UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

https://helda.helsinki.fi

The Literary-Historical Memory of Sargon of Akkad in Assyria as the Background for Nimrod in Genesis 10:8-12

Jones, Christopher W.

2022
Society of Biblical Literature
http://hdl.handle.net/10138/578773
Jones, C W 2022, 'The Literary-Historical Memory of Sargon of Akkad in Assyria as the Background for Nimrod in Genesis 10:8-12', Journal of Biblical Literature, vol. 141, no. 4, pp. 595-615. https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1414.2022.1

Downloaded from Helda, University of Helsinki institutional repository. https://helda.helsinki.fi
This is an electronic reprint of the original article.
This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.
Please cite the original version.

JBL 141, no. 4 (2022): 595–615
https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1414.2022.1

The Literary-Historical Memory of Sargon of Akkad in Assyria as the Background for Nimrod in Genesis 10:8–12

CHRISTOPHER W. JONES
christopher.jones@columbia.edu
University of Helsinki, Centre of Excellence in Ancient Near Eastern Empires
00014 University of Helsinki, Finland

The figure of Nimrod in Gen 10:8–12 remains enigmatic: while the passage clearly depicts a Mesopotamian figure, no consensus has been reached on attempts to identify Nimrod with any historical or mythological character. I argue that the passage dates from the mid-seventh century and should be understood in light of the literary-historical memory of Sargon of Akkad and the Akkad dynasty then circulating in the Neo-Assyrian Empire. With royal support, Assyrian court scholars used omens, chronicles, epics, and geographic lists to present the Neo-Assyrian Empire of the seventh century as the heir to the legacy of Sargon's empire a millennium and a half earlier, a process that culminated in the refounding of the city of Akkad by Esarhaddon in 674 BCE. The identification of Assyria with Sargon of Akkad served as an ideological justification for imperialism, and the Nimrod pericope should be understood as a response to and a critique of Assyrian imperial ideology.

The Nimrod pericope in Gen 10:8–12 has long been recognized as an interpolation into the Table of Nations in Gen 10. While material originating from the Priestly source can be readily identified in Gen 10 through its use of verbless lists, the rest of the chapter has typically been assigned to the J or non-Priestly source. Even among the varied non-P material in Gen 10 the Nimrod passage is distinctive, describing an individual figure who founds cities rather than fathering

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in 2019 in San Diego, California. I would like to thank my adviser Prof. Marc Van De Mieroop for reading a draft of this paper and offering comments and suggestions. This project grew from a seminar on historical memory in the ancient Near East, and I would like to thank my classmates Mallory Ditchey and Jacob Stavis for generously sharing the resources they created. I would also like to thank Robin Ten Hoopen for further reading suggestions, Susan Hylen and the reviewers for helpful editorial comments, and Teresa Imfeld at the Ellison Library at Warren Wilson College for extensive research assistance.

This article was published in *JBL* 141/4 (2022) 595–615, copyright © 2022 by the Society of Biblical Literature. To purchase copies of this issue or to subscribe to *JBL*, please contact SBL Customer Service by phone at 866-727-9955 [toll-free in North America] or 404-727-9498, by fax at 404-727-2419, or visit the online SBL Store at www.sbl-site.org.

descendants.[1] As a result, most scholars have identified the passage as originating from a source different from other J or non-P material in Gen 10.[2] Accepting that Gen 10:8–12 likely has an independent origin from the rest of the material in the Table of Nations, I will first use the list of cities contained in the pericope to narrow the possible date range to the seventh century BCE. After discussing the inadequacy of previous suggestions for the identity of Nimrod, I will examine the production and political use of literary-historical texts related to the Akkad dynasty in the late Neo-Assyrian Empire before offering a synthesis to understand the Nimrod pericope as a response to Assyrian imperial ideology.

I. Genesis 10:8–12: Dating the Pericope

The Nimrod pericope contains a statement of Nimrod's significance (v. 8), a popular saying (v. 9) and a city list (vv. 10–12). The city list provides our best internal evidence for dating the passage, while verses 8–9 provide clues to the origins and purpose of the pericope.[3]

וכוש ילד את־נמרד הוא החל להיות גבר בארץ: הוא־היה גבר־ציד לפני יהוה על־כן יאמר כנמרד גבור ציד לפני יהוה: ותהי ראשית ממלכתו בבל וארך ואכד וכלנה בארץ שנער: מן־הארץ ההוא יצא אשור ויבן את־נינוה ואת־רחבת עיר ואת־כלח: ואת־רסן בין נינוה ובין כלח הוא העיר הגדלה:

[8]Kush begat Nimrod. He was the first to be a mighty warrior on the earth. [9]He was a mighty hunter before YHWH, which is why it is said, "like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before YHWH." [10]The beginnings of his kingdom were Babylon, Uruk, and Akkad, all of them in the land of Shinar. [11]From that land he went out

[1] David M. Carr, *The Formation of Genesis 1–11: Biblical and Other Precursors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 189–91.

[2] Carr, *Formation of Genesis 1–11*, 178–99; John Day, "In Search of Nimrod: Problems in the Interpretation of Genesis 10:8–12," in *"What Mean These Stones?" Essays on Texts, Philology, and Archaeology in Honour of Anthony J. Frendo*, ed. Dennis Mizzi, Nicholas C. Vella, and Martin R. Zammit, ANESSup 50 (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 95–110, here 95; Israel Knohl, "Nimrod, Son of Cush, King of Mesopotamia, and the Dates of P and J," in *Birkat Shalom: Studies in the Bible, Ancient Near Eastern Literature, and Postbiblical Judaism Presented to Shalom M. Paul on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Chaim Cohen et al., 2 vols. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 1:45–52, here 46–48; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15,* WBC 1 (Dallas: Word, 1987), 213–22; J. Simons, "The 'Table of Nations' (Gen. X): Its General Structure and Meaning," *OtSt* 10 (1954): 155–84, here 163–65; James Grau Jr., "The Gentiles in Genesis: Israel and the Nations in the Primeval and Patriarchal Histories" (PhD diss., Southern Methodist University, 1980), 28; but cf. John Van Seters, who argues that most of Gen 10 originally belonged to J before Priestly material was edited into it at a later date (*The Yahwist: A Historian of Israelite Origins* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013], 28–32).

[3] All translations are my own.

This article was published in *JBL* 141/4 (2022) 595–615, copyright © 2022 by the Society of Biblical Literature. To purchase copies of this issue or to subscribe to *JBL*, please contact SBL Customer Service by phone at 866-727-9955 [toll-free in North America] or 404-727-9498, by fax at 404-727-2419, or visit the online SBL Store at www.sbl-site.org.

> to Assyria and founded Nineveh and Rehoboth-Ir, and Kalah, [12]and Resen between Nineveh and Kalah, that is the great city.

The statement in verse 8 that Nimrod was the first warrior is likely the work of the editor who compiled the passage into the Primeval History, as the use of the verb חלל in the *hiphil* is consistent with other uses of the same verb elsewhere in Gen 1–11 to refer to an individual becoming the first to do something (Gen 4:26, 6:1, 9:20).[4] The phrase על־כן יאמר ("this is why it is said") in verse 9 is used elsewhere in the Pentateuch and Deuteronomistic History to introduce popular sayings, and indicates that the editor was drawing on material in wider circulation rather than inventing a new character.[5]

The presence of a popular tradition linking Nimrod with Assyria is supported by Mic 5:4b–5, a short composition that equates Nimrod with Assyria via poetic seconding.[6]

> אשור כי־יבוא בארצנו וכי ידרך בארמנתינו והקמנו עליו שבעה רעים ושמנה נסיכי אדם: ורעו את־ארץ אשור בחרב ואת־ארץ נמרד בפתחיה והציל מאשור כי־יבוא בארצנו וכי ידרך בגבולנו:

> [4b]When Assyria enters into our land, and walks in our palaces, we will raise against him seven shepherds, and eight tribal leaders of men. [5]They will graze the land of Assyria with a sword, the land of Nimrod with a dagger. He will deliver (us) from Assyria when he enters into our land, and walks in our territory.

Micah 4:9–5:12 is generally recognized as containing a variety of superficially connected materials of uncertain date.[7] No consensus has been reached on the date of the passage or its relation to the rest of the book.[8] Many have argued that the

[4]See Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 222–23.

[5]See Num 21:14, 27; 1 Sam 19:24; 2 Sam 5:8; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15,* 223.

[6]For the emendation of בִּפְתָּחֶיהָ to בַּפְּתָיְחָה, see Charles S. Shaw, *The Speeches of Micah: A Rhetorical-Historical Analysis,* JSOTSup 145 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 130 n. 4. The translation "dagger" is based on clear seconding of חרב in the previous line.

[7]Shaw, *Speeches of Micah*, 131–38; Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Micah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,* AB 24E (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 480–81. For arguments that this passage was originally an incantation text, see Jan A. Wagenaar, *Judgement and Salvation: The Composition and Redaction of Micah 2–5,* VTSup 85 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 298–300; for arguments for its origins as a parenthetical comment, see Hans Walter Wolff, *Micah: A Commentary,* trans. Gary Stansell, CC (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990), 147. For an overview of scholarly debates on the literary coherence of Micah, see Mignon R. Jacobs, "Bridging the Times: Trends in Micah Studies since 1985," *CurBR* 4 (2006): 293–29, as well as Jacobs, *The Conceptual Coherence of the Book of Micah,* JSOTSup 322 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 16–45, 60–62; Kenneth H. Cuffey, *The Literary Coherence of the Book of Micah: Remnant, Restoration, and Promise*, LHBOTS 611 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015).

[8]Proposed dates range from the late eighth to the fourth century BCE; see overview in Antoon Schoors, *The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries B.C.E.,* trans. Michael Lesley, BibEnc 5 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 177–80.

This article was published in *JBL* 141/4 (2022) 595–615, copyright © 2022 by the Society of Biblical Literature. To purchase copies of this issue or to subscribe to *JBL*, please contact SBL Customer Service by phone at 866-727-9955 [toll-free in North America] or 404-727-9498, by fax at 404-727-2419, or visit the online SBL Store at www.sbl-site.org.

passage is postexilic and interpret Assyria as a metonym for whatever enemy was threatening Israel at the time it was written.[9] Regardless of its date, the passage suggests that later Israelite readers of the Table of Nations would have understood a link between Nimrod and the Neo-Assyrian Empire that had threatened Judah in the eighth and seventh centuries.

The toponyms of the city list in Gen 10:10–12 provide additional evidence connecting Nimrod with Assyria as well as the best evidence for dating the pericope. Unfortunately, several of the names—Kalneh in verse 10, Rehoboth-Ir in verse 11, and Resen in verse 12—are obscure and match no known ancient or modern toponyms. W. F. Albright's suggestion to repoint כַּלְנֵה ("Kalneh") in verse 10 as כֻּלָּנָה ("all of them") has gained wide acceptance and has been supported by evidence from Samaritan reading traditions.[10] The identities of Rehoboth-Ir and Resen are less clear. In the Hebrew Bible the verb רחב is used with the general sense "to become broad, wide," and the noun רחוב in the context of a city refers to a wide street, a type of public space where an assembly could gather and where community life takes place.[11] The Hebrew is a clear cognate of the Akkadian term *rebītu*.[12] The prism inscriptions of Sennacherib frequently used *rebītu* when describing that king's massive expansion of Nineveh into a new royal capital after 704 BCE, saying that previous kings had not been concerned with *ana šutēšur sūqi āli ū šumdul rebâti,* "the straightening of its streets and the widening of its *rebâti*."[13] By contrast, Sennacherib claimed *ša Ninua āl bēlūtiya šubatsu ušrabbi rebâtišu ušandilma birēti ū sūqāni ušpardima unammir kīma ūme,* "I enlarged Nineveh, city of the seat of my rulership. I widened its *rebâti* and brought light into its streets and alleyways, making them bright as day."[14] Nineveh's two types of streets also appear in Nahum's prophecy of doom for that city in Nah 2:5, which states, בחוצות יתהוללו הרכב ישתקשקון ברחבות, "In the alleyways chariotry will drive madly, they will charge

[9] Wagenaar, *Judgement and Salvation,* 300; Jacobs, *Conceptual Coherence of the Book of Micah,* 154–55.

[10] W. F. Albright, "The End of 'Calneh in Shinar,'" *JNES* 3 (1944): 254–55; John Alexander Thompson, "Samaritan Evidence for 'All of Them in the Land of Shinar' (Gen 10:10)," *JBL* 90 (1971): 99–102, https://doi.org/10.2307/3262990.

[11] R. Bartelmus, "רְחוֹב," *TDOT* 13:427–36; see Ezra 10:9; and Neh 8:1, where a רחוב serves as a site of public assembly; see also Neh 8:16, Esth 4:6, 6:9, which describe a רחוב as a major thoroughfare connected to a city gate.

[12] Speiser, *Genesis*, 68; Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, part 2, *From Noah to Abraham,* trans. Israel Abrahams (1964; repr., Skokie, IL: Varda, 2005), 203; Thorkild Jacobsen, "Rehoboth-Ir," *IDB* 4:31; Jack Sasson, "Reḥōvōt 'ir," *RB* 90 (1983): 94–96.

[13] A. Kirk Grayson and Jamie Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704–681 BC), Part 1,* RINAP 3/1 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), no. 1 line 69, no. 3 line 40, no. 4 line 67, pp. 37, 53, 67.

[14] Grayson and Novotny, *Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, Part 1,* no 1 line 92, no. 2 line 68, no. 3 line 61, no. 4 line 89, no. 16 col. vii line 77, no. 17 col. viii line 14, pp. 40, 47, 55, 68, 123, 144.

This article was published in *JBL* 141/4 (2022) 595–615, copyright © 2022 by the Society of Biblical Literature. To purchase copies of this issue or to subscribe to *JBL*, please contact SBL Customer Service by phone at 866-727-9955 [toll-free in North America] or 404-727-9498, by fax at 404-727-2419, or visit the online SBL Store at www.sbl-site.org.

back and forth in the broad streets." Here the term רחבות appears to be identical in meaning to *rebītu*, referring to broad streets in Nineveh. Rehoboth-Ir, therefore, would seem to refer not to an independent toponym but to an aspect of the city of Nineveh that was mentioned prominently in Assyrian royal inscriptions only after 704 BCE.

The identity of Resen in verse 12 remains enigmatic. It is clear that there was no large city located between Kalhu and Nineveh in ancient times.[15] Attempts to identify Resen with the Akkadian word *risnu* or the city of Dur-Sharrukin (modern Khorsabad) remain unconvincing.[16] The adjective *risnu* does not refer to irrigation channels, as sometimes claimed, but was used to describe soaking materials for tanning.[17] Etymologically extracting Resen from Dur-Sharrukin requires positing herculean feats of scribal damage to the text.[18]

The most enticing possibility connects Resen with the little-known town of Rēš-ēni, mentioned in two administrative texts from Šibaniba (modern Tell Billa) as well as in Sennacherib's inscription at the canal locks at Bavian.[19] The site has been identified with the modern site of Ra's al-Ain, located near the source of a spring in the foothills just north of Dur-Sharrukin.[20] This spring was incorporated into a massive public works project designed to supply the new capital of Nineveh with sufficient water. The project involved diverting numerous springs as well as the construction of major canals diverting water from the Tigris and Gomel Rivers

[15] Victor Hurowitz, "In Search of Resen (Genesis 10:12): Dūr-Šarrukīn?," in Cohen et al., *Birkat Shalom*, 511–24, here 518.

[16] For arguments in favor of linking Resen and *risnu,* see Walter Bührer, "Nimrod coram Domino – Nimrod coram Israhel: Inhalt und Tendenz der Nimrod-Notiz Gen 10:8-12," *BN* 173 (2017): 3–22, here 6; Edward Lipiński, "Nimrod et Aššur," *RB* 73 (1966): 77–93, here 85–86; for a refutation, see Hurowitz, "In Search of Resen," 516–17. For identifying Resen with Dur-Sharrukin, see Terry Fenton, "Nimrod's Cities: An Item from the Rolling Corpus," in *Genesis, Isaiah, and Psalms: A Festschrift to Honour Professor John Emerton for His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Katharine J. Dell, Graham Davies, and Yee Von Koh, VTSup 135 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 23–31, here 28; Hurowitz, "In Search of Resen," 511–24.

[17] *CAD* 14, s.v. "risnu"; Hurowitz, "In Search of Resen," 517.

[18] The changes proposed by Fenton ("Nimrod's Cities," 28–31) to transform דר־סרגן into רסן would require dropping the first three consonants and then a scribal error changing a ג into a ס, even though these two letters bear no resemblance in either block script or in Paleo-Hebrew.

[19] Jacob J. Finkelstein, "Cuneiform Texts from Tell Billa," *JCS* 7 (1953): 111–76, here 139–40, no. 77 line 5, no. 82 line 13; A. Kirk Grayson and Jamie Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704–681 BC), Part 2,* RINAP 3/2 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), no. 223 line 9, p. 313. The link between Resen and the town of Rēš-ēni was first proposed by Eberhard Nestle, "Resen in Genesis 10," *ZDMG* 58 (1904): 158–60; and more recently by Hurowitz, "In Search of Resen," 518.

[20] Thorkild Jacobsen and Seton Lloyd, *Sennacherib's Aqueduct at Jerwan,* OIP 24 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935), 39–40.

This article was published in *JBL* 141/4 (2022) 595–615, copyright © 2022 by the Society of Biblical Literature. To purchase copies of this issue or to subscribe to *JBL*, please contact SBL Customer Service by phone at 866-727-9955 [toll-free in North America] or 404-727-9498, by fax at 404-727-2419, or visit the online SBL Store at www.sbl-site.org.

into the Khosr. This last feat involved the construction of an aqueduct at Jerwan, which carried water perpendicularly across another river impeding the route.[21] Sennacherib's son Esarhaddon further expanded the canals by constructing a rock-cut tunnel at Negub to bring water from the Upper Zab to Kalhu.[22] The landscape around the canals was marked with monuments, sculptures, and royal inscriptions that emphasized the king's role in providing prosperity and order to his royal cities.[23] The link between kingship and waterworks would have been intuitively grasped by the people of Judah in the seventh century due to the many smaller-scale water systems built by kings in the cities of the southern Levant.[24]

It remains difficult to see why the compiler of Gen 10:12 would list the obscure village of Rēš-ēni alongside the great cities of Nineveh and Kalhu, much less describe it as a "great city."[25] It is more likely that Resen, like Rehoboth-Ir, is derived

[21] Jason Ur, "Sennacherib's Northern Assyrian Canals: New Insights from Satellite Imagery and Aerial Photography," *Iraq* 67 (2005): 317–45; T. J. Wilkinson et al., "Landscape and Settlement in the Neo-Assyrian Empire," *BASOR* 340 (2005): 23–56, here 25–32.

[22] Christopher J. Davey, "The Negub Tunnel," *Iraq* 47 (1985): 49–55; Ariel M. Bagg, "Assyrian Hydraulic Engineering: Tunneling in Assyria and Technological Transfer," in *Men of Dikes and Canals: The Archaeology of Water in the Middle East; International Symposium Held at Petra, Wadi Musa (H. K. of Jordan) 15–20 June, 1999*, ed. Hans-Dieter Bienert and Jutta Häser, Orient-Archäologie 13 (Rahden, Westphalia: VML, 2004), 355–64, here 355–56.

[23] Maria Grazia Masetti-Rouault, "The King and the Canal: Development of a Literary Image in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions," in *Water for Assyria,* ed. Hartmut Kühne, Studia Chaburensia 7 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2018), 25–40; Mario Liverani, *Assyria: The Imperial Mission*, MC 20 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2017), 165–78; Douglas J. Green, *"I Undertook Great Works": The Ideology of Domestic Achievements in West Semitic Royal Inscriptions,* FAT 2/41 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 52–80.

[24] Jonathan Kaplan, "The Mesha Inscription and Iron Age II Water Systems," *JNES* 69 (2010): 23–29; Arthur Jan Keefer, "Proverbs 21:1 and Ancient Near Eastern Hydrology," *VT* 71 (2021): 205–18; Green, *"I Undertook Great Works"*, 130–31.

[25] Hurowitz's suggestion that the name served as a pseudonym for Dur-Sharrukin due to Assyrian discomfort with mentioning the abandoned capital by name after Sargon II's untimely death in 705 BCE cannot be supported, as the city continued to be inhabited and active until the end of the empire in 612 BCE and is frequently mentioned in Assyrian documents from the seventh century. See Steven W. Cole and Peter Machinist, eds., *Letters from Priests to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal,* SAA 13 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1998), nos. 92:4.3, 99:4. 2, 114:15′, pp. 78, 81–82, 88–89; *Legal Transactions of the Royal Court of Nineveh,* part 1, *Tiglath-Pileser III through Esarhaddon*, ed. Theodore Kwasman and Simo Parpola, SAA 6 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1991), no. 340:r. 4′, p. 279; *Legal Transactions of the Royal Court of Nineveh,* part 2, *Assurbanipal through Sin-sarru-iskun*, ed. Raija Mattila, SAA 14 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2002), nos. 69:4, 220:r. 4, pp. 71, 174; *The Political Correspondence of Esarhaddon,* ed. Mikko Luukko and Greta Van Buylaere, SAA 16 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2002), no. 79:7, p. 76. Governors of Dur-Sharrukin served as eponyms in 693, 672, 664, and in the postcanonical period. See Alan Millard, *The Eponyms of the Assyrian Empire, 910–612 BC*, SAA 2 (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1994), 61, 95, 97–98, 103, 121; but note the caution in I. L. Finkel and J. E. Reade that some of these individuals could have been governors

This article was published in *JBL* 141/4 (2022) 595–615, copyright © 2022 by the Society of Biblical Literature. To purchase copies of this issue or to subscribe to *JBL*, please contact SBL Customer Service by phone at 866-727-9955 [toll-free in North America] or 404-727-9498, by fax at 404-727-2419, or visit the online SBL Store at www.sbl-site.org.

not from the village of Rēš-ēni but from the etymology of the toponym itself. In Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, *rēš ēni,* literally "head of the spring," was used to refer to the source of a spring or river.[26] Resen therefore may refer to the sources of the canal system that stretched from the Khosr to the Upper Zab, irrigating the land between Nineveh and Kalhu. At some point the original meaning of Rehoboth-Ir and Resen were lost, which led to their being reinterpreted as toponyms marked with direct object markers alongside Nineveh and Kalhu.[27] While a conclusive identification of Resen is not necessary for the main thesis of this article, the possibility that Resen refers to the post-704 BCE water supply networks of Nineveh and Kalhu would explain why the toponym is located between the two cities in verse 12 as well as provide another clue for dating the pericope.

Eliminating the above toponyms from consideration leaves five whose identity is undisputed, and these provide the best information for dating the passage: Uruk, Babylon, Akkad, Nineveh, and Kalah (or Kalhu).[28] While Uruk and Babylon were important urban centers throughout the first and second millennia BCE,

---

of the city of Dur-Šarrukku in Babylonia ("Assyrian Eponyms, 873–649 BC," *Or* NS 67 [1998]: 248–54, here 253). Furthermore, a small collection of eight economic texts and one letter which date from the final years of the Neo-Assyrian Empire have been excavated at Dur-Sharrukin; these are held in the collection of the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago under the catalog abbreviation CTDS and remain unpublished. For archaeological evidence of a 612 BCE destruction layer at Dur-Sharrukin followed by a squatter phase, see John Curtis, "The Assyrian Heartland in the Period 612–539 BC," in *Continuity of Empire (?): Assyria, Media, Persia,* ed. Giovanni B. Lanfranchi, Michael Roaf and Robert Rollinger, HANE/M 5 (Padua: S.A.R.G.O.N., 2003), 157–67, here 161.

[26] *CAD* 7, s.v. "īnu," 2e2′.

[27] Similar arguments have been advanced by Speiser, *Genesis,* 68; Day, "In Search of Nimrod," 105–6; and David S. Vanderhooft, "Biblical Perspectives on Nineveh and Babylon: Views from the Endangered Periphery," *Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies Journal* 3 (2008): 83–92, here 83–84.

[28] It should be noted that Assur in verse 11 certainly does not refer to the city of the same name but rather to the entire region of Assyria. Although making Assur the subject of the verb **יצא** in verse 11 (making Assur another eponymous ancestor) is the most straightforward reading due to the lack of a *he-locale*, taking Nimrod as the subject and Assur as the object (making Assur a toponym) both makes sense in the context of the chapter (as Assur is otherwise not introduced until v. 22) and is consistent with the link between Nimrod and Assyria preserved in Mic 5:5. There are other cases in which a *he-locale* is not used even when theoretically possible, but in either case the function of **יצא** in the Nimrod pericope is to demonstrate Assyria's cultural dependence on Babylonia. For discussion of this issue, see Bührer, "Nimrod coram Domino," 3–4; Day, "In Search of Nimrod," 104; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15,* 223–24; Vanderhooft, "Biblical Perspectives on Nineveh and Babylon," 84–85; Speiser, *Genesis,* 67–68; Eckart Frahm, "Mensch, Land und Volk: Aššur im Alten Testament," in *Assur: Gott, Stadt und Land; 5. Internationales Colloquium der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 18.–21. Februar 2004 in Berlin*, ed. Johannes Renger, CDOG 5 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 267–85, here 269–71; for other instances where a *he-locale* is not used, see Gen 10:19, Judg 14:19, 18:8, Hos 7:11; see Jacob Hoftijzer, *A Search for Method: A Study in the Syntactic Use of the h-locale in Classical Hebrew*, SStLL 12 (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 117

This article was published in *JBL* 141/4 (2022) 595–615, copyright © 2022 by the Society of Biblical Literature. To purchase copies of this issue or to subscribe to *JBL*, please contact SBL Customer Service by phone at 866-727-9955 [toll-free in North America] or 404-727-9498, by fax at 404-727-2419, or visit the online SBL Store at www.sbl-site.org.

Akkad flourished only under the rule of Sargon and his dynasty in the mid-twenty-third century before being destroyed during the collapse of that dynasty 180 years later. Akkad is barely attested during the second millennium, and disappears from the extant sources entirely during the early first millennium until it was refounded by Esarhaddon in 674 BCE. After this, the city continued to serve as an important cult site until the Achaemenid period.[29]

The Assyrian cities in verses 11–12 allow the date range to be narrowed further. Kalhu is first mentioned in sources from the Old Babylonian period but only rose to prominence after Assurnasirpal II rebuilt it to serve as a new imperial capital in 879 BCE. Likewise, while Nineveh was inhabited from prehistoric times, it rose to international prominence only after Sennacherib massively expanded it to serve as a new capital beginning in 704 BCE. Both cities were destroyed during the collapse of the Neo-Assyrian Empire in 612 BCE and were only sparsely reinhabited.[30] While Nineveh's name was remembered long after its destruction, the sole mention of Kalhu in any post-612 source comes from Strabo, who mentions Καλαχηνή in his discussion of the geography of Assyria. Even so, Strabo presents Καλαχηνή as the name of a region rather than a city, alongside Adiabene (*Geogr.* 16.1.1).[31] Kalhu does not appear in any Neo-Babylonian or Achaemenid sources from after 612.[32] Xenophon identified the mound by the name Λάρισα (*Anab.* 3.4.7), and an itinerary issued to a Persian messenger traveling from Babylonia to Egypt passes through the former Assyrian provincial centers of Lahiru, Arzuhina,

---

n. 372, 121; Arie van der Kooij, "'Nimrod, A Mighty Hunter before the Lord!' Assyrian Royal Ideology as Perceived in the Hebrew Bible," *JSem* 21 (2012): 1–27, here 4 n. 10.

[29] Aage Westenholz, "The Old Akkadian Period: History and Culture," in *Mesopotamien: Akkade-Zeit und Ur III-Zeit,* OBO 160.3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 17–117, here 29–31; Martti Nissinen, "City as Lofty as Heaven: Arbela and Other Cities in Neo-Assyrian Prophecy," in *"Every City Shall be Forsaken": Urbanism and Prophecy in Ancient Israel and the Near East,* ed. Robert D. Haak and Lester L. Grabbe, JSOTSup 330 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 172–209, here 202–3; Grant Frame, "Nabonidus and the History of the Eulmaš Temple at Akkad," *Mesopotamia* 28 (1993): 21–50.

[30] Julian E. Reade, "Ninive (Nineveh)," *RlA* 9:395–97, 428–30; J. N. Postgate and Julian E. Reade, "Kalḫu," *RlA* 5:320–22; Karen Radner, "The Assur-Nineveh-Arbela Triangle: Central Assyria in the Neo-Assyrian Period," in *Between the Cultures: The Central Tigris Region from the 3rd to the 1st Millennium BC; Conference at Heidelberg, January 22nd–24th, 2009*, ed. Peter A. Miglus and Simone Mühl, HSAO 14 (Heidelberg: Heidelberger Orientverlag, 2011), 321–29, here 323; Amélie Kuhrt, "The Assyrian Heartland in the Achaemenid Period," *Pallas* 43 (1995): 239–54, here 248–50; Curtis, "Assyrian Heartland in the Period 612–539 BC," 158–60.

[31] Kuhrt, "Assyrian Heartland in the Achaemenid Period," 243; Hamish Cameron, *Making Mesopotamia: Geography and Empire in a Romano-Iranian Borderland*, Impact of Empire 32 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 83–85.

[32] Ran Zadok notes that all attestations date from before 612 BCE (*Geographical Names according to New- and Late-Babylonian Texts,* RGTC 8 [Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1985], 191); cf. Abdolmajid Arfaee, "The Geographical Background of the Persepolis Tablets" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2008).

This article was published in *JBL* 141/4 (2022) 595–615, copyright © 2022 by the Society of Biblical Literature. To purchase copies of this issue or to subscribe to *JBL*, please contact SBL Customer Service by phone at 866-727-9955 [toll-free in North America] or 404-727-9498, by fax at 404-727-2419, or visit the online SBL Store at www.sbl-site.org.

and Arbela without mentioning it.[33] Later, the Targums Neofiti (Gen 10:11) and Pseudo-Jonathan (Gen 10:11) identified Kalhu with Adiabene.[34] During the Islamic period, the site gained the appellation Nimrud as part of a broader trend of folktales linking Nimrod to pre-Islamic ruins.[35]

Therefore, the only historical period during which all of the cities listed in verses 10–12 were extant is between 674 and 612 BCE, bounded by the rebuilding of Akkad in 674 and the destruction of Kalhu and Nineveh in 612. If the terms Rehoboth-Ir and Resen refer to features of Nineveh that existed only after the expansion of the city during the reign of Sennacherib, this further confirms a seventh-century date for the pericope.

II. Previous Attempts to Identify Nimrod

A bewildering variety of candidates have been advanced for the identity of Nimrod. Early attempts to identify Nimrod with the heroes Lugalbanda or Gilgamesh, or the historical figures Hammurabi, Nazi-Murataš, or Amenhotep III have been abandoned.[36] Three possibilities deserve further consideration: that Nimrod was originally (a) a deity such as Marduk or Ninurta; (b) a historical figure of the late second millennium such as Tukulti-Ninurta I; or (c) an archetype of a Mesopotamian monarch not linked to any specific historical figure.

Nimrod's name has a clear Hebrew etymology as a first-person plural imperfect of the verb מרד, meaning "we will rebel." Efforts to identify Nimrod with Marduk or Ninurta depend on the assumption that the Israelite author of the pericope manipulated the consonants of the gods' names in order to produce a polemical

[33] James M. Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters,* 2nd ed., WAW 14 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 90–91 (no, 41); Christopher Tuplin, *The Arshama Letters from the Bodleian Library,* vol. 3, *Commentary* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2013), 56–58.

[34] For the reading of Pseudo-Jonathan, see Michael Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis,* ArBib 1B (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 48 n. 24.

[35] Austen Henry Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains,* vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1849), 23–24. Similar traditions sprang up around the sites of Birs Nimrud (Borsippa), Hatra, Baalbek, Mount Hermon, and the Ayyubid castle of Qal'at as-Subayah in the Golan Heights. See Christoph Uehlinger, *Weltreich und "eine Rede": Eine neue Deutung der sogenannten Turmbauerzählung (Gen 11,1–9),* OBO 101 (Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 191–94; Amatzia Baram, *Culture, History and Ideology in the Formation of Ba'thist Iraq, 1968–89* (New York: St. Martin's, 1991), 115; Michael Harriz, *Baalbek: A Story in Stone* (Beirut: Harb Bijjani, 1963), 117; Charles Warren, "Our Summer in the Lebanon, 1869," *PEFQS* 2 (Jan.–Mar. 1870): 215–44, here 225; Moshe Sharon, *Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum Palaestinae,* vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 59. I am indebted to Michael Press for bringing the Layard and Warren references to my attention.

[36] For the most recent summary of the arguments against these identifications, see Day, "In Search of Nimrod," 96–98.

This article was published in *JBL* 141/4 (2022) 595–615, copyright © 2022 by the Society of Biblical Literature. To purchase copies of this issue or to subscribe to *JBL*, please contact SBL Customer Service by phone at 866-727-9955 [toll-free in North America] or 404-727-9498, by fax at 404-727-2419, or visit the online SBL Store at www.sbl-site.org.

etymology and demonstrate their subservience to YHWH.[37] Neither deity fits the passage well: Marduk had no foothold in Assyria, and the Israelite tradition evidenced by Mic 5:5 clearly linked Nimrod with Assyria. While the worship of the warrior god Ninurta was brought to Assyria during the Middle Assyrian period, and the god was often portrayed as a hunter, by the late Neo-Assyrian period his popularity had clearly waned. The idea that Ninurta served as a model for Neo-Assyrian kingship has come under increased criticism in recent years, and studies have suggested that the god played a relatively minor role in the later Assyrian pantheon.[38] Only two Assyrian kings after 934 BCE bore theophoric names invoking Ninurta: Tukulti-Ninurta II (r. 890–883) and Tukulti-apil-Ešarra III (Tiglath-Pileser III, r. 745–727), with the latter referencing Ninurta only via an epithet.[39] By the late eighth century, Ninurta seems to have been displaced by the cult of Nabû: no new temples were constructed, and royal inscriptions mention Ninurta only rarely and always alongside other gods.[40] Neither Marduk nor Ninurta fits the clear Assyrian and seventh-century context of the Nimrod pericope.

Attempts to identify Nimrod with historical figures run afoul of similar chronological confusion. E. A. Speiser's proposed identification with the Middle Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (r. 1293–1197 BCE) not only runs into the same etymological and chronological problems as the god whose name he bore, but does not account for the fact that Tukulti-Ninurta I conquered Babylonia, while the Nimrod passage moves in the opposite direction from south to north.[41] Speiser's identification, like many early attempts to link Nimrod and Ninurta, is rooted in Gerhard

[37] For scholars identifying Nimrod with Marduk, see Lipiński, "Nimrod et Aššur," 77–93; Jeffrey L. Cooley, "Exegeting Enoch," *JNES* 80 (2021): 59–71, here 66–68. For those identifying Nimrod with Ninurta, see Ronald Hendel, "Genesis 1–11 and Its Mesopotamian Problem," in *Cultural Borrowings and Ethnic Appropriations in Antiquity*, ed. Erich S. Gruen, OeO 8 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2005), 23–36, here 30–31; Fenton, "Nimrod's Cities," 23–25; Day, "In Search of Nimrod," 99–101; Karel van der Toorn and P. W. van der Horst, "Nimrod before and after the Bible," *HTR* 83 (1990): 1–29, here 7–14; Peter van der Veen and Uwe Zerbst, "Nimrod – The Mighty Hunter," *Journal of the Ancient Chronology Forum* 9 (2004): 32–37.

[38] Tero Alstola et al., "Aššur and His Friends: A Statistical Analysis of Neo-Assyrian Texts," *JCS* 71 (2019): 159–80, here 159–60, 174–75.

[39] His name means "my trust is in the heir of Ešarra," likely a reference to Ninurta's status in Assyria as the son of Assur. See Heather D. Baker, "Tukultī-apil-Ešarra," in *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire,* vol. 3.2, *S–Z*, ed. Heather D. Baker, Publications of the Foundation for Finnish Assyriological Research (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2011), 1328–31; Amar Annus, *The God Ninurta in the Mythology and Royal Ideology of Ancient Mesopotamia*, SAAS 14 (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2002), 41; for the epithet applied to Ninurta, see Markham J. Geller, *Healing Magic and Evil Demons: Canonical Udug-hul Incantations* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 195 n. 95; for the temple name, see A. R. George, *House Most High: The Temples of Ancient Mesopotamia*, MC 5 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 145.

[40] Annus, *God Ninurta,* 44–47.

[41] Day, "In Search of Nimrod," 99. For arguments that Nimrod is the subject of the verb in verse 11, see n. 29 above.

This article was published in *JBL* 141/4 (2022) 595–615, copyright © 2022 by the Society of Biblical Literature. To purchase copies of this issue or to subscribe to *JBL*, please contact SBL Customer Service by phone at 866-727-9955 [toll-free in North America] or 404-727-9498, by fax at 404-727-2419, or visit the online SBL Store at www.sbl-site.org.

von Rad's dating of the J source to the tenth century or earlier.[42] As consensus has shifted toward a later dating of J or non-P material, searching for Nimrod's identity in historical figures or gods of the late second millennium is no longer tenable.[43]

Recognizing the clear Neo-Assyrian background of the city list, some recent studies have interpreted Nimrod as an archetype of Mesopotamian kingship written during the first millennium.[44] While this can account for the Neo-Assyrian elements in the pericope, it cannot explain the positioning of Nimrod in the distant past or his origins in southern Mesopotamia. It also leaves the unusual presence of Akkad in verse 10 unexplained, as the city was virtually unknown in the late second and early first millennia before being revived as a minor cult center during the late Neo-Assyrian period.

A handful of scholars have attempted to explain the presence of Akkad on the list by identifying Nimrod with Sargon or his grandson Naram-Sin from the first dynasty of Akkad, positing that the Nimrod pericope preserves an unbroken stream of tradition dating back to the third millennium BCE.[45] The depiction of Nimrod as the first great warrior and the first to create an expansionistic state is consistent with Sargon's role in early Mesopotamian history. Yet, while Sargon's dynasty fits the geographic scope of the passage as well as Nimrod's origins in Babylonia, this identification creates a number of difficulties. Least among them is deriving Nimrod from Naram-Sin, which requires dropping the final two consonants, metathesizing the second and third, and adding a final ד, all of which remain unexplained.[46] A larger problem arises from the city list: Why is Babylon, a minor and unimportant city during Sargon's dynasty, described as the beginning of Nimrod's kingdom? Why is Nimrod linked to cities that became prominent fifteen hundred years after the downfall of the Akkad dynasty? Finally, none of these authors can satisfactorily explain how knowledge of persons and events that occurred a millennium and a half or more before the pericope was written was transmitted to the scribes of ancient Israel. To find the origins of Nimrod one must look instead to sources from the seventh century BCE.

[42] Speiser, "In Search of Nimrod," 33–34; Gerhard von Rad, "The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays,* trans. E. W. Trueman Dicken (London: SCM, 1966), 1–78.

[43] See the summary in Thomas Römer, "The Elusive Yahwist: A Short History of Research," in *A Farewell to the Yahwist? The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretation,* ed. Thomas B. Dozeman and Konrad Schmid, SymS 34 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 9–27.

[44] Van der Kooij, "'Nimrod, A Mighty Hunter,'" 1–27; Carr, *Formation of Genesis 1–11,* 238–48.

[45] Yigal Levin, "Nimrod the Mighty, King of Kish, King of Sumer and Akkad," *VT* 52 (2002): 350–66; Knohl, "Nimrod, Son of Cush," 49–52; Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis*, NCBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 116–17; Douglas Petrovich, "Identifying Nimrod of Genesis 10 with Sargon of Akkad by Exegetical and Archaeological Means," *JETS* 56 (2013): 273–305.

[46] Day, "In Search of Nimrod," 98.

This article was published in *JBL* 141/4 (2022) 595–615, copyright © 2022 by the Society of Biblical Literature. To purchase copies of this issue or to subscribe to *JBL*, please contact SBL Customer Service by phone at 866-727-9955 [toll-free in North America] or 404-727-9498, by fax at 404-727-2419, or visit the online SBL Store at www.sbl-site.org.

III. The Missing Link: The Literary Memory of Sargon of Akkad and His Dynasty

The missing link that can tie the antiquarian interest of the Nimrod pericope with its clear seventh-century setting can be supplied by the literary-historical memory of Sargon of Akkad as written during the final century of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. This period saw a revival of literary interest in Sargon and Naram-Sin in which scribes and scholars transformed these historical figures into figures of memory who served as an ideological justification for Assyrian imperialism.

Historical memory first became unmoored from the historical Sargon of Akkad during the Old Babylonian period. Sargon became a blank screen on which scribes and kings projected imperial ambitions and anxieties over the impermanence of empire.[47] Although authentic royal inscriptions from the Akkad dynasty were still being read and copied by scribes, this activity appears to have been confined to the Ekur temple in Nippur.[48] From locations as distant as Ur and Kanesh, new literary compositions and omen texts were written that bore little resemblance to the historical Sargon of Akkad.[49] The production of new texts slowed during the Late Bronze Age. The primary literary composition known from this era was the narrative epic Šar tamḫāri, examples of which were found written in Hittite at Hattusa and in Akkadian at Akhetaten (modern Tell el-Amarna).[50]

It was not until the later Neo-Assyrian period in the late eighth and seventh centuries BCE that Sargon literature regained the popularity it had held in the Old Babylonian period. Second-millennium literary compositions continued to be copied and read, as evidenced by fragments of Šar tamḫāri that were discovered at Nineveh and Assur.[51] Omen series such as Šumma izbu preserved omen apodoses related to Sargon that did not differ greatly from those of the early second millennium, as well as new omens that conspicuously expanded the earlier material.[52] A

[47] Benjamin R. Foster, *The Age of Agade: Inventing Empire in Ancient Mesopotamia* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 246–58.

[48] Foster, *Age of Agade,* 249–51, 257–58.

[49] For literary compositions from this period found at Uruk, Babylon, Šaduppûm, Nippur, and Ur, see Joan Goodnick Westenholz, *Legends of the Kings of Akkade*, MC 7 (1997; repr., Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), nos. 1, 6, 8, 10–19, pp. 34–35, 59–101, 143–261; Jerrold Cooper and Wolfgang Heimpel, "The Sumerian Sargon Legend," *JAOS* 103 (1983): 67–82; for Kanesh, see Marc Van De Mieroop, "Sargon of Agade and His Successors in Anatolia," *SMEA* 42 (2000): 133–59. For a summary of relevant omens, see Brian Lewis, *The Sargon Legend: A Study of the Akkadian Text and the Tale of the Hero Who Was Exposed at Birth*, ASOR Dissertation Series 4 (Cambridge: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1980), 136–40; Foster, *Age of Agade,* 254–57.

[50] Westenholz, *Legends of the Kings of Akkade,* no. 9, pp. 102–33.

[51] Westenholz, *Legends of the Kings of Akkade,* nos. 9D, 9E, pp. 134–39.

[52] Foster, *Age of Agade,* 252–62; Lewis, *Sargon Legend,* 136–40.

This article was published in *JBL* 141/4 (2022) 595–615, copyright © 2022 by the Society of Biblical Literature. To purchase copies of this issue or to subscribe to *JBL*, please contact SBL Customer Service by phone at 866-727-9955 [toll-free in North America] or 404-727-9498, by fax at 404-727-2419, or visit the online SBL Store at www.sbl-site.org.

compilation of eleven omens related to Sargon and three related to Naram-Sin was found in the library of Assurbanipal at Nineveh.[53] The apodoses of these omens are largely concerned with otherwise unattested military campaigns that Sargon allegedly undertook against Elam, Amurru, Subartu, and across the Western Sea. As Benjamin Foster has noted, these campaigns more accurately describe the military feats of the Neo-Assyrian king Sargon II (r. 722–705 BCE) in Babylonia, the Levant, Urartu, and Cyprus than any campaign known to have been undertaken by Sargon of Akkad.[54] The omens present Sargon in an unflinchingly triumphalist light. Even Sargon's alleged construction of a new Babylon opposite Akkad and his triumph over revolts against him are presented here as great achievements.[55]

The construction of a new Babylon also features prominently in the so-called Weidner Chronicle, actually a literary letter whose earliest known copy was found in the N4 library belonging to a seventh-century family of exorcists attached to the Assur temple.[56] The letter credits Sargon's rise to power to his piety demonstrated by providing fish to Marduk's temple in Babylon, but states that he later offended the gods by building a new Babylon next to Akkad, which caused the god Enlil to trigger the revolts against him and afflict him with insomnia.[57] Marc Van De Mieroop has interpreted this as a veiled critique of the Assyrian king Sargon II's decision to build a new capital city for Assyria where no city had been built before.[58] This critique would have been intelligible only if the reader equated Assyrian kings with Sargon of Akkad. Such an identification was already being made early in Sargon II's reign by his scribe Nabû-zuqup-kēnu, who from 716 BCE onward began identifying Sargon II as *Šarru-ukīn arkû*, "the latter Sargon," in a clear allusion to the earlier Sargon of the Akkad dynasty.[59] Sargon also sometimes played word

[53] L. W. King, *Chronicles Concerning Early Babylonian Kings, Including Records of the Early History of the Kassites and the Country of the Sea*, 2 vols. (London: Luzac, 1907), 2:25–39, 129–37 (no. III). Two additional Neo-Babylonian copies of unknown provenance are extant; see King, *Chronicles*, 2:40–45, 139–41 (no. IV); Nicla De Zorzi, "The Death of Utu-hegal and Other Historical Omens," *JCS* 68 (2016): 129–51, here 144–47.

[54] Foster, *Age of Agade,* 252–55, 259–62.

[55] Sargon omens §III lines 8–11, in King, *Chronicles,* 2:27–28.

[56] Olof Pedersén, *Archives and Libraries in the City of Assur: A Survey of the Material from the German Excavations,* 2 vols., AUU.SSU 2 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1986), 41–59, 64.

[57] Weidner Chronicle, lines 56–61, in Jean-Jacques Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, WAW 19 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 266–67.

[58] Marc Van De Mieroop, "Literature and Political Discourse in Ancient Mesopotamia: Sargon II of Assyria and Sargon of Agade," in *Munuscula Mesopotamica: Festschrift für Johannes Renger*, ed. Barbara Böck, Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum, and Thomas Richter, AOAT 267 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1999), 327–39, here 337–39.

[59] Natalie Naomi May, "The Scholar and Politics: Nabû-zuqup-kēnu, his Colophons, and the Ideology of Sargon II," in *Proceedings of the International Conference Dedicated to the Centenary of Igor Mikhailovich Diakonoff (1915–1999),* ed. N. V. Kozlova, Trudy Gosudarstvennogo Érmitazha 95 (St. Petersburg, Russia: State Hermitage, 2018), 110–64, here 116–17; the translation of *arkû* follows the suggestion of Andreas Fuchs, "Aufruf zur Eliminierung von 'Sargon I.' und Sargon

This article was published in *JBL* 141/4 (2022) 595–615, copyright © 2022 by the Society of Biblical Literature. To purchase copies of this issue or to subscribe to *JBL*, please contact SBL Customer Service by phone at 866-727-9955 [toll-free in North America] or 404-727-9498, by fax at 404-727-2419, or visit the online SBL Store at www.sbl-site.org.

games with his name *Šarru-ukīn* to link it to the former king of Akkad's name *Šarru-kēnu*.[60]

Another text linking the historical memory of Sargon with the contemporary Neo-Assyrian Empire was the Sargon Geography, a copy of which was found in the N4 library alongside the Weidner Chronicle.[61] This text is a list of toponyms arranged geographically that the document declares to be *siḫirti mātāti kalīšina ša Šarru-kēn šar kiššа*[*ti*] *adi 3-šu qassu ikšudu,* "the sum total of all the lands which Sargon, King of the Universe, conquered three times."[62] The Geography's stylistic similarities to geographic lists in royal inscriptions from the time of Sargon II onward have long been noted, and it was certainly composed in the late Neo-Assyrian period.[63] The geographic boundaries described therein, stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Zagros Mountains, and west to the Mediterranean coast down to the Egyptian border, match the borders of the Neo-Assyrian Empire during the late reign of Sargon II or his son Sennacherib. The inclusion of Crete and Magan, located just outside its borders, can be seen as a call for Assyria to fulfill its destiny through further expansion.[64]

The links between the historical memory of Sargon of Akkad and the expansionist aspirations of the Neo-Assyrian Empire are made explicit in the Birth Legend, in which Sargon narrates his birth from an illicit affair by a priestess, his abandonment in a basket in the Tigris, and his subsequent rise to kingship, which he credits to the favor of the goddess Ishtar. Due to similarities with the birth narrative of Moses, most scholarship on the Birth Legend has focused on the themes of the abandoned child and the legitimation of power present in the first half of the narrative.[65] Less attention has been paid to the second half of the Birth Legend,

---

'II.' von Assyrien, sowie von 'Sargon' von Akkad," in *Mu-zu an-za*$_3$*-še*$_3$ *kur-ur*$_2$*-še*$_3$ *ḫe*$_2$*-ĝal*$_2$*: Altorientalische Studien zu Ehren von Konrad Volk*, ed. Jessica Balwin, Jana Matuszak, and Manuel Ceccarelli (Münster: Zaphon, 2020), 69–86, here 82–83.

[60] Van De Mieroop, "Literature and Political Discourse," 329–30; Andreas Fuchs, "Šarru-kēnu, Šarru-kīn, Šarru-ukīn," in Baker, *Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire,* 3.2:1239–40.

[61] Wayne Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, MC 8 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998), 67.

[62] Sargon Geography, lines 43–44 in Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, 72–73.

[63] Mario Liverani, "Model and Actualization: The Kings of Akkad in the Historical Tradition," in *Akkad: The First World Empire; Structure, Ideology, Traditions,* ed. Mario Liverani (Padua: Sargon, 1993), 41–67, here 64–67; Liverani, "The Sargon Geography and the Late Assyrian Mensuration of the Earth," *SAAB* 13 (1999): 57–85; Van De Mieroop, "Literature and Political Discourse," 331–33.

[64] Van De Mieroop, "Literature and Political Discourse," 333.

[65] For discussion of the Birth Legend and its relation to Exod 2, see Brevard S. Childs, "The Birth of Moses," *JBL* 84 (1965): 109–22, https://doi.org/10.2307/3264132; Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary,* OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 8–14; Eckart Otto, "Mose und das Gesetz: Die Mose-Figur als Gegentwurf Politischer Theologie zur neuassyrischen Königsideologie im 7. Jh. v. Chr," in *Mose: Ägypten und das Alte Testament*, ed.

This article was published in *JBL* 141/4 (2022) 595–615, copyright © 2022 by the Society of Biblical Literature. To purchase copies of this issue or to subscribe to *JBL*, please contact SBL Customer Service by phone at 866-727-9955 [toll-free in North America] or 404-727-9498, by fax at 404-727-2419, or visit the online SBL Store at www.sbl-site.org.

where the story abruptly shifts. Sargon lists his accomplishments as king in language very similar to Assyrian royal inscriptions.

> […] *šanāti šarrūta lū epu*[*š*]
> [*niš*]*ē ṣalmāt qaqqadi lū abēl lū aš*[*pur*]
> [*šad*]*ê dannūti ina akkulāte ša erî lū up*[*taṣṣid*]
> [*lū*] *ētilli šadî elût*[*i*]
> [*lū*] *attatablakkata šadî šapl*[*ūti*]
> [*mā*]*ti tāmti lū almâ tašlišu*
> *Dilmun lū ik*[*nušnia*]
> [*an*]*a dūri šamê erṣeti rabî* […] *lū* [*ēli*]
> [*ab*]*ni lū unakkirma*
>
> For [x] years I did hold the kingship
> The black-headed [people] I did rule over and gov[ern]
> With pickaxes of copper, I did [cut] my way through the rugged [mountain]s
> The high mountains I [did] ascend
> The low mountains I [did] cross over
> The Sealand I did go around three times.
> Dilmun did su[bmit to me]
> [t]o the Great Wall of Heaven and Earth I did [ascend]
> [The st]ones I did remove[66]

Following this section, Sargon then issues a challenge to [*man*]*nu šarri š*[*a*] *illâ arkīa,* "whatever king who arises after me."[67] He then repeats his list of achievements, with the verbs changing from first person to third-person masculine, challenging any future king to match Sargon's accomplishments in empire building.[68] Three copies of the Birth Legend were found in the royal palaces at Nineveh, suggesting that Assyrian kings themselves were reading or being read Sargon's invitation to prove themselves worthy heirs to his legacy.[69] The similarity of Sargon's list of accomplishments to many claims made in Assyrian royal inscriptions from the reign of Sargon II onward suggests that Assyrian kings would have understood themselves as having already accomplished many of these same achievements.[70]

Eckart Otto et al., SBS 189 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2000), 43–83, here 47–51; cf. Lewis, *Sargon Legend*, 263–67.

[66] After Westenholz, *Legends of the Kings of Akkade,* no. 2, lines 13–21, pp. 40–43.

[67] Westenholz, *Legends of the Kings of Akkade,* no. 2, line 22, pp. 44–45.

[68] Westenholz, *Legends of the Kings of Akkade,* no. 2, lines 23–30, pp. 44–45; see also Lewis, *Sargon Legend*, 116 n. 24. These lines are more fragmentary than lines 13–21. The argument by Tremper Longman III that this section represents a blessing of future rulers (*Fictional Akkadian Autobiography: A Generic and Comparative Study* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1991], 55–57) relies primarily on an admittedly plausible reconstruction of line 23, but for that reason cannot be considered conclusive.

[69] Westenholz, *Legends of the Kings of Akkade,* 37–38.

[70] Compare, for example, inscriptions from the reign of Sargon II. See Grant Frame, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sargon II, King of Assyria (721–705 BC),* RINAP 2 (University Park, PA:

This article was published in *JBL* 141/4 (2022) 595–615, copyright © 2022 by the Society of Biblical Literature. To purchase copies of this issue or to subscribe to *JBL*, please contact SBL Customer Service by phone at 866-727-9955 [toll-free in North America] or 404-727-9498, by fax at 404-727-2419, or visit the online SBL Store at www.sbl-site.org.

Literature about Sargon circulated widely throughout the late Neo-Assyrian period and into the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid periods. While the identification of Neo-Assyrian kings with Sargon of Akkad likely began during Sargon II's reign and should be understood in a political context of increasing centralization of power in the person of the king, Sargon literature was much more than a purely personal interest of Sargon II.[71] Neo-Assyrian Sargon literature was widely read outside of official circles. The N4 library, which contained copies of the Sargon Geography and the Weidner Chronicle, belonged to a family of exorcists who lived and worked outside the orbit of the Assyrian court and acquired texts within their local community in Assur.[72] These texts continued to be widely read and copied. Later copies of the Birth Legend, Sargon Geography, and Weidner Chronicle are known from Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid archives in Uruk, Dilbat, Sippar, and either Babylon or Borsippa.[73] The omen list was used as a source for the Neo-Babylonian Chronicle of Early Kings, and other collections of omens with historical apodoses are known from Late Babylonian sources.[74] At the end of the Neo-Babylonian period, the Babylonian king Nabonidus (r. 555–539 BCE) claimed to have discovered a statue of Sargon in Sippar and established offerings to it, and he also renovated the temple of Ishtar in Akkad.[75]

Esarhaddon (r. 680–669 BCE) moved beyond literature to establish an ideological link to Sargon of Akkad in physical space through rebuilding Sargon's capital. While the building project and the resettlement of people in the city are not mentioned in Esarhaddon's royal inscriptions, several letters to the king do discuss

---

Eisenbrauns, 2021), texts no. 1 line 443; no. 10 lines 18–19; no. 65 lines 13–17, line 24; no. 2009 line 7′, pp. 80, 174, 279–280, 494.

[71] For the centralization of power in Assyria during Sargon II's reign, see Christopher W. Jones, "Power and Elite Competition in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, 745–612 BC" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2021), 246–318. For arguments that such literature was a personal interest of Sargon II, see Foster, *Age of Agade,* 278; Van De Mieroop, "Literature and Political Discourse," 329–30.

[72] For discussion of this family, see Troels Pank Arbøll, *Medicine in Ancient Assur: A Microhistorical Study of the Neo-Assyrian Healer Kiṣir-Aššur*, Ancient Magic and Divination 18 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 18–29, 268.

[73] For the Weidner Chronicle, see Farouk N. H. al-Rawi, "Tablets from the Sippar Library, I. The 'Weidner Chronicle': A Supposititious Royal Letter Concerning a Vision," *Iraq* 52 (1990): 1–13; Adam Falkenstein, *Literarische Keilschrifttexte aus Uruk* (Berlin: Georg Olms, 1931), 14, no. 41; Irving Finkel, "Bilingual Chronicle Fragments," *JCS* 32 (1980): 65–80, here 72; for the Birth Legend, see Westenholz, *Legends of the Kings of Akkade,* 37; for the Sargon Geography, see Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography,* 67 n. 1.

[74] Chronicle of Early Kings (no. 20), lines 1–23 in A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, TCS 5 (1970; repr., Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 45–49, 152–56; De Zorzi, "Death of Utu-hegal," 138–44.

[75] Paul-Alain Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon, 556–539 B.C.*, YNER 10 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 133–36, 141–42; see also Frame, "Nabonidus and the History of the Eulmaš Temple at Akkad."

This article was published in *JBL* 141/4 (2022) 595–615, copyright © 2022 by the Society of Biblical Literature. To purchase copies of this issue or to subscribe to *JBL*, please contact SBL Customer Service by phone at 866-727-9955 [toll-free in North America] or 404-727-9498, by fax at 404-727-2419, or visit the online SBL Store at www.sbl-site.org.

them.[76] Two Neo-Babylonian chronicles record the return of Ishtar of Akkad and the other gods of the city from Elam in 674 BCE, where they had been taken at an unknown earlier date.[77] The rebuilt city appears to have served an important ritual function: in the Babylonian celestial omen tradition, Akkad was one of the four canonical geographic regions alongside Amurru, Subartu, and Elam. In Assyrian interpretation, Subartu was generally equated with Assyria and Akkad with Babylonia. Esarhaddon had assumed the throne of Babylon upon his accession, and so he took omens related to Akkad to refer to himself and used the newly rebuilt city, which likely had a small population centered on its temples, to host at least one substitute king ritual.[78] His son Ashurbanipal (r. 669–631 BCE) did not claim the title king of Babylon, but his scholar Akkullanu maintained the link with Akkad by explicitly identifying Akkad with Assyria, declaring in an omen interpretation that *māt Aššūr māt Akkadimma ša šarri bēlīya,* "The land of Assyria is the land of Akkad, and of the king my lord."[79]

Rather than being the special interest of one monarch, Sargon literature was produced and read widely throughout the late Neo-Assyrian period. Its common themes depicted Sargon as a king of the distant past, a mighty warrior, and a conqueror who created an empire. Sargon not only provided a model to aspire to but issued a challenge to future kings to match his feats, thereby creating an ideological justification for an ever-expanding empire whose kings would be worthy heirs to the great warrior-hero of the past. Esarhaddon's refounding of Akkad further established such links in physical and ritual space, presenting Assyria as the successor to Sargon's empire.

IV. From Sargon to Nimrod

All attempts to determine Nimrod's identity from his name should be abandoned. The name, with its clear Hebrew etymology, is obviously pseudonymous and didactic, in a manner consistent with naming practices throughout Gen 1–11, in which Adam, Eve, Abel, Seth, Noah, Shem, Ham, Joktan, and Peleg are all given

[76] Simo Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars,* SAA 10 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1993), nos. 359, 361, 368, pp. 296–98, 303–4.

[77] Chronicle 1, col. iv lines 17–18; Esarhaddon Chronicle (no. 14), lines 21–22 in Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, 84, 126. It is dated to 10 Adar in Esarhaddon's seventh year.

[78] Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars,* no. 351 lines 5–14, no. 352 lines 5–r.9, pp. 67–68, 286–89. See also no. 90 lines 5–23 of the same volume, in which Ashurbanipal enthrones a substitute image in Akkad in 666 BCE and in return receives a scolding from the scholar Akkullanu for enthroning it in the wrong city.

[79] Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars,* no. 100 line 33, p. 77. This letter dates from 657 BCE.

This article was published in *JBL* 141/4 (2022) 595–615, copyright © 2022 by the Society of Biblical Literature. To purchase copies of this issue or to subscribe to *JBL*, please contact SBL Customer Service by phone at 866-727-9955 [toll-free in North America] or 404-727-9498, by fax at 404-727-2419, or visit the online SBL Store at www.sbl-site.org.

names related to the roles they play in the narrative.[80] There is no need to explain how any candidate for Nimrod's identity matches his name.

Yet it would also be a mistake the dismiss Nimrod as a mere archetype, uninfluenced by any particular literary or historical figure and only reflecting a general view of Mesopotamian kingship. Many scholars have already elucidated myriad instances where Assyrian royal propaganda reached Israel and influenced the writing of the Hebrew Bible.[81] The erection of monuments and rock reliefs in the Levant, visits by Judahite ambassadors to the Assyrian royal court, and the dissemination of propaganda from Assyrian administrative centers are all possible vectors for Assyrian ideology to reach ancient Judah.[82]

The case for the influence of seventh-century Neo-Assyrian Sargon literature on the Nimrod pericope can be made using thematic comparisons. Like the Neo-Assyrian Sargonic corpus, the Nimrod pericope shows clear signs of being composed during the seventh century BCE. In addition to the city list, the appropriation of a popular saying describing Nimrod as a "mighty hunter" clearly recalls Assyrian royal reliefs such as the famous lion-hunt reliefs of Assurbanipal. Nevertheless, like Sargon, the figure of Nimrod is situated deep in the ancient past, positioned in the book of Genesis as a figure at the dawn of postdiluvian history alongside the ancestors of every other civilization on earth. Yet Nimrod is different from the other figures of Gen 10. He is presented in explicitly individual terms, as the first to become a mighty warrior and to found a kingdom ruling over multiple cities rather than fathering them as an eponymous ancestor.[83]

[80] Richard S. Hess, *Studies in the Personal Names of Genesis 1–11*, AOAT 234 (Kevelaer: Butzon & Berker; Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchener Verlag, 1993), 14, 27–33, 75–76, 111–17, 144–45, 157–61.

[81] The literature on Assyrian influence on the book of Deuteronomy is vast and hotly debated; for recent interventions, see Eckart Otto, *Das Deuteronomium: Politische Theologie und Rechtsreform in Juda und Assyrien*, BZAW 284 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999); Hans U. Steymans, "Deuteronomy 28 and Tell Tayinat," *VeEc* 34 (2013): 1–13; C. L. Crouch, *Israel and the Assyrians: Deuteronomy, the Succession Treaty of Esarhaddon, and the Nature of Subversion*, ANEM 8 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014); Jeremy M. Hutton and C. L. Crouch, "Deuteronomy as a Translation of Assyrian Treaties: An 'Optimal Translation' Approach," *HBAI* 7 (2018): 201–52; Laura Quick, *Deuteronomy 28 and the Aramaic Curse Tradition*, Oxford Theology and Religion Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Nicholas O. Polk, "Deuteronomy and Treaty Texts: A Critical Reexamination of Deuteronomy 13, 17, 27, and 28" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2020). For Neo-Assyrian influence on Isaiah, see Peter Machinist, "Assyria and Its Image in the First Isaiah," *JAOS* 103 (1983): 719–37; Hayim Tadmor and Mordechai Cogan, *II Kings: A New Translation,* AB 11 (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 236–38; Baruch Levine, "Assyrian Ideology and Israelite Monotheism," *Iraq* 67 (2005): 411–27; Shawn Zelig Aster, *Reflections of Empire in Isaiah 1–39: Responses to Assyrian Ideology*, ANEM 19 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017); Aster, "Isaiah 19: The 'Burden of Egypt' and Neo-Assyrian Imperial Policy," *JAOS* 135 (2015): 453–70.

[82] Shawn Zelig Aster, "The Image of Assyria in Isaiah 2:5–22: The Campaign Motif Reversed," *JAOS* 127 (2007): 249–78, here 249–51.

[83] Carr, *Formation of Genesis 1–11,* 189–90.

This article was published in *JBL* 141/4 (2022) 595–615, copyright © 2022 by the Society of Biblical Literature. To purchase copies of this issue or to subscribe to *JBL*, please contact SBL Customer Service by phone at 866-727-9955 [toll-free in North America] or 404-727-9498, by fax at 404-727-2419, or visit the online SBL Store at www.sbl-site.org.

Likewise, the literary Sargon of the eighth and seventh centuries was presented as a mighty warrior whose martial abilities and wide-ranging conquests were valorized. The Weidner Chronicle describes a few earlier rulers such as Enmerkar or Ku-baba as receiving *šarrūtu kiššat mātāti,* "kingship over all the lands," from Marduk.[84] Sargon, by contrast, receives the superlative *šarrūt k*[*ibrā*]*t a*[*rba*]*'i*, "kingship over the four corners," a phrase also frequently used to describe him in the omen literature.[85] The geographic extent of his conquests and the centrality of territorial conquest to the narratives clearly set him apart from other legendary kings set in the distant past such as Gilgamesh, Lugalbanda, Etana, or Enmerkar. While the latter kings were primarily identified with single cities, Sargon was invariably identified first and foremost as a conqueror who expanded his empire in all four directions.[86]

In short, Nimrod occupies a position that is thematically very similar to the role played by Sargon in Neo-Assyrian literature. Given the chronological proximity of the sources in the seventh century BCE, it is reasonable to suggest that the people of ancient Israel came into contact with Assyrian literature depicting their empire as heir to Sargon's legacy, which was then transmitted to the scribes who compiled Gen 10:8–12 and Mic 5:4b–5.

The Nimrod pericope sits among various other non-P materials in Gen 10, which, taken together, lack coherence and seem to reflect a variety of sources. Some of this material, such as the list of Canaanites in verses 15–19 and the list of the Cities of the Plain in verse 19 are partially reflected in either the Deuteronomistic History or non-P material from elsewhere in the Pentateuch.[87] The descendants of Miṣrayim in verses 13–14 and of Joktan in verses 26–30 have no clear relationship to any other material.[88] In view of David Carr's argument that the scattered nature of the non-P material (which lacks the clear tripartite structure of the Priestly material in Gen 10) indicates that it was inserted to supplement the Priestly material, the Priestly genealogy therefore must predate the non-P material.[89] If the Nimrod pericope dates from the seventh century BCE, this supports Richard

[84] Weidner Chronicle, lines 45, 55, in Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles,* 266–67.

[85] Weidner Chronicle, line 58 in Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles,* 266–67; cf. the collection of Sargon omens, §II lines 5–6, §V line 14 in King, *Chronicles,* 26–29; K. 2065, in Lewis, *Sargon Legend,* 138.

[86] Although Etana is described in the Sumerian King List as the one who "put all countries in order," this text was not read or copied during the Neo-Assyrian period. See Sumerian King List, col. iv lines 16–18, in Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles,* 120–21; see also 117–18.

[87] Similar lists of Canaanites from non-P material can be found in Exod 3:8, 17; 23:23; 33:2; 34:11; and in DtrH in Deut 7:1; 20:17; Josh 3:10; 9:1; 12:8; 24:11; Judg 3:5; 1 Kgs 9:20. For the Cities of the Plain, see Deut 29:23, as well as the independent source of Gen 14:2.

[88] Westermann, *Genesis 1–11,* 518–20, 526–28.

[89] Carr, *Formation of Genesis 1–11,* 178–95. The arguments of John Van Seters that the tripartite division of Gen 10 was originally found in J before being modified by P (*Yahwist,* 30–32; and *The Pentateuch: A Social-Science Commentary* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999], 118–19)

This article was published in *JBL* 141/4 (2022) 595–615, copyright © 2022 by the Society of Biblical Literature. To purchase copies of this issue or to subscribe to *JBL*, please contact SBL Customer Service by phone at 866-727-9955 [toll-free in North America] or 404-727-9498, by fax at 404-727-2419, or visit the online SBL Store at www.sbl-site.org.

Elliott Friedman's dating of the Priestly source to the late eighth or early seventh century during the reign of Hezekiah.[90]

What purpose, then, does Nimrod play in the narrative of Gen 1–11? A growing number of scholars now place the origins of the Tower of Babel story in Gen 11:1–9 in a seventh-century Neo-Assyrian context, making the story contemporary with the Nimrod pericope.[91] While the disparate nature of the non-P material means that no direct connection between Nimrod and the Tower of Babel can be established, the two are linked as the only pericopes in the final form of the Primeval History to mention Babylon and by shared interest in explaining the origins of the world's peoples and empires.[92] While the Tower of Babel functions as a critique of Mesopotamian religious practice and urban hubris, the Nimrod pericope provides an etiology of empire.

Most ancient interpreters understood Nimrod's name etymology "we will rebel" to imply that Nimrod led the people in rebellion by constructing the Tower of Babel.[93] The meaning of the name is ambiguous and would have allowed multiple interpretations. Others such as Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (Gen 10:11–12) interpreted Nimrod as the one being rebelled *against*, saying that he left Babylonia for Assyria in order to avoid being associated with the inhabitants' plans to build the tower. This ambiguity would have been evident also at the time the pericope was composed. If readers understood the rebellion as being against Nimrod, it reflects the revolts against Sargon described in the omen collection and the Weidner Chronicle.[94] If Nimrod is taken as the leader of the rebellion, then it was ultimately not against an earthly overlord but against YHWH, consistent with

---

cannot be supported from the extant text, as neither Ham nor any descendants of Japheth are mentioned in the non-P material.

[90] Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?*, 2nd ed (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 187–91.

[91] Van der Kooij, "'Nimrod, A Mighty Hunter,'" 8–13; Samuel Boyd, "Sargon's Dūr-Šarrukīn Cylinder Inscription and Language Ideology: A Reconsideration and Connection to Genesis 11:1–9," *JNES* 7 (2019): 87–111; Uehlinger, *Weltreich und "eine Rede"*, 470–571; cf. Frederick Mario Fales, "Su un passo di Sargon e la 'Torre di Babele,'" in *"Suaditi?": Scritti di amici e colleghi in memoria di Francesco Aspesi,* ed. Vermondo Brugnatelli and Leonardo Magini (Milan: Centro Studi Camtio-Semitici, 2022), 149–66.

[92] John Day, "The Tower and City of Babel Story (Genesis 11.1–9): Problems of Interpretation and Background," in *From Creation to Babel: Studies in Genesis 1–11*, LHBOTS 592 (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 166–88, here 186; Pierre Swiggers, "Babel and the Confusion of Tongues," in *Mythos im Alten Testament und seiner Umwelt: Festschrift für Hans-Peter Müller zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Armin Lange, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Diethard Römheld, BZAW 278 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), 182–95; Theodore Hiebert, "The Tower of Babel and the Origin of the World's Cultures," *JBL* 126 (2007): 29–58, https://doi.org/10.2307/27638419.

[93] Josephus, *Ant.* 1.113–119; b. Ḥul. 89a; see also van der Toorn and van der Horst, "Nimrod before and after the Bible," 16–28.

[94] Sargon omens §X, lines 36–r. 2, in King, *Chronicles,* 34–35; Weidner Chronicle, line 61, in Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles,* 266–67.

This article was published in *JBL* 141/4 (2022) 595–615, copyright © 2022 by the Society of Biblical Literature. To purchase copies of this issue or to subscribe to *JBL*, please contact SBL Customer Service by phone at 866-727-9955 [toll-free in North America] or 404-727-9498, by fax at 404-727-2419, or visit the online SBL Store at www.sbl-site.org.

the idea that Assyria was in rebellion against YHWH by threatening Judah, as presented in 2 Kgs 19 and Isa 10.[95] Both interpretations of Nimrod's name, therefore, function as a critique of the origins of Assyrian imperialism, suggesting that the figure in the distant past whose legacy Assyria claimed as their own was in fact both rebelled against and a rebel against YHWH, the same as the Neo-Assyrian Empire in the author's own time.[96]

Given that the editor of the pericope appropriates a popular saying featuring Nimrod, it seems unlikely that the editor invented the name but rather repurposed a name and popular saying that, although likely linked with Assyria, may originally have had nothing to do with Sargon. Placed in its new context within the pericope, the phrase "mighty hunter before YHWH" served to remind its audience that YHWH ultimately held power over Nimrod just as he held control over Assyria's destiny in the author's own time. Through a pseudonymous presentation that critiqued a propagandistic symbol of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, the author of Gen 10:8–12 sought to undermine a powerful symbol of Assyrian imperialism then threatening the borders of Judah.

[95] The verb מרד is used throughout the Hebrew Bible to describe rebellion against either a king or YHWH. See L. Schwienhorst, "מָרַד," *TDOT* 9:1–10.

[96] A similar line of reasoning was used by Yohanan b. Zakkai to equate Nimrod with Nebuchadnezzar II, with the latter possibly a metonym for Titus. See b. Pesaḥ. 94a–b; b. Ḥag. 13a; Isidore Epstein and Joseph Herman Hertz, *The Babylonian Talmud: Seder Mo'ed* (London: Soncino, 1938), 2.4:74 n. 9.

This article was published in *JBL* 141/4 (2022) 595–615, copyright © 2022 by the Society of Biblical Literature. To purchase copies of this issue or to subscribe to *JBL*, please contact SBL Customer Service by phone at 866-727-9955 [toll-free in North America] or 404-727-9498, by fax at 404-727-2419, or visit the online SBL Store at www.sbl-site.org.