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The Neo-Assyrian Empire

Peter R. Bedford

1. INTRODUCTION

The Neo-Assyrian (hereafter NA) Empire is the name given to a polity centered on the upper Tigris River that at its height in the seventh century B.C.E. controlled territory extending from the Zagros Mountains in the east to the Levant (Syria-Palestine) and much of Egypt in the west and from the Persian Gulf in the south to the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates in southeastern Anatolia in the north. It was the largest polity seen in western Asia up until that time. The NA period is technically a linguistic designation, denoting the third and last period of the Assyrian dialect of Akkadian (Old Assyrian period c.2000–c.1800 B.C.E.; Middle Assyrian period c.1400–c.1050 B.C.E.), although this period is coincident with the empire in which the texts were generated. While dates for the beginning of the empire can be disputed, it is generally accepted that the empire existed from the late tenth century until the late seventh century (c.934–c.605 B.C.E.), more than three hundred years. It was therefore also the most durable empire seen until then in western Asia. There had been a smaller Assyrian Empire for part of the Middle Assyrian (hereafter MA) period that extended across northeastern Mesopotamia (now northern Iraq, northeastern Syria, and southeastern Turkey) and after which the NA Empire was initially fashioned. Previous to this, the empires based in Mesopotamia were centered in the south (Babylonia) and, while extending along the Euphrates river valley into northern Syria, were much more modest in their territorial reach. The best known of the southern-based empires are those founded by Sargon of Akkad (c.2340–c.2159 B.C.E.)¹ and Hammurabi of Babylon (he of the famous “law code”; 1863–1712 B.C.E. [middle chronology]). Arguably these third- and early-second millennium “empires” were rather different in their forms of maintenance and political integration from what one sees in the NA Empire.

With this empire lasting some three hundred years, it is possible to identify changes in its character, not simply its geographic extent, but also its organization and modes of political domination and economic exploitation. This chapter offers a description of aspects of these changes by means of an historical overview of the

period. In so doing, it attempts to elucidate, with varying degrees of success, a number of questions that should prove useful for the comparative study of empires: how did the empire begin? How was it maintained and expanded? How did it end? How was it ruled? Given the constraints of space and the nature of the available sources, it is possible to offer here an extended consideration of two areas closely related to the second and fourth questions, namely principles or beliefs that provided legitimacy and identity to both rulers and the ruled and mechanisms of imperial control, including the classification of regions of the empire into different categories. The NA Empire is significant not only for the new and distinctive ways in which it justified and attempted to integrate the empire. It also bequeathed modes of imperial organization and legitimation to the ensuing Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid Persian empires. Before turning to the historical outline of the NA Empire, however, the chapter briefly sets out by way of orientation the sources available for the study of the empire and the types of questions they can address; and it briefly introduces certain aspects of NA culture and society.

2. ORIENTATION AND BACKGROUND

Various categories of evidence are available for the study of the NA Empire. Written sources include chronological texts, such as king lists, chronicles, and eponym lists (year-names taken from the names of officials),² and royal inscriptions, such as annals, display inscriptions, votive inscriptions, and “letters to the god” (reports on military campaigns).³ As these texts are primarily royal commemorative texts, they have proved to be useful sources for the study of royal ideology and the ideological justifications for Assyrian imperialism. They also include important information concerning the political geography of the empire, types and amount of tribute and booty obtained, chronology of reigns, and political history. These types of texts cover the whole period, but not in uniform depth. More inscriptions, for example, were produced in periods of Assyrian ascendancy (in periods 1a, 1b, 2a, and 2b, in the historical overview provided later in this chapter). Officials’ inscriptions include texts written by NA governors in their provinces⁴ and others written by indigenous ruling houses that were retained in power by the Assyrians, as evidenced in Neo-Hittite and Aramean and Phoenician texts from Syria-Palestine.⁵ As the Tell Fekherye inscription (midnorthern Mesopotamia) shows,⁶ these two types were not mutually exclusive categories, since local rulers could represent themselves as governors as well as indigenous monarchs (in this bilingual stele the local ruler is termed “governor” in the Akkadian text and “king” in the Aramaic text). Royal inscriptions were composed by independent Babylonian kings.⁷

Loyalty oaths and treaties are the oaths sworn by client kings and also by Assyrian officials.⁸ Probably to be included here are the Aramaic treaties from Sifre, which are thought by some to be between an Assyrian provincial governor and a client king.⁹ Administrative texts deal with the palace and temple, with provincial and military

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administration. Administration often includes economic matters.¹⁰ Legal texts deal with decisions before a judge over matters such as murder, theft, and debt¹¹ or concern conveyances (of persons or property, including land), contracts (loans and promissory notes), and receipts (as proof that a debt had been discharged).¹² There are also legal and economic texts from Babylonia.¹³ Also to be included here are royal grants and decrees giving land and tax concessions to senior administrators.¹⁴

About 2,500 letters and fragments survive mainly from historical period 2 (discussed later), although a preponderance of all datable letters come from two brief periods in period 2b)—“ten years at the end of Sargon’s reign and nine years at the beginning and end of Esarhaddon’s and Assurbanipal’s reigns, respectively.”¹⁵ The letters are written to and from the royal court, dealing with administrative matters (only in part to do with the provinces), and about half of them deal with matters of medicine, extispicy, astrology, and omen interpretation.¹⁶ Oracular material was largely generated for the royal court by cultic experts in response to enquiries to deities, particularly Shamash, the god of justice.¹⁷ Whereas in the “letters to the king” it is commonly unsolicited omens being reported, the extispicy reports are solicited by the king to obtain divine advice. A related category of texts consists of “prophecies” delivered to the king from the goddess Ishtar (the god of war [and love]), so often the message is an encouragement for the battle.¹⁸ The date of these texts is quite late (historical period 2b), but they offer insight into the types of political decisions that had to be made by kings, the ways in which they were reached, and other concerns of the kings (illness, loyalty of officials and clients). Together with the annals, they also help to track military campaigns, since the kings always sought divine support and the divine timetable in undertaking military activities. Finally, there are also literary texts, some of which give insight into royal ideology.¹⁹

Noncontextual information comes from surface surveys, undertaken for sections of the upper Habur Valley and northern Jezirah (both north-central Mesopotamia),²⁰ and above all from excavations, mainly of cities, notably the Assyrian royal (capital) cities in the homeland (such as Kalhu [Nimrud]; Dur-Sharrukin [Khorsabad]; Nineveh; Aššur) as well as some provincial capitals (for example, Til Barsip/Kar Shalmaneser [Tell Ahmar] on the Euphrates bend; Dur-katlimmu on the Habur).²¹ The emphasis has been on palatial buildings, which has led to the discovery of texts but leaves us with little understanding of urban sites as a whole. Assyrian palace reliefs have been analyzed in detail, particularly with an eye to their ideological import. There is also interest in influence on Assyrian art from western (that is, Aramean and Neo-Hittite) artistic traditions.²²

The preponderance of written sources date from the later period (historical period 2b). We rarely obtain anything from the subjugated peoples themselves, so our view of them is from the perspective of the dominant Assyrian power. The biblical texts from Israel and Judah ascribed to this period are about our only source for the views of subjugated peoples. Texts such as First Isaiah (Isaiah 1–39), Amos, and Deuteronomy document knowledge of Assyrian literary traditions.²³ Much of

the Assyrian source material, both written and archaeological, is skewed toward the royal court and the king in particular. The types of sources, their provenances, and their dates circumscribe to a great degree the analysis of the empire that is possible.

Both Assyriology and the historical study of ancient western Asia based on the cuneiform sources (as distinct from classical or biblical sources) are still relatively young academic fields, only about 150 years old. Much of that time has been spent deciphering the texts, establishing a reliable chronology, and outlining the political history. For the NA period, deciphering the texts has proven to be particularly demanding, with a number of false steps along the way. Take the letters mentioned earlier. They were rather poorly copied in the 1890s through the 1910s and similarly poorly edited in the 1930s; they thus proved to be of limited historical use. It was not until the 1970s that reliable translations of them began to appear, thanks largely to the work of Simo Parpola. Similarly, hand copies of the economic and administrative texts had been published,²⁴ but they were not always accurate and often proved hard to understand, not the least because it proved difficult to establish a context for them and they are filled with specialist terminology. Nicholas Postgate’s work since the late 1960s has helped immensely to clarify the meaning of these texts. Having said that, I must admit that there is much that we cannot deduce simply because we have no clear knowledge of the context of the texts. Parpola’s team that produced the State Archives of Assyria (that is, the complete corpus of NA texts produced by the empire)²⁵ has rendered an invaluable service to those who do not want to be burdened with deciphering the texts. That does not mean, of course, that a firsthand familiarity with the texts and an intimate knowledge of the language are unimportant for historians of the NA Empire.

The upshot of all this is that a number of questions pertinent to those interested in the comparative study of empires cannot be readily answered with any assurance. Take demography, for example. Ancient Near Eastern historians have been reticent to offer even guesses at the population of western Asia for any pre-Hellenistic period. It might be possible to estimate the population by extrapolating from the number of deportees given in NA annals, if we knew what percentage of the conquered population they represented and if we could trust the numbers given. Estimates of the overall number of people deported in the NA period range from 1.5 to 4.5 million.²⁶ But even the lower of these figures is commonly considered to be impossibly high, not least because of the logistical problems facing the Assyrian administration in moving, in the largest contingent, some 208,000 persons (from Babylonia to Assyria). Even if this latter figure is interpreted as the number of persons deported in a series of movements, logistical problems remain. While we cannot trust the figures sufficiently to extrapolate an accurate population count, the general settlement pattern clearly underwent a change, with more villages appearing across northern Mesopotamia and signs of increased settlement in Babylonia.²⁷ Urbanism, not the least in the Assyrian heartland, is also a feature, with royal cities either being newly built or being

refurbished and expanded (Aššur 75 ha; Nimrud 360 ha; Khosabad 300 ha; Nineveh 700 ha). Provincial capitals were also constructed or refurbished, with their populations increased by new settlers (for example, Kar Shalmaneser 60 ha; Dur-katlimmu 55 ha). The populations of these royal cities were mostly settled by the crown, and arguably the same obtains for most, if not all, the new agricultural settlements across northern Mesopotamia. Rather than reflecting population increase, changing settlement patterns were an outcome of a government policy that included the resettlement of people after deportation and the sedentarizing of semi-nomadic Arameans and Chaldeans. It points to a restructuring of the agricultural economy; exploiting labor in new ways and opening up new lands.²⁸

We are only a little better served in respect of technology.²⁹ Assyria lagged behind both the Hittites and Syria-Palestine in the use of iron. As Brinkman notes: "The Hittites had mastered the methods of producing significant amounts of iron by at least the thirteenth century, and Syria-Palestine was making wide use of the technology by the tenth century. Assyria at the beginning of the ninth century was still largely dependent on bronze for weapons and for agricultural and household implements."³⁰ Iron was seemingly appropriated by Assyrians for military use from caches captured in Syria-Palestine, but by the third quarter of the eighth century it was undoubtedly a producer. This slow introduction of the technology for iron production did not hamper Assyrian military success. Much of what we know of technological improvements pertains to the military—the development of more advanced chariotry, particularly the development of a platform that could support three (and sometimes four) men (the driver, the bowman, and the shield bearer), and of highly specialized siege warfare, including the development of the battering ram, the construction of earthen ramps, and the use of sappers. Something more substantial can be said on the topics of Assyrian political and religious institutions and class structure, although it must be stressed that the vast bulk of our information pertains to the upper echelons of society. We really know very little about the ordinary members of society.³¹

Assyria seems to have formed in the early fourteenth century when a territory at the eastern edge of the northern Mesopotamian Hurrian kingdom of Mitanni extricated itself. In wresting its independence, Assyria was born. This polity needs to be distinguished from the ancient city-state of Aššur (Ashur), although there is clear continuity with it, not the least in Ashur initially being the capital, and that city's tutelary deity (also named Ashur) becoming the paramount deity of the new polity. MA and NA king lists and lists of officials present Assyria as being an unbroken continuation of the city-state, and cultural continuity is evident in language and religion. The territory of Assyria was much larger than that controlled by the city-state, however. It encompassed a triangular area from Ashur in the south, to Dur-Sharrukin (Khorsabad) in the north, across to Arbela in the east (see map 2.1). This was the Assyrian homeland. To this was attached a number of provinces in northern and northeastern Mesopotamia taken from the declining Mitanni.

NA notions of kingship and the political and religious institutions and beliefs that obtained are all indebted to the MA period. More will be said on royal ideology in a later section, but here it should be noted that the king was viewed as having an intimate relationship with the god Ashur, and he implemented the divine will.³² He enjoyed absolute power over the state and had responsibility for good governance, which included the care and feeding of gods and the maintenance of their shrines. He was the supreme and sole legislator and chief justice. No formal law codes are known to us. Most legal matters were regulated by custom, and the judicial system operated without the king's personal intervention.³³ While the king was the supreme human being in Assyrian thought, he was a mortal all the same, and Assyrians resisted the deification of their ruler, which had been known in Sumer and early Babylonia. Assyria was a militaristic state, and the king was the chief military leader, although he did not always lead the army in person. In marching to war, the army was a sort of religious procession, led along by priests and statues of the gods. All wars were religious wars, justified by the will of Ashur.³⁴

Our knowledge of religion is limited to the state cults. Little is known of personal piety or the religious beliefs and practices of ordinary Assyrians. Assyrian religion was polytheistic, with the gods organized as in a hierarchy under the chief deity, Ashur.³⁵ They each had assigned roles (for example, Ishtar: battle and love; Shamash: justice), and each had a primary residence in one of the main cities (Ishtar: Arbela; Ninurta: Kalhu; Ashur: Ashur), although they all had shrines in various cities. Babylonian deities such as Enlil, Marduk, and Nabu were also worshipped in Assyria, and Babylonian ceremonies such as the *akitu* ritual were borrowed.³⁶ The center of the cult was the temple and the divine statue. The temple was a monumental structure housing the cult statue in a central shrine and provided space for other deities in ancillary chapels. It also had rooms for storage and the activities of various personnel who worked there: artisans, scribes, kitchen staff, and domestic servants, as well as cultic functionaries. A temple was a self-contained community with its own hierarchy of personnel and its own economic resources, which were mainly in the form of land holdings, although increasingly they were dependent on royal benefits, including donations of tribute and booty, specific taxes levied on certain provinces, and ex voto offerings. The head of the temple was the "chief administrator," who was responsible to the king. Given that the king had ultimate responsibility for the cults, temples and their senior personnel can be viewed as part of the state bureaucracy. Divination (specifically astrology and extispicy) also fall within the bounds of religion, since the Assyrian worldview understood that deities communicated with the terrestrial world, in particular with the king, through such means. There were numerous specialists in both astrology and extispicy attached to the royal court and within the state bureaucracy generally (as temple personnel or attached to the palace of a provincial governor).³⁷

In the administration of the empire³⁸ there was a clear distinction between, on the one hand, Assyria (the home provinces) and the northern Mesopotamian provinces

that paid taxes of various kinds and, on the other hand, the subjugated client states from which tribute was exacted. There were some similarities in organization, since the king placed each province under the control of a governor³⁹ or in client states, particularly earlier in the empire and in territories more distant from the Assyrian heartland, under a member of an indigenous ruling house as a loyal servant of Assyria. Beneath the governor and his bureaucracy were local town and village mayors. Some agricultural lands were placed at the disposal of governors, leading bureaucrats of the central administration, and members of the leading Assyrian families, often including the labor to work the land (for example, appendix, text no. 4).

The Assyrian state, including the administration, was essentially militaristic in organization, and there was usually little distinction between military service and civil service. The chain of command was not always from one level to that immediately adjacent; the crown gave direct orders to some officials far down the pyramid, and the king had the right to intervene at any level in any matter. While the authority of the king was technically unlimited, it was checked by religion, legal precedent, and the temper of his nobles and officials; this last group effectively ran the empire on the king's (and the deity's) behalf.⁴⁰ At the royal court there were six senior officials (the following English titles are attempts to make some sense of their position): the major domo, the vice-chancellor, the field marshal, the palace herald, the chief butler, and the (chief) steward. The first two were royal advisers (the former alone having direct access to the king), the third headed the army, the fourth was the chief administrative officer of the realm, the fifth acted as the king's plenipotentiary, and the sixth undertook special royal commissions. We do not know much about their actual duties. Some of these officials had provinces ceded to them, which were administered by others in view of the owner's absence at court.⁴¹ Land grants were also given to certain administrators at the next level down: viziers, the chief eunuch, and the chief justice. At this level also were the provincial governors, basically organized in a hierarchy (most prestigious in the homeland or near it). Their responsibilities were military and civil. Technically, they were members of the court, but they served in the provinces. Also outside the court, but of high standing in the administration, were the chief administrators of the main temples and the mayors of the major cities in the Assyrian heartland. There were numbers of lower-level administrators ("courtiers") attached to the palace who were organized under the chief baker (note that often the titles of senior bureaucrats reflect their origins in domestic service). There were also tax collectors for royal lands and for the provinces. Some of these were assigned specialized tasks such as the collection of horses for the army. Army officers should also be mentioned among important, but lower-level, officials. Captains commanded a company of fifty men. Charioteers were viewed as the elite fighting forces within an army that also included cavalry, engineers, and infantry, the last forming the majority of the troops. What we know of the class structure arises out of this bureaucracy, since it reflected the

social order.⁴² At the top was the king; next came those attached to the royal court or the court of the crown prince, then administrators at various levels, officers in the army, ordinary Assyrian "citizens" (there is no Assyrian term), and semifree laborers (made up of deportees who worked on state land). At the bottom were slaves (never a very large number; some were Assyrians reduced to debt bondage, others prisoners of war).

Assyrians belonged to family groups or clans that were in turn part of larger groupings usually called tribes. One's social status, and thus access to administrative posts and the emoluments that came with them, depended on the family or clan to which one belonged. It was possible, although not common, for families to move up in social status given one or more generations of sterling service to the state by an individual. In this way, one successful family member could enhance the social and economic standing of the whole family. Some foreigners were integrated into the Assyrian social system, since by the late eighth century Aramean names appear at very high levels in the class structure. There were a number of other "free" foreigners who also attained high rank in the bureaucracy. Generally foreigners did forced labor on building and agricultural projects or were otherwise employed in menial capacities in temples and palaces.

The vast majority of the population were farmers who worked family-owned land. Families and clans lived together in villages near their agricultural holdings. We do not know how these villages were organized beyond each having a mayor who represented them before state bureaucrats and who also acted as the local judge (a traditional role rather than one given by the state; many bureaucrats [palace officials, temple officials] acted in a judicial capacity, with their role more like that of a counselor to the parties involved than a judge who passed judgment). Babylonian villages, towns, and cities were characterized by councils of "citizens" who made determinations in certain legal cases. Whether or not something similar obtained in Assyria is not known. We might assume so, but such a body is not mentioned in any text. There is no popular assembly of any kind or any quasi-representative body that could make known the concerns of the people to their rulers. Perhaps the mayors played this role. There were never any popular uprisings by Assyrians against the crown or its administrative appointees. The only rebellions by Assyrians were those of the provincial governors, which reflect tensions within the elite class.

The state dominated ownership of the means of production, but there was also a vibrant private economic sector with property rights ensured by the state. All large-scale investment, such as the construction of monumental buildings, construction of infrastructure such as roads, expansion of agriculture into new areas, and mineral exploration and exploitation, was undertaken by the crown. Most of the trade was also in government hands, although some may have been contracted to private operators. Private contractors could be used for major construction work, as is clear in the construction of the new royal city Dur-Sharrukin.⁴³ But in this project a levy of labor, tools, animals, and raw materials was laid on provincial governors, so it was

mainly construction undertaken by the state. Private investment and the wealth it generated were dwarfed by the state. It was the largest employer of labor, including semifree labor (deportees), controlled a large portion of the land (and thus agricultural production), controlled much of the manufacturing, and held a monopoly in the exploitation of minerals.

The economy was structured in such a way that surpluses flowed to the center or were used for the maintenance of the state in the provinces (including provincial courts). It was the Assyrian elite that was most advantaged by this. Postgate sees three sectors of the NA economy: palace sector, government sector, and private sector.⁴⁴ This tripartite division has not convinced everyone. The government sector seems to overlap both the other two rather than being completely discrete. For example, when a high government official is involved in trading activities for personal gain, one must assume that this is part of the private sector, not part of the government sector, even though it may be his government position that affords him opportunity to trade.⁴⁵ However, when an official trader is sent out by the crown to undertake trading activities, this must be seen as part of the palace sector.⁴⁶

The palace sector comprised all things owned by the royal family. Included in this sector as consumers were the royal palaces, royal family, domestic staff, administrators and military, and court officials. Income was in the form of booty, tribute, "gifts," produce and rents from lands owned, credit activities, slave sales, appropriations, and confiscations. Expenditures covered the subsistence of palace residents and staff, equipment of military staff, luxuries, gifts, regular temple offerings, and building operations. The government sector (including the army) drew on the private sector to provide resources for civil and military operations via taxation and conscription. The backbone of the government sector was the provincial system. The government subordinates were responsible for the collection of payments of all kinds from their province and for conscription and supply of soldiers and civil laborers. Village inspectors were responsible to the provincial administration for the assessment of taxation. There is no evidence of a conscious effort by the crown to control or monopolize trade, although both the crown and government officials were involved in it via agents. The private sector is hard to document because of scarcity of sources, although there is evidence for trading in private hands.⁴⁷

Liverani, in contrast, has used a two-sector model of "palace" and "family" to examine trends in land tenure and inheritance from the mid-third through the mid-first millennium.⁴⁸ He sees two processes at work in the first millennium that I believe are apt particularly for the NA period (at least in the Assyrian homeland and northern Mesopotamia).⁴⁹ First, the palace sector directed to members of the palace organization (high officials at court and in the provinces) land, labor, and surpluses as it decentralized control of its lands.⁵⁰ Some (most?) of these lands may well have been prebendary holdings accompanying the office, rather than actually "owned" by the officials.⁵¹ Much of the labor on these estates would have been deportees from elsewhere in the empire, some of whom were put to work in (new) royal cities. We

should expect this to have increased agricultural output and thus the overall wealth of the empire, but it is impossible to obtain figures to show its actual scale. Much (or all, in the case of state land) of this wealth would have gone to the state or enriched the elite families to whom the king had granted the land and labor.

The second process noted by Liverani is the erosion of the connection between land lot and a family or kinship group that had characterized earlier periods. Eventually, land became freely alienable. The upshot of this is that some families were completely deprived of landed property (and enslaved for debts), while other families accumulated large extensions of land that in the "free" sector came to be the exact counterpart of the large landed properties that belonged to the high officials in the Palace sector.⁵²

Both processes led to ownership of landed property being concentrated in the hands of only some individuals or families, whereas in the second millennium landed properties were equally distributed among different family units in the family sector and centralized by the great organization in the Palace sector.⁵³ Both these models recognize that wealth came to be concentrated in the hands of the leading families that held the top administrative positions in the empire. Liverani's model points to the impoverishment of an increasing number of Assyrians who lost their family lands, but the size of this change is impossible to judge.

3. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The following schematic outline of the history of the NA Empire helps to contextualize our main concerns. This history has been divided a number of ways, depending on whether a reign has been interpreted as marking the beginning of a new epoch or as belonging with the reigns that preceded it. Some of these divisions are fairly arbitrary, so I offer here one way of organizing the period:⁵⁴

1. From territorial state to imperial power—934–745 B.C.E.
 - a. Recovery of areas dominated in the MA period—934–884 B.C.E. (Ashur-dan II, Adad-nirari II, Tukulti-ninurta II)
 - b. Extension of control to areas further west, south, and east—883–824 B.C.E. (Ashurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III)
 - c. Internal problems in Assyria—823–745 B.C.E. (Shamshi-Adad V — Ashur-nirari V; five kings)
2. Imperial expansion and consolidation—744–c.630 B.C.E.
 - a. Second expansion and further provincial organization—744–722 B.C.E. (Tiglath-pileser III and Shalmaneser V)
 - b. Imperial apogee—721–c.630 B.C.E. (Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, Ashurbanipal)
3. The fall of Assyria—c.630–609 B.C.E. (Ashur-etel-ilani, Sin-shar-ishkin, Ashur-uballit II)

3.1. *Period 1a*

What seemed to be driving expansion westward, northward, and eastward from the Assyrian heartland was a desire to reclaim territories that had been gained in the MA period after the demise of the Hurrian state of Mitanni/Hanigalbat in the mid-fourteenth century.⁵⁵ Assyria had lost control of these territories in the mid-eleventh century after the death of Tiglath-pileser I. Around this time, Assyria, with the rest of western Asia and the eastern Mediterranean, was plunged into something of a "dark age" usually connected to climatic change⁵⁶ and events surrounding the movements of the Sea Peoples in Anatolia and along the Levantine coast. When written sources reappear in the early first millennium, a quite different political landscape obtains in western Asia. Whereas before 1200 a group of major powers (Egypt, Hatti, Assyria [replacing Mitanni], Babylonia) was involved in international diplomacy and rivalry,⁵⁷ no such polities now existed. The Hittite empire was defunct, Egypt had retreated within its traditional borders, and Babylonia was stable but lacked rulers with imperial aspirations. In the place of city-states in Syria-Palestine, over which Egypt and Hatti had struggled for dominance in the mid- to late second millennium, there was a series of independent kingdoms (such as Israel, Aram, Moab, Edom). A similar political geography was evidenced across northern Mesopotamia (Aramean kingdoms) and into northern Syria (Neo-Hittite and Aramean kingdoms).⁵⁸ As at the end of the MA period, Aramean pastoral nomads were found across northern Mesopotamia, and there were Aramean and Chaldean semi-nomadic and sedentary tribes in Babylonia. There were no major powers contesting control of northern Mesopotamia, which was obviously a prerequisite for Assyrian expansion. Assyria had a clear military advantage over the smaller polities in northern Mesopotamia, as it was able to muster more resources to overpower these smaller states if they were not immediately intimidated into submission. In this period, Assyrian expansion stayed well within the limits of the area controlled during the MA period.⁵⁹ If one considers the military activities in this period as the (re)taking of territory deemed to be historically Assyrian, it is interesting that there was no attempt to integrate all of this territory into Assyria immediately. The "control" was not marked by the immediate institution of provincial administration. Rather, it took the form of a series of raids, collecting tribute and confirming local rulers as Assyrian administrators and governors. A number of these local rulers were in fact the descendants of Assyrian governors who had served in the MA provincial system. The royal annals record these (usually) annual "tours" of Assyrian-controlled areas, and the itineraries in the annals give us a clear idea of the geographic extent of Assyrian power. Even though these lands were viewed as properly Assyrian territory, the Assyrian kings took advantage of the internal organization of these territories that had developed in the interim between the MA and the NA periods. The formation of kingdoms in this region, as with the rest of northern Syria and Palestine in the aftermath of the demise of the great second-millennium powers, was seen not as something that needed to be

completely overturned but rather as something that could be exploited. The problem was that these territories were not submissive to Assyria, not that they had the wrong form of political organization.

It is likely, then, that this first period should be viewed as an attempt to return to the political conditions of the MA period. From the Assyrian perspective, this might be considered not a new act of imperialism but rather the re-establishment of control over territories in rebellion against their long-standing overlord. They had tried to withdraw from the natural condition of belonging to Assyria. The significance of this is that it is possible to construe the Assyrian Empire as beginning in the fourteenth century (MA period), then experiencing a hiatus in the eleventh century, followed by recovery in the tenth century.⁶⁰ Thus, the mechanisms of imperialism may in fact derive from a period earlier than the first millennium. That the NA kings saw themselves as standing in a tradition that reached back into the MA period is evidenced not only by the occasional reference by name to military exploits of MA kings but also by reference to the fact that "Assyrians" lived in these territories and had been displaced by Arameans and others. The Assyrian king was seeking to return to political normalcy by reasserting Assyrian rule and returning Assyrians to towns and lands from which they had been displaced. So one motivation for the territorial expansion in this period, as well as in the next, was the correction of perceived political anomalies. Another motivation would seem to be economic, since the annals register the tribute exacted from these traditionally subjugated areas as well as the booty taken in one-off raids into territory (notably in Babylonia) that Assyrian kings recognized could not be retained. Also, in reconstituting "Assyria," polities abutting the territories under Assyrian control began to send gifts acknowledging Assyria's status.

3.2. *Period 1b*

This period has two identifiable sections.⁶¹ The first half of this period (reign of Ashurnasirpal II, 883–859) saw the continued expansion westward, northward, and southward within the limits of Assyrian control marked out in the MA period, as well as the development of the imperial administrative system.⁶² In this period, the construction of garrisons on borders or at strategic points in Assyrian-controlled territory was undertaken. Unsurprisingly, borders became contested places, not least because, prior to NA annexation, many of these subjugated polities had developed political and economic arrangements with their neighbors with which Assyrian hegemony interfered. Territories outside Assyria proper (say, west of the Habur River in central north Mesopotamia) were often initially dealt with in terms of treaty agreements (and at least sometimes under threat of Assyrian invasion), which afforded Assyria income in the form of tribute and the opportunity to intervene in their client's affairs if the partner did not meet treaty obligations. In that event, a client state (commonly termed "vassal" in the scholarly literature) might have its ruler replaced with a more compliant member of the indigenous ruling house or might be turned

into a province (one result of resistance to the Assyrian army can be seen in appendix, text no. 2). In the second half of this period (reign of Shalmaneser III, 858–824), a number of north Syrian states beyond the Euphrates bend, which had marked the limit of Assyrian control, were made clients.⁶³ A coalition of these states successfully challenged Assyrian influence, but only for a time. Only by forming coalitions could the smaller states, for example the northern Syrian kingdoms in period 1b and by Syro-Palestinian kingdoms in periods 1b and 2a, have any hope of successfully resisting Assyria. Quite often these coalitions were initially successful, but they proved difficult to maintain in the longer term. Once they broke up due to internal wrangling or Assyrian meddling in an effort to win favor with some of the allies, the Assyrians subjugated their territories. These polities were not provincialized but remained clients. A few others became clients in period 2a by calling on Assyrian aid against former coalition partners. Period 1b also saw the beginning of direct Assyrian involvement in Babylonian political affairs, with Shalmaneser intervening militarily to secure the Babylonian throne for the incumbent royal house against a usurper. The Babylonian king returned the favor in the next period. The character of Assyrian control in this period continues to be debated. It is indisputable that, over time, members of the ruling Assyrian families were installed as provincial governors. Provincialization across northern Mesopotamia was, however, sporadic, with client states and provinces intermixed. For Liverani, the control of newly acquired territories was a web or a network with a series of control points or nodes (“islands,” “outposts”) connected by roads but with much of the territory not directly under Assyrian administrative control. From these centers the Assyrians could strike out against Aramean tribes or others who were causing problems. Thus, “the empire is not a spread of land but a network of communications over which material goods are carried.”⁶⁴ This can be contrasted with the more common view of Assyrian expansion and administrative control as an “oil stain” that slowly spread across northern Mesopotamia and that covered everything in its path.⁶⁵ It is a question of how tightly controlled these holdings were in administrative practice. This issue continues to be relevant throughout the history of the NA Empire, particularly on the northern frontier.⁶⁶

It is in this period that the lines of the NA administrative system, characterized by client states and provinces, clearly appear. The development of provincialization marked a higher level of integration. Here the Assyrians ruled directly through their own Assyrian appointees, commonly from the elite families. Why move from using the local political structures to having an Assyrian ruler? One argument is that this was a more efficient means of domination and economic exploitation. When Assyria relied on local rulers and structures, it incurred the costs of the annual “visits” needed to collect or demand the tribute. Provincialization, as a system in which the tribute moved naturally, without the costs of direct coercion but certainly because of the threat of coercion if there was a rebellion, arguably lowered the costs of running the empire. In theory, however, the system of clientship should have delivered this “natural,” regular sending of tribute.

Perhaps one aspect of provincialization in this period was the reinforcement of ties to the crown afforded by the appointment of members of the leading Assyrian families to governorships or other administrative positions. Also, this practice arguably extended the territory of “Assyria,” since these lands were now ruled by Assyrians, not by locals. Here we may observe in the royal inscriptions the beginnings of a changing notion of what constituted “Assyria” and “Assyrians.”

3.3. *Period 1c*

This period is particularly interesting as we reflect on the structure and cohesion of the empire. In the late MA period, central weakness led the provinces in northern Mesopotamia to establish independent polities of their own. Assyria in period 1c also exhibited central weakness, marked by wrangling over the kingship and the cessation of annual military campaigns. While the western client states took advantage of this and ceased sending tribute, the status of the provinces closer to the Assyrian homeland is unclear. There is no indisputable evidence for a loss of provinces similar to the end of the MA period. When the annals start again, in period 2a, Assyria did not have to reassert authority over these territories, so it may have been possible for the weak center to hold onto these territorial gains. Perhaps the administrative structure (provincialization) was able to continue to function regardless of events in the center so long as the governors’ commitment to the center was maintained. That is, a weak center did not mean that the Assyrian governors declared independence, nor were the local populations in a position militarily to overthrow the governors. Perhaps, then, the idea of the “weak center” is incorrect if the center could still command the allegiance of the provinces despite turmoil among the Assyrian elite concerning who should be king.

Another interpretation of the relationship between provincial governors and the central administration in this period emphasizes the role of the former, as members of elite families, in confirming an incoming king. The beginning of period 1c saw a major rebellion of cities (capitals of provinces?) within the empire, which Postgate suggests reflects factionalism among the provincial governors over the coming to power of Shamsi-Adad V, Shalmaneser’s successor.⁶⁷ So divided was the Assyrian elite that he needed Babylonian support to secure the throne.⁶⁸ The independence of some governors in this period is thought to be seen in the Aramaic treaties from Sifre between the western ruler Mati’ilu of Arpad and Bar Gay’ah of KTK.⁶⁹ Bar Gay’ah was the dominant partner, and he has been identified by some commentators with Shamash-ili,⁷⁰ Assyrian governor of Bit Adini (Bit Adini is then identified with the otherwise unknown KTK). Shamash-ili would then have been acting independently of the Assyrian crown in making a client treaty with Mati’ilu. Others counter that the texts should be interpreted as presenting Shamash-ili as acting in the interests of the central administration by binding to Assyria a client who would otherwise have become delinquent.⁷¹ This would mean that the governor had not rebelled against the incumbent king. A third alternative is that Bar Gay’ah was an

independent king (location of KTK unknown) who was able to poach a former Assyrian client due to the weak center. The matter continues to be debated.

3.4. Period 2

This period is commonly identified as the NA Empire proper. The frontier of Assyria continued to press westward, northward, and southward beyond the limits set in period 1b, confronting other sovereign territories that had not traditionally been under Assyrian control (see map). Claims to them could not therefore be made on the basis of tradition, although it could be affirmed that at some previous time Assyrian kings had received occasional tribute or gifts of recognition from such territories (including in period 1b). Perhaps, on the western frontier at least, the borders were unstable, and so, in order to secure them, the area beyond the periphery had to be brought under Assyrian control.⁷² Thus, the frontier kept moving. Did Assyria somehow “blunder” into confrontation with those territories neighboring to the west (Syria-Palestine), east (Zagros Mountains), north (Urartu), and southeast (Elam) in period 2a due to border conflicts and a concern to retain the allegiance of clients, or was there some overarching policy goal that Assyria was trying to attain but that it was in fact not successful in fully realizing until period 2b?⁷³ It is widely thought that there was a specific purpose in pushing westward beyond the Euphrates in period 2, although not in fulfillment of some long-held “policy” from period 1, and that its primary motivation was economic. Assyria sought a stranglehold on all the trade routes in western Asia. It wanted to divert to the center the luxury goods and as much as possible of the surplus produced in the subjugated territories, which were then largely devoted to the building of palaces and new royal cities (the first of which was constructed as early as period 1b). Driving westward to the Mediterranean, it gained access to the Phoenician seaports, with their exotic wares, and to Lebanese cedar, while by pushing north into eastern Anatolia and east into the Zagros it obtained control over mineral deposits. In the west, at least, trade had to pass through Syria-Palestine, coming from the Aegean or further west in the Mediterranean or coming from the southwest (Arabia). That trade was probably both state controlled and in private hands (maybe no difference, since the “private” operators may in fact have been government officials), and the Assyrians were thus dependent on these other states for the goods. Demands for tribute may have been a way of enforcing terms of trade (in one direction) that were economically advantageous for Assyria.⁷⁴ Assyria obtained the goods and materials it wanted “free” (minus the costs to enforce compliance, which could be high; notice that the Assyrians had to keep going back to the West to militarily enforce these demands). This is not primarily about the control of territory, but of goods and surpluses. I contend that at this stage the Assyrians were not thinking that they needed more land or that they wanted to appropriate and redeploy the labor available there.

The last point is significant because it is commonly supposed that Assyria had a voracious appetite for territories and populations, not just for extracting their

surpluses through ruthless military aggression. Here we need to make a distinction between those territories east of the Euphrates bend and those to the west. Territories to the east were seemingly incorporated into Assyria. Territories to the west were not initially, and the Assyrians did not want to run these territories. That is to say, the westward push was not some sort of land grab, nor a grab for labor. Assyria would have preferred that these territories remain under their indigenous ruling houses and send tribute and goods to the center of the empire. This was the purpose of the system of clientship.

In this system, the Assyrian king intimidated the kings of the smaller western polities into submitting to his overlordship, legally binding themselves to the service of the Assyrian king through the swearing of oaths of obedience by both local and imperial gods. Part of the act of obedience was the annual sending of tribute to the Assyrian king. Thus, the Assyrians were to be guaranteed regular tribute income and access to trade goods without the costs of regular military “trips” to extort it, unless the client broke the agreement and refused to pay. In return for submission, the local polity would retain a level of self-determination and territorial integrity. The system did not work, however. The Assyrians may have felt that the coercive power of oaths sworn by the gods, coupled with the threat of military intervention if the oaths were broken, would effectively bind the client; but it did not. This is why, throughout period 2, the Assyrians moved to provincialize most of the western polities. It was not out of the desire (or a specific policy) to control these lands directly (otherwise they could have been provincialized from the outset); rather, it was in response to the failure of the client system. If a kingdom repeatedly dishonored its oaths by refusing to pay the tribute, then the polity had to be dissolved and turned into a province ruled by an Assyrian governor. In that way, the flow of income to the center could be assured. The ideological underpinning of these actions will be explored in the following section. The failure in the client system was in no small way a result of the meddling of Assyria’s powerful neighbors—Urartu, Elam, and Egypt. As early as period 1b, Urartu had sought to obtain the allegiance of Assyrian clients across northern Mesopotamia and north Syria. This continued into period 2b. Elam in period 2 persistently provided support for Chaldean rebellion in Babylonia, and Egypt similarly in period 2b encouraged and aided rebellion among south Syrian and Palestinian clients. So provincialization, and the military action on which it depended, can be seen as responses to the influence and interference of powerful polities bordering on Assyrian-controlled territories. These polities wanted to put a break on Assyrian expansion, if only to preserve their own economic interests in their respective areas. Political destabilization would also check the integration of the empire. These polities may properly have feared that stable Assyrian clients would offer a staging ground for a move against their territory. Assyria attacked them in any case, but its purpose appears to have been to stop their political meddling with Assyrian clients rather than to subjugate them and incorporate them into Assyria. Although kings in period 2b made successful military

incursions into Egypt, with Ashurbanipal reaching as far south as Thebes, Egypt was never subjugated in any real sense. Assyrian authority there was limited to making clients of Delta kings.⁷⁵ A long border war with Urartu was fought from period 1c throughout period 2a and into period 2b, until Sargon II made a successful raid into Urartian territory and as a result managed to stabilize the border.⁷⁶ In the case of Elam, Ashurbanipal (period 2b) successfully attacked its capital, Susa, and claimed to have sacked it, but he immediately withdrew and made no attempt to retain control of the territory. Hallo is seemingly right in noting of period 2b that "Assyrian power was in fact approaching the natural limits of which it was capable, and the thrusts that were now made into more distant regions such as Persia [Elam], central Anatolia [Urartu], or Egypt were either repulsed or only temporarily successful."⁷⁷

What did clients get from siding with a powerful neighbor against Assyria? Although there is no direct evidence, these large polities must have been offering terms that were deemed more beneficial to the ruling elites. In both southern Syria-Palestine and Babylonia, the offer seems to have been independence, although Egypt and Elam, respectively, might have expected more in return for their military investment than just a check on Assyrian expansion. In northern Syria, there is evidence that, at least in some instances, Urartu demanded by military threat that Assyrian clients transfer their allegiance to them. Clients were in an invidious position. They not only had to weigh up the putative benefits of accepting aid, breaking with Assyria, and realigning themselves with the powerful neighbor but also had to judge the military strength and resolve of the neighbor to resist the Assyrian retaliation that was sure to come. Elam turned out to be a reliable ally to Chaldean Babylonia, whereas Egypt proved to be fundamentally useless to the south Syrian and Palestinian states. It was thus a highly dangerous political game to play off Assyria against other powerful polities. The potential gains were improved terms of clientship (since all the states in Syria-Palestine would need to be in a relationship with one major power or another), which could also include something approaching "independence." The risk was political extermination through provincialization. All the clients opted for the former status, but most of these polities by the end of period 2b had obtained the latter.

In period 2b, Assyria had basically won out over its potential rivals and stabilized the internal organization of the empire, with the exception of Babylonia, which proved to be an intractable problem (on which see the next section). It is for this reason that Hallo terms period 2b *pax assyriaca*.⁷⁸ Culturally, economically, and territorially, this was the empire's zenith. Agriculture was greatly expanded, and vast amounts of wealth were invested in monumental building projects in the Assyrian homeland and in artistic displays in palaces as the provincial system successfully delivered taxes and labor to meet Assyrian economic objectives.

The relationship among elite families, provincial governors, clients, and the king is evidenced in an interesting set of texts known as the Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon.⁷⁹ These are not client treaties in the regular sense but binding agreements for

the groups named earlier to support the succession to the throne of Ashurbanipal, Esarhaddon's son and heir (period 2b). Sargon II, Esarhaddon's grandfather, had usurped the throne, although he was a member of the royal family, and there is some suggestion the Esarhaddon was not his father's first choice for king. His father, Sennacherib, had been murdered in a palace conspiracy.⁸⁰ Since the succession to the throne was potentially fraught with problems, at the height of the empire's power no less, Esarhaddon wanted to secure Ashurbanipal's position before his death. He used this legal instrument to obtain the commitment of the ruling elites across the empire to ensure it.

3.5. Period 3

The rapid demise of Assyria from its zenith under Ashurbanipal (668–631) to its defeat at the hands of the Medes and the Babylonians (612–605) has long confounded historians.⁸¹ The sources are scant and problematical. In the late 620s, Babylonia again wrested its independence from Assyria. It has been thought that some military or organizational weakness must have been exploited by Assyria's enemies, but what seems likely is that Assyria could not withstand a loosely coordinated two-pronged attack by two strong armies, particularly from directions in which it was less well defended (the south and east). The fact that Babylonia could become so economically and politically buoyant as to challenge militarily the Assyrian homeland highlights a serious inadequacy in the Assyrian administration of Babylonia and the failure of the Assyrians to integrate Babylonia fully into the empire. In this regard, Assyria may have fallen victim to the privileged view it held of Babylonia and its culture, manifested not least in the privileges it granted the ancient Babylonian cities. It is noteworthy that the provincial administrative system stayed in place, inherited by the Babylonians who continued to use it successfully, as did the Achaemenid Persians later. The overall strength of this system can be seen in the ease with which political power was transferred with little fragmentation of territorial holdings. The empire did not end, therefore. Rather, its center shifted from the upper Tigris south to Babylon, arguably continuing under the Persians with its center shifted again further east.

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4. CONSTRUCTING "ASSYRIA": IMPERIAL IDEOLOGY, ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION, AND TECHNIQUES OF IMPERIAL CONTROL

One topic that has been of considerable interest to students of the NA Empire is the ideology of Assyrian imperialism. The annals and other royal inscriptions, together with artistic representations on the walls of Assyrian palaces depicting victorious battles and the king's reception of subjugated peoples with their tribute, lend themselves to this analysis. A number of themes have been identified: royal ideology; the legitimacy of the king to subjugate foreign lands and to appropriate surpluses; the

rule of the god Ashur (= Assyria) bringing "order" to nations that are disordered (that is, outside Assyrian control); defining "Assyria"; and the view of foreigners.⁸² These themes are interlinked and are closely aligned with modes of imperial organization and the construction of imperial identity.

Economic gain has been commonly accepted as the primary motivation for Assyrian territorial expansion. The ruling elite sought to organize territory and people for its own economic benefit, to maximize agricultural output through a more efficient use of labor on newly opened cultivatable lands, to enhance the flow of luxury goods and raw materials to the center, and to keep the costs of running the empire as low as possible by lessening the threat of internal revolt. How was the empire administratively organized to attain these goals? Basically, it was through a mixed system of direct and indirect rule. Direct rule took the form of incorporating territory into the Assyrian provincial system with an Assyrian administrator appointed as governor. Indirect rule drew on a long-standing form of international relations between politically superior and inferior rulers. This is the vassal or client system.

While it is no doubt true that an economic motive was driving imperial aspirations, it is notable that Assyrian texts, particularly the annals and court literature focusing on royal ideology, are at pains to legitimate both direct and indirect forms of Assyrian domination. As mentioned in the historical overview, a case can be made to justify the initial territorial expansion (periods 1a and 1b) on the basis of historical precedent: these lands had been under Assyrian control in the MA period. Further, Assyrian texts expound an imperial ideology claiming that Ashur was the preeminent deity who ruled over all the gods, and, as a corollary, the political reality on Earth should be that all peoples acknowledged the sovereignty of Ashur's representative, the Assyrian king. To that end, the king was charged at his coronation to "extend the borders" of Assyria.⁸³ Territories beyond Assyrian control were held to be disordered, chaotic realms that did not conform to proper conduct. Charged with bringing more peoples under the shadow of Ashur, the Assyrian king was a divine agent for order in the world.⁸⁴

The superior military power on which Assyrian hegemony was founded was thus a reflection of the will of Ashur and the divine mandate to bring territories under his control (appendix, texts nos. 1, 3, 6). Assyrian expansion was construed in theological and moral terms: it was right and proper that neighboring peoples submit to Assyrian sovereignty, a circumstance sanctioned by the gods. The Assyrian Empire was bringing into earthly political reality the order that obtained in the heavenly realm where the gods of all the peoples and polities of western Asia acknowledged Ashur as their lord. Resistance to Assyrian sovereignty of course meant resistance to the divine will, which marked one as a reprobate deserving of the most stringent punishments (see appendix, texts no. 2, 8).

This ideology served as an important impetus for and a legitimization of Assyrian imperialism.⁸⁵ At its heart, beside the god Ashur, stood the Assyrian king.

Traditionally, the Assyrian king was a religious functionary; at least his title in the Old Assyrian period (early second millennium), "vicar of Ashur," marked him off as such. Another common title was "administrator of Ashur" (formerly translated "priest of Ashur"), which probably has cultic overtones given that the king held ultimate administrative responsibility for the cult of Ashur and other leading state deities. His role as cultic administrator may in fact be symbolic of his rule over the polity as a whole, if one accepts that Assyria was understood to be the domain of the god Ashur. Technically, it was the deity who ruled over the land, with the divine will implemented by his executive, the "administrator." It is not until the MA period, probably in response to the need to represent himself as an equal of the other "Great Kings" among whom western Asia was then divided, that one sees the consistent use of the term "king" for the Assyrian ruler. This club of "Great Kings" in western Asia during the mid-second millennium recognized its members as political equals, as well as trading partners and potential competitors, and they called each other "brother."⁸⁶ The basic criterion for membership was sovereignty over territories outside one's homeland, which led to recognition of one's status by the existing members of the group. As in the case of Egypt and Hatti, this sovereignty could be expressed in the submission of neighboring polities, the recognition by lesser kings of the authority of the Great King. Submission was ratified through vassal treaties and the swearing of oaths. The MA Assyrian kings joined the club of Great Kings not through treaties with vassals but by occupying and provincializing territory west and southwest of their homeland from which they had displaced Mitannian rule.⁸⁷ These relationships of "brotherhood" among political equals and vassalage of smaller polities were the mechanisms by which international relations were played out in this period.

Assuming that recollection of the control of territories bordering the homeland by the MA Great King underpinned initial NA expansion, it is notable that by period 1b this area included examples of both direct (provincialization) and indirect (clientship) rule. In fact, a number of independent polities that had developed west of the Assyrian homeland during the so-called dark age were seemingly remnants of the MA provincial system whose governors had established independent dynasties as a result of the weak center. For Assyria, the outcome of indirect rule was much the same as that of direct rule, except that the client state retained vestiges of independence. On the economic level, Assyrian interests were met through the payment of tribute and privileged trading arrangements. In some ways, being a client king was similar to being a provincial governor. Governors also swore oaths of allegiance to the king, and in return the king granted them not only political power over a territory but also economic rewards and privileges.⁸⁸ If we consider client kings to be on a similar administrative level and to have similar administrative responsibilities vis-à-vis the Assyrian king, we could conclude that the empire was run by an administrative elite, some Assyrian, some native, who all ascribed to the Assyrian imperial ideology and who were linked to the king through a relationship of oaths,

mutual obligations, and responsibilities. As the Assyrian king was Ashur's vice-regent, so client kings and provincial governors served and represented the Assyrian king and maintained imperial interests. Imperial ideology acted as a mechanism for giving the empire some cohesion at the elite level. As will be seen, it also justified the eradication of polities ruled by recalcitrant clients and their incorporation into the provincial system.

While it is possible to identify similarities in the roles of clients and governors within the provincial administrative system, there are important differences that help to focus our attention on the problem of the type of polity Assyrian imperialism was forming. Provinces had their local political institutions replaced by Assyrian governors, who were commonly members of leading Assyrian families. Their appointment was an act of political largesse that served the king's political interests, since the support of these families secured his position. Client states retained local rulers and political institutions. The client relationship was also a form of benefaction, but it should be construed after the model of international relations in the mid-second millennium in which the "Great King" accepted homage (marked by tribute, gifts, and subservience) from lesser kings, as was his due. The innovation in NA royal ideology lies in the fact that the Assyrian king was no longer a Great King among a group of "brothers" but *the* Great King. It was to the Assyrian king alone that Ashur, supreme among the gods, had given authority to rule. In the divinely instituted order of things (imperial ideology) it was appropriate for small kings to acknowledge the Great King; indeed, the Assyrian king was impelled to make them submit. The character of the relationship between the client and the Great King arose directly out of Assyrian royal ideology, which reinforced the relative status of the two parties. In response to submission, the Assyrian king, as Ashur's representative, confirmed and legitimated the rule of the junior partner, committing himself to supporting that royal line against usurpers and defending the kingdom's territorial integrity against foreign encroachment. The Assyrian king acted as the protector of good order in the kingdom that had submitted itself to the (indirect) rule of Ashur. The client king recognized that his legitimacy flowed from the Assyrian king and was dependent on the maintenance of good relations with him as a faithful servant. The two kings formed a pact or political relationship with mutual obligations. It was, of course, an unequal relationship both politically and economically. Nevertheless, it can properly be described as a reciprocal relationship: the client gave the Assyrian king tribute, allegiance, and adherence to imperial goals, and the Assyrian king gave legitimacy, tenure of rule, and promises of protection.

In assuming his obligations to the client, the Assyrian king exercised royal responsibilities, just as he did in the Assyrian homeland. This alerts us to the fact that the client kingdom could be considered a part of "Assyria." If Assyria was the domain of the god Ashur, then client kingdoms fell within this domain, but they were of a category or status different from that of the homeland or the provinces. This difference is evident not only in the form of administrative leadership—local

client kings versus Assyrian provincial governors—but is reinforced in the language used to describe their economic relationship with the center. Provinces (including the homeland) paid taxes into the Assyrian treasury that are described in a vocabulary quite distinct from that used to describe the tribute and gifts paid to the Assyrian king by client kings. Gifts and tribute reflected an acknowledgment of Assyrian sovereignty, rather than a tax that was placed on a province as part of Assyria. So "Assyria" can be understood in a number of ways. It can refer to the homeland and to the homeland plus provinces. But its meaning can also seemingly encompass the client states, as well. When historians write of "the Assyrian Empire," these client states are always in view. It is important to consider, however, how the status of these clients within the Assyrian "Empire" makes the character of this emerging polity somewhat complex.

In order to meet his obligation to "extend the borders" of Ashur's rule, the Assyrian king drew on the model of mid-second-millennium international relations in which independent polities entered, voluntarily or not, into a submissive political relationship with Assyria. Other territories were immediately incorporated into the Assyrian provincial system. Thus, the "empire" was constituted as a homeland surrounded by a network of provinces and client kingdoms of various sizes. In respect to the client states, this may not have been an "empire," since they were still semi-independent and had indigenous political institutions. They did, however, have a living memory of being an autonomous polity. I suppose it turns on how we view the NA-type of overlord-client relationship. To the extent that territories were provincialized, they qualify as imperial possessions, although much of the territory east of the Euphrates had formerly been under Assyrian rule (MA period) and from the Assyrian perspective should never have been independent.

This mixed system of direct and indirect rule is consonant with many studies of modern imperialism, which include both direct and indirect rule within their definition of empire.⁸⁹ But why were some territories immediately provincialized while others were made clients? The answer is unfortunately not as simple as identifying the reaction of these polities to the claim of Assyrian hegemony: those that submitted were permitted to become clients, while those that resisted were made into provinces. The evidence from the annals and province lists shows that some polities that were initially unwilling to acknowledge Assyria had a compliant local ruler set on the throne who was made a client, whereas some submissive territories became provinces. Further, should we perhaps view the provincialization throughout period 1 of an increasing number of the territories formerly under Assyrian control in the MA period as an attempt to create a "Greater Assyria"? That is, should this be construed an act of state formation rather than as empire? And if it should be, what are the boundaries of the state? Should a distinction be made between the territories west of the Habur River (central north Mesopotamia) and those east of it—the former being beyond the limits of the state proper, while the latter were annexed to an expanded Assyrian homeland? This consideration is made

all the more challenging given the thorough provincialization of the territories between the Habur and the Euphrates (that is, the territories west of the Habur) into what appears to be a "Greater Assyria" by the end of period 1b. To be sure, this "Greater Assyria" might not have held together during the period of central weakness in period 1c, but it is the political reality that was immediately reinstated in period 2a. In period 2a, the client system was extended to encompass all of Syria-Palestine. Throughout period 2a and 2b, almost all these clients were provincialized in response to persistent rebellion. What, then, should be made of the change of status of many of the Syro-Palestinian kingdoms from client to province in period 2? If incorporation of provinces east of the Habur (or also east of the Euphrates?) could be considered the formation of a Greater Assyria and perhaps reflect the process of state formation, can the incorporation of the Syria-Palestine clients as provinces be viewed similarly? In discussing how administrative organization reflected and reinforced the developing understanding of imperial identity, we must consider that period 2 offers clear evidence from Syria-Palestine of how subjugated polities moved from the status of client to that of province, how the appropriation of lands and peoples was justified, how the territories and peoples were viewed, and how they were integrated into the empire. To highlight the complexity of Assyrian views on subjugated territories, the discussion juxtaposes the treatment of Syro-Palestinian polities with that of Babylonian polities. It is to a consideration of the role of client states in period 2 that our attention now turns.

Syria-Palestine was unambiguously outside Assyria. Occasionally, MA period kings had marched westward to the Mediterranean, collected gifts from local rulers, and erected a stele noting the accomplishment, the latter perhaps marking the nominal limits of Ashur's rule. Assyrian kings in period 1b did likewise. Assyrian territorial ambitions in period 1b (specifically, during the rule of Shalmaneser III) may have run to the control of northern Syria, but temporary coalitions of Syro-Palestinian states successfully resisted Assyrian military encroachments. In period 2a, by which time the territory east of the Euphrates had been provincialized, a concerted effort was made by Assyrian kings to bring Syria-Palestine under Assyrian control. Why was this? Economic gain and royal ideology again feature as the two main reasons. The economic motive is obvious enough. As a Mediterranean coastal region, Syria-Palestine had a different climate and therefore produced different agricultural products from the rest of Assyrian-controlled territory. Most significant, however, was the role of the Phoenician cities as trade centers, which was promoted by the Assyrians' demand for exotic goods. Via these centers, the empire could control Mediterranean commerce.⁹⁰ Royal ideology arguably features in the need for successive kings to "extend the borders" of Assyria. To do so would make one a "good" king who obeyed the will of Ashur, and it is possible that the Assyrian elite expected this of its rulers. Kings would therefore need to undertake successful campaigns in order to keep the support of elites, who were also undoubtedly economically advantaged through such activities.

In period 2, Syro-Palestinian states subjugated by Assyria, a few voluntarily, the sizable majority involuntarily, were all made clients. To be a client was to come within the economic and ideological orbit of Assyria. It was to recognize that Assyria was your overlord to whom homage was due in the form of annual tribute; it was also to recognize the legitimacy of Assyrian sovereignty in terms articulated by the Assyrians themselves: that Ashur, the great lord, the lord of all gods (including the gods of the client territory), had commissioned the Assyrian king to superintend this land, which the deities of this land themselves affirmed. Clients were bound to the Assyrian king by oaths sworn by both the local and the Assyrian gods. This made the relationship one that was divinely sanctioned, although in effect it meant that the client was no longer a sovereign state. The legitimacy of the local king to rule now depended on his loyalty to the Great King, which itself was construed as an act of obedience to the local gods. As the local gods served Ashur, the imperial deity, so the local king served the vice-regent of Ashur, the king of Assyria. The earthly political reality was to mirror the cosmic political reality. If the oath was broken by nonpayment of tribute (= rebellion), the Assyrians were justified in undertaking drastic action against the perpetrators who had committed an offense against the gods.

The ideological reason for not immediately incorporating these territories into the provincial system may have been respect for the deities of these lands. These deities had not wronged Ashur and had arguably served him appropriately in the heavenly realm, where all things are done in good order. Thus, on the ground, as it were, these polities were afforded the opportunity of serving Ashur's vice-regent, the Assyrian king (a service marked by the prompt payment of annual tribute). If they did so, well and good. But if they did not, then they had offended divine order and their own gods. This in part explains the confiscation of cult statues from recalcitrant clients. If a people did not know how to honor their deity by keeping the oaths sworn by that deity, then clearly that deity needed to be taken into Assyrian care. Indeed, the Assyrian king claimed that the local deity had called on him to punish the deity's own people because they had broken their oath (see also appendix, text no. 7). The removal of the deity from its shrine was not a mark of disrespect; rather, it was interpreted as the result of that deity's will—he or she wished to go to Assyria to pay homage to Ashur. The local deity is said to have abandoned its people because of the effrontery of oath violation and to have permitted the Assyrian army to capture the kingdom, replace its monarchy, and take the local god back to Assyria, where it would be properly cared for. (And as the deity was being removed to Assyria or elsewhere in the empire, so too that deity's people could follow it into exile.) The spoliation of the divine images of rebellious vassals and the destruction of shrines was thus viewed as just punishment for unwillingness to submit to Ashur and his king.

There has been a long-running debate over whether the Assyrians imposed on client states the obligation to worship Assyrian gods as a gesture of submission and as a means of "Assyrianizing" them. The balance of opinion is against such an

imposition.⁹¹ Client states, as distinct from provincial territories in northern Mesopotamia, were spared direct Assyrian interference in religious affairs, even though tribute payments and loyalty oaths were required to demonstrate allegiance to the Assyrian overlord. Assyrians permitted local cults to continue even after the spoliation of divine images.⁹² That this was the case even in provincial territories may be shown by II Kings 17:24–34, where the worship of Yahweh was officially sanctioned in the former kingdom of Israel. Peoples deported to this territory were also permitted to worship their traditional gods that they had brought with them. The threat of destruction of shrines or the removal of deities from the shrines in their homelands was an important means by which the NA Empire managed relationships with its client states. NA monarchs did not sanction the wanton destruction of the shrines and cult objects of subject peoples.⁹³ The images of minor deities could be destroyed, while the images of the main deities of the subjugated territory, together with accompanying religious objects, were removed to Assyria. There they were commonly treated with respect and placed in a shrine in Assyria or in an outlying district. One reason for the spoliation of divine images was to secure loyalty oaths from vassals, after which the cult images could be returned.⁹⁴ Shrines were destroyed and divine images destroyed and/or removed in territories unwilling to submit to the Assyrian king or in rebellious vassal states, especially when there was resistance on the arrival of the army of the empire. There does not seem to have been a consistent policy, however, since not all territories appear to have suffered the loss of divine images or shrines. From Tiglath-pileser III (period 2a) on, states in Syria-Palestine suffered this fate if they proved to be consistently recalcitrant vassals.⁹⁵

Ostensibly, while subjugated peoples were responsible for their own local and national cults, the king of Assyria had final responsibility for them. The royal inscriptions of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal (period 2b) not only speak of the normalization and regulation of Assyro-Babylonian cults and cult centers but also include references to the repatriation of captured foreign deities (that is, deities outside the Assyro-Babylonian cultural sphere) and the re-establishment of regular offerings and income for these foreign cults.⁹⁶ There is also a reference to the restoration of shrines of foreign deities. Esarhaddon claims to have proclaimed a general amnesty for all gods who had been taken to Assyria:

[I am he] who returned the pillaged gods of the countries from Assyria and Elam to their shrines, who let them stay in comfortable quarters until he completed temples [for them], and could set the gods upon daises as a lasting abode. In all cult centers, [it was] I, who established the necessary accessories.⁹⁷

The result of military action to restore divine order to the territories of rebellious clients normally was incorporation into the Assyrian provincial system, the second category of administration, with an attendant loss of autonomy. Peoples who rebelled were seen as criminals against the divine order and thus had to be severely

punished (appendix, text no. 8). Their indigenous leaders had forfeited the right to rule the territory, and, for the sake of good order and the well-being of gods and people, the territory had to be ruled directly by an Assyrian governor and incorporated into the provincial system. Much of the local population would be deported and peoples from elsewhere in the empire relocated to the region. Religion was thus clearly used by the Assyrians as a tool of subjugation, and Assyrian gods were used to that end. The use of the client states' own deities as an ideological tool of control, as part of the imposition of Assyrian imperial ideology to recast national self-understanding, might also be seen as a form of "Assyrianization." The claim that the Assyrian king was the final protector of religion in both the provinces and client states undermined traditional national understandings of the relationship between deities and their polities and peoples and brought them all within the Assyrian worldview.

As noted in the historical overview (period 2a), the Assyrians arguably preferred that the territories west of the Euphrates remain in a client status. This form of subjugation as an administrative tactic expressed an Assyrian imperial ideology that ascribed an identity and location to these polities within the Assyrian worldview. The changing of status between client and province demanded a change in the view of territory and also in the view of the subjugated population. What had been a client state with a level of autonomy and territorial integrity was now incorporated under direct Assyrian control, as were its people. This was not only another level of administrative integration into the empire; the territory and people occupied a different place in the Assyrian worldview. It marked a different relationship between the empire and the territory and people and moved the territory into a different category. "Client" as an ascribed identity with certain characteristics was replaced by "province" as a different ascribed identity with different characteristics. Clients were accorded the right to retain their national ideology and territorial integrity, and thus their "national" identity, albeit within the context of the Assyrian "symbolic universe." But once a territory was incorporated into the provincial system, the Assyrian claim was that the territory and people now belonged to the Assyrian Empire. This then became the ideological justification for deportation, since the subjugated peoples were informed that they were now, after a fashion at least, "Assyrians" and that they now lived in "Assyria," so they could legitimately be moved anywhere within that realm without ever leaving "their" territory and even take their gods with them. There was an economic spin-off from this. As new agricultural lands, including some in quite marginal areas in northern Mesopotamia (successful crops two in five years), were opened up, much of the labor on these estates was performed by deportees from elsewhere in the empire (see appendix, text no. 4). The populations of provinces became viewed as labor that could be best utilized on projects (usually agricultural projects, although there is evidence for building projects such as new royal cities) that served imperial needs. This concern with the efficient use of labor was sometimes couched in terms of political expediency: people

had to be moved from their homeland in order to quell rebellion. However, these people were usually those deemed to be less economically productive and so were put to use in fertile agricultural areas (for example, urbanites who had been using up the local surplus; Arameans, Chaldeans, and other pastoral nomads who were not sedentary agriculturalists and who were settled to become such). Their status was not the same as that of "ethnic" Assyrians, however. The legal status of these deportees was not "slave" but "dependent labor," since they were tied to a particular estate. Postgate views them as "helots," borrowing a category applied to western Asia by Diakonoff.⁹⁸

As client kingdoms were turned into provinces, peoples and deities were no longer tied to a particular place but now belonged to the empire. In breaking the traditional nexus of people, place, and gods (divine rule), the Assyrian elite dissolved the basis for existing national and ethnic identities and ascribed to subjugated peoples a new identity. Deportation was a mechanism for breaking old and constructing new identities, since peoples from various locations were mixed in new settlements. Thus, deportation achieved two complementary goals for the central administration: it dissolved national and ethnic identities that were risked fragmenting the empire (even though client status sought to bring all such polities within a single "symbolic universe"), and it legitimated the movement of labor within Assyria to locations where it could be more economically exploited. So far as I can tell, this attitude toward and use of provincialization and deportation was an innovation, certainly on this scale. It also might be termed "Assyrianization," if by that one means turning populations from whatever they were (e.g., "Israelites," "Bit Adinians") into "Assyrians" (see appendix, texts nos. 3, 4, 5).

Provincialization was qualitatively different from clientship both administratively and ideologically. In considering the evidence from NA royal inscriptions pertaining to the incorporation of territories and peoples into the empire, Machinist reviews a number of key phrases such as "accounted to/with the people of Assyria/my land," "added to the border of Assyria/my land/a particular district or province of Assyria," "I (= the king) imposed upon them my yoke/the yoke of my rule/the yoke of Ashur, my lord," and the claim to have imposed taxes on subjugated peoples "like Assyrians," among others. He concludes that "the terms 'Assyria' and 'Assyrian,' in the royal inscriptions, are not really, or at least essentially, ethnic terms but rather political ones, defining a region and people that manifest the required obedience [to Ashur/the Assyrian king]."⁹⁹ This, of course, need not suggest that "Assyria" did not also refer specifically to the Assyrian homeland in contradistinction to the subjugated territories or that "Assyrian" referred specifically to the indigenous inhabitants of the homeland. In the latter case, "Assyrian" was arguably an ethnic designation.¹⁰⁰ It is perhaps notable, although unremarked by Machinist since he was concerned solely with royal inscriptions, that in NA administrative texts, subjugated peoples, including those who had been deported to the Assyrian homeland, were never termed "Assyrians." They were always denoted by their ethnic designation or by

reference to their place of origin. Despite the evidence of the administrative texts, the royal inscriptions make clear that the Assyrian elite viewed subjugated peoples and lands, particularly when they had been incorporated into the provincial system, as "Assyrians" and "Assyria," respectively. This was a direct challenge to the identity affirmed by the subjugated peoples themselves. The Syro-Palestinian kingdoms, for example, had articulated "national" and ethnic identities that clearly referred to a political and social identity tied to a particular place (the kingdom ruled over by the divinely appointed indigenous king) and (a) particular national god(s).¹⁰¹ Assyrian hegemony contravened that, initially by imposing client status and, more violently, by turning the state into a province. The Assyrians were not consistent in their treatment of Syro-Palestinian polities. The positive outcomes to the empire from provincialization needed to be evaluated against possible negatives. The clear example of this is the Phoenician cities Tyre, Sidon, and Byblos. Their economic significance to Assyria was such that they were never brought into the provincial system but were instead permitted to retain a level of self-determination as client states even after episodes of rebellion. Babylonia offers a starker contrast with the experience of Syro-Palestinian states. Babylonia was seen to have close cultural connections to Assyria, with major temples of deities revered by the Assyrians long established in Babylonian cities. Assyrians recognized their culture as younger than Babylonia's and as in some sense derivative of it. Assyrians and Babylonians spoke dialects of the same language, and Assyrians had borrowed the Babylonian cuneiform writing system. Babylonia was effectively turned into a province in period 2a, regained its independence in period 2b with Elamite support (reign of Sargon II), only to be subjugated soon after (reign of Sennacherib). Assyrian kings were so concerned to legitimate their rule there that more than one Assyrian king in period 2 assumed the throne of Babylon and ruled (perhaps in name only) the two states concurrently. Assyria never did resolve how to govern Babylonia. When Shamash-shuma-ukin, the brother of Ashurbanipal (late period 2b), was installed as king of Babylon, a bloody civil war between them followed.

Babylonia was the only subjugated territory in which the Assyrian king assumed the indigenous kingship. Other recalcitrant territories were quashed and indigenous kingship eradicated, and while it is true that the city of Babylon was razed by Sennacherib out of frustration at the population's recalcitrance, it was almost immediately rebuilt by Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal, who claimed to have been called by Marduk, the god of Babylon, to restore cultic normality to Babylonia. They undertook rebuilding projects in this conquered territory and sought to have themselves portrayed as legitimate kings of Babylon rather than as foreign usurpers.¹⁰² To this end, they not only had royal inscriptions written proclaiming such but also adopted the titulary of the king of Babylon, as evidenced in economic and legal texts written during their reigns. There were also deportations (mainly of Arameans and Chaldeans), but the royal inscriptions make it clear that Babylonia was a special place culturally and so had to be treated in a special way. This marks a different

conception of Babylonia as a territory within the orbit of Assyrian control. Nominally, one might expect the king of Assyria to be king over all the subjugated territories. While this was so, the important thing to note is that in all locations other than Babylonia either the Assyrian king either recognized the local king as a client and thus retained him or eradicated the indigenous monarchy and replaced it with the Assyrian king, who ruled via an appointed Assyrian governor. The Assyrian king did not have himself crowned king according to the rites of the subjugated territory. This consideration was afforded Babylonia alone. The local traditions of legitimate kingship were not set aside as they were when other territories were made into provinces. They were retained in Babylonia, and the Assyrian king was seemingly at pains to legitimate himself by keeping them (although not necessarily all of them; see, for example, his absence from the annual *akitu* ritual at which the Babylonian king's presence was normally required).¹⁰³ Following the tradition of Babylonian kings, the *kiddinutu* status of the ancient Babylonian cities with their long-standing legal rights and tax concessions for their citizens, including curtailment of the king's authority to exact taxes, fines, labor service, and army service, were recognized by the Assyrians.¹⁰⁴

Babylonian cities were centers of culture and the economy, so it is hardly surprising, given the Assyrians' attitude toward Babylonia, that they displayed a generally positive disposition to them. It was also politically expedient to do so. Tribal Chaldeans and Arameans whose power base lay in regional Babylonia needed the support of urban elites and institutions (specifically, temples) to mount rebellions against Assyrian rule. Throughout period 2, they had some success in unifying urban, elite, and regional interests to resist Assyrian hegemony. The Assyrians themselves countered by acting like indigenous Babylonian monarchs. This positioning was deliberately targeted at the urban elites and institutions and sought to undermine Chaldean coalition building. In the struggle for the hearts and minds of the Babylonian urban elites, the Chaldeans were ultimately successful.

By the end of period 2, the empire consisted largely of provinces across northern and southeastern Mesopotamia, Syria, and northern Palestine. Southern Palestinian kingdoms such as Judah were some of the few remaining clients. Babylonia vacillated among being a province, being a kingdom ruled by the Assyrian king, and being independent. The administrative status of subjugated territories reflected their particular relationship to the Assyrian king and their position within the Assyrian "symbolic universe." The ideology of empire was impressed on both Assyria and the subjugated polities, since to the Assyrian ruling elite they were part of a single system, even though they belonged in distinct categories. Structurally, the empire looked much like it had at the end of period 1b. It was a nexus of homeland, provinces, and clients, but now Babylonia was included as a seemingly different type of territory. The question of what type of polity the Assyrian Empire was remains. In fact, the extension of the provincial system into Syria exacerbates the problem of defining "Assyria," especially since deportation to various parts of the empire and

ethnic mixing might be construed as a form of state formation. It is a problematic notion, though, given that provincialized populations and deportees did not have the same legal standing as Assyrian "nationals." To make matters more complex, it is unclear exactly how an Assyrian "national" should be defined, since if it is done on the basis of birth in the homeland (or of descent from one born there), the boundaries of the homeland are debatable. My suspicion is that by-period 2b it would be the territory east of the Habur.

In this section I have emphasized (1) aspects of the ideology underpinning Assyrian imperialism; (2) some mechanisms for controlling, organizing, and integrating the empire; and (3) problems in elucidating the character of the polity being formed by Assyrian imperialism; I have attempted to show how they are interconnected. It seems to me that the problem of integration plagued the empire. It is that problem, no doubt exacerbated by the empire's vast (for the time) territorial reach, that constantly demanded the attention of Assyrian rulers, strained their system of administrative organization, and exercised their powers of coercion. The process of integrating an empire may prove to be one of the areas that could be fruitfully further pursued in comparative research.

5. CONCLUSION: WHAT'S "NEW" ABOUT THE NEO-ASSYRIAN EMPIRE?

In his study of ancient Near Eastern imperialism, Michael Mann devotes most of his attention to the late-third-millennium empire of Sargon of Akkad.¹⁰⁵ This is understandable, not only because it is the earliest of the "empires" but also because it affords Mann the opportunity to lay out his interpretative strategy for this and later empires. I am somewhat surprised, though, that he devotes comparatively little space (only some seven pages) to the much better attested NA Empire. In any case, since he has treated both empires, it affords an opportunity to relate my discussion in this chapter to his work and to reflect on the relationship between the NA and earlier western Asian empires.

In his study of the empire of Sargon of Akkad, Mann elucidates the four principal strategies in the development of genuine imperial domination: rule through clients; direct army rule; "compulsory cooperation" (indicating "that economic development and repression could go together," with economic benefits depending "on the provision of certain uniform and repressive services by the state": 153); and the development of a common ruling-class culture (where the place of religion as "ideological power" is recognized, noting its role in the development of "ruling-class community"). Mann holds that, generally, the first two strategies dominated in the earliest empires, with the balance shifting to the latter two strategies by the time of the Roman empire. It would seem that Sargon of Akkad's empire emphasized rule through clients and direct army rule, although elements of compulsory cooperation and common ruling-class culture can be detected. By comparison, the

NA Empire was marked by a strategy that "combined ruling through the army and a degree of compulsory cooperation with a diffused upper-class 'nationalism' of their own core" (231). Mann notes regarding this empire that "the 'army option' [was] pursued to its most ferocious known limits in our historical traditions," marked by large conquests, the control of subjugated populations "by threat and occasional use of ruthless militarism," and deportations (234). The compulsory cooperation resulted in a number of claimed economic benefits through expenditure on the building of palaces, royal cities, and other administrative centers, through investment in the provision of plows and the acquisition of draught horses, and through the storing of grain reserves. While these two strategies have much in common with those of earlier empires, for Mann the NA Empire introduces a new element: "a form of 'nationalism'" (235). This is not "a cohesive ideology that spreads vertically through all classes of the 'nation,'" since Assyria was too hierarchical a society, unlike the Greeks, whose nationalism "was dependent on rough equality and a measure of political democracy." It was only the Assyrian upper classes—nobility, landowners, merchants, officials—that, together with the army, conceived of themselves as belonging to the same nation. "They seem to have participated in a common ideology, a normative community that diffused universally among the upper classes" (235, author's emphasis). "Their community seems to have ended abruptly at the boundaries of what was called the Assyrian nation, consigning the outer provinces to a clearly subordinate status. This was probably the most novel technique of rule, adding to the cohesion of the empire's core. Ideological power as immanent ruling-class morale seems to make its clearest historical entry so far in this narrative" (235, author's emphasis; cf. 160–1). Thus, with the emergence of "nationalism," "more diffuse, universal sources of social identity grew at the expense of particularistic, local ones" (236).

I agree with Mann that we see the emergence of a sense of Assyrian national identity in the NA period, although I think that it may well go somewhat deeper in Assyrian society than he allows. Be that as it may, what Mann's analysis misses, and what I have tried to emphasize in this essay, is the use of imperial ideology to integrate subjugated peoples into the Assyrian "symbolic universe." Mann is correct to note that the Assyrian ruling elite looked on subjugated peoples and territories differently from the way they looked on Assyria and "ethnic" Assyrians, but it is significant that this ruling-class ideology also articulated the ways in which various types of subjugated peoples related to and were placed within the empire. This ideology was diffused throughout the empire, at least at the level of elites.

One could therefore view clientship not simply as an example of ruling through a conquered elite (as in earlier empires), but as a means, articulated through imperial ideology, of integrating this elite within an empire-wide ruling-class culture. The conquered elite now belonged to the Assyrian ruling elite, albeit on the second tier. They were legally recognized as ruling their territory under the patronage of the Assyrian king, and they became representatives of Assyrian rule and imperial

values and ideology. Subjugated peoples and their rulers who were submissive and continued to be obedient were applauded for their moral virtues and for acting "like Assyrians." The ideology underpinning clientship articulated a relationship between Assyria and the subjugated polity that placed the latter in a position inferior to Assyria even as it drew the ruling élite into an association with the Assyrian king and the imperial ruling structures.

Provincialization can also be viewed similarly. It did indeed reinforce the status of the territory as something considerably less than Assyria proper, as Mann avers (at least in the sense that it was a territory in need of correct ordering by an Assyrian governor), but it also integrated the territory and population closely with Assyria, spreading the notion of Assyria beyond the boundaries of the home provinces. This is seen most clearly for provinces east of the Euphrates bend, but it is arguable also for provinces in Syria-Palestine. Provincialization in particular led the peoples and territories to become "Assyrian," even if that "Assyria" can be distinguished in some sense from the homeland.

This highlights the issue of the type of polity the Assyrians were forming. Earlier empires espoused religio-political ideologies to legitimate the subjugation of neighboring territories. But I do not think that prior to the Assyrians there was an attempt to articulate an imperial ideology that sought to integrate the subjugated polities into the ruling-class worldview and then, if necessary, to change where they "fitted" into that worldview (moving from client to province). Assyrian imperial ideology was diffused across the empire and should be seen as an innovative means of integrating the empire, expressing power, and maintaining control. We might want to draw a distinction between an Assyrian national and ethnic identity and an Assyrian imperial identity, although the two are obviously related. All subjugated territories and peoples found a place in the latter, whether in the administrative category of client or province. These peoples may not have had a place in ethnic or national Assyria, but the issue needs further research.

APPENDIX: ASSYRIAN TEXTS

1. Tiglath-pileser, strong king, unrivalled king of the universe, king of the four quarters, king of all princes, lord of lords, chief herdsman, king of kings, attentive purification priest, to whom by the command of the god Shamash the holy scepter was given and who had complete authority over the people. . . . The god Ashur [and] the great gods, who magnify my sovereignty, and who granted as my lot power and strength, commanded me to extend the border of their land. They placed in my hands their mighty weapons, deluge in battle. I gained control over lands, mountains, towns, and princes who were hostile to Ashur and I subdued their districts. I vied with 60 crowned heads, kings and achieved victory over them in battle. I have neither rival in strife nor equal in conflict. I added territory to Assyria [and] people to its population. I extended the border of my land and ruled over all their lands. (Tiglath-pileser I, MA period) (Grayson 1991b: 13)

2. In strife and conflict I besieged [and] conquered the city. I felled 3,000 of their fighting men with the sword. I carried off prisoners, possessions, oxen, [and] cattle from them. I burnt many captives from them. I captured many troops alive: I cut off some of their arms [and] hands; I cut off of others their noses, ears [and] *extremities*. I gouged out the eyes of many troops. I made one pile of the living (and) one of heads. I hung their heads on trees around the city. I burnt their adolescent boys [and] girls. I razed, destroyed, burnt, [and] consumed the city. (Ashurnasirpal II, 883–859 B.C.E.; period 1b) (Grayson 1991b: 201)
3. When Ashur, the great lord, chose me in his steadfast heart [and] with his holy eyes and named me for the shepherdship of Assyria, he put in my grasp a strong weapon which fells the insubordinate, he crowned me with a lofty crown, [and] he sternly commanded me to exercise dominion over and to subdue all the lands insubmissive to Ashur... I uprooted 17,500 of his troops. I took for myself Ahunu together with his troops, gods, chariots, [and] horses, brought [them] to my city Ashur, [and] regarded them as people of my land. (Shalmaneser III, 858–824 B.C.E.; period 1b) (Grayson 1996: 8, 29–30)
4. [Of] those [Ara]means [whom] I despoiled, X thousand to the province of the *turtanu*, 10,000 [to] the province of the Palace-Herald, [...] thousand [to] the province of the Chief Cupbearer, [...] thousand [to] the province of Barha[ll]zi, 5,000 [to] the province of Mazamua [I divid]ed and settled [therein]. I made them of one mouth. [I considered them as] inhabitants of [Assyria]. [I placed upon them] the yoke of Ashur my lord, as upon the Assyrians. The abandoned settlements in the periphery of my [land], which had go[ne] to ruin [during the reign of my royal ancestors, the kings of Assyria], I restored. (Tiglath-pileser III, 744–727 B.C.E.; period 2b) (Tadmor 1994: 44–45)
5. The population of the four [quarters], of foreign tongue and divergent speech, inhabitants of mountain and plain, all of whom the Light of the gods, the lord of all, shepherded, whom I had carried off with my powerful scepter by the command of Ashur, my lord—I made them of one mouth and put them in its [= the new city; Dut-katlimmu] midst. Assyrians [lit., sons of Assyria], versed in all the proper culture, I ordered as overseers and supervisors to give them instruction in fearing god and king. (Sargon II, 721–705 B.C.E.; period 2b) (Machinist 1993: 95)
6. May Shamash, king of heaven and earth, elevate you to shepherdship over the four regions! May Ashur, who gave you the scepter, lengthen your days and years! Spread your land wide at your feet!... Ashur is king—indeed Ashur is king! Ashurbanipal is the representative of Ashur, the creation of his hands. May the great gods make firm his reign, may they protect the life of Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria! May they give him a straight scepter to extend the land and his peoples! May his reign be renewed, and may they consolidate his royal throne for ever! (Ashurbanipal, 668–631 B.C.E.; period 2b) (Livingstone 1989: 26–27)
7. The goddess X, beloved of Tel.unu, priestess of the land of [Arabia], who, angered at Haza'el, king of Arabia,... handed him over to Sennacherib, my own grandfather, and caused his defeat. She [i.e., the goddess] determined not to remain with the people of Arabia and set out for Assyria... Hazail, king of the Arabs, came before him [i.e., Esarhaddon] with [his rich] gifts, kissed his feet, and appealed to him concerning the return of his goddess. He had mercy on him and agreed... Esharhaddon had a star of red gold made, which was studded with precious stones,... and presented it for a healthy life and long days, the prosperity of his descendants, the constancy of his rule, and the overthrow of his enemies. He showed kindness toward captured gods of all lands, whose sanctuaries had been trampled, so that the gods might grant him the blessing of long life and permit his offspring to rule over humanity. (Ashurbanipal, 668–631 B.C.E.) (Cogan 1974: 16–17)

8. Uate' together with his army, who had not kept the sworn oaths (and) who had fled before the weapons of Ashur my lord, Erra the strong overcame them. Disaster broke out among them so that they ate the flesh of their children to keep from starving. [The Assyrian gods] quickly inflicted all the curses which are written in the sworn oaths (including that) a camel-foal, a donkey-foal, a calf, a lamb might suck at seven milk-giving animals yet could still not satisfy their bellies with milk. The people in Arabia asked each other: "Why has such a disaster fallen on Arabia?"—"Because we did not abide by the great oaths of Ashur, and sinned against the kindness of Ashurbanipal, the king who pleases the heart of Enlil!" (Ashurbanipal, 668–631 B.C.E.; period 2b) (Streck 1916: 2:76–79)

NOTES

1. Liverani 1993.
2. Grayson 1975; Millard 1994.
3. For example, Streck 1916; Luckenbill 1926–27; Borger 1956; Grayson 1991b, 1996; Tadmor 1994. For an overview see Grayson 1980.
4. Frame 1995: 11.
5. Gibson 1975, 1982.
6. Abou-Assaf, Bordreuil, and Millard 1982.
7. Frame 1995.
8. Watanabe 1987; Parpola and Watanabe 1988; Brinkman 1990.
9. Fitzmyer 1995.
10. Menzel 1981; Fales and Postgate 1992, 1995.
11. Jas 1996; see Radner 2003 for a review of types of legal texts.
12. Postgate 1976; Kwasman 1988; Kwasman and Parpola 1991; Mattila 2002.
13. Brinkman and Kennedy 1983.
14. Postgate 1969; Kataja and Whiting 1995.
15. Parpola 1981: 120.
16. Parpola 1970–83; Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990; Hunger 1992; Parpola 1993; Cole and Machinist 1998; Fuchs and Parpola 2001; Luukko and Van Buylaere; Dietrich 2003; Reynolds 2003.
17. Starr 1990.
18. Parpola 1997; Nissinen 1998.
19. Livingstone 1989.
20. Kühne 1991; Kühne 1995; Wilkinson 1995; Wilkinson and Tucker 1995; Wilkinson 2000: 232; Wilkinson, Wilkinson, Ur, Altaweel 2005: 37–44.
21. Nimrud: Oates and Oates 2001; Khorsabad: Loud 1936, Loud and Altman 1938; Nineveh: Layard 1849, Stronach and Lumsden 1992; Aššur: Andrae 1977; Til Barsip: Bunnens 1993–94; Dur-katlimmu: Kühne 1991.
22. Reade 1979; Winter 1997; Russell 1991; Lamprichs 1995: 269–326; Cifarelli 1995, 1998.
23. Weinfeld 1972; Machinist 1983; Paul 1991; Steyermanns 1995; Otto 2002: 94–219.
24. Johns 1898–1923.
25. Parpola 1987.
26. Oded 1979: 19–22.
27. For northern Mesopotamia see the studies cited in n. 20; for Babylonia see Brinkman 1984: 3–10.
28. Bedford 2007: 307–8, 315–17.

29. Moorey 1999, esp. 278–292 on iron technology.
30. Brinkman 1999: 7. See also Waldbaum 1978; Wertime and Muhly 1980.
31. For an overview of Assyrian society and political and religious institutions, see Grayson 1991a; on senior officials see Mattila 2000.
32. Oppenheim 1977: 98–100, 102–3; Maul 1999.
33. Radner 2003: 883, 886–87.
34. Oded 1992.
35. Porter 2000.
36. Pongratz-Leisten 1994.
37. Pongratz-Leisten 1999; Fales 2001: 244–83.
38. Pecirková 1977, 1987; Allen 2005.
39. Postgate 1980.
40. Grayson 1999; Holloway 2002: 223–24.
41. Grayson 1991a: 200–1, cf. Mattila 2000; Postgate 1995 on provinces.
42. Fales 2001: 53–71.
43. Parpola 1995.
44. Postgate 1979.
45. Cole 1996: 56–68; cf. Oppenheim 1967.
46. Elat 1987; Radner 1999: 101–9.
47. Radner 1999: 109–19.
48. Liverani 1984.
49. See also Fales 1984a, 1984b, but cf. Postgate 1989.
50. Liverani 1984: 39–40.
51. Postgate 1989: 147.
52. Liverani 1984: 42.
53. Liverani 1984: 40.
54. Partially indebted to Kuhrt 1995, cf. Liverani 1988a, both of whom offer extended historical overviews.
55. Kühne 1995: 69–79.
56. Neumann and Parpola 1987.
57. See Liverani 1990.
58. Hawkins 1995.
59. Liverani 1992: 103–10.
60. Postgate 1992.
61. Liverani 2004a.
62. Liverani 1992: 111–15.
63. Yamada 2000.
64. Liverani 1988b: 86.
65. Postgate 1992: 255–56.
66. Parker 2001.
67. Postgate 1995.
68. Brinkman 1990: 96–97, 107–11, for the treaty imposed on Shamshi-Adad by Marduk-zakir-shumi I of Babylon.
69. Fitzmyer 1995; Fales 1990.
70. Ikeda 1999: 287.
71. Lemaire and Durand 1984; Dalley 2000.
72. Lamprichs 1995.

73. On Assyria and Syria-Palestine see Hawkins 1982, Parpola 2003; on Assyria in the Zagros, see Lanfranchi 2003; on Assyria and Urartu, see Barnett 1982: 333–65, Zimansky 1985, Dinçol 1994; on Assyria and Elam, see Potts 1999: 263–88.
74. See Bär 1996 for types of tribute and its ideological significance; Aubet 2001: 85–95 on Assyrian relations with Phoenician cities.
75. Spalinger 1974a, 1974b.
76. Barnett 1982: 333–65.
77. Hallo and Simpson 1998: 137.
78. Hallo and Simpson 1998: 134.
79. Wiseman 1958; Watanabe 1987; Parpola and Watanabe 1988.
80. Parpola 1980.
81. Zawadzki 1988; Oates 1991; Machinist 1997.
82. Liverani 1979; Cifarelli 1998.
83. Tadmor 1999: 55–56.
84. Maul 1999.
85. Oded 1992: 163–76.
86. Liverani 1990.
87. Harrak 1987.
88. Postgate 1969; appendix, text no. 4.
89. Howe 2002: 15–16.
90. Frankenstein 1979; Sherratt and Sherratt 1993; Aubet 2001.
91. Cogan 1974: 42–110; McKay 1973: 60–66; Cogan 1993; Holloway 2002; against Spieckermann 1982.
92. Cogan 1974: 33–34.
93. Cogan 1974: 9–41; Holloway 2002: 123–51 for a discussion of the character and purpose of the destruction of shrines and the spoliation of divine images in the Neo-Assyrian Empire.
94. Sometimes marked with an inscription “as a visible reminder of the overlordship of Assyria”; Cogan 1974: 36.
95. Donner 1977: 418–21.
96. Bedford 2001: 137–38; Holloway 2002: 238–319.
97. Borger 1956: §27 esp. 3, 24–25.
98. Postgate 1979; Diakonoff 1974.
99. Machinist 1993.
100. Smith 1986.
101. Grosby 2002.
102. Frame 1992: 64–65, 67–78, 104–8, 111–13; Porter 1993.
103. Kuhrt 1987: 40–46.
104. Kuhrt 1995: 610–17; Holloway 2002: 293–302.
105. Mann 1986: 130–78.