

INTRODUCTION

The present investigation examines the royal authority and ideology in the early Neo-Assyrian Empire (934-745 B.C.). In light of current scholarship, the development of a research project on the topic is necessary and would contribute to Ancient Near Eastern studies and ancient history in general.

The reasons for the need for this work can be summarised as follows: 1) the lack of a synthesised and detailed study to trace the reign of the Assyrian rulers of the early Neo-Assyrian period in light of new studies and published sources; 2) the presence of mainly short historical essays whose focus is limited to various major events from the reign of most rulers; 3) the need for further research on the ideology of the early Neo-Assyrian Empire to consider its various aspects from different angles and propose possible solutions to debatable issues; 4) the lack of and need for a study that combines in one complete text the issues in each reign and the factor supporting its success – the ideology.

The term “authority” has many meanings, but the present text refers to the rule exercised under the sceptre and crown of the early Neo-Assyrian kings. In order to better understand the dynamics of relations and control in the Empire, some offices and institutions that also have power are briefly presented. “Ideology” here refers to the Assyrian royal ideology – clearly documented in various sources with the ideas, beliefs and messages it carries.

Regarding the **methodology of the work**, a complex approach is used, combining philological work with cuneiform texts, analyses of iconographic sources, and archaeological data about the building activities of the kings concerning the construction of the relevant palaces and their structure. This approach allows the implementation of a comprehensive historical analysis of the reign of the rulers (Part III), as well as a cultural-historical analysis on the ideology of kingship (Part IV).

The necessary **base** to which this methodology is applied consists of the published volumes of the cuneiform sources, the historiographical literature from the beginning of the Assyriological studies to the present day, digital libraries, and electronic collections.

According to the aforementioned, the **aims of the book** can be summarised as follows:

1. A study of the reign of each Assyrian king of the period, his military and political actions, including the dynamics of contacts with the other states of the region, the goals pursued by him, and – when applicable – the relevant internal affairs and building activities.

2. A study of Assyrian royal ideology in the context of certain motives, beliefs, and suggestions attested in the sources.

3. Concluding observations on and a synthesis of the exercise of authority, which led to the historical processes and political contacts in combination with the motives, beliefs and suggestions of Assyrian royal ideology.

The tasks for implementation are outlined specifically and in detail in the introductory section of each chapter of the book. They can be briefly summarised as follows:

1. Translation of the written sources on the topic, as in the present study only key passages are presented, accompanied by transcription and philological commentary.

2. Clarification of the terminology used in the sources – indicated in the book by logograms, transcribed Akkadian terms, etc.

3. Commentary on the relevant concepts on the topic in contemporary literature and how that provides additional clarification.

4. Analysis of the written and iconographic material on the topic of authority in the context of historical events and decisions made by the rulers in the period:

- tracing and analysis of military and political events from the reign of the kings;
- tracing the routes of the military campaigns of those rulers for whom it is applicable;
- marking the historical processes and the configuration of powers in the region as a result of the Assyrian expansion;
- clarification of the chronology of events and proposals for dating some chronologically debatable events;
- presenting aspects of the internal affairs of those kings whose sources offer such information;
- presenting the building activity of the rulers to whom it is applicable;
- marking the main problems concerning the reign of the rulers, contributing to the relevant discussions, and/or arguing new proposals.

5. Synthesis of the known information regarding the functioning of the state apparatus with its institutions and officials.

6. Analysis of the written and iconographic sources on the topic of Assyrian royal ideology from the period of this research:

- studying the motifs for the choice and appointment of the king by the great gods in the context of the information provided in the titulary and epithets, the call to rule in the royal inscriptions and the text of the so-called *Middle Assyrian Coronation Ritual*, as well as consideration of their various messages;
- studying the priestly role of the Assyrian king, the contexts in which it is attested, and the messages conveyed on the subject;
- presenting and analysing various motifs in the royal ideology that justify the imperial mission and conquest policy of the Assyrian rulers;
- illustrating and exploring the various motifs for the “uniqueness” of the Assyrian ruler and the messages they imply;
- studying the functions of each king’s palace and the iconographic sources as markers for the reign and ideology.

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This section of the introduction provides an overview of major titles on the subject of the kings' reign and ideology in the early Neo-Assyrian Empire (934-745 B.C.) in order to trace the current state of scholarship. Firstly, the scientific works on the subject of authority will be presented, and then the attention will be focused on those devoted to ideology. It is noteworthy that the period of rule of the respective kings and the historical development of the early Neo-Assyrian Empire in general have not been studied in detail. There are, however, several brief historical essays that aim to summarise information about Assyria in the early Neo-Assyrian period. Although not entirely relevant today, I start with A. T. Olmstead's *History of Assyria* (published in 1923 and reprinted in 1951), which devotes about 100 pages to the early Neo-Assyrian period. For its time, this work was particularly important because it covered Assyrian history in principle and served as a basis for more detailed and private studies.¹ In comparison, among general studies of the period, A. K. Grayson's "Assyria: Ashur-dan II to Ashur-nirari V (934-745 BC)", published in Volume III, Part 1 of *The Cambridge Ancient History*, is the most informative.² Various books on the history of the ancient Near East or ancient Mesopotamia have undoubtedly covered the period in question, a good example being G. Roux's *Ancient Iraq*.³ A review essay on the entire Neo-Assyrian period that should be mentioned is E. Frahm's *A Companion to Assyria*, published in 2017 – "The Neo-Assyrian Period (ca. 1000-609 BCE)".⁴ An interesting study of Assyrian history, but more through the prism of archaeological data, is provided by B. S. Düring in his 2020 book *The Imperialisation of Assyria: An Archaeological Approach*.⁵

Part of the foreign policy of some Assyrian kings is treated in studies on Urartu, the Aramean and Neo-Hittite states because they present and discuss the established contacts with Assyria. As far as Urartian studies are concerned, one should start with the book of Б. Пиотровский *Ванское царство (Урарту)*, published in 1959.⁶ Н. Арутюнян published in 1970 a monograph entitled *Биайнили (Урарту): Военно-политическая история и вопросы топонимики*.⁷ R. Barnett published in 1982 a historical exposé entitled "Urartu" in *The Cambridge Ancient History*.⁸

On the western policy of the Assyrian rulers of the 1st millennium B.C., A. M. Bagg published a book in 2011 entitled *Die Assyrer und das Westland: Studien zur historischen Geographie und Herrschaftspraxis in der Levante im 1. Jt. v.u. Z.*⁹ The contacts between Assyria and the Neo-Hittite states are dealt with in comparatively more detail in T. Bryce's *The World of the Neo-Hittite Kingdoms: A Political and*

¹ Olmstead 1951, 75-174.

² Grayson 1982.

³ Roux 1992, 282-305.

⁴ For more on the early Neo-Assyrian period, see Frahm 2017, 161-176.

⁵ Düring 2020.

⁶ Пиотровский 1959.

⁷ Арутюнян 1970.

⁸ Barnett 1982.

⁹ Bagg 2011.

Military History, published in 2012.¹⁰ The author discusses the emergence of the Neo-Hittite states, their military and political development, and even devotes two chapters to relations with Assyria. K. L. Younger in his book *A Political History of the Arameans: From Their Origins to the End of Their Politics*, published in 2016, discusses the political relations between the Arameans and Assyrians.¹¹

During the period defined in the present work, Assyria was ruled by a total of ten rulers, but specific works were dedicated to only some of them. The reign of Ashurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III have been relatively well researched, and many specialised studies have been devoted to various aspects of their rule. Even in these cases, however, there are fields for development. A number of publications have also been dedicated to the monuments associated with both kings, such as their palaces and reliefs. The publications dedicated to Ashurnasirpal include *King of the World: Ashur-nasir-pal II of Assyria 883-859 B.C.* by S. Paley (1976),¹² *Studies on the Annals of Ashurnasirpal II/2: Topographical Analysis* by M. Liverani (1992),¹³ “The Texts, the Palace, and the Reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II” by S. Paley (1977),¹⁴ *Assyrian Reliefs from the Palace of Ashurnasirpal II: A Cultural Biography* edited by A. Cohen and S. Kangas (2010),¹⁵ *The Balawat Gates of Ashurnasirpal II* edited by J. Curtis and N. Tallis (2008).¹⁶ Regarding Shalmaneser III, A. T. Olmstead could be mentioned again, who published an article on the reign of Shalmaneser III in 1921 entitled “Shalmaneser III and the Establishment of the Assyrian Power”.¹⁷ An important study dealing specifically with the Western policy of Shalmaneser III was published in 2000 by S. Yamada under the title *The Construction of the Assyrian Empire: A Historical Study of the Inscriptions of Shalmaneser III (859-824 BC) Relating to His Campaigns to the West*.¹⁸ For the reliefs of Shalmaneser III at Imgur-Ellil, see L. W. King’s book *Bronze Reliefs from the Gates of Shalmaneser, King of Assyria, B.C. 860-825* (1915).¹⁹ Further specialised studies will be cited in the chapters on Ashurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III.

Basically, the reign of Adad-nērārī III was also examined in some detail. L. R. Siddall dedicated a book published in 2013 to him, and indeed to the ideology during his reign – *The Reign of Adad-nērārī III: An Historical and Ideological Analysis of an Assyrian King and His Times*.²⁰ Often the kings from Šamšī-Adad V to Aššur-nērārī V are generally seen as part of a period of crisis, but the reign of Adad-nērārī III, and to some extent, the period of Šamšī-Adad V are a little better studied. Among the publications dealing particularly Šamšī-Adad V’s campaigns

¹⁰ Bryce 2012.

¹¹ Younger 2016.

¹² Paley 1976.

¹³ Liverani 1992.

¹⁴ Paley 1977.

¹⁵ Cohen and Kangas 2010.

¹⁶ Curtis and Tallis 2008.

¹⁷ Olmstead 1921.

¹⁸ Yamada 2000.

¹⁹ King 1915.

²⁰ Siddall 2013.

to Babylonia is that of E. F. Weidner entitled „Die Feldzüge Šamši-Adads V. gegen Babylonien“ (1933-1934).²¹ In 2008, A. Fuchs published „Der Turtān Šamši-ilu und die große Zeit der assyrischen Großen (830-746)“ dealing with the period from 830 B.C. to the end of the early Neo-Assyrian era, but focusing on the role and positions of high officials and their relations with the given Assyrian ruler.²²

With regard to the studies on ideology, most of them refer to the whole Neo-Assyrian period or cover the entire Assyrian chronology, in general. In 1979, M. Liverani published “The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire” in 1979, in which Assyrian ideology was presented as an imperialist ideology aimed at advancing certain economic and political interests.²³ Later, in 2017, Liverani further developed his thesis in a monograph entitled *Assyria: The Imperial Mission*, in which the terms “imperial ideology”, “imperial mission” and “imperialism” were used synonymously.²⁴ In the chapter “The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire” in the volume *Historiography, Ideology and Politics in the Ancient Near East and Israel* (2021), he remained faithful to the ideas he had previously defended.²⁵ Although not as pronounced, other authors have also included an imperialist reading of Assyrian ideology in their works. Already from the 1970s in his studies on Assyrian royal inscriptions and ideology, it is noticeable that H. Tadmor also shared similar views to a certain extent.²⁶ A little later, he and P. Garelli²⁷ fully develop this approach in their studies of royal ideology. In addition, the two authors elaborate on the problem of propaganda as a means of realising the goals of royal power.²⁸

On ideology through the lens of religion, see R. Labat’s 1939 article «Le caractère religieux de la royauté assyro-babylonienne».²⁹ In his 2002 book *Aššur is King! Aššur is King! Religion in the Exercise of Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, S. W. Holloway also uses the term “religious imperialism” in relation to Assyrian politics and ideology.³⁰ A particular proponent of the study of ideology in the context of religion is B. Pongratz-Leisten, who in 2015 published a book entitled *Religion and Ideology in Assyria*.³¹

In his 2013 dissertation “Early Neo-Assyrian State Ideology: Relations of Power in the Inscriptions and Iconography of Ashurnasirpal II (883-859) and Shalmaneser III (858-824)”, M. Karlsson attempted to reconcile the different approaches to the study of Assyrian royal ideology during the reigns of Ashurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III. A little later, he published his dissertation in book form (2016), again focusing on the two kings, but also covering the rest of the

²¹ Weidner 1933-1934, 89-104.

²² Fuchs 2008, 61-145.

²³ Liverani 1979, 297.

²⁴ Liverani 2017, 9.

²⁵ For the entire chapter, see Liverani 2021, 135-154.

²⁶ Tadmor 1975; Tadmor 1977 (*non vidi*).

²⁷ For the studies of P. Garelli, see Garelli 1981 and Garelli 1982, 16-27.

²⁸ Garelli 1982; Tadmor 1997.

²⁹ Labat 1939.

³⁰ Holloway 2002.

³¹ Pongratz-Leisten 2015.

early Neo-Assyrian era – *Relations of Power in Early Neo-Assyrian State Ideology*.³²

Last, but not least, I would like to mention B. Oded's book *War, Peace and Empire: Justifications for War in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions* (1992).³³ The decision to mention this author and his work at the end of this chapter is based on my personal opinion that he has done the most comprehensive and thorough research on the issues of ideology. In assessing this remarkable study, it must be borne in mind that at the time of its publication many of the corpora of additional sources had not yet been published. Accordingly, the field of ideology and power in the early Neo-Assyrian Empire is still open to new research.

³² Karlsson 2016.

³³ Oded 1992.