

WORLD DOMINION: THE EXPANDING HORIZON OF THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE

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I

In June of 1980, a group of leading Italian scholars and several foreign guests convened at Cetona, near Siena, for a symposium on Assyrian royal inscriptions. The volume of papers presented there¹ marked a new style in the study of that genre and of political ideologies in ancient Mesopotamia. I should like to acknowledge here the very substantial contribution to this field by the Italian scholars, leading to a better appraisal of the political-ideological lexicon of Assyrian court historians.²

The present paper, which deals with horizons of the Assyrian empire, is concerned with the political-ideological factors that shaped that empire's territorial expansion. I shall not discuss the economic factors, though I am aware — as we all are — of their significance, which should in no way be underestimated, but which ought to be discussed in a different framework.

We shall begin with a text that contains our main argument in a nutshell, namely, that the primary duty of every Assyrian king was to expand the borders of his land. This assertion is clearly stated in the earliest surviving evidence of a royal ritual — a Middle Assyrian text from the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I. The text describes what was most likely a ceremony performed at the beginning of the Assyrian cultic year. In the course of the ceremony, the king was crowned by the priest of Aššur, who placed a scepter in the king's hands and said (Col. II, 35): "With your just scepter, extend your land! (*mātka rappiš*)."³

This is the only royal duty mentioned in the ritual. The rest of the priest's address consists of blessings or good

wishes. About six hundred years later, we find a very similar ceremony in a text from the reign of Aššurbanipal.⁴ Here, too, the king is ordered (l. 3): "Extend your land (*mātka ruppīš*) at your feet!" and he is blessed (l. 17): "May the gods give him a just scepter to extend (his) land and his people." We should note especially the almost identical wording of the command to the king in both the earlier and the later texts. However, the king receives not only a "scepter," *ḥaṭṭu*, to extend the land and people of Aššur, but also a "weapon," *kakku*, a mace.⁵ In fact, both "scepter" and "weapon" are mentioned by two outstanding warrior-kings, Aššurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III, as having been given to them at the outset of their respective reigns. The "scepter" is for "shepherding" the people, while the "merciless weapon," *kakku la padū*, is for conquering lands, from the moment of accession to the throne, forever after.⁶

The imperative of territorial expansion had been expressed in several royal epithets already in the Middle Assyrian period. Adad-nirari I, two generations before our coronation ritual, refers to himself as the "enlarger" of the Assyrian territory (*murappiš mišri u kudurrī*).⁷ He assigns this royal title to three of his predecessors, as far back as Aššur-uballiṭ I in the 14th century BCE. Centuries later, Sargon II employs a similar epithet: "one who aggrandizes (*mušarbu*) the border of Aššur."⁸ Esarhad-don rephrases it even more explicitly: "to attack, to plunder, to extend the border of Assyria — the gods empowered me."⁹

1. F.M. Fales (ed.), *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: New Horizons in Literary, Ideological and Historical Analysis*, Roma 1981 (= ARINH).

2. Of special interest for the present paper is M. Liverani's *Prestige and Interest* (HANE/S 1), Padova 1990, which examines — among other topics — the ideological framework of the claim for world dominion in the royal inscriptions of the Middle Assyrian period (44-65); see also B. Oded, *War, Peace and Empire*, Wiesbaden 1992, 169-176.

3. K.F. Müller, *Das assyrische Ritual* (MVAG 41/3), Leipzig 1937, 12.

4. A. Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea* (SAA 3), Helsinki 1989, 26f.

5. The nature of the "weapon" is not entirely clear. Mostly it denotes a (ceremonial) mace: CAD K, 57b; D.O. Edzard, *RIA* 5, 578f.; F.A.M. Wiggermann, *JEOL* 29 (1985-86), 3-34; *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits*, Groningen 1992, 60. Cf., however, the critical remarks of W.G. Lambert in *BSOAS* 52 (1989), 545f.

6. Grayson, *RIMA* 2, 196, Col. I, 41, 44-45; *RIMA* 3, 28, Col. II, 1.

7. M.-J. Seux, *Épithètes royales akkadiennes et sumériennes*, Paris 1967 (= ERAS), 239.

8. *Ibid.*, 234.

9. Borger, *Esarh.*, 98, 34-35.

A recurrent motif connected with the principle of perennial expansion is that of "heroic priority."¹⁰ The king boasts that he has traversed a land that none of his forefathers had heard of. This motif stems from another essential feature of Assyrian royal ideology: the image of the king as hero.¹¹ At the outset of his reign, every monarch performs some sort of heroic deed. Tiglath-pileser I passes over steep ridges, hacking his way with bronze pick-axes and Aššurnasirpal II pursues his enemies across impassable mountains, never scaled by his royal fathers.¹² These demonstrations of royal valour, coupled with the claim of "heroic priority," recur in the inscriptions of the Sargonid kings of the Empire, in connection with their expansion of the borders and conquest of lands beyond the achievements of their fathers.

What were the maximal borders claimed in this pattern of continuous expansion? In theory, they were the edges of the earth, marked in Mesopotamian cosmic geography by the large bodies of water far away: the Upper Sea of the Sunset and the Lower Sea of the Sunrise.¹³ The Upper Sea of the Sunset is of course the Mediterranean. To the north lay the two seas of Nairi, Urmia and Van (occasionally referred to in the early periods as the Upper Seas). The quest to reach the Upper Sea is a well-known feature of Assyrian territorial expansion, starting with Šamši-Adad I, who followed in the footsteps of Yaḥdun-Lim of Mari.¹⁴ Reaching the Mediterranean to perform the ritual of "washing weapons in the sea" was linked with climbing the Amanus—or the Lebanon—and the ceremonial felling of cedar trees.¹⁵ It was a feat not to be repeated by the kings of Assyria who followed Šamši-Adad during the *floruit* of the Hittite Empire. After its fall, near the end of the 12th century, Tiglath-pileser I was the first to renew the practice, followed by Aššurnasirpal II.¹⁶ For each the campaign to the Mediterranean was a sporadic act, performed only once in his reign. It became common practice, however, with Šalmaneser III, who already in his first campaign reached the Sea of Nairi—Lake Urmia—and the Upper Sea of the West.¹⁷ He then

repeatedly campaigned to the Mediterranean coast, climbing the Amanus on the way. The declaration of dominion, at this stage, did not refer to a permanent hold on the sea coast, which would only be achieved under Tiglath-pileser III; rather, it was a function of a military campaign. The reign of Tiglath-pileser III institutionalized the ideological claim: from that time on the Assyrian emperor became the permanent master of the whole earth from the Upper to the Lower Sea. The quest for expansion then turned to other directions.

The geographical extent of the Assyrian conquests was commemorated by monuments set up in distant lands in the course of or at the conclusion of successful military campaigns.¹⁸ In this context, the generic term *šalmu* denotes both the three-dimensional monument, the stele, and the stele-like round-topped rock relief. Since the monument carries an inscription recording the king's victories, it is denoted as "the record of my triumph in battle," "the record of my powerful victory" or "praise of Aššur and my own might." The key terms are *litu* and *danānu*, mostly as a hendiadys; *kiššūtu*, *qurdu*; and compound forms such as *litāt qurdiu*, *tanattū kiššūti* and the like.¹⁹

Such a monument not only commemorated the victory of the monarch and his god; it was also a constant reminder of the Assyrian imperial presence in a distant land, substituting for the king's presence.²⁰

II

At no other period in the history of the Assyrian empire did it so expand its horizons within the reign of one monarch as in the days of Tiglath-pileser III. Within a decade, the border of the empire in the west moved from the Euphrates, where it had been for several centuries, to the Mediterranean and to the Brook of Egypt (Wadi el-Arish) in the southwest. At two points in his reign, Tiglath-pileser defined the horizons of his empire. The first was in the course of a campaign to western Iran in his ninth year, 737. A stele set up far away in the mountains of Luristan commemorates his achievements with a short hymnic summary at the conclusion of an account of the campaigns to central and northern Syria, defining the extent of his empire at that stage:²¹

18. D. Morandi, *Stele e statue reali assire: localizzazione, diffusione e implicazioni ideologiche*, «Mesopotamia» 23 (1988), 106-155.

19. CAD K, 462; CAD L, 222; CAD Q, 318; AHw., 1318b.

20. Cf. Liverani, *Prestige and Interest* ..., 59-60.

21. H. Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, King of Assyria*, Jerusalem 1994, 105. Col. II B, 15-24.

"(Foreign) lands larger (than) the territory of Assyria I captured.

Countless people unto its people I added;

I continuously herded them in safe pastures.

I (am) Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria,

who from East to West

personally conquered all the lands.

Over realms where the chariot of the kings, my fathers, never passed,

I appointed governors.

From the Great Sea of the East to Rešišuri (and)

Gubla, on the shore of the Great Sea of the West,

I marched to and fro, and I ruled the world."

The second occasion when Tiglath-pileser defined the horizons of his empire was about a decade later, at the close of his reign, after he had defeated the Chaldean king of Babylonia, Ukin-zer, and assumed the throne as Babylon's legal king. This time our text is not a commemorative stele, but a large-sized foundation clay tablet. The prologue reads:²²

"The king, who marched about at the command of Aššur, Šamaš and Marduk, the great God, from the Bitter Sea of Bit-Yakin up to Mount Bikni in the east and up to the Upper Sea of the West as far as Egypt, from the horizon to the heights of heaven, he ruled and reigned over the countries."

As we know from other sources, by that time, 728, Tiglath-pileser III had subdued Philistia and reached the border of Egypt. A stele, mentioned in a text, was set up near the Brook of Egypt to commemorate the empire's westernmost expansion.²³ In the East, the traditional furthest point was Mount Bikni, which is identified by the minimalists with the Alwand range and by the maximalists—whose view is more generally accepted—with the distant Mount Damavand near the Caspian. The Bitter Sea in Chaldea, the Persian Gulf, was the southernmost extent. These were far extremes indeed, but the royal author goes on to add another cosmic dimension not attested in any other Assyrian historical text: "From the horizon to the heights of heaven." Only the sun traverses that perimeter. Thus, it would seem that the king is tacitly compared to the sun—an analogy not entirely unusual in the list of epithets of the Assyrian emperor.²⁴

Further expansion of the horizons of Assyria took place towards the close of the reign of Sargon II, two decades

after the death of Tiglath-pileser III. In this last phase of his reign, after he had conquered Babylonia, Sargon's newly composed inscriptions redefined the territorial horizons of his empire. At the extremities of his realm, the northwest and the southwest, two kings—Mita of Muški and Uperi of Dilmun, "who lives like a fish, thirty double hours away, in the midst of the sea of the rising sun," and who, as the texts stress, had never submitted to any of Sargon's predecessors—now sent ambassadors to Dūr-Šarrukin bearing gifts which were regarded, from the Assyrian point of view, as tribute of submission.²⁵

The third land whose submission Sargon claimed at that stage (707) was Yadnana - Cyprus. Its submission is recorded on a stele set up on top of a sacred mountain near Larnaca.²⁶ From fragmentary lines in the Dūr-Šarrukin annals, we gather that Sargon intervened in a conflict between the king of Tyre or the governor of Kition, and a confederation of seven Cypriot cities, whom he claims to have defeated.²⁷ In the stele, only the heroic summary is recounted.²⁸

"And seven kings of Ia², a district of Yadnana—whose distant abodes are situated a seven days' journey over the Sea of the Setting Sun, and the name of whose land from days of yore until now no one of the kings, my fathers, who lived before my day, had heard—(now, these kings) heard from afar, in the midst of the sea, of the deeds which I was performing in Chaldea and the land of Ḥatti; their hearts palpitated, fear fell upon them: ... (their gifts) they brought before me in Babylon, and they kissed my feet."

What emerges from these boasts of heroic priority is that Sargon expanded the horizons of the Empire one step beyond the limits set by Tiglath-pileser. These horizons no longer extended merely from sea to sea, but to the islands in the midst of the seas. One wonders if a stele similar to that near Larnaca, now in the Berlin Museum, may not have been set up somewhere in Bahrain.

Surely the mention of these two extremities across the Lower and the Upper Seas reminded contemporaries of

10. R. Gelio, in Fales, ARINH, 103, fn. 3.

11. H. Tadmor, *Propaganda, Literature, Historiography: Cracking the Code of the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, in S. Parpola - R.M. Whiting (Eds.), *Assyria 1995*, Helsinki 1997, 326f.

12. Grayson, RIMA 2, 14f., Col. II, 7-10; 197, Col. I, 49-56.

13. Cf. Liverani, *Prestige and Interest* ..., 53.

14. Grayson, RIMA 1, 50, 81; G. Dossin, «Syria» 33 (1955), 13-14, Col. I, 34 - III, 2.

15. Cf. A. Malamat, *Studies Landsberger*, 365ff.

16. Grayson, RIMA 2, 42, 24-30; 218, 84-92.

17. Grayson, RIMA 3, 15, 25-26.

22. *Ibid.*, 158, 1-4.

23. *Ibid.*, 178, 181.

24. Seux, ERAS; Parpola, LAS 2, 130.

25. Luckenbill, ARAB II, §70; A. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad*, Göttingen 1994, 232-235, 144-153.

26. Mt. Ba'it-hurri: H. Tadmor, *Some Notes on the Stele of Sargon II from Cyprus*, «Eretz-Israel» 25 (1966), 288f. (English Summary, 99*).

27. Fuchs, *Sargon*, 175f.

28. Winckler, *Sargon*, 180-182, 28-42; Luckenbill, ARAB II, § 186.

the feats of the king's illustrious ancient namesake, Sargon of Akkad, who in the Mesopotamian heroic tradition ruled over Dilmun in the East and reached Kaptara far away in the Sea of the West.²⁹ The very name of the Assyrian emperor epitomized the heroic tradition — indeed, in economic texts of Sargon II he is occasionally referred to as “Sargon, the latter” (*arkū*),³⁰ clearly, the “former” was Sargon of Akkad. Was this historically pregnant name given to him by Tiglath-pileser III, his father,³¹ or was it a throne name assumed by the young prince upon his accession? In any event, we must connect the sudden re-emergence of the name of the creator of Mesopotamia's golden age with the fact that Sargon II, following Tiglath-pileser's example, expanded the horizons of the Assyrian Empire to their maximal limits, in the footsteps of the kings of Akkad. The royal titles of the Assyrian kings: “King of the World,” “King of the Four Quarters,” and, especially, “King of Sumer and Akkad,” were a link with ancient tradition.

Sargon's imperial policies were continued not by his son, Sennacherib, but by his grandson, Esarhaddon. Having inherited an empire whose horizons were set at their maximum extent from the Upper to the Lower Sea, Esarhaddon took special pains to announce acquisitions of his own.

Two stages can be distinguished in the expansion of Assyria's horizons under Esarhaddon, one beginning with his fifth year and the other after his tenth. At the end of each stage the extent of Assyria's expansion was redefined. The first stage is reflected in the historical prism from Nineveh, from 676.³² According to this text, Esarhaddon's first military achievement was to punish severely the port city of Sidon in Phoenicia, whose king must have defied the economic burdens imposed upon the city. As the text claims, the Sidonian king was supported by a king in Cilicia, whose cities were situated in mountains difficult to traverse.³³

This campaign of Esarhaddon was exceptionally brutal. Sidon was destroyed, and a new city called “The Port of Esarhaddon” was built in its place. This war culmin-

ated in a gory triumph: the heads of the king of Sidon and of his Cilician ally were carried in a procession, tied to the necks of their ministers, through the streets of Nineveh amidst much jubilation and song.³⁴

Another triumph followed by the humiliation of a vassal king was the case of the city of Arza on the border of Egypt. It was conquered, and its king was triumphantly exhibited in fetters at the gates of Nineveh, together with a bear, a dog and a pig.³⁵ These manifestations of imperial power in Phoenicia, Cilicia and the border of Egypt determined once again the horizons of the empire in the West.

As for Cyprus, the hold established by Sargon most probably had not been lost. Though Esarhaddon does not mention explicitly that he was the sovereign of Yadnana, he claims that he held sway over the Greeks from Yadnana to Tarsos in Anatolia.³⁶ On another occasion, ten kings of Yadnana are listed together with twelve kings of the seashore as vassals of Esarhaddon.³⁷

Having asserted the dominion of Assyria in the West, Esarhaddon turned elsewhere to expand his imperial borders, as was expected of him according to the Assyrian royal ideological code and historical tradition. The only non-subjugated areas adjacent to his borders were the deserts — in the south and faraway east. And indeed, the Arabian desert and the desert in Media, near Mt. Bikni, are claimed as the next challenge.³⁸ Not that there was much to conquer there, but Esarhaddon made a great deal out of it, embellishing the account of his campaigns with legendary motifs. In both campaigns the motif of “heroic priority” is duly stressed. No king of Assyria had ever set foot in these out of reach, remote places, which, in royal inscriptions, became synonymous with inaccessibility and hardship. The invasion of Bazu in Arabia is colorfully and dramatically described.³⁹

“The land of Bazu, a remote district, godforsaken desert, the land of salt, place of thirst, (march of) one hundred and forty *bēru* (Var. 120) of dunes (*qaqqar bašši*), thorns, and ‘gazelle-tooth’ stones, where snakes and scorpions, like ants, fill the ground, (march of) twenty *bēru* ... I left behind me and passed on. That district to which, in days

of old, no king before me had come, by the command of Aššur, my lord, I marched therein, victoriously.”

A new topos, that of itinerary, is introduced in this description. The distances are expressed in terms of *bēru*, “a double hours’ stretch of land,” roughly ten kilometers. The use of the figures is uneven: realistic figures, like six or seven *bēru*, are mentioned alongside one of 120 *bēru*, roughly 1,200 km, surely a highly inflated number.

Similar topological numbers appear in the so-called “Sargon Geography,” which delineates the borders of the Empire of Sargon of Akkad.⁴⁰ There we find that 120 *bēru* separate the “cistern of the Euphrates” from Meluḥḥa and Magan. Other figures are 40, 60, 90, and even 180 *bēru* — the last representing the circumference of Akkad. Though using older, different types of sources, this remarkable document was probably composed in Sargonid Assyria.⁴¹

Already Sennacherib had been concerned, in the latter part of his reign, with extending Assyrian control over desert routes, possibly as far as Adummatu — the major oasis of Dumat al-Jandal, Jauf, in North Arabia.⁴² Esarhaddon refers to Adummatu, “which Sennacherib my own father had conquered ...” and whose gods he carried off to Assyria.⁴³ Esarhaddon made a point of returning these images of gods to the Arabs, while imposing upon them an additional tribute, which included, among other items, one thousand leather bags of spices. However, this affair with the Arabs did not serve as a platform for royal boasting, along the lines of heroic priority. It was specifically the campaign to Bazu, in Esarhaddon's fourth year, 677 (the date in the Babylonian chronicles should be corrected),⁴⁴ which became the paradigmatic tale of ultimate expansion into the desert.

Esarhaddon's description of his campaigns to the desert lists the exact names of the eight kings of Bazu who were captured and killed, but it nevertheless has a legendary shading. Would it be too far-fetched to suggest that the episode of the “eight kings of Bazu”⁴⁵ was introduced as an analogy to the “seven kings of Yadnana,” subdued by Esarhaddon's grandfather? Moreover, there

is an obvious similarity between the name of the land, *Bāzu*, and the term *baššu*, “land of dunes;” could this have been a further trigger for the embellishment of that story?⁴⁶

A fresh definition of the horizons of the Empire took place in 671, after Esarhaddon's conquest of Northern Egypt. This extraordinary military feat was not an unprovoked invasion of the fabulously rich empire of the south, traditionally beyond Assyria's imperial horizon. Rather, it came as a result of the Egyptian military expansion as far as Ashkelon in Philistia, under Tirhaqa, the militant pharaoh of the 25th Nubian dynasty of Egypt.⁴⁷

In their chronicle of the war with the Nubian army, Esarhaddon's annals often refer to the land of Nubia — *Kūsu* in Akkadian — under the elevated geographical term “Meluḥḥa,” the fabulous land of the heroic age of Mesopotamia.⁴⁸ In olden times, Magan and Meluḥḥa had referred to the Oman peninsula and the Indus valley, respectively.⁴⁹ Gradually, already in the Amarna period, and clearly in the first millennium, Meluḥḥa came to denote the land of Nubia, likewise a source of gold and inhabited by a dark-skinned people. Magan, linked in the heroic tradition to Meluḥḥa, was also transferred to the same area. Thus, on the ideological plane, Esarhaddon's conquest of Magan and Meluḥḥa placed him in the company of the great kings of Akkad. Only somewhat later was the exact geographical terminology of Egypt and Nubia employed. The string of royal titles of the king now read:

“Great king, mighty king, king of Assyria, viceroy of Babylonia, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of Karduniaš (Babylonia), king of the kings of Egypt, Paturisu and Kūsu.”⁵⁰

The account of Esarhaddon's arduous campaign to the Sinai desert on the way to Magan and Meluḥḥa resembles that of the campaign to Bazu; it is a mixture of a military itinerary, expressed in terms of *bēru* (double hours' march), and imaginary heroic clichés.⁵¹ “after four *bēru* of ground, a journey of two days, the king encountered ‘two-headed serpents spewing forth death’ and ‘yellow snakes with wings’.”⁵² Similar topoi describing the de-

29. A.K. Grayson, *The Empire of Sargon of Akkad*, AfO 25 (1974-77), 61, 41; W. Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, Winona Lake 1998, 87f.

30. A. Ungnad, *RIA* 2, 415b.

31. F. Thomas, *Sargon II., der Sohn Tiglath-pileasers III., in Festschrift Bergerhof* (AOAT 232), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1985, 465-470; E. Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib Inschriften* (AfO Beiheft 26), Wien 1997, 2.

32. A. Heidel, «Sumer» 12 (1956), 9ff.; this text was re-edited and expanded in the prism from 673/2: Borger, *Esarh.*, 46ff. (= Nin. A.).

33. Heidel, Col. I, 38-49.

34. *Ibid.*, Col. I, 51-56 (cf. Nin. A, Borger, *Esarh.*, 50, 32-38).

35. Heidel, Col. I, 57-63.

36. Borger, *Esarh.*, 86, § 57, 10.

37. *Ibid.*, 60, Col. V, 54-73.

38. Heidel, Col. III, 9-36; 53-61.

39. Heidel, Col. III, 9-20; Nin. A, Col. IV, 53-61. On the location of Bazu see Eph'al (below, fn. 44), 132-137 and D. Potts, *JNES* 41 (1982), 279ff.

40. Grayson, AfO 25, 56ff.; Horowitz, *Cosmic Geography*, 67ff.

41. Cf. M. Liverani (Ed.), *Akkad. The First World Empire*, (HANE/S 5), Padova 1993, 64-67.

42. Luckenbill, *Senn.*, 92-93, 25-26.

43. Borger, *Esarh.*, 53, Col. IV, 1-5.

44. I. Eph'al, *The Ancient Arabs*, Jerusalem 1982, 53f.

45. Borger, *Esarh.*, 56, 62-69.

46. Cf. *ba-aš-ša is-sab-tu*, in Grayson, ABC, 83, 5-6.

47. H. Tadmor, *BiAr* 29 (1966), 97-100; A. Spalinger, *OrNS* 43 (1974), 300-302.

48. Borger, *Esarh.*, § 24, 6; § 76, Obv. 5.

49. W. Heimpel, *RIA* 7, 195-199; 8, 53-55.

50. Borger, *Esarh.*, § 65, Obv. 16; § 44, 3.

51. *Ibid.*, 76, Obv. 7.

52. *Ibid.*, Rev. 4-7.

sert are well known from the Hebrew Bible, which refers to fiery serpents and scorpions (*Deuteronomy*, 8, 15), and to the land of the viper and the flying serpent (*Isaiah*, 30, 6). Herodotus, too, refers to flying serpents in the Sinai desert (II, 75; III, 109).

Another text from the same time describes Esarhaddon's fight with Tirhaqa, the Nubian:⁵³

"Like a lion I raged, I put on my coat of mail, my helmet, emblem of victory. I grasped in my hands the mighty bow (and) the arrow which Aššur, king of the gods entrusted to me."

We can easily recognize here the heroic depiction of Sennacherib in his battle with the king of Elam in the course of his eighth campaign.⁵⁴ As recently shown, this depiction speaks of Sennacherib in terms expressly similar to those used to describe the god Marduk in his battle against the sea-monsters in *Enuma-Elish*.⁵⁵ It appears that the royal bards not only made use of heroic metaphors when describing a major victory, but also transported these heroic achievements to the mythical sphere.

The use of elevated-style geographical terminology did not cease with the death of Esarhaddon. Aššurbanipal, in the tradition of his father, states that he marched against Magan and Meluḫḫa, though Tirhaqa is correctly named there as king of Egypt and Nubia.⁵⁶ This archaic terminology was employed even long after Assyria lost control of Egypt, never again to expand the horizons of its Empire in the southwest.

Moreover, it would seem that Aššurbanipal's loss of his political hold over Egypt triggered repetitive—even compensatory—references to his achievements "in Magan and Meluḫḫa," which his historical inscriptions always mention as the king's first campaign.⁵⁷

We observe continuity with Esarhaddon in relation to the Arabs as well. Like his father, Aššurbanipal concluded the history of his life's work of war with long, elaborate descriptions of his campaigns against the Arabs, mainly in the Syrian Desert.⁵⁸ However, no mythical elements were employed in these accounts. On the contrary, their elegant, literary narrative style with its

didactic overtones⁵⁹ constitutes one of the highest achievements of Assyrian Imperial prose.

Elam, Assyria's historical rival to the East, now remained the only target for expanding its imperial horizons. The historical prisms vividly describe the bitter struggle with the kings of Elam, in the course of which several successive claimants to the throne in Susa—victims of dynastic instability—found refuge in the Assyrian court. The wars ended in a devastation of Elam and a destruction of Susa.⁶⁰

The climax of the heroic sequence which started with the first campaign against "Magan and Meluḫḫa" at the beginning of Aššurbanipal's reign, now culminated, twenty-five years later, with a triumphal ceremony in Nineveh during the Akitu of Ištar. Aššurbanipal arrived at the temple of the goddess standing in a processional carriage which was drawn, not by four horses, but by four captive kings: three Elamites and one Arab.⁶¹

"I had them harnessed to the yoke of my processional carriage and they pulled it, under me, as far as the (entrance) gate of the temple."

The immediate association that comes to mind is the chariot of Adad or, that of Marduk, harnessed to the four winds (*šār erbetti*): "the south wind, the north wind, the east wind, the west wind."⁶² In the present case, however, only the vanquished princes of the east and the west could have been harnessed to the carriage: the south, Babylonia, had been subdued several years earlier, and the north was never annexed by Aššurbanipal. However, the claim to universal rule is achieved by adding a description of the voluntary expression of friendship by the king of Urartu, implying submission.⁶³ It was, in fact, the last time that an Assyrian emperor could boast of hegemony over the four quarters.⁶⁴

59. E.g., Gerardi, *ibid.*, 97-100.

60. Borger, *Assurbanipal* ..., 239-243.

61. *Ibid.*, 71, A § 85; A.G. George, *BiOr* 53 (1996), 376.

62. Lambert-Millard, *Atra-ḫasis*, 123, Rev. 45; *En. El.*, IV, 42-43, 50-53.

63. Borger, *Assurbanipal*, 71, A § 86.

64. Further, peaceful expansion of Assyria's horizon is briefly reported in texts composed after the fall of Susa and the devastation of Elam. Rulers of far-away lands, to the east and south-east of Elam sent delegations of "friendship and goodwill," bringing their gifts. Among them were Cyrus of Parsušaš and Hūduru of Dilmun: Borger, *Assurbanipal*, 250, Prism H; Fuchs, *Sargon*, 294, 115-118; 129-131.

III

In the Assyrian tradition of perennial territorial expansion, the reign of Sennacherib marks a dramatic departure from centuries-old norms. Except for the campaign to Phoenicia, Judah and Philistia, Sennacherib did not personally initiate any campaign of expansion in the west. His generals led two additional expeditions to the northwest—to Cilicia in the year 696 and to the border of Tabal in 695, for the suppression of uprisings—which were dated in the Annals not in terms of Sennacherib's own campaigns, *girru*, but, exceptionally, in the old-fashioned manner, in terms of respective eponyms.⁶⁵ The only campaign of expansion which resulted in territorial annexation, Sennacherib's second campaign, was in the east, in the mountainous land of the Kassites. It is in connection with this campaign that the motif of "heroic priority" was invoked.⁶⁶ A similar motif is repeated in the course of the narration of Sennacherib's fifth campaign—to Mount Nipur north of Assyria: "none of the kings who lived before me have traveled unblazed trails and wearisome paths along those rugged mountains."⁶⁷ It is also on the occasion of this campaign that the motif of the king's personal heroism is artfully expressed:⁶⁸

"Gullies, mountain torrents and dangerous cliffs. I surmounted in my (sedan) chair; where it was too steep for any chair, I advanced on foot. Like a young gazelle, I mounted the highest peaks. ... yet whenever my knees gave out, I sat down and drank cold water from my water-skin to quench my thirst."⁶⁹

However, this isolated incursion into the mountains north of Assyria represented no more than token acknowledgment of the traditional duty of the king to expand the borders. The court scribe must have been hard pressed trying to correlate the high style of royal heroism with the fact that there was not much to boast about in this ephemeral attempt at territorial expansion.

All in all, Sennacherib was overtly not an expansionist. Throughout his reign, the Assyrian borders remained more or less the same. In some places (such as Philistia) they even shrank slightly. However, Sennacherib repeat-

65. Luckenbill, *Senn.*, 61-62.

66. *Ibid.*, 26, 65-68.

67. *Ibid.*, 37, 15-17.

68. *Ibid.*, 36, 5-8.

69. Counterbalancing this exhibition of vigour, Sennacherib is the only king of Assyria who admits retreat, albeit not before the power of his enemies, but before the powers of nature: *ibid.*, 41, 7-11.

edly translated the motif of outstanding novel achievement into two very different areas of activity. The first was architecture: almost at the very beginning of his reign, he abandoned Dūr-Šarrukin and started to rebuild the ancient city of Nineveh, turning it into Assyria's magnificent new capital. He changed the course of the river flowing through the city, brought water from afar with the aid of a masterfully designed aqueduct, built massive walls, temples, and royal palaces.⁷⁰ He employed in this work scores of deportees brought from the entire empire, among them Cilicians, Phoenicians and Philistines.⁷¹ In the folk tradition (and for the prophet Jonah), Sennacherib's Nineveh became a megalopolis, a three days' walk from one end to the other.

The second realm of innovation and extension of horizons was metal technology, especially the art of casting bronze. Sennacherib claims that he personally supervised the casting of bull-colossi and pillars, and invented a new method for casting these giant sculptures as simply "as one casts half-sheqel pieces."⁷² It is here that we find the "heroic priority" motif, which we would have expected in other contexts: his royal predecessors were ignorant of the proper casting technique, it was the king who—"in his own wisdom," clever understanding, and ingenuity (*milik tēmia*)—made the innovation possible.⁷³ When casting bronze doors for the newly built Akitu House on the outskirts of the city of Aššur, Sennacherib addresses the reader with a rather emotional statement, most unusual for a king of Assyria:

"To future generations (*ana iḫuranūti*), in order that they should know, I say: In this casting, it is I who enlarged the quantity of tin. From this you will learn that it is I who accomplished this work of casting."⁷⁴

And to dispel any doubt that he and no one else engineered the casting of the gates, he swears that he and no other was responsible for this innovative technological procedure.⁷⁵

70. Luckenbill, *Senn.*, 94ff.; T. Jacobsen, *Sennacherib's Aqueduct at Jerwan* (OIP 24), Chicago 1935, 17-43.

71. Luckenbill, *Senn.*, 104, 52-53.

72. *Ibid.*, 109, 17-18.

73. *Ibid.*, 108, 80-109; A. Heidel, «Sumer» 9 (1953), 162, 7-25.

74. Luckenbill, *Senn.*, 141 (K. 1356), Rev. 8-9; B. Landsberger, *JNES* 24 (1965), 292.

75. A new edition: B. Pongratz-Leisten, *Ina šulmi Trub. Die kulttopographische und ideologische Programmatik der Akitu-Prozession im Babylonien und Assyrien im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Baghdader Forschungen 16), Mainz 1994, 207, 20-25.

53. Luckenbill, *ARAB* II, § 561; Borger, *Esarh.*, § 28, 6-12.

54. Luckenbill, *Senn.*, 44, Col. V, 67-45; 82.

55. E. Weissert in H. Waetzoldt - H. Hauptmann (Hrsg.), *Assyrien im Wandel der Zeiten* (CRR 39), Heidelberg 1997, 191-202.

56. E.g., Prism A, Streck, *Assurbanipal* II, 6, 52ff. (R. Borger, *Beiträge zum Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals*, Wiesbaden 1996, 17ff.).

57. M. Cogan - H. Tadmor, *OrNS* 46 (1977), 82f.

58. P. Gerardi, *SAAB* 6 (1992), 67-101.

Sennacherib's departure from the past is even more pronounced in his revision of imperial priorities with regard to Babylon — a political and cultural issue of high prominence during the reign of Sargon. Sennacherib's new policy is manifested — like the architectural innovations — from the very start of his reign, and is apparent in the cultic-religious and even the theological spheres.⁷⁶ Ultimately, having failed to resolve the vexing "Babylonian problem," Sennacherib destroyed Babylon, transferring the center of Mesopotamian civilization to Assyria, with the city of Aššur as its core.⁷⁷ Sennacherib — to use the metaphor of the present symposium — restructured the cultural-religious landscape of Mesopotamia. Assur and Nineveh would forever inherit what

once was Babylon, with its pleiada of sacred satellite cities. In the terminology of Edward Schills,⁷⁸ which nowadays has become almost a commonplace, Sennacherib restructured the center — and not the periphery, as had traditionally been the mode in the Assyrian Empire.

However, this process was halted relatively soon. Sennacherib was killed by the rightful heir to the throne, and Esarhaddon, the youngest but preferred son, immediately changed the course of Assyrian history. The city of Babylon was rebuilt and restored, and eventually, within less than a century, Babylonia succeeded Assyria as the predominant — but no longer expansion-oriented — Empire in the Ancient Near East, a forerunner of the first truly universal Empire of the Achaemenids, which extended, as the book of Esther puts it, from India to Ethiopia — "over an hundred and seven and twenty provinces."

76. H. Tadmor in S. Eisenstadt (ed.), *The Origins and Diversity of the Axial Age Civilizations*, Albany 1986, 212f.; *The Sin of Sargon and Sennacherib's Last Will*, SAAB 3 (1989), 31; cf. also J. Reade, *Neo-Assyrian Monuments in Their Historical Context*, in ARINH 163-165.

77. P. Machinist, *The Assyrians and Their Babylonian Problem: Some Reflections*, «Jahrbuch der Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin» 1984/5, 353ff.

78. *Center and Periphery. Essays in Macrosociology*, Chicago 1975, 3ff.

HANE / M - Vol. III/1

Editor-in-Chief: Frederick Mario Fales

Editor: Giovanni B. Lanfranchi

A publication grant of C.N.R.
assigned to Stefano de Martino
is acknowledged for this volume

Printed by Tipografia Edicta
Viale Europa 14/A - 35020 Ponte S. Nicolò (Padova)

History of the Ancient Near East / Monographs - III/1

LANDSCAPES

Territories, Frontiers and Horizons in the Ancient Near East

Papers presented to the XLIV Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale
Venezia, 7-11 July 1997

Edited by
L. Milano, S. de Martino, F.M. Fales, G.B. Lanfranchi

Part I
Invited Lectures



Sargon srl
Padova 1999