

THE ENTHRONEMENT OF THE KING AND THE CAPITAL CITY IN TEXTS FROM ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA AND SYRIA

GIORGIO BUCCELLATI
Loyola University, Chicago

“When the kingship was lowered from heaven, the kingship was in Eridu. (In) Eridu A-lulim (became) king and reigned 28,800 years. . . .”¹ To the mind of the ancient Sumerian historian, monarchy was the earliest attested form of political institutions: “In the beginning was the kingship.” But, to be true to his historical and political conception, a detail should immediately be added: “And the kingship was in a city.” The importance of the relationship between kingship and the city is evident throughout the King List.² Of particular interest is the formula which occurs in the passage just quoted and which is repeated in the text each time that the beginning of a new dynasty is related:³ “(In) Eridu A-lulim (became) king” (ERIDA Á-lulim lugal).⁴ The formula emphasizes the fact that kingship has been transferred to a new city and is now staying *there*: “*In such and such a city a certain person became king.*”

An identical formula occurs in other cuneiform documents of a similar nature but from later times: the Babylonian Chronicles. In the *Babylonian Chronicle*⁵ the formula is repeated often, in several variations. Six times it is said that a certain king “sat himself on the throne in Babylon” (*ina Bābili ina kussī ittašab*),⁶ whereas twice it is said that a foreign king “caused” a vassal of his choice “to sit on the throne in Babylon” (*ina Bābili ina kussī ullešib*).⁷ At the death of Esarhaddon, “his two sons sat on the throne, Šamaš-šum-ukīn in Babylon (and) Aššurbanipal in Assyria” (*Š. ina Bābili A. ina Aššur, 2 mārēšu, ina kussī ittašbū*).⁸ Here the formula is doubled, and the name of a country (Assur), rather than a city, is introduced. The name of a country is found regularly in the formulas pertaining to the Assyrian⁹

¹ T. Jacobsen, *The Sumerian King List* (Chicago, 1939), p. 71, i 1-4.

² *Ibid.*, p. 37, n. 86.

³ The formula occurs twenty-four times: i 2, 11, 20, 26, 32, 43; ii 48; iii 39; iv 8, 20, 39, 45; v 3, 17, (23), 36, 44; vi 9, 24, 31; vii 15; viii 3, 9, 23. Once more (vii 27) the formula occurs in connection with “the horde of Gutium” rather than with a city.

⁴ This is the late wording of the formula, the introductory part of the King List having been added late, Jacobsen, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-68, 136, 162. The earlier wording has: lugal - à m; see, e.g., *ibid.*, p. 76, i 43-44.

⁵ Text in CT 34, Pls. 43-50, partial translation by A. L. Oppenheim in *ANET*², pp. 301-3.

⁶ i 3, 23, 32; ii 5, 22; iii 12.

⁷ ii 30, 43-44.

⁸ iv 33.

⁹ *ina Aššur ina kussī ittašab*, i 2, 27-28, 31; iii 38.

and the Elamite kings.¹⁰ That "Assur" stands for the country rather than for the city is shown by the determinative KUR and also by the fact that in the case of Esarhaddon, to give only one example, we know that the enthronement took place in Nineveh.¹¹ In the *Babylonian Chronicle* the formula is used regularly for the accession of every new king, with one exception: the accession of Nabū-šum-ukīn. In this case the text has: "Šum-ukīn (!), the governor, a rebel, sat himself on the throne,"¹² without the specification "in Babylon."

In the *Chronicles of the Chaldaean Kings*, too, the formula occurs regularly whenever the accession of a new king is related. "For one year there was no king in the land. In the month of Araḫšamnu, the twenty-sixth day, Nabopolassar sat on the throne in Babylon (*ina Bābili ina kussī ittašab*)."¹³ In the case of Nebuchadnezzar there is a slight variation: "For twenty-one years Nabopolassar reigned over Babylon. In the month of Abu, the eighth day, he died. In the month of Ululu, Nebuchadnezzar came back to Babylon, and in the month of Ululu, the first day, he sat on the royal throne in Babylon (*ina Bābili ina kussī šarrūti ušib*)."¹⁴ The double mention of Babylon should be noticed. After the statement that Nebuchadnezzar has come back to Babylon, the specification that he is enthroned in Babylon seems superfluous, and it can best be explained assuming that we are dealing with a standard, fixed formula. One last example concerns the Assyrian king Aššur-uballiṣ who "sat on the throne in Harran to reign over Assyria (*ina Ḥarrāni ana šarrūt Aššur ina kussī ittašab*)."¹⁵ In this case the mention of the city where the enthronement took place may be explained in terms of the context: the capital, Nineveh, is destroyed, and the new king is enthroned in a border region of the former Assyrian empire. But this is also the only place where the context calls for a specific mention of the city where the enthronement has occurred. The contrast with the other texts, where the mention of the city is not conditioned by the context, constitutes a further indication that the expression of the type *ina (āli) ina kussī wašābu* may be considered as a standard and "frozen" formula.

The formula seems to be limited, in Mesopotamia, to texts of the Chronicle type. It does not occur, for instance, in the annals of the Assyrian kings. It is true that an expression of a similar type occurs in the annals of Esarhaddon: "In the month of Addaru, a favorable month, the eighth day, the feast day of Nabū, I joyfully entered Nineveh, my lordly city, and sat on the throne of my father."¹⁶ But here the mention

¹⁰ *ina Elamtim ina kussī ittašab*, i 10, 40; ii 34; iii 9, 15-16, 27, [33]; iv 13.

¹¹ See below and *Babylonian Chronicle* iii 38.

¹² i 16.

¹³ CCK p. 50, ll. 14-15.

¹⁴ CCK p. 68, ll. 9-11.

¹⁵ CCK p. 60, ll. 49-50; cf. *ibid.*, p. 62, ll. 60-61: *ana Ḥarrāni [ana arki] Aššur-[uballiṣ] ša ina Aššur ina kussī ušibi illikū*.

¹⁶ . . . *ina qirib Ninua, āl bēlūtiya, ḥadiš erumma ina kussī abiya ṭābiš ušib*. R. Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons* (Graz, 1956), Nin. A II 1, p. 45.

of the capital is a detail, which stands by itself in the sequence of the events, being grammatically and logically separated from the sentence relating the enthronement of the king. In the annals of the other Assyrian kings the entrance to power of the king is regularly described by referring to his enthronement, but there never is a mention of the capital city nor of any other city where the enthronement may have taken place.

An identical formula can be found in texts from ancient Syria.¹⁷ In these texts the wording of the formula corresponds to the Sumerian, rather than the Akkadian, wording: the verb "to become king" is used instead of "to sit on the throne." After quoting these texts,¹⁸ an attempt will be made to point at some factors which are common to both Mesopotamia and Syria and which may give a reason for the origin of the formula.

In the beginning of the inscription of Zakir (ll. 3-4) we read: *whmlknj . b-l šm* [/]*zrk*. The sentence is usually restored as follows: *whmlknj . b-lšm[jn . l / h]zrk* "Ba'alšamaj made me king over Hazrak."¹⁹ Such a restoration is, however, questionable. Hazrak is a city, not a territory; more precisely, it is the capital city of the country of La^aš.²⁰ In West-Semitic texts the verbal expression *mlk l* is never followed, to my knowledge, by the name of a city, but only by the name of a country.²¹ Instead, the form *mlk b*, "to reign in," followed by the name of a city is very common.²² It seems likely, therefore, that in the inscription of Zakir we should read: *whmlknj . b-lšm[jn / bh]zrk*,²³ "Ba'alšamaj made me king in Hazrak."

The fact that the verb is in the causative form does not make the strength of the formula any less: it is only a variant, due to the fact that in this case the source of

¹⁷ "Syria" is meant here in a broad sense, including Phoenicia and Palestine.

¹⁸ Most references are found in the Old Testament, but they come from different traditions and are found in considerably different contexts, so that they may be considered as independent pieces of evidence.

¹⁹ See, e.g., M. Lidzbarski, *Ephemeris für semitische Epigraphik*, III (Giessen, 1915), 3; H. Donner and W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*, I (Wiesbaden, 1962), 37, n. 202.

²⁰ See M. Noth, "La^aš and Hamath," in *ZDPV* 52 (1929), 124-41.

²¹ Such is the case in the texts quoted by Ch.-F. Jean and J. Hoftijzer, *Dictionnaire des inscriptions sémitiques de l'Ouest*, III (Leiden, 1962), 152-53, s.v. *mlk*, as well as in the biblical passages quoted by G. Lisowsky, *Konkordanz zum hebräischen Alten Testament* (Stuttgart, 1958), pp. 804-7, s.v. *mlk*.

²² See, e.g., Sefire I (*KAI* 222) B 22, and very often in the Old Testament.

²³ Elsewhere in the inscription the preposition *b* is graphically connected with the succeeding word, see G. Garbini, *L'aramaico antico* (Rome, 1956), p. 256; for this reason I have restored *b* at the beginning of line 4 rather than at the end of line 3. Going over Noth's article (quoted in n. 20) I notice that he had reached the same conclusion (p. 127, n. 3), on the basis of paleographic considerations. Occasionally, it can be found that the restoration with *b* has been suggested by other scholars (e.g., C. C. Torrey, "The Zakar and Kalamu Inscriptions," in *JAOS* 35 [1915], 358) but with no specific justification.

the royal power is explicitly mentioned. The same is true of several biblical passages. The elders of Shechem "went and made Abimelek king by the terebinth of the sacred pillar which is at Shechem (*wajjamlikû ʔet-ʔĀbimelek lʔmelek ʔim-ʔēlôn muššāb ʔāšer bišʔkem*)."²⁴ "All the people went to Gilgal and there they made Saul king in front of Jahweh in Gilgal (*wajjamlikû šām ʔet-Šāʔul lifnê JHWH baggilgāl*)."²⁵ The emphasis resulting from the repetition ". . . there . . . in Gilgal" should be noticed. It should also be noticed that in the case of Saul there was no traditional capital where the enthronement would naturally take place; the site of Gilgal, however, was one of the traditional cultural centers of the tribal league before the introduction of the monarchy,²⁶ and as such it was fit to be chosen for the enthronement of the first king. "All the elders of Israel came to the king in Hebron, and king David made a pact with them in Hebron before Jahweh (*wajjikrot lāhem hammelek Dāwid bʔrît bʔhebrôn lifnê JHWH*) and they anointed David king over Israel."²⁷ The standard formula is missing, but the situation is the same, because there is a special emphasis on the site where the people made David king: the elders came to Hebron and made David king in Hebron. "On that day all of Israel made king over Israel Omri, general of the army, in the camp (*wajjamlikû kol-Jiśrāʔel ʔet-Omri sar-šābā ʔal Jiśrāʔel bajjôm hahû bammahānē*)."²⁸ This example does not fit the standard pattern because the place where the enthronement takes place is not the capital, or not even a sanctuary worthy to be mentioned by name (like Gilgal in the case of Saul). In fact in this case the mention of "the camp" could be simply due to the intention of the historian to state with some detail a situation which was not the normal one at the enthronement of the king. "The people of the land took Jehoahaz, son of Josiah, and made him king in Jerusalem as the successor of his father (*wajjamlikuhû taḥat ʔabiw bīrûšālēm*)."²⁹

Other texts have the verb in the normal, rather than the causative, form. "Absalom sent messengers throughout all the tribes of Israel to say: When you hear the sound of the horn you will say: Absalom has become king in Hebron (*mālak ʔAbšālôm bʔhebrôn*)."³⁰ The special emphasis which is apparent in this text should be noticed. The "tribes of Israel" to which messengers had been sent were to be won over to Absalom's cause, so that when the horn would blow they would recognize him as the new king. The detail concerning the site of the enthronement would not really seem to be essential, especially since from the rest of the story it appears that Jerusalem was obviously more important to Absalom than Hebron. Yet the detail is there: the people recognize Absalom as their new king by proclaiming aloud, at the sound of the horn, that he "has become king in Hebron." "Ahaziah, son of

²⁴ Judg. 9:6.

²⁵ 1 Sam. 11:15.

²⁶ See, e.g., R. De Vaux, *Les institutions de l'Ancien Testament*, II (Paris, 1960), 134-35.

²⁷ 2 Sam. 5:3.

²⁹ 2 Chron. 36:1.

²⁸ 1 Kings 16:16.

³⁰ 2 Sam. 15:10.

Ahab, became king over Israel in Samaria (*mālak ʿal-Jiśrāʾēl bʿšomrôn*) in the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah."³¹ "Jehoram, son of Ahab, became king over Israel in Samaria (*mālak ʿal-Jiśrāʾēl bʿšomrôn*) in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah."³² "In the twenty-sixth year of Asah, king of Judah, Elah, son of Baasha, became king over Israel in Tirsa (and reigned for) two years (*mālak ʿĒlā ben-Baʿšā ʿal Jiśrāʾēl bʿtiršā šʿnātājim*)."³³ In this case the verb *mālak* has a twofold meaning. On one hand it can be translated as "he became king," because of the temporal specification which comes before it: "In the twenty-sixth year of Baasha." On the other hand it can also be translated as "he reigned" because of the other temporal specification which comes after it "for two years." Exactly the same expression occurs ten more times in Kings, always in connection with the kings of the Northern kingdom.³⁴

As shown by the last example, the meaning of the verb *mālak* is fluctuating,³⁵ and it must be established in each case according to either the syntax or the context. There are thus some cases which show an exact correspondence to the standard enthronement formula, were it not for the different meaning of the verb. These texts should be quoted here, not only because of the formal similarity, but also because they show the importance of the capital city in its relationship to the reign, as well as to the enthronement, of the king. The pertinent occurrences may be divided into several types. (1) In the summary of the reign of a king, the king is said to have reigned for a given time *over* his territory *in* his capital: "Ahab, son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria for twenty-two years (*wajjimlok ʿAḥāb ben ʿOmri ʿal-Jiśrāʾēl bʿšomrôn*)."³⁶ (2) More frequent is the case where the specification pertaining to the country is grammatically separated from the mention of the capital city: "In the eighteenth year of king Jeroboam, son of Nebat, Abiam became king over Judah (and) reigned for three years in Jerusalem (*šāloš šānīm mālak bīrûšālēm*)."³⁷ (3) Even more common is the case where only the capital, but not the country, is mentioned: "In the seventh year of Jehu, Joash became king and

³¹ 1 Kings 22:52.

³² 2 Kings 3:1.

³³ 1 Kings 16:8.

³⁴ 1 Kings 15:33; 16:15; 2 Kings 13:1, 10; 14:23; 15:8, 17, 23, 27; 17:1.

³⁵ On this subject see D. Michel, "Studien zu den Thronbesteigungsspsalmen," *VT* 6 (1956) pp. 60-63. It may be noticed that also the Sumerian expression *lu ga l* (see above, p. 54) can be translated both as "he became king" and as "he is king," and the choice has to be made on the basis of the context. In Sumerian, however, there is another expression which clearly means "to reign, to be king," literally "to perform (kingship)," see Jacobsen, *op. cit.*, p. 37, n. 85.

³⁶ 1 Kings 16:29; see also 2 Sam. 5:4-5 (= 1 Kings 2:11; 1 Chron. 3:4; 29:27); 1 Kings 11:42 (= 2 Chron. 9:30); 2 Kings 10:36.

³⁷ 1 Kings 15:1-2 (2 Chron. 13:1-2); see also 1 Kings 14:21; 15:9-10; 16:23; 22:41-42; 2 Kings 8:16-17, 25-26, and parallels in 2 Chron.

reigned for forty years in Jerusalem (*w^carbā'im šānā mālak bīrūšālēm*)."³⁸ (4) In some cases there is a relative clause attached to the name of the king, such as: "Sihon, king of the Amorites, who was king in Heshbon (*šāser mālak b^chešbōn*)."³⁹ Sometime the importance of the capital for the reign of a certain king is expressed without the verb *mālak*, such as in the list of the Edomite kings: "Bela^c, son of B^cor, reigned in Edom and the name of his city was Dinḥabah."⁴⁰

Besides the texts pertaining to the enthronement of a human king, evidence for the same type of enthronement formula can be found in texts referring to Jahweh. "Jahweh Sabaoth has become king on Mount Sion and in Jerusalem (*mālak JHWH Šēbā'ōt b^char Šijjōn ūbīrūšālēm*)."⁴¹ "Jahweh has become king over them on Mount Sion (*mālak JHWH 'alēhem b^char Šijjōn*)."⁴² Elsewhere the same concept, but not the same formula, occurs. "Say to Sion: your God has become king (*mālak 'elohajik*)."⁴³ "Jahweh reigns, . . . in Sion Jahweh is great (*JHWH mālak . . . JHWH b^cšijjōn gādōl*)."⁴⁴ As is well known, the problem of the "enthronement of Jahweh" is a highly controversial one among Old Testament scholars today. Without entering the discussion here, it should be stressed that the application of the enthronement formula to Jahweh does not imply by itself the existence of an enthronement feast of Jahweh, and it should be considered in the light of all the other expressions which are drawn from the language of the royal court and are applied to God and religion.

Independently from the problem of the feast of the "enthronement of Jahweh," the texts quoted above are important because they may help us in picturing the background against which the enthronement formula becomes meaningful. Since monarchy was vested with definite religious connotations, the site where a man would, formally and solemnly, be made king was also brought within the religious sphere. As the king is "consecrated," so is the physical site where the ceremony takes place. In the inscription of Zakir we read that a god, Ba'alšamaj, "made" Zakir "king in Hazrak." In the case of Saul, he was made king by the people "in front of Jahweh at Gilgal," and in the same way David "made a pact" with the elders of Israel "before Jahweh in Hebron." In most of the cases, the enthronement site would

³⁸ 2 Kings 12:2. See also 2 Kings 14:2; 15:2, 33; 16:2; 18:2; 21:1, 19; 22:1; 23:31, 33Q, 36; 24:8, 18 (=Jer. 52:1): all of these texts refer to kings of Judah, and are paralleled in 2 Chron. Two more occurrences, with a slightly different wording (*wajjimlok b^c*), refer to a king of Damascus (1 Kings 11:24) and a king of Israel (2 Kings 15:13).

³⁹ Josh. 13:10, 21; see also 13:21; Judg. 4:2; 1 Kings 15:18; Judith 1:1.

⁴⁰ Gen. 36:32 ff. (= 1 Chron. 1:43 ff.).

⁴¹ Isa. 24:23. From the context, the perfect appears to be a prophetic future, but this does not have bearing on our problem.

⁴² Mic. 4:7: here, too, the perfect stands for a future.

⁴³ Isa. 52:7.

⁴⁴ Ps. 99:1-2.

remain the capital of the king and possibly of the dynasty.⁴⁵ So there is room for a further theological development: the enthronement site and seat of kingship is "chosen" by divine initiative, just as the king and his dynasty are "chosen." "I have consecrated my king, on Sion, my holy mountain."⁴⁶ "Jahweh has sworn to David . . . : From the fruit of your body I will put (a descendant) for you on the throne . . . , because Jahweh has chosen Sion, he wants it to be his dwelling. . . ."⁴⁷ Roboam "reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which Jahweh had chosen from among all the tribes of Israel to place in it his name."⁴⁸ This concept is well attested in the Old Testament, so much so that it has been suggested that there may have been a "feast of Sion," during which the election of the dynasty and of its city was celebrated.⁴⁹ Whether or not the existence of a "feast" can be accepted, it seems certain that to the people the capital was a city endowed with a religious character and that this aspect was emphasized at the moment of the king's enthronement.

Other evidence, drawn from Mesopotamian texts, points in the same direction. The beginning of the code of Hammurapi states that the king was "chosen" (literally, "called by name") by the great gods Anum and Enlil, in close connection with the choice of Marduk as the greatest among the other gods and of Babylon as royal city: "When lofty Anum, king of the Anunnaki, (and) Enlil, lord of heaven and earth, the determiner of the destinies of the land, determined for Marduk, the first-born of Enki, the Enlil-functions over all mankind, made him great among the Igigi, *called Babylon by its exalted name, made it supreme* in the world, established for him *in its midst an enduring kingship*, whose foundations are as firm as heaven and earth—at that time Anum and Enlil named me, . . . Hammurapi, (to become king)."⁵⁰ And similarly in an inscription by Samsu-iluna: "When Anum and Enlil . . . gave to Marduk the lordship of the four quarters of the world, gave him a lofty name among the Anunnaki, and *established for him the foundations of Babylon* (to be as firm) as those of heaven and earth, then Marduk . . . gave to me, Samsu-iluna . . . all of the lands for shepherding."⁵¹ In these texts the enthronement of the king, or at least his advent as the new ruler, is united in a single line of perspective with the original choice of Babylon as the city of Marduk, the king of the gods. The mythical story of this primeval event is to be found at the end of the *Enūma eliš* where the gods, gathered in Babylon, "the place which (Marduk) loves,"⁵² "granted him (i.e.,

⁴⁵ Besides the biblical examples where the enthronement site is different from the capital, the case of the Ur III kings may be mentioned: they were successively enthroned, as it seems, in Nipur, Uruk, and Ur. See T. Jacobsen, "The Reign of Ibbi-Suen," *JCS* 7 (1953), 36, n. 2.

⁴⁶ Ps. 2:6.

⁴⁷ Ps. 132:11, 13.

⁴⁸ 1 Kings 14:21.

⁴⁹ See H.-J. Kraus, *Die Königsherrschaft Gottes im Alten Testament* (Tübingen, 1951), pp. 27–99, especially pp. 38–39 and 44–49.

⁵⁰ *CH* i 1–28, 49, transl. T. J. Meek in *ANET*², p. 164.

⁵¹ *LIH* 2 97 + *VAS* 1 33, 1–22.

⁵² *En. el.* vi 72, see E. A. Speiser, in *ANET*², p. 69.

Marduk) the exercise of kingship of the gods, they confirmed him in dominion over the gods of heaven and earth."⁵³ The passages from the royal inscriptions just mentioned seem to refer explicitly to the traditions incorporated in the *Enūma eliš*, and they certainly reflect the same conviction: the choice of the site where Marduk's kingship was reconfirmed⁵⁴ was almost as important as the enthronement act itself.

To sum up, the following conclusions can be drawn. (1) The clause of the type "to become king in a certain city" is attested in a fairly large number of examples. In many cases it is clear that the mention of the city where the enthronement took place is not due to any specific interest in relating a particular historical detail. We must rather assume that we are dealing with a *formula* which was commonly in use. (2) Is it possible to point to any reason which may explain the origin of the formula? The answer seems to be affirmative. In both the areas which have been studied here, Mesopotamia and Syria, there is evidence to the effect that the city where the enthronement would take place (usually the capital city) was considered the object of a special divine choice. It was, therefore, because of religious reasons that the *act* of the enthronement was strictly linked with the *site* of the enthronement. (3) The research has brought up some implications concerning the problem of the "enthronement of Jahweh." Even though these implications have not been discussed here, they seem particularly interesting, especially in view of the considerable attention which has been given to that problem in recent Old Testament scholarship.

⁵³ vi 99-100, *ibid.* p. 514.

⁵⁴ There may have been an enthronement act, even though this is not described in the text. A royal throne is mentioned in vi 93, *ibid.* p. 514.



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Robert D. Biggs</i>	AN INSCRIPTION OF ILUM-GĀMIL OF URUK	1
<i>J. A. Brinkman</i>	MERODACH-BALADAN II	6
<i>Giorgio Buccellati</i>	THE ENTHRONEMENT OF THE KING AND THE CAPITAL CITY . .	54
<i>Richard I. Caplice, S.J.</i>	AKKADIAN "UD(D)Ū"	62
<i>M. Civil</i>	A HYMN TO THE BEER GODDESS AND A DRINKING SONG	67
<i>A. K. Grayson</i>	AMBUSH AND ANIMAL PIT IN AKKADIAN	90
<i>William W. Hallo</i>	THE SLANDERED BRIDE	95
<i>Rivkah Harris</i>	THE NADĪTU WOMAN	106
<i>Hans Hirsch</i>	EANNATUM VON LAGAŠ UND SARGON VON AGADE	136
<i>Anne Draffkorn Kilmer</i>	THE USE OF AKKADIAN DKŠ IN OLD BABYLONIAN GEOMETRY TEXTS	140
<i>Erle Leichty</i>	THE COLOPHON	147
<i>Oswald Loretz</i>	DAS HEBRÄISCHE VERBUM LPT	155
<i>Edith Porada</i>	AN EMACIATED MALE FIGURE OF BRONZE IN THE CINCINNATI MUSEUM	159
<i>Erica Reiner</i>	THE PHONOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF A SUBSYSTEM IN THE AKKADIAN SYLLABARY	167
<i>Aaron Shaffer</i>	"KITRU/KITERRU": NEW DOCUMENTATION FOR A NUZI LEGAL TERM	181
<i>Appendix</i>	BIBLIOGRAPHY OF PUBLICATIONS BY A. LEO OPPENHEIM	195