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Contents

Divine & Conquer

Ancestors, Gods, and the Right to Rule

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Abstract

This article explores the use of legendary, ancestral, and divine figures in consolidation and legitimization of power, drawing on a theoretical framework provided by David Graeber and Marshall Sahlins in their book On Kings (2017). It takes its offset in literary narratives and their use in legitimizing kingship: First, the Sargon Birth Legend is investigated, and it is shown how this text might be understood as a part of a larger-scale legitimization of Sargon II and his dynasty's claim to the Assyrian throne. Then, Saxo Grammaticus' Gesta Danorum is examined in relation to its role in Danish king Valdemar and his dynasty's claim to the throne, and to sovereignty from the Holy Roman empire. It is analyzed and compared to the Assyrian case, to show the manners in which history-making and self-association to powerful ancestors and divine agents are used to legitimize and consolidate power in both cases. Finally, it is argued how the uses of these texts, and their characters, can help elucidate our understanding of the appropriation and transmission of narratives within intercultural frameworks, and the divinities and legendary figures in them, as potential universal tendencies in the legitimization and consolidation of power.

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The article is based on my BA-thesis in Assyriology

تستكشف هذه المقالة استخدام الشخصيات األسطورية واألجدادية واإللهية في توطيد السلطة وتشريعها، مستندة إلى اإلطار الذي قدمه ديفيد جريبر ومارشال سالينس في كتابهما "عن الملوك")2017(. تستند المقالة إلى السرد األدبي ودوره في تشريع الحكم الملكي. في المقام األول ، يتم اإلستقصاء حول أسطورة والدة سرجون حيث يُظهر كيف يمكن فهم هذا النص ا لسرجون الثاني ومطالبته هو وساللته بالعرش اآلشوري. ثم بعد ذلك، يتم فحص جيستاً ق كجزء من عملية تشريع أوسع نطا دانوروم لساكسو غراماتيكوس فيما يتعلق بدوره في مطالبة الملك الدنماركي فالديمار وساللته بالعرش، وسيادتهم على اإلمبراطورية الرومانية المقدسة. يتم تحليله ومقارنته مع الحالة اآلشورية، إلظهار الطرق التي يتم استخدامها لصنع التاريخ والترابط الذاتي مع األجداد األقوياء والوكالء اإللهيين لتشريع السلطة وتوطيدها في كلتا الحالتين. وأخيًرا، يُرَّجح كيف يمكن استخدام هذه النصوص وخصائصها في توضيح فهمنا الستصالح ونقل السرد في اإلطارات الثقافية المتقاطعة، واآللهة. والشخصيات األسطورية فيها، كسمات عالمية محتملة في توحيد السلطة وتشريعها

Translation by Mahmoud Alsayed Ahmed, MA-student, University of Copenhagen

Introduction

This article explores the use of literary sources in the legitimization of power, exemplified by cases from ancient Mesopotamia and Medieval Denmark. Critically approaching and comparing the *Sargon Birth Legend* and *Gesta Danorum*, with theoretical considerations from David Graeber and Marshall Sahlins' *On Kings* (2017), I examine whether these texts could yield comparative insights on the use of the divine, and of legendary heritage and genealogy in the legitimization of power. This article as such explores aspects of the development of religion, or legendary and religious literature, by showing similarities in the ways narrative-production, and the modeling on, or self-association with ancient, culturally important characters in narratives can legitimize power, and argues that this is a feature of power across time and space.

Approach to the Sources

The aim of this article is not to provide a "historical kernel" in any of the works dealt with. The historicity of the sources is less relevant to the present study. Methodologically, it follows Mario Liverani's guidelines for historiographic text-interpretation, which moves from having the literal subject matter of a given source as its focus, to investigating the political motivations of the author (Liverani 1993: 47). For Sargon of Akkad (23rd century BCE) or king Dan, this means leaving behind the apparent protagonists of the literary narratives and instead looking at them as allegories, mirrors, allusions, or stand-ins for groups or personages who were alive and/or politically and socially relevant at the time of composition (Liverani 1993: 47).

Because of this methodology, we can investigate texts as reflections of conflicts and politics, or of certain events that were relevant at the time of composition, and further on the strategic use of rulers, legendary figures, and (claimed) ancestors as legitimizing agents and role-models for dynasties and kings following them (Liverani 1993: 47). Attention is given to the author, the audience, the apologetical (or other) aims, the political context, and the media of communication. This brings us to the sources in question.

The Sargon Birth Legend

The Sargon Birth Legend is a literary narrative known only in fragments, written in the Akkadian language (Westenholz 1999: 36). The dating of the text is disputed, and ascertaining with certainty a date of composition is difficult. Lewis believes it can only be established that it was composed between the 21st and the 7th centuries BCE. However, he leans towards a later composition (Lewis 1980: 96-101), and the observations presented in the next chapter corroborate this view.

The narrative relates how a high priestess becomes pregnant with an unknown man, despite being forbidden from having children. She manages to hide her pregnancy, and after giving birth to Sargon of Akkad in the city of Azupirānu on the

banks of the Euphrates, she secrets him away on the river in a pitched reed basket. After floating down the river, a gardener, Aqqi, picks up the basket with the boy and adopts him, raising him as a gardener. At some point in his life the goddess Ishtar grows fond of Sargon, which ultimately leads to his coronation. The rest of the column relates to heroic deeds done by Sargon and ends with a challenge to any future king to do what he has done (Westenholz 1999: 38-45, Lewis 1980: 92-94). Other texts exist that elaborate on the latter part of Sargon of Akkad's life, and while there is a good chance they have a relationship, the authorships do not appear directly related to that of the current text (Westenholz 1999: 51-52, 57-78). While the reader may have already made the connection, Lewis mentions that there are clear parallels to the Moses narrative in Exodus 2 here (Lewis 1980: 263-267). This parallel is not the direct object of this study, but it will be addressed in future studies .

A Lineage for the Millennia

The idea of Sargon and the kingship he instated would live on in- and outside Mesopotamia in comparable manner to that of Alexander the Great (d. 323 BCE) around the Mediterranean, expanding the conceptual expectations of what a conqueror could accomplish for kings as far down in time as the time of Alexander himself (Foster 2015: xv, 3-4). Even further, as Pongratz-Leisten notes in her work on Assyrian religion and ideology, the Kings of Akkad had profound influence on the understanding of kingship itself both in- and outside Mesopotamia for millennia to come (Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 87). By the Old Babylonian period, Akkad had already become a paradigm for kingship that would hold sway well into the first millennium BCE, concerning its understanding of a proper ruler, the idea of Babylonia as the center of power and the control over this and marginal areas, plus the expansion of imperial bureaucracy (Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 88). Pongratz-Leisten remarks how royal inscriptions from the time of Sargon II (d. 705 BCE) onwards became increasingly literary, with specific intertextual references between narratives such as Enuma Eliš and the Erra Epic (Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 319-320).

Neo-Assyrian regents built on the Old Babylonian use of Sargon and his grandson Naram-Sin as prototypes for future kings, in the discourse of an ideology of kingship, blending it with, and even founding it in myth, thus giving greater sanction to actions of kings (Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 322). Further, the use of ancestors and divine agents to source, legitimate and consolidate power is one of the hypotheses put forth by Graeber and Sahlins in their publication *On Kings* (2017) as being a ubiquitous tendency amongst rulers across time and space, which they call *Galactic Mimesis* (Graeber & Sahlins 2017: 3, 13-14). Following this line of thought, we shall turn our attention to Sargon II and his dynasty, to understand if, why, and how he would have been interested in modeling himself on this ancient king of Akkad.

A Lineage of the Millennia

The Neo-Assyrian state emerged from the proverbial dark of the centuries following the Bronze Age Collapse (ca. 1200 BCE), having lost many former territories. During the 9th-8th centuries BCE great political turmoil and fragmentation plagued the land of Aššur, magnates and kings all vying for power over the kingdom (Frahm 2017: 161). This phase ended with the ascension of Tiglath-Pileser III (d. 727 BCE) who is attributed with starting the imperial phase of the Assyrian kingdom, a time when power once again centralized around the king, and the Assyrian territories expanded drastically, holding power beyond Mesopotamia at its height, until its swift downfall at the hands of Babylonians and Medes between 615 and 609 BCE (Frahm 2017: 161).

By the end of the reign of Aššurbanipal (d. 631 BCE), the Assyrian state stretched from the Nile to the Zagros, from Cappadocia to Elam, and according to Elayi, one of the main driving forces behind this development was Sargon II (Elayi 2017: 3). Ruling from 722 to 705 BCE, not much is known about Sargon II's life before his ascension (Elayi 2017: 4, 7-8). The name of Sargon II has been heavily discussed, and Elayi notes that it is certainly an important discussion as names of Mesopotamian rulers are rarely coincidental (Elayi 2017: 12). In the following, I explore the circumstances of Sargon's ascent to the Assyrian throne to contextualize the potential relevance of the *Sargon Birth Legend* to Sargon II's reign.

Much debate has surrounded Sargon II's ascent to the throne of Assyria, but Elayi finds usurpation unlikely (Elayi 2017: 25-30, 214-215). While the debate cannot be elaborated upon here, the present article disagrees with Elayi on this point, following, amongst others, Frahm and Fales in suggesting a usurpation seems highly likely (Frahm 2017: 180, Fales 2014: 220-222). After Sargon II's father Tiglath-Pileser III, his brother Shalmaneser V (d. 722) ascended to the throne. His reign was short-lived, however, as he died five years later, after which Sargon II becomes king. In the Assur-charter, this is framed as the gods having chosen the path for Sargon II due to his brother's ineptitude (Elayi 2017: 25-26).

A Game of Thrones

The possibility of Sargons II's usurpation is reflected in texts such as Sargon II's grandson Esarhaddon's (d. 669 BCE) inscription *The Sin of Sargon*. Here, it is made abundantly clear by the diviners that Aššur, head deity of the Assyrian pantheon at the time, and Marduk, head deity of the Babylonian pantheon at the time, must be honored equally to maintain equilibrium in the empire. However, Assyrian scribes allegedly stop Sargon II's son Sennacherib (d. 681 BCE) from doing so (Elayi 2017: 215; Frahm 2017: 186-187; Tadmor, Landsberger & Parpola 1989: 9-10, 31-32). *The Sin of Sargon* seems to date to the time of Sennacherib's son Esarhaddon, a king who had a much milder inclination towards Babylon than his father had, and less of an inclination than his grandfather (Frahm 2017: 186-187). Esarhaddon seems to have been painfully aware of the divide in the empire and felt that appeasing Baby-

lon was the best way forward in consolidating his reign and maintaining the empire (Frahm 2017: 187). *The Sin of Sargon* is probably an expression of Esarhaddon's grappling with contentious pro-Babylonian and pro-Assyrian scribes and elites during his own reign (Tadmor, Lansdberger & Parpola 1989: 45-46). The following passage investigates how several factors points to such a need for appeasement of powerful factions in the imperial administration already during Sargon II's time, due to a potential violent usurpation instigated by him.

During Sargon II's reign we begin to see in the spelling of Aššur's name a conflation with Anšar, the "Father of the Gods" in Enuma Eliš, who chooses Marduk as leader of the Gods (Tadmor, Landsberger & Parpola 1989: 29-30). To Tadmor, this hints at Sargon II's drive towards mixing Babylonian and Assyrian pantheons to appease the rivalling factions of the empire. The mixture of the pantheons is further highlighted with the Assyrian version of Enuma Eliš, most likely composed during the reign of Sennacherib (Tadmor, Landsberger & Parpola 1989: 29-30). This version replaces Marduk with Anšar, possibly to appease the Assyrian nationals after Sargon II's very Babylon-oriented reign (Tadmor, Landsberger & Parpola 1989: 30). Sargon II's usurpation may further be reflected in what the Babylonians, judging from *Babylonian King List A*, considered a dynastic fracture upon the ascension of Sargon II (Fales 2014: 228-229). While the state of source material means defining a positively certain time of composition is out of reach, I suggest that it is within this context, of usurpation and balancing of the scales of power, that we shall find the composition of the *Sargon Birth Legend*. The adoption of the Sargon-model very likely would have proven useful in both Assyria and Babylonia, to calm the hectic relationship of the two great powers and their scribal factions. There is great power in modeling oneself on such ancient and well-known figures as Sargon, both in terms of descendancy, ambition and power. I will elucidate this point, following some theoretical considerations pertaining to the use of ancestors in legitimation of power from Graeber and Sahlins' *On Kings* (2019).

Kings of Cosmic Order
Using case examples from many different parts of the world, across different times and modes of societies, Graeber and Sahlins argue that something akin to a state, a *cosmic polity*, is a universal human condition, but that the highest authorities in these states, whether tangible or intangible in a contemporary, legal sense, are often divine or meta-human (Graeber & Sahlins 2017: 2-3). Considering this ontological order of human and non-human actors in a political sense, kings can be understood to be modeled on gods and ancestors, rather than the other way around (Graeber & Sahlins 2017: 3). As seen with the struggle of Assyrian kings to create balance between Aššur and Marduk, the cities of Aššur and Babylon, and between their followers in scribal circles, the king tries assuming the role of representative of the god. In the same vein, Graeber & Sahlins argue that there is no pure secular power (Graeber & Sahlins 2017: 3). Authority to rule over others, though it may be

taken, given, and lost, is ultimately the authority of the ancestors, the divines, or the meta-humans. The past is not just prologue, it is paradigm. Embedding the present in terms of the past is fundamental to making history (Graeber & Sahlins 2017: 17).

I argue that the modeling on Sargon of Akkad by Sargon II or his associated scribes, and his divine mandate, must be understood as twofold: It is at once a very politically effective move, and an expression of Sargon II's aspirations for his reign. Sargon II was not necessarily playing the part of imposter when he became "Sargon" or adopted Babylonian theological practices. We can consider it an expression of aspiration to achieve the kinds of accomplishments of an ancient hero, as well as a strategic political move. While this is far from a definitive conclusion, such is what can be achieved in the current paper and will be researched further. Other weaknesses, such as the existence of a third king, conventionally named Sargon I, who lived approximately between 1920 and 1881 BCE, but whom we know practically nothing about, also add to our problems. In short, the point here it that the use of ancestors and gods in legitimizing and consolidating a reign seems an effective strategy for a king, and the duality between appeasements of the gods and scribes, should not be considered contradictory, if we wish to explore the dynamics of cases such as this one. As a further example of these tendencies, the next part will deal with Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum.*

A Layered Heritage

From almost two millennia later, in the faraway budding Danish kingdom, Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*, or *Deeds of the Danes*, is a work which *claims* to describe the history of Danish kings from well before the birth of Jesus to the time of Saxo and the Valdemar-dynasty of Denmark in the late 12th-early 13th century (Friis-Jensen 2015: xxix-xxxvi, 1-9 [Chapter/"verse" 1.1-1.6]; Skovgaard-Petersen 1987: 11-20, 56-60). It was commissioned by the bishop of Roskilde and archbishop of Lund, Absalon (d. 1201), and it was likely composed between 1190 and 1208 (Friis-Jensen 2015 I: xxix-xxx, xl; Zeeberg & Friis-Jensen 2005 I: 32-33, 73).

Gesta Danorum consists of 16 books covering (alleged) pre-history to the time of Valdemar I's Son Cnut VI (1163-1202). It contains an extraordinary amount of intertextual references and parallels to a wide array of literary and poetic traditions exist within, such as Frode Fredegod and his reign of peace being a mirror to Roman emperor Augustus in book 5 (Friis-Jensen 2015 I: xxxviii-xxxix), parallels between Svend Estridsen and Theodosius in book 11-13 (Skovgaard-Petersen 1987: 252-253), or the marriage strife of Danish mythological king Hadingus and his wife Regnild mirroring the marriage strife of Norse sea-god Njorð and the goddess of the hunt and skiing Skaði (Zeeberg & Friis-Jensen 2005 I: 125-127; Dumézil 1973: 19-23). In the following, the contexts surrounding the compositions of these texts will be analysed, and their place within the ideologies of their states investigated.

The author of *Gesta* Danorum, Saxo Grammaticus, while his exact clerical station is debated, had high praises for archbishop Absalon of Lund, and likely came from a family that had long-standing ties with Danish royalty, and as the latter was part of the clan of Valdemar I, the Hvide-clan. While Saxo seems to have been intimate with royal power in late 12th-early 13th century, nothing points to him necessarily being Hvide himself (Friis-Jensen 2015 I: xxix-xxxiii, xlv; Hybel 2018: 10). Through his work, Saxo hoped to instill some sense of a Danish nation, but importantly also to write a national history of the Danes as a befitting addition to universal (ecclesiastic) history, in the eyes of his at the time relatively small, aristocratic readership (Skovgaard-Petersen 1987: 91-94, 252-253). This dual-purpose is seen in Saxo's espousing of an ethical code which, as was quite popular in the 12th century, synthesized moral virtues of the Graeco-Roman traditions with medieval Christian ones (Friis-Jensen 2015: xxli-xlii; Skovgaard-Petersen 1987: 91-94, 247-253; Mundal 2010: 233-239; Hybel 2018: 7).

Saxo claims that his primary sources for *Gesta Danorum* are highly reliable ancient, Danish, runic inscriptions on stone. While the specifics are not necessarily relevant to us here, this claim has been rather thoroughly scrutinized on several fronts (Skovgaard-Petersen 1987: 63-64; Bagge 2010: 167-171; Friis-Jensen 2010: 95-103). He also directly mentions having drawn inspiration from Absalon and from "the Icelanders" (Zeeberg & Friis-Jensen 2005 I: 75-77, Skovgaard-Petersen 1987: 62-63). Inspiration, both linguistically and in terms of content, has seemingly come to Saxo from many places. For example, we find stylistic and linguistic inspiration in such authors as Valerius Maximus and Justin (Zeeberg & Friis-Jensen 2005 I: 11), as well as Virgil (Zeeberg & Friis-Jensen 2005 I: 31), but also in medieval writers like Bede, Dudo, Adam of Bremen, and Svend Aggesøn (Friis-Jensen 2015 I: xl-xlii; Zeeberg & Friis-Jensen 2005 I: 28). Saxo departs from Medieval Latin, purposefully using a more classical Latin. He uses pre-Christian Roman terminology for even positions in the church, includes pagan elements and stories from vernacular traditions, and bases some authority in his work through their age, but writing within 13th century church ideology, he simultaneously embeds an expectation for canonical law and the rule of Valdemar within the history of Denmark. This functions as a legitimization on several fronts both at home and internationally (Skovgaard-Petersen 1987: 233-238, 240-242; Friis-Jensen 2015 I: xlvii-l; Friis-Jensen 2010: 102-105).

A Dream of the Sovereign
Though many Danish historians tended to consider the Danish vassalage to both the Franks before 1000 CE and the Holy Roman empire in the late Middle Ages a mere formality, historians such as Ole Fenger and Esben Albrechtsen consider Denmark's vassalages as much more impactful (Hybel 2018: 139-140). During the succession conflict between Svend, Knud, and Valdemar I (1157 CE), national autonomy was severely threatened as infighting between the great magnates of the Jelling-dynasty

weakened central Danish power (Hybel 2018: 139-140). Further, there was a cleri-cal power struggle going on with the Nordic Bishops of Lund, who wished for inde-pendence from Bremen-Hamburg (Hybel 2018: 127). As such, upon ascension in 1157, the challenges of Valdemar I were manifold: Strengthening, centralizing, con-solidating, and legitimizing his own power on several fronts. The dynasty of Valde-mar focused increasingly on national legislation, the expansion of the legislative and jurisdictional power of the king, as well as castle-building, centralizing power even further while maintaining the delicate balance of power with the church (Skovgaard-Petersen 1987: 239-245, 247-253; Hybel 2018: 184-185, 291-292).

The idea that some of the difficulties in Saxo's work could at times potentially be ascribed to it being more aspirational in nature, describing an ideal situation, rather than representing reality, is a factor which was brought into question already last century (Skovgaard-Petersen 1987: 247). Saxo argued, and traditional Danish histo-riography largely followed, that since *Marca* can mean "borderland", the name must have referred to the borderland of Dan, or the Danes (Hybel 2018: 118-119). As such, Saxo's account provides for the reader a neat, alternate explanation to the rather unflattering origin that may, according to Hybel, lie behind the name Den-mark, as a mere province (*marca*) of the long-dead Frankish empire, although this is still an unsettled question (Hybel 2018: 342-343). Saxo's attitude to the Holy Roman emperors is glimpsed for example in his downplaying of the oath of fealty sworn by Valdemar I to emperor Frederick Barbarossa in Dôle (Hybel 2018: 129). Seen as such, the idea of vassalage was in contradiction with Saxo's views on sovereign monarchy, and he opposed this subordination and envisioned (through his national narrative) a sovereign Danish kingdom (Hybel 2018: 305, 348). Under Valdemar II's conquests and crusades in the Baltic region, this vision may have been more tangi-ble than ever (Friis-Jensen 2015: xlii-xliv).

Crusader Kings of the North

At the climax of Danish expansion in 1219, the realm stretched across the Baltic from Estonia to Schleswig and Holstein, and from Scania and Jutland to Pomerania, Prussia, and Mecklenburg (Hybel 2018: 344). This points to the efforts of the Valde-mar-dynasty to solidify their reign, both internally trying to unite warring factions of Danish nobility and the church, as well as externally, trying to gain legitimacy and some degree of sovereignty in the eyes of the empire and the papacy. Such efforts are reflected in *Gesta Danorum*. Presented as a history of Danish kings, the reader is shown the yet-to-be fulfilled potential of Denmark, with kings acting as law-bringers and moral exemplars, and sometimes evils, for all Danish households. It idealizes the relation between king, church, and country, given direction, structure, and meaning with a place in the universal history, and the developing world views, as well as political, legal, and economic institutions of the 13th century (Skovgaard-Petersen 1987: 248-253; Hybel 2018: 304; Friis-Jensen 2010: 104-110; Zeeberg & Friis-Jensen 2005 I: 77, 87). In the coming section, I will discuss the sources as-

sessed in this paper as reflections of a process of legitimization of power that transcends time and place, and points to something deeper about human understandings of authority (and challenges to it), and the legitimacy to hold power.

Narratives and the Right to Rule

The dynamics behind the creations of the *Sargon Birth Legend* and *Gesta Danorum* are undoubtedly varied and impossible to ascribe to any single thing. Likewise, as already mentioned, parallels between *Gesta Danorum* and other Biblical and European literature, from Roman history to the Prose Edda to Genesis to the Aeneid, are many. But while the specifics of the local cases are important to study more closely, whether the *Sargon Birth Story* was borrowed into the Hebrew tradition or the other way around, whether king Dan, Frothi, or Hadingus were historic figures or not, or whether Saxo relied on rune stones or not, matters little here: As Graeber and Sahlins note, based on core-periphery relations, or *cosmic polities*, lesser chiefs or rulers often assume the power-forms of their proximate superiors in competition with local adversaries for domination, a process they term *galactic mimesis* (Graeber & Sahlins 2017: 13-14). The concept of sacral kingship is in no way new (Brisch 2013: 37-44), and I could have included several different theoretical works on the topic for this project (insert ref here), but elected not to as this is not a theoretical discussion of the concept of sacral kingship, but rather how it is expressed through literature. For the limited purposes of this paper, however, the sacralization of the king is but one aspect of a larger tendency. Here we have attempted a cross-domain approach the topic, considering several levels at once: Personal, symbolic, political, cultural, and, importantly: Religious, but without distinguishing too sternly "pre-Biblical" from "Biblical", to more clearly see what continues after Christianity takes over European state cults (or any other Abrahamic religion does something similar). This angle has proven fruitful due to the approach of Graeber and Sahlins, which relies heavily on world-system thinking, but which also abandons "shopworn" and taken-for-granted concepts such as egalitarian pre-state societies, "things" in the Cartesian sense (as actor-less objects inherently opposed to acting subjects), and the structural disproportion between kings and divines (Graeber & Sahlins 2017: 18-21).

They specifically outline two types of galactic mimesis: *Complementary schismogenesis*, in which individuals/communities, contending for leadership in a community/or larger galactic field, attempt to affiliate with a superior chief to trump their local rivals. Opposite *Complementary schismogenesis* is *antagonistic acculturation*. Here, a lesser group resists the dominant power by adopting their political apparatus, making the claim to power a direct stand-off. In other words, they "scale up" their authority to a higher register of the regional hierarchy (Graeber & Sahlins 2017: 13-14). I argue that Sargon II modeling himself on, or being modeled on, Sargon of Akkad, for example via issuing the *Sargon Birth Legend*, and the adoption of Babylonian theology, to strengthen his claim over both Assyria and Babylonia, can be considered *complementary schismogenesis*. In the case of *Gesta Danorum*, I argue *complemen-*

tary schismogenesis is applicable to the way the Saxo attempts to claim ancient, Danish heritage for Valdemar and the Danish kingdom, with old Norse and Roman backgrounds placed in a medieval, 13th century European church ideology. Simultaneously, the mix of these traditional Nordic tropes with Christian modes of narration, language, and ideology, could be considered *antagonistic acculturation*, challenging the authority of the empire, and the German church, to gain a higher degree of sovereignty, thus striking a balance in the historiography of Danish sovereignty. To Graeber and Sahlins, most societies, wherever we search, are hybrid societies, whose political and cosmological forms are not entirely of any society "originally" (Graeber & Sahlins 2017: 14). As it has been pointed out and shown earlier, all these hybrid societies are embedded in a cosmic hierarchy, and draw upon history-making, ancestors, and divine agents to source this power. This article has, so to speak, tested this hypothesis, but to perform a more fully-fledged test, as well as a more convincing parallel, more research is certainly needed.

Conclusions

This article has explored the relationships between history-making, legendary and divine figures, and their uses as paradigmatic tools for consolidating and legitimizing power in literary narratives. From Ancient Southwestern Eurasia to medieval Western Eurasia, rulers seem to have drawn on perceived or alleged ancestors, even modeling themselves directly on them, to appease their human as well as divine power bases. I have argued that Sargon II of Assyria, upon his usurpation of the crown at the cost of his brother's life, in a display of great ambition, and in his attempt to maintain balance between the great, ancient power bases of Assur and Babylon under one rule, likely took the name of, and even modeled himself on the famous, ancient king Sargon of Akkad. By fighting wars, but also by commissioning great works of literature, art, and architecture, he steeped himself in millennia-deep history, and managed to maintain his rule even with troubles of succession and revolt that seemed ever-present in his time. Though he met a tragic end, he came to be the namesake of the Sargonids, one of the most famous dynasties of Mesopotamian history.

King Valdemar the Great and his sons successfully wrestled themselves free of the grip of their Holy Roman overlords, both spiritually and politically, by nestling themselves both in the ancient, pagan, past of their perceived Roman and Danish ancestors, and in the flourishing, medieval, Christian-European tradition of kingship and church ideology. Despite centuries of domination from the south and a short-lived reign altogether, Valdemar I the Great and his successors themselves became one of the most famous dynasties of Danish history (Danmarkshistorien.dk, Aarhus University). The main point/hypothesis of the article has been to explore the use of ancestral legends and kingmaking. It has presented the argument that embedding oneself and one's rule in the deep, meaningful past, as well as in one's ancestors and gods, while not a direct borrowing of an ancient political strategy, appears to

be a tendency across different societies at different times. This project is far from finished yet, and research is currently being done conducted more deeply into several questions raised in this article, particularly concerning the Mesopotamian-Biblical parallels briefly discussed. As stated, Lewis has noted the similarity between the Sargon-narrative and that of Moses' childhood in Exodus (Lewis 1980: 263-267). According to Lewis, it is impossible to know the origin of the child-exposure narrative itself, but even if it does not exemplify a direct relation from the Sargon- to the Moses-narrative, the narrative-form may well have been quite powerful in ancient Mesopotamia and beyond (Lewis 1980: 266-267). Neither of these are unthinkable, given current consensus around the compilation of the Hebrew Bible being some point after the Exile (Collins 2004: 53-54). I lean towards a more complex explanation, as parallels between Hebrew and Mesopotamian literature are quite plentiful (see for example the Epic of Gilgamesh and Genesis 5-9), but this relationship is one that I will research further in a thesis currently being worked on.

Whether part of the greatest polities of our times, contenders to that very spot, or far-removed peripheral participants, humans are ourselves subjects or deputies in a cosmic order that spans beyond borders both in time and space, co-producers of culture and literature that goes far beyond conventionally conceived realms of politics and power. The right to rule is an opaque one, and one on which much more research is needed. Apart from deeper investigations of the cases provided here, further research could explore the dynamics between rulers, magnates, and scribal- and priestly classes, and their roles in securing and toppling rulers and law, also described by Graeber and Sahlins as a constant negotiation (Graeber & Sahlins 2017: 7 -8).

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