


2006

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Recommended Citation

“Smart Mobs, Bad Crowds, Godly People and Dead Priests: Crowd Symbols in the Josianic Narrative and Some Mesopotamian Parallels,” *Biblical Research* 51 (2006): 25-52.

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Smart Mobs, Bad Crowds, Godly People and Dead Priests: Crowd Symbols in the Josianic Narrative and Some Mesopotamian Parallels

Steven W. Holloway

American Theological Library Association

It is a distinct honor to have been asked to participate in this session and to address you, members of the Chicago Society of Biblical Research, on a cherished topic of Lowell Handy's scholarship. In an effort to break free of the usual research strategies that bind Josiah to Mesopotamia, I think it expedient to dwell on two faceless crowds that drive the 2 Kings narrative — the עַם הָאֲרָץ and the slaughtered priests of Bethel.

Why crowds? Crowds and crowd symbols figure massively in literary evocations of the modern world. Use of the English noun *crowd* corresponds to the rise of the early modern metropolis, specifically London, whose population catapulted from 100,000 to perhaps 200,000 in the twenty years between 1580 and 1600,¹ generating anxieties about the breakdown of civic order and a novel sense of drowning in an irresistible tide of humanity.² Social theorists such as Gustave Le Bon, Sigmund Freud and Elias Canetti paint dystopic visions of crowds as rudderless mobs, pawns in the power of a fascist genius, apt for evil, and the figure of the crowd as a political and social actor tends to bleed into that of the rabble, evoking suspicion rather than relief.³ On the contrary, literary crowds, biblical and modern, are far more ambiguous. As any open-minded survey of post-Revolutionary American

¹ The Oxford English Dictionary² traces usage of *crowd* as a large number of people pressing in upon each other, a multitude or a throng, to the early modern period (1567, and often in Shakespeare); “crowd, *n.*,” OED² online (accessed 18 August 2007). A disparaging term for a disorderly, riotous crowd or the masses, *mob*, from *mobile vulgus*, dates from the seventeenth century, and nearly all usages carry a pejorative connotation; “mob, *n.* (and *adv.*),” OED² online (accessed 18 August 2007). Compare *rabble* with usages contemporary with *crowd*; “rabble, *n.*1 (and *a.*),” OED² online (accessed 18 August 2007). The verb *crowd*, although of Old English extraction, is comparatively rare prior to the seventeenth century, and does not appear in the KJV Bible.

² Ian Munro, *The Figure of the Crowd in Early Modern London: The City and its Double* (Early Modern Cultural Studies; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 1–13.

³ For the biblicist or ancient Near Eastern specialist unacquainted with the ponderous mass of modern social theory kicked up in the wake of crowd anxieties, I would direct you to the orientational studies in Jeffrey T. Schnapp and Matthew Tiews, eds., *Crowds* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006).

literature reveals, literary crowds are as capable of advancing righteous political objectives as they are of loosing anarchy.⁴ It is a curious fact that comparatively little attention is paid to the role of *literary* crowds in the narrative construction of the Bible or the broader literature of the ancient Near East beyond metaphoric language for the city or military adversaries.⁵ We shall attend to crowds in 2 Kings 21 and 23 without a theoretical agenda and work within the confines of the Bible itself and possible Mesopotamian parallels

1. Smart Mobs, Godly People

Following the formulaic accession narrative of King Amon of Judah and the terse report of his assassination at the hands of his servants, 2 Kgs 21:24 tells us, “But the עַם הָאָרֶץ (literally, “the people of the land”) struck down all those who had conspired against King Amon, and the עַם הָאָרֶץ made his son Josiah king in place of him.”⁶ The Hebrew expression עַם הָאָרֶץ has acquired a remarkable currency within the lexicon of emancipatory theologies, especially Korean *minjung* theology, due to the work of Ahn Byung-Mu, Jürgen Moltmann and others who link the Greek ὄχλος of the New Testament with the עַם הָאָרֶץ of rabbinic sources.⁷ Some Hebrew Scriptures specialists such as Rainer Albertz seek, tendentiously in my view, to envision a comparable role for the עַם הָאָרֶץ of the Bible.⁸ The expression עַם הָאָרֶץ (singular and plural) occurs 73 times in the Masoretic text and functions as a catchall term for a striking variety of crowds including: the Hittite inhabitants of the land (Gen 23:7), to be translated “natives”, the entire population of Egypt (Gen 42:6), and a plethora of Judahite crowds in Jeremiah about which Robert Carroll rather desperately concludes that the expression “may mean ‘the ordinary peasantry of the country’ or ‘the landed gentry.’” This expression also serves

⁴ Nicolaus Mills, *The Crowd in American Literature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 1–17.

⁵ I found J. R. C. Cousland, *The Crowds in the Gospel of Matthew* (NovTSup 102; Leiden: Brill, 2002) reductionistic, tone-deaf to the narrative possibilities of the New Testament, and irresponsible in his failure to engage the massive theological debates surrounding the possible background of the עַם הָאָרֶץ in relation to the Gospel entities of the crowd.

⁶ All translations of Hebrew and Akkadian are mine unless otherwise noted.

⁷ Ahn Byung-Mu, “Jesus and *ochlos* in the Context of His Galilean Ministry,” in *Asian Contextual Theology for the Third Millennium: A Theology of Minjung in Fourth-Eye Formation* (ed. Paul S. Chung, Kim Kyoung-Jae, and Veli-Matti Kärkäinen; trans. Paul S. Chung; Princeton Theological Monograph Series; Eugene, Ore: Pickwick Publications, 2007), 33–50; Jürgen Moltmann, “Minjung Theology for the Ruling Classes,” in *Asian Contextual Theology*, 69–85.

⁸ Rainer Albertz, *Religionsgeschichte Israels in alttestamentlicher Zeit, 1: Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende der Königszeit* (GAT 8/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 313–18, 361, 364.

as a term for the exilic community in Ezek 12:19. The expression עַם הָאָרֶץ occurs 12 times in 2 Kings, operating as elsewhere as a blanket expression for an undefined crowd. In the narrative describing the careers of Joash (2 Kings 11), Josiah (2 Kings 21) and Jehoahaz (2 Kgs 23:30), however, the people of the land perform a unique function, namely, they suddenly materialize, overcome inertial political opposition to install a Davidic king on the throne, and thereupon promptly vanish.⁹ In the case of Joash, the bona-fides of this king are so precarious that the biblical authors resorted to using the pan-Near Eastern “Hero Exposed at Birth” motif, conventionally employed to paper over the rise of a pretender to the throne.¹⁰ Following the dispatch of Josiah by Pharaoh Neco, the עַם הָאָרֶץ for reasons unknown install Jehoahaz/Shallum, a younger son who is presumably not in the direct line of succession.¹¹ Apart from participating in a complex three-way covenant administered by the High Priest Jehoiada in the Joash narratives¹² and covenanting with Josiah to live by the book of the law, the anonymous crowds represented by the עַם הָאָרֶץ do nothing in these narratives save for installing faltering claimants to the throne of Judah. Efforts to tease out a specific socio-economic status or foreign policy directive for these narrative entities are, in my view, an exercise in futility.¹³ The pivotal function of these anonymous crowds in the narrative

⁹ This position is essentially that of Lowell K. Handy, “A Realignment in Heaven: An Investigation into the Ideology of the Josianic Reform” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1987), 282.

¹⁰ See Lowell K. Handy, “Speaking of Babies in the Temple,” *Proceedings, Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies* 8 (1988): 155–65.

¹¹ See Robert Althann, “Jehoahaz,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed. David Noel Freedman et al.; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:659–60; Gösta W. Ahlström, *A History of Ancient Palestine, from the Palaeolithic Period to Alexander’s Conquest* (JSOTSup 146; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 740, 767.

¹² See Burke O. Long, “Sacred Geography as Narrative Structure in 2 Kings 11,” in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (ed. David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 231–38; Patricia Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art, Political Rhetoric: The Case of Athaliah and Joash* (JSOTSup 209; Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1996); J. G. McConville, “Priesthood in Joshua to Kings,” *VT* 49 (1999): 82–85; Robert L. Cohn, *2 Kings* (Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2000), 77–84.

¹³ The scholarship on the biblical עַם הָאָרֶץ is prodigious. For useful discussions and surveys of the literature, see Handy, “Realignment in Heaven,” 282 n. 2; Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 11; New York: Doubleday & Company, 1988), 129–30; Joseph P. Healey, “Am Ha’arez,” in *ABD*, 1:168–68; for cognate terms and usages, see Eduard Lipiński, עַם “am,” in *TDOT* 11:163–77. James A. Montgomery and Henry Snyder Gehman, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings* (ICC; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951), 521, eschew political theories by labeling this

economy of 2 Kings is to hand the Judahite throne over to select Davidites. Once the job is done, they vanish in a puff of smoke, just like their Mesopotamian counterparts, as we shall see.¹⁴

2. Mesopotamian *Comparanda* for Godly People

For texts that could conceivably parallel 2 Kgs 21:24, the elevation of a king to the throne by an equivalent to the crowd symbol עַם הָאָרֶץ I have searched for narratives in which “people” (Akkadian *nišū*, Sumerian UN.MEŠ) play an active role in either installing or acclaiming the installation of a ruler, regardless of whether the installed person is the legitimate king or one judged a usurper by posterity. I have covered the entire period of Sumerian and Akkadian scribal production from the Sargonic to the Parthian eras, from approximately 2300 to 61 BCE, using the most up-to-date translations known to me, checking them against the Sumerian or Akkadian originals when something looked promising. For those unfamiliar with Mesopotamian royal inscriptions, the rhetoric of divine election and dynastic succession characterizes accession of kings to their thrones under ordinary circumstances.¹⁵ Some of these royal inscriptions incorporate flowery paeans to the utopian state of society upon a given king’s enthronement, but the texts that attribute agency to the people primarily deal either with military revolts or irregular successions. In 2200 years of Mesopotamian royal inscriptions, I have found precisely five texts that answer to my search criteria.

a) Unlike Egypt, a small number of Mesopotamian kings have themselves declared gods with temples, liturgies, and priesthoods established in their honor¹⁶ A unique inscription of Narām-Sîn (2213–2176 BCE), arguably the

deed “the most democratic action recorded in the history.” Their silly observation is refreshingly countered by T. R. Hobbs, *2 Kings* (WBC 13; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 310–11. On the historicity of the reign of Amon and the possible motives of his assassins, see Abraham Malamat, “The Historical Background of the Assassination of Amon, King of Judah,” *IEJ* 3 (1953): 26–29; Theodore J. Lewis, “Amon (Person),” in *ABD* 1:198.

¹⁴ The discovery of “lost” books in classical literature is a narrative topos that deserves to be read against the finding of the “book of the law” in 2 Kings 22–23. See Katherine Stott, “Finding the Lost Book of the Law: Re-reading the Story of ‘The Book of the Law’ (Deuteronomy–2 Kings) in Light of Classical Literature,” *JSOT* 30 (2005): 153–69; Arthur J. Droge, “‘The Lying Pen of the Scribes’: of Holy Books and Pious Frauds,” *MTR* 15 (2003): 117–47, and, on the nature of literary lies and the art of biblical historiography, see David Henige, “In Good Company: Problematic Sources and Biblical Historicity,” *JSOT* 30 (2005): 29–47.

¹⁵ For example, RIM E3/2.1.4.3 i 1–ii 13 (Šu-Sîn); RIM E4.3.6.2 1–27 (Hammurapi); RIM A.0.102.1 3; A.0.102.2 i 1–4 (Shalmaneser III). Hundreds of examples could be cited.

¹⁶ See discussion and bibliography in Steven W. Holloway, *Aššur is King! Aššur is King! Religion in the Exercise of Empire in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Culture & History of the Ancient Near East 10; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 178–93.

most successful of the Sargonic emperors, describes how the citizens of Agade, his royal seat, implore the leading pantheon deities of the empire to make him their city god. As the first Mesopotamian ruler known to have repackaged himself as a deity, the lack of precedence is in part overcome by an appeal to the *vox populi*. No other royal inscription possessed of such a remarkable rationale is attested in Mesopotamian history.¹⁷

In view of the fact that he protected the foundations of his city from danger, [the citizens of] his [Narām-Sîn's] city requested from [the gods] Aštar in Eanna, Enlil in Nippur, Dagan in Tuttul, Ninhursag in Keš, Ea in Eridu, Sîn in Ur, Šamaš in Sippar, [and] Nergal in Kutha, that [Naram-Sîn] be [made] the god of their city, and they built within Agade a temple [dedicated] to him (RIM E2.1.4.10 20–57 [Bāseṭki copper statue base inscription, IM 77823]).

b) Following the reign of Narām-Sîn, nothing fits my search criteria in the preserved inscriptions of the Ur III dynasts, the Old Babylonian period, and the Old, Middle and Neo-Assyrian kings down to the late 9th century.¹⁸ The

¹⁷ RIM E2.1.4.10 20–57. On the reign of Narām-Sîn and the Bāseṭki inscription, see Abdul-Hadi al-Fouadi, “Bassetki Statue with an Old Akkadian Royal Inscription of Narām-Sîn of Agade (B.C. 2291–2255),” *Sumer* 32 (1976): 63–75; Walter Farber, “Die Vergottlichung Naram-Sins,” *Or* 52 (1983): 67–72; Amelie Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000–330 BC* (Routledge History of the Ancient World; London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 1:50–55; Douglas R. Frayne, “Narām-Sîn. A.,” in *RIA* 9:169a–74a; Eva Strommenger, “Narām-Sîn, König von Akkade. B. Archäologisch.,” in *RIA* 9:174a–77b; Joan Goodnick Westenholz, “The King, the Emperor, and the Empire: Continuity and Discontinuity of Royal Representation in Text and Image,” in *The Heirs of Assyria: Proceedings of the Opening Symposium of the Assyrian and Babylonian Intellectual Heritage Project held in Tvärminne, Finland, October 8–11, 1998* (ed. Sanna Aro and Robert M. Whiting; Melammu Symposia 1; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2000), 101–110. An unusual poetic composition glorifying Utu-hegal, the last king of Uruk prior to the founding of the Ur III dynasty, recounts how the citizens of Dabrum, suitably impressed by his legitimating credentials from Enlil, help him to apprehend a Gutium adversary. Known from three Old Babylonian tablets, one of which was found in Nippur, this work evidently made a brief entry into the school curriculum and so fails our test of a royal inscription (RIM E2.13.6.4 109–14).

¹⁸ Celebrating the Urartian campaign of Shalmaneser III, fragments of a heroic composition in the Neo-Assyrian dialect contain an inspirational acclamation by his subjects. Following Grayson’s reconstruction, the lines read, “The people of Assyria have shouted, [they have praised my] heroism: ‘[Upon you be] the best of blessings to gain dominion [over your foes.] March, O lord of kings! crush [the enemies of Aššur] Let the god Nergal march before you, let the god Girra [come behind].’ (is-sa-’a UN.MEŠ KUR aš-šur.KI zik-[ru-ti (?)]... de-eq-tú DÜG.GA <<LA>> a-dan-niš a-na be-lu[m...] a-lik be-lum LUGAL.MEŠ-ni da-áš x [...] dMAŠ.MAŠ ina IGI-ka lil-lik dGIŠ.B[AR...])” (SAA 3 17 obv. 26–29 [SU 51/10 = STT 43]); compare the edition in

end of the long reign of Shalmaneser III is marked by years of pitched civil war between two sons, rival claimants to the throne. The victor and younger sibling, Šamši-Adad V (823–811 BCE), ascribes the defection of the “people of Assyria” to the agency of his treacherous brother, who forced them to take “binding oaths”; otherwise, Šamši-Adad’s surviving titulary and statement of divine election are unexceptionable.¹⁹ Šamši-Adad composes the annal recensions containing the apologetic shortly before his death, possibly at the instigation of his queen, Sammu-rāmat, known to Greek historians as Semiramis, whose son Adad-nārārī III bears a name indicating he is not the eldest son. Although Tadmor identifies the question of succession as “the cardinal problem of Assyrian monarchy from the middle of the eighth century on,”²⁰ I would push the date back at least 75 years to the troubled reign of Šamši-Adad V. The text reads:

RIM A.0.102.17. Judging from the broken text, this passage does allow a measure of agency to the cheering Assyrian crowds, but nothing was needed from them in the guise of popular support for a questionable kingship. There is no evidence that Shalmaneser III faced opposition of any sort in ascending his dead father’s throne.

¹⁹ RIM A.0.103.1 i 1–38.

²⁰ Hayim Tadmor, “Autobiographical Apology in the Royal Assyrian Literature,” in *History, Historiography and Interpretation: Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Literatures* (ed. Hayim Tadmor and Moshe Weinfeld; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1983), 52. On the basis of a speculative essay by Güterbock, numerous Assyriologists believe that a specific genre for royal apologetics existed, the *narū*. See Hans G. Güterbock, “Die historische Tradition und ihre literarische Gestaltung bei Babyloniern und Hethitern bis 1200,” *ZA* 42 (1934): 1–91; Tadmor, “Autobiographical Apology,” *passim*; Kuhrt, *Ancient Near East*, 1:47. Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses: an Anthology of Akkadian Literature. Vol. 1: Archaic, Classical, Mature* (2nd ed.; Potomac MD: CDL Press, 1996), 38, speaks of pseudonymous or fictional autobiographies as comprising a genre, but limits these to “famous ruler[s] from the remote past” and cites the Birth Legend of Sargon and the Cuthaeen Legend of Naram-Sin as examples. Compare Erica Reiner, “First-Millennium Babylonian Literature,” in *Cambridge Ancient History, vol. 3 part 2: The Assyrian and Babylonian Empires and Other States of the Near East, from the Eighth to the Sixth Centuries B.C.* (ed. I. E. S. Edwards, et al.; 3rd ed.; Cambridge, Eng.: University Press, 1991), 304–306. W. Röllig, “Narū,” in *RIA* 9:179a–80a, casts weighty doubt on the concept of a *narū* autobiographical genre. Slanski’s study of the so-called *kudurrus* has established that they were “self-identified” as *narū* (NA₄/NA.RÚ.A) “(stone) stele” or “(stone) monument” and that the objects were originally stationed in Babylonian temples and never used as boundary-markers; Kathryn E. Slanski, *The Babylonian Entitlement narūs (kudurrus): A Study in their Form and Function* (ASOR Books 9; Boston, Mass: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2003), 19–64. Of the 55 inscribed *narūs* canvassed in her study, she (pp. 65–104) established the following typology: royal grants of land (*eqlu* or *kirū*) (and associated exemptions and prebends) (30), non-royal purchases of land (6), royal adjudications (5), royal affirmations of previously held land (4), royal grants of temple prebend (*isqu*) only (3), royal grants of exemptions (*zakātu*) only (3), non-royal gifts of land (3), non-royal gift of prebend (1), multiple royal and

When Aššur-da''in-apla, at the time of Shalmaneser [III], his father, acted treacherously by inciting insurrection, uprising, and criminal acts, caused the land to rebel and prepared for battle; [at that time] the people of Assyria (*nišē māt Aššur*), above and below, he won over to his side, and made them take binding oaths (*eliš u šapliš ušeshirma udannina tamētu*). He caused the cities to revolt and made ready to wage battle and war [follows 27 Assyrian capital city names, including Assur and Nineveh] altogether 27 towns with their fortresses which had rebelled against Shalmaneser [III], king of the four quarters, my father, sided with Aššur-da''in-apla. I subdued [them] (*ana šēpēya ušakniš*, literally, "I made [them] kiss my feet") (RIM A.0.103.1 39–53a [Calah stele of Šamši-Adad V; BM118892 (59-9-9,63), VA Ass 4511]).

The titulary of the usurper Sargon II never alludes to his father, of course, but he apparently feels it unnecessary to invoke the people of Assyria as a leg for his throne, a function of the fact that all of his preserved inscriptions date from ten or more years after he had securely ensconced himself in the kingship.²¹

non-royal events (1). A literary *topos* for ruler apologetics certainly existed, as witness the examples amassed in Brian Lewis, *The Sargon Legend: A Study of the Akkadian Text and the Tale of the Hero Who was Exposed at Birth* (Cambridge, Mass: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1980). However the evidence that a specific, labeled apologetic genre formed part of an educated scribe's repertoire is lacking.

²¹ See Hayim Tadmor, "The Campaigns of Sargon II of Assur: A Chronological-Historical Study," *JCS* 12 (1958): 22–40, 77–100; Andreas Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad* (Göttingen: Cuvillier Verlag, 1994). The so-called Aššur Charter of Sargon II, a text known from a single tablet found at Nineveh (K 1349), appears to be a copy of an inscription that adorned a votive silver statue dedicated to the imperial god Aššur at the ancient capital city Assur. Following a lengthy titulary, the message of the text is strikingly apologetic: Sargon's immediate predecessor, Shalmaneser V, had violated an ancient covenant by forcing the citizens of Assur to perform onerous services to the crown (*ilku tupšikku*), for which the city had formerly enjoyed an exemption (*kidinnu*), an institution zealously guarded by the inhabitants of the great cult cities of Babylonia; see Holloway, *Aššur is King!*, 293–302. In condign judgment, "the Enlil of the gods [in this context, Aššur], in the fury of his heart, overthrew his [Shalmaneser V's] lordship (and) decreed me, Sargon, king of Assyria"; cuneiform transliteration in Galo W. Vera Chamaza, "Sargon II's Ascent to the Throne: the Political Situation," *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 6/1 (1992): 23 1.34 (pp. 21–33). Internal evidence indicates that the text was composed no more than two years into the reign of Sargon II. While this text clearly begs to be read through the eyes of an Assur-based audience that was (presumably) cheering the elevation of the liberator Sargon over the corpse of the tyrant Shalmaneser V, it does not belong in a comparative discussion of 2 Kgs 21:24 because the text unequivocally specifies that it was Aššur, who called Sargon II to kingship. The people of Assur exercise no agency in the matter within the narrative economy, whatever the political reality may have been. Had the people merely "cried out" to the gods to correct the evil abuses of

Quite otherwise are the autobiographical succession narratives of Esarhaddon and his son Assurbanipal, both of whom have older brothers and so are technically not in the direct line of succession.²²

c) Sennacherib, influenced by the irregular succession of his own father and the loss of the heir-apparent to Babylonian intrigue in 694, declares Esarhaddon, son of the powerful queen Naqī'a/Zakūtu, crown prince, in spite of the fact that there were older sons in line for the crown. In order to solidify this act, Sennacherib has a loyalty oath administered to "the people of Assyria, great and small" guaranteeing the sanctity of the succession. All does not go well. Esarhaddon, estranged from his father, goes into hiding in Anatolia. Late in the winter of 681, Sennacherib is subsequently murdered by two sons,

Shalmaneser, I would have included the inscription, on analogy with the Bāseṭki inscription of Narām Sīn, but they do not — the initiative of removing Shalmaneser and installing Sargon is solely the good pleasure of Aššur. The ideology of the composition is nothing out of the ordinary on other fronts. The titulary of K 1349 specifies that Sargon was elevated to the throne in order to repair the palace, maintain the sacred rites, and to "make lustrous the cult cities among all the black-headed ones whom he [Aššur] steadfastly regards" (ll.13–14), a subset of the charge to administer *kittu u mišaru*, truth and justice, the social compact behind all royal dynastic elections that kings violated at their peril. Tadmor, "Autobiographical Apology in the Royal Assyrian Literature," certainly knew of the existence of K 1349 and appreciated better than most its political ramifications, but he did not include it in his sweep of Assyrian autobiographical apologetic inscriptions.

²² The recensions of Esarhaddon's annals with the salient autobiographical section, Borger's Nin A, were found in abundance at Nineveh on better than 35 prisms. The six datable copies were composed after 673. Porter asserts that Nin F, which preserves twelve lines from the autobiographical section of Nin A, was written in 676 or later; see Barbara Nevling Porter, *Images, Power, and Politics: Figurative Aspects of Esarhaddon's Babylonian Policy* (Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society, 208; Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1993), 18 n. 29. Tadmor observes that Esarhaddon's eighth year (673/2) posed grave political as well as personal challenges to his tenure as king. Esarhaddon had fought an unsuccessful war against Egypt two years earlier, his wife had died, and he had initiated a highly controversial building scheme in Babylonia. Some combination of these prompted him to follow in the footsteps of his father and to administer an oath of succession to greater Assyria that guaranteed the Assyrian throne to Assurbanipal and that of Babylonia to his older brother, Šamaš-šuma-ukīn. Tadmor, "Autobiographical Apology," 38–47. While a historical scenario in the eighth year of Esarhaddon is plausible, pinpoint dating of the composition is impossible, and one must allow for other possibilities. The recensions of Assurbanipal's *res gestae* that bear on the problem date no earlier than 645, a few years after quelling the Babylonian revolt led by his brother Šamaš-šuma-ukīn and a year or so after definitively scouring Elam and sacking Susa. Tadmor hypothesizes that the rationale behind the composition was the perennial issue of succession. Whatever arrangements Assurbanipal may have made for Aššur-etel-ilāni and Sīn-šar-iškun, they failed, and, following Assurbanipal's death, Assyria was once again locked in bitter civil war). Tadmor, "Autobiographical Apology," 47–52.

who know that the crown prince Esarhaddon must be eliminated before securing the throne. A recklessly successful counterattack and perhaps a general fear on the part of the Assyrian leadership of the consequences of breaking their oath sworn to Sennacherib results in Esarhaddon's elevation to the kingship. Three times the faceless crowd *nišē māt Aššur*, the people of Assyria, figure in Esarhaddon's apologetic narrative: at the swearing of the oath under Sennacherib, at their refusal to follow the wiles of the parricides, and at his elevation to the throne.

[My father Sennacherib] assembled the people of Assyria, young and old (*nišē māt Aššur šeher rabī*), together with my brothers, the seed of my father's house, and before [the gods] Aššur, Šin, Šamaš, Nabū, and Marduk, the gods of Assyria, the gods who dwell in heaven and earth, he made them swear a heavy oath to guard my claim to succession (*aššu našār ridūtiya zikiršum kabtu ušazkiršumūti*) (Borger, *Asarh.*, §27: Nin i 15–19 [p. 40]).

The people of Assyria who had taken, with water and oil, the oath of the treaty of the great gods in order to support my kingship, did not go to their assistance (*nišē māt Aššur ša adē māmīt ilāni rabūti ana našār šarrūtiya ina mē u šamni itmu ul illikū rēšūssun*) (Borger, *Asarh.*, §27: Nin i 50–51 [p. 43]).

The people of Assyria who had sworn in my presence the oath of the treaty of the great gods, came to me and kissed my feet (*nišē māt Aššur ša adē niš ilāni rabūti ina muhhiya izkurū adi mahriya illikūnimma unaššiḳū šēpēya*) (Borger, *Asarh.*, §27: Nin i 80–81 [p. 44]).

d) Twenty-three years into his reign, Assurbanipal adds a remarkable autobiographical apology to his *res gestae* that legitimates his claim to a throne that is not his hereditary due and that emphasizes the agency of his father in working at the behest of the Assyrian state deities. "The people of Assyria, great and small, from coast to coast," are once again compelled to swear a succession oath, this time guaranteeing the throne to Assurbanipal.²³ The succession oaths, administered by Sennacherib and Esarhaddon, are independently attested historical events performed under the auspices of the powerful queen and queen-mother Naqī'a/Zakūtu.²⁴ While there is a

²³ Text in Rykle Borger, *Beiträge zum Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals: Die Prismenklassen A, B, C = K, D, E, F, G, H, J und T sowie andere Inschriften* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1996), A i 18–22 || F i 12–17 (pp. 15–16); Erica Reiner, *Your Thwarts in Pieces Your Mooring Rope Cut: Poetry from Babylonia and Assyria* (Michigan Studies in the Humanities 5; Ann Arbor, Mich.: Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies at the University of Michigan, 1985), 17–28.

²⁴ SAA 2 3 (p. 18).

correlative historical kernel to these two apologetic narratives, the formulation draws on earlier Mesopotamian *topoi*.

He [Esarhaddon] convened the people of Assyria, young and old, from coast to coast, for protecting my crown-princeship and — afterward — my exercising the kingship of Assyria he made them pronounce a sworn agreement and established a binding treaty (*upahhir nišē māt Aššur šeher u rabi ša tāmti elūti u šapū(i) ana našir mār šarrūtiya u arkānu šarrūtu māt Aššur epēš adē niš ilāni ušazkiršunūti udannina riksāte*) (Berger, *BIWA*, A i 18–22 || F i 12–17 [pp. 15–16]).

e) Nabonidus, the last Neo-Babylonian king, acquires his throne through conspiracy in which he plays a role, without perhaps having premeditated his own elevation to kingship. Like Nabopolassar, the first Neo-Babylonian king, he is a self-proclaimed “son of a nobody”; unlike his illustrious predecessor, however, Nabonidus sees fit to footnote the popular acclamation of his rule. In a text known from a single broken stele from Babylon, composed during his first regnal year, following a break in the inscription, Nabonidus professes that

They [Nabonidus’ co-conspirators against Lā-abāši-Marduk] brought me to the palace and all of them prostrated themselves at my feet and kissed my feet. They kept praising my kingship (*ana qereb ēkalli ublū’innima kullassunu ana šēpēya [i]ššapkūnima unaššiqū šēpēya iktanarrabū šarrūti*) (Schaudig, *Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon*, 3.3. Babylon-Stele, pp. 517–18 v 1’–7’ [Istanbul, Arkeoloji Müzeleri 1327]).

Thereafter follows the stereotypical assertion of divine election by Marduk.²⁵

The Achaemenid royal inscriptions, in all languages including Akkadian, say nothing whatsoever about popular legitimation of kings—it is Ahuramazda alone who bestows the people upon Darius or Xerxes, not the other way around, whereas it is the Lie that makes people rebel against Darius (DB 54).²⁶

²⁵ Text classification, recensions and earlier bibliography in Paul-Richard Berger, *Die neubabylonischen Königsinschriften: Königsinschriften des ausgehenden babylonischen Reiches (626–539 a. Chr.)* (AOAT 4/1; Kevelaer: Verlag Butzon & Bercker, Neukirchener-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1973), Nabonid Stelen-Fragment XI, pp. 384–86. Text and translation in Hanspeter Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon und Kyros’s Grossen samt den in ihrem Umfeld entstandenen Tendenzschriften: Textausgabe und Grammatik* (AOAT 256; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2001), Babylon-Stele, Col. V 1’–7’ pp. 517–18. See the analysis in Paul-Alain Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus King of Babylon 556–539 B.C.* (Yale Near Eastern Researches 10; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 20–22, 90–98, 114–15.

²⁶ For the Achaemenid royal inscriptions, I consulted the translations of Roland G. Kent, *Old Persian: Grammar, Text, Lexicon* (2nd revised ed.; American Oriental Series 33; New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1953) and Pierre Lecoq, *Les*

The Book of 2 Kings, therefore, with its repeated curtain-calls of the הארץ עב to support royal sons not in the direct line of succession (Jehoahaz), probable pretenders (Joash), and legitimate claimants threatened by court intrigue (possibly Josiah), forms part of an ancient trope in Mesopotamian literature, not overly well attested to be sure, but one accessible to first-millennium scribes from a variety of sources.

3. Bad Crowds of Dead Priests in Bethel

2 Kgs 23:15–20 carries Josiah's war against false gods and priests into the former territory of the Northern Kingdom. The greater part of the narrative concerns the altar of Bethel and the melodramatic fulfillment of its destruction, a *vaticinium ex eventu* prophecy uttered against Jeroboam I, three centuries and 33 chapters ago, conveniently referenced by the anonymous men of the city. From Bethel, Josiah spreads the good news of his reform throughout the cities of Samaria that includes slaughtering priests of the high places on their own altars and further desecrating them with human ostial ashes.²⁷ The narrative structure itself weaves simple reportage around a question-and-answer scenario centered on ancient prophecy. The staccato rhythm of actions, repeated use of emphatic connective adverbs, abrupt shifts in person and terse explanation of the prophecy to Josiah have spawned

inscriptions de la Perse achéménide: traduit du vieux perse, de l'élamite, du babylonien et de l'araméen (L'aube des peuples; n.p.: Gallimard, 1997).

²⁷ Referenced by the same term in MT for Yahwistic temple functionaries (כהן), these priests are maligned with the Akkadico-Aramaic loanword כמרא in Targum Jonathan, whose cognate term is used polemically in MT only for non-Yahwistic priests. Targum Jonathan makes a similar distinction between מדרבא and איגורא, Yahwistic and idolatrous altars, respectively. See Leivy Smolar and Moses Aberbach, *Studies in Targum Jonathan to the Prophets* (The Library of Biblical Studies; New York and Baltimore: KTAV Publishing House and The Baltimore Hebrew College, 1983), 36–40; Bernard Grossfeld, *A Bilingual Concordance to the Targum of the Prophets, vol. 7: Kings (I) פ-ק* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1997), 33–34; Bernard Grossfeld, *A Bilingual Concordance to the Targum of the Prophets, vol. 7: Kings (II) ט-פ* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 141–42; Carol A. Dray, *Studies on Translation and Interpretation in the Targum to the Books of Kings* (Studies in the Aramaic Interpretation of Scripture 5; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006), 161–62. The most detailed study of the archaeological and historical setting of this passage remains W. Boyd Barrick, "Burning Bones at Bethel: A Closer Look at 2 Kings 23,16a," *SJOT* 14 (2000): 3–16, and idem, *The King and the Cemeteries: Toward a New Understanding of Josiah's Reform* (VTSup 88; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 27–60. Cohn, *2 Kings*, 158, aptly observes that the northern reform narrative of Josiah makes no allusion to the syncretistic cults introduced into Assyrian *Samerina* by deportees and comments, "Instead the text focuses only on those shrines built by the kings of Israel as if Samaria were an occupied territory of Judah rather than a foreign province."

countless emendations to the text, beginning with a remarkably expansive LXX version, none of which needs to detain us.²⁸

Estimations of the historicity of 2 Kgs 23:15–20 range from paeans to biblical literalism,²⁹ to the position in Lowell Handy's doctoral dissertation that the Bethel raid undoubtedly happened but is unconnected with the

²⁸ On the text of 2 Kgs 23:15–20 and the versional evidence, see Charles F. Burney, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Kings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903), 361–62; Natalio Fernández Marcos, "The Lucianic Text in the Books of Kingdoms: From Lagarde to the Textual Pluralism," in *De Septuaginta: Studies in Honour of John William Wevers on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (ed. Albert Pietersma and Claude E. Cox; Mississauga, Ont: Benben Publishers, 1984), 161–84; Natalio Fernández Marcos and José Ramón Busto Saiz, *El texto Antioqueno de la biblia Grieca, II: 1–2 Reyes* (Textos y estudios "Cardenal Cisneros" de la Biblia Políglota Matritense 53; Madrid: Instituto de Filología del CSIC, 1992), 153–54. For the Septuagint, Old Latin and Peshitta translations of Kings in general, see Natalio Fernández Marcos, *Scribes and Translators: Septuagint and Old Latin in the Books of Kings* (VTSup 54; Leiden and New York: Brill, 1994); and Hans Gottlieb and E. Hammershaimb, *The Old Testament in Syriac According to the Peshitta Version, part II, fascicle 4: Kings* (Leiden: Brill, 1976). On the literary shape of Josianic narratives in 2 Kings, see Burke O. Long, *2 Kings* (FOTL 10; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 250–85. Peter J. Leithart, *1 & 2 Kings* (Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible; Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 268. Long believes that the six uses of שָׂרָף were deliberate and symbolized incompleteness — the seventh burning will be that of Nebuchadnezzar II.

²⁹ So I. W. Slotki, *Kings: Hebrew Text & English Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (Socino Books of the Bible; London and Bournemouth: Socino Press, 1950), 307; Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 335–37; Iain W. Provan, *1 and 2 Kings* (NIBCOT; Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, and Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995), 273–74. Liverani accepts as history Josiah's action against Bethel but rejects 2 Kgs 23:19–20 as a "later expansion." See Mario Liverani, *Israel's History and the History of Israel* (BibleWorld; London and Oakville: Equinox, 2005), 172–73. This passage and the notice of Josiah's death at Megiddo have occasioned a fantastic volume of studies since the 1950s that purport to prove that Josiah's true motive for rampaging through Samaria was the re-establishment of the Davidic United Kingdom. This exegetical position is actually two thousand years old and counting; see Lowell K. Handy, "Josiah in a New Light: Assyriology Touches the Reforming King," in *Orientalism, Assyriology and the Bible* (ed. Steven W. Holloway; Hebrew Bible Monographs 10; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 415–35. On the need for methodological caution in treating the Josianic narratives as straightforward historical data, see Lowell K. Handy, "Historical Probability and the Narrative of Josiah's Reform in 2 Kings," in *The Pitcher is Broken: Memorial Essays for Gösta W. Ahlström* (ed. Steven W. Holloway and Lowell K. Handy; JSOTSup 190; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1995), 252–75. On the editorial relationship between 2 Kings 17 and our passage, see Mordechai Cogan, "A Slip of the Pen? On Josiah's Actions in Samaria (2 Kings 23:15–20)," in *Sefer Moshe: The Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume: Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East, Qumran, and Post-Biblical Judaism* (ed. Chaim Cohen, Avi Hurvitz, and Shalom M. Paul; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 3–8.

Judahite cultic transformations,³⁰ to the reading of Blenkinsopp³¹ and others³² that Josianic ultraviolence against Bethel and the northern priesthood masks Exilic and possibly post-Exilic rivalry between Jerusalem and its Levitical or Zadokite priesthood, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the Aaronide or certainly non-Levitical priests that officiated at the competing cult centers in the hill country of Benjamin. Bethel survives both the Assyrian conquest of 720 and the Babylonian campaigns of the 6th century, as we know from Jer 41:5, Zech 7:1–3, Hag 2:14 and other passages, presumably the recipient of Neo-Babylonian sponsorship as a useful organ of the provincial body politic, a situation unpopular with the Jerusalem-alone restoration party in the Persian Period. In the words of Blenkinsopp, “following the elimination of the Jerusalem Temple, the old Bethel sanctuary, having survived the Assyrian conquest and the reforming zeal of Josiah, obtained a new lease on life by virtue of the favored status of the Benjamin region and the proximity of Bethel to the administrative center at Mizpah.”³³

This fascinating passage raises two distinct questions for our comparative study. First, are there comparable stories in royal Mesopotamian inscriptions? That is, do Sumerian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Hellenistic or Parthian kings ever boast about liquidating priests? Second, is there any period in the long history of the great Mesopotamian city-temples when priests and others guilty of sacrilege are executed by fire or a time when it is common knowledge that such crimes would meet with such state-licensed savagery?³⁴

³⁰ Handy cites Josephus *Ant.* 10.68 and, for the early modern period, Sir Walter Raleigh. See Handy, “A Realignment in Heaven,” 425.

³¹ Joseph Blenkinsopp, “The Judean Priesthood during the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid Periods,” *CBQ* 60 (1998): 25–43; idem, “Bethel in the Neo-Babylonian Period,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (ed. Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 93–107.

³² “The only historical information to be retrieved from this theological trash is the notion that Bethel served as the cultic and cultural center of Samaria after 720 — probably not because it was established as such by the Assyrians but because it was not destroyed between 733 and 720, whereas Samaria and Shechem were.” See Ernst Axel Knauf, “Bethel: The Israelite Impact on Judean Language and Literature,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, 328 n. 188. Volkmar Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings: A Continental Commentary* (trans. Anselm Hagedorn; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 408–409, views 2 Kgs 23:15–20 strictly as a literary accommodation for removing the “sin of Jeroboam,” and therefore sees no need to wrestle with questions of historicity.

³³ Blenkinsopp, “Bethel in the Neo-Babylonian Period,” p. 99.

³⁴ The burning of the Samaritan priests by Josiah, to my mind, pushes us — the biblical studies guild — to consider *why* such an action was attributed to the king as a mark of praise. Conventional wisdom yields Josiah a thirty-year reign, in which he presumably ran through the repertoire of most ANE kings — surviving court intrigues, engaging in wars or border skirmishes, prosecuting building projects, initiating trade enterprises, maintaining diplomatic relations with neighboring kingdoms, and a

4. Mesopotamian *Comparanda* for Bad Crowds of Dead Priests

Our final sweep of Mesopotamian sources to discover a text in which the killing of priests serves to enhance the image of the king is a flat negative. No priest of any class is slaughtered in surviving royal Akkadian or Sumerian inscriptions. In fact, not only do priests fail to die in these texts, astonishing to say, priests go almost unmentioned in the genre as a whole.³⁵ Take note: At the heart of ancient Mesopotamian religion is the city-temple; it is the sacred duty of all kings to maintain its fabric, provide an unending stream of animals

plethora of other kingly activities in addition to the items mentioned in 2 Kings 22–23. Even if it be granted that Josiah was motivated by the ideology of Deuteronomy, a perilous stretch in my estimation, we still have no concrete idea why his slaughtering Samarian priests made it into the canon, a biographical detail utterly unthinkable in a traditional Mesopotamian milieu. The explanation I set forth here, most tentatively, is that the events of 2 Kgs 23:15–20 accrued to the figure of Josiah in a time and a place when the burning of priests and others guilty of major temple theft, a species of sacrilege, assumed the air of legal normalcy. The historical Josiah may or may not have committed fatal atrocities against a swathe of Samarian priests. The tradition voiced by 2 Kings 23, however, manifestly saw fit to attribute such deeds to his name in the service of extolling his Yahwistic zeal. As historical researchers, it is methodologically incumbent that we explore the social, cultural, political and legal contexts of the creation of the Bible fully by bracketing our chronological preconceptions of compositional date until the final step.

³⁵ Genre classification is paramount here. For instance, if the so-called Babylonian *kudurrus*, the entitlement *narûs* that were written for the most part by kings and set up in Babylonian temples to guarantee land grants and prebendal entitlements to both secular individuals as well as various classes of temple functionaries, are lumped together with the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian royal stele, then the assertion of the largely-priestless nature of Mesopotamian royal inscriptions is false, for these texts are replete with priests of all descriptions. The concept of royal inscription followed in this study is essentially that of Grayson, who specifies a “canon” exemplified by the Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia volumes commissioned by the project of that name at the University of Toronto. Grayson begins his study of Mesopotamian historiography with what he terms royal inscriptions — Sumerian, Assyrian and Babylonian. His criteria for inclusion include subject matter and their placement as well as the nature of the objects upon which they were written such as *sikkatu*, bricks, stone slabs, foundation deposits, steles. Under the heading of Assyrian royal inscriptions, Grayson categorizes (1) commemorative inscriptions consisting of annualistic, display texts and commemorative labels, (2) labels, (3) dedicatory inscriptions, and (4) letters to the god. Under Babylonian royal inscriptions, he posits (1) commemorative inscriptions, (2) labels, (3) and dedicatory inscriptions. He distinguishes chronographic from royal inscriptions, as well as legal, administrative and epistolary texts, which would include “*kudurrus*.” Albert Kirk Grayson, “Histories and Historians of the Ancient Near East: Assyria and Babylonia,” *Or* 49 (1980): 140–94; Albert Kirk Grayson, Grant Frame, and Douglas Frayne, *Assyrian Rulers of the Third and Second Millennia BC (to 1115 BC)* (RIMA 1; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 3–6.

and comestibles for sacrifice, and, if need be, exercise oversight over the cultic personnel.³⁶ The royal inscriptions burst at the seams with pious claims by the king to repair, beautify, and enhance the temples and to guarantee the care and feedings of the gods in timely fashion, but — and this point is little commented upon by professional Assyriologists: temple functionaries from the *šangû* and *šatammu*, the most exalted administrators, to the lowly *šerku*, temple slaves—all are virtually invisible in the royal inscriptions.³⁷ The historical consistency of this topic limitation suggests a genre convention. For those engaged in cross-cultural research between the Bible and texts east of the Euphrates or for those who seek defining examples of worldviews that set

³⁶ See, e.g., RIM E4.11.2.2, where a brick inscription by Takil-illisu, a ruler of Old Babylonian Malgium, lists the sacrificial meals provided for various deities in the temple of Anum, building projects, apotropaic statues, and he claims to have regulated its rituals. He provided drums for female drummers, but, typical of Mesopotamian royal inscriptions down to the Hellenistic period, priests are not named, even when the “upgrades” to temple and ritual affected their office at the most basic level. Compare RIM A.0.101.30 53–77, which recounts Aššur-nāšir-apli II’s most detailed — and wholly priestless — description of his temple renovations in Calah/Kalhu. Similarly, accounts of the destruction and pious restoration of temples do not speak directly of the priesthood. See, for instance, RIM E4.11.1 and the reign of Ipiq-Eštar of Malgium.

³⁷ Robert William Rogers, *A History of Babylonia and Assyria, volume 1: Prolegomena* (New York: Eaton Mains; Cincinnati: Jennings & Pye, 1900), 377–87; Albert Ten Eyck Olmstead, “Assyrian Historiography: A Source Study,” (University of Missouri Studies, Social Science Series, 3/1; Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri, 1916), 1–66; idem, *History of Assyria* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1923), 573–611. Oppenheim famously questions the very possibility of writing a descriptive history of Mesopotamian religion, a frustration due in part to his sensitivity to the genre conventions of the preserved inscriptions. In any event, he does not comment directly on the sparseness of priests in royal inscriptions. See A. Leo Oppenheim and Erica Reiner, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (Rev. ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 143–153, 168, 172–83; Paul Garelli, “Les temples et le pouvoir royal en Assyrie du XIV^e au VIII^e siècle,” in *Le Temple et le Culte. XX^e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Leiden, 3–7 juillet 1972* (ed. F. R. Kraus, et al.; Publications de l’Institut historique et archéologique néerlandais de Stamboul 37; Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archeologisch Instituut, 1975), 116–24; Karen Rhea Nemet-Nejat, *Daily Life in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Daily Life through History; Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998), 175–215; Jean-Jacques Glassner, *La Mesopotamie* (Guide Belles Lettres des civilisations Paris: Belles lettres, 2002), 94–108, 211–16; Gwendolyn Leick, *The Babylonians: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2003), 100–128; Eva Christiane Cancik-Kirschbaum, *Die Assyrer: Geschichte, Gesellschaft, Kultur* (C.H. Beck Wissen; München: Beck, 2003), 102–117. Sallaberger and Vulliet correctly observe that royal sources deal little with the everyday life of the temple although they fail to note the chronic reluctance of royal inscriptions to speak of priests, even when pious royal attentions to temple renovation and cultus form the narrative content. See W. Sallaberger and F. Huber Vulliet, “Priester A. 1. Mesopotamien,” in *RIA*, 10:620b.

the Bible apart from its ancient Near Eastern context, few distinctions are more readily verified than that between the priest-ridden pages of the Bible and the all-but-priestless royal inscriptions of Mesopotamia.³⁸

A polemical work against an eighth-century Babylonian king, one Nabû-šuma-iškun, recounts his crimes and sacrileges in gleeful detail, including—horrors of horrors—his forcing the priests of Babylon to eat leeks and his burning of citizens of Cutha, but in none of the wretchedly preserved portions do we learn that he slaughtered priests by fire or any other method. This omission is disappointing—if any inscription were to have gossiped about the wanton killing of priests, it should have figured in the epic mischief of Nabû-šuma-iškun.³⁹

That individual priests commit crimes against sacred property, as well as secular crimes ranging from adultery to high treason, takes no one by surprise in antiquity, certainly not the kings of Mesopotamia. One does meet with the execution by fire of Mesopotamian priests and others guilty of sacrilege in a series of “asides” in the so-called astronomical diaries, a vast textual corpus in which Esagila personnel or individuals in the pay of Esagila (the Marduk temple complex in Babylon) maintain meteorological and astronomical

³⁸ The (non-)occurrence of priests in royal Mesopotamian inscriptions was elaborated in a paper delivered at the 2008 American Oriental Society congress in Chicago, “The Curious Case of the Missing Priests in Royal Mesopotamian Inscriptions.”

³⁹ Text and translation in Steven W. Cole, “The Crimes and Sacrileges of Nabû-šuma-iškun,” *ZA* 84 (1994): 220–52; RIM B.6.14.1; Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, 301–313. To place this omission in perspective, the correspondence of the Sargonid kings is replete with letters written by priests, updates on temple rituals, raw materials for temple refurbishment, progress reports on building activities, and a great deal of temple-gossip, a specie of the obsequious whining and tattling of the Neo-Assyrian royal correspondence. Of the twelve correspondents identified in the letters written to Sargon II from Babylon, for example, eight were priests. See SAA 17 nos. 20 (Bēlšunu), 21–31 (Bēl-iqīša), 32–33 (Ina-tēšī-ēšir), 34–38 (Nabû-šuma-līšir, co-authored with Ešeru no. 36), Qišti-Marduk (39–42), Nabû-šuma-iškun (46), Rīmūtu (47). It was patently impossible for the Assyrian kings to rule southern Babylonia effectively without the collusion of the powerful city-temple priesthood, as Sennacherib learned to his rage and sorrow, an error addressed by his son Esarhaddon. In Persia, the Persepolis Fortification Tablets, among the largest cuneiform archives known, prosaic administrative and economic documents that canvassed royal affairs in the Iranian heartland, detail Achaemenid sponsorship of the *lan*-(state) sacrifices and record rations for the priestly classes involved, together with distributions to other cults and priests, a situation bespeaking intense royal engagement in the lives of the priests. See Heidemarie Koch, “Theology and Worship in Elam and Achaemenid Iran,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (ed. Jack M. Sasson; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995), 3–4:1965–69. Yet the royal display inscriptions of the Persian kings never hint that priests exist.

records dating in composition from 651 to 61 BCE.⁴⁰ In addition to the requisite heavenly data, ominous events in the city and items of general interest are jotted down⁴¹ that include the judicial trials and executions of

⁴⁰ Abraham J. Sachs and Hermann Hunger, *Diaries from 652 B.C. to 262 B.C.* (vol. 1 of *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia*; ed. idem; Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse Denkschriften 195; Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1988) (= AD I); idem, *Diaries from 261 B.C. to 165 B.C.* (vol. 2 of *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia*; Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse Denkschriften 210; Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1989) (= AD II); idem, *Diaries from 164 B.C. to 61 B.C.* (vol. 3 of *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia*; Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse Denkschriften 247; Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996) (= AD III); Hermann Hunger, *Lunar and Planetary Texts* (vol. 5 of *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia*; Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Denkschriften 299; Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2001); idem, *Goal Year Texts* (vol. 6 of *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia*; Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Denkschriften 346; Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2006). On the nature of the diaries, *našāru ša ginē*, see Hunger's introduction, AD I, 11–38. He (p. 12) comments, "Nothing is known about the locations of discovery of the tablets and their original arrangement, whether they were all found in one building or come from different places within Babylon." See also Francesca Rochberg, *The Heavenly Writing: Divination, Horoscopy, and Astronomy in Mesopotamian Culture* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 147–53. For a general overview of crime and punishment in antiquity, including the crime of ἱεροσυλία (temple desecration) and the sentence of *crematio*, see Hans Neumann, Malte Römer, and Gottfried Schieman, "Strafe, Strafrecht," in *Brill's Der Neue Pauly (Antike)* (ed. Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider, 2007) (<http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=dnpe1123610>, accessed 29 June 2007); Hans Neumann and Gottfried Schieman, "Death penalty," in *Brill's New Pauly* (<http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=dnpe1216600>, accessed 29 June 2007); Gerhard Thür, "Hierosylia," in *Brill's New Pauly* (<http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=dnpe513470>, accessed 29 June 2007). The article on capital punishment in the *Reallexikon* ends idiosyncratically with the Neo-Assyrian text corpus; G. Ries, "Kapitaldelikte," in *RIA*, 5:391b–99a.

⁴¹ "A typical diary contains information on the following topics: (1.) Moon, (2.) Planets, (3.) Solstices and equinoxes, Sirius phenomena, (4.) Meteors, comets, etc., (5.) Weather, (6.) Prices of commodities, (7.) River level, and (8.) Historical events." See AD I, 13 and R. J. van der Spek, "The Astronomical Diaries as a Source for Achaemenid and Seleucid History," *BO* 50 (1993): 91–101; Alice Louise Slotsky, *The Bourse of Babylon: Market Quotations in the Astronomical Diaries of Babylonia* (Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 1997); and T. Boiy, *Late Achaemenid and Hellenistic Babylon* (OLA 136; Dudley, Mass.: Peeters, 2004), *passim*. Boiv relies heavily on these documents for his historical reconstruction.

those caught stealing temple property, and of course these included *ērib-bīti* -priests.⁴² The dark cellas of Mesopotamian gods and their divine images are heavily encrusted with gemstones and precious metals, a dire temptation to all ranks of sticky-fingered priests and qualified temple prebendaries granted access.

BM 47737, a tablet containing a compilation of three such judicial proceedings against suspected thieves in the Esagila, dates no earlier than 222 BCE, the reign of Antiochus III.⁴³ In the third “act,” a goldsmith, a jeweler, and a gate-keeper employed by the temple are interrogated and tortured in the presence of the temple leadership, a council comprising the highest civil authority in Babylon.⁴⁴ One dies during incarceration, and his corpse is burned. The jeweler, his sons, and the gate-keeper are subsequently convicted and burned. The first two sets of proceedings on the tablet do not involve priests, but all the malefactors are burned. I have identified four other Hellenistic Akkadian texts associated with Babylonian temples that condemn

⁴² In addition to temple personnel who routinely performed ritual functions, the *ērib-bīti*, “temple-enterer,” in the Hellenistic era was used for individuals holding *ērib-bītūtu* prebends. This broad class could encompass craftsmen such as goldsmiths (*kutimmu*), jewelers (*kabšarru*), seal-cutters (*purkullu*), and even cooks (*nuhatimmu*), brewers (*sirāšu*) and butchers (*jābihu*). See Marc J. H. Linssen, *The Cults of Uruk and Babylon: The Temple Ritual Texts as Evidence for Hellenistic Cult Practices* (Cuneiform Monographs 25; Leiden: Brill/Styx, 2004), 17–18; Francis Joannès, *The Age of Empires: Mesopotamia in the First Millennium BC* (trans. Antonia Nevill; Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 185–90; Boiy, *Late Achaemenid and Hellenistic Babylon*, 266. See also the extensive discussion of the prebendal system of Neo-Babylonian Ebabbar at Sippar in A.C.V.M. Bongenaar, *The Neo-Babylonian Ebabbar Temple at Sippar: Its Administration and Its Prosopography* (Uitgaven van Het Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul 80; Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut, 1997), 140–295; and examples from Neo-Babylonian Eanna of Uruk cited in Paul-Alain Beaulieu, *The Pantheon of Uruk During the Neo-Babylonian Period* (Cuneiform Monographs 23; Leiden: Brill/Styx, 2003), 171–74.

⁴³ Transliteration, translation and commentary in Francis Joannès, “Une chronique judiciaire d’époque hellénistique et le châtement des sacrilèges à Babylone,” in *Assyriologica et Semitica: Festschrift für Joachim Oelsner anlässlich seines 65. Geburtstages am 18. Februar 1997* (ed. Joachim Marzahn and Hans Neumann; AOAT 252; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2000), 194–205 (BM 47737).

⁴⁴ For the *šatammu* and assembly (*kiništu*) of Esagila, see R. J. van der Spek, “The Babylonian City,” in *Hellenism in the East: The Interaction of Greek and Non-Greek Civilizations from Syria to Central Asia after Alexander* (ed. Amélie Kuhrt and Susan Sherwin-White; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 57–74; idem, “The *šatammus* of Esagila in the Seleucid and Parthian Periods,” in *Assyriologica et Semitica*, 437–46; Boiy, *Late Achaemenid and Hellenistic Babylon*, 196–204.

temple thieves to death by burning, but no instances of lesser punishments meted out for such crime.⁴⁵

Day 7, Bēl-zēra-līšir, the goldsmith, [died] in jail.

ūmu 7 Bēl-zēra-līšir kutūmu ina bīt šibtē [ti imūt]

His corpse was carried out and burnt with fire. [That] day, Bēl-
[xxx,]

müssu šūšatu ina išāti qalāt ūm[u šuātu Bēl-xxx....]

the jeweller, his two sons, the gate keeper and [his sons (?)]

kabšarru 2 mārēšu maššar abullu u [mārēšu (?)].....

were interrogated as previously, were convicted (and) [burnt] with fi[re].

libbū mahrū šalū uktinnū ina iš[āti qal]ū (Glassner, Mesopotamian Chronicles, no. 37, p. 258 ll.30-33).

In contrast to this text, crimes committed against temples in the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian text corpora are not punished by immolation. In none of the Neo-Assyrian court proceedings proper could I locate a single capital sentence for any crime, and the state epistolary archives yield accounts of only two deaths for temple theft (a beating and a laconic “he was killed”).⁴⁶ In the

⁴⁵ See the “Gold Theft Chronicle” in Babylonian Chronicles of the Hellenistic Period 15 (BM 32510 = 76-11-17,2251), available online (http://www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/bchp-gold/theft_1.html, accessed 14 June 2007). See AD I, 330, no. -277 C14' (BM 132279+) (crown of Bel and Nabû stolen; thieves [restored reading] were burned in the Šuanna quarter of Babylon); AD II, p. 26, no. -254 obv. 12'-lower edge 1 (BM 34728+35418) (property of Zababa and Ninlil; thieves [šarraqu] were burned in Babylon); AD II, p. 78, no. -240 obv. 6'-8' (Rm 720+732+BM 41522)(text is broken, but apparently something was stolen from the temple of Ištar of Babylon; the thief was interrogated and convicted, but the manner of death is uncertain); AD II, 476, no. -168 rev. A15'-A18' (BM 41581, BM 35605, BM 55584, BM 55570) (divine standard of Ammami'ita was stolen; the thieves were interrogated in the presence of the šatammu and the temple judges, and burned the same day).

⁴⁶ SAA 13 157 (death by beating, *hisi'tu*), SAA 13 128 s.1 (*dēku*, killed). SAA 10 107, ABL 150 and 551 deal with theft of gold from the Aššur temple; transliterations and translations of the relevant portions of ABL 150 and 551 in LAS 2, pp. 327-28, n. 610. SAA 17 8 describes the theft by an *ērib-bīti*-priest of a “golden heaven” from Esagila. Babylonian priests and other temple staff of Ninurta and Ea steal golden ornaments and a statue, ABL 493, 1389; golden objects made by Sargon are stolen from a Babylonian temple according to ABL 951. See citations in SAA 13, xxviii-xix; Holloway, *Aššur is King!*, pp. 322-29; Grant Frame, *Babylonia 689-627 B.C.: A Political History* (Uitgaven van het Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul 69; Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1992), 98 (reign of Esarhaddon). In the judicial trials (*dīnu*) from the Neo-Assyrian capital cities edited by Remko Jas, only one stipulates the death penalty, (a murderer who fails to pay the blood money will be slain [*iddūkūšu*] on the victim's grave) no. 42. Nos. 14, 44, 45 deal with theft, but not from temples. See Remko Jas, *Neo-Assyrian Judicial Procedures* (State Archives of Assyria Studies 5; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1996).

case of the Neo-Babylonian temples, however, for which we have substantial documentation, thirty-fold fines for theft are normative, as specified in the Code of Hammurabi 8, in which theft from palace or temple is to be restored thirty-fold.⁴⁷ Matthew Stolper suggests that the Persians exploited corporal punishments of a sort that strikingly depart from the penalties and distraints attested in earlier Babylonian sources; numerous colorful examples could be adduced.⁴⁸ In terms of historical Mesopotamian judicature, the judicial procedure of human immolation for temple sacrilege is a novelty probably

⁴⁷ M. San Nicolò, "Parerga Babylonica VII: Der § 8 des Gesetzbuches Hammurapis in den neubabylonischen Urkunden," *Archiv Orientalní* 4 (1932): 327–44; Johannes Renger, "Notes on the Goldsmiths, Jewelers and Carpenters of Neobabylonian Eanna," *JAOS* 91 (1971): 501–502; Ira Spar, "Three Neo-Babylonian Trial Depositions from Uruk," in *Studies in Honor of Tom B. Jones* (ed. Marvin A. Powell and Ronald H. Sack; AOAT 203; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1979), 161; Francis Joannès, "Les textes judiciaires néo-babyloniens," in *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie: Archives judiciaires du Proche-Orient ancien (III^e–I^{er} millénaires avant J.-C.)* (ed. Francis Joannès; Temps & espaces; Vincennes: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 2000), 221–23, nos. 164–65; H. H. Figulla, "Lawsuit Concerning a Sacrilegious Theft at Erech," *Iraq* 13 (1951): 95–101 (= Joannès, "Textes judiciaires," no. 165). Texts recording temple theft but not punishment may be found in Joannès, "Textes judiciaires," 211–21, 222–27, nos. 155–63, 166–68; Bongenaar, *Neo-Babylonian Ebabbar Temple*, 152–53, 364, with discussion in Joannès, "Chronique judiciaire," 206–11.

⁴⁸ See Matthew W. Stolper, "Mesopotamia, 482–330 B.C.," in *The Fourth Century B.C.* (vol. 6 of *Cambridge Ancient History*; ed. I. E. S. Edwards, C. J. Gadd, and N. G. L. Hammond; 3rd ed.; Cambridge, UK: University Press, 1994), 258. A judicial document from the reign of Darius II Ochus records the trial of a man accused of robbing the temple of Uraš in Dilbat. The trial took place in the presence of Bēlšumu, the governor of Babylon known from the *Anabasis* of Xenophon and the so-called Kasr Archive of Babylon. Bēlšumu decreed that the thief be clapped in irons, his property distrained, and an amount equivalent to the theft be delivered to the treasury of Uraš. Transliteration, translation and commentary in Francis Joannès, "Une chronique judiciaire," 209–11 (= TBER pl. 6 [AO 2569]). On the Kasr Archive, see Matthew W. Stolper, "The Babylonian Enterprise of Belesys," in *Dans le pas des Dix-Mille: Peuples et pays du Proche-Orient vus par un Grec. Actes de la Table Ronde Internationale Toulouse 3–4 février 1995* (ed. Pierre Briant; Pallas: Revue d'études antiques 43; Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 1995), 217–38; idem, "The Kasr Texts, the Rich Collection, the Bellini Copies and the Grotefend Nachlass," in *Assyria and Beyond: Studies Presented to Mogens Trolle Larsen* (ed. Jan Gerrit Dercksen; Uitgaven van het Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten te Leiden 100; Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2004), 511–49; idem, "Achaemenid Legal Texts from the Kasr: Interim Observations," in *Babylon: Focus mesopotamischer Geschichte, Wiege früher Gelehrsamkeit, Mythos in der Moderne. 2. Internationales Colloquium der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 24.–26. März 1998 in Berlin* (ed. Johannes Renger; Colloquien der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 2; Saarbrücken: SDV Saarbrücker Druckerei und Verlag, 1999), 365–75.

instituted under the Persians and certainly institutionalized in Hellenistic Babylonia.⁴⁹

Live human burning occurs in pre-Achaemenid cuneiform sources as a judicial punishment,⁵⁰ state-sponsored acts of terrorism,⁵¹ anti-witchcraft

⁴⁹ The Persian kings, together with their Hellenistic and Parthian successors, maintained the fabric and rites of the ancient city-temples of Babylonia, an indispensable role in the perdurable ideology of Mesopotamian kingship. See R. J. van der Spek, "The Babylonian Temple during the Macedonian and Parthian Domination," *BO* 42 (1985): 546–47; Susan Sherwin-White, "Seleucid Babylonia: A Case-Study for the Installation and Development of Greek Rule," in *Hellenism in the East: The Interaction of Greek and Non-Greek Civilizations from Syria to Central Asia after Alexander* (ed. Amélie Kuhrt and Susan Sherwin-White; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 1–31; Javier Teixidor, "Interpretations and Misinterpretations of the East in Hellenistic Times," in *Religion and Religious Practice in the Seleucid Kingdom* (ed. Per Bilde, et al.; Studies in Hellenistic Civilization 1; Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1990), 66–78; R. J. van der Spek, "Cuneiform Documents on Parthian History: The Rahimesu Archive: Materials for the Study of the Standard of Living," in *Das Partherreich und seine Zeugnisse/The Arsacid Empire: Sources and Documentation: Beiträge des internationalen Colloquiums, Eutin (27.–30. Juni 1996)* (ed. Josef Wiesehöfer; Historia: Zeitschrift für alte Geschichte 122; Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998), 205–58; idem, "The Theatre of Babylon in Cuneiform," in *Veenhof Anniversary Volume: Studies Presented to Klaas R. Veenhof on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (ed. W. H. Van Soldt, et al.; Uitgaven van Het Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul 89; Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor Het Nabije Oosten, 2001), 445–56; Eckart Frahm, "Zwischen Tradition und Neuerung: Babylonische Priestergelehrte im achämenidenzeitlichen Uruk," in *Religion und Religionskontakte im Zeitalter der Achämeniden* (ed. Reinhard G. Kratz; Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie 22; Gütersloh: Kaiser Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2002), 74–108; Joannès, *Age of Empires*, 160–61, 240–41; Boiy, *Late Achaemenid and Hellenistic Babylon*, 81–92, 97–98, 193–204, 214–17, 265, 277–85.

⁵⁰ In the Code of Hammurabi, human immolation is the punishment for looting a burning house, for a *nadītu*-priestess who frequents or runs a tavern, and for mother-son incest. See CH §§25, 110, 157, respectively. Note the Old Babylonian liver omen in CT 6 pl. 2 case 42: *ēnum asakku ištannariq i[šabba]tūšima iqallūši šumma šagūm ēnam ittanayyak* (Bu 89–4-26,238, Old Babylonian liver model): "the *ēn*-priestess will repeatedly steal what is under taboo/the sacred property of the god, but they will seize her and burn her, or: the *šangū*-priest will repeatedly have sexual intercourse with the *ēn*-priestess." Instead of "burn her," a variant text reads, "she shall be killed" (*iddāk*), whereas other Old Babylonian extispicy texts substitute a *šangū*-priest (or his wife) or an exorcist for the thieving *ēn*-priestess, with the same outcome (*iddāk*); J. Nougayrol, "Textes hépatoscopiques d'époque ancienne conservés au Musée du Louvre (III)," *RA* 44 (1950): 29; Joannès, "Une chronique judiciaire," 207–208. W 20472, 125, an Uruk Old Babylonian administrative text, specifies that the *šangū*-priest of Nanaia will pay one-third shekel for the theft of a bronze object from the temple; Adam Falkenstein, "Zu den Inscriftenfunden der Grabung in Uruk-Warka 1960–1961," *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 2 (1963): 48. On the role of the *ēn*-priests and priestesses in Old

rituals,⁵² and gruesome penalty clauses in Neo-Assyrian contracts.⁵³ With the possible exception of an isolated Old Babylonian extispicy text, however, not a single pre-Achaemenid example of immolation for temple sacrilege, either threatened or executed, could I find.⁵⁴

Babylonian temples, including this cameo appearance in an extispicy text, see Johannes Renger, "Untersuchungen zum Priestertum in der altbabylonischen Zeit," *ZA* 58 (1967): 114–31. *Naditu*-priestesses figure in the extispicy series *Šumma ālu*, tablet 1:139, but are not burned, nor is anyone else in the extensive clerical lineup of this tablet. Temple thefts occur in connection with the status of the gate's latch-hook (naturally!) in the apodoses of *Šumma ālu*, tablet 9:10', 13', 14'; texts and translations in Sally M. Freedman, *If a City is Set on a Height: The Akkadian Omen Series Šumma alu ina mēlê šakin, volume 1: Tablets 1–21* (Occasional Publications of the Samuel Noah Kramer Fund 17; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum, 1998). A Mari text from the age of Zimri-Lim prescribes a river ordeal for a man accused of treason, and should the accused party survive, the slanderer is to be burned; Jack M. Sasson, "Treatment of Criminals at Mari: A Survey," *JESHO* 20 (1977): 97; in another text, a man guilty of treason is burnt together with his family (p. 109).

⁵¹ In RIM A.0.78.1 iii 43–44, Tukulti-Ninurta I claims to have burned the inhabitants of the land of Purulumzu alive (*balṣu*), a punishment meted out elsewhere in RIM A.0.101.1 i 108–109, ii 1, 43, 57–58, 108, 109–110; A.0.101.17 ii 1–2, 62–63, iii 13–14, 50, iv 77–78, 82–83. In A.0.101.19 75, 76–77, the early Neo-Assyrian king Aššur-nāšir-apli II boasts of having burnt either captives or adolescent boys and girls while on campaign, a boast imitated by the chancellery scribes of his son, RIM A.0.102.2 i 17. The Assyrian royal inscriptions of the first millennium routinely describe putting whole cities to the torch, but the assertion that human beings were burned while on campaign was rare, whatever the reality may have been.

⁵² Two incantation compendia against witchcraft, *Maqlū* and *Šurpu*, both words meaning "burning," prescribe the fashioning of various substitutionary objects and their burning to destroy unseen witches through fire. See Gerhard Meier, *Die assyrische Beschwörungssammlung Maqlū* (AFOB 2; Berlin: 1937); Erica Reiner, *Šurpu: A Collection of Sumerian and Akkadian Incantations* (AFOB 11; Graz: 1958).

⁵³ Some 35 penalty clauses in Neo-Assyrian contracts stipulate that the contract challenger's first-born son or daughter, or seven male-oblates and seven female-oblates, shall be burned (*qalū* or *šarāpu*) in the presence of various gods, sometimes with incense, a procedure attested in the ninth-century Akkadian curse formulae of Kapara of Güzāna. It is unknown whether any of these penalties were ever put into practice. Contracts with these penalty clauses, a tiny portion of the published Neo-Assyrian contract corpora, are attested at Nineveh, Calah and Assur. See Karen Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden als Quelle für Mensch und Umwelt* (SAAS 6; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997), 211–19. In addition to the immolation of the firstborn son and daughter, the contract defaulter in SAA 6 101 rev. 3–9 is required to eat one mina of ox hide and drink an *aganmu*-vessel of tanner's paste, impossible stipulations that cast doubt on the real-world likelihood that any of these penalties were ever executed.

⁵⁴ On the Old Babylonian liver omen apodosis that condemns an *ēn*-priestess to death by burning, see n. 49. It should be born in mind that a fiery death was the order of the day for the *naditu*-priestess guilty of pub-crawling in the Code of Hammurapi §

As you know, the Hebrew Scriptures legislate the burning of incestuous criminals and the daughters of priests convicted of prostitution (Lev 20:14, 21:9). The Patriarch Judah condemns Tamar to death by fire for prostitution (Gen 38:24), the Philistines burn Samson's wife (Judg 15:6), and Zimri of Israel incinerates himself with his palace (1 Kgs 16:18). Burning as punishment for sacrilege is a closer analogy to the burning of priests in Bethel. It is the final solution for Achan and his family for stealing valuables under the *herem*-ban (Josh 7:15–26), and figures famously in the first account of priestly death in the canon, namely, the supernatural immolation of Nadab and Abihu for offering Yahweh "strange fire" (Lev 10:1–2).⁵⁵ The Bethel desecration text of Josiah shares a unique feature in the Hebrew Scriptures with the golden calf episode of Exodus 32 because fire, normally the purification agent *par excellence*, here produces impurity. Aaron's lame apology to Moses for fashioning the calf includes his ridiculous expostulation, "So I said to them, 'Whoever has gold, take it off'; so they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out popped this calf! (ויצא העגל הזה) (Ex 32:24)."⁵⁶

110 and that therefore death by fire in this case may have more to do with patriarchal control of priestesses than the nature of the crime itself. To balance out our Mesopotamico-centric perspective, execution by fire is attested in Pharaonic Egypt for political rebellion and for some cultic offenses that include trespass on protected areas in the Abydos necropolis and temple vandalism. Temple theft, however, appears to have been punished by impalement, beatings, or fines. See A. G. McDowell, "Crime and Punishment," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* (ed. Donald B. Redford; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1:316–18. The destruction of Osiris' enemies by fire features in the Coffin Texts and later works that represent a mythological enactment of the fate of political rebels of all stripes. In the fictional *Instructions of Ankhsheshonqy*, a late Ptolemaic composition, the king apprehends a would-be assassin, commands that an earthen altar be built at the door of the palace, and proceeds to burn the ringleader, kinfolk and accomplices on a brazier. See McDowell, "Crime and Punishment," 317. Leahy notes, "Death by burning was well-known to Egyptians in the latter half of the first millennium B.C., and that it seems to have been regarded as particularly appropriate to treason." See Anthony Leahy, "Death by Fire in Ancient Egypt," *JESHO* 27 (1984): 200.

⁵⁵ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16* (AB 3; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 595–600, 628–40.

⁵⁶ On the exegetical history of Exodus 32, see Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 574–79. The observation that the creation of the golden calf utilized fire to create impurity and its link to 1 Kings 13 and 2 Kings 23 do not appear in any of the commentaries I consulted such as Samuel Rolles Driver, *The Book of Exodus* (The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1929), 346–54; Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in Shemot (Exodus), part II: Mishpatim — Pekudei (Exodus 21,1 to end)* (trans. Aryeh Newman; Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1981), 549–617; Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (The JPS Torah Commentary;

Slaughtered priests and the burning of bones may purify Israel but they pollute the Bethel altar with corpse contamination, and perhaps constitute a form of post-mortem punishment, as JoAnn Scurlock's presentation at this meeting of the Chicago Society of Biblical Research describes. Both passages, textbook-perfect examples of cult polemics, are linked through 1 Kings 12, the figure of Jeroboam I and his breakaway high place at Bethel.⁵⁷

In summation: the killing of priests, either singly or by the crowd, is unattested in Mesopotamian royal inscriptions. Indeed, viewed from the perspective of a Sumerian or Akkadian reader, the account of such a deed in 2 Kgs 23:20 would have violated a 2000-year-old genre convention and served to brand Josiah as a rogue arch-criminal, hardly the intention of the biblical author. In historical light, priests and others who commit the sacrilege of theft against Babylonian temples, if caught and convicted, suffer death by fire, and these examples are the closest analogy in the Mesopotamian text corpus to Josiah's bloody deeds. All such texts, however, date from the Hellenistic period, even though I suggest that the custom was a Persian innovation. If it

Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 208; Terrence E. Fretheim, *Exodus* (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 280–90; John Van Seters, *The Life of Moses: the Yahwist as Historian in Exodus–Numbers* (CBET 10; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 290–318; J. Gerald Janzen, *Exodus* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 226–39; Dirk U. Rottzoll and Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Parascha Jethro bis Pekudej (Ex 18–40)* (vol 2 of *Abraham Ibn Ezras langer Kommentar zum Buch Exodus*; SJ: Forschungen zur Wissenschaft des Judentums 17/2; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 962–1005; David L. Lieber, ed., *Etz hayim: Torah and Commentary* (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 2001), 534–35; Enrique Sanz Giménez-Rico, *Cercanía del Dios distante: imagen de Dios en el libro del Éxodo* (Publicaciones de la Universidad Pontificia Comillas Madrid, series 1: estudios 84; Madrid: Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 2002), 363–71, 375–90; Christoph Dohmen, *Exodus 19–40* (HTKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2004), 288–316; Carol L. Meyers, *Exodus* (New Cambridge Bible Commentary: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 258–63. The *Nachleben* of this pericope began in the Hebrew Scriptures. For its Jewish exegetical history, see Christopher T. Begg, “The Golden Calf Episode According to Pseudo-Philo,” in *Studies in the Book of Exodus: Redaction — Reception — Interpretation* (ed. Marc Vervenne; BETL 126; Louvain: Leuven University Press / Uitgeverij Peeters, 1996), 577–94; Scott M. Langston, *Exodus through the Centuries* (Blackwell Bible Commentaries through the Centuries; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 232–42. Among the patristic exegetes, this pericope served as a potent weapon in the *adversus judaeus* wars. See Pier Cesare Bori, *The Golden Calf and the Origins of the Anti-Jewish Controversy* (South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 16; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990).

⁵⁷ Ex 32:2, the pericope in which the golden earrings of the women, sons and daughters are removed and brought to Aaron, is typologically linked to Gen 35:4, Jacob's construction of an altar at Bethel that, which begins with the removal and burial of all the “strange gods” and earrings of his household. Dohmen, *Exodus 19–40*, 295–9.

be granted that immolation becomes a normative, legal, and hence widely practiced punishment for temple sacrilege in the Achaemenid Empire, this situation could impact our notions concerning the *Sitz-im-Leben* of 2 Kgs 23:15–20, and other extreme examples of punishment in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Appendix: History or Cult Polemic? Josiah's Actions in Bethel

Etched against the overriding cultic concerns of the authors, the geopolitics of 2 Kings from the reign of Hezekiah through his great-grandson Josiah, continue to elude many commentators who confound the biblical entities with their historical counterparts. In the Bible, the defeat of the host of Sennacherib outside Jerusalem is so overwhelmingly complete that the Assyrians never trouble little Judah again, neither in the remaining years of Hezekiah nor in the protracted reign of Manasseh or in the brief stage appearance of Amon, and certainly the Assyrians appear nowhere in the Josianic narrative. Murder of Sennacherib: Exeunt Assyria. Neither does any Egyptian king interfere in the internal affairs of Judah from the reign of Hezekiah until Josiah's death at the hands of Necho at Megiddo. Following the speech of Rab Shaqeh outside Jerusalem: Exeunt Egypt. The narrative economy of 2 Kings requires a profound external power vacuum in order to sustain the contrast between the *Unheilsherrscher* Manasseh and squeaky-clean Josiah, neither of whom could have played their parts with such melodramatic *sauvé-faire* had they been cast as Assyrian or Egyptian vassals, hapless cogs whirring in the mighty imperial clockwork.

In contrast, the geopolitical reality of the historical kingdom of Judah in the days of Josiah was radically different. Assurbanipal's armies campaigned along the Phoenician coast in 644, four years before the traditional date of Josiah's enthronement. Psamtik I, who acquired his throne with Assyrian assistance and unified Egypt by dethroning the Delta princes and repulsing a Nubian offensive in 656, is never cast as an Assyrian enemy in Egyptian, Greek, or Akkadian sources. Apart from a skirmish with Gyges of Lydia, the Egyptians disappear from datable Mesopotamian texts until 616, when the Babylonian Chronicle reports that the Egyptian army rushed to succor Šin-šar-iškun in battle against Nabopolassar. At precisely what point Assyria struck an entente cordiale with Egypt to administer its Cis-Euphratian empire is unclear. Herodotus' account of a massive Scythian invasion along the Southern Levant is as mythical as his mighty Median Empire, but there is no compelling evidence that Assyria ceased to rule over its western provinces and vassal states before the death of Assurbanipal and the Babylonian revolt in the 620s, long after the traditional date of Josiah's royal accession.⁵⁸

Speaking of the genuine historical forces that dictated Josiah's enthronement, therefore, the assassination of Amon, an Assyrian vassal ruling a state bordering the militarily strategic and spice-trade-rich Philistine coastal emporia, would have constituted a matter of keen interest to Assurbanipal in distant Nineveh. An illustrative

⁵⁸ The most judicious weighing of the historical possibilities of Josiah's reign to date is Nadav Na'aman, "Josiah and the Kingdom of Judah," in *Good Kings and Bad Kings* (ed. Lester L. Grabbe; Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 393; European Seminar in Historical Methodology 5; London and New York: T&T Clark International, 2005), 189–247.

case: Aššur-rešuwa, an Assyrian field operative working for the crown prince Sennacherib, wrote numerous letters detailing a Urartian palace revolt, in which he identified the conspirators, sketched the counter-revolution that suppressed it, and recounted the subsequent execution of the traitors.⁵⁹ We can assume with a high degree of confidence that Assurbanipal would have received similar missives from his agents in Judah or *Samerina*. The assassins of Amon were either removed through direct Assyrian connivance or their elimination through internal events and installation of Josiah was approved in Nineveh; there is no third possibility. Assurbanipal, the chief actor behind the facts on the ground in Syria-Palestine in the eighth year of Josiah, is never acknowledged in the pages of 2 Kings, and one must accordingly exercise circumspection in casting those doughty actors, the עַם הָאָרֶץ, as either freedom-loving peasants enamored of recreating a lost Davidic empire or as an organized band of elites struggling against another such band in a power vacuum. The historical entity pulling the marionette strings was Assurbanipal.

Playing the devil's (that is, the Deuteronomist's) advocate, there is nothing intrinsically improbable about the historical Josiah's mounting a raid against historical Bethel that killed a number of priests. The royal correspondence of the Neo-Assyrian empire, mostly Sargonid in date, attests numerous incidents in which a provincial governor crosses the border of his neighboring province and commits one enormity or another; examples of such behavior on the part of vassals and provinces are harder to come by, but examples do indeed exist. Reprisals by irritated Assyrian kings were unpredictable. If the Assyrian vassal Josiah were rash enough to interfere with the cultic affairs of Bethel just across the border, he, depending on the weakness of the *Samerina* garrisons and the good pleasure of the king in distant Nineveh, might have escaped official censorship and reckoning. A more sustained destructive effort throughout the Assyrian province, however, would have been tantamount to a declaration of war, and it seems improbable to me that Josiah would have risked his kingdom and his very skin, even if he sensed that Assyria was militarily in decline — after all, who could tell whether the dying Assyrian lion might not rouse itself for one last punitive campaign?

Destroying extra-Jerusalemite cult places and their priests formed a central plank in the Deuteronomistic program that wielded decisive control over the content and structuring of the historiography in 1 and 2 Kings. The Josiah that inhabits the pages of the Bible, whatever the historical kernel behind the memory, performs in a theatre that suppressed historical datum at odds with its sermonic didacticism, such as the Assyrian vassalage of Josiah, his father and his illustrious grandfather. We may justly ponder the likelihood whether the historical Josiah actually attacked the cult centers to the north, in light of the powerful rationale for staging the biblical entity Josiah to have smashed rival altars and their priests in the literature written for an Exilic or post-Exilic community, when the shadow of Bethel loomed large over Jerusalem. A sop for the historicity of the passage could be a Judahite skirmish launched against Bethel, for any number of reasons unconnected with altar reforms, in which Josiah captured and executed the leading citizens left defending the city, including the priests, in the fashion of his Assyrian overlords when the walls of a recalcitrant vassal city were

⁵⁹ See Peter Dubovský, *Hezekiah and the Assyrian Spies: Reconstruction of the Neo-Assyrian Intelligence Services and Its Significance for 2 Kings 18–19* (BO 49; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2006), 134–36.

finally breached. A Deuteronomist editor many years after the fact conceivably exploited this pedestrian tale of hostilities as evidence for the crusading zeal of Josiah.

Archaeology is of scant help in the matter. The Bethel excavations, a series of soundings taken over a 4-acre swathe of the modern village of Beitin by W.F. Albright and James L. Kelso between 1927 and 1960, execrably poor archaeology even for the era, reveal almost no structures that can be confidently associated with the Iron Age, certainly nothing that could be construed as an altar. Even William Dever categorizes the final excavation report as “a parade example of the interpretative problems typical of the ‘Biblical archaeology’ movement.”⁶⁰ If indeed Josiah mounted a destructive raid against the Bethel high place, all of eight miles to the north of Jerusalem, his work failed to endure there any more than it endured in Jerusalem or Judah.

Abbreviations:

ABL = Robert Francis Harper, *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters Belonging to the Kouyunjik Collections of the British Museum* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1892–1914)

Borger, *Asarh.*, §27: Nin = Rykle Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons, Königs von Assyrien* (AfOB 9; Osnabruck: Biblio-Verlag, 1967 [1956]), §27: Nineveh

Borger, *BIWA* = Rykle Borger, *Beiträge zum Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals: Die Prismenklassen A, B, C = K, D, E, F, G, H, J und T sowie andere Inschriften* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1996)

CT = *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets, etc., in the British Museum* (1896–)

DB = Darius Bīsitūn inscription

LAS = Simo Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal* (AOAT 5/1–2; Kevelaer: Verlag Butzon & Bercker, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970)

RIM A = Albert Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC (1114–859 BC)* (The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Assyrian Periods 2; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); Albert Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC II (858–745 BC)* (Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Assyrian Periods 3; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996)

RIM B = Grant Frame, *Rulers of Babylonia: From the Second Dynasty of Isin to the End of Assyrian Domination (1157–612 BC)* (Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Babylonian Periods 2; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995)

⁶⁰ William G. Dever, “Beitin, Tell,” in *ABD* 1:651–52. Barrick, *King and the Cemeteries*, 28–30, substantially agrees with Dever’s evaluation of the Bethel excavations. Knauf reanalyzed the Bethel pottery assemblage and concludes that there is essentially no gap or man-made destruction there between the eighth and the third centuries. In his words, “no destruction at Bethel is attested between 733 and 586.” Knauf, “Bethel: The Israelite Impact on Judean Language and Literature,” 307–308.

RIM E2 = Douglas Frayne, *Sargonic and Gutian Periods (2334–2113 BC)* (Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Early Periods 2; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993)

RIM E3/2 = Douglas Frayne, *Ur III Period (2112–2004 BC)* (Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Early Periods 3/2; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997)

RIM E4 = Douglas Frayne, *Old Babylonian Period (2003–1595 BC)* (Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Early Periods 4; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990)

SAA = *State Archives of Assyria* (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1987–)

STT = O. R. Gurney and J. J. Finkelstein, *The Sultantepe Tablets I* (Occasional Publications of the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara 3; London: British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, 1957); O. R. Gurney and P. Hulin, *The Sultantepe Tablets II* (Occasional Publications of the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara 7; London: British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, 1964)

TBER = Jean-Marie Durand, *Textes babyloniens d'époque récente* (Recherche sur les grandes civilisations, Cahier 6; Paris: Éditions A.D.P.F., 1981)

Excavation or museum sigla:

AO = Département des Antiquités Orientales, Musée du Louvre, Paris

BM = British Museum, London

Bu = E.A.W. Budge collection, British Museum

IM = Iraq Museum, Baghdad

SU = tablets from the British excavations at Sultantepe in Ankara

VA Ass = Assur collection, Vorderasiatische Museum, Staatliche Museen, Berlin

W = excavation numbers from the German expeditions to Warka



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