illustrates his reaction. As a result, following the reign of Šamši-Adad I, the expected ascension of the crown prince, Ishme-Dagan, to the Assyrian throne occurred. During this period, Assyria began to lose its status as the center of power in Ancient Mesopotamia. The decline of Assyrian power becomes evident in Hammurabi's letter to Ishme-Dagan, where he ordered him to await military aid (Oates, 2015: 68-69). Furthermore, the necessity for Yasmah-Adad, Ishme-Dagan's brother, to relinquish control of Mari, a significant center of Mediterranean trade, to Zimri-Lim, is another notable example highlighting the turbulent era Assyria was experiencing (Oates, 2015: 68; Yıldırım, 2018: 204).

With the death of the powerful Ashurnasirpal II in 858 BC, his son Shalmaneser III (858-824 BC) ascended to the throne, marking the beginning of his rule. According to cuneiform inscriptions, this long-reigning king mentioned that his armies crossed the Euphrates twenty times and the Amanos Mountains seven times before conducting four campaigns into the Que territory, which is located in the present-day Çukurova region. Additionally, this king also led military campaigns in the Mediterranean regions. Records suggest that after these campaigns, the Assyrian army washed their weapons in the salty waters of the Mediterranean. An inscription from the first year of his reign contains the following statements about this matter:

“In my first regnal year, I crossed the Euphrates in flood (and) marched to the western sea. I washed my weapons in the sea (and) made sacrifices to my gods...” (RIMA III, A.0.102.6: i 42-43).

Shalmaneser III, following in his father's footsteps with a series of successful military campaigns and emphasising his superiority over all other kings by using the title of king of the four quarters, designated his son Ašur-dan-apli as the crown prince and declared him as his successor (Sever, 2008: 86-89; Yıldırım, 2017: 86). Ašur-dan-apli began accompanying his father Shalmaneser III in wars from 858 BC onwards (Olmstead, 1921: 381). It was stipulated that the crown prince had to be at least forty-five years old at that time. Records indicate that the Euphrates River was crossed for an attack on Bit-Adini in the presence of significant commanders and the crown prince (Olmstead, 1921: 354). However, at a later stage, Shalmaneser III removed his son from the position of crown prince. Ašur-dan-apli did not accept this decision and initiated a rebellion movement in 827/828 BC, garnering support from various vassal kingdoms and governors (Sever, 2008: 86-90). Some assessments suggest that Ašur-dan-apli's rebellion wasn't solely due to his removal from the throne. Since Shalmaneser III had spent a significant portion of his reign engaged in warfare and no longer led the army himself, he appointed a “*turtānu*” (army commander). Dayyan-Aššur, the appointee to this position, was not accepted by the crown prince. While jealousy has been proposed as a motive, it remains inconclusive (Dezső, 2012: 220; Toptaş and Akyüz, 2020: 55). The appearance of the term “rebellion” in the Assyrian Chronicles for five consecutive years, beginning in 828 BC, suggests that the king's authority in Assyria began to wane. Olmstead has suggested that Dayyan-Aššur, holding the position of *turtānu*, amassed considerable power and exhibited behavior that claimed to possess the sacred authority typically reserved for the king. It is

believed that the mature crown prince could not tolerate Dayyan-Aššur's assertion of kingship and thus initiated a rebellion. Unfortunately, the aging king passed away in 824 BC before he could quell the rebellion. Instead of Ašur-dan-apli, who was known as the crown prince, the throne was passed to Šamši-Adad V (823-811 BC) (Olmstead, 1921: 380-382). Although the Sargonid Period established a rule for appointing a crown prince, the process of determining succession remained the same in previous periods. Once the crown prince, chosen with the approval of the gods, took his place in the “*bīt rēdūti*” (house of succession), he could adopt a different name. From this perspective, it's possible that Crown Prince Aššur-dan-apli used the name Šamši-Adad after assuming the throne, and these two names may have belonged to the same individual.

Tiglath-Pileser III (744-727), who ascended to the Assyrian throne after a 67-year period of stagnation that began with the reign of Šamši-Adad V (823-811 BC), played a pivotal role in transforming the Assyrian State into a fully-fledged empire. His rule marked a new era in Assyrian history, characterized by comprehensive military and administrative reforms. During his reign, Tiglath-Pileser III expanded the crown prince's duties, elevating the crown prince to the foremost authority in the administration of the country when the king was at war. Tiglath-Pileser III appointed his son, Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC), named initially Ulūlāyu (born in September), as the crown prince while he ruled the Assyrian kingdom. In this role, Shalmaneser V wrote administrative letters to his father. Following Tiglath-Pileser III's death, Shalmaneser V ascended to the Assyrian throne without opposition. He chose a new throne name for himself, ceasing to use the name Ulūlāyu and adopting the name Shalmaneser, which was one of his ancestors' names. However, Shalmaneser V's reign was short-lived (Grayson, 2008a: 83-85). According to the Babylonian Chronicle, Sargon II deposed Shalmaneser V in Ṭebētu (January) of the fifth year of his reign (722 BC) (ABC 1, i. 29-31). Sargon II assumed the throne on the twelfth day of the same month, marking the establishment of a new dynasty in Assyrian history and initiating the period known as the Sargonid Period (722-626) (Elayi, 2023: 134). Uncertainty surrounds the origins of Sargon, the ruler who established a new dynasty in Assyrian political history. While an inscription from the new king identifies himself as the son of Tiglath-Pileser III, a propaganda text from the Neo-Babylonian period refers to Sargon as “*the son of a slave*” (*ilittu dusmu*). This description of Sargon II raises questions about whether he had royal lineage or not. However, a Babylonian letter suggests Tiglath-Pileser III as Sargon's father. Suppose we accept the statement in this letter as accurate. In that case, it implies that Sargon's son, Sennacherib, who succeeded Sargon II, grew up in the Assyrian court as the grandson of Tiglath-Pileser III and the nephew of Shalmaneser V (Frahm, 1997: 2). Sargon II assumed control of the Assyrian administration without a designated crown prince while Shalmaneser V was still on the throne. To legitimize his rule, he introduced himself as “*šarru*” (*king*) and “*kēnu*” (*true, legitimate*). Known for his military accomplishments, he also claimed titles such as “*king of the World*” (*šār kišati*) and “*king of the four corners of the World*” (*šar kib-rat arba'i*). There is speculation that Sargon II's mother may have been Iaba, which could trace his lineage back to Tiglath-Pileser III. His strong criticism of Shalmaneser V's activities after ascending the throne raises suspicions of his usurpation of power. Furthermore, even though Babylon was briefly captured by Merodak-Baladan (Marduk-apla-iddina II) in the early years of Sargon II's reign, his ability to retain the capital and his throne indicates that the turmoil in Assyria was far from over (Elayi, 2023: 131-133). Given all these circumstances, making definitive statements about the origin of Sargon II would be premature. The title “*šarru kēnu*” (*true king, legitimate king*), which he attributed to himself, underscores that he asserted

ownership of the throne, whether by royal blood or through alternative means. It's essential to note that Sargon II, in the king annals he dictated, portrayed himself as the son of Tiglath-Pileser III (RINAP 2, no. 066: 1). This practice aligns with the tradition among Assyrian kings to mention their ancestors in their texts, proudly highlighting their noble lineage, considered sacred. Hence, considering the statement within these texts, it's plausible that Sargon II could have been the son of Tiglath-Pileser III, born to a concubine or a slave. The ambiguity surrounding his origin and the diverse accounts available necessitate caution in drawing definitive conclusions.

From the reign of Sargon II onwards, it became a tradition for kings to designate one of their sons as the crown prince. Within the scope of this tradition that emerged from this period, the king had to have the crown prince approved by the gods Šamaš and Adad through the priests, just like in previous periods. After this approval, the crown prince would go to the “*bīt rēdūti*” (*house of succession*) to prepare for his future succession to the throne (Roaf, 1996: 188).¹ Before traveling to the *bīt rēdūti*, the crown prince was introduced to the public in a ceremony. In this ceremony, the crown prince wore a garment known as an *urba*, which was not as elaborate as the king's robe. After the ceremony, the crown prince's new place of residence, the *bīt rēdūti*, had to have someone to educate the crown prince. In addition, there was also a special counselor and doctor for the crown prince in this building. It is also known that the crown prince was married at this step (Kuhrt, 2010: 187). After these steps, the crown prince could also take a different name according to his wish (Roaf, 1996: 188).

Sennacherib was likely around 20-25 years old when Sargon II assumed the Assyrian throne. Sargon II appointed his son Sennacherib as the crown prince, a move believed to have occurred before 715 BC. The precise location of Sennacherib's residence during his time as crown prince remains uncertain, but according to Simo Parpola's interpretation, he resided in the “*bīt rēdūti*” north of Nineveh. As crown prince, Sennacherib played an active and influential role in the administration of the Assyrian state during his father Sargon II's military campaigns in Babylon from 710 to 707 BC. He was also actively involved in the military policies carried out in the north of Assyria (Frahm, 1997: 3). Correspondence from the period suggests that Sennacherib provided numerous reports to his father, Sargon II, regarding state affairs while serving as the crown prince (Grayson, 2008a: 117). The intelligence letters addressed to Sennacherib during his succession contain crucial information regarding the policies of the Urartu State (Barnett, 2008: 355). From captured documents, it becomes evident that the Urartu State influenced a buffer state affiliated with the Assyrian State to act against their loyalty. The city of Ukku, believed to be located in today's Hakkâri region, served as the center of this buffer state. In 697 BC, when Sennacherib was crown prince, he effectively neutralized Ukku (Radner, 2012: 257-260) to prevent any hostile military actions. Additionally, due to the significant defeats suffered by the Urartu State, which supported Ukku, against the Cimmerians, the military and political threats that could have emanated from the north were mitigated for a period. These political achievements significantly shaped the military and political policies executed in Mesopotamia during Sennacherib's reign, facilitating Assyria's intensified actions toward various southern cities, particularly Babylon (Frahm, 1997: 2-3)

¹ It is also thought that the election of the crown prince became a tradition during the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III. see Elayi, 2023:154

Sennacherib received the same education as his brothers while he was an ordinary prince before being designated as the heir. During this period, his father Sargon II had not yet seized the throne. His education, along with his other brothers, was overseen by a figure named “Hunni”. Following his father’s assumption of the Assyrian throne, he was appointed as the crown prince, marking the beginning of a tenure lasting for more than fifteen years. As the crown prince, Sennacherib met with local kingdom leaders and Assyrian governors. He also dealt with matters related to military intelligence and envoys. Throughout this period, Sennacherib corresponded with his father, writing numerous letters to inform him of the developments concerning the responsibilities he held (Elayi, 2023: 151-154).

Sargon II was succeeded to the Assyrian throne by his son Sennacherib (705-681 BC). Sennacherib carried out the Babylonian Campaign in the first years of his rule. Sennacherib's activities on Babylon were a continuation of the struggles with Elam that started during the reign of his father Sargon II (Holloway, 2002: 353; Oates, 2015: 124; Pekşen, 2021: 629). Therefore, before analysing Sennacherib’s policies on Babylon, including the appointment of princes belonging to the Assyrian dynasty to the throne of Babylon, it is necessary to evaluate the developments that took place during the reign of his father Sargon II. In fact, both Sargon II and his son Sennacherib had to struggle with Elam for the goals they wanted to realise in Babylonia.

Sennacherib assumed the position of king of Assyria and ruler of Babylonia. However, Marduk-apla-iddina II, who had been maintained on the Babylonian throne by Sargon II, was still alive and did not hold the same respect for Sennacherib as he had for Sargon II. Around 703 BC, an unknown figure named Marduk-zakir-şumi II seized the Babylonian throne. In response, Marduk-apla-iddina II took action to reclaim the Babylonian throne. During this process, he sought to hinder Sennacherib’s involvement with the Babylonian region by inciting the vassal cities in present-day Palestine to revolt and forming an alliance with Elam. These developments prompted Sennacherib to take measures against Marduk-apla-iddina II and ultimately regain control of the Babylonian throne. In an effort to manage the Babylonian situation smoothly, Sennacherib appointed Bel-Ibni, a Babylonian of native origin educated in the Assyrian court, as the new king of Babylon. Nevertheless, this strategy did not provide a lasting resolution for the Babylonian issue. Consequently, Sennacherib launched another campaign against Babylon (Oates, 2015: 124).

Sennacherib aimed to secure control over the Babylonian throne without complications, and to achieve this, he appointed Bel-Ibni, a Babylonian with local origins who had received education in the Assyrian court, as the new king of Babylon. Nevertheless, this strategy failed to provide a permanent solution for the Babylonian issue, leading Sennacherib to launch another campaign against Babylon (Holloway, 2002: 353; Brinkman, 2008: 33; Oates, 2015: 124; Pekşen, 2021: 629; Toptaş, 2021: 27). After this intervention, he placed his eldest son and crown prince, Aşşur-nādin-şumi, on the Babylonian throne in 699/700 BC (Bart, 1874: 169; Sayce, 1895: 45; Holloway, 2002: 353; Oates, 2015: 124; Pekşen, 2021: 629; Toptaş, 2021: 27). While these developments were unfolding in Babylonia, Marduk-apla-iddina II is known to have passed away. Although his death positively impacted Sennacherib’s political influence, it did not resolve the Babylonian problem for Assyria. Elam, seeking to weaken Assyria’s control over Babylon, incited the local population to revolt. In response, Sennacherib initiated preparations for an expedition against Elam in 696 BC to curtail the activities of the Elamites concerning Babylon (Holloway, 2002: 353-354; Oates, 2015: 124; Pekşen, 2021: 629).

Taking advantage of Sennacherib's campaign preparations, which diverted his attention from Babylonia, the Elamites initiated activities against the Assyrian crown prince, Aššur-nādin-šumi, who held the Babylonian throne. Despite Aššur-nādin-šumi's rightful claim to the Babylonian throne, the Babylonians and Elamites allied, ousted Aššur-nādin-šumi, and captured him. Following this incident, Sennacherib lost contact with his son. Subsequently, in response to these events, Sennacherib launched a campaign against Babylon and Elam. The Elamite-supported Nergal-ušezi, who occupied the Babylonian throne, was captured by the Assyrians. In 689 BC, the Assyrians gained complete control over the city of Babylon and apprehended Mušezi-Marduk and his family. Sennacherib, possibly in retaliation for the death of his son-in-law, Aššur-nādin-šumi, enacted a devastating action in Babylon. It is believed that he created a man-made flood² by altering the course of the Tigris River through the city's ruined walls. Sennacherib's dissatisfaction led to the order for the destruction of religious statues, including the statue of God Marduk, the chief deity of Babylon, and also revered in Assyria. Only the statue of God Marduk was relocated to Assyria (Pekşen, 2021: 629-631), and the city of Babylon was subjected to plunder and destruction (Porter, 1996: 166). These events hold particular importance as they underscore the role of Assyrian crown princes as deputies to the king and demonstrate the Assyrian State's strong response to any actions that jeopardized the well-being of the crown princes. The extensive devastation, including the burning and destruction of Babylon, one of Mesopotamia's most significant cities, serves as a stark illustration of this stance.

Although Babylon suffered destruction, Sennacherib appointed another son, Nergal-šumu-ibni, to rule on the Babylonian throne. The former crown prince, Aššur-nādin-šumi, was succeeded by his son Arda-Muliššu. However, Arda-Muliššu's tenure as crown prince was brief. Sennacherib removed him from this position and declared his other son, Esarhaddon, as the new crown prince. The specific reasons for Arda-Muliššu's removal remain unclear, but it is suggested that Esarhaddon's mother, Naqia, may have played a role in this decision. This practice by Sennacherib illustrates that the appointment of crown princes was subject to change (Toptaş, 2021: 27; Coşkun, 2022a: 61; Coşkun, 2022b: 35-36). When examining the name of the new crown prince, Esarhaddon, it becomes apparent that it means "Aššur gave a brother". This suggests that Esarhaddon was not the eldest child because Arda-Muliššu was born to Sennacherib from his other wife, Tashšmetu-šarrat, prior to Esarhaddon. While it wasn't a strict rule that the crown prince must be the eldest child, the first-born child generally enjoyed favorability in the selection process. Despite the fact that Esarhaddon was not the eldest child, various developments led to his declaration as the crown prince. It was typical for a prince whose succession was approved to adopt a different name. Esarhaddon was also known by the name "Aššur-etel-ilāni-mukin-apli", meaning "Aššur, the prince of the gods, has appointed an heir" (PNA 1/I 184; Olmstead, 1923: 337; Toptaş, 2021: 25-28). These developments suggest that the wives of kings had an influential role in determining the heir. Analyzing the meaning of the name Esarhaddon received after his selection as the crown prince, it appears that society aimed to convey the idea that heirs, like the kings, were chosen through divine election.

The determination of the crown prince by the gods, which was observed before the Sargonid Period, is also seen in the case of Esarhaddon. King Sennacherib offered sacrifices to the gods

² In the Babylonian narratives, the flood in question is described as presenting the image of the "Great Flood". see Porter, 1996: 170.

Šamaš and Adad and asked whether Esarhaddon could be the crown prince. It is recorded that the gods replied “*he is your successor*”. Having received approval from the gods, Sennacherib felt the need to organise an oath ceremony in the presence of his other children, members of the dynasty and the people (Çetin, 2019: 105). The main reason for this situation was that while there was already a crown prince, he was dismissed and replaced by Esarhaddon. While all these developments were conveyed to the people as the will of the gods, a loyalty treaty was made so that the new crown prince would be respected by the people and protected from enemies (Toptaş, 2021: 28). The statements in the loyalty treaty for Esarhaddon are given below:

“[..... which Sennacherib, king of Assyria, your lord], has *set to you*;[If you should hear] improper things, you shall speak out [going] to Sennacherib, king of Assyria, [your lord], and totally devote yourselves to the king, your lord;you shall protect [*Esarhaddon*, the crown prince designate, and] the other princes [whom Sennacherib, king of Assyria, has presented to you;(otherwise):...”

In the continuation of the text, it is documented that individuals who failed to uphold the stipulations outlined in the oath ceremony would incur the wrath of the gods of Ancient Mesopotamia (SAA 2, 3, 1-5).

A copy of Esarhaddon’s prism was uncovered during excavations at Kouyunjik, within a structure known as “*The house built by Sennacherib for his son*”. Within this document, Esarhaddon discusses his selection as the crown prince and provides insights into the reactions of his brothers (Kraeling, 1933: 338):

“The palace of Esarhaddon, great king, mighty king, king of the world, king of Assyria, governor of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four quarters, true shepherd, favorite of the great gods, (i 5) whom from his childhood the gods Aššur, Šamaš, Bēl, and Nabû, Ištar of Nineveh, (and) Ištar of Arbela named for the kingship of Assyria —

I am my older brothers’ youngest brother (and) by the command of the gods Aššur, Šin, Šamaš, Bēl, and Nabû, Ištar of Nineveh, (and) Ištar of Arbela, (my) father, who engendered me, elevated me firmly in the assembly of my brothers, saying: “This is the son who will succeed me”. He questioned the gods Šamaš and Adad by divination, and they answered him with a firm “yes”, saying: ‘He is your replacement.’ (i 15) He heeded their important word(s) and gathered together the people of Assyria, young (and) old, (and) my brothers, the seed of the house of my father.” (RINAP 4, no.1, i 1 – i 16)

The expressions within a treaty text that contains loyalty oaths administered by Esarhaddon demonstrate that princes had the capacity to engage in treaty-making and pledge loyalty, much like kings. Notably, in the text of the treaty, Esarhaddon is referred to as “*lord*” rather than “*king*”, implying that this particular treaty may have been forged during Esarhaddon’s succession period before he officially ascended to the throne in Adar 681 BC:

“I [will] be [his servant] and speak good of him, I [will be] loyal to him and [... the *face* of Esarhaddon my lord, [...]; I will [keep] the oath [*of this treaty tablet*] and not perform the (rite of) undoing the [oath ...] or make [...]. Also, you shall not make [...], and you shall not make [...], and you shall not [.....] of undoing ...[...]. (Whoever sins against this treaty tablet:) [May Aššur, father of the gods, and king] of the totality of heaven and earth, [impose a heavy] punishment [upon him ... and forbid his entering into the presence of god and king. May [Mullissu, the great mother, his] beloved wife [...] alter his [mind]. [May Ištar, lady of warfare, break his bow in] the thick of battle, and have him crouch as a captive [under his enemy]. [May Šamaš.....] untruthful scales [.....] in the plaza of his city. [May Nikkal...] worsen his case [and not intercede for him] in the presence of Sin [her husband]. [May Nergal, *the strongest among the gods*,] destroy [his] people through plague and pestilence [...” (SAA 2, 4, 8-26).

Esarhaddon notably invoked the powerful gods and goddesses of Ancient Mesopotamia as witnesses to the treaty he established during his succession. This practice serves as an additional

indicator of the divine support bestowed upon heirs, paralleling the divine support traditionally associated with kings.

In the treaty text, which pertains to the oath of allegiance made on behalf of the crown prince Aššur-etel-ilāni-mukin-apli (Esarhaddon), it is noteworthy that the former crown prince, Arda-Muliššu, was among those who swore allegiance. However, he later sought to reclaim his former position from his father, Sennacherib. When Sennacherib did not accede to this request, it prompted a conspiracy by the crown prince against Esarhaddon. This conspiracy ultimately resulted in the exile of Esarhaddon. The circumstances surrounding Esarhaddon's exile also give rise to the possibility that Sennacherib may have chosen to exile his son as a protective measure against other potential threats (Grayson, 2008b: 120; Radner, 2003: 166-167; Toptaş, 2021: 29). Regardless of the motivation, Esarhaddon left the palace, while Arda-Muliššu did not ascend to the crown prince position as he had anticipated (Toptaş, 2021: 29).

Arda-Muliššu, recognizing that the crown prince's position would no longer be conferred upon him, orchestrated a rebellion with the aim of usurping the throne. This uprising, spearheaded by Sennacherib's own sons, culminated in the assassination of Sennacherib on the twentieth day of Tebeth (in 681 BC. This tragic event marked the onset of a complex and turbulent period for the Assyrian State. It is widely believed that Sennacherib met his demise at the hands of his own son(s), with Arda-Muliššu likely at the forefront of the conspirators (Mieroop, 2003: 16; Leichty, 2011: 2; Elayi, 2023: 167). The Babylonian Chronicles offer the following insights into the rebellion:

“On the twentieth day of the month of Tebeth, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, was killed in a rebellion by his son. Sennacherib ruled Assyria for twenty-four years. The rebellion continued in Assyria from the twentieth day of the month of Tebeth to the 2nd day of the month of Adar.” (ABC 1, iii 34-37; Glassner, 2004: 199-201).

The question of where Sennacherib met his demise holds a certain intrigue, just as the question of who was responsible for his death. Prism A, discovered as a belonging of Ashurbanipal, Sennacherib's grandson, offers valuable insights into this matter. According to the information contained in this text, Sennacherib was inside a temple in Babylon at the time of the fatal incident. Engaged in an act of worship, he was caught off guard and lost his life in the sudden attack. The prism narrative also reveals that Ashurbanipal did not allow the deeds against his ancestor to go unpunished (RINAP 5/1, no. 11: iv 70; Kraeling, 1933: 344; Toptaş, 2021: 29-30).

The Babylonian society, negatively affected by Sennacherib's actions towards Babylon, deemed him a “*godless king*”. His assassination, seen as punishment, was chronicled in this light in the Babylonian chronicles. To further understand Sennacherib's son Arda-Muliššu's potential role in the assassination, one can turn to cuneiform documents. In Simo Parpola's study titled “*The Murder of Sennacherib*”, a letter is discussed that contains clues to the identity of the presumed assassin. Although the “LÍL” at the end of the name Arad-Ninlil is missing in the letter, there is no other Sargonid prince with a name starting with “Arad”. Additionally, the correct reading of the word “Ninlil” at the end of the name suggests “Muliššu” (or “Mullěsu”). As a result, this letter equates the name Arda-Muliššu (Arad/Urdu-Muliššu) with Arad-Ninlil. You've provided additional information about the involvement of two palace officials, Nabû-šum-iškun and Silla, in the assassination and their continued presence in office during Esarhaddon's rule. This information enhances the context and understanding of the events surrounding Sennacherib's assassination (Parpola, 1980: 171-173). As a result of the evaluation of this source, it is seen that high-ranking officials in the palace were also involved in Sennacherib's murder and

probably supported Arda-Muliššu. After analyzing the letter in question, it can be concluded that Arda-Muliššu was prevented from conveying news of his rebellion to the king due to the support he received from the officials and soldiers in the palace. According to the obtained document (SAA 18, 100, 2-12), some Babylonians learned that Arda-Muliššu was preparing for a rebellion. When a Babylonian citizen came to the Assyrian palace to report this news to Sennacherib, he was directed to Arda-Muliššu instead of the king. Consequently, Arda-Muliššu and his supporters neutralized this individual and continued with their plans for rebellion (Toptaş, 2021: 30).

Esarhaddon was not in the capital when Arda-Muliššu initiated a rebellion, resulting in the death of his father, Sennacherib. Given the events that transpired, Esarhaddon must have realized that he would not be able to ascend to the throne without a struggle. The struggle was particularly challenging for Esarhaddon, who marched to the Hanigalbat region west of Nineveh to confront his older brother, Arda-Muliššu, who had the support of palace officials and some soldiers. Arda-Muliššu was able to assert his authority over the Assyrian people and seize the throne with the backing of the army. In his annals, Esarhaddon described this situation and recorded that during his march to the capital, those who had initially opposed him changed sides and pledged their support. The people of Assyria recognized him as their king, appointed by the gods, and swore an oath of allegiance (Grayson, 2008b: 120; Toptaş and Akyüz, 2020: 67; Toptaş, 2021: 33). Esarhaddon emerged victorious from the conflict with his brother and assumed the throne of Assyria in Nineveh (Toptaş, 2021: 34). The Babylonian chronicles document this event with the statement, “*On the twenty-eight/eighteenth day of the month of Adar, his son Esarhaddon ascended to the throne of Assyria*” (ABC 1, iii 38; Glassner, 2004: 201).

When the Assyrian throne was no longer in the hands of the rebel prince, he and his other brothers, who supported him but whose identities could not be determined, sought refuge in the Urartu State under the rule of Rusa II. This narrative is also supported by accounts found in the Old Testament (Kings II, 19: 37; Yeşeya, 37: 38; Wiseman, 1958: 6; Coşkun, 2022a: 62; Toptaş, 2021: 35). The palace officials who were unable to escape with Arda-Muliššu were executed. Furthermore, Esarhaddon removed other palace officials who were not proven to have participated in the rebellion because they had shown leniency towards Arda-Muliššu during his claim to the throne. In addition to the officials, he replaced the guards, citing negligence as the reason for their dismissal, and appointed new individuals to take their positions (Toptaş and Akyüz, 2020: 68; Toptaş, 2021: 35). Esarhaddon exhibited some noteworthy behaviors as a result of his father's murder, the struggle for the throne, and the illness he carried. First and foremost, he was the Assyrian king who consulted the gods through the priests the most frequently. He based his decisions on the answers he received from these consultations. Additionally, he consistently heeded the ominous signs observed by astrologers. Esarhaddon conducted the proxy king (*šar puhi*) ritual seven times between 677-669 BC (Elayi, 2023: 174). The matter of determining the heir was also aimed to be resolved based on the guidance received from the gods. Sîn-nādin-apli, the eldest son of Esarhaddon, is the subject of a text on “*bīt rēdūtī*”, that is, whether or not he could be admitted to the house of the heir (house of succession) (Yalvaç, 1963: 57; Toptaş, 2023). The text in question includes the following statements:

“Šamaš, great lord, give me a firm positive answer to what I am asking you! Should Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, strive and plan? Should he enter his son, Sin- nadin-apli, whose name is written in this papyrus and placed before your great divinity, into the Succession Palace? Is it pleasing to your great divinity? Is it acceptable to your great divinity? Does your great divinity know it? Is the

entering of Sin-nadin-apli, son of Esahaddon, king of Assyria, whose name is written in this papyrus, into the Succession Palace, decreed and confirmed in a favorable case, by the command of your great divinity, Šamaš, great lord? Will he who can see, see it? Will he who can hear, hear it?" (SAA 4, 149, 1-7).

While it was not a rule in the Assyrian dynasty to automatically designate the eldest male prince as the heir apparent, the narrative above indicates that Esarhaddon gave priority to his eldest son, Sīn-nādin-apli (Sin-iddina-aplu). Esarhaddon was also known to have had a daughter named Sherua-eterat and five other sons: Šamaš-shum-ukin, Aššur-ban-apli, Aššur-mukin-palīa, Aššur-ethil-shame-eršetī-balitsu, and Šamaš-mita-luballit. The absence of mentions of Sīn-nādin-apli in later sources suggests that he may have passed away. Instead, Ashurbanipal is now referred to as the crown prince, replacing Sīn-nādin-apli. Kadriye Yalvaç, in her work titled *"The Question of Heirship and Ashurbanipal"*, suggests that Ashurbanipal may have used the name Sīn-nādin-apli/Sin-iddina-aplu before officially being declared as the crown prince. It's worth noting that "Sin" was typically used for younger children and "Aššur" for older ones. In light of this suggestion, Kadriye Yalvaç's research implies the presence of another prince named Ashurbanipal who may have passed away before his other brothers. The name "Aššur-ban-apli-mah-ri-i" in the eighteenth line of the narrative, which is believed to belong to the deceased Ashurbanipal I, provides supporting evidence for this hypothesis. Consequently, it is argued that following the death of Aššur-ban-apli-mah-(ri-i), who is thought to be Ashurbanipal I, his brother Sīn-nādin-apli / Sin-iddina-aplu assumed the name Ashurbanipal. The description "*mār šarri dannu*" (strong heir) in the sixteenth line of Ashurbanipal I's inscription was attributed to Ashurbanipal, the last influential king of the Sargonid Period. Furthermore, in an effort to identify Esarhaddon's children, it was concluded that Aššur-taqiṣa-libluṭ and Šamaš-mita-luballit mentioned in the analyzed texts, may refer to the same individual (Yalvaç, 1963: 56-57).

Esarhaddon is thought to have been about twenty years old when he chose Ashurbanipal as the crown prince (Elayi, 2023: 181). Ashurbanipal probably characterized the older Šamaš-šumi-ukin with the phrase "ahu talimu", meaning "equal status". It has been suggested that Šamaš-Shumi ukin, the first prince born after the death of Esarhaddon's eldest son Sin-nadin-apli, may have been twins with Ashurbanipal. This suggestion is based on the term "*ahu talimu*", which signifies equal status or close succession. The expression in question has been a controversial one, as it suggests who is the second-born of twin children. Another possibility is that Šamaš-šumi-ukin also described Ashurbanipal using this term. Therefore, the meaning of "*ahu talimu*" should be viewed with skepticism. However, in the Zincirli Stele built by Esarhaddon, the two brothers are depicted as equals (Wiseman, 1958: 6-7).

Esarhaddon wished for his son Ashurbanipal to succeed him on the Assyrian throne. However, he harbored reservations about Ashurbanipal remaining in this position and eventually becoming king. These reservations were rooted in the distrust that Esarhaddon felt toward those around him. Esarhaddon's struggles had a profound impact on his mental health. From a young age, Esarhaddon faced certain health issues, and it is evident that his mental well-being influenced all of his decisions after ascending to the throne. Furthermore, the death of his wife, Ešarra-hammāt, in 673 BC had a significant impact on the king. The fact that he dismissed officials responsible for the security of the palaces in Ninive and Kalhu, concerns about potential uprisings or rebellions, the selection of officials in the Assyrian State, and even his worries about the high priest of the country were all matters he consulted the oracles on. These actions are important in revealing the mental crisis experienced by this king. In addition to these concerns, it is evident that Esarhaddon sought divine guidance through oracles when making

foreign policy decisions related to Egypt, Urartu, Phrygian, and Late Hittite States. The assassination of his father Sennacherib by his own sons instilled in Esarhaddon a constant fear of death, despite his successful military campaigns. Consequently, this fear led him to adopt a protective attitude toward his crown prince and other sons, as he was wary of potential threats against them (Coşkun, 2022a: 63-68).

“As to what the king wrote [to me]: “Adjure Adad-šumu-usur! Why did he say that the crown prince and Šamaš-Šumu-ukin should not go outdoors before the the twenty-second day of Tishri (VII)? Has he seen some portent?” (SAA 10, 314, 3).

As evident from the cuneiform document above, Esarhaddon closely monitored divine communications with the people through celestial events, natural disasters, and similar occurrences. Consequently, he took precautions with the assistance of oracles and astrologers.

It is observed that the great power of the sun god Šamaš, which he had since the earlier periods, continued even during the reign of Esarhaddon, and that he was consulted through the priests regarding the health of the crown prince as well as his influence on the future of the dynasty (Kuhrt, 2010: 162). A cuneiform text contains the following statements in this regard:

“[Should Assurbanipal, the crown prince of the] Succession Palace, [drink this drug which] is placed [before] your great [div]inity, [and in drinking this drug will he] be rescued and spared? [Will he live and get well? Will he ..., be s]laved and escape? [Will the illness of] his [body] be released? Will it leave (him)? Does your great divinity know it?” (SAA 4, 187, 1-4).

During Esarhaddon’s reign, there was a noticeable improvement in Babylonian policy, which became more favorable to the Assyrian State. This shift is attributed to his Babylonian mother, Naqīa, who exerted a significant influence in this regard. Naqīa raised her son with Babylonian culture and arranged his marriage to a Babylonian princess (Oates, 2015: 126). This queen held a prominent position within the Assyrian dynasty and was known for her generous donations to temples. Some believe that she may have played a role in securing Esarhaddon’s position as the crown prince. Throughout her son’s reign, the queen continued to wield power and actively participated in military campaigns. Esarhaddon often sought her counsel (Coşkun, 2022a: 61). There is even an allegation that suggests Sennacherib’s assassination was part of a plan devised by the queen (Sever, 2008: 113).

Esarhaddon was committed to closely monitoring political and social events in Babylon. Assyrian court records from this period contain disputes, complaints, and reports among Babylonian officials (Grayson, 2008b: 133). Under his rule, the city of Babylon, which had suffered significant destruction during Sennacherib’s reign, was rebuilt to its former glory (Holloway, 2002: 77; Sever, 2008: 113).³ In an attempt to erase the unfavorable legacy of his father in the eyes of the Babylonian people, Esarhaddon asserted that Assyrian nobles had caused the destruction of the city. He sought to improve Babylonian politics and foster unity between Assyrians and Babylonians through religious measures. As part of his efforts, he revoked the ban on non-Assyrian citizens entering Assyrian temples, a law from the previous era. He also lifted trade restrictions on the peoples residing in Nippur and Sippar, situated outside the city of Babylon. Concurrently, diplomatic relations with Urtaki, the ruler of Elam, and Assyria showed signs of improvement. One of Esarhaddon’s notable actions was the restoration of the Esagila temple in Babylon. Simultaneously, the Ešarra temple in Assyria underwent renovation (Sever, 2008: 113-114). The initial construction of the Esagila temple

³ Esarhaddon’s activities of renovation and construction of cult buildings are expressed in cuneiform texts. see RINAP 4, no.077, 1.

was dedicated to the Babylonian chief god, Marduk. Later, the construction of the Ezida temple, which was the dwelling place of the god Nabu (known as the son of Marduk), contributed to the strength of the Esagila. Historical records indicate that during the reigns of Esarhaddon and his son Ashurbanipal, the “*New Year Festival (Akītu)*” was celebrated, and offerings were made to the statue of God Nabu. In the process of rebuilding the Esagila during Ashurbanipal’s rule, there is documentation that he personally assisted by carrying a basket of earth on his head (Yıldırım, 2021: 264-265; Oates, 2015: 128).⁴ It is possible that Esarhaddon’s involvement in religious building projects was influenced by the belief that his grandfather, Sargon II, was cursed by the gods due to his father Sennacherib’s destruction of Babylon and his grandfather Sargon II’s body being left unburied without proper burial rites. The king in question appears to have dictated inscriptions on the way to the Assyrian temple, requesting the gods’ forgiveness for the sins of his ancestors and asking them not to punish him. These inscriptions detail the transgressions of his forebears (Elayi, 2023: 176).

Although Esarhaddon aimed to prevent any challenges to his chosen crown prince, Šamaš-šumu-ukīn expressed his desire to ascend to the throne. However, Esarhaddon was reluctant to change his crown prince and likely sought to avoid the same fate that befell his father, Sennacherib. To address this, Esarhaddon rewarded Šamaš-šumu-ukīn by granting him the succession to the Babylonian throne (Toptaş, 2021: 197). Šamaš-šumu-ukīn then took up residence in Lower Mesopotamia (Brinkman, 2008: 40). The first instance of this practice was observed with Esarhaddon’s older brother, Aššur-nādin-šumi. After designating his son Šamaš-šumu-ukīn as the ruler of Babylon, Esarhaddon bestowed upon him the title “*mār-šarri Babilī*”, signifying the Babylonian heir (Yalvaç, 1963: 56).

Esarhaddon formally declared Ashurbanipal as the crown prince of Assyria (*mār šarri Aššur*) and Šamaš-šumu-ukīn as the crown prince of Babylon (*mār šarri Babilī*) in ceremonial proclamations. He made it clear that he expected loyalty from his sons even after his reign, invoking the gods as witnesses to this decision and formalizing treaties with vassal kingdoms. Esarhaddon assigned various public offices with religious significance to his other sons in cities across Assyria and Harran. However, it’s important to note that this distribution of responsibilities doesn’t imply that Esarhaddon relinquished all royal Powers (Wiseman, 1958: 7) or that the country was divided between crown princes Ashurbanipal and Šamaš-šumu-ukīn. Esarhaddon continued to rule the state until his death. The subsequent oath text of Ashurbanipal, who ascended the throne after Esarhaddon’s passing, reveals that he actively assisted his father in state affairs during his reign, but there was no power-sharing arrangement. This underscores the fact that Esarhaddon maintained authority until the end of his rule (Yalvaç, 1963: 56).

Upon his appointment as crown prince, Ashurbanipal’s life underwent a transformation within the house of succession (*bīt ridūti*). Here, he received comprehensive military training, including horse riding, chariot driving, spear and arrow shooting, and the use of shields of various sizes and shapes. He was also groomed to make quick and sound decisions as a future king. Furthermore, in addition to learning about state administration and military matters, there are records indicating that Ashurbanipal engaged extensively in reading and writing during his

⁴ Usually the first brick in the construction of a temple was carried by the king himself or his crown prince. see Reiner, 2008: 314.

time in the succession house (Grayson: 2008a: 159). This passion for literacy likely played a pivotal role in the establishment of his renowned library.

Esarhaddon employed a comprehensive oath-taking procedure. The initial part of the oath text, which invoked divine witnesses, asserted the commitment of vassal kingdoms to support the chosen crown prince. This preamble was followed by more than thirty articles comprising the oath. An analysis of these articles reveals that the primary objective of the vassal kings' oaths was to acknowledge Ashurbanipal as the rightful ruler after Esarhaddon's reign. It's important to note that the oath of loyalty to Ashurbanipal did not equate Šamaš-šumu-ukīn, the Babylonian heir-apparent, with the succession to the Assyrian throne. The text of the main treaty, including the oath clauses, was transcribed onto treaty tablets, known as *tuppi riksi*, *tuppi nic ili (m)*, or *tuppi ade*, which were subsequently dispatched to other vassal kingdoms. In essence, the verbal oath exchanged between the Assyrian king and a vassal king was formalized into a written treaty. These treaty tablets were shared with other vassal states for the purpose of administering their oaths of loyalty. It was expected that other vassal states would accept these decisions without objection, as any dissent could be construed as an act of rebellion (Wiseman, 1958: 27-28; Parpola, 2003: 101; Toptaş and Kahya, 2019: 321). Thus, Esarhaddon reached every segment of the Assyrian population and made them swear allegiance to the future king Ashurbanipal (Mieroop, 2007: 259). The wording of the treaty made by Esarhaddon on behalf of his son Ashurbanipal, whom he declared heir apparent:

“(This is) the treaty which Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, has concluded with you, in the presence of the great gods of heaven and earth, on behalf of Ashurbanipal, the great crown prince designate, son of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, your lord, whom he has named and appointed to the crown-princeship: When Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, passes away, you will seat Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate, upon the royal throne, and he will exercise the kingship and lordship of Assyria over you. You shall protect him in country and in town, fall and die for him. You shall speak with him in the truth of your heart, give him sound advice loyally, and smooth his way in every respect. You shall not depose him nor seat (any)one of his brothers, elder or younger, on the throne of Assyria instead of him. You shall neither change nor alter the word of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, but serve this very Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate, whom Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, your lord, has presented to you, and he shall exercise the kingship and dominion over you.” (SAA 2, 6, 41-57).

The treaty, which includes the declaration of Ashurbanipal as the heir apparent, ends with the following statements:

“...eighteenth (var. 16th) day of Iyyar, eponymy of Nabû-bel-usur, governor of Dur-Šar-rukku. The treaty of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, conclu[ded] on behalf of Ashurbanipal, the great crown prince designate of Assyria, and Šamaš-šumu-ukin, the crown prince designate of Babylon...” (SAA 2, 6, 664).

As seen in the cuneiform text above, the governors responsible for the administration of the cities of Assyria had to show loyalty to the crown princes designated for the Assyrian and Babylonian thrones. As a result, the governors in charge of the cities took some kind of precaution to prevent the chaos that might occur by not supporting a person who had not received divine approval in case of a claim to the throne.

Towards the end of Esarhaddon's reign, a revolt occurred. The reason for this rebellion was the election of Ashurbanipal as the crown prince of the Assyrian dynasty instead of Šamaš-šumu-ukīn. However, the Babylonian Chronicles did not associate the revolt of 670/669 BC with the succession to the throne. According to the statements in the chronicles, this rebellion ended with the killing of a group of people who could be considered the upper class in Assyrian society. With the death of Esarhaddon in 669 BC, the rule of the heirs to the Assyrian and Babylonian

throne began (Wiseman, 1958: 8). Although Ashurbanipal ascended the throne as expected, under the influence of his grandmother Naqīa, he established a new loyalty oath that covered the entire dynasty, state officials, and the Assyrian people. There is no similar example to compare in Assyrian political history. Ashurbanipal's mother had passed away and was succeeded by the former Naqīa (Kirschbaum, 2004: 114). The document in which her grandson Ashurbanipal is mentioned as her foster son begins with the following statement: “*The treaty of Zakūtu, the queen of Senna[cherib, ki]ng of Assyria, mother of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria*” (SAA 2, 8). Thus, after the untimely death of his father, Ashurbanipal received the support of a powerful member of his family. Moreover, in this treaty, Šamaš-šumu-ukīn was subjected to an oath without emphasizing that he was the Babylonian heir apparent. The theme of this treaty, like that of Esarhaddon's treaty with Ashurbanipal, was loyalty (Parpola, 1987: 167-169):

“[And if] you from this day on (hear) an ugly [word] of rebellion and insurrection being spo[ken against] your lord Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria, you shall come and inform Zakūtu his mother and Ashurbanipal, [king of Assyria], your lord; and if you hear of (a plan) to kill or eliminate your lord [Ashur]banipal, king of Assyria, you shall come and inform Zakūtu [his mother] and your lord Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria;” (SAA 2, 8, r.2-7)

The new king appointed one of his unnamed brothers as the highest priest of the god Sin (the Moon God), granting him a position in a temple located in the city of Harran (Kirschbaum, 2004: 115; Mutlu and Albayrak, 2018: 138). In 668 BC, Šamaš-šumu-ukīn, who had been declared the Babylonian heir apparent during his succession, was crowned as the king of Sumer and Akkad. This event is documented in cuneiform texts as follows (Kirschbaum, 2004: 115):

“Šamas-šuma-ukin, the mighty king, king of the Amnanu, king of Babylon, known for his capability and wisdom, a shepherd, beloved by the gods Enlil, Šamaš, and Marduk, and ruler of the land of Sumer and Akkad.” (RIMB 2, 1, 1-5).

Ashurbanipal aimed to continue the favorable Babylonian policy established during his father Esarhaddon's reign. Although Babylonia had been officially recognized as independent, the leaders of Babylonian society were uneasy about having an Assyrian ruler. However, Šamaš-šumu-ukīn's diligent fulfillment of his religious duties allowed him to gain acceptance as a religious leader among the Babylonian clergy, despite his Assyrian heritage. Nevertheless, this acceptance did not extend to the realm of politics, where Ashurbanipal made crucial decisions regarding Babylon. This created discontent among some, and Šamaš-šumu-ukīn was perturbed by Ashurbanipal's dominance and interference in Babylon's administration. By 652 BC, a war between the two brothers became inevitable. In the lead-up to the conflict, Šamaš-šumu-ukīn prohibited Ashurbanipal from entering the sacred sites in Babylon to eliminate his influence. Furthermore, he pursued a policy contrary to Assyria's interests by forming agreements with Chaldean tribes, Gutu, Amurru, and Meluhha kingdoms. The Babylonian king also gathered support from regions under Assyrian rule, resulting in the breach of loyalty oaths sworn to Ashurbanipal. This constituted an offense against the king and a transgression against the gods invoked in those oaths. The gods had established a world order by endorsing Ashurbanipal's reign. However, some factions refused to accept this situation, leading to various rebellion movements. As a result, those who failed to honor their oaths were seen as having transgressed against the gods. The war between the two brothers persisted from 652 to 648 BC. During the conflict, the Assyrian army laid siege to Babylon and Borsippa⁵, resulting in starvation and the

⁵ The Babylonian chronicle of Šamaš-šumu-ukīn mentions that in the eighteenth year of his reign, Assyria, referred to as the enemy, besieged Babylon. see ABC 1, iii 15.

outbreak of diseases within the cities. Historical accounts indicate that cannibalism occurred. Ultimately, in an effort to avoid falling into the hands of his brother, Šamaš-šumu-ukīn committed suicide by setting his palace on fire. This act solidified Ashurbanipal's rule as the king chosen by the gods (Kirschbaum, 2004: 114-120). In Prism A, Ashurbanipal's interpretation of his brother Šamaš-šumu-ukīn's suicide by burning is described as a divine punishment for his rebellion, as follows:

“The deities Aššur, Sīn, Šamaš, Adad, Bēl (Marduk), Nabû, Ištar of Niniveh, Šarrat-Kidmuri, Ištar of Arbela, Ninurta, Nergal, (and) Nusku, who march before me (and) kill my foes, consigned Šamaš-šuma-ukīn, (my) hostile brother who had started a fight against me, to a raging conflagration and destroyed his life.” (RINAP 5/1, no.11, iv.46 – iv52).

While it was customary to appoint a crown prince during the Sargonid period, the identity of Ashurbanipal's crown prince remains uncertain (Kirschbaum, 2004: 121; Oates, 2008: 172). It is believed that Ashurbanipal's son, Asur-etel-ilani, assumed the Assyrian throne in 631/30 BC. Another son, Sīn-šar-iškun, became the ruler of Babylon in 627 BC, but he faced challenges in administering the city (Kirschbaum, 2004: 121-122). Despite the existence of a cuneiform text mentioning Ashurbanipal's dream of renovating the “*bīt rēdūti*” palace, where the crown prince resided, the name of the crown prince is not specified (Mieroop, 1997: 57). Information about the events in Assyrian history between 630 and 616 BC remains limited.

Conclusion

Assyria held a significant place in the annals of Ancient Mesopotamia. The Assyrian State evolved into an imperial power that exerted influence over other political entities within Ancient Mesopotamia through a combination of military, administrative, and cultural policies. This influence extended to interventions in the Babylonian throne, with Assyrian princes occasionally appointed as rulers. The absence of a codified succession system in the Assyrian State until the Sargonid period left room for various succession possibilities.

Throughout the Assyrian State's early periods, any member of the dynasty had the right to ascend the throne. However, it was customary for one of the king's sons to succeed him. Dissatisfaction with the chosen heir often led to revolts, typically led by the brothers of the designated heir. This absence of a specific succession system likely aimed to safeguard the continuity of the dynasty. At times, kings appointed heirs during their lifetime to prevent posthumous struggles for the throne. While the king did not strictly adhere to the birth order when selecting an heir among his sons, the first-born son was generally given precedence. Esarhaddon, who was chosen as the crown prince and later became the ruler of the Assyrian throne, received the name “*Aššur-etel-ilāni-mukin-apli*”, meaning “*Aššur, the prince of the gods, has appointed an heir.*” This choice of name may have been an attempt to mitigate any unfavorable circumstances arising from Esarhaddon not being the first male child born, with divine support sought to legitimize his position.

In the Old Assyrian Period, the crown prince was Ishme-Dagan, the son of Šamši-Adad I. Šamši-Adad I laid the foundations of the Assyrian imperial state through military victories and also fostered cultural achievements, ushering in a prosperous era for Assyria. Clearly, he recognized the significance of the power gained from his political and military successes. To safeguard the continuity of the military and political strength he had built, Šamši-Adad I designated his son Ishme-Dagan as his successor.

The Assyrian kings relied on a combination of physical competence and intellect when selecting the “*good shepherd*” who would lead the people after them. They also invoked divine power to

legitimize their authority and all state-related activities, including the designation of successor princes. Kings sought counsel from the gods, particularly Šamaš and Adad, through the priests to assess the suitability of their chosen crown prince. Notably, the responses received from the gods were aligned with the king's intentions, emphasizing the divine approval of the chosen crown prince. This practice reinforced the acceptance of the crown prince by both the dynasty members and the populace, as it portrayed the king as fulfilling the will of the gods, thereby preempting debates about the chosen heir's suitability for the role.

The Sargonid Period, commencing with Sargon II, witnessed a succession of powerful kings and continuous political dynamics on the Babylonian throne. The origin of Sargon II, who initiated this era, is debated. His initial actions, such as not leaving the capital for a certain period after ascending the throne, diminishing the activities of Shalmaneser V, and self-identifying as *šarru* (king) and *kēnu* (true, legitimate), suggest that he came to power through usurpation in an attempt to quell ongoing turmoil. Sargon II's inscriptions also present him as the son of Tiglath-pileser III, but a cuneiform text characterizes him as "*the child of a slave*" (*ilittu dušmu*). This description may emphasize his usurpation of the throne, possibly due to his mother's status as one of Tiglath-pileser III's concubines. Moreover, it is unlikely that anyone outside the palace was responsible for the removal of Shalmaneser V. It is probable that Shalmaneser V was considered the rightful heir to the throne as the child of the queen, while Sargon II was seen as the offspring of a concubine, lacking legal claim to the throne.

During the Sargonid Period, a significant and enduring change was introduced to the succession system, wherein it became a legal requirement for the king ascending the throne to designate an heir. This decision by Sargon II was likely driven by a dual aim: to safeguard the dynasty's future and to provide the prince with an early introduction to the responsibilities of the throne, cultivating an experienced king-to-be. Upon being appointed as the heir, princes often resided separately, sometimes even in various provinces of Assyria. Their responsibilities included leading in warfare on behalf of their fathers or governing the state from the capital during their fathers' military campaigns. Crown princes who failed to fulfill these duties could be replaced. Kings had the authority to appoint and change crown princes at their discretion. In such instances, kings commonly involved divine endorsement in their decision-making, asserting that it was the gods' will.

Arda-Muliššu serves as a notable example of a deposed crown prince. Sennacherib removed him from the crown and declared his other son, Esarhaddon, as the new crown prince. While Arda-Muliššu initially accepted this situation, he later attempted a revolt. During Sennacherib's rule, Babylon, the epicenter of science, culture, and religion in Ancient Mesopotamia, became uninhabitable. As a result, Arda-Muliššu garnered support from certain high-ranking officials within the Assyrian palace and pro-Babylonian vassal kingdoms for his rebellion.

During Sennacherib's rule, Assyria initiated a policy of appointing members of the dynasty as administrators in Babylon while attempting to maintain control over the city. This policy, initiated by Sennacherib, was subsequently adopted and executed by his successors. The initial implementation of this policy by Sennacherib was with his heir son, Aššur-nādin-šumi. However, Aššur-nādin-šumi was deposed and killed through an alliance of Babylon and Elam. Consequently, Sennacherib launched a campaign against Babylon, resulting in significant destruction, including the burning and desecration of temples and statues of gods. The primary reason cited in cuneiform texts for these actions was the assassination of his crown prince, Aššur-nādin-šumi, whom he had designated as his successor following the will of the gods. This

underscores the significance attached to crown princes. Additionally, the murder of the deputy king, representing the qualities bestowed by the gods upon kings, can also be viewed as a sign of disrespect towards the gods.

The choice of crown princes, referred to as “*mār šarri*” in the sources, was also influenced by their mothers. A compelling example of this dynamic is seen in Naqīa, the mother of Esarhaddon. When Sargon’s son Arda-Muliššu held the position of crown prince, Naqīa wielded influence and ensured Esarhaddon’s succession. This highlights the power of Naqīa as a formidable queen. Furthermore, the fact that she negotiated treaties with vassal kingdoms to secure loyalty to her grandson Ashurbanipal, the chosen crown prince, underscores her capacity to intervene in the succession to the throne. This elevated the queen’s status within the patriarchal Assyrian society, akin to notable historical figures like Semiramis.

Oath tablets containing declarations of loyalty to the crown prince during their ascension to the throne and subsequent rule have been discovered. These cuneiform tablets are primarily from the Sargonid period, and they serve as evidence that the designation of the crown prince had become a formalized law. These loyalty treaties aimed to reinforce the loyalty and respect owed to the crown prince after their succession, often with divine justification. These treaties invoked the gods as witnesses and included curses, in which the gods were invoked to curse the prince should the conditions of loyalty not be upheld. These measures protected against potential rebellions or challenges to the designated heir. These treaties, which formalized the appointment of successors and included oaths of loyalty to them, were typically enacted by the current king. However, certain cuneiform documents indicate that even the queen and the crown prince, who held influential positions in the palace, played a role in executing these loyalty treaties alongside the king. One notable example is Sennacherib’s declaration of Esarhaddon as the crown prince after removing Arda-Muliššu from the position, followed by his establishment of a loyalty treaty to secure his heir. Another recovered document addresses loyalty to Esarhaddon, addressing him as “master”. The timing of this treaty coincides with Esarhaddon’s succession, and the fact that it was created separately from the existing loyalty treaty raises the possibility that it was initiated by Esarhaddon himself. As for Ashurbanipal, the treaty established by Naqīa likely served as a reminder of his responsibility, emphasizing the decision of the gods and aiming to solidify his grandson’s authority on the throne.

It is accurate to assert that crown princes, chosen with divine approval, were held in a “sacred” regard. In addition to the sanctity attributed by divine decision, various circumstances influenced the acceptance of the crown prince by the dynasty members, state officials, and the populace. If the nation’s enemies could not be vanquished, peace remained elusive, and injustice prevailed, it was believed that the crown prince was responsible for ending this perceived chaos. Hence, the crown prince was expected to embody the “good shepherd” qualities commonly associated with kings. In this context, one can speculate that Arda-Muliššu, Sennacherib’s former crown prince who was removed from his position by Sennacherib, may have felt compelled to rectify a dire situation by initiating a rebellion that ultimately led to his father’s death. A similar assessment could be made for Esarhaddon’s son, Šamaš-šumu-ukin, whom he designated as the Babylonian crown prince. Even though Šamaš-šumu-ukin was declared the king of Babylon by his brother Ashurbanipal, Ashurbanipal’s consistent interference in Babylonian administration suggested that he did not view Šamaš-šumu-ukin as a legitimate king. Instead, Šamaš-šumu-ukin seemed to function more as an official appointed by Assyria to

govern Babylon. It's plausible that Šamaš-šumu-ukin chose to conflict with his brother Ashurbanipal to rectify this situation and assert his legitimacy as the true king.

In summary, Assyria did not possess a rigid succession system. After a king selected his successor, he needed to seek the gods' approval through consultation with the priests. Any change in the heir had to be presented as the divine will. Additionally, divine authority played a significant role in the loyalty-themed oath treaties crafted for the sake of the heir's loyalty and safety. It is conceivable that other princes who rebelled viewed themselves as saviors appointed by the gods. Furthermore, in Assyria, the king ruled as the gods' representative; similarly, the crown prince served as a proxy for both the king and the gods. Given that the crown prince would eventually assume the role of the king, their acceptance by the people was almost unquestioned.

Abbreviations

- ABC 1 : Grayson, A. K. (2000). *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*. Winona Lake, Indiana.
- ARMT 1: Georges, D. (1950). *Correspondance De Šamši-Addu Et De Ses Fils (Archives Royales De Mari I)*. Paris.
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- RIMA III: Grayson, A. K. (2002). *The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Vol.III, Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC II (858-745 BC)*, University of Toronto Press.
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