

# The Expression “Son of a Nobody” in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions

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## 1. Introductory remarks

The creating of enemy images is a universal and timeless phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> In this process, an abnormal “Other” is negatively stereotyped in relation to a normal “Self”, not the least in political discourse. In various contexts - notably ones that involve the topic of colonialism - a “subaltern” is constructed, that is an agent who is both inferior (thus “sub”) and different in a fundamentally bad way (thus “altern”). Through the developing of images of “alterity”, various oppressive systems can be justified. In this way, a colonial power can legitimate its possession of foreign lands and resources.<sup>2</sup>

Enemy images are conveyed not the least in Assyrian royal inscriptions in which Assyrian kings seek to legitimate their coercion and imperialist wars and ambitions. As a doctoral student, focusing on this text corpus, I became very aware of this. One enemy image that I encountered, and which I decided to return to when I had the time, was the suggestive term or epithet “son of a nobody” (*mār lā mamman*)<sup>3</sup>, applied to some foreign rulers in Early Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions. Most often derogatory in meaning, I noticed that this term could also have positive connotations in certain contexts.<sup>4</sup> In this article, I present the results of my investigations on all this. To my knowledge, the term in question has not been the topic of a separate study before,<sup>5</sup> although it of course has been frequently noted in scholarly works.<sup>6</sup> Anyway, the *contexts* of the relevant expression, more precisely the textual passages in which the expression occurs, was highlighted in my analysis and search for meanings.<sup>7</sup>

In my investigation process, I searched for further attestations by surveying the preserved Assyrian royal inscriptions (as defined in Grayson 1987: 4), as these are conveyed in up-to-date publications. I did this both through reading the relevant books and through making use of the developed, digitalized search tools in the field.<sup>8</sup> As for the books, I naturally refer to the RIMA-volumes (RIMA 1-3) concerning the Old, Middle, and Early Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions and to the RINAP-volumes (RINAP 1, 3-4) regarding the Late Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions. Concerning the inscriptions of Sargon II (RINAP 2 is not yet published), I looked at the publications of his inscriptions from Dur-Sharrukin (Fuchs 1994) as well as at those (prism fragments) from Assur and Nineveh (SAAS 8). I also examined Sargon II’s “letter to a god” which contains this ruler’s famous narration of his eighth campaign (Mayer 1983), and the highly rhetorical, so-called “Assur Charter” (Saggs 1975). As for Ashurbanipal and his texts (RINAP 5 is not yet published), I naturally consulted the publication by Borger (1996). I also looked at important, recent works which present

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a part of my research program “The Enemy in Assyrian Propaganda”.

<sup>2</sup> These observations are naturally a part of post-colonial theory, as exemplified in Said 1978.

<sup>3</sup> An example of the cuneiform writing of the term is DUMU *la ma-man* (RIMA 2:A.0.101.1:i76). Variations are all about how to render the word *mamman* and do not involve semantics. The expression has also been translated as “commoner” (e.g. Tadmor and Yamada 2011: 123, 133).

<sup>4</sup> The term is only briefly discussed in my two books (Karlsson 2013: 145, 190; 2016: 162-63, 215).

<sup>5</sup> A list of attestations can be found in Seux 1980-83: 152.

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. Yamada 2000: 189, Jursa 2007: 127-28, Richardson 2007: 193-97, and Lanfranchi 2009: 140-41. Their findings will be incorporated into the concluding discussion of this article.

<sup>7</sup> Rather than the semantics and etymology of the words that constitute the expression, namely the noun *māru* (son), the negative particle *lā*, and the indefinite pronoun *mamman* (somebody).

<sup>8</sup> The primary search tool that I used was Oracc, available on <http://orac.museum.upenn.edu/>.

*new* Assyrian royal inscriptions (CUSAS 17, KAL 3). Although their not being royal inscriptions proper, I also paid attention to the less rhetorical texts of the state archives of Nineveh (SAA 1-19), because of their accessibility and relevance.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. The attestations

In the following, I will present and discuss all the attestations of the relevant term, one by one, in chronological order. After the survey had ended, I could conclude that several Assyrian kings used the term in question, namely Ashurnasirpal II, Shalmaneser III, Tiglath-pileser III, and Sennacherib. It was also used in a royal letter in the reign of Esarhaddon. All the attestations are from the Neo-Assyrian period.

The first attestation (actually the first two) of the relevant epithet comes from the royal inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal II. The passage in question is a part of the annalistic-like inscription on the walls and floors of the Ninurta temple of Kalhu, and the narrated event occurred early on in the king's reign (RIMA 2:A.0.101.1:i74-94). The passage is given below in the translation of Grayson (1991: 198-99).

While I was in the land Katmuḫu this report was brought back to me: 'The city Sūru, which belongs to Bīt-Ḫalupe, has rebelled. They have killed Ḫamatāia, their governor, (and) appointed Aḫi-iababa, **son of a nobody**, whom they brought from the land Bīt-Adini, as their king.' With the assistance of Aššur (and) the god Adad, the great gods who made my sovereignty supreme, I mustered my chariotry (and) troops (and) made my way to the banks of the River Ḫabur. On my march, I received the plenteous tribute of Samanuḫa-šar-ilāni, a man of the city Šadikanni, (and) of Amīl-Adad, a man of the city Qatnu – silver, gold, tin, bronze casseroles, garments with multi-coloured trim, (and) linen garments. I approached the city Sūru, which belongs to Bīt-Ḫalupe. Awe of the radiance of Aššur, my lord, overwhelmed them. The nobles (and) elders of the city came out to me to save their lives. They submitted to me and said: 'As it pleases you, kill! As it pleases you, spare! As it pleases you, do what you will!' I captured Aḫi-iababa, **son of a nobody**, whom they brought from the land Bīt-Adini. With my staunch heart and fierce weapons I besieged the city. All the guilty soldiers were seized and handed over to me. ...<sup>10</sup>

... I appointed Azi-ili as my own governor over them. I erected a pile in front of his gate; I flayed as many nobles as had rebelled against me (and) draped their skins over the pile; some I spread out within the pile, some I erected on stakes upon the pile, (and) some I placed on stakes around about the pile. I flayed many right through my land (and) draped their skins over the walls. I slashed the flesh of the eunuchs who were guilty. I brought Aḫi-iababa to Nineveh, flayed him, (and) draped his skin over the wall of Nineveh. (Thus) have I constantly established my victory and strength over the land Laqû.

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<sup>9</sup> Conveniently accessible on <http://orac.museum.upenn.edu/saa/>.

<sup>10</sup> The skipped lines do not denote a lacuna but simply enumerate the booty taken from the enemy. This enumeration is of course of limited value in this context, and is thus excluded here.

To sum it up, people in Suru, a city belonging to the polity Bit-Halupe and lying close to the mouth of the Habur river, incite a rebellion by killing the Assyrian vassal Hamatajja and placing a “son of a nobody” named Ahi-iababa from Bit-Adini as their ruler. Ashurnasirpal II and his army march to Suru. On their way, the king receives tribute. When arriving at Suru, the nobles and elders come out and surrender, and the usurper and his men are captured or extradited. The city is taken and the king exacts brutal punishments to those who had been actively involved in the rebellion. Ahi-iababa is taken to Nineveh where he is flayed and has his skin draped over the city wall. A man named Azi-ili is installed as governor over the now pacified city Suru.

The question then is who this “son of a nobody” Ahi-iababa was? It is said of him that he was someone “whom they (people in Suru) brought from the land Bīt-Adini, as their king” (*ištu māt Bīt-Adini ūblūnissu ana šarrūti ana muḥḥišunu iškunū*). Otherwise, it is only his gruesome fate that is told of in the passage. He appears only as a *passive* figure, as being appointed, seized, and executed. It seems that this Ahi-iababa had two shortcomings in Ashurnasirpal II’s eyes. In part, he was not backed by the Assyrian king. People in Suru had, completely on their own, elevated him. Ahi-iababa and his men are contrasted through the loyal and submissive behaviour of the vassals of Shadikanni and Qatnu who deliver their great tribute to Ashurnasirpal II. In part, he was simply a “son of a nobody”, that is he was not of royal descent. The nature of his standing at Bit-Halupe (from where he was taken) is obscure. Ahi-iababa’s “son of a nobody”-ship implied political illegitimacy and social misplacing.

The third attestation of the epithet derives from the reign of Shalmaneser III. The text in question is written on a fragmentary statue of the king that was erected at the Tabira Gate in Assur. The text highlights certain conflicts with foreign rulers, such as the protracted one with the Syrian polity Damascus, here in 853 and 841 BCE (RIMA 3:A.0.102.40:i14-ii1). The text dates to 833 BCE or shortly thereafter (Grayson 1996: 117). The passage is conveyed below, in the translation of Grayson (1996: 118).

I defeated Hadad-ezer (Adad-idri), the Damascene, together with twelve princes who were his allies. I laid low like sheep 29,000 of his brave warriors (and) threw the remnant of his troops into the Orontes. They fled to save their lives. Hadad-ezer (Adad-idri) passed away (and) Haza’el, **son of a nobody**, took the throne. He mustered his numerous troops (and) moved against me to wage war and battle. I fought with him (and) defeated him. I took away from him his walled camp. He fled to save his life (and) I pursued (him) as far as Damascus, his royal city. [I cut down his] gardens. [...]

Summing the events up, Shalmaneser III in his sixth regnal year (853 BCE) defeats (so he argues) the ruler of Damascus and his twelve allies at the Orontes river. He claims to have staged a great massacre of these Levantine opponents there. Years later (841 BCE), the Damascus ruler passes away and a man named Haza’el seizes the throne. This man immediately turns against the Assyrian king with his army. The latter of course wins the battle. Haza’el flees and Shalmaneser III chases him. The Assyrian king punishes the defeated polity by cutting down its orchards (?). Other inscriptions inform us that the battle with Haza’el took place in a non-urban, mountainous area, that Haza’el fled to Damascus afterwards, and that Shalmaneser III only ravaged the outskirts of the city (e.g. RIMA 3:A.0.102.8:1’-21’’).

Focusing on Haza’el, the “son of a nobody”, he is obviously described as a person of low social status through the relevant epithet. This is one of his many faults in the

thinking of Shalmaneser III. Secondly, he appears as a morally defect individual in various ways. He e.g. engages in chaotic violence in his preparing for and engaging in battle. In Assyrian state ideology, only the Assyrian king's warfare is regarded as orderly and legitimate (Karlsson 2016: 226-27). Haza'el is then pictured as a coward, who flees the scene instead of, in a manly way, facing his opponent face-to-face (Karlsson 2016: 236-38). He is also portrayed as haughty in his "seizing" (*ṣabātu*) the throne, without getting the proper approval. In other inscriptions, he is described as presumptuously "trusting in the might of his soldiers" (*ana gipiš ummānātīšu ittakil*) (e.g. RIMA 3:A.0.102.8:3'-4'), instead of in the Mesopotamian deities and their earthly representative, the Assyrian king (Karlsson 2016: 225-26). However, the fault of being illegitimate, in the sense of not being appointed by the Assyrian king, does not apply perfectly here, since Damascus was outside the Assyrian area of domination at this point in history (Roaf 1992: 296). Perhaps it would be more fair to say that Haza'el of Damascus was illegitimate insofar as he was not of royal descent.

The highlighted epithet is also expressed in the royal inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III. The critical passage is (identically) expressed in two different texts that were written on two clay tablets from Kalhu in long summary inscriptions (RINAP 1: Tiglath-pileser III 47: r. 14'-15', RINAP 1: Tiglath-pileser III 49: r. 27-29). The texts were composed in or shortly after 729 BCE (Tadmor and Yamada 2011: 115). The passage is rendered below, in the translation of Tadmor and Yamada (2011: 123).<sup>11</sup>

[U]assurme of the land Tabal acted as if he were the equal of Assyria and he did not come before me. [I sent] a eunuch of mine, the chief [eunuch, to the land Tabal. ...]. I placed [Ḫu]llî, a **commoner** (lit. "son of a nobody") on his royal throne. [I received] 10 talents of gold, 1,000 talents of silver, 2,000 horses, (and) [... mules as his audience gift].

Summing up the events, Uassurme, ruler of the south-east Anatolian polity Tabal, refuses to pay his submissive respects ("come before me") to Tiglath-pileser III around 730 BCE (Tadmor and Yamada 2011: 115). This provokes the Assyrian king, who expects submission and tribute. Uassurme is presumably deposed after a military campaign led by the king's chief eunuch, and Tiglath-pileser III then installs a man named Hulli, a "son of a nobody", on the throne instead. From this vassal, the Assyrian king receives a grand tribute, both in terms of quantity and quality.

Centering on the relevant "son of a nobody", it is striking that the expression in question here seems to carry a *positive* connotation. Hulli is legitimate (backed by the Assyrian king) and the "son of a nobody" at the same time. Additionally, this man fulfills his duties by being submissive and deliver a grand tribute. There is no fault in the behaviour of this "son of a nobody". By contrast, Uassurme is haughty in that he does not recognize his correct status in the world order established by the Mesopotamian deities and administered by the Assyrian king (Karlsson 2016: 147-58). Anyway, this passage shows that the term can have a positive meaning too.

Also the Sargonid king Sennacherib used this curious epithet. It is attested twice, on two (?) clay tablets from Nineveh (probably) which notably preserve a rather unorthodox version of the narration of the king's eighth military campaign (RINAP 3/2: Sennacherib 146: 6-9, RINAP 3/2: Sennacherib 147: 6-9). The relevant passage is given below in the translation of Grayson and Novotny (2014: 198, 200).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The translation in question is based on the former text (as for the reconstruction markers).

<sup>12</sup> The translation in question is based on the former text (as for the reconstruction markers).

[A] *Chaldea*[n (Šūzubu), ... a rash fellow, a] *chariot fighter*, a servant who belonged to the [governor of the city Laḥīru, (...)] who in the time of my father fled like a bird on a]ccount of *the beating of the ...-official and the tearing out (of his hair)* [... and] wandered about in the open country, [who entered Babylon] when there was rebellion and [revolt (...)] and] *was reckoned as one of them*: They (the Babylonians) exalted him over them and [they entrusted him with] the king[ship of the land of Sumer and Akkad]. To Babylon, which was very guilty, [... (wherein) *Šūzubu*, a Chaldean, **son of a nobody**], a person of lowly status who has no streng[th, ..., was appointed as ... of Babylon]: *The people of Babylon* who had rebelled (and) the Chaldeans, [*Arameans*, (...)] fugitives, (and) runaways] who had banded toge[ther] with them in exchange for gifts and bribes [... and they took an oath].

Regarding the events, the passage above is too fragmentary to give a coherent picture. It can be grasped however that a Chaldean named Shuzubu came to Babylon and was elevated to the rulership of Babylonia (Sumer and Akkad) by its inhabitants. The passage ends with mentioning a coalition between the people of Babylon, the Chaldeans, the Arameans, and groups functioning as mercenary troops. Shuzubu is better known as Mushezib-Marduk, and he succeeded in temporarily breaking Babylon free from Assyrian domination. In this, he joined forces with the powerful state of Elam, not the least in the indecisive battle at Halule in 691 BCE. In 689 BCE, Sennacherib, after a protracted siege, managed to re-take (and destroy) Babylon (Roux 1992: 322-23). The fate of Mushezib-Marduk in this process is unclear.

As for Mushezib-Marduk, the “son of a nobody” in question, this man is through this term belittled socially. He is also diminished by the expression “a person of lowly status” (*eṭlu dunnamû*), as conveyed by the noun *dunnamû* meaning “person of lowly status” or “fool” (CAD D: *dunnamû*). His low, social status is also indicated by his being “a servant who belonged to the governor of GN” (*arad dāgil pāni bēl pīḥāti GN*). Mushezib-Marduk is also an *illegitimate* ruler, since Babylonia was seen as a part of the Assyrian empire, and because he as Babylonian ruler did not care for Assyrian support (Roux 1992: 322). Lastly, Mushezib-Marduk is also morally defect, e.g. in that he is a “rash fellow” (*lā ḥasīs amāti*), i.e. not very upright, evident also in his schemeful coalition forming. He also engages in chaotic violence, and finds opportunities in revolts. Still, he is described as “one who has no strength” (*ša lā iṣū emūqī*). He is also pictured as a coward in the imagery of him like a “bird” (*iṣṣūrīš*), flying away from the scene. In sum, this “son of a nobody” was socially misplaced, politically illegitimate, and morally defect according to the Assyrian world view.

The epithet “son of a nobody” is also expressed in a royal letter from the state archives of Nineveh. This letter was written by the astrologer Bel-ushezib to king Esarhaddon and deals with omen on kingship (SAA 10: 109 r. 10-20). The letter, here in translation by Parpola (1993), is quite fragmentary and unclear in many points.

Now [then portents] have occurred in the reign of the king, my lord, bearing upon him. *They have set aside* whatever [.....]; (but) where (are they)? They are looking for a pleasant sign [..., saying]: “Keep *evil [omens]* to yourselves, let [.....].”

[This was the sign] of kingship: (If a planet comes close to a planet), the son of the king who lives in a city on my border [will make a

rebellion against his father, but will not seize the throne; **a son of nobody** will come out and se]ize [the throne]; he will restore the temples [and establish sacrifices of the gods; he will provide jointly for (all) the temples.]

[Now then a sign] has occurred [in] Iyyar (II), in the reign of the king, my lord [...] [.....] called a kingship of far-off days [.....] [.....] the crown prince who was meant [.....] [.....] the king came [.....]

As for the contents of this passage, the first portion seems to refer to bad omen interpretation, in the sense of scholars avoiding to deliver “bad news” to the king. The second portion focuses on a specific omen and the interpretation of it. The third portion relates this interpretation to a specific event. In the preceding portions, Belushezib in his letter reminds king Esarhaddon that he correctly predicted the king’s rise to the throne. He had said that “you will take over the kingship” (*umma šarruti tanašši*) to Esarhaddon. Esarhaddon may be the “son of a nobody” in question.

Regarding this epithet, we here have another attestation of it as carrying a positive meaning. It is said of this “son of a nobody”, which probably alludes to Esarhaddon (or at least to this king’s irregular ascent to the throne), even though he was of royal descent (Roux 1992: 324-25), that he “[will come out and se]ize [the throne]; he will restore the temples [and establish sacrifices of the gods; he will provide jointly for (all) the temples.]” (*uṣṣīma kussâ iṣabbat bīt ilāni rabūti ana ašrīšunu utār [...]*). A reference to Esarhaddon’s various rebuilding and renovation programs, notably in Babylon (Roux 1992: 325-26), may be expressed. If anyone is belittled here, it is Sennacherib (the king’s father) who would be this “nobody” (*lā mamman*)!

Also the Neo-Babylonian king Nabopolassar (626-605) used the term “son of a nobody”. Its attestation is included here because of the Assyrian background of this ruler and his family (Jursa 2007: 127-28). The text highlighted below comes from a fictive autobiography in which Nabopolassar explains his ascent to the Babylonian throne (SANER 3:C12/1:4-12). It is written on a barrel cylinder of clay and has Babylon as provenance. It is rendered below in the translation of Da Riva (2013: 62).

When I was young, although I was the **son of a nobody**, I constantly sought in the sanctuaries of my lords Nabû and Marduk. My mind was preoccupied with the establishment of their cultic ordinances and the complete performance of their rituals. My attention was directed towards justice and equity. Šazu, the lord who knows the hearts of the gods of heaven and the underworld, who observes regularly the clever behaviour(?) of the people, perceived my intentions and placed me, me the insignificant (one) who was not even noticed among the people, in the highest position in the country in which I was born. He called me to the lordship over land and people.

In the above passage, Nabopolassar firstly and humbly states that he was just a “son of a nobody”. Irrespective of this social obstacle, he sought to attend to the Babylonian gods Nabu and Marduk in their sanctuaries. He focused on their cultic ordinances and rituals, and cherished justice and equity (as his ethics?). Nabopolassar then relates that the god Shazu discovered his character and deeds, and that this god installed him on the Babylonian throne, despite the fact that Nabopolassar was just an “insignificant one”. The fictive autobiography inscription then goes on by referring to

the Babylonian victory over the Assyrians, and Nabopolassar concludes that it is not military might but humble piety that elevates individuals (like himself).

As for Nabopolassar as the “son of a nobody”, his humble social origins is also told of in the epithets of “insignificant one” and “who was not even noticed among the people”. Later on in the text, he is also “weak one” (*enšum*) and “powerless one” (*pisnuqu*). As for the former, a part of the semantics of this noun is “(socially) weak”, contrasted with “the strong” (*dannu*) (CAD E: *enšum*). The latter term can also be translated as “feeble” and “wretched”, referring to a social inferior (CAD P: *pisnuqu*). This presentation of Nabopolassar as a social inferior is a propagandistic one, since he and his family were a part of the ruling sphere in Babylonia under Assyrian dominance. Through his fictive autobiography and its absent ruler genealogy, Nabopolassar probably sought to hide away his uncomfortable, compromising background (Jursa 2007: 127-28, Da Riva 2013: 4). Anyway, the “son of a nobody” of this passage is an altogether positive character. Nabopolassar is e.g. “king of justice” (*šar mīšarim*) and “shepherd called by Marduk” (*rē’ûm nibīt Marduk*). The king’s message is that humble background is peripheral in relation to humble piety. Both Esarhaddon and Nabopolassar as a “son of a nobody” highlight religious themes.

### 3. Concluding discussion

This article has explored the meanings of the expression “son of a nobody” by drawing conclusions from the passages in which it is attested. The expression was found to be attested only in the Neo-Assyrian (and Neo-Babylonian) period(s).

The traditional legitimacy grounds for Assyrian and Mesopotamian kings were royal descent or divine election (Tadmor 1981: 26-30). This is also reflected in the dual (negative and positive) meanings of the here highlighted term “son of a nobody”. When royal descent was absent or compromising, divine election was stressed.

On the one hand, the expression “son of a nobody” has a negative connotation, as in the examples from the royal inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal II, Shalmaneser III, and Sennacherib, targeting rulers from Suru, Damascus, and Babylon respectively. This kind of “son of a nobody” is socially misplaced (by belonging to the lower classes), politically illegitimate (by not being sanctioned by the Assyrian king), and morally defect (by being haughty, godless, violent, cowardly, and generally wicked). A distinction between active and passive (negative) “sons of nobodies” can also be made. Ashurnasirpal II’s opponent is just passively elected, seized, and executed.

On the other hand, the expression in question also has a positive connotation, as in the royal inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, Esarhaddon (Bel-ushezib), and Nabopolassar. This positive connotation is two-folded in character. One positive “son of a nobody”, as in the example from the text of Tiglath-pileser III which focuses on the ruler of Tabal, is put on the throne by the Assyrian king, and behaves in the way prescribed by Assyrian state ideology. Another positive “son of a nobody” refers to the direct and indirect patrons of the relevant texts, namely the Assyrian Esarhaddon and the Babylonian Nabopolassar. The imagery of this figure is of a ruler who was not expected to take the throne (but who in spite of this did it), and who was focused on religious reforms. Humble piety is here placed above social standing. The term seems to be associated with a ruler who will come and put things in their right order.

It is important to recognize that the expression is also attested *outside* the genre of royal inscriptions. It is here linked to certain Assyrian rulers in the Assyrian King List (with no or little negative connotations) (§§ 8-10), and to a Babylonian ruler in the Synchronistic History (with significant negative connotations) (§ 222) (Grayson 1972:

31, 50). All this tells of the complex meanings of the relevant expression, as noted also in the study by Jursa (2007: 127-28) on the use of it in the Nabopolassar text.

According to Yamada (2000: 189 n. 382), the theme of a “son of a nobody” is common in Assyrian and Babylonian inscriptions, and “indicates someone whose father was not a legal member of the major branch of the contemporary royal family, and expresses a value judgment with negative connotations, i.e. ‘a usurper’ or ‘an upstart’”. The present study finds no objection to this, other than adding the positive aspect just noted. Lanfranchi (2009: 140-41) argues for a metaphorical interpretation, and claims that the “son of a nobody” (regarding Assyrian vassals) was an “orphan” who needed the Assyrian king as a father figure. This is certainly a valid perspective, but the aspect of class-based contempt should not be underestimated. The Assyrian society was divided into the rulers and the ruled, and the notion of a royal line was pivotal and sacrosanct in the state ideology (Karlsson 2016: 211-23). Richardson (2007: 193-97) talks of the epithet in the context of a “discorporation between the body and the body politic”. This phenomenon is certainly attested in the text of Nabopolassar who denies his real social background (in the context of the ill fate of his father’s corpse), in favour of his picturing the gods Nabu and Marduk as his upbringers. Son-ship thus existed on two levels, on a personal and a public level.

It is my hope that the present study can contribute to earlier research on the topic. Anyway, it is obvious that the expression is a semantically multi-faceted one, and that the research on it, for the very same reason, will be further explored in the future.

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