

## THE IMPERIALISATION OF ASSYRIA

The Assyrian Empire was the first state to achieve durable domination of the Ancient Near East, enduring some seven centuries and, eventually, controlling most of the region. Yet, we know little about how this empire emerged from a relatively minor polity in the Tigris region and how it managed to consolidate its power over conquered territories. Textual sources, often biased, provide a relatively limited source of information. In this study, Bleda S. Düring examines the rich archaeological data of the early Assyrian Empire that have been obtained over the past decades, together with the textual evidence. The archaeological data enable us to reconstruct the remarkably heterogeneous and dynamic impact of the Assyrian Empire on dominated territories. They also facilitate the reconstruction of the various ways in which people participated in this empire, and what might have motivated them to do so. Finally, Düring's study shows how imperial repertoires first developed in the Middle Assyrian period were central to the success of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.

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THE IMPERIALISATION OF  
ASSYRIA  
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL APPROACH

BLEDA S. DÜRING

Leiden University



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*This book is dedicated to all the victims of modern  
imperialism at its worst in Syria and Iraq.*

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As with any work of research this book project, and the larger ERC project of which it was part, would not have been possible without the help and support of numerous colleagues and institutions. The *European Research Council* made the research possible by funding my research application. Professor Peter M. M. G. Akkermans gave me full access and freedom to work on his laboriously acquired data set of the Late Bronze Age strata at Tell Sabi Abyad, where a staggering total of seventy-nine trenches with remains from this period were excavated in an excavation project that spanned more than two decades. My debt to Peter is immense. Further, my thanks go out to Peter Akkermans, Frans Wiggermann, Kim Duistermaat, and Merel Brüning, who had been working on the Tell Sabi Abyad LBA data set for many years, for making a place for me and accepting me in their midst. This also included their tolerance to a number of new interpretations of the site which were at odds with previous ones proposed (and cherished) by them earlier in the research. I am also very grateful to the research team of the ERC project – which we as participants called *The Dunnu Project*: Peter Akkermans; Merel Brüning; Réne Cappers; Hannah Plug; Victor Klinkenberg; Tijm Lanjouw; and Frans Wiggermann. In the team we had countless discussions about the interpretation of our data, often accompanied by good food or drinks, from which I learned a great deal.

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Among the external participants of the second project symposium (spring 2014), focusing on the comparative archaeology of empires in Eurasia, were Peter Attema, Anna Boozer, Henry Colburn, Lidewijde De Jong, Daniele Morandi Bonacossi, Bradley Parker, Lauren Ristvet, and Daniel Rogers, and they were joined by John Bintliff, Tesse Stek, Frans Theuws, and Joanita Vroom from my own department. With my colleague Tesse Stek I have edited the proceedings of this symposium into another book.<sup>2</sup> I have learned a great deal from these colleagues about the archaeology of empires.

With my colleagues Bradley Parker (The University of Utah) and Anna Boozer (Baruch College, City University of New York) I set up a follow-up symposium on the archaeology of empires, which was sponsored by the American Schools of Research and took place in Santa Fe, New Mexico in May 2017. Sadly, my dear friend and colleague Bradley died unexpectedly in January 2018, and so Anna and I are working on publishing the proceedings of the Santa Fe seminar.<sup>3</sup>

In Leiden I need to thank a number of people as well. The board of the Faculty of Archaeology granted me a sabbatical in the autumn of 2015, which I could devote to writing part of this book. My research was stimulated by conversations with colleagues such as David Fontijn, Ben Haring, Harmen Huigens, Olivier Nieuwenhuys, Aris Politopoulos, Tesse Stek, Willemijn Waal, and Caroline Waerzeggers, who arranged a workplace for me in the NINO library to work on this book. I am also very grateful to Joanne Porck and Tijm Lanjouw for their work on the illustrations.

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<sup>1</sup> Düring ed. 2015.      <sup>2</sup> Düring and Stek eds. 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Boozer, Düring, and Parker eds. 2020.

## A NOTE ON CHRONOLOGY

In Mesopotamian history a considerable amount of controversy exists on how to date various events and kings, and various scholars have proposed five alternative dating schemes for Mesopotamia: the so-called High Chronology; Middle Chronology; Modified Middle Chronology; Low Chronology; and, Ultra Low Chronology.<sup>4</sup> Various recent monographs and many additional studies have been devoted to assessing the plausibility and effectiveness of these chronologies, the assessment of which is akin to opening Pandora's box. While many archaeologists have favoured the Ultra Low Chronology, or New Chronology,<sup>5</sup> as it is based on dendrochronology and radiocarbon dating, historians and many Near Eastern archaeologists have largely continued to use the Middle Chronology or Orthodox Chronology mainly because to accept the New Chronology would result in a large number of new chronological problems or would cause confusion amongst colleagues.<sup>6</sup>

Some years ago, two systematic studies devoted to the evaluation of these chronologies by Furlong and Newgrosh concurred that the New Chronology is the most robust one. This conclusion was based primarily on radiocarbon dates, which appeared to fit the New Chronology best at the time. In general, ancient historians were much less willing to accept the New Chronology for two main reasons. For historical reconstructions the New Chronology has very profound consequences, in which for example the current synchronisations between Hittite and Middle Assyrian histories completely disappear. New historical scenarios have been proposed, such as a war between Tiglath-pileser I and the Hittites, whereas in traditional chronologies Tiglath-pileser I ruled some seventy years after the collapse of the Hittite Empire.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the various proposals of new historical chronologies diverge widely from each other in their absolute dates and their proposed synchronisations of various historical sequences. Pruzsinszky has discussed such problems and inconsistencies in the New Chronology in some detail.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Newgrosh 2007: 64–5; Pruzsinszky 2009: 24; Furlong 2010: 9.

<sup>5</sup> Newgrosh 2007: 515; Pruzsinszky 2009: 17–22; Furlong 2010: 215–19.

<sup>6</sup> Van de Mieroop 2004: 4; Tenu 2009a: 323.

<sup>7</sup> Newgrosh 2007: 494–506; Furlong 2010: 29. <sup>8</sup> Pruzsinszky 2009.

Furthermore, in recent years, new synchronisations between Anatolian dendrochronological data and Old Assyrian eponym lists have been proposed, which taken together with new astronomical arguments suggests that the (modified) Middle Chronology is in fact, the most accurate on the basis of current evidence.<sup>9</sup>

Middle Assyrian King	New Chronology (BCE)	Middle Chronology (BCE)	Modified Middle Chronology (BCE)
Puzur-Assur III		1521–1498	
Enlil-nasir I		1497–1485	
Nur-ili		1484–1473	
Assur-saduni		1473	
Assur-rabi I		1472–1453	
Assur-nadin-ahhe I		1452–1430	
Enlil-nasir II		1430–1425	
Assur-nirari II		1424–1418	1424–1408
Assur-bel-nisesu		1417–1408	1407–1399
Assur-rim-nisesu		1408–1401	1398–1391
Assur-nadin-ahhe II		1400–1391	1390–1381
Eriba-Adad I		1390–1364	1380–1354
Assur-uballit		1363–1328	1353–1318
Enlil-nirari	1182–1173	1327–1318	1317–1308
Arik-den-ili	1172–1161	1317–1306	1307–1296
Adad-nirari I	1160–1129	1305–1274	1295–1264
Shalmaneser I	1128–1099	1273–1244	1263–1234
Tukulti-Ninurta I	1098–1062	1243–1207	1233–1197
Assur-nadin-apli	1061–1058	1206–1203	1196–1193
Assur-nirari III		1206–1197	1192–1187
Enlil-kudurri-usur	1057–1053	1196–1192	1186–1182
Ninurta-apil-Ekur	1052–1050	1191–1179	1181–1169
Assur-dan I	1049–1004	1178–1133	1168–1133
Ninurta-tukulti-Assur			
Mutakkil-Nusku			
<i>Assur-uballit II</i>	1012–1004	<i>does not exist</i>	
Assur-resha-ishi	1003–986	1132–1115	
Tiglath-pileser I	985–957	1114–1076	
Asarid-apil-Ekur	956–955	1075–1074	
Assur-bel-kala	954–937	1073–1056	
Eriba-Adad II	936–935	1055–1054	
Shamsi-Adad IV	<i>does not exist</i>	1053–1050	
Assurnasirpal I	<i>does not exist</i>	1049–1031	
Shalmaneser II	<i>does not exist</i>	1031–1019	
Assur-nirari IV	<i>does not exist</i>	1018–1013	
Assur-rabi II	<i>does not exist</i>	1023–972	

Chronology of Middle Assyrian kings after Van de Mieroop (2004: 294–5); Newgrosh (2007: 287); Tenu (2009: 323); Postgate (2013: 429).

<sup>9</sup> Sallaberger and Schrakamp 2015. These authors argue that one should deduct twelve years from the traditional Middle Chronology dates.



Neo-Assyrian King	Chronology (BCE)
Assur-resha-isi II	971–967
Tiglath-pileser II	966–935
Assur-dan II	934–912
Adad-nirari II	911–891
Tukulti-Ninurta II	890–884
Assurnasirpal II	883–859
Shalmaneser III	858–824
Shamsi-Adad V	823–811
Adad-nirari III	810–873
Shalmaneser IV	782–773
Assur-Dan III	772–755
Assur-nirari V	754–745
Tiglath-pileser III	744–727
Shalmaneser V	726–722
Sargon II	721–705
Sennacherib	704–681
Esarhaddon	680–669
Assurbanipal	668–627
Assur-etel-ilani	627–623
Sin-shar-ishkun	622–612
Assur-uballit II	611–?

Chronology of Neo-Assyrian kings after Van de Mieroop (2004: 295–6).

Clearly, these arguments are as much about reputations and academic allegiances, as they are about chronology. For the purpose of this book, however, it is best to avoid these chronological issues, given that they cannot be resolved easily, and that they need to be resolved by historians mainly. Therefore, I will adhere to the, possibly erroneous, Middle Chronology dates in this book, which reflect the consensus of decades of historical scholarship. In the following table the relevant dates according to the various chronologies are provided (the problems do not exist for the first millennium BCE), and in the text dates are kept to a necessary minimum.

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