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Theocracy as Gods' Governing the Events of History: An Investigation in the Suḫian Inscriptions of the Early 8th c. BCE

1 Introduction

It is commonly accepted that the concept of theocracy was born in the Mediterranean basin, appearing for the first time in the writings of Josephus Flavius (*Against Apion* IV 340). According to Josephus, theocracy was a way of ruling ancient Israel ordained by Moses. Through the centuries the concept of theocracy developed along different trajectories. Despite different and often contrasting definitions of theocracy, all scholars agree that the concept refers to a society ruled by God.[1] "[S]ince, however, God is not known to have ruled a worldly government directly, the word in its strict sense is usually understood to mean government by a clergy, or a self-appointed group who claim to speak and act on God's behalf."[2] Another way of understanding theocracy concerns a set of rules that lies behind civic legislature. Accordingly, theocracy is "the multiple patterns of the intertwining of religion in the language, practices, and substance of the politics of the modern statehood."[3] Hence, theocracy does not have to be necessarily a group of clerics ruling the country but represents a set of practices, beliefs, and symbols that governs a society independently of the ruling class, whether it be laity, clergy, army, etc.[4] Nevertheless, since God gave human beings divine

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1 "[A] certain school of political thought has described some Western European and North American states as secular theocracies. According to this argument, these societies are therapeutic states that attempt to re-design social conscience by legislating morality"; cf. https://www.staff.ncl.ac.uk/nick.megoran/pdf/theocracy.pdf, consulted on February 11th, 2020.

2 Mario Ferrero, "The Rise and Demise of Theocracy: Theory and Some Evidence," *Public Choice* 156 (2013): 723–24.

3 Megoran, Nick, "Theocracy," in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, vol. 1, eds. Rob Kitchin and Nigel Thrift, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2020): 224.

4 There are other possible understanding of theocracies such as the Byzantine model of God's kingdom, constitutional theocracy, liberal theocracy during the Risorgimento in Italy during the 19th c., stealth theocracy, but also Augustine's model; cf. for example Ran Hirschl, *Constitutional Theocracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Steven Runciman, *Byzantine Theocracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Roberto Romani, "Liberal Theocracy in the Italian Risorgimento," *European history quarterly* 44 (2014): 620–50; Fred Dallmayr, "The-

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laws, which represent an undisputable premise of human behavior, rulers have to exercise their rulership in accordance with the divine will mediated through dogmas, Decalogue, Scripture, tradition, etc. In sum, the blending of political and religious power and thought resulted in different ways in which divinity was present in politics.[5]

In recent times, theocracies have been rare, and they have been perceived as a direct threat to the practice of liberal democracy. In contrast, they were a predominant concept that lay behind ancient kingship and chiefdoms in general. In many ancient societies the religious and political powers blended into a system in which the gods were considered the supreme leaders of the state, city, and people. In some cases, different deities became a sort of aristocracy. Since in most cases the gods did not rule directly, the will of the gods was mediated by a ruling class. Some leaders came from clerical circles and, therefore, the mediation was due to their priestly nature. The role of a king mediating divine kingship on earth varied between two poles. One pole represents a king who was deified. For example, there were the reigns of Naram-Sin, Shulgi, etc.[6] The other pole represents a chief who is a human being whose authority can be easily withdrawn, yet was endowed with divine power.[7] In between there are models of kingship according to which the king was a special creation of the gods, gods' vicar or appointee, or the ruler was considered partially human

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ocracy as Temptation: Empire and Mindfulness," in *Challenging Theocracy: Ancient Lessons for Global Politics*, ed. Toivo Koivukoski, David Tabachnick, and Herminio Meireles Teixeira (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018): 7; Yvonne Tew, "Stealth Theocracy," *Virginia Journal of International Law* 58 (2018): 96–105.

5 Scholars have noted several examples of theocracies: "the Israelite theocracy after the return from the Babylonian exile (the first for which we have a written record), the crusaders' kingdoms in Palestine, the Papal state in Italy from the eighth century to 1870, the Jesuits' mission system in Paraguay, Savonarola's brief rule in Florence, Calvin's rule in Geneva, the Anabaptist "kingdom" of Muenster, the Mormon State of Utah, the Muslim caliphates, the contemporary ayatollahs' Iran, Afghanistan under the Taliban, the Mahdi state of Sudan in the 1880s, a wide range of Islamic regimes throughout history, and the Buddhist regimes of traditional Tibet, Bhutan and Mongolia"; Ferrero, "The Rise," 724.

6 For a review of previous scholarship see Nicole Brisch, "Of Gods and Kings: Divine Kingship in Ancient Mesopotamia," *Religion Compass* 7 (2013): 37–46. A ruler's claim to divinity was expressed in different ways, such as his name being preceded by the logogram DINGIR, his headdress being represented with horns, a temple being dedicated to the king (Šu-Sin at Tell Asmar), his cult being performed by priests (Šulgi who called himself "god of his land"), the personal names involving the king's name, or the ruler being worshipped by his people; J. Nicholas Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia: Society and Economy at the Dawn of History* (London: Routledge, 1992), 260–67.

7 Seth Abrutyn and Kirk Lawrence, "From Chiefdom to State: Toward an Integrative Theory of the Evolution of Polity," *Sociological Perspectives* 53 (2010): 421.

and partially divine.[8] For this reason, most studies on theocracy in the ancient Near East have focused on various types of divine kingship.[9] In all these cases the underlying concept of divine rulership is the deity – the creator and the ruler of the world. According to this logic, the head of the universe is the god(s) who created the world and, consequently, the deity was the supreme ruler and legislator while any earthly ruler had to answer to him.

Paralleling theocracy understood as divine kingship, there was another aspect of divine rulership of the universe: the gods were the lords of history since they ruled over the vicissitudes of human history.[10] Thus, the rise of one kingdom and the downfall of another was not a casual process but was ultimately controlled by the gods.[11] The gods' governing of the events of history was interpreted by divine wrath theology.[12] When the gods became angry with their king, city, temple, or people, they abandoned their temples and handed them over to the hands of

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8 The need for a more flexible understanding of divine kingship was voiced by Peter Machinist, "Kingship and Divinity in Imperial Assyria," in *Text, Artifact, and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion*, BJS 346, ed. Gary M. Beckman and Theodore J. Lewis (Providence, RI: Brown University, 2006): 152–88.

9 Cf. for example Carl-Martin Edsman, ed., *The Sacral Kingship / La Regalità Sacra: Contributions to the Central Theme of the VIIIth International Congress for the History of Religions (Rome, April 1955) / Contributi al tema dell' VIII congresso internazionale di storia delle religioni (Roma, Aprile 1955)* (Leiden: Brill, 1959), 3–17; Michael Roaf, "Mesopotamian Kings and the Built Environment," in *Experiencing Power, Generating Authority: Cosmos, Politics, and the Ideology of Kingship in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia*, ed. Jane A. Hill (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013): 331–60; Jane A. Hill, Philip Jones, and Antonio J. Morales, *Experiencing Power, Generating Authority: Cosmos, Politics, and the Ideology of Kingship in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia: University Museum Publications, 2013); Shawn W. Flynn, *YHWH Is King: The Development of Divine Kingship in Ancient Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Mario Liverani, *Assyria: The Imperial Mission*, *Mesopotamian Civilizations* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2017), 10–13.

10 The suzerainty of the gods can be noticed in many other spheres in the ancient Near East, such as the spatial – the gods were the supreme rulers of a given territory, city, etc., the ethnic – the gods were the supreme leaders of a nation, tribe, family, etc., the temporal – the gods were the supreme lords of the future as expressed in the divination, the sapiential – the gods were the ultimate source of knowledge, etc., the personal – the gods gave life and had the power to take it away. For some of these aspects see Stefan M. Maul et al., *Ritualbeschreibungen und Gebete* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011); Peter Meusburger, Derek Gregory, and Laura Suarsana, *Geographies of Knowledge and Power*, 1st ed. (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015).

11 The concept can be traced in the idea of "decreeing the destinies of the land", as is found in the Prologue of the Code of Hammurabi. Similarly Aššur is called MAN NAM.MEŠ "the king of destinies" (Ashur-bel-kala, RIMA 2 A.0.89.7 i 3), the one who decrees destinies (Ashurnasirpal II, RIMA 2 A.0.101.17 i 1; Adad-narari III, RIMA 3 A.0.104.2010:1); cf. Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia*, 267–68.

12 Cf. for example Reinhard Gregor Kratz and Hermann Spieckermann, eds., *Divine Wrath and Divine Mercy in the World of Antiquity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

enemies, who defeated the rulers' army, looted their sanctuaries, deported the people, and harshly ruled the subdued kingdom. On the contrary, when the gods were reconciled, the king was victorious and his country prospered. This divine suzerainty was also expressed in other ways, such as the necessity to consult the gods before starting a military campaign, before appointing governors or kings, the construction of a temple, the importance of offerings and festivals for gods, etc.[13] From this viewpoint, to acknowledge the gods' ability to rule the course of human history was another expression of the theocratic worldview in the ancient Near East.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore how Mesopotamian historiography articulated the relation between the human and divine sphere.[14] Instead, in this paper, I will concentrate on one aspect of writing history, namely, the techniques the Suḫian scribes used to acknowledge the suzerainty of the gods in the course of history.

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13 Liverani, *Assyria*, 14–15.

14 A popular view has often contrasted Greek historiography and the Mesopotamian writings on the past. The latter has often been considered uncritical history writing since the scribes described divine powers intervening into the course of history. Moreover, the Mesopotamian royal inscriptions did not present different opinions, contrary to Herodotus whose goal was to investigate the truth by comparing and evaluating sources. This view has been challenged by many scholars and the scholars addressed the questions on the nature of historiography, history writing in the ancient Near East, critical and uncritical historiography, etc. Cf., for example, I. Tzvi Abusch et al., eds., *Historiography in the Cuneiform World: Proceedings of the XLVe Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale*, vol. 1 (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2001); George J. Brooke and Thomas Römer, eds., *Ancient and Modern Scriptural Historiography = L'historiographie Biblique, Ancienne Et Moderne* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007); Israel Eph'al, Hayim Tadmor, and Nadav Na'aman, eds., *Royal Assyrian Inscriptions: History, Historiography and Ideology: A Conference in Honour of Hayim Tadmor on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2009); William W. Hallo, "New Directions in Historiography," in *Dubsar Anta-Men: Studien zur Altorientalistik: Festschrift für Willem H. Ph. Römer zur Vollendung Seines 70. Lebensjahres mit Beiträgen von Freunden, Schülern und Kollegen*, ed. W. H. Römer et al. (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1998): 109–28; Mario Liverani, *Myth and Politics in Ancient Near Eastern Historiography: Studies in Egyptology and the Ancient Near East* (London: Equinox, 2004); Steven L. McKenzie and Thomas Römer, eds., *Rethinking the Foundations: Historiography in the Ancient World and in the Bible: Essays in Honour of John Van Seters* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000); Albert T. Olmstead, *Assyrian Historiography: A Source Study*, The University of Missouri Studies. Social Science Series 3/1 (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 1916).

2 Suḫian Inscriptions

2.1 Introductory Notes

Salvage excavation in the area of the lake created by the dam on the Euphrates river close to Haditha (Iraq) brought to light an extraordinary collection of texts that are a remarkable testimony to the 8th c. BCE kingdom of Suḫu. About twenty inscriptions unearthed in Sur Jureh, Anat, Dawali, and Zawiyeh together with a stele found in Babylon and other Assyrian inscriptions are the basis on which modern scholars have built their reconstruction of the Middle-Euphratean kingdom called Suḫu. The kingdom had a long history and the governors of Suḫu traced their origin back to the time of Hammurabi.[15] Ashurnaṣirpal II conquered the region, but sometime between 770–760 BCE the Suḫian governors shook off the Assyrian yoke and managed to control a good part of the Middle Euphrates.[16] In this period the governors of Suḫu – Šamaš-reša-uṣur and Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur, taking advantage of the Assyrian military absence in the region consolidated their power and expanded their territory. Like most ambitious kings of the period, they also left behind inscriptions and steles to commemorate their mighty deeds.[17] Suḫian independence was abruptly ended by the campaigns of Tiglath-pileser III.[18]

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15 For the history of the kingdom and its relation with Assyria see Paul-Alain Beaulieu "Suḫi/u," in *RlA* S: 259–62; see also John A. Brinkman, *A Political History of Post-Kassite Babylonia, 1158–722 B.C.* (Roma: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1968), 185, n. 1127; Noémi Háklár, "Die Stellung Suḫis in der Geschichte: Eine Zwischenbilanz," *OA* XXII (1983): 29–36; Paul E. Dion, "The Syro-Mesopotamian Border in VIIIth Century BC: The Aramaeans and the Establishment," *C.S.M.S. Bulletin* 30 (1995): 5–10; Lawson K. Younger, "Another Look at the Nomadic Tribal Arameans in the Inscriptions of Ninurta-Kudurrī-Uṣur of Suḫu," in *Marbeh Hokmah: Studies in the Bible and the Ancient near East in Loving Memory of Victor Avigdor Hurowitz*, ed. Shamir Yonah et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015): 606–16; Simonetta Ponchia, "Describing the Empire: Some Notes on Tigalth-Pileser III's Inscriptions," *SAAB* 22 (2016): 1–11.
16 Cf. Ponchia, "Describing the Empire," 4.
17 Nadav Na'aman, "The Suhu Governors' Inscriptions in the Context of Mesopotamian Royal Inscriptions," in *Treasures on Camels' Humps: Historical and Literary Studies from the Ancient near East Presented to Israel Eph'al*, ed. Mordechai Cogan and Dan'el Kahn (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2008): 223.
18 A similar dynamic can be reconstructed from the archaeological records at Tell Masaikh in the Middle-Euphrates (Terqa region). Stratum NA2 shows that after a typical Neo-Assyrian stratum (NA1) the new stratum (NA2) attests *damnatio memoriae*. The previous palace was torn down and rebuilt; new ceramics and crafts appeared. The excavators interpreted these new activities and construction as an attempt at independence from Assyrian control by a local ruler. Based on this evidence it is possible to conclude that not only Suḫu but a good part of the Middle-Euphrates

3 A Direct Acknowledgment of Divine Suzerainty over History

The idea that the course of human history is in the gods' hand is a well-known *topos* in Mesopotamian royal inscriptions. According to this viewpoint, military victories ultimately belonged to the gods. This thought was articulated in different ways: the gods could directly intervene in battles, their mighty weapons scared off or defeated enemies, the king, trusting in gods, inflicted a defeat, etc. The Suḫian governors also ascribed their victories to their gods. The acknowledgement of the gods' suzerainty can be observed in the titles attributed to the gods, as it was the case in other Mesopotamian inscriptions,[19] but also through specific rhetorical devices. In the following paragraphs we will explore a literary device – fictional dialogue, which the Suḫian scribes employed to convey divine suzerainty. In sum, the following evidence does not prove that the Suḫian governors invented a new motif, but it does show how they employed and adapted a common theme.

3.1 Fictional Dialogue – a Rhetorical Device Voicing Theocracy in Suḫu

A unique feature of the Suḫian inscriptions is the question. We can distinguish three types of questions.

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gained its independence in the first half of the 8th c. BC before being subjugated by Tiglath-pileser III' campaigns; cf. Maria G. Masetti-Rouault, "L'évolution d'une colonie Néo-Assyrienne dans le Bas Moyen-Euphrate Syrien (9e-8e Siècle Av. J.C.)," in *La Famille dans le Proche-Orient Ancien: Réalités, symbolismes, et images: Proceedings of the 55th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale at Paris, 6–9 July 2009*, ed. Lionel Marti (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014). For a similar development in the Laqu region see Maria G. Masetti-Rouault, "Globalization and Imperialism: Political and Ideological Reactions to the Assyrian Presence in Syria (IXth–VIIIth Century BCE)," in *Melammu: The Ancient World in an Age of Globalization*, Max Planck Research Library for the History and Development of Knowledge Proceedings, ed. J. Geller Markham (Berlin: Edition Open Access, 2014): 55–64.

19 See for example: "For the gods Adad and Apla-Adad, the great lords; (to the god Adad), the eminent, noble, majestic, powerful, mightiest of the gods, whose rule is pre-eminent in all of heaven and earth, the splendid ruler, whose strength cannot be rivalled by any of his brother gods, the canal inspector of the extensive heavens, the holy son of the god Anu, the strong one, whose mighty anger no god can face,…" (RIMB 2 S.0.1002.11:1–6).

3.1.1 Anacoenosis

The first type occurs only in the inscriptions of Šamaš-reša-uṣur. It is introduced by *man-nu ár-ku-ú šá* E$_{11}$-*ma*, "Anyone in the future who comes forward...". Šamaš-reša-uṣur urged the "one who comes in the future" to inquire through the elders and ask: "Is it true that Šamaš-reša-uṣur, the governor of the land of Suḫu, introduced honey-bees into the land of Suḫu?" (RIMB 2 S. 0.1001.1 v 3–6; cf. 2 r. 5'–7'; 3 r. 6'–10' referring to *dullu*, "task"). Thus, the invitation to inquire through the elders functions as an *anacoenosis*.[20] The scribes give no hint as to how to answer this question and, thus, left the reader/hearer to supply a positive answer after he had consulted the elder. Since the reader/hearer already knows about Šamaš-reša-uṣur's glorious deeds, he was just to observe how the "one who comes in the future" would arrive to the obvious conclusion. The scribes led the external reader/hearer to acknowledge the greatness of the king but in a different way than most royal inscriptions did. The reader/hearer observes the query of the "one who comes in the future" and sees how everyone can recognize the governor's deeds.[21]

3.1.2 One Question-Answer Dialogue

Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur continued with the question-style but developed it a bit further in the episode the water at the well of Bukrê. The question is introduced with the same phrase *man-nu ár-ku-ú šá* E$_{11}$-*ma* as was the case in Šamaš-reša-uṣur's inscriptions: "How is it that (any) stranger who passes by may drink (this) water?" (RIMB 2 S. 0.1002.2 iii 10'). Contrary to his predecessor, Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur suggests what the answer should be: *ina* PÚ *ni-iq-bu-ú-nu i-šat-ti* "he may drink from the well which *we formed*."[22] The suggested answer leads the reader/hearer to acknowledge the generosity of the governor.

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20 "Asking the opinion or judgment of the judges or audience, usually implying their common interest with the speaker in the matter." Cf. https://web.archive.org/web/20071027171020/http://rhetoric.byu.edu/figures/A/anacoenosis.htm, consulted on February 19th, 2020.

21 Theoretical background of this analysis is described in Umberto Eco, *Lector in fabula: La cooperazione interpretativa nei testi narrativi*, 1. ed. (Milano: Bompiani, 1979), 27–37.

22 The *ni-iq-bu-ú-nu* can be interpreted also as an Aramaism derived from the Syrian root *qb'*, "to collect"; cf. RIMB 2, 298, note iii 11'; Antoine Cavigneaux and Bahija K. Ismail, "Die Statthalter von Suḫu und Mari im 8. Jh. v. Chr.," *BaM* 21 (1990): 356.

3.1.3 Two-question Fictional Dialogue

While the previous cases aim at the greatness and generosity of the king, a unique rhetorical device – the fictional dialogue – is inserted after the defeat of the Aramean tribesmen.[23] The picturesque description of the battle is full of metaphors, direct speech, and digressions. Equally artistically composed was the conclusion of the narrative. When Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur defeats the Aramean tribes marauding in the region, he claims that it was not by his own merit but because of the gods (RIMB 2 S. 0.1002.1:43–50).[24] While in the previous questions the answer was suggested in the 1st person plural, now the governor speaks in the 1st person singular. As a result, the acknowledgment of the gods' control over history assumes the literary form of a fictional dialogue between the "one who comes" and Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur.

The fictional dialogue is rare in the Mesopotamian inscriptions. Nevertheless, it is a powerful rhetorical device to engage the audience.[25] It conveys the message in a more acceptable way. The governor does not preach or state eternal truths in an *ex cathedra* manner, but he urges and is urged to enter into a dialogue. Thus, the audience feels more participative since it can observe the query of the "one who comes in the future", identify itself with him, and, consequently, become sympathetic to the royal propaganda.

The two-question fictional dialogue unfolds in the following manner:

Question 1: Anyone in the future who comes forward and says: "How did Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur, the governor of the land of Suḫu and the land of Mari, inflict this defeat?"

Answer 1: I did not inflict (this) by my own power, (but rather) I inflicted this defeat by the power of the gods Šamaš and Marduk, Adad and Apla-Adad, the great gods, my lords.

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23 The tribe Ḫatallu (another reading Minu'û) made an incursion into the land of Laqu. The governor of Laqu appeals to Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur for help after the retreat of the governor of Ruṣappa, who was afraid of the Arameans. Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur, after having consulted his gods, agrees and defeats the Arameans. For more details see RIMB 2, 288; Frederick M. Fales, "The Djezireh in Neo-Assyrian Sources," in *The Syrian Jezira - Cultural Heritage and Interrelations: Proceedings of the International Conference Held in Deir Ez-Zor, April 22nd–25th, 1996*, Documents d'archéologie Syrienne, ed. M. al-Maqdissi (Damascus: Direction générale des antiquités et des musées, 2002): 181–99; Younger, "Another Look," 605–31.

24 RIMB 2 S.0.1002.2 ii 29–35 has the same questions but there are about 20–30 lines missing, therefore it is impossible to establish whether this is two-question or three-question fictional dialogue.

25 For the theoretical background of this analysis see Bronwen Thomas, *Fictional Dialogue: Speech and Conversation in the Modern and Postmodern Novel* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012); Elise Nykänen and Aino Koivisto, "Introduction: Approaches to Fictional Dialogue," *Literary linguistics* 5 (2016): Art. 1.

Question 2: Anyone in the future who comes forward and should ask the elders of his land and the elders of the land of Laqu: "Is it true that Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur, the governor of the land of Suḫu and the land of Mari inflicted this [defeat] at the command of the god Apla-Adad, the great lord, his lord?"

Answer 2: This was the handiwork of the god Apla-Adad, my divine lord [...] he loves me and set my hands to this task (RIMB 2 S. 0.1002.1:43–50).[26]

The Suḫian scribes construct a fictional partner for the dialogue, who asks the questions to which Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur replies. There are some hints as to how the scribes constructed the partner for the fictional dialogue. First, the word *kīki* occurs exclusively in the Babylonian text. Secondly, the texts refer to the fictional partner of the dialogue as the one who goes up (*elû*). Thirdly, the partner of the dialogue is asked to inquire through the elders of his land and through the elders of the land of Laqu. These hints suggest that the partner of the fictional dialogue is not imagined as an Assyrian nor coming from Laqu. Moreover, he is described as a person coming up from Babylonia or some other region along the Euphrates not from Suḫu. Thus, the partner in the fictional dialogue was constructed as a foreigner, who was not a witness of the Aramean defeat.

In the first question-answer, the partner of the fictional dialogue asks: *ki-i-ki-i* ᵐᵈMAŠ-NÍG.DU-PAP LÚ.GAR KUR.*su-ḫi u* KUR.*ma-ri di-ik-ti an-ni-tu₄ id-duk*, "How did Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur, the governor of the land of Suḫu and the land of Mari, inflict this defeat?" This question engages two types of audiences. First, the "one who comes in the future" and the implied readers/hearers. The latter is passive and the inscription presupposes that they would know about Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur's victory over the Arameans described in the previous sections of the text. The former is a direct partner of the dialogue to whom Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur explains who the real victor in the battle with the Arameans is. As mentioned above, taking into consideration that the partner of the fictional dialogue is a foreigner, the aim of the fictional dialogue seems to be to communicate to the implied reader/hearer that Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur's attribution of the victory to the gods would be confirmed even by someone who did not witness it directly.

As for the content of the communication, the first question-answer uses the expression *di-ik-ti an-ni-tu₄ id-duk,* which has an equivalent in the Assyrian royal inscriptions. However, the Assyrian inscriptions never use *annītu*. If the adjective is employed, it is *ma'attu* "great" (cf. RIMA 2 A.0.87.10:49). This might be an indirect hint (for other reversal techniques, see below) that the Suḫian governor wanted to

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26 RIMB 2 S.0.1002.2 ii 29–35 has the same questions but there are about 20–30 lines missing. Therefore, it is impossible to establish whether this is a two-question or three-question fictional dialogue.

distance himself from Assyrian parlance.[27] He uses the term *emūqu* "power" twice claiming that his is derived from the *emūqu* of the gods that cannot be rivalled (RIMB 2 S. 0.1002.11:4; 2 i 6–7). Thus, the governor's victory is only an externalization of the divine *emūqu*.[28] In sum, by means of the fictional dialogue, Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur's scribes lead their implied audience to the conclusion that the victory indeed belonged to the gods and that Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur was only implementing the gods' will.

While this concept is a well-known *topos* in the Mesopotamian royal inscriptions,[29] the second fictitious dialogue has no parallel in the Mesopotamian inscriptions. The rhetorical complexity of this dialogue is due to the fact that, besides the "one who comes in the future", there appears another partner in the fictional dialogue, namely the "elders". Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur's role is to bring these two fictional partners into dialogue. Therefore, he urges the "one who comes in the future" to verify the message, i. e. to establish whether it is true (*kittū*). To give more weight to the verification process, the "one who comes in the future" is to interrogate two groups of elders – his own and the elders of Laqu. The object of comparison is not whether the event really happened or not, but who initiated it. Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur asks the partner of his fictitious dialogue whether he should ask (*šalû*) if Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur acted by the command of the gods (*ina amāt*). For the implied audience, this was a familiar expression since it refers to the description of the first stages of the battle when Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur questions the gods and the next line starts with, "At the command of" ᵈA-ᵈIŠKUR EN GAL-*ú* EN-*ia áš-al-ma ina a-mat* ᵈA-ᵈ꜒IŠKUR꜓ EN GAL-*ú* EN-*ia* (RIMB 2 S. 0.1002.1:31–32).

According to this dialogue, it is not sufficient to claim that Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur was "using" the *emūqu* that the gods granted him, but whether the victory corresponded to the command of the gods. If it is not *ina amāt ilāni*, then Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur would be like any Assyrian king who boasted about his own victories. In sum, the elders were to confirm not the historical fact but whether Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur's deeds correspond to the intention, order, decision, or word of the gods.[30] By doing so the elders had to establish whether *a-ga-a ši-kin qa-ti šá* ᵈA-ᵈIŠKUR DINGIR, lit. "this was the setting of the hands (handiwork) of the god Apla-Adad". A play on the words

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27 While in the Assyrian inscriptions "to inflict a defeat" aimed at praising the king, Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur in his fictional response attributes the victory to the gods. The questions posed by Šamaš-rēša-uṣur aim also at the greatness of the governor Šamaš-rēša-uṣur whereas a similar question employed by Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur emphasizes the generosity of the governor towards foreigners.

28 This might have been another aspect of the anti-Assyrian stance since, in the Sargonid period, the expression *ina emūqi Aššur* regularly introduces the campaigns against Babylonia and thus became a part of the Assyrian propaganda in this region; Liverani, *Assyria*, 19.

29 Cf. for example RIMA 2 A.0.89.2 I 8'–18'.

30 CAD A/II, 29.

šakānu "to set" and *qātu* "hand" shows that the elders were to confirm whether Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur's "setting" of the hands (*dul-la an-na-a a-na* ŠU.II-*ia iš-kun*) correspond to the gods' "setting" of their hands. Thus, it is a question of whether the gods really appointed Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur for this task.

3.1.4 Three-question Fictional Dialogue

Despite poor state of preservation of RIMB 2 S. 0.1002.4 ii 9'–iii 13 and 8:15'–r. 13, the extant lines clearly show that the fictional dialogue in these two inscriptions continued with a third round of question-answer.[31] The first two parts of the dialogue are similar to those presented before. RIMB 2 S. 0.1002.9 r. 5 adds a new sentence: "He delivered my enemy into my [hands]." This phrase seems to be developed in the following lines: "(Then) [... his enemy ...] will not exist. This is the *experience* [and ...] the god Apla-Adad, my lord, and the gods [...] they allowed (me) to trample my enemy under my feet" (RIMB 2 S. 0.1002.8 r. 6–8). From the preserved parts we can deduce that the third dialogue starts with a similar question: "How [did Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur] inflict [this defeat]?" In his answer Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur wants to show (*kullumu*) the gods to the partner of his fictional dialogue. The three-question fictional dialogue, thus, would lead the partner from his personal dialogue with the governor, through the interrogation of the elders back to the original question. However, the new answer is not a new piece of knowledge. The argument is based on evidence – the destruction of the enemies. This might also be the meaning of an unclear expression *a-ga-a a-ma-ru* "this is a seeing" in RIMB 2 S. 0.1002.4 iii 6–7; 8r. 6. Only then does Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur lead his partner to the culmination of his fictional dialogue. He no longer wants to conduct the discussion but to show the gods to the partner of his dialogue. From the narrative viewpoint he passes from the rhetoric of telling to the rhetoric of showing.

A final remark can be added to the considerations on the fictional dialogue. The dialogues presenting pious Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur who humbly attributes his victory to the gods stand in shocking contrast with the speech that the leader of the Aramean tribes conducts with his tribesmen and which is reported to him:

> Šama'gamni, the herald of the Sarugu (clan), who is thoroughly pervaded with falsehood, was their leader. They came up to plunder the land of Laqu, but while in the steppe they deliberated, saying:
>
> "The governor of the land of Sūḫu is hostile to us. How shall we pass by (him) in order to plunder the land of Laqu?"

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31 This could not have been the case of RIMB 2 S.0.1002.1 since after the last line there is a conclusion of the inscription.

> Šamaʾgamni ... said the following to them:
>
> > "Not one among the governors of the land of Sūḫu, his ancestors, (ever dared to) go to fight against one thousand Arameans. Now then, this one will (have to) go to fight against two thousand Arameans! If he comes up against us, we will go to fight him and take the land of Sūḫu for our own. However, if he does not come up (against us), we will take away booty and draw (more) men to us. Then we will go and attack the houses of the land of Sūḫu. We will seize his towns which are (located) in the steppe and cut down their fruit trees." (RIMB 2 S. 0.1002.2 i 16–27)

In conclusion, the fictional dialogues lead the audience to a well-known truth, namely, that the gods were the true reason for the Suḫian victory. Moreover, they suggest that not every king acted correspondence to the divine command. The role of the king was to act according to the gods' design and, thus, in practice, to recognize divine suzerainty over history. Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur is clearly contrasted with "Šamaʾgamni, the herald of the Sarugu (clan), who *was* thoroughly pervaded with falsehood", acting according to his own plans (RIMB 2 S. 0.1002.2 i 12–13). This "eternal truth" regarding divine agency was presented in the form a fictional dialogue that includes a powerful literary device to make the implied audience prone to accept official propaganda.

4 Writing History for Gods

While the previous section showed how the governors directly acknowledged the suzerainty of the gods, in the following paragraphs we will focus on the style the scribes used to convey a similar message.

One of the modalities in which the Suḫian governors acknowledged the divine governing the course of history was by addressing an inscription to their gods. Writing history for the gods was not a Suḫian invention. A well-known style of writing history for the gods are the "letters to gods" containing vast and detailed descriptions of the king's military campaigns and building activities. Examples of such letters are known for Shalmaneser IV, Sargon II, Esarhaddon, etc.[32] Besides

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32 For the discussion and bibliographical references see for example A. Leo Oppenheim, "The City of Assur in 714 B.C.," *JNES* 19 (1960): 133–47; James V. Kinnier Wilson, "The Kurbaʾil Statue of Shalmaneser III," *Iraq* 24 (1962): 90–115; Louis D. Levine, "Observations on 'Sargon's Letter to the Gods'," *Eretz-Israel* 27 (2003): 111–19; Israel Ephʿal, "Esarhaddon, Egypt, and Shubria: Politics and Propaganda," *JCS* 57 (2005): 99–111; Erle Leichty, "Esarhaddon's Letter to the Gods," in *Not Only History: Proceedings of the Conference in Honor of Mario Liverani Held in Sapienza-Università di Roma, Dipartimento di scienze dell'antichità, 20–21 April 2009*, eds. Gilda Bartoloni, Maria Giovanna Biga, and Armando Bramanti (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016): 52–58; cf.

the letters to gods, there have been preserved numerous royal inscriptions that are addressed to the gods, which have many similarities to royal inscriptions. These inscriptions are a unique source for understanding theocracy as the gods' way of ruling the course of human history. This type of inscription seems to be known not only among the writing of the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian rulers,[33] but also in smaller kingdoms such as Suḫu that is the object of this study. Among the Suḫian inscriptions there are texts describing the same event, in particular, the Anat episode. One inscription is addressed to gods while another is not. These variants allow us to compare the content and style of these two models, the "religious" and "secular" way of writing history, the former being a literary example of the Suḫian theocratic worldview.

4.1 Historical Background of the Anat Episode

During the period of their primacy, the Suḫian governors claimed to control the territory "approximately from the town Rapiqu (possibly to be identified with Tell Anbar, near Falluja) on the northern border of Babylonia in the southeast to the area of Ḫindanu (modern Tell Jabiriyah, near Al-Qaʾim) in the northwest".[34]

The city of Anat located on the Euphrates had close relations with the governors of Suḫu.[35] Nergal-eriš, the Assyrian governor of Raṣappa, whose eponyms are linked with 803 and 775 BCE, claimed to control Anat, Suḫu, Ḫindanu and Laqu. Sometime during the first half of the 8th c. BCE the city was under Suḫu, but then it shifted its allegiances when the Assyrians assassinated the Suḫian governor Tabnea, who paid tribute to Assyria. The inscriptions emphasized

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also Frederick M. Fales, "Narrative and Ideological Variations in the Account of Sargon's Eighth Campaign," in *Ah, Assyria…; Studies in Assyrian History and Ancient near Eastern Historiography Presented to Hayim Tadmor*, Scripta Hierosolymitana, eds. Mordechai Cogan and Israel Eph'al (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1991): 129–47.

33 There are numerous inscriptions dedicated to the gods: Shamshi-Adad IV (to Ashur; RIMA 2 A.0.91.4), Ashurnaṣirpal II (to Ninurta RIMA 2 A.0.101.1, 3; to Sharapat-niphi RIMA 2 A.0.101.28; to Ashur RIMA 2 A.0.101.17, 19, 20, 47), Shalmaneser III (to Adad RIMA 3 A.0.102.12, to Ninurta RIMA 3 A.0.102.19, to Ishtar RIMA 3 A.0.102.38; to Ashur RIMA 3 A.0.102.2, 4, 6, 10, 14), Shamshi-Adad V (to Ninurta RIMA 3 A.0.103.1), Adad-nirari III (to Adad RIMA 3 A.0.104.6, 7; to Ashur RIMA 3 A.0.104.2010).

34 http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/Suḫu/introduction/index.html (January 2017).

35 It seems that the city might have been for some period a capital of Suḫu, but according to Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur's inscriptions the city that was Anat could not have been a capital of Suḫu during the first half of the 8th c. BCE; Cavigneaux and Ismail, "Statthalter," 331–32.

that the Anatians sided with the Assyrians[36] voluntarily and remained an ally for fifty-three years. The negative consequences of the Assyrian domination are vividly described. In the third year of Šamaš-reša-uṣur the city of Anat returned to Suḫu and prospered for four years. When Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur became the king, he rebuilt Anat on both banks of the Euphrates, resettled the people (probably new inhabitants), built two palaces (the Akitu palace and the palace of joy), and brought back gods from Ribaniš (RIMB S. 1002.3 iv 8'–30'). Finally, we learn that Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur moved the gods of Anat to his newly built city Kar-Apla-Adad (RIMB 2 S. 0.1002.2 iii 28'–20').[37]

4.2 "Secular" and "Religious" Accounts on the fall and rise of Anat

The Anat episode has been preserved in six exemplars (RIMB 2 S. 0.1002.3 iv 2'–25'; 4 iv 5–15; 5 iv 1–17; 9 i 6–ii 25; 10:15–34; 11:14–20).[38] The first four texts are written in a typical royal annalistic style known in Mesopotamia for millennia and we label them a "secular" account. The last two texts are dedicated to the gods, namely, a stone stele dedicated to Anat and a small clay tablet dedicated to the gods Adad and Apla-Adad. We call these the "religious" account. All accounts except RIMB 2 S. 0.1002.11 have three steps: 1. the description of the Anatian pact with the Assyrian, 2. the devastation of the city by the Assyrians, 3. the restoration undertaken by Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur.

Both accounts start with a narrative introduction. They not only describe the similar events but also use the same words and even the same signs (see N. Na'aman's reconstruction and translation). The sections dedicated to the Assyrian domination of the city of Anat are substantially different. The dedicatory stele omits the detailed description of the Assyrian destruction and it concentrates on the Assyrian desecration of the cultic places. Both accounts finish with the restoration of the cult. After this point the "religious" account is only poorly preserved whereas the "secular" accounts continue with building narratives. However, the

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36 The inscriptions do mention the name of an Assyrian ruler and scholars have argued about his identity. He was most likely Nergal-šar-uṣur; cf. Cavigneaux and Ismail, "Statthalter," 337–39; Nadav Na'aman, "Three Notes on the Suhu Inscriptions," *N.A.B.U.* (2003), No. 4: 93.

37 Cavigneaux and Ismail, "Statthalter," 331–32.

38 For the editions see Cavigneaux and Ismail, "Statthalter," 331–32; Na'aman, "Three Notes on the Suhu Inscriptions," *N.A.B.U.* (2003), No. 4: 93–94; Nadav Na'aman, "Two Additional Notes on the Suhu Inscriptions," *N.A.B.U.* (2003), No. 4: 101–02 as well as RIMB 2.

signs preserved in the "religious" account suggest that it describes other events than those in the "secular" account.

Finally, both accounts insist on the foolishness of the Anatians who surrendered willingly to the Assyrian. On the other hand, both showcase the Assyrians' perfidy, who, instead of protecting the Anatians, exiled them and settled their own people in the city, ruined the city, and devastated the cult places. The untrustworthy Assyrians are sharply contrasted with the loyal and caring Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur. In the following paragraphs we analyze some techniques the Suḫian scribes used in writing history and we show how these techniques are modified in the "secular" and "religious" accounts.

4.3 Reversal of Assyrian Propaganda

Even though most scholars consider the inscription Neo-Babylonian,[39] they also have recognized similarities between the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions and the inscriptions of Suḫian governors.[40] These similarities, however, are suprising since both Šamaš-reša-uṣur and Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur boasted about opposing Assyria and claimed to be independent. Thus, it seems strange that the anti-Assyrian governors of Suḫu accepted uncritically Assyrian propaganda and even adopted their vocabulary. A closer look at the Assyrian parlance used in the Suḫian inscriptions points to the reversal technique the Suḫian king skillfully used to disparage Assyria.

4.3.1 "Secular" Reversal

The most obvious resemblance with the Assyrian inscriptions is the phrase É.MEŠ *šá* Á KUR *ù* Á KUR-*i šá* URU.*an-ata-na* DU$_6$ *ù kar-mi ut-tir* "and he (the Assyrian) turned the houses of the (Euphrates) bank of the land and the (Euphrates) bank of the mountains into heaps and ruins" (RIMB 2 S. 0.1002.9 i 19–20). The closest parallel to this expression occurs in Ashurnaṣirpal II's inscription URU.MEŠ-*nišá* GÌR *an-na-te ù* GÌR.II.MEŠ *am-ma-te šá* ÍD.IDIGNA *šá* KUR.*ar-ka-a-na-a ana* DU$_6$ *ù kar-me* GUR-*er* "I turned into heaps and ruins the cities which lie on this bank and the other bank of the Tigris at Mount Arkania." (RIMA 2 A.0.101.1 iii 102–103).

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39 The Assyrian Empire was not only an imposed mode of rule, but certain echelons of society willingly accepted Assyrian models in literature, architecture, etc. Nevertheless, the attraction of Babylonian culture survived in the Euphrates region despite Assyrian propaganda; Masetti-Rouault, "Globalization and Imperialism," 51.

40 Cavigneaux and Ismail, "Statthalter," 324.

A comparison of the Assyrian's dealing with Anat with how Ashurnaṣirpal II describes the conquest of Ḫabḫu, besides the phrase mentioned above, shows that there are other similarities. For example, both Anat and Ḫabḫu after having surrendered to Assyria, had to suffer deportation and the imposition of Assyrian people as their rulers.[41] This similarity raises a question as to why the Suḫian governors borrowed propagandistic expressions from their enemies, i. e. from Assyria.

The phrase *ana tīli u karmi turru* occurs in the Middle-Assyrian inscriptions but became the hallmark of 9th and 8th c. BCE Assyrian royal propaganda. It conveys the nuance of an abandoned site that was left on its own similar to an edifice that had become dilapidated. The heaps and ruins stand in obvious contrast with the king's reconstruction of dilapidated edifices.[42] Ashurnaṣirpal II uses this expression about twenty-six times describing the same or different events.[43] The phrase became a frozen expression to describe Ashurnaṣirpal II's great victories over recalcitrant enemies. It was normally accompanied by other similar frozen expressions such as *a-púl a-qur ina* IZI.MEŠ GÍBIL-*up ana* DU₆ *u kar-me* GUR-*er*; "I razed, destroyed, (and) burnt XY I turned (them) into heaps and ruins" (RIMA 2 A.0.101.1 ii 59–60). A clipped version "to raze and destroy", omitting "to burn with fire", was used when the city was willing to collaborate (cf. RIMA 2 1A.1.0.101.1 ii 100–103). Similar phrases describing Assyrian overwhelming victories are to burn with fire, to massacre, to loot the country and carry off the booty and the war prisoners.[44] Some other atrocities are also mentioned such as impaling soldiers, heaping the heads at the city gate, and burning the adolescent boys and girls, or reaping the harvest of that land.[45]

In contrast to the Assyrian propaganda, the phrase *ana tīli u karmi turru* occurs only once in the Babylonian inscription RIMB 2 B.6.14.1 iii 18'–19' from the 8th c. BCE. The inscription was found in Uruk and it lists the crimes and impious acts of the Dakkurian ruler Nabu-šuma-iškun I (ca. 760–748 BCE). It was most likely composed after Nabu-šuma-iškun I's death. Despite being a Chaldean, he committed horrendous crimes against the people and gods of Babylon:

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41 Both inscriptions use the term *ramānu* (RIMB 2 S.0.1002.9 i 21 and RIMA 2 A.0.101.1 iii 104).

42 RIMA 2 A.0.101.1 ii 84–86; iii 133.

43 Shalmaneser III uses it once (RIMA 3 A.0.102.40 iii 6) and it is often employed by later Assyrian kings until Ashurbanipal (see for example RINAP 1 47:17; 3/1 17 v 14; 5 9 iv 51).

44 Cf. RIMA 2 A.0.101.1 ii 57–59; ii 70, 114–17.

45 "I felled 800 of their combat troops with the sword (and) cut off their heads. I captured many soldiers alive. The rest of them I burnt. I carried off valuable tribute from them. I built a pile of live (men and) of heads before his gate. I impaled on stakes 700 soldiers before their gate. I razed, destroyed, (and) turned into ruin hills the city. I burnt their adolescent boys (and) girls." (RIMA 2 A.101.1 ii 107–10)

Yearly he increased against them (the level of) killing, robbing, murdering, (and) performance of feudal obligations and corvée-labor. On a <single> day he burned (alive) sixteen Cuthians with fire in the gate of the god Zababa, which is inside Babylon. He carried off citizens of Babylon to the lands of Ḫatti and Elam as greeting-gifts. He expelled the citizens of Babylon, their wives, children and servants, and he <settled them> in the steppe. [The house(s)] of the citizens of Babylon ... he piled up into heaps and ruins and turned (them) over to his palace. (RIMB 2 B.6.14.1 iii 6'–19')

This inscription shows that the only king to whom the Babylonian scribes attributed this expression was one of the worst Babylonian rulers; the inscription does not even call him a king.

The Suḫian king Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur not only used the phrase but also the same logogram DU₆ for *tīlu*. His use of the phrase *ana tīli u karmi turru* bespeaks his way of disarming the machinery of Assyrian propaganda. He takes one of the most frequent phrases of Ashurnaṣirpal II's propaganda[46] and shows the other side of it, namely, what it means for the inhabitants of Anat who believed in Assyrian propaganda. What constituted the object of Assyrian pride became the source of humiliation and devastation for the people of Anat.

The contrast between the treacherous enemy and the pious and loyal Assyrians is one of the most important literary *topoi* often used to justify the Assyrian annihilation of rebels.[47] It is also applied by Ashurnaṣirpal II's scribes describing the conquest of Suḫu (RIMA 2 A.0.101.1 iii 15–50).[48] The Suḫian scribes turn the Assyrian propaganda upside-down and make Assyria the treacherous enemy while the Suḫian governor, considered by Ashurnaṣirpal II's inscriptions as a treacherous enemy, becomes the righteous king:

Assyrian model		Suḫian model	
Righteous king	Treacherous enemy	Righteous king	Treacherous enemy
Ashurnaṣirpal II	Suḫian king	Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur	the Assyrians

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46 Another expression is also the term *šuglû*, meaning "to deport" (CAD Š/3, 201). The expression is quite rare and the Assyrian inscriptions normally employ *šalālu* or *našû*. However, the term LÚ.*šuglû* is often used in the later Neo-Assyrian letters for the description of deportees (cf. SAA 1 219:6, 10; 5 54:4'; 13 157:10'; 15 233:5'; 18 94 r. 10'; 19 127:11').

47 Fales, "Narrative and Ideological Variations in the Account of Sargon's Eighth Campaign," 135–38; Peter Dubovský, "Assyrians under the Walls of Jerusalem and the Confinement of Padi," *JNES* 75 (2016): 118–19.

48 It is important to notice that the expression "he turned XX into a heap of ruins" (RIMB 2 S.0.1002.9:19–20) occurs also in the description of the Aramaean raid in RIMB 2 S.0.1002.2 i 29–30. Thus, the Assyrian behaved in the same way as the Aramaean invaders.

A similar literary technique is used by Nabopolassar (625–605 BCE). While describing his victory over Assyria, he claims that he reduced Assyria to heaps and ruins.[49] He employs the Assyrian favorite expression *ana tīli u karmi turru* and turns it against Assyria, implying that the Assyrians are punished in the same manner they used to mistreat other nations.

4.3.2 "Religious" Reversal

Traces of a reversal technique, even less pronounced, can be noticed in the "religious" account as well:

> URU URU.*an-at ù* DINGIR.MEŠ-*šu ú-šal-pit* TÚG SIG₅ *an-at* KÙ.GI *ṣa-ri-ri* NA₄.MEŠ *ni-siq-tim ù mim-ma si-mat* DINGIR-*ti-šu ú-šal-pit-ma*

> He desecrated the city of Anat and its gods. He desecrated the fine garment of (the goddess) Anat, the *ṣāriru*-gold, the precious stones, and all the (other) things befitting her godhead. (RIMB 2 10:19–22)

The destruction of the sanctuaries is a frequent motif in the royal inscriptions. However, the Suḫian inscriptions use the term *lapātu*. In the later Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, this term put into relief the Assyrian victory over recalcitrant enemies (RINAP 3/1 26 i 6'–13'). Similarly, this term is part of Ashurbanipal's propaganda describing his destruction of the Elamite sanctuaries (RINAP 5 9 v 42–43). The act itself is not only a physical demolition of the building but also its desecration and Ashurbanipal claims *eš-re-e-ti* KUR.ELAM.MA.KI *a-di la ba-še-e ú-šal-pit* "I have made destroy the sanctuaries of Elam, so they did not exist anymore" (RINAP 5 11v 62–63).

In the Babylonian inscriptions, this term is frequently used to describe the devastation of the sanctuaries in Babylon[50] and in later periods it referred to the Assyrian desecration of the cultic places as the prototypical religious crimes.

As is the case in the "secular" inscriptions, the "religious" one of Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur turns Assyrian propaganda against Assyria. What constitutes the reason for Assyrian boasting, becomes the rationale for their condemnation. Moreover, he accuses the Assyrians of committing crimes, similar to those directed against the Babylonian shrines by the Elamites or other enemies, all of which are considered a horrendous offense against the gods.

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49 MA.DA-*su ú-te-er-ru a-na* DU₆ *ù ka-ar-mi* (Etenmenanki Inscription C31 i 26–27); cf. also E'edinna Inscription C22 i 3–4. For the text and English translation see the ORACC website, Nabopolassar n. 5 and 14 respectively.
50 CAD L, 93.

Another contrasting element the Suḫians used is the Š-stem of *wašābu*. The most important part of the Assyrian reconstruction of a temple is the entrance ceremony (RIMA 1 A.0.73.4 r.5–7; RIMA 2 A.0.101.40:37; 50:25).[51] The king brings the gods to the temple and seats them on their daises. As a result, the gods are pleased and bless the king and his country. In contrast, in the Suḫian inscription, the Assyrians seat the goddess Anat in a hidden place that was obviously not appropriate for the divinity (RIMB 2 S. 0.1002.10:22–23).

In sum, both "secular" and "religious" accounts employ the reversal technique. It has been recognized that this model has been used by biblical scribes as well. For example, P. Machinist concludes that "Isa 10:5–15 picks up the genre and language of the Assyrian royal inscriptional tradition and turns it upside-down. In the process, it also inverts the ideology encoded in and transmitted by the inscriptions".[52] In the words of M. Chan, "an Assyrian theme is taken and attributed to the Lord and thus Assyria is put down. The king of Assyria is stripped of his title and becomes a servant of the Lord".[53] S. Aster, exploring Isaiah 19, concludes that "Isa 19:1 subverts the image of the god Ashur riding on a cloud ahead of his army to describe YHWH doing the same act, causing the same results".[54] The fact that the reversal technique was used by both the Israelite and Suḫian scribes, who were hardly in contact, suggests that the reversal motif in the Assyrian royal inscriptions became one of the ways through which small kingdoms tried to disarm Assyrian propaganda. The "secular" accounts turn upside-down the propaganda involving Assyrian territorial expansion while the "religious" account include reversals involving the Assyrian treatment of gods and sanctuaries.

4.4 Structures

Another important difference between the "secular" and the "religious" versions can be noticed in the structure of the narratives.

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51 Jamie R. Novotny, "Temple Building in Assyria," in *From the Foundations to the Crenellations: Essays on Temple Building in the Ancient near East and Hebrew Bible*, eds. Mark J. Boda and Jamie R. Novotny (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2010): 132–37.
52 Peter Machinist, "'Ah, Assyria . . .' (Isaiah 10:5ff.): Isaiah's Assyrian Polemic Revisited," in *Not Only History: Proceedings of the Conference in Honor of Mario Liverani Held in Sapienza-Università di Roma, dipartimento di scienze dell'antichità, 20–21 April 2009*, eds. Gilda Bartoloni, Maria Giovanna Biga, and Armando Bramanti (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016): 207.
53 Michael Chan, "Rhetorical Reversal and Usurpation: Isaiah 10:5–34 and the Use of Neo-Assyrian Royal Idiom in the Construction of an Anti-Assyrian Theology," *JBL* 128 (2009): 717–33.
54 Shawn Z. Aster, "Isaiah 19: The 'Burden of Egypt' and Neo-Assyrian Imperial Policy," *JAOS* 135 (2015): 468.

4.4.1 Synonymic and Antinomic Parallelism in the "Secular" Accounts

Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur uses parallelism to disparage Assyria. By doing so he creates a contrast between an "evil" Assyrian and a "loyal" Suḫian. The Assyrian destruction of the region is contrasted with Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur's reconstruction of the region. The deportation of the local inhabitants and the repopulation with new deportees is opposed with Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur's repopulation of both banks of the Euphrates. The scribes underline this difference not only by contraposing the themes but also by contrasting the vocabulary (*ú-šag-li-šú-nu-ti-ma pi-rik* KUR.KUR.MEŠ *ú-sap-pi-iḫ-šu-nu-ti* in contrast to *ú-še-šib*; LÚ.*aš-šur*.KI-*a-a* versus *a-na-ku*) as well as by employing the same words (LÚ *áš-bu-tu*/*áš-bu-ti*;[55] *ul-te-še-bu*/*ul-te-šib*; Á KUR *ù* Á KUR-*i*):

LÚ *áš-bu-tu šá* URU.*an-at*
...
LÚ.*aš-šur*.KI-*a-a*
    ú-šag-li-šú-nu-ti-ma pi-rik KUR.KUR.MEŠ *ú-sap-pi-iḫ-šu-nu-ti* É.MEŠ *šá* Á
    KUR *ù* Á KUR-*i šá* URU.*an-at a-na* DU₆ *ù kar-mi ut-tir*
      ˹*ù*˺ LÚ.*aš-šur*.KI-*a-a* ÉRIN.MEŠ *šá ram-ni-šú* ˹*ina*˺ URU.*an-at ul-te-še-bu*
        ...
a-na-ku ˹*uk-tin*˺ [(...)]
    u áš-bu-ti ina URU.*an-at* Á KUR *u* Á KU[R-*i*] *ul-te-šib*
      URU [UR]U.*an-at ki pa-na-a-m*[*a*★] Á KUR *u* Á KUR-*i ú-še-šib*

While this antinomic parallelism puts in contrast two rulers, there are other synonymous or antinomic phrases or words that, however, are aimed at the description of the Anatians. The verb *elû* is employed in 1002.9 i 8 and 13 creating an antinomic effect. Line i 8 speaks about Tabnea *going up* to Assyria where he is murdered; lines i 12–13 speak about the Anatians who *brought up* the Assyrian to their country who afterwards destroy the country. As the result of this contradiction, the nonsensical behavior of the Anatians is clearly revealed.

    The inscriptions RIMB 2 S. 0.1002.3, 4, 5 add another negative portrayal of the Anatians by employing the term *ṣaltu*.[56] The Aramean tribes make an assault (*ṣaltu*) against the Euphrates region and plunder Laqu. The Laqians are subdued by force by their invaders and do everything they can to resist the invaders. On the contrary, the Anatians give their land voluntarily – without fighting – to the Assyrian.

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55 RIMB 2 S.0.1002.3 iv 8' reads LÚ.*áš-bu-ti*.
56 CAD Ṣ, 87–88 translates as "fight, fighting, battle".

4.4.2 Concentric Structure of the "Religious" Account

The "religious" account omits the description of the Assyrian devastation and the historical notes on how long Anat was under the Assyrians. By omitting these elements, Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur's scribes organize the narrative according to a different pattern and thus shift the focus to desecration. The concentric structure of the "religious" account creates the link between the corresponding parts. The links between the corresponding elements are achieved by means of repetition of key words (DINGIR.MEŠ, TÚG SIG5, KÙ.GI ṣa-ri-ri, NA4.MEŠ ni-siq-tim) as well as by antinomy. Thus, the desecration (ú-šal-pit) in A1 is in contrast with of making the gods dwell in the temple (ú-še-šib-šú) in A2; the desecration of the divine clothes in B1 is in contrast with making them complete in B2; the bringing of the goddess Anat to a hidden place in C1 is opposed with bringing her out of the hidden place in C2.

A1 URU URU.*an-at ù* DINGIR.MEŠ-*šu* 20 *ú-šal-pit*
   B1 TÚG SIG5 *an-at* KÙ.GI ṣa-ri-ri 21 NA4.MEŠ *ni-siq-tim ù mim-ma si-mat* 22 DINGIR-*ti-šu ú-šal-pit-ma*
C1 *ù a-na šá-a-ši* 23 *ú-še-šib-šú i-na pu-uz-ru*
   a-na-ku 24 md*nin-urta*-NÍG.DU-ÙRU LÚ.GAR KUR ⌜*su*⌝-*ḫi u* KUR *ma-ri* 25 ÌR
   pa-liḫ DINGIR-*ti-šu* GAL-*ti an-at*
C2 *ul-*⌜*tu*⌝ 26 *pu-uz-ru ú-še-ṣa-am-ma*
   B2 TÚG SIG5 ⌜KÙ.GI⌝ 27 [ṣa]-⌜*ri*⌝-*ri* ⌜*ù* NA4⌝.MEŠ ⌜*ni-siq-tim*⌝ [x]-x-⌜*tú*⌝ 28 [x x x x *ú*]-*šak-lil*
A2 DINGIR-*us*-⌜*su*⌝ *ù* 29 *i-na* [...] *ú-še-šib-šú*

The center of the concentric structure is dedicated to Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur whose reign is depicted as the apogee of the Assyrian cultic abuse. The titles attributed to Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur are unique in the whole collection of texts found in Suḫu. He is called "the servant who reveres her great godhead". That title perfectly fits the religious setting of the inscription. The king is not portrayed as a savior of the people and of the country, as he was in the "secular" version, but he rescues the goddess, restores her cultic drapery and brings her back to the shrine so that she can rule over the city.

Making central the pious nature of Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur, the inscription establishes a link with the opening lines (LUGAL *pa-liḫ-šú* and ÌR *pa-liḫ* DINGIR-*ti-šu*). Thus, Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur is presented as an ideal king corresponding to the opening lines: he fears Anat, he respects her majesty, and takes care of her cultic place. Therefore, Anat instructs him (*ta-nam-din ur-tu4*). Furthermore, the opening lines contrast the sacrilegious Assyrians and the pious Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur. The

Assyrian desecrates her godhead (DINGIR-*ti-šu ú-šal-pit-ma*) that is splendid; he makes the goddess Anat dwell in the hidden place while she should dwell in Ešuziana ("House, True Hand of Heaven"), the holy cella, the august shrine; he strips off her clothes, jewelry, and other things befitting her godhead, despite her being the perfect, most powerful, august, and splendid goddess. Finally, the scribes in the "religious" account make clear that the priority was to restore and keep the cult since the rest would come afterwards, as is shown by the sequence of the titles:

> *Nature of the goddess*
>> Anat, the perfect lady, most exalted of the goddesses, most powerful of the goddesses, greatest of the Igīgū gods, august lady whose godhead is splendid, splendid lady whose valor is not equaled by (that of any of) the (other) goddesses,

> *Role and attitude of the king*
>> one who grasps the hand of the weak, grants life, and gives instruction(s) to the king who reveres her,

> *Consequences for the people*
>> (one who) presents plenty and abundance to the people of her settlements...

If the king respects the goddess, she will take care of her people and grant the people abundance and plenty. In sum, the "secular" version is a demonstration of what Anat could do.

In conclusion, the study of the structures of the "religious" and "secular" account shows that the "religious" account focuses on the reconstruction of the divine sphere whereas the "secular" concentrates mainly on the reconstruction of the well-being of the region. Thus, the "religious" account betrays another aspect of theocracy: if the gods are not treated properly, the humans fall into the hands of their enemies. Once the dignity of the gods is reestablished, the course of history could evolve smoothly.

4.5 Resilience Model

Another technique both accounts employ is the resilience model. The term resilience was originally used to describe different levels of elasticity of a material. A resilient material, such as rubber, could be bent and return to its original shape. The term is used in its figurative meaning as physical resilience. It describes the body's ability to recover from moments of distress. The term was also adopted by psychologists to determine the human ability to recover from difficult condi-

tions such as trauma. Finally, the term was transferred to sociological studies.[57] Resilience of societies or social groups refers to their ability to respond to, to adapt to, and to recover from adverse situations such as natural disasters, wars, etc. Resilience is often put in contrast with other models of coping with challenges of history such as revolution, reform, restoration, etc. Resilience is not only an attempt to re-establish the previous *status quo*, but "it deals with complex adaptive system dynamics and true uncertainty and how to learn to live with change and make use of it".[58] D. Carr successfully applies the logic of resilience to the Bible.[59] This concept is also used for describing the process of recovery in the ancient Near East.[60]

Reading the Suḫian "religious" and "secular" accounts of the Anat episode through the resilience viewpoint, we can notice that the period of Assyrian dominance was an intermezzo that concluded with the Anatian return to Suḫu.

4.5.1 "Secular" Version of Resilience

The parallel structure created by Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur's scribes (see above) contrasts the evil Assyrian and the loyal Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur. On the other hand, the scribes insist that the situation in Anat returned to its original state. Translated into the modern terminology, Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur's scribes skillfully apply the resilience model to Anatian political affairs. The resilience model can be noticed on different levels.

The "secular" accounts, in contrast to the "religious" one, present three steps of the restoration process. First, the regular offerings are reestablished. Then, the population and city are returned to their original well-being. Finally, the gods are brought to their temples.

Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur claims:

> I (re-)established the regular offerings, offe[rings, (...)] and festivals of the god Adad [(...)] according to the wording (of the commands) of Ḫam[mu]-rab[i, king of Babylon, and] the father who begot me. (RIMB 2 9 ii 9–11; cf. 10:30–32)

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57 Munatāsīra Māmuna, *Civil Society in Bangladesh: Resilience and Retreat*, 1st ed. (Calcutta, India: Firma KLM under the auspices of University of Calcutta, 1996).

58 Carl Folke, "Resilience," *Ecology and Society* 21 (2016): 44.

59 David McLain Carr, *Holy Resilience: The Bible's Traumatic Origins* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

60 Tate Paulette, "Domination and Resilience in Bronze Age Mesopotamia," in *Surviving Sudden Environmental Change*, Answers from Archaeology, ed. Jago Cooper and Payson Sheets (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2012): 167–96.

He did not introduce a new system of offerings but re-establishes those prescribed by his father Hammurabi. Thus, his task is to re-establish the original state of affairs in the cult after fifty-three years of interruption. This naturally contrasts the Assyrian and the Babylonian cult. Even though the terminology for the offerings is the same in Assyrian and Babylonian, the content is different.

The parallel structure presented above links the Assyrian's destruction of the region and Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur's reconstruction. The text presents Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur's activity not as a new development but as the renewal of the status that existed before the Assyrian's intermezzo. Just as the inhabitants were deported by the Assyrian, so the (new) inhabitants are resettled on both banks of the Euphrates. The region was *ki pa-na-a-⌈ma*⌉ "as (it had been) before" (RIMB 2 S. 0.1002.9 ii 14). Resilience, in this sense, does not consist in bringing back the original inhabitants but in repopulating the region and rebuilding new houses, allowing Anat a chance to march towards a new future.

The last step of the restoration of the city of Anat is the bringing back of the gods. Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur restores the gods, who abandoned Anat because of the Assyrians. Once again, the scribes use the expression *ki pa-na-a-ma* (RIMB 2 S. 0.1002.9 ii 18). Not only is the region brought back to a previous stage of prosperity but also the gods are restored so that the country could prosper.

4.5.2 Anatian "Conversion"

According to the "secular" accounts Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur is the protagonist who re-establishes the previous state of things. However, we can rightly ask what is the role of the Anatians in this process. The resilience model lays also behind the description of the Anatian siding with the Assyrian and their return to Suḫu. The inscription reads:

> LÚ *áš-bu-tu šá* URU.*an-at   la-pa-an* KUR.*su-ḫi ib-bal-kit-ú-ma* ŠU.II-*su-nu a-na* LÚ.*aš-šur*.KI-*a-a it-⌈tan*⌉-[*nu*] *ù* LÚ.*aš-šur*.KI-*a-a a-na* URU.*an-at   ul-te-lu-ú-nu* LÚ-*aš-šur*.KI-*a   ul ina da-na-nu ul ina ṣal-ta* URU.*an-at   [iṣ]-bat* ÉRIN.MEŠ DUMU.MEŠ URU *ra-man-šú-nu* [*ana*] ⌈LÚ⌉.*aš-šur*.KI-*a-a it-tan-nu*

> Then the inhabitants of the city Anat <u>moved away</u> from the land of Suḫu <u>and they</u> joi[ned] hands with the Assyrian and brought the Assyrian up to the city Anat. The Assyrian [to]ok the city Anat neither by force nor by battle; (rather) the men – the citizens of the city themselves – gave (it) [to] the Assyrian. (RIMB 2 S. 0.1002.9 i 9–16; cf. 4 iv 713; 5 iv 1–3; 10:15–19)

The shift of the Anatian relations is described with the expression *la-pa-an* KUR. *su-ḫi ib-bal-kit-ú-ma* that is normally translated as "they rebelled against the land

of Suḫu".[61] A comparison of the term *nabalkutu* in the Suḫian corpus shows that the verb takes two prepositions *ina maḫri* and *lapani*. The form is an equivalent of the Neo-Assyrian syntagma *nabalkutu itti*-XX and it refers to a rebellion of people who are in relationship with Assyria, most likely through a treaty. A similar type of a rebellion against Suḫu, which is mentioned in RIMB 2 S. 0.1002.1 i 17–18; 3 iii 19' and expressed by *nabalkutu ina maḫri*, refers to the rebellion of Ra'il against Assyria. This rebellion is suppressed by Šamaš-reša-uṣur (RIMB 2 S. 0.1002.1:15). However, the Anatian shifting of allegiance is described by the syntagma *nabalkutu lapani* that occurs in RIMB 2 S. 0.1002.2 ii 17; 3 ii 23'; 6 ii 24'. It expresses a movement away from a person, place, etc.[62] This nuance demonstrates that the relation of Anat with Suḫu is different than that with Ra'il. The inhabitants of Anat do not rebel, but move away from Suḫu and side with Assyria whereas the inhabitants of Ra'il rebel and, therefore, are invaded and defeated. Thus, we can conclude that while the city of Ra'il was considered part of the Suḫian kingdom and the governors felt authorized to intervene, the city of Anat was not under direct control of Suḫu.

As argued above, the Suḫian inscriptions present the Anatian distancing from Suḫu not as a full-fledged rebellion but as a voluntarily siding with Assyria. The Suḫian scribes, thus, create a frame for the description of Assyrian dominance by means of the verbs of movement *nabalkutu lapani* "to move away from" and *târu* [*ana*] "to return to". This constitutes an important element of the Suḫian way of controlling Anat. Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur does not occupy Anat but restores the original state of affairs that was interrupted by the Assyrian dominance and even improves their well-being.

The turning point of the Anatians' fate is captured by means of the verb *târu* that is employed three times (1002.9 i 20, ii 5, 18).[63] The verb emphasizes the contrast between what the Assyrian do (*ut-tir*; turned the country into the heaps and ruins) with Ninurta-kudurii-uṣur's action (*ú-te-ri-šú-nu-ti-ma*; he brought back the gods and thus reestablished the true cult).[64] The real well-being of Anat could take place only when the Anatians reestablish their loyalty with their true lord –

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61 For a detailed study of the terminology see Peter Juhás, *Bārtu nabalkattu ana māt Aššur īpuš-ma uḫaṭṭâ … Eine Studie zum Vokabular und zur Sprache der Rebellion in ausgewählten neuas-syrischen Quellen und in 2 Kön 15–21* (Kamen: Hartmut Spenner, 2011).

62 Cf. CAD L, 80.

63 First, the Assyrian turns the land into heaps and ruins; secondly, the Anatians realizing their mistake return to Šamaš-resa-uṣur, and finally Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur brings back the gods to their place.

64 RIMB 2 S.0.1002.3 iv 13' reads ⌈ú⌉-*še-ṣa-áš-šú-nu-ti-ma*. Thus, this inscriptions links the reestablishment of the cult with the "religious" version (RIMB 2 S.0.1002.10:26) that describes how Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur brings the gods out of the hiding place where the Assyrian had placed them.

Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur (AD-*ia₅ it-tu-ru*; 1002.9 ii 4–5, cf. 1002.3 iv 2'; they returned to Šamaš-reša-uṣur).

4.6 "Religious" Version of Resilience

As argued above, the "religious" account organizes the events in a concentric structure. Both the "secular" and "religious" accounts put the king in the center, but the latter portrays him as as a pious man fearing the gods. The re-establishment of the previous status quo proceeds through four steps. First, the king has to bring the goddess out of the hidden place where the Assyrians deposits Anat. In the "secular" accounts, this is the last step. Secondly, Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur must restore the dignity of the goddess, giving her back her clothes, jewelry and other things that befit her godhead. This element is missing in the "secular' accounts. The damaged lines of the stele read *i-na* [...] *ú-še-šib-šú* "I made her dwell in [...]" (RIMB 2 S. 0.1002.19 10:29). Only after the dignity of the goddess is restored and the correct offerings are re-established can Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur bring Anat to her temple. Consequently, the king is able to re-establish the offerings according to Hammurabi's command. In the "secular" account, this is the first step. In sum, the "religious" account focuses on the restoration of the cult and has reversed the order of the events.

The comparison of the accounts brings to light another element of the Suḫian concept of theocracy. To guarantee the correct course of history, it is necessary to re-establish the original state of affairs. Contrary to the modern evolutionary model of history, the Suḫian concept of history is the resilience model, i. e. to go back to the original state after a moment of interruption.

5 Conclusions

In this paper I have argued that beside the concept of divine kingship, the theocratic concept can be traced in the acknowledgment of the gods as the supreme rulers of the course of history. This type of theocracy has been explored in the Suḫian inscriptions. The analysis demonstrates that the Suḫian governors employed different models for acknowledging divine suzerainty in history by using fictional dialogues and by addressing their inscriptions to the gods. A comparison of the "religious" and "secular' accounts of the Anat episode shows how not only the content but also the style was modified and adapted when history was written for the gods.

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