

Article

# Mesopotamian Synchronistic Chronography and the Book of Kings

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**Abstract:** The Book of Kings uses a particular synchronistic framework to present the parallel histories of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah in 1 Kings 14–2 Kings 17. Some Ancient Near Eastern chronographic compositions (synchronistic king lists, the Neo-Babylonian chronicle, the so-called Synchronistic History) also record chronological relationships between ruler sequences in neighboring kingdoms. This paper distinguishes between synchronized dating and synchronistic compositions, offers a comparison between these compositions and the Book of Kings, and discusses aspects of the latter's characteristics and pragmatics. The extant Mesopotamian synchronistic compositions presuppose and express a special connection between Assyria and Babylonia. It seems that a similar idea — applied to Israel and Judah — also stands behind the synchronistic composition in 1 Kings 14–2 Kings 17.

**Keywords:** Book of Kings; chronography; synchronistic compositions

## 1. Introduction

The greater part of the Books of Kings (1 Kings 14–2 Kings 17) describes the era of the parallel existence of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah. It covers the period from the end of the united Davidic–Solomonic kingdom up to the conquest of Israel by the Assyrians. The presentation in 1 Kings 14–2 Kings 17 is characterized by a specific synchronistically interlocked structure, which is closely related to the synchronized accession year dates contained in the so-called regnal frame. The latter is a clearly discernable formulaic element that serves as a structural backbone for the Book of Kings.

The Book of Kings is not the only chronographic composition known from the Ancient Near East that contains synchronized dates or displays a synchronistic structure. The question therefore arises, how does this example of biblical chronography fit into the genre: Is it conventional or peculiar? Do the Ancient Near Eastern chronographic compositions help to understand the rationale behind the Book of Kings' specific way to structure its presentation?

## 2. Synchronized Dating and Synchronistic Compositions in ANE Literature

Chronography is a widely attested genre (locally and temporally) within Ancient Near Eastern literature.<sup>1</sup> Applying a definition of A.K. Grayson (“[T]he word chronographic denotes documents which are composed along essentially chronographical lines.” (Grayson 1975, p. 4)), king lists, royal chronicles, or annals come to mind but also a great variety of other compositions of cultic, economic, astronomical nature, etc.<sup>2</sup> For a comparison with the synchronistic portion of the Book of Kings, a limited corpus from this wide range promises to be enlightening: chronographic works dealing with dated sequences of rulers and dynasties, and among them, especially synchronized as well as synchronistic compositions.<sup>3</sup>



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### 2.1. Two Ways of Dating Accession Years

Synchronizing the sequences of rulers requires chronologically delimitating the reigning periods of the rulers in question. Unlike modern dating practices, the Ancient Near East did not have an absolute count of years that could be used to date the reigning periods of individual kings or dynasties. This is reflected by the fact that the most common numerical data to be found in ruler chronologies are not the accession year dates but the regnal year totals of kings or dynasties.<sup>4</sup> The accession year date was usually determined implicitly from the count of the regnal years of the predecessor.<sup>5</sup> Only very few chronological compositions record the year of accession of a new king. Specifying it required a reference either to an external counting or naming of years or a relational linkage with another chronological sequence.

Except for the Book of Kings, there are only two extant Ancient Near Eastern chronological compositions that record the accession years of kings, each applying one of the two options. The Neo-Assyrian Eponym Chronicles (critical edition: Millard 1994) resort to the Assyrian practice of naming each year after a high official (eponym) and thus establish a way of referring to specific years without recourse to the regnal years of a given king. In the Neo-Assyrian Empire, the king usually took the eponymate of his first year of reign. In the eponym lists, the king's name is supplemented by the title *šarru*, therefore, the kings' accessions are evident. However, there are also exceptions. Tiglat-Pileser's III assumption of power in 745 BCE is listed in Chronicle B1 (Millard 1994) but the year did not carry his name:<sup>6</sup>

B1<sup>75'-76'</sup>

[<sup>md</sup>Nabû-bêlu-ušur <sup>a</sup>]arrapḫa: ina <sup>arah</sup>ajjāri ūmi 13<sup>kam</sup> [<sup>m</sup>Tukul]ti-apil-ešarra: ina <sup>is</sup>kussî ittušib

[Nabû-bêlu-ušur,] of Arrapḫa: in Ajar, the 13<sup>th</sup> day, [Tig]lat-Pileser ascended to the throne.

The second known composition recording accession years use the other option. In Chronicle 1 (ABC 1) of the Neo-Babylonian Chronicle series, the beginning of the reign of Humban-nikaš of Elam is dated in the following way:

ABC 1, i 9–10

MU V <sup>d</sup>Nabû-našir Ummanigaš ina <sup>kur</sup>Elamti ina kussê ittašab

In the 5<sup>th</sup> year of Nabonassar: Humban-nikaš in Elam ascended to the throne.

This latter example is one of a synchronized dating practice; the new Elamite king's accession is dated by referring to the counting of the regnal years of the Babylonian king.

### 2.2. Synchronized Ruler Chronologies in the Neo-Babylonian Chronicle

The Neo-Babylonian Chronicle (ABC 1-7/CM 16f., 21–27) is attested in a series of seven excerpts which—as far as they are extant—cover the period from Nabû-našir (747–734) to the conquest of Babylonia by Cyrus II (539). It stands to reason that the Chronicle continued into later periods. The Chronicle names the Babylonian kings and records their regnal year totals as well as important events in each of their reigns. Recurring themes are military conflicts as well as cultic matters such as the observance of the Akitu festival. Chronicle 1 (ABC 1/CM 16) synchronizes as many as three ruler chronologies—Babylonia, Assyria, and Elam.<sup>7</sup> The chronicle dates the accession years and records the regnal year totals of the Assyrian and Elamite kings and also notes irregular changes of power, such as the assassination of Sennacherib (ABC 1, iii 34–35) or the various coups in Elam.

The Neo-Babylonian Chronicle has been praised for its seemingly neutral, even objective presentation but the perspective is clearly Babylonian.<sup>8</sup> Content-wise, it concentrates on military activities and religious occurrences that concern Babylonia directly or at least influence her fate, e.g., Humban-nikaš's I fight against Sargon II in which the Babylonian king Marduk-apla-iddin II wanted to participate (ABC 1, i 33–37) or the conflict of Sennacherib with Elam (ABC 1, ii 36–38), which led to instability in Babylonia. Activities of

Assyrian kings not directed against Babylonia itself are reported only for those years in which they also served as Babylonian rulers. Accordingly, the annual campaigns of Sargon II are only recorded for the period after his assumption of power in Babylonia (ABC 1, ii 1'–7'). The Babylonian focus can also be seen in the literary structure. The basic framework of the chronicle is provided by the sequence and the counting of the regnal years of the Babylonian rulers. The dating of specific events is consistently based on Babylonian regnal years. This applies without exception, also for the synchronized dates given for accessions or replacements of kings in Elam and Assyria. These form a specific class of events to be reported within the account of the reigns of the kings of Babylonia.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the abundance of chronological references pertaining to Elam and Assyria, the Neo-Babylonian Chronicle remains fundamentally an account of the history of Babylonia. The Elamite or Assyrian history are not recorded for their own right but selectively integrated into the representation of the Babylonian history, in so far as they are perceived as worth reporting within Babylonian history. The dating practice is solely based on the Babylonian regnal years. Moreover, the accessions of the Babylonian kings themselves are not dated by referring to the other ruler chronologies. In terms of content and structure, the Chronicle is therefore not a synchronistic composition. The manner of presentation, however, seems to indicate an awareness of the regional interconnectedness of the three kingdoms and their activities.

### 2.3. Mesopotamian Synchronistic Compositions

Besides synchronized dating practices, there also exist synchronistic compositions in a more narrow sense of the word. These include synchronistic king lists as well as the so-called Synchronistic History.

#### 2.3.1. Synchronistic King Lists

The synchronistic king lists form a small and distinctive group within the wider genre of Ancient Near Eastern king lists (Grayson 1980–1983, pp. 116–25). So far, they only attest to the kings of Assyria and Babylonia. Most of the extant documents (the majority of them very fragmentary) juxtapose in columns the names of the rulers of Assyria and Babylonia (occasionally supplemented by the names of high officials) but they do not indicate which kings ruled simultaneously. The Synchronistic King List (Grayson 1980–1983, pp. 116–21) is an exception. It not only records the succession of the kings of Assyria and Babylonia but also marks their chronological relationship. This is not produced via numerical data but by means of structural and graphic markers: kings whose reigns are considered to be parallel in time are arranged side by side—the name and title of the Assyrian king on the left, those of the Babylonian king on the right—and framed by horizontal lines. In the case of a succession of two or more kings of one series parallel to one reign in the other, the name of the longer-reigning king is repeated until all his contemporaries are listed. Horizontal lines complete the section.

Although the beginning of the list is not preserved, the summation note at the end (iv 17–20) indicates that the list contained 82 kings of Assyria from Irīšum to Assurbanipal and 98 kings of Babylonia from Sumulāilu to Kandalānu, covering a time period from the 19th century to the 7th century BCE. The list may well have been written during the reign of Assurbanipal since he is the last king mentioned (Grayson 1975, p. 134).

#### 2.3.2. The Synchronistic History

The Synchronistic History (ABC 21/CM 10) represents another genre. It is a highly structured narrative composition offering an account of Assyrian–Babylonian relations from the time of Puzur-Aššur III (first half of the 15th century) to Adad-nērārī III (810–783). The beginning is missing but the available fragments suggest that the historical review began with Puzur-Aššur or Aššur-bēl-nišešu (the first two sections are arranged in counter-chronological order) and followed a prologue praising the god Assur. The starting point of the narrative is a border treaty between these kings and their Babylonian counter-

parts. The following account enumerates a long sequence of breaches of the treaty by the Babylonian side, each of which resulted in military conflict until it could be ended in an Assyrian victory bringing renewed peace and a renewal of the border agreements—a recurring pattern up to the time of Adad-nērārī III.<sup>10</sup> The account is concluded by an epilogue (ABC 21, iv 23–30), which clearly states the purpose of the composition: it is to be written on a stela to enhance the glory of Assur and to keep the treachery of Babylonia in constant remembrance. The composition is structured by a repeated formula that reiterates what the author considers to be the ideal state of affairs:

<i>nišū<sup>meš</sup> kur Aššur<sup>kur</sup> Karduniaš</i>	The peoples of Assyria and Karduniaš
<i>itti aḥameš iballu</i>	were connected.
<i>mišru taḥumu ištēniš ukinnu</i>	They established the border by mutual agreement.

The Synchronistic History did not aim at a continuous presentation of history but rather a selective choice of events according to the intention stated in the epilogue. Accordingly, it does not mention all Assyrian or Babylonian kings from the selected period but only those who interacted with each other. The presentation is obviously tendentious and pro-Assyrian: breaches of contract and aggressions consistently start from the Babylonian side; the Assyrians always emerge victorious and establish peace.

### 2.3.3. Synchronistic Compositions and Their Pragmatics

It lies in the nature of lists that they are not very explicit regarding their purpose. While the Synchronistic King List may well share the legitimatory functions of the king list genre in general (presenting kingship as a venerable and indispensable institution existing since the dawn of time, legitimizing every single king by putting him into the time-honored line of successors), the juxtaposition of Babylonian and Assyrian kings goes beyond that. It is conceivable that the list owes itself to chronographic interests and is primarily concerned with showing which kings were contemporaries. However, there may be additional pragmatics. A.K. Grayson suggested that the list was meant to argue against too close a connection between the two monarchies (Grayson 1975, p. 117) but there are no signs of that. The entries for the kings who ruled over both kingdoms do not show any criticism or reservation.<sup>11</sup> Two of the entries in question have survived (Sennacherib and Esarhaddon), both are simply listed as “king of Assyria and Babylonia”. It is therefore more likely that the authors of the list did not want to problematize this situation at all, perhaps they even approved of it.

Thanks to the epilogue, the intention of the Synchronistic History is easier to grasp. It is written from an Assyrian point of view and throws harsh criticism at the Babylonians but it also illustrates what the author considers an ideal state: the peoples are united and live in peaceful coexistence within mutually respected borders. This state is made possible and guaranteed by the respective Assyrian king, especially against Babylonian troublemakers. Grayson (1975), in his interpretation, puts again more stress on the contrasts than the interconnections. He dates the composition to the later years of Adad-nērārī III and reads it as an attempt to encourage Assyria at a time when it came under pressure from the Babylonians.<sup>12</sup> Adad-nērārī III is indeed the last Assyrian king mentioned, therefore, his reign marks an indisputable *terminus a quo*. Of course, depending on the assessment of the pragmatics, a later time is also conceivable. A new military clash between Assyria and Babylonia is not documented until Tiglat-Pileser III, so for the direct successors of Adad-nērārī III there would have been nothing to report. A slightly later date is therefore tangible as well, and the composition could well have had other intentions, e.g., the legitimization of Assyrian rule in Babylonia which began with Tiglat-Pileser III.

Even if the dating and the pragmatics of the compositions cannot be clarified here—or even discussed in detail—some conclusions may be drawn. One is that chronological interests and political pragmatics should not be seen as exclusive but usually coincide. The Neo-Babylonian Chronicles with their synchronized accession year dates would be another example but basically, this applies to the chronographic genre as a whole.

When it comes to Mesopotamian synchronistic compositions, it remains striking that they are known only for Babylonia and Assyria, not for any other set of neighboring kingdoms. They depict or presuppose the history of Assyria and Babylonia as mutually inter-related. Despite its unmistakable polemic against the Babylonian rulers, the Synchronistic History sees Assyria and Babylonia as connected, each as an independent entity but nevertheless as belonging together and ideally coexisting peacefully with each other. Not least because of this, the question of whose dominance history will ultimately prove and legitimize is of such importance. Given the random nature of our data, the fact that synchronistic compositions are solely related to Assyria and Babylonia may be preliminary. On the other hand, it is not surprising that they are to be found here of all places. It has long been noted that Assyrian–Babylonian relations were of a specific and complex kind—a long story of counter- and coexistence—oscillating between being “sister nations” and in a fierce “Kulturkampf”.<sup>13</sup> The synchronistic compositions fit well into the picture, reflecting the mutual relatedness but also the conflictual relationship between Babylonia and Assyria.

### 3. The Book of Kings in Light of These Mesopotamian Compositions

Chapters 1 Kings 14–2 Kings 17 tell the history of the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel, which according to 1 Kings 12 both emerged out of the unified Davidic–Solomonic kingdom at the time of Solomon’s son Rehoboam. Section 2 Kings 17 reports Israel’s fall and integration into the Neo-Assyrian empire. The remaining chapters of 2 Kings focus on Judah and follow its history up to the Neo-Babylonian conquest of Judah and Jerusalem. The account in 1 Kings 14–2 Kings 17 is organized in a peculiar way, the reigns of the individual kings of Israel and Judah form literary units, which are arranged following a principle that was already described by Samuel R. Driver:

In the arrangement of the reigns of the two series of kings a definite principle is followed by the compiler. When the narrative of a reign (in either series) has once been begun, it is continued to its close . . . ; when it is ended, the reign or reigns of the other series, which have synchronized with it, are dealt with; the reign overlapping it at the end having been completed, the compiler resumes his narrative of the first series with the reign next following, and so on (Driver 1891, p. 179).

Thus, the narrative jumps back and forth from one kingdom to the other based on a chronological arrangement of the respective kings. The chronological data underlying the sequence is found in the regnal frame.

#### 3.1. Dating Patterns in the Regnal Frame

The regnal frame has been called the “skeleton” of the Book of Kings (Wellhausen 1875, p. 608). Its introductory formula<sup>14</sup> consists of six to eight distinctive elements, which introduce each new reign and thus provide a clearly discernable structure for the account in 1 Kings 14–2 Kings 17. These elements include:

1. The name of the king<sup>15</sup>;
2. A synchronized accession year date;
3. The king’s domain;
4. The king’s age at accession (only kings of Judah);
5. The regnal year total;
6. The place of residence;
7. Information on the king’s mother (only kings of Judah);
8. An evaluation based on the king’s cultic policies.

Synchronized accession year dates can obviously only be found in 1 Kings 14–2 Kings 17. With the end of the monarchy in Israel, this element necessarily disappears from the introductory formula for the Judahite kings; accordingly, Hezekiah is the last Judahite king whose introductory formula (2 Kings 18:1–3) contains a synchronized accession year

date.<sup>16</sup> The accession year dates are set out in a fixed form, which appears in two variants. The variants differ in the sequence of synchronism and the king’s name. One pattern places the synchronism in front of the name of the king:<sup>17</sup>

בשנה ... (שנה) ל ... (בן...) מלך ישראל/ יהודה	In the year ... of (, son of ... ,) king of Israel/Judah
מלך	began to reign
... בן ...	... (, son of ... )
ב/על ישראל/יהודה	in/over Israel/Judah

In the second pattern, the name of the king precedes the synchronism:<sup>18</sup>

... בן ...	... , son of ...
מלך	began to reign
על ישראל	over Israel
בשנה ... (שנה) ל ... מלך יהודה	in the year ... of ... king of Judah

In addition, there are minor deviations in detail (some of them indicated in the brackets) but these are neither significant in terms of content nor do they affect recognizability.<sup>19</sup>

These synchronized accession year dates form the structural backbone of the synchronistic composition. As an integral part of the regnal frame, they serve as a structuring element within the literary design of the composition and introduce each new section. They also elucidate the overall arrangement of the sections because these synchronized dates relate the two ruler sequences to each other and it becomes apparent which kings reigned at the same time, which changes of the throne in the neighboring kingdom fell within a reigning period, etc.

### 3.2. The Synchronistic Composition in Light of Its Ancient Near Eastern Counterparts

That Ancient Near Eastern chronographic literature shares many features with the Book of Kings is hardly surprising. Chronography is a written genre; the density of numbers, names, and details does not lend easily to oral tradition. Its primary institutional contexts are administrative (e.g., keeping annals or chronicles, dating treaties and records, etc.) and courtly (e.g., the legitimatory functions of king lists, annals, etc.), both of which are also connected to scribal culture and education.<sup>20</sup> As David Carr has shown, the education of professional scribes in the Ancient Near East is best described in an “oral-written educational-enculturational model” (Carr 2005, p. 292), which involved the immersion into and the internalization of extant texts, traditions, and genres as well as an intellectual world and mindset that was much broader than the small-scale political structures in Israel, Judah, or its immediate neighbors would suggest.<sup>21</sup> When it comes to scribal culture, overlaps between Israelite and Mesopotamian or even Egyptian traditions, genres, or conventions are the rule rather than the exception, and the Book of Kings can well be seen as an Israelite manifestation of a wider Ancient Near Eastern chronographic genre. This is especially true for the topics usually covered in chronographic compositions (Weingart 2020, pp. 95–102; cf. Weingart 2023). However, what can be said about the Book of Kings, specifically drawing on synchronized dating and synchronistic works as a comparator?

#### 3.2.1. Dating Formulas

In terms of wording and sequence, the Neo-Babylonian Chronicle offers an astonishing parallel to the synchronized accession year dates in the introductory formula. As the above-cited example from ABC 1, i 9 on the accession of an Elamite king illustrates, it runs closely parallel to the first of the two dating patterns in the introductory formula. Both share the same sequence: regnal year of the neighboring king, name of the king, and statement on the assumption of power.

בשנה ... (שנה) ל... (בן) מלך ישראל/יהודה	ABC 1, i 9–10 MU V <sup>d</sup> <i>Nabû-našir</i>
מלך	
... בן ...	<i>Ummanigaš</i>
ב/על ישראל/יהודה	<i>ina</i> <sup>kur</sup> <i>Elamti</i>
	<i>ina kussê ittašab</i>

The great similarity in the dating formula can hardly be a coincidence and has long been seen and discussed.<sup>22</sup> Some recent studies (Kratz 2000, p. 164; Blanco Wißmann 2008, pp. 213–23) want to explain it as a direct reception of the Neo-Babylonian Chronicle in the Book of Kings. However, one has to be cautious here; despite the similarity, there are also notable differences (cf. Weingart 2020, p. 118f.). One concerns the numerical data itself; while regnal year totals and accession year dates are recorded in both documents, the age at accession which the Book of Kings records for the Judahite kings has no equivalent in the Neo-Babylonian Chronicle. The other difference concerns the literary structure: As noted above, the Neo-Babylonian Chronicle contains synchronized dates for the accession of Assyrian and Elamite kings but not for the Babylonian kings whose reigns stand in the focus of the composition and whose regnal years provide its basic framework. The accessions of the neighboring kings appear among other events as occurrences in the reign of each king. Unlike in the Book of Kings, a synchronized date does not mark the opening of a new section in the literary structure. While the dating formulas resemble each other, the narratives differ in their overall structure. In addition, the parallels can also result from factual reasons. Such a set of data allows only a limited number of possibilities in its presentation. If the languages in question also have comparable syntactic structures, similarities are to be expected. So, the close proximity in the dating formulae probably does not point to the direct processing of a specific text but is rather due to a shared genre and/or factual similarities.

### 3.2.2. Synchronistic Structures

When it comes to a comprehensive synchronistic compilation of two ruler chronologies, the Book of Kings has its closest parallel in the Synchronistic King List. Here, two sequences of rulers are related to each other, detailing which kings were contemporaneous, which reigns overlapped, etc. However, compared to the Book of Kings, the Synchronistic King List uses a different way to convey this information. It lacks any numerical data, compiles the names in columns, and applies graphic means (alignment of names, horizontal lines) to express the temporal relations. As a list, it lacks any further information or significant narrative portions.

The Synchronistic History, on the other hand, is not a combination of two historical lines in the strict sense. It rather treats Assyrian–Babylonian relations as a shared history and brings the events in chronological order. However, it does not tell the Assyrian or Babylonian history, let alone both of them, in their own right. Although, like the Book of Kings, it uses a formulaic element to structure the account; there it is the regnal frame, here it is the recurring statement of consensuality mentioned above. In addition, the selective and tendentious nature of the composition also reminds us of the Book of Kings. The Synchronistic History picks out episodes of Assyrian–Babylonian conflict and presents them in a way that puts blame on the Babylonians. It is a well-known characteristic of the Book of Kings that it has a strong focus on the religious policies of the kings and evaluates them according to criteria remindful of Deuteronomy 12 which does not easily align with Ancient Near Eastern royal ideology in general.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, it shows a certain Judahite bias, which leads to a consistently negative assessment of the Israelite kings while there are at least some positive examples in Judah (David, Hezekiah, Josiah, etc.). The selection of the material is (as always) necessarily connected to the pragmatics of the compositions.

#### 4. Results: An Expression of Interrelatedness

The comparison of ANE chronographic compositions containing synchronized accession year dates or synchronistically relating ruler sequences with the synchronistic history in the Book of Kings points on one hand to parallels. Similar dating forms and also a comparable use of structural markers (recurring formulaic elements) are discernable. Both do not seem to point to literary dependencies but rather to factual commonalities or a shared literary genre. On the other hand, there is no direct equivalent to the synchronistic composition in 1 Kings 14–2 Kings 17. This pertains to the specific numerical data in the regnal frame (elsewhere, synchronized accession year dates are not given for the kings whose sequence is the structural backbone of the composition and no other known Mesopotamian chronographic document records the kings' age at accession). It also pertains to the unique narrative structure of the Book of Kings, the mutually interlocked presentation of the histories of the two neighboring kingdoms which integrates the parallel threads into a linear narrative composition. It has a structural parallel in the Synchronistic King List but—so far—there is no directly comparable narrative composition.

While there is no direct counterpart to the Book of Kings, the comparison is instructive in another regard. Martin Noth, in his seminal study on Deuteronomistic History, suggested that the Deuteronomist sought to present the history of Israel as a self-contained process beginning with the Exodus and leading to the destruction of Jerusalem (Noth 1943, p. 103). In this process, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah belong together in a shared history of sin, which inevitably brought about God's judgment. The contrary and ramified debates about the DtrH, its literary history, or even its existence need not concern us here but Noth's observation that in the Book of Kings Israel and Judah are connected to a shared history of sin remains valid in many respects. The evaluations of the kings of Israel and Judah are interlinked through explicit references (cf. the references to the offenses of the kings of Israel in the evaluations of the kings of Judah in 2 Kings 8:18f., 27; 16:2–4) but also at a deeper, systematic level (so already and fundamentally (Hoffmann 1980), and more recently (Lee 2018)). The same applies to the comprehensive reflection on the common history of sins of both kingdoms in 2 Kings 17:7–23. Its lengthy catalog of sins combines offenses from Israel and Judah and thus justifies the parallel, albeit time-delayed, fate of both kingdoms (Hoffmann 1980, p. 133; Weingart 2014, p. 64).

For Noth, the synchronistic chronology basically served as literary means to link the histories of both kingdoms.<sup>24</sup> When it comes to the structure of the book, he is certainly right. With its interplay of synchronized dating and interlocked representation, the author of the Book of Kings created a composition unique to the Ancient Near East. Both aspects belong together, the synchronistic chronology and the narrative sequence are inseparable, and the latter necessarily presupposes the former.<sup>25</sup> However, the comparison to the ANE counterparts shows, that their significance goes beyond the structural aspect. It is rather to be understood as a specific expression of an idea that is also tangible in the Assyrian–Babylonian synchronistic compositions, namely that they build upon a concept of underlying mutual connectedness within a shared history. In the Synchronistic History, the concept shines through in the way the ideal state of affairs of Assyrian–Babylonian relations is imagined. For the Synchronistic King List, the most sophisticated example of the synchronistic king list genre, the specific bond between Assyria and Babylonia is marked by the fact that these synchronistic lists are only to be found for these two kingdoms. In choosing this peculiar way of presenting the history of Israel and Judah, the author of the Book of Kings adds another building block to his argument: the structure itself presents the fates of two kingdoms as one of complex togetherness, i.e., based on a bond standing behind each specific line of development and also transcending the conflicts that arose again and again.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Important collections of Mesopotamian chronographic compositions are (Grayson 1975) = ABC; (Glassner 2005) = CM; (Finkel and van der Sprek 2004ff.) = BCHP (preliminary publication online <http://livius.org/babylonia.html> (accessed on 5 March 2023)).
- <sup>2</sup> A few examples might suffice: the Egyptian *gnwt* records the annual heights of the Nile floods (Redford 1986, pp. 65–96), other chronographic compositions list market prices (ABC 23), deliveries of fish to the Marduk-temple (ABC 19), disturbances of the Akitu-festival (ABC 16), recurring omnia in chronological order (ABC 17), or collect years with lunar eclipses (Grayson 1975, p. 195f.).
- <sup>3</sup> For a broader comparison of ANE chronographic literature and the Book of Kings, see (Weingart 2020, pp. 85–121).
- <sup>4</sup> For an overview, see (Weingart 2020, Appendix III).
- <sup>5</sup> For identifying specific days, the situation changes; the fixed months and the counting of their days provided a text-external and absolute reference chronology. Accordingly, dating a certain event within a regnal year is much more common, cf. among others ABC 1, i 27; i 31; ABC 2, 14–15 for accession dates or ABC 1, ii 46–47; iii 21; iii 36–37; iv 5–6; iv 16; ABC 2, 29, etc. for other events.
- <sup>6</sup> Possibly, there was also an explicit note for Salmanassar’s V assumption of power in the year 727 BCE but text preserved in B37 is very fragmentary, vgl. (Millard 1994, p. 59).
- <sup>7</sup> Starting with Tiglat-Pileser III, the Assyrian rulers were partly also kings of Babylonia.
- <sup>8</sup> So, e.g., (Grayson 1975, p. 10f.): “The Weltanschauung of the authors of this series is parochial in that they are interested only in matters related to Babylonia and, in particular, her king. But this narrow outlook does not affect the manner in which the events are narrated. Within the boundaries of their interest the writers are quite objective and impartial.”
- <sup>9</sup> Particularly striking in this regard is how the change from Īumban-ĥaltaš I to Īumban-ĥaltaš II in Elam (ABC 1, iii 30–33) and the assassination of Sennacherib (ABC 1, iii 34–35) are dated. The chronicle records these events “in the 8th year of the period without a king in Babylonia” (iii 28). Even without a king, the count of regnal years in Babylonia is retained as a basic structure.
- <sup>10</sup> Compared to the Assyrian King List (see Grayson 1980–1983, pp. 101–15; CM 5; Yamada 1994), the Synchronistic History deviates regarding the names and the sequence of several kings (see, Brinkman 1976, pp. 6–34).
- <sup>11</sup> In the case of Sennacherib, a brief and only partially preserved narrative section explains that he ruled as king in Babylonia until he was replaced in a revolt (iv 3–6). Sennacherib’s and Essarhaddon’s entries and title “king of Assyria and Babylonia” spans both columns (iv 10.12). For other relevant kings, the list is not preserved, the entire section for the period between Salmanassar III and Sennacherib is missing.
- <sup>12</sup> Grayson (1975, p. 53) argues that at the beginning of the 8th cent. BCE, Assyria was in conflict with Urartu and Babylonia profited from the situation. In this situation, the author of the Synchronistic history “attempted to rally his countrymen to action by showing that whenever the Babylonians had violated this agreement in the past, they had been effectively repulsed by the Assyrians”. The supposed enmity between Assyria and Babylonia in this period is not confirmed in any known source, it is rather inferred by Grayson from this composition.
- <sup>13</sup> See for the former (Nissinen and Parpola 2004, p. 214): “Until Sennacherib’s destruction of Babylon, it had been the normal Assyrian ideology to view Assyria and Babylonia as sister nations—if not a single nation—under one ruler.” The term “Kulturkampf” was applied by Machinist (1978, p. 522) to describe the long-lasting Assyrian struggle with Babylonia for hegemony over the prestigious cultural heritage of Mesopotamia which was led to extremes by Sennacherib and Esarhaddon in the late 8th and 7th cent. BCE. See also (Vera Chamaza 2002; Na’aman 2010; or Nielsen 2012).
- <sup>14</sup> Its counterpart is the closing formula which stands at the end of the description of each reigning period. It includes a source reference, a note on the death and burial of the king, as well as the name of the successor.
- <sup>15</sup> The only ruling queen Ataliah (2 Kings 11) has no regnal frame, chronological data, and evaluation. The regular regnal frame is also missing for the Israelite king Jehu, his chronological data appear at the end of his account in 2 Kings 10:35f.
- <sup>16</sup> Not the introductory formula itself but its numerical data for Hezekiah are connected to one of the many chronological conundrums in the Book of Kings, see (Weingart 2018).
- <sup>17</sup> This is the most common dating pattern. It is usually used for the Judahite kings up to Hezekiah: Abijam (1 Kings 15:1), Asa (1 Kings 15:9), Jehoram (2 Kings 8:16), Ahaziah (2 Kings 8:25), Jehoash (2 Kings 12:2 with a slightly different sequence), Amaziah (2 Kings 14:1), Azariah (2 Kings 15:1), Jotham (2 Kings 15:32), Ahaz (2 Kings 16:1), and Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:1). Rehoboam (1 Kings 14:21) does not have a synchronized accession date. It is also used for twelve Israelite kings: Baasha (1 Kings 15:33), Elah (1 Kings 16:8), Zimri (1 Kings 16:15), Omri (1 Kings 16:23), Jehoahaz (2 Kings 13:1), Jehoash (2 Kings 13:10), Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:23), Zechariah (2 Kings 15:8), Menahem (2 Kings 15:17), Pekahiah (2 Kings 15:23), Pekah (2 Kings 15:27), and Hoshea (2 Kings 17:1).
- <sup>18</sup> The introductory formulae of five of the nineteen kings of Israel apply this pattern: Nadav (1 Kings 15:25), Ahab (1 Kings 16:29), Ahaziah (1 Kings 22:52), Jehoram (2 Kings 3:1), and Shallum (2 Kings 15:13). It is also found for the Judahite king Jehoshaphat (1 Kings 22:41).

- <sup>19</sup> A closer look at the entire introductory formulae beyond the dating patterns, shows that further differentiation is appropriate (see already, Bin-Nun 1968). The first pattern is encountered in two forms, one for the kings of Judah and one for the kings of Israel. These two forms differ in the order of the remaining elements, the syntactic structure, and the data included. Probably, the second pattern mentioned above owes its origin to the adoption from an older synchronized list of Israelite kings, while the two versions of the first pattern were more or less created by the author of the Books of Kings (Weingart 2020, pp. 124–37). Since these questions do not directly concern the dating formulae and the synchronistic structure of the Books of Kings, they need not be pursued further here.
- <sup>20</sup> For institutional contexts, see, e.g., (Jamieson-Drake 1991), or the more recent discussion in (Richelle 2016) and (Blum 2019).
- <sup>21</sup> On scribal education, see also (van der Toorn 2007).
- <sup>22</sup> See among others already (Lewy 1927, pp. 7–9; Aharoni 1950, p. 93; Jepsen 1953, p. 108).
- <sup>23</sup> Evaluated by other criteria such as military or diplomatic success, economic development, etc., the most criticized kings including Ahab or Manasseh would appear in a different light. On royal ideology in Judah, see, e.g., (Salo 2017).
- <sup>24</sup> (Noth 1943, p. 74): “In den Königsbüchern [bildet] das aus Regierungszahlen und Synchronismen bestehende Datenwerk den einzigen lückenlosen Zusammenhang und die einzige ständige Verbindung zwischen den beiden Linien der israelitischen und jüdischen Könige.”
- <sup>25</sup> If one goes further back into the literary history of the Book of Kings, it becomes clear that the synchronistic composition is a creation of its author but synchronized accession year dates were already present in one of his *Vorlagen*. Literary historical indicators, as well as the numerical data, point to the fact that a synchronized chronicle of the kings of Israel was one of the sources underlying 1 Kings 14–2 Kings 17 (see Weingart 2020).

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