

Akitu was an Assyrian and Babylonian Festival

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We should refer to reliable sources, tablets translations and other historic texts when discussing historical events. Many topics on the Internet are motivated to serve a purpose, sometimes hidden and destructive. People must face and accept the well documented facts, support such facts and refrain from supporting obvious fabricated account.

One historic fact is that Akitu festival took place in both Babylon and Assyria. Translated cuneiform texts are clear in this regard. Thus, we should not scrap or neglect our own history but be proud of it.

In fact, the Akitu ceremony had started earlier in Sumer and later transferred to Babylon and later to Assyria. Lets examine few of these important references that show clearly that Akitu was practiced in Babylon and Assyria and that it was not a strictly Babylonian festival, as few claim.

1. “But it is not legitimate to assume that we have to see the Akitu festival in Assyria as reproducing that of Babylon in all details. In Assyria the Akitu ceremonies did not even necessarily take place at the beginning of the year in the month Nisan (April); we find references to such ceremonies, for example, in either Ab (August) or Elul (September) at a place near Arbil, and in Addar (March) at an unidentified place. The occurrence of the festival in Addar is already evidenced in the early second millennium. However, from the city of Ashur there is also evidence for an Akitu ceremony in Nisan, with strong indications that much of what happened paralleled the Akitu ritual in Babylon.” (**The Might that was Assyria, by H.W.F. Saggs, page 208**).

2. We also read that when Tiglath Pileser took Babylon he took the hands of Marduk in the Akitu festival. (**The Might that was Assyria, by H.W.F. Saggs, page 91**). If the Assyrian King Tiglath-Pileser was stranger to Akitu, he was not going to take the hands of Marduk in the procession in Babylon.

3. “The akītu festival is one of the oldest recorded religious festivals in the world, celebrated for several millennia throughout ancient Mesopotamia. Yet, the akītu was more than just a religious ceremony; it acted as a political device to ensure the supremacy of the king, the national god, and his capital city.” (**The Akitu Festival – Religious Continuty and Royal Legitimation in Mesopotamia, by Julye Bidmead.**)

It is very clear here that Akitu was not only performed in Babylon, rather throughout Mesopotamia.

4. “The akitu or New Year festival in Assyria is a topic that has been quite extensively treated. It has been approached from the perspective of what insights may be gained on royal ideology from examining cultic texts that when pieced together conform a cultic calendar of sorts, from a cultic topography or a geographical perspective, or as part of the “theological reforms” of Sennacherib after the destruction of Babylon. Sennacherib’s shared traits with Tukulti-Ninurta I have also been pointed out. However, the questions of why and how a public festival of this import was inserted into a cultic ground that was not its own during the Sargonid period have never been duly considered. The aim of this paper is to **explain how Esarhaddon succeeded in establishing an akitu network in Assyria** within the framework of his cultic harmonization program, envisioned for the main cultic sites of Assyria and Babylonia, and as a culmination of innovative efforts on that regard initiated by his

predecessors.” (**THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE AKITU UNDER THE SARGONIDS – SOME REFLECTIONS, by Cristina Barcina.**)

Then the same author states:

“Therefore, the decree that Sennacherib issued in 683 BC, two years before his death, granting personnel to the Akitu-house of the Steppe, would theoretically furnish the year when this symbol of Babylonian identity would have its processions enliven the streets of Assur for the first time in history. However, we would be hasty in presuming that Esarhaddon undertook its continuation as a matter of course. The only inscription of Esar-haddon mentioning the celebration of an akitu the so-called Sammeltext (RINAP 4 54), a collection of temple renovations undertaken in **Babylonia and Assyria to be dated to 671 or later, refers actually to the cult of Ištar of Arbela:** (As for) the akitu-house of the steppe, the house of joyful singing, [and I was restoring its rites, [...]. I built that [...] with black (and) blue (glazed) baked bricks [...] Ulūlu (VI), seventeenth day, [...] before them [...] they were bringing their offerings in good time [...] with] far-reaching intelligence (and) vast understanding [...] I seated them inside the akitu-house (and) [...] their ... I placed before [them inside the akitu-house [...].s, ten sheep, ten fowl, seven homers of wine, four homers of [...] ..., groats, this image, for [their] divine meal, [...]. ...of my lord ...[...]. I made [offerings] to their [...] ...I laid its foundations] and secured [its] brickwork. [...] ...I brought in; like [...] ...residence of relaxation of [...] returning ...together with the gods, her counselors, [...].I brought her in and placed her in a [peaceful] dwelling (r.20’–39’).” (**THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE AKITU UNDER THE SARGONIDS – SOME REFLECTIONS, by Cristina Barcina, page 94-95**)

5. “Moreover, an inscription carved on a limestone slab, recently dated to Sargon II by Frahm, refers to a bit akitu. Assurbanipal’s inscriptions indicate that Sargon II was one of the first builders of the bit akitu of the goddess Ishtar in Nineveh. Finally, Assurbanipal himself records his own work and restoration, providing the bit akitu with glazed bricks representing his military deeds. Assurbanipal seems to devote particular attention to the reconstruction of the bit akitu of the goddess in Nineveh.” (**ASSYRIAN HIGH-RELIEF BRICKS FROM NINEVEH AND THE FRAGMENTS OF A ROYAL NAME, by Davide Nadali.**)

Under the leadership of [Prof. Simo Parpola](#), who is an authority in Assyrian studies, several papers were published under the [Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project](#). The academic papers were collected in the publication titled “Assyria 1995”.

Let’s go through few of those papers:

6. Reference to the Akitu festival of Babylon, King Sargon II inscriptions reports that he “takes the hands of Marduk (and) Nabu and leads them to the ceremonies.” (**Assyria 1995, the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project. Paper Titled, What the Assyrians thought the Babylonians thought about the Relative Status of Nebu and Marduk in the Late Assyrian Period, by Barbara Porter, page 257**).

7. “The name of the god Ashur was put into some Assyrian manuscripts of the Babylonian national epic, the enuma elish in place of that of Marduk. Moreover, Sennacherib built a New Year’s Festival center, the bit Akiti sha seri, in which Ashur was to be the chief protagonist in the cosmic battle against chaos, as shown explicitly by on inscription which was to be placed on a bronze door belonging to the

center.” (**Assyria 1995, the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project. Paper Titled, New Dimensions in the Study of Assyrian Religion, by Alasdair Livingstone, page 167**).

8. “Over the years Assyria had carried out actions which would not have endeared them to Babylonians – numerous military actions, removal of the statues of Babylonian deities, large-scale deportation of Babylonians (in particular members of tribal groups), and the destruction of Babylon in 689. The fact that Sennacherib deposited dust from the city of Babylon, which he had just destroyed, in his new temple for Ashur’s Akitu festival, is unlikely to have endeared that god to Babylonians.” (**Assyria 1995, the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project. Paper Titled, The God Ashur in Babylonia, By Grant Frame, page 63**).

It is obvious from the above that the Akitu ceremony was not solely a Babylonian festival, it was an Assyrian festival as well. The History of Mesopotamia is knitted closely. We should not politicize a historic event and try in the process to glorify one political group while demonizing another. No one is trying to undermine our history. It is always fruitful to reach a common understanding.

Akitu is the Assyrian Akkadian term for the ancient New Year festival. Thus, we should protect and preserve our ancient heritage – **Happy Assyrian New Year (Akitu)**.