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Family Rebellions and Political Instability in the Assyrian Empire: A Study of Cuneiform Sources and Visual Representation

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Abstract

This study examines rebellions and dynastic conflicts within the Assyrian royal house as a recurring source of political vulnerability in the Neo-Assyrian Empire (911–609 BC). It integrates two bodies of evidence: cuneiform sources—especially royal inscriptions, Babylonian chronicles, eponym records, treaties, and administrative correspondence—and visual representations from palaces, stelae, and seals. The analysis combines historical reconstruction, source criticism, discourse analysis, and contextual study of images within their architectural and communicative settings. The comparison shows that succession crises were not isolated incidents but recurrent manifestations of weaknesses in the transfer of royal power, visible in the revolt of Aššur-dān-apli (827/826–820 BC), Sennacherib's assassination and the ensuing struggle for the throne (681–680 BC), the rebellion of Šamaš-šumu-ukīn (652–648 BC), and the disturbances of the empire's final decades. The article proposes the concept of "selective visual silence" to explain the limited representation of conflict within the royal family when compared with the extensive depiction of defeated foreign enemies; absence, however, is treated as contextual evidence rather than proof in itself. The study concludes that dynastic warfare, the disruption of elite networks, and the erosion of royal legitimacy contributed substantially to Assyria's declining capacity to withstand Babylonian and Median pressure, without reducing the empire's fall to a single internal cause.

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Introduction: Research Problem and Methodological Framework

The Neo-Assyrian Empire (911–609 BC) was one of the most highly organized and expansive imperial systems in the history of the ancient Near East. At its height, it extended from western Iran in the east to Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean in the west, and from Anatolia in the north to the Arabian Gulf in the south. This political and military structure rested on the strong centrality of the king, who was represented as the earthly agent of the god Aššur and the supreme holder of authority, and on an extensive royal household whose members occupied prominent religious, administrative, and military offices. Yet the concentration of legitimacy in the person of the king and his family made the transfer of power an exceptionally sensitive moment. Competition among dynastic branches could transform the family from a foundation of continuity into a direct source

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of conflict. Assyrian texts record sons rebelling against fathers, brothers contesting the throne, palace conspiracies, assassinations, and coups that affected the balance of the state and its capacity to govern its provinces.

The central research question is: What was the nature of family rebellions and dynastic conflicts in the Assyrian Empire, how were they framed in cuneiform texts and visual representations, and to what extent did they contribute to political instability? Several subsidiary questions follow. What were the semantic fields of the Akkadian terms associated with rebellion and the breach of loyalty? Which historical cases were most significant, and what were their contexts and consequences? How did official visual discourse represent—or avoid representing—an enemy who belonged to the royal house? Finally, to what extent did the cumulative effect of succession crises weaken the state before its fall, without neglecting other military, economic, and geopolitical factors?

The importance of this study lies in the limited number of Arabic-language treatments devoted specifically to conflict within the Assyrian royal house and in the need to bring textual and visual evidence into a single analytical framework rather than examining them separately. The phenomenon also offers a means of testing the relationship between the extreme centralization of authority and the vulnerability of its transfer, a central problem in the study of ancient monarchies.

The study employs a historical-analytical method to reconstruct and sequence events; source criticism to balance royal inscriptions against chronicles, letters, and treaties; discourse analysis to examine the language of legitimacy and rebellion; and contextual visual analysis to interpret artistic scenes within their architectural settings and probable audiences. The absence of an image or name is not treated as evidence in itself, but as an indication that acquires significance only when compared with the broader representational program and with patterns of inclusion and omission in a corpus that is broadly comparable in date and function. The study focuses primarily on the Neo-Assyrian period, while invoking the case of Tukultī-Ninurta I from the Middle Assyrian period as a comparative precedent.

The primary sources comprise the Assyrian royal inscriptions in their standard scholarly editions, especially the Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Assyrian Periods (RIMA) and the Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period (RINAP); the Babylonian chronicles in Grayson's standard edition; the eponym lists in Millard's edition; treaties, loyalty oaths, and administrative letters in the State Archives of Assyria (SAA); and published works of art from museum collections, including the British Museum, the Iraq Museum, and the Louvre, identified by their established registration numbers. These sources are treated as products of authoritative discourse that require criticism and comparison, not as neutral narratives of events: a royal inscription is an instrument of political representation before it is a historical record.

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Previous Scholarship and the Research Gap

In modern scholarship, Simo Parpola's 1980 study of the identity of Sennacherib's murderer marked a turning point by demonstrating that dynastic rebellion could be reconstructed from administrative documentation rather than from royal inscriptions alone[1]. Karen Radner subsequently offered an advanced analytical model of palace conspiracy in her study of the plot against Esarhaddon in 670 BC[2], while Sarah Melville examined the political role of the queen mother Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid politics[3]. Eckart Frahm explored the familial and psychological background of Sennacherib's reign[4], Christopher Jones (2023) comprehensively reassessed the evidence for Sennacherib's assassination[5], Andrew Knapp developed a theoretical framework for "royal apologetic" as a justificatory literary genre[6], and Poppy Tushingham (2024) provided a detailed reassessment of Esarhaddon's succession-covenant documents[7]. In the study of art, the works of Irene Winter, Julian Reade, and John Russell established the interpretation of Assyrian palace reliefs as programmed ideological discourse[8]. In Arabic scholarship, major general studies by Taha Baqir, Ahmad Fakhri, Georges Roux in Arabic translation, and others treated Assyrian political history within broader accounts of ancient Iraq[9], while specialized works examined political thought, treaties, and resistance movements in ancient Mesopotamia[10]. Yet family rebellion as an independent phenomenon integrating textual and visual evidence has not received a comprehensive Arabic study. This is the gap the present article seeks to address.

Hypothesis and Contribution

Although previous scholarship is extensive, most studies concentrate on a single crisis, one textual genre, or a specific artistic program. The contribution of this study lies in testing the hypothesis that recurrent dynastic conflicts reveal a structural vulnerability in the mechanisms of succession and that official discourse addressed this vulnerability through two complementary strategies: textually redefining the rebel as a violator of the oath, and limiting his visual representation unless he had been defeated and absorbed into a narrative of royal victory. This is an interpretive and probabilistic hypothesis; the study therefore distinguishes between what the texts demonstrate directly and what may be inferred from comparison and context.

Section One: Family Rebellion in Assyrian Political and Religious Thought—Concept, Terminology, and Mechanisms of Control

1. The Royal Family and the Structure of Power in the Assyrian State

The Neo-Assyrian state was founded on a monarchy endowed with divine legitimacy and strong political centralization. The king was not himself a god, but official discourse presented him as the representative of the god Aššur (šaknu / išši'ak Aššur) and as the deity's commissioned shepherd over land and people; his person therefore stood at the center of the legitimacy of the entire system. This legitimacy extended from the king to his family. The royal kin group (kimtu), sometimes

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expressed as the "father's house" (bīt abi) or "seed of his father's house" (zēr bīt abīšu), formed the uppermost stratum of the state hierarchy: royal sons occupied the succession and major administrative offices, while the affairs of the harem and royal palaces were managed through a network of royal women headed by the queen and queen mother. Recent studies of royal women have shown that the Assyrian queen was not an isolated symbolic figure, but an active participant in the palace economy and in administrative and religious networks, with her own seals, officials, and estates[11]. Yet this familial prominence was double-edged. Polygyny within the royal harem created competing branches of half-brothers, each with its own mother, supporters, and officials. Competition for the succession therefore became a contest among "houses" within the same household rather than a purely administrative arrangement for inheritance.

At the center of this structure stood the institution of the crown prince. The king selected one of his sons—Assyrian law did not impose primogeniture—designated him the "great son of the king" (mār šarri rabû), and transferred him to the "House of Succession" (bīt redûti), an independent palace with its own administration and staff. Subjects throughout the empire were then bound by loyalty oaths to protect this arrangement. A direct textual witness is an inscription of Sennacherib describing his son Esarhaddon as the "great son of the king who resides in the House of Succession," in the context of inaugurating the new succession palace at Nineveh[12]. Because the selection of the heir was simultaneously royal and divine, it was commonly confirmed by procedures of divination, especially queries concerning the candidate. Esarhaddon famously states that his father Sennacherib asked the god Šamaš, "Is this my heir?" and that the gods replied, "He is your second self." In official discourse, therefore—at least in theory—a familial decision became a divinely endorsed decision that was difficult to challenge.

2. The Lexicon of Rebellion: Akkadian Terms and Their Semantic Fields

Akkadian possessed a precise lexicon for rebellion, distributed across distinct semantic fields. Its analysis reveals an Assyrian awareness of the difference between internal, palace-dynastic revolt and external, vassal-separatist rebellion. Akkadian dictionaries show that sīḫu is frequently used in contexts of internal insurrection, coup, and sedition within a single political entity, whereas bartu denotes rebellion in the broader political sense, including the revolt of vassals against central authority[13]. It is significant that the Babylonian Chronicle used sīḫu specifically for Sennacherib's assassination: "his son killed him in a rebellion/sedition (ina sīḫi)"[14]. The eponym lists likewise recorded each year of Aššur-dān-apli's revolt with the single terse entry si-ḫu ("rebellion")[15]. Official Assyrian institutions thus classified these events as internal rupture rather than war against a foreign enemy.

This terminological awareness appears most clearly in Šamšī-Adad V's account of his brother's revolt, where three expressions are placed in a single sequence: "When Aššur-dān-apli acted improperly in the days of my father Shalmaneser, he stirred up sedition (sīḫu), rebellion (bartu), and evil speech (amāt ḫulṭi), turned the land against its king (māta ušbalkit), and prepared for battle"[16]. The sequence moves from internal sedition to political rebellion and then to verbal

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transgression, transforming a familial act—a son against his father and brother—into a cosmic offense against the order established by the gods. Related to this field are adê (loyalty treaty/covenant) and māmītu (oath and oath-curse). An Assyrian loyalty treaty was not merely a secular political agreement but a sacred oath sworn before the great gods, whose violation activated divine sanctions. Royal texts accordingly cast the family rebel as unfaithful or disloyal (lā kīnu), thereby stripping him of moral and political legitimacy[17]. Modern lexicography likewise shows that māmītu can denote both the oath and the punishment incurred by its breach, just as adê denotes both the covenant and the curse embedded within it[18].

Table 1. Akkadian Terms for Rebellion and Loyalty and Their Semantic Fields

Akkadian term	Lexical meaning	Predominant semantic field	Textual example in this study
sīḫu	Sedition; internal insurrection	Internal revolt and disorder; may occur with bartu in the same context	Sennacherib's assassination (Babylonian Chronicle: ina sīḫi); the years 826–820 in the eponym lists
bartu	Rebellion; armed revolt	Political rebellion, internal or external according to context	Šamšī-Adad V's inscription concerning his brother's revolt
nabalkutu	To cross over; turn against; transfer allegiance	Transfer of loyalty away from legitimate authority	"He turned the land against its king" (māta ušbalkit) in the same inscription
adê	Loyalty covenant; sworn treaty	Regulation of succession and the loyalty of elites and vassals	Esarhaddon's succession treaties (672 BC)
māmītu	Oath / oath-curse	The oath and the sanctions or curses resulting from its breach	Framework for interpreting the death of rebels (Šamaš-šumu-ukīn in the fire)
lā kīnu	Unfaithful; unreliable; disloyal to the oath	Moral and political delegitimation of the opponent	The "unfaithful brother" (aḫu lā kīnu) in Ashurbanipal's inscriptions

3. Royal Legitimacy at the Critical Moment: The Vulnerability of Succession

Karen Radner has observed that Assyrian kingship was at its weakest at the moment of the king's death, incapacity, or old age, and that the killing of a father or brother—however abhorrent—did not constitute an absolute legal or religious barrier to accession. If the perpetrator prevailed, victory

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itself could legitimate him because success was interpreted as a divine judgment in favor of the new king[19]. This observation explains two related features of Assyrian royal discourse. First, a successful usurper regularly emphasized "divine selection" as the sole source of his legitimacy while remaining silent about his lineage. Second, royal literature did not acknowledge usurpation as usurpation, but rewrote it as "deliverance" or "divine response." The throne name adopted at accession could therefore perform a direct propagandistic function. Sargon II chose the name Šarru-kīn ("the legitimate/true king") after reaching the throne in obscure coup-like circumstances; the predecessor from whom he seized power appeared in his inscriptions only as a transgressor deserving divine punishment.

Succession loyalty documents show that the Assyrian state understood this vulnerability and sought to contain it institutionally. Before his death, Sennacherib bound his subjects by oath to his heir Esarhaddon[20]. After the catastrophe of 681 BC, Esarhaddon went further: in 672 BC he concluded comprehensive succession treaties (adê) to secure the throne for his son Ashurbanipal. They encompassed provinces, vassals, and senior officials, and copies were displayed in temples to be read publicly and preserved as sacred "tablets of destinies"[21]. The display itself functioned as an instrument of internal political control at Kalḫu[22]. Yet these mechanisms reveal the depth of fear. The treaty mobilizes its oath-takers against meticulously enumerated scenarios in which the threat might come from "one of his brothers, his uncles, his cousins, his family, a member of his father's dynasty, any descendant of former kings, or any senior official, governor, or eunuch." The royal family thus appears explicitly at the head of the list of possible dangers to the throne, before foreigners and external enemies—a rare institutional admission that the most dangerous enemy could reside within the royal house itself.

Section Two: Historical Cases of Family Rebellion in the Cuneiform Sources

Despite their well-known royal bias, the cuneiform sources make it possible to reconstruct a connected sequence of family rebellions across Assyrian history. Comparison reveals a recurrent structure approaching a historical pattern: the principal actor comes from within the royal house; the critical moment is one of succession, old age, or weakness; and neighboring powers are present either as refuges for rebels or as beneficiaries of their crisis. The principal cases are presented below in chronological order, with attention to the context, textual framing, and political consequences of each.

1. The Early Formation of the Pattern: The Assassination of Tukultī-Ninurta I (ca. 1207 BC)

Although this study focuses chronologically on the Neo-Assyrian Empire, the formative model of Assyrian family rebellion reaches back to the Middle Assyrian period. Tukultī-Ninurta I (1243–1207 BC), conqueror of Babylon and architect of a more expansive Assyrian monarchy, was killed by members of his own family. A Babylonian chronicle, commonly known as the Tukultī-Ninurta

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Chronicle, reports that "his son and the nobles of Assyria rebelled against him, removed him from his throne, confined him in his palace at Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, and killed him with the sword"[23]. The assassination was followed by two decades of dynastic uncertainty, during which three sons and grandsons of the dead king occupied the throne in short and troubled reigns before kingship passed to a collateral branch under Ninurta-apil-Ekur. The methodological significance is twofold. First, family rebellion was an old structural feature of Assyrian history rather than a late aberration. Second, the precedent remained alive in Neo-Assyrian political memory. Eckart Frahm has noted a striking irony: Sennacherib, who appears to have taken Tukultī-Ninurta I as a royal model, ultimately met the same fate at the hands of his sons, as though the foundational tragedy had reproduced itself[24].

2. The Rebellion of Aššur-dān-apli against Shalmaneser III (827–820 BC)

The rebellion of the prince Aššur-dān-apli was the largest and geographically most extensive dynastic revolt of the ninth century BC. Late in the reign of Shalmaneser III (859–824 BC), the commander-in-chief (turtānu) Dayyān-Aššur had monopolized leadership of the army since about 832 BC, while the prince—apparently the effective heir—had accumulated extensive power and influence. When he was displaced in favor of his younger brother Šamšī-Adad, Aššur-dān-apli rebelled in 827/826 BC. Twenty-seven fortified cities joined him, among them Nineveh, Aššur, Arbela, and Arrapḫa—the historic Assyrian heartland—while the capital Kalḫu and the army under Dayyān-Aššur remained loyal to the new heir[25]. The eponym lists show that the crisis lasted six full years, recording "rebellion" (si-ḫu) year after year from 826 to 820 BC[26]. Fighting continued after the aged Shalmaneser died in 824 BC. Šamšī-Adad V prevailed only after seeking the assistance of the Babylonian king Marduk-zākir-šumi I, at the cost of a politically humiliating treaty that exceptionally acknowledged the superior position of the Babylonian party[27]. The treaty measures the high political price paid by the recognized king to extinguish his brother's revolt.

Structurally, this case demonstrated that dynastic rebellion could divide the Assyrian core itself—not merely dependent territories—into opposing camps and could consume state resources for years. After its suppression, the empire entered what historians often describe as an age of stagnation. The annual campaigns that had been the lifeblood of the state declined, while the great magnates (rabûti), above all the commander Šamšī-ilu, rose to a position approaching shared authority with the king for almost half a century[28]. Assyria recovered its expansionist dynamism only with another dynastic coup, the accession of Tiglath-pileser III in 745 BC[29]. The revolt of 827–820 BC thus established a recurring equation: dynastic rebellion could be defeated militarily while leaving a prolonged structural imbalance in the distribution of power within the state.

3. The Mid-Eighth-Century Crisis and the Usurpation of Tiglath-pileser III (763–745 BC)

After the reign of Adad-nārārī III (810–783 BC), whose early years witnessed the well-known regency of the queen mother Šammuramat, the empire entered a phase of compound disintegration:

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recurrent epidemics in 765 and 759 BC; the total solar eclipse of 15 June 763 BC, interpreted as a celestial sign of divine anger; and a sequence of revolts recorded by the eponym lists even in heartland cities—Aššur (763–762), Arrapḫa (761–760), and Guzana (759)[30]. The two phenomena interacted: dynastic weakness at the center encouraged rebellion in the provinces, while widespread rebellion prepared the way for a decisive dynastic intervention. In 746 BC, revolt broke out in Kalḫu itself; in the following year Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 BC) seized the throne under coup-like circumstances that his inscriptions do not disclose[31].

The king's origins are themselves revealingly obscure. The Assyrian King List calls him a son of Aššur-nērārī V, whereas a later brick inscription describes him as a son of Adad-nārārī III. This contradiction is commonly interpreted as a legitimizing fabrication by a usurper who, if he belonged to the dynasty at all, came from a collateral branch[32]. His inscriptions omit his father entirely, a characteristic feature of Assyrian usurper discourse in which human genealogy is replaced by abstract "divine selection." The major historical paradox is that this elite-dynastic coup saved the empire from disintegration. The new king rebuilt the state through far-reaching military and administrative reforms—a standing army, smaller provinces, and mass deportation—showing that the Assyrian system could correct its crises through internal violence itself. In this case, family rebellion became an agent of "refoundation," not merely of fragmentation, although it remained an exception that underscores the broader pattern.

4. The Crisis of 722 BC and the Accession of Sargon II

The same pattern recurred at the death of Shalmaneser V in 722 BC. Sargon II (721–705 BC) took the throne in ambiguous circumstances accompanied by uprisings in the Levant and Babylonia, while his origins were deliberately obscured: he never names his father in his inscriptions and adopted the conspicuously programmatic throne name Šarru-kīn, "the legitimate king"—a claim unnecessary for one whose legitimacy was uncontested. A unique document, the Aššur Charter, preserves an echo of the internal struggle surrounding his accession. It accuses his predecessor Shalmaneser V of violating the ancient privileges of the holy city of Aššur by imposing corvée labor; the god Aššur therefore overthrew his kingship. In this way, the document legitimates the coup retrospectively and records that Sargon deported 6,300 Assyrian "wrongdoers" (bēl ḥiṭṭi) to Hamath in Syria[33]. Such a large number of offenders from the Assyrian homeland strongly suggests a broad purge of supporters of the deposed royal branch, making Sargon's accession another episode in a dynastic struggle for the throne, veiled by a discourse of sacrilege and divine condemnation[34]. Sargon's own death in battle in 705 BC, with his body lost in enemy territory, struck the royal family as a cosmic shock. It was interpreted as divine punishment, and its psychological shadow remained present in the conduct of his son Sennacherib throughout his reign[35].

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5. The Assassination of Sennacherib (681 BC) and the Fraternal Civil War

Sennacherib's assassination represents the dramatic climax of Assyrian family rebellion and is the best documented event in the present corpus because multiple sources converge on it. The story begins with what Frahm has called Sennacherib's "inconsistent succession policy." He appointed his son Aššur-nādin-šumi crown prince and king of Babylon in 700 BC, but the Elamites captured him in 694 BC and he died in captivity. Sennacherib then made Arda-Mulišši crown prince for approximately a decade, only to displace him abruptly in 684 BC in favor of his younger half-brother Esarhaddon, son of Queen Naqia, and compelled the displaced prince to swear loyalty to him. In his celebrated apologetic inscription, Esarhaddon describes his brothers' response: they "went mad and drew their swords in a godless manner in the midst of Nineveh"[36]. On the twentieth day of Ṭebētu in 681 BC, according to the Babylonian Chronicle, Sennacherib was "killed by his son in a rebellion," and the upheaval in Assyria lasted from 20 Ṭebētu to 2 Addaru, approximately six weeks[37]. The biblical account names the assassins as Adrammelech and Sharezer. In Parpola's influential hypothesis, these names correspond to Arda-Mulišši and Nabû-šarru-uṣur; his argument drew in part on an administrative letter, SAA 18 no. 100, concerning Arda-Mulišši's movements in the palace before the murder[38]. Stephanie Dalley and Luis Siddall (2021) reread the letter and reduced its evidentiary value, while Andrew Knapp went further by considering the possibility that Esarhaddon himself was implicated. The most recent comprehensive assessment by Christopher Jones (2023), however, again favors the brothers' culpability and describes the event as a "failed coup"[39].

Whatever the precise distribution of culpability, the political structure of the event is clear: a palace coup within the family became an open civil war. Esarhaddon—whom his father had sent to the western provinces for his protection—met his brothers' army in Ḫanigalbat in the western empire. Most soldiers deserted the brothers and joined him, and he entered Nineveh without resistance six weeks after his father's death. Retribution was comprehensive: "I counted one by one the ranks of the rebel troops who had plotted the conspiracy for my brothers, imposed a severe punishment upon them, and annihilated their offspring"[40]. The two principal assassins fled to the northern kingdom of Urarṭu, an instructive precedent for the role of a neighboring power as a refuge for dynastic rebels. The shock produced two enduring consequences: a wide purge among administrative and military elites, and a memory of dynastic trauma that shaped Esarhaddon's political conduct until the end of his reign.

6. The Conspiracy of 670 BC against Esarhaddon: The Rebellion That Could Not Be Named

Royal investigative documents, rather than celebratory inscriptions, reveal another episode of palace vulnerability. In 670 BC, a conspiracy emerged to install a man named Sasî as king. It was fueled by an ecstatic prophet who announced in the name of the god Nusku that Esarhaddon had been deposed, and its network implicated senior palace officials and inhabitants of the Assyrian heartland. Karen Radner reconstructed the crisis from royal divinatory queries and from a terse

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entry in the Babylonian Chronicle: "The king put many of his magnates in Assyria to the sword"[41]. The methodological significance is twofold. First, the danger of a coup was no longer confined to direct members of the royal family but extended to elite networks aligned with dynastic factions; its rhetorical instruments were distinctly religious, in the form of false prophecy. Second, the events are entirely absent from Esarhaddon's official royal inscriptions. As Radner emphasizes, the internal enemy could scarcely be acknowledged in celebratory discourse, because the admission of his existence undermined the image of a king protected by the gods[42]. This "documentary silence" anticipates the discussion of visual representation in Section Three.

7. Sargonid Succession Engineering: The Treaties of 672 BC and the Zakutu Treaty

Esarhaddon responded to the cumulative shocks of 681 and 670 BC with an unprecedented institutional engineering of the succession, based on three complementary instruments. First came the division of kingship. In 672 BC he designated his younger son Ashurbanipal as crown prince of Assyria and his elder surviving son Šamaš-šumu-ukīn as crown prince of Babylon. This dual arrangement was intended to prevent a repetition of 681 and to provide Babylon with its own king, thereby absorbing some of its separatist impulse[43]. Second were the comprehensive succession treaties (adê) concluded with provinces, vassals, and senior officials to protect the arrangement. The text mobilizes the oath-takers against disturbingly precise scenarios: "If one of his brothers, his uncles, his cousins, his family, a member of his father's dynasty, any descendant of former kings, or any senior official, governor, or eunuch draws you into a conspiracy"[44]. The royal family thus stands, with unusual explicitness, at the head of the anticipated dangers to the throne. Copies of the treaty were displayed in major temples to be read and preserved before the gods. The Tell Tayinat copy, discovered in 2009, demonstrates its institutional display in a provincial temple[45], while Cristina Barcina has shown that the Kalḫu copy in the temple of Nabû (Ezida) functioned chiefly as an instrument of internal political control directed at the Assyrian elite itself[46]. Third came the treaty of the queen mother Zakutu (Naqia), which after Esarhaddon's death bound the royal family and the entire court to loyalty toward her grandson Ashurbanipal and expressly required the reporting of any sedition, whether originating with his brothers or any member of the royal line[47]. The woman who had lived through the killing of her husband Sennacherib by his sons thus became the guardian and enforcer of the new dynastic order, giving Melville's analysis of her political role a particular tragic dimension[48]. Yet this carefully constructed system contained the seed of its failure: the division of kingship between two brothers, however elaborate its oaths and rituals, ultimately depended on the relationship between the brothers themselves, and that relationship collapsed exactly two decades later.

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8. The Great Fraternal Rebellion: Šamaš-šumu-ukīn against Ashurbanipal (652–648 BC)

After sixteen years of dual royal coexistence, Šamaš-šumu-ukīn, king of Babylon, rebelled against his younger brother Ashurbanipal in 652 BC, initiating the gravest civil war in the history of the empire. Ashurbanipal's inscriptions portray his opponent as the "unfaithful brother" (aḫu lā kīnu) who "violated my treaty (adê) … whose words were outwardly favorable while inwardly he plotted murder." This formulation converts fraternal betrayal into a major oath offense deserving divine punishment[49]. The rebel assembled a wide regional coalition—Elamites, Chaldeans, Arameans, and Arab tribes—transforming the family conflict into a general imperial war. Ashurbanipal subjected Babylon, Borsippa, Sippar, and Cutha to devastating sieges whose horrors are recorded by the chronicles. Babylon fell in 648 BC, and the rebel king died in the burning of his palace. Royal propaganda interpreted his death as the literal realization of the oath-curse: "the great gods … cast that hostile brother into a blazing fire and destroyed his life"[50]. Popular memory preserves a tragic human dimension in a later Aramaic composition, Papyrus Amherst 63, which tells of Šērūa-ēṭirat, sister of the two kings, attempting to stop the war and warning them that "war between brothers is not good"[51]. Despite Assyria's military victory, the strategic consequences were severe. Babylon was devastated and the empire's claim to guardianship of the south was weakened; the army was consumed for four years in the imperial core rather than at the frontiers; Egypt was effectively lost from 655 BC; and the regional balance on which Assyrian security depended was disrupted. Mario Liverani therefore regards the war as a turning point at which the empire's countdown began while it still stood at the height of its territorial extent[52]. Family rebellion had moved from a recurrent destabilizing factor to an instrument of structural fracture within the imperial project itself.

9. Dynastic Collapse: Conflict among the Sons and the End of the Empire (631–609 BC)

The empire's final decades show a close conjunction between disrupted succession and declining political and military capacity. The last securely attested date of Ashurbanipal is 631 BC, while the exact end of his reign remains debated. Aššur-etel-ilāni then occupied the throne before Sîn-šarru-iškun succeeded him under circumstances that remain fragmentarily documented[53]. In Babylonia, the eunuch commander Sîn-šumu-līšir briefly claimed kingship in 626 BC, demonstrating that the crisis at the center had expanded from rivalry among royal family members to the palace and military command networks[54]. In the vacuum created by these struggles, Nabû-apla-uṣur (Nabopolassar) established Babylonian independence in 626 BC, and the Babylonian chronicles describe the subsequent campaigns within the context of disintegrating Assyrian control over the south. A reconstruction of 623–622 BC also suggests that an Assyrian commander in the western provinces rebelled and temporarily seized Nineveh before Sîn-šarru-iškun recovered the capital after approximately one hundred days, although both the details and the rebel's identity remain uncertain[55]. Some late texts attributed to Ashurbanipal, including tablet K 891, employ a

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personal language of grief and exhaustion, but they do not provide direct testimony of a conflict within his family and cannot be used to prove a specific dynastic struggle[56]. The fragmented evidence indicates that succession crises were an important component in weakening the center, but it does not diminish the effects of Babylonian independence, the rise of Median power, and military pressure on multiple fronts[57]. Nineveh fell in 612 BC, while Assyrian resistance continued at Harran until 609 BC.

Table 2. Major Family Rebellions in Assyrian History and Their Political Consequences

Event	Date (BC)	Dynastic parties	Principal cuneiform source	Political consequence
Assassination of Tukultī-Ninurta I	ca. 1207	The king's son and senior elites against the royal father	Tukultī-Ninurta Chronicle (ABC 22)	Two decades of dynastic uncertainty and weakened kingship
Rebellion of Aššur-dān-apli	827–820	The displaced son against his father and his brother, the designated heir	Inscription of Šamšī-Adad V; eponym records	Approximately half a century of stagnation and the rise of the magnates
Coup of Tiglath-pileser III	746–745	A usurper from a dynastic branch seizes the throne	Eponym records; contradiction between the King List and the inscriptions	Refoundation of the empire through far-reaching reforms
Accession of Sargon II	722	Palace coup and possible usurpation	Aššur Charter (RINAP 2, no. 89)	Foundation of the Sargonid dynasty; deportation of 6,300 Assyrians
Assassination of Sennacherib and succession war	681–680	Displaced sons against their father and his designated heir	Babylonian Chronicle; Apology of Esarhaddon (RINAP 4, no. 1)	Purge of elites; a traumatic memory that shaped the new reign
Conspiracy of Sasî	670	Palace elites aligned with dynastic factions	Divinatory queries; Babylonian Chronicle	Execution of senior officials; intensified palace surveillance

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Event	Date (BC)	Dynastic parties	Principal cuneiform source	Political consequence
Rebellion of Šamaš-šumu-ukīn	652–648	The elder brother (king of Babylon) against the younger brother	Ashurbanipal's inscriptions; Babylonian Chronicle	Exhaustion of Babylonia and the army; a major turning point but not the sole cause of collapse
Conflict among the sons and the eunuch's usurpation	ca. 631/630–622	Sons of Ashurbanipal; Sîn-šumu-līšir; a rebellious Assyrian commander	Babylonian chronicles (ABC 2–3)	Loss of control over Babylonia, disorder at the center, and increased external pressure

Taken together, these cases reveal five structural constants. First, the principal actor comes from within the royal "father's house" or from its immediate palace instruments. Second, the critical moment is succession, old age, or illness. Third, the family rebel regularly seeks regional support—Urarṭu, Babylon, Elam, or Media—just as the state mobilizes regional powers against him. Fourth, punishment extends to the rebel's "seed" (zēru), reflecting a struggle among dynastic branches rather than merely among individuals. Fifth, official discourse adopts a dual policy: theological amplification of punishment once the rebellion has been suppressed, and deep silence while it is active or successful. In Frahm's classification of Assyrian rebellions—which distinguishes vassal revolts, separatist movements in newly annexed regions, and factional conflicts in the imperial core—family rebellions emerge as the most dangerous form of the third category because they strike the center of legitimacy rather than its periphery[58].

Section Three: Family Rebellion in Visual Representation—The Presence and Absence of the Image

Whereas cuneiform texts frame family rebellions through the language of legitimacy and oath violation, visual representations reveal what the state chose to display and what it left outside the field of representation. An Assyrian palace relief is not a comprehensive record of events but a selective program related to architecture, audience, and the function of the palace. Absence is therefore not automatic proof of deliberate suppression, but it becomes meaningful when it recurs across several artistic programs and is compared with the dense visual presence of victories over external enemies.

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1. The Function of Assyrian Visual Representation and Its Intended Audiences

Irene Winter's work established the understanding of Assyrian palace relief as a programmed form of "royal rhetoric." Sculpted slabs were not distributed randomly across palace walls but according to an architectural and functional logic: images of gods and protective beings at entrances and thresholds; war and victory scenes in the major reception suites where visitors and delegations stood; and royal hunt scenes in more restricted spaces. The reliefs therefore addressed multiple audiences: the gods first, then the court elite and foreign visitors, and finally later kings as successors to the ruler[59]. Winter also showed that the Assyrian "royal image" performed a preservative function within the cosmic order: the king leading the army, hunting lions, or supervising ritual embodied order triumphing over chaos, not merely successful military leadership[60]. Julian Reade characterized this art as propaganda in the literal sense, intended to intimidate enemies, reassure subjects, and glorify the state[61]. Through architectural analysis, John Russell demonstrated that the distribution of text and image within the palace followed precise rules of audience: some of the most violent scenes occupied spaces of restricted visibility, while some messages were intended for divine eyes alone[62]. Pamela Gerardi's study of epigraphs accompanying the reliefs further showed how short labels developed to direct ideological interpretation by naming the enemy, specifying his offense, and fixing his punishment[63]. Within this framework, presence and absence may be read as elements in a politics of representation, while avoiding the assumption that every absence proves direct censorship.

2. The Image's Silence concerning the Family Rebel: A Pattern with Exceptions

Within the known palace programs, direct representation of the family rebel is almost entirely absent. No preserved scene depicts Sennacherib's assassination or Esarhaddon's confrontation with his brothers, and the war of Šamaš-šumu-ukīn is not represented as a confrontation between two brothers. This study proposes that the pattern reflects the difficulty of incorporating a divided royal house into an image that presents the king and his family as the center of order. The explanation remains probabilistic, since the loss of large portions of the relief programs and the selective nature of their subjects require caution. Textual comparison supports the possibility: Radner has shown that internal conspiracies could be omitted from celebratory inscriptions[64], whereas Esarhaddon's stelae from Til Barsip and Zincirli display the dual succession arrangement prospectively and affirm the unity of the royal project[65]. The placement of the two heirs beside the king may therefore be understood as a public declaration of dynastic order and a deterrent message, not as direct evidence that the state expected an inevitable war between them. This distinction is essential if the image is not to be burdened with claims it does not explicitly make.

A revealing case appears after the fall of Babylon in 648 BC on slabs from Room M of the North Palace at Nineveh (BM 124945–124946). The scene shows Ashurbanipal receiving prisoners and booty taken from Babylon after the suppression of his brother's rebellion, but it does not represent Šamaš-šumu-ukīn or the fraternal confrontation itself[66]. The family conflict enters the image through its military consequences and confiscated objects, after being transformed into a narrative

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of royal victory[67]. Some royal inscriptions call Šamaš-šumu-ukīn the "hostile" or "unfaithful brother," making kinship part of the textual condemnation while the rebellious royal body remains outside the surviving visual scene. This does not establish an absolute rule, but it illustrates the mechanism of reframing: the effects of rebellion are displayed after its defeat, while a confrontation between the brothers as equivalent members of the royal house is withheld.

3. Visually Acceptable Dynastic Conflict: The Foreign Enemy as a Counter-Model

In contrast to the limited representation of internal dynastic conflict, Assyrian art allowed broader visual treatment of crises of legitimacy and political violence among foreign opponents. The best-known example is the Garden Banquet scene (BM 124920) from the North Palace, in which Ashurbanipal and his queen appear in a festive setting while the head of the Elamite king Teumman hangs nearby. Teumman had seized the throne after the death of Urtak and had driven members of the Elamite royal house to seek refuge in Assyria[68]. The scene does not depict a "family rebellion" in the strict sense. Rather, it appropriates an Elamite crisis of legitimacy and the defeat of a foreign opponent to affirm the security and control of the Assyrian king. The contrast between royal calm and the suspended head reinforces a discourse of order and victory, but it cannot alone establish a general Assyrian attitude toward every foreign dynastic conflict[69].

The most precise visual connection between family rebellion and Assyrian propaganda may be the throne base from Fort Shalmaneser, now in the Iraq Museum, where Shalmaneser III clasps hands with the Babylonian king Marduk-zākir-šumi I. This encounter between formally equal kings—rare in Assyrian art—commemorates Shalmaneser's intervention in the Babylonian civil war between the king and his rebellious brother Marduk-bēl-ušāti (851–850 BC)[70]. Assyria thus represented itself as the defender of royal legitimacy against fraternal rebellion in Babylonia, only to face a still more violent fraternal revolt in its own heartland a generation later. The image demonstrates how intervention in a foreign succession crisis could present the Assyrian king as the protector of legitimate order. Comparing it with later conflicts within Assyria, however, remains a historical reading imposed from outside the image rather than a message explicitly stated within it.

4. Erasing Memory and the Final Warning: The Inverse Politics of Image and Text

If the production of an image was a political decision, its destruction was a corresponding act. Traces of "memory erasure" (damnatio memoriae) appear in this corpus through damage, reuse, and changes of context. Copies of Esarhaddon's succession treaty were found broken in the Ezida temple at Nimrud within the destruction layer of 612 BC; the find context alone, however, does not identify who broke them or whether the damage deliberately targeted the dynasty[71]. Conversely, royal inscriptions end with curses against anyone who erases the king's name or destroys his text, as in the warning colophon of the Rassam Cylinder, showing the importance

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assigned to the endurance of name and monument in sustaining legitimacy[72]. The omission or abbreviation of genealogy in the inscriptions of kings whose accessions were disputed, such as Sargon II and Tiglath-pileser III, may likewise be interpreted as a strategy that privileged divine selection over descent[73]. Yet calling this the "erasure of the father" must remain an interpretation rather than a direct textual fact. Ömür Harmanşah has shown that cities, texts, and images in the ancient Near East were contested arenas for creating and erasing memory[74]. Family rebellion, as a crisis of legitimacy, was therefore a battle over memory before it was a battle of armies.

Table 3. Major Works of Art Related to Family Rebellion and Their Ideological Significance

Work of art	Location / registration number	Date (BC)	Connection with family rebellion	Ideological significance
Throne base of Shalmaneser III (hand-clasp scene)	Fort Shalmaneser; Iraq Museum	ca. 846–845	Commemorates Assyrian intervention in a Babylonian fraternal revolt	Assyria as protector of royal legitimacy against rebellion among "others"
Stelae of Esarhaddon with the two heirs	Til Barsip (Tell Ahmar); Zincirli	ca. 673–672	Displays the dual succession arrangement intended to deter dynastic revolt	A deterrent message directed at internal rivals
Presentation slabs after the fall of Babylon (Room M)	North Palace, Nineveh	after 648	Displays prisoners and booty after suppressing Šamaš-šumu-ukīn's revolt	Reframes family conflict as the outcome of a royal victory
Garden Banquet scene and the head of Teumman	North Palace, Nineveh; BM 124920	ca. 645–640	Appropriates the Elamite legitimacy crisis and Teumman's defeat	Contrasts Assyrian royal security with the disorder of a defeated enemy
Lachish reliefs (punishment scenes)	Southwest Palace, Nineveh	ca. 700–692	Model of public punishment for violators of loyalty	Furnishes the political imagination with the expected end of rebellion

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Work of art	Location / registration number	Date (BC)	Connection with family rebellion	Ideological significance
Broken copies of the succession treaty	Ezida temple, Nimrud; Tell Tayinat	672 (broken in 612)	Succession texts intended to prevent rebellion; recovered from destruction contexts	Breakage alone cannot establish the motive for destruction or the identity of the agent

Section Four: The Structural Impact of Family Rebellions on Political Stability—An Analytical Reading

Having examined the historical cases and their textual and visual meanings, this section addresses the central question: through what mechanisms did family rebellions weaken political stability and imperial capacity? The answer is discussed under six interrelated themes, while distinguishing structural contribution from the immediate causes of collapse.

1. The Recurrent Critical Moment: Succession as a Crisis-Prone Structure

The chronological distribution of the cases in Table 2 shows that most major crises clustered around transfers of power or the final years of a king's reign. The pattern may be explained by the combination of an intensely centralized monarchy, wide flexibility in selecting the crown prince, multiple maternal branches, and competing court networks. Loyalty oaths and advance proclamations of succession reduced the danger but did not create a fixed rule capable of preventing renewed competition after the king's death[75]. Dynastic conflict may therefore be described as a recurrent vulnerability of the system, not as an inevitable outcome of every accession.

2. Material and Military Costs: Civil War as Self-Exhaustion

The major family rebellions imposed heavy military and financial costs. Aššur-dān-apli's revolt lasted from 827/826 to 820 BC and extended to twenty-seven cities, while the war of Šamaš-šumu-ukīn lasted from 652 to 648 BC and involved sieges and campaigns in Babylonia and its surroundings[76]. In the empire's final years, Assyrian armies fought in Babylonia and then returned to address internal disturbances in the west and at the capital, dissipating time and strength as the external danger intensified. Dynastic wars therefore constituted a real form of self-exhaustion, even if their cost cannot be quantified because financial and military records are incomplete. The war between the brothers remains one of the significant turning points from expansion to defense[77].

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3. Purges of the Elite and Administrative Disruption: The Hidden Human Cost

The consequences of crisis extended beyond the battlefield into administrative and command networks. After the struggle of 681–680 BC, Esarhaddon announced the punishment of participants and the destruction of their offspring, while the Babylonian Chronicle recorded the execution of many senior officials during the conspiracy of 670 BC[78]. These measures suggest a coercive restructuring of elite networks, although the sources do not permit the scale or duration of institutional loss to be measured precisely. Sargon II's deportation of 6,300 Assyrian "wrongdoers" to Hamath indicates extensive collective punishment, but does not prove that all of them belonged to the administrative elite. Nevertheless, recurrent execution, deportation, and shifts of allegiance could weaken trust and accumulated expertise within an apparatus that depended heavily on personal and familial ties.

4. Crisis of Legitimacy and the Discourse of Justification: When a King Requires an "Apology"

The accumulation of usurpations and dynastic assassinations created a growing need for justificatory discourse that had been less prominent in earlier Assyrian kingship. What Hayim Tadmor called "autobiographical apology" in Assyrian royal literature reached its fullest expression in the Apology of Esarhaddon, which devotes substantial space to explaining the circumstances of his accession—an indication that the succession required exceptional explanation and justification[79]. Knapp has analyzed this literary genre as a technique for rebuilding legitimacy after contested accessions and has examined revisionist interpretations of the events of 681 BC. The more recent assessment by Jones, however, favors understanding Sennacherib's assassination as a failed coup led by Esarhaddon's opponents, not as evidence of Esarhaddon's complicity[80]. Other legitimizing instruments complemented apologetic: the programmatic throne name Šarru-kīn ("legitimate king"); the omission of genealogy from royal titulary; exaggerated emphasis on abstract divine selection; and the moral and religious delegitimation of the opponent as "unfaithful" or "an oath-breaker." The most important analytical point is that these instruments, however effective, treated the symptoms of a legitimacy crisis rather than its cause. Each new king who survived a family rebellion reproduced the conditions that had produced it: absolute centralization, an incompletely institutionalized succession, and a harem divided into multiple branches. The system thus entered a cycle renewed in every generation.

5. External Exploitation of Dynastic Crisis: The Open Frontiers of Internal Conflict

Family rebellions never remained exclusively internal. The geopolitics of the ancient Near East made every Assyrian dynastic crisis a strategic opportunity for rival powers, and the reverse was equally true. Urarṭu sheltered Sennacherib's assassins; Babylon supported Šamšī-Adad V against his brother at a high political price; Elamites, Chaldeans, and Arabs joined Šamaš-šumu-ukīn's

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coalition against Ashurbanipal; and Media and Babylonia benefited from the final conflict among the sons. In the opposite direction, Assyria itself was highly skilled at exploiting the dynastic crises of others. Shalmaneser III intervened in the Babylonian civil war between Marduk-zākir-šumi and his brother Marduk-bēl-ušāti, gaining influence and the legitimacy of a "protector of kingship." Ashurbanipal received members of the Elamite royal family who had fled their dynastic conflict and turned them into instruments for the dismantling of Elam[81]. This reciprocal pattern shows that succession crises formed part of regional competition: an external rival offered refuge or support, while the central state used exiles and claimants to foreign thrones in return. Disorder at the Assyrian center had particularly wide consequences because of the empire's extensive military and administrative commitments, although comparison with Babylonia and Elam does not permit a definitive ranking of the relative fragility of each system.

6. From Rebellion to Collapse: Structural Convergence in the Final Years

The strands of the analysis converge in the period from the last securely dated evidence for Ashurbanipal in 631 BC to the fall of Harran in 609 BC. The sources for this phase are fragmentary, and the chronology of Aššur-etel-ilāni and Sîn-šarru-iškun remains disputed. Nevertheless, dynastic competition, the royal claim of Sîn-šumu-līšir, and the revolt of a commander in the west coincided with the loss of Babylonia and the intensification of Median-Babylonian pressure[82]. This does not mean that family rebellions alone "caused" the fall. Rather, they reduced the state's capacity to mobilize resources and make decisions at a critical moment. Nineveh's collapse should therefore be understood as the interaction of internal disintegration and an external military coalition, not as the automatic culmination of a single dynastic trajectory.

Conclusion: Results, Interpretations, and Limitations

After balancing the textual and visual evidence and taking its limitations into account, the study reaches the following conclusions:

1. Cases of family rebellion reveal a recurrent vulnerability in Assyrian mechanisms of succession, especially at the king's death or when the designated heir was changed. Dynastic conflict was therefore an important structural factor, but it was not an inevitable feature of every transfer of power.
2. The texts employ overlapping Akkadian terms for sedition, rebellion, and the transfer of allegiance; no single term should automatically be assigned to only one type of conflict. Official discourse describes the opponent as unfaithful or disloyal to the oath, not as an "unbeliever" in the modern technical sense.
3. The revolt of Aššur-dān-apli (827/826–820 BC) is the clearest early example of a succession war that extended into the cities of the Assyrian heartland. It demonstrates that the restoration of

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military control did not necessarily erase the effects of division on the balance among elites and within the state.

4. Sennacherib's assassination and the subsequent struggle demonstrate that a succession crisis could generate extensive purges within palace and military networks. The experience of 681 BC helped shape Esarhaddon's policies, the succession treaties, and Zakutu's measures.
5. The rebellion of Šamaš-šumu-ukīn (652–648 BC) was a major turning point. It consumed state resources and reshaped Assyria's relationship with Babylonia, but it does not by itself explain the empire's collapse decades later.
6. The study proposes a pattern of "selective visual silence" concerning direct confrontation among members of the royal family. Surviving programs do not depict Sennacherib's assassination or Esarhaddon's battle with his brothers, and they present the aftermath and booty of Babylon's fall rather than an equal confrontation between the two brothers. The conclusion remains probabilistic because substantial portions of the visual corpus have been lost.
7. Scenes associated with Teumman and Marduk-zākir-šumi permit analysis of how external legitimacy crises were incorporated into Assyrian victory discourse. They are not all family rebellions in the strict sense and should not be made to carry an explicit message about internal Assyrian conflicts.
8. Loyalty treaties, divine selection, and the intervention of the queen mother reduced the risks of succession, but they remained instruments of deterrence and stabilization of an existing arrangement rather than a permanent constitutional rule capable of preventing renewed competition.
9. In the final decades, disorder within the dynasty and palace networks interacted with Babylonian independence, the rise of Media, and military pressure on several fronts. Internal conflict was therefore a major weakening factor within a multicausal explanation of the empire's fall.
10. The study confirms the value of integrating text and image, but emphasizes that "absence" becomes evidence only when it is examined within a defined corpus and compared with what could have been represented and what official discourse actually chose to display.

The study is limited by the incompleteness of the archives, the loss of large portions of palace programs, and the differing character of its sources, which range from celebratory texts to administrative documents and later chronicles. Future research should expand the visual corpus to include seals, statues, stelae, and deliberately damaged monuments, and should undertake systematic comparison with succession crises in Babylonia, Elam, and Urarṭu. Letters and administrative archives should be used as necessary counterweights to royal inscriptions, but not treated as neutral or inherently "more truthful" sources.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Comparative Chronology of Major Family Rebellions and Succession Crises

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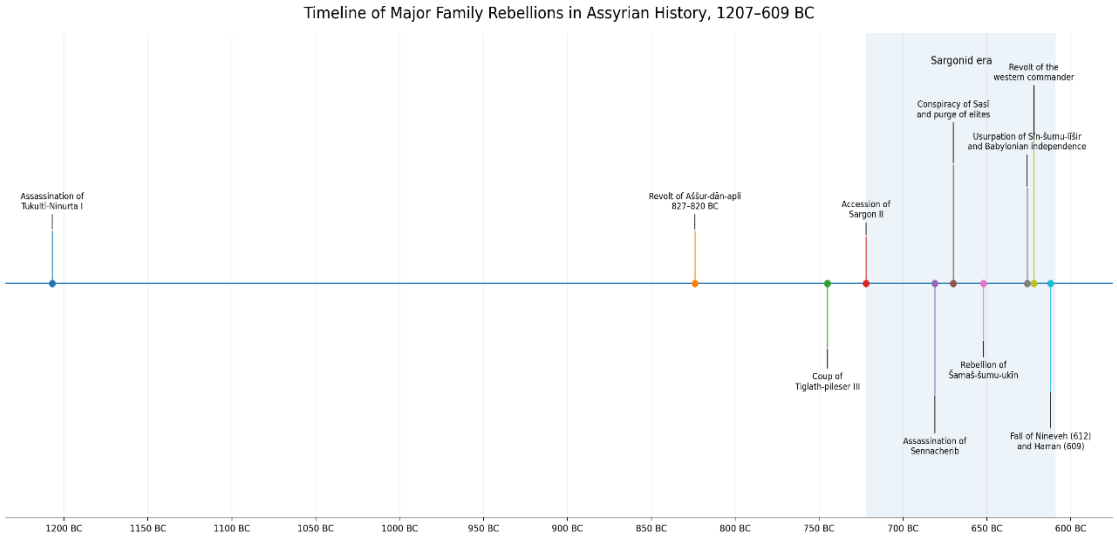
Year (BC)	**Event**
ca. 1225	Tukultī-Ninurta I captures Babylon and Middle Assyrian kingship reaches its height
ca. 1207	Tukultī-Ninurta I is assassinated by his son and senior elites; dynastic uncertainty begins
827/826	Aššur-dān-apli rebels against his father Shalmaneser III
824	Shalmaneser III dies while the civil war continues
820	Šamšī-Adad V suppresses the revolt with Babylonian assistance
763–759	Repeated revolts in Aššur, Arrapḫa, and Guzana; the Bur-Sagale eclipse and epidemics
746–745	Revolt at Kalḫu; Tiglath-pileser III seizes the throne
722	Accession of Sargon II; the Aššur Charter and the deportation of "wrongdoers"
705	Sargon II dies in battle and his body is lost
694	Aššur-nādin-šumi, crown prince and king of Babylon, is captured by the Elamites
684	Arda-Mulišši is displaced and Esarhaddon designated crown prince
681	Sennacherib is assassinated on 20 Ṭebētu; fraternal civil war follows
680	Esarhaddon enters Nineveh and purges the coup network
673–672	Ashurbanipal and Šamaš-šumu-ukīn are designated as heirs; succession treaties are concluded
670	Conspiracy of Sasî and execution of senior officials
669	Esarhaddon dies; Zakutu's treaty protects Ashurbanipal's accession
652	The rebellion of Šamaš-šumu-ukīn begins
648	Babylon falls and Šamaš-šumu-ukīn dies in the burning of his palace
631	Last secure date for Ashurbanipal; Aššur-etel-ilāni succeeds at an uncertain date
627	Sîn-šarru-iškun takes the throne in a disputed chronology
626	Sîn-šumu-līšir usurps power in Babylonia; Nabopolassar establishes Babylonian independence
622	A western commander rebels and temporarily occupies Nineveh
614	The city of Aššur falls to the Medes
612	Nineveh falls to the Median-Babylonian alliance
609	Harran falls and Aššur-uballiṭ II disappears from the record: the end of the empire

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Appendix 2. Assyrian Kings Relevant to the Study and the Dates of Their Reigns

King	Reign (BC)	Relevance to the study
Tukultī-Ninurta I	1243–1207	Assassinated by his son and elites
Shalmaneser III	859–824	Faced the revolt of his son Aššur-dān-apli
Šamšī-Adad V	824–811	Won the civil war against his brother
Adad-nārārī III	810–783	Early reign under the influence of the queen mother Šammuramat
Aššur-nērārī V	754–745	Overthrown in the coup of 745
Tiglath-pileser III	744–727	Coup accession and disputed origins
Shalmaneser V	726–722	Accused of sacrilege in his successor's charter
Sargon II	721–705	Coup-like accession; death in battle caused a dynastic shock
Sennacherib	704–681	Assassinated by his sons
Esarhaddon	680–669	Survived a fraternal civil war and engineered the succession
Ashurbanipal	668–after 631?	Defeated his brother's revolt; the exact end of his reign remains debated
Šamaš-šumu-ukīn	667–648	King of Babylon who rebelled against his brother
Aššur-etel-ilāni	ca. 630–627	A weak reign amid rivalry among the sons
Sîn-šarru-iškun	ca. 626–612	Last king of Nineveh; died during its fall
Aššur-uballiṭ II	611–609	Attempted to continue resistance from Harran, the final Assyrian stronghold

Appendix 3. Graphic Timeline of Major Family Rebellions (1207–609 BC)



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Figure 1. Timeline of the Major Family Rebellions in Assyrian History (prepared by the author)

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