

OFFPRINT FROM

*Symbiosis, Symbolism,  
and the  
Power of the Past*

Canaan, Ancient Israel, and Their Neighbors  
from the Late Bronze Age through Roman Palaestina

Proceedings of the Centennial Symposium  
W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research and  
American Schools of Oriental Research  
Jerusalem, May 29–31, 2000

*edited by*

WILLIAM G. DEVER AND SEYMOUR GITIN

Winona Lake, Indiana

EISENBRAUNS

2003

# *Assyria's Expansion in the 8th and 7th Centuries and Its Long-Term Repercussions in the West*

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## *Introduction*

After a period of internal weakness and stagnation that lasted from the end of the 9th century until the middle of the 8th century B.C.E., Assyria entered a period of dynamic expansion that was to have far-reaching consequences. By the end of the 8th century, most of the Levant, eastern Anatolia, and large parts of Iran were permanently annexed to Assyria. In the 7th century, Assyria's control of the conquered territories was consolidated, and the process of expansion continued in all directions, so that by the middle of the century the Empire had reached the Aegean in the west and had absorbed Egypt in the south and the Elamite Empire in the east.<sup>1</sup>

This process of expansion is well documented by Assyrian sources, and its mechanisms and dynamics are on the whole well understood (Liverani 1988; 1992; Tadmor 1999; Parker 2001). The impact of Assyrian rule on the annexed territories has been investigated in several studies (e.g., Oded 1974; Eph'al 1979; Frankenstein 1979; Otzen 1979; Elat 1982; 1991; Spieckermann 1982; Gitin 1995; 1997; 1998; Lanfranchi 2000), many of which have also drawn attention to certain long-term developments set in motion by the Assyrian expansion. However, Assyria's role in affecting long-term cultural development in the territories subject to its expansion, particularly in the field of *intellectual life*, has not received the attention it deserves. In what follows I will present my personal view of the matter, focusing on the long-term consequences of the Assyrian expansion in western Anatolia and Judah. In order to address the issues at hand properly, we must first briefly consider the nature and driving forces of Assyrian imperialism, as well as the strategies and methods that it applied to achieve its goals.

## *The Nature of Neo-Assyrian Imperial Expansion*

It is essential to keep in mind first of all that Assyria's 8th–7th-century expansion, despite its spectacular strength, was not a new phenomenon as such but rather the culmi-

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1. Maps of Assyria usually place the western border of the Assyrian Empire at the western extremity of Cilicia (about 34° E), with the Halys River as its northern border. This is incorrect, since from the reign of Gyges (ca. 667–665) on, Lydia was an ally of Assyria, obliged to pay yearly visits to the imperial court (Tadmor and Cogan 1977; Parpola and Watanabe 1988: xviii–xix). A similar alliance between Assyria and Phrygia had already existed since the reign of Sargon II (ca. 710). In the east, Assyria extended, after the sack of Susa, as far as Parsumaš/Fars, the ruler of which, Kuraš, a former vassal of Elam, even sent his son to Nineveh as a hostage (Postgate 1989: 9; Rollinger 1999).

nation of a long process that had its roots already in the beginning of the second millennium B.C.E. and even earlier. When Assyria emerged as an independent city-state after the collapse of the Ur III Empire to which it had belonged as a province, the primary concern of its rulers appears to have been the control of the trade routes vital to the overland trade of the city (Larsen 1976; 1979). This modest strategic goal, however, soon gave way to an open claim for world dominion. The royal ideology backing this claim, which transformed the Assyrian king from a local ruler to the earthly representative of the supreme god, had been taken over directly from earlier empires (Galter 1998), as were the methods by which the imperial ambitions were furthered. Treaties, diplomacy, ruthless deployment of military force, political intimidation, indoctrination, and propaganda—essential tools of Neo-Assyrian imperialism—are all well attested already in third-millennium Mesopotamia and can therefore by no means be regarded as Assyrian innovations.

There is, however, an essential difference between the Neo-Assyrian Empire and its predecessors that accounts for the 8th–7th-century expansion—namely, the strategy of systematic economic, cultural, and ethnic integration introduced by Tiglath-pileser III in 745 B.C.E. Until then, the Empire had only a relatively limited core area under direct control of the central government, with vassal states loosely tied to the center through treaties, loyalty oaths, and royal marriages. This political structure was by its nature unstable and required constant intervention on the part of the central government; over time, it became not only impossible to expand the empire beyond certain limits, but also very difficult to maintain the areas already conquered, as demonstrated by the countless rebellions of the 9th century and the period of stagnation and shrinking in the early 8th century.<sup>2</sup>

The strategy introduced by Tiglath-pileser III aimed at expanding the core area by systematically reducing semi-independent vassal countries to Assyrian provinces directly controlled by the central government (Tadmor 1994: 9; cf. Garelli 1991). The reducing of a country to a province was carried out according to a standardized procedure<sup>3</sup> involving the utter destruction of the vassal's urban centers; massive deportations (Oded 1979); rebuilding the capital in Assyrian style; the installation of an Assyrian governor; the construction of Assyrian garrisons and forts (Parker 1997); the imposition of a uniform taxation and conscription system (Postgate 1974), imperial standards and measures (cf. Eph'al and Naveh 1993), cults (Spieckermann 1982: 322–44),<sup>4</sup> and a single *lingua franca*, Aramaic

2. On this period, see Kuhrt 1995: 482–93 and RIMA 2–3 for the sources.

3. For a typical passage in Tiglath-pileser's inscriptions reflecting the underlying procedure, see Ann 9:1–4 (Tadmor 1994: 42): "I rebuilt those cities. On top of a ruin heap which is called Humut, I established a city. I built (and) completed it from its foundation to its parapet. A palace for my royal residence I built there. I named it Kar-Aššur. I set up the weapon [i.e., a garrison] of Aššur, my lord, therein. I settled therein people of (foreign) lands, conquered by me. I imposed upon them tribute (and) I considered them as inhabitants of Assyria"; see similarly Anns 5:3–4; 10:1–4; 11:5–6; 16:4–8; 25:6–12; Summs 1:6–7; 7:36–37, and *passim* (omitting individual elements of the procedure). The stereotypical formulation and extraordinary frequency of such passages in Tiglath-pileser's inscriptions provides a striking contrast to the inscriptions of earlier Assyrian kings and can only be explained (despite Garelli 1991) by assuming a deliberate change in Assyria's strategy of territorial expansion.

4. Cogan (1974: 85; followed, e.g., by Frame 1997: 56) believes that "Assyria imposed no religious obligations upon its vassals." This is contradicted by Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty (VTE), in which the vassals are sworn to accept Aššur as their god and the future king as their (only) lord (see n. 13 below and the analysis of the passage in Parpola 2000b: 167). Note also Tadmor 1994: 177, 189 (Tigl. Summs 8:16–17 //

(Eph'al 1979: 284; Garelli 1982; Tadmor 1982; Postgate 1989; Parpola 2000a: 11–12). The inhabitants of the new province became Assyrian citizens; its economy was completely reorganized in line with Assyrian commercial interests (Elat 1978; 1991; Postgate 1979; Gitin 1997; Lanfranchi 2000: 12); and the seat of the governor, a copy of the imperial court in miniature,<sup>5</sup> became a channel through which Assyrian culture was systematically spread to the country.

### *Elites as a Channel of Assyrian Cultural Influence*

The drastic measures involved in the creation of new provinces were legitimized through vassal treaties that called for the total destruction of the vassal country in the event that it violated the provisions of the treaty (Parpola 1987: 161; Parpola and Watanabe 1988). From the reign of Tiglath-pileser III on, the punishments prescribed in the treaties were systematically implemented by the Assyrians—but only if the treaties had actually been broken. If the treaty was kept, the vassal would retain its formal independence. Even in this case, however, it was subject to strong and ever-increasing Assyrian influence. With the passage of time, the heavy obligations of the treaty usually resulted in an attempt to revolt and, hence, in the total annexation of the country.

Obviously, treaties were of pivotal importance to Assyria's strategy of territorial expansion, and despite the heavy obligations and terrible sanctions that came with each treaty, Assyria had no difficulty in finding new treaty partners. This was because foreign elites often needed Assyrian military or political backing to eliminate political opponents or external threats (Parpola and Watanabe 1988: xvi). Accordingly, elites were the primary target group on which the Assyrians focused their attention in their efforts to assimilate a country. Pro-Assyrian foreign elites were the best possible medium to advance Assyrian interests in a country waiting to be annexed or already annexed. For this reason, foreign ambassadors and visitors to the Assyrian capital were lavishly entertained and honored at the royal court (Postgate 1994), while exiled princes and aristocratic youths sojourning or held at the court received a thorough education in Assyrian literature, science, and ways

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9 rev. 14–15), "A golden (statue) bearing the image of the great gods my lords and my royal image I fashioned. In the palace of Gaza I set it up and counted it among the gods of their land," and cf. p. 207 (the image of Ištar placed in Hadattu/Arslan Tash along with the king's own image). Similar references to royal images set up in strategic places (temples, palaces, streets, and squares of cities, even on mountaintops) throughout the Empire, not only in the provinces but in the vassal states as well, can be found throughout Assyrian royal inscriptions and royal correspondence (Cole and Machinist 1998: xiii–xv). This is clear evidence of an emperor cult imposed on vassals and citizens alike in the fashion of the late Roman and Byzantine Empires (see further Porter 1995; Winter 1997).

5. Cf. Postgate 1992: 258–59; and on the governmental palaces of Til-Barsip and Dur-Katlimmu (the best-known Assyrian provincial capitals), see Thureau-Dangin and Dunand 1936; Bunnens 1997; Radner 1998: 47–51. Note also Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 8.6.10–14: "And he gave orders to all satraps he sent out to imitate him in everything that they saw him do . . . to require as many as received lands and palaces to attend at the satrap's court . . . to have the boys that were born to them educated at the local court, just as was done at the royal court. . . . 'And with you also, just as with me, let the most deserving be set in the most honourable seats. . . . Have parks, too, and keep wild animals in them. . . .' And as Cyrus then effected his organization, even so unto this day . . . all the courts of the governors are attended with service in the same way" (emphasis mine). It is clear, of course, that the system described here did not originate with Cyrus but ultimately went back (via the Median and Neo-Babylonian Empires) to the Neo-Assyrian Empire.

of life in general (Parpola 1972: 33–34; 1998: 328; Parpola and Watanabe 1988: xx). The overall goal was to integrate all foreign elites as much as possible within the imperial elite and then to work on the masses through these elites.<sup>6</sup>

Paradoxically, Assyria's success in bringing ever new nations under its sway rested on two seemingly opposite pillars: on the one hand, *the chilling fear* that its ruthless military machine and drive to expand inspired in its opponents, and on the other hand, *the numerous benefits* it offered to those who chose to cooperate. This observation accords well with Xenophon's summary of the reasons behind the success of Achaemenid Cyrus the Great:

He ruled over these nations, even though they did not speak the same language as he, nor one nation the same as another; for all that, he was able to cover so vast a region with the fear which he inspired, that he struck all men with terror and no one tried to withstand him; and he was able to awaken in all so lively a desire to please him, that they always wished to be guided by his will. (*Cyropaedia* I.I.5)

Against this background we will now consider the long-term consequences of Assyria's expansion in the light of the two concrete examples to which we have already alluded, Lydia and Judah.

### *Assyria and Lydia*

The decision of Gyges ca. 665 B.C.E. to seek Assurbanipal's protection against the Cimmerian threat against Lydia provided Assyria with an excellent channel to spread its influence to western Anatolia. The alliance with Assyria, which remained in effect for at least two generations, opened up a direct route of communication between Sardis and Nineveh (Burkert 1992: 14, 161)<sup>7</sup> that without doubt was used not only for the payment of the yearly tribute but also for commercial, military, and cultural purposes. The pro-Assyrian stance of the Lydian royal house, reflected by its genealogy, which traced its origins from Ninus and Belus (Herodotus I.7), soon materialized in the imitation of the imperial culture and life-style. The cult of Kubaba of Carchemish was introduced to Lydia in this period (Popko 1995: 181–88; Posani 1999), as were such luxury items such as the parasol and the *kline*, among others (West 1997: 32–33).<sup>8</sup>

What is more important in this context, however, is that the "Assyrianization" of Lydia also directly affected the Ionian city-states of the Aegean coast, which were within Lydia's immediate sphere of influence and in lively contact with it.<sup>9</sup> Many scholars, in particular

6. Cf. n. 5 above.

7. There cannot be any doubt that the Royal Road leading from Sardis to Susa, which later served as the main artery of the Achaemenid Empire to the west (Eph'al 1983: 102–4; Dandamayev and Lukonin 1989: 107), was originally an Assyrian construction. It ran through the Assyrian heartland, following the course of the Neo-Assyrian Royal Road (Kessler 1997: 131; cf. the map in Scarre et al. 1988: 158), and its description in Herodotus 5.52–53 (cf. 8.98) accords in all details with what is known of the Neo-Assyrian royal road system.

8. On the possibility that the Lydian coinage introduced during the reign of Alyattes (ca. 600) was inspired by earlier Assyrian models, see Radner 1999: 127.

9. Note that the Lydian capital, Sardis, was only about 80 km from Smyrna and Samos, about 90 km from Ephesus, Colophon, Clazomenae, and Magnesia, and about 120 km from Miletus, Priene, and Phocaea. According to Herodotus (I.15–17), "as soon as Gyges came to throne, he too, like others, led an army

West (1995; 1997) and Rollinger (1996), have convincingly argued in recent years that the Homeric poems were reedited in the mid-7th century B.C.E. under the influence of Akkadian literature, specifically Neo-Assyrian royal poetry and the Gilgamesh epic. The influences are such that a direct exposure to Akkadian epic poetry must be assumed (West 1997: 401; Burkert 1999: 26–31). Moreover, Abusch (2001) shows that certain structural features in the Iliad and the Odyssey imply familiarity not only with the form but also with the *esoteric content* of the late version of the Gilgamesh epic. It thus seems that the alliance with Lydia opened the gates to a strong Assyrian cultural influence on Ionia as well. In this light, it is hardly a coincidence that all the great names in late-7th-/early-6th-century Ionian philosophy come from cities in the immediate vicinity of Lydia.<sup>10</sup> From Lydia and Ionia, cultural influences were further transferred to mainland Greece (Burkert 1992; West 1997). One may note that Gyges dedicated numerous votive objects to Delphi (Herodotus 1.13–14) and that the late-7th-century Spartan lyric poet Alcman originally was a Lydian freed slave (Carey 1996).

However, the Greeks also received influences directly from the Assyrians. The consolidation of Assyrian control over the entire Near East created a vast market that turned out to be especially profitable for the Greeks. As Lanfranchi has shown (2000: 31), the Assyrians followed a policy that allowed foreign settlement in recently annexed Assyrian territory, but only after Assyrian control thereof had been definitively consolidated. This condition was met in the eastern Mediterranean after Sennacherib had defeated the Ionians in a naval battle and rebuilt Tarsus in Assyrian fashion in 696 B.C.E. After this date, the number of Greek commercial settlements in northern Syria and Cilicia dramatically increased, as did the number of Greek imports in the Levant and vice versa. This development brought enormous profits to the Greeks, and as a result, the initial hostility of the Greeks toward the Assyrians was soon replaced by a totally favorable attitude receptive to cultural influences from the east (Lanfranchi 2000: 32–33). Among the many cultural borrowings from Assyria in this period, one may note the Athenian governmental system of nine archons and the system of year eponyms introduced in 683 B.C.E. (Parpola 1995: 397).

### *Assyria and Judah*

In the Levant, Judah remained a semi-independent vassal kingdom not incorporated into the Assyrian provincial system. Assyrian influence increased steadily, however,

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into the lands of Miletus and Smyrna; and he took the city of Colophon. . . . Ardys, the son of Gyges . . . took Priene and invaded the country of Miletus. . . . Alyattes [ca. 610] took Smyrna, invaded the lands of Clazomenae . . . and laid siege to Miletus.” Despite these attacks, the Lydian court continued to exert a powerful attraction for contemporary and later Ionian elites, and there were many *lydizantes* among the latter (Lanfranchi 1996: 108).

10. Thales (ca. 625–550) and his disciples Anaximander (ca. 610–548) and Anaximenes were citizens of Miletus. Pythagoras (ca. 570–494), who migrated to Italy ca. 530 BCE, was born in Samos. Xenophanes (ca. 570–480), the alleged teacher of Parmenides, was from Colophon, Heraclitus (ca. 540–490) from Ephesus, and Anaxagoras (ca. 500–428) from Clazomenae. On the indebtedness of Pythagoras and other pre-Socratic philosophers to ideas from Assyria, see Halpern, in this volume; see also Parpola 1993; Kingsley 1995; 1999. Specifically, the theological notions of Xenophanes about God as “one and many,” hailed by classicists as totally novel in the ancient world (Versnel 2000), can be easily traced back to the Assyrian concept of God, on which see Parpola 1997: xxi–xxvi; 2000b: 165–73.

especially during the reign of Manasseh (692–638),<sup>11</sup> as amply attested both in the biblical and in the archaeological record. Assyrian religious and ideological motifs appear in this period on locally manufactured seals and cult objects (Ahlström 1984; Keel and Uehlinger 1993: 327–429), and archaeological evidence indicates that the economy of Judah at least indirectly profited from the new international order created by the Assyrian overlord (Broshi 1974; Elat 1982: 246–47). Like other loyal vassals, Manasseh and his successors paid yearly tribute, participated in imperial campaigns and building projects, and, to judge from 2 Kgs 21:16, even executed anti-Assyrian elements among their own people (Weippert 1989).

However, there is a significant difference vis-à-vis Lydia in Judah's relationship with Assyria. Whereas Gyges had apparently sought Assyria's protection on his own volition, for Judah the vassalage of Assyria was from the beginning not an option but only a means to avoid total annihilation. The fate of the Northern Kingdom and the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib had taught Manasseh a lesson, and his primary motive in "pulling the yoke of Aššur" undoubtedly was plain *fear*, not greed.

Several scholars in recent years have pointed out remarkable parallels between Deuteronomy 13 and Neo-Assyrian treaties, especially the succession treaty of Esarhaddon (VTE; Levinson 1995; Otto 1999: 3–90; Pakkala 1999: 20–50; see also Steymans 1995a; 1995b). Significantly, the parallelism is limited to two issues: the relationship between the treaty partners (God/King vs. people) and the merciless fate of those who violate the terms of the treaty. In both cases, the subordinate party (= the people of Israel/Judah) is told to love its overlord wholeheartedly, *to the exclusion of everything else* (Deut 13:4; VTE §24),<sup>12</sup> the only difference being that in one case the overlord is the God of Israel, while in the other it is *the king of Assyria*.

There cannot be any doubt that, not only the king of Judah, but the ruling class of Judah as a whole was familiar with the central provisions of the treaties with Assyria, for vassal rulers were explicitly told to propagate them to their people.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, it can be assumed that the treaties had, figuratively speaking, "entered the intestines of their sons and daughters like bread and wine," as prescribed in VTE §72. Hence, the fact that this

11. This dating of the reign of Manasseh follows *The New Standard Jewish Encyclopedia* (rev. ed., 1992). Alternative dates are 693–639 (Reade 1981); 697–643 (Weippert 1989); and 698–643 (Elat 1982).

12. The Hebrew phrase *bēkol-lēb*, "wholeheartedly," in Deut 13:4 renders the Akkadian idiom *ina gum-murti libbi*, denoting the vassal's undivided loyalty toward his overlord (Stol 1993). The phrase *bēkol-napsēkem*, "with all your soul," in Deut 13:4 similarly corresponds to the phrase *kī napsātīkunu*, "like your souls/lives" in VTE §24 (see further Otto 1999: 5, 53).

13. VTE §25: "This treaty which Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, has confirmed and concluded with you . . . you shall speak to your sons and grandsons, your seed and your seed's seed which shall be born in the future, and give them orders as follows [emphasis mine]: 'Guard this treaty. Do not sin against your treaty and annihilate yourselves, do not turn your land over to destruction and your people to deportation.'"

VTE §§33–34: "You and your sons to be born in the future will be bound by this oath concerning Assurbanipal . . . from this day on until what(ever) comes after this treaty. While you stand on the place of this oath, you shall not swear this oath with your lips only but shall swear it wholeheartedly; you shall teach it to your sons to be born after this treaty [emphasis mine]. . . . To the future and forever Aššur will be your god, and Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate, will be your lord. May your sons and your grandsons fear him."

For epistolary evidence indicating that the entire population of the Empire (not just the elites) was familiar with the provisions of this treaty, see Parpola 1972: 30–31.

very language was chosen to formulate the laws in Deuteronomy 13, one of the core texts of Deuteronomic monolatry, has far-reaching implications. To spell it out: *in the mind of the writer of Deuteronomy 13, the God of Israel has taken the place previously occupied in the collective mind of the nation by the feared, almighty king of Assyria.* The same is implied by the paradoxical image of the Deuteronomic God, who, according to a recent analysis by Geller, “is above all else a person” (2000: 280 [emphasis mine]). Strikingly, the Covenant God’s characteristics listed by Geller (2000: 307–8) are also central characteristics of the Assyrian king—“the very likeness of God”—as presented in Assyrian imperial propaganda (Parpola 1999: 20–21).<sup>14</sup> The conclusion seems inescapable that the Deuteronomic concept of God, which according to current scholarly consensus evolved in the late 7th or early 6th century B.C.E. and is basic to all later Judaism, is heavily indebted to Assyrian religion and royal ideology.

This conclusion is supported by parallel developments elsewhere within the area of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. As recently shown by Beaulieu (1997), Anu, the god of heaven of Uruk, was in post-Assyrian times transformed into a universal god through his equation with Aššur, whose cult was transferred to Uruk in the Sargonid period. The Harranian moon-god Sin, promoted as a universal god by the Neo-Babylonian King Nabonidus, had been syncretized with Aššur already under the Assyrian Empire, possibly in order to create an imperial god more acceptable to the Aramean-speaking masses (Mayer 1998).<sup>15</sup> The supreme god of the Achaemenid Empire, Ahura Mazda, was likewise syncretized with Aššur, as shown by the adoption by the Achaemenid Dynasty of the winged disk of Aššur as the emblem of Ahura Mazda (Dandamayev and Lukonin 1989: 342).

It is difficult to keep these developments separate from the contemporary transformation of the Deuteronomic concept of God, particularly considering that in Ezra 1:2, Yahweh and the supreme god of the Empire are syncretized as “ΥΗΩΗ, the God of heaven.”<sup>16</sup>

We do not know what would have happened if Assyria had not expanded to the shores of the Aegean and the Sea of Galilee. But it does seem that this expansion set in motion processes that would not have been possible without crucially important stimuli from Assyria. Certainly the economic, intellectual, and psychological conditions that enabled the rise of Greek civilization and led to the crystallization of the biblical image of God *were not there* before the Assyrians arrived. They were the tools and products of Assyrian statecraft and came with the Assyrian Empire.

14. On the Assyrian king as the image of God, see Parpola 1993: 168; Winter 1997: 374–75. On the *homoousia* of Aššur and the Assyrian king, see Parpola 2000b: 190–92, 202–5; on the king as the “son of God,” see Parpola 1997: xxxvi–xlv; cf. Liverani 1979: 301, who regards Aššur as “the hypostasis of the Assyrian kingship.”

15. See, e.g., van Driel 1969: 97 viii 55. Note also the prominence of Sin beside Aššur in the names of the Neo-Assyrian kings since the reign of Sargon II.

16. Note that in contemporary cuneiform documents, both the Iranian *baga*, “God,” and Yahweh are written with the logogram DINGIR.MEŠ, “gods.” This spelling goes back to the Assyrian Empire, where it refers to the supreme god as “the (totality of) gods” and is well attested as a divine name (*ilāni*), exactly comparable to the biblical *Elohim* (Parpola 1997: xxi nn. 30–31; 2000b: 172).



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