

The Substitute King Ritual in Ancient Mesopotamia

1. Eclipse (of sun, moon, Jupiter, Venus, or some other planet) sets up this ritual.
2. Prophetess may predict that a certain PN will reign.
3. The order is given by the real king to enthrone the substitute king.
4. The substitute king ascends the throne.
5. The substitute king reigns for x days (100 in one case).
6. The real king is to remain on guard and under strong protection.
7. Apotropaic rituals, penitential psalms, and rites against malaria and pestilence are to be performed for the life of the real king.
8. Communication with the real king takes place regarding the substitute king.
9. While the substitute king reigns, the real king was to avoid action regarding royal matters. In one case the real king went by the name "Farmer."
10. The signs (celestial, terrestrial, or of malformed births) are recited before Šamaš.
11. The signs are read to the substitute king several times.
12. The substitute king is made to recite omen litanies before Šamaš.
13. The signs or evil omens are transferred to the substitute king in front of Šamaš.
14. The substitute king takes the signs on himself.
15. The signs are bound in the hem of the substitute king's garment.
16. The substitute king and queen are treated with wine, washed with water, and anointed with oil.
17. The substitute king and queen are made to eat cooking birds.
18. Both the substitute king and queen are put to death. They die for the real king's reprieve (*pīdu*).
19. A tomb is made and a burial chamber is prepared.
20. The substitute king is purged.*
21. Censer of pine essence is set up.*
22. A meal is served and libation is poured.*
23. Substitute king is decorated, treated, displayed, buried, and wailed over.
24. The substitute king (and presumably queen) are buried in the tomb.
25. A burnt offering is made.
26. All portents are cancelled.
27. Numerous apotropaic rituals, *bit rimki* and *bit sala'mâ* are performed to perfection.
28. The substitute's royal throne, table, weapon, and scepter are burned with fire.
29. The ashes of these implements are buried at their head.

*Because of the fragmentary nature of the texts, it is not certain when these events take place.