

SARGON II, KING OF ASSYRIA

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SARGON II, KING OF ASSYRIA

Josette Elayi

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Author's Note

Because my book was completed before the publication of Sarah C. Melville's *The Campaigns of Sargon II, King of Assyria 721–705 B.C.* (Campaigns and Commanders 55, [Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016]), I was unable to consult it.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAE	<i>Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy</i>
AANEAS	Archaeopress Ancient Near Eastern Archaeology
ABS	Archaeology and Biblical Studies
ACFP	<i>Atti del Congresso Internazionale di Studi Fenici e Punice</i>
AchHist	Achaemenid History
ActAnt	<i>Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae</i>
ADPV	Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins
AeL	<i>Ägypten und Levante</i>
AfO	<i>Altorientalische Forschungen</i>
AfOB	Altorientalische Forschungen Beiheft
A.J.	<i>Josephus Antiquitates judaicae</i>
AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
ALASP	Abhandlungen zur Literatur Alt-Syrien-Palästinas und Mesopotamiens
AMI	<i>Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran</i>
AMIT	<i>Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran und Turan</i>
AncCiv	<i>Ancient Civilizations from Scythia to Siberia</i>
ANESSup	Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement Series
ann.	annals
AnOr	Analecta Orientalia
AnSt	<i>Anatolian Studies</i>
AntSem	Antiquités Sémitiques
AO	Louvre Museum acquisition number
AoF	<i>Altorientalische Forschungen</i>
AOS	American Oriental Series
ARAB	Luckenbill, Daniel David. <i>Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia</i> . 2 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1926–1927. Repr., New York: Greenwood, 1968.
ARRIM	<i>Annual Review of the Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia Project</i>

ARTA	<i>Achaemenid Research on Texts and Archaeology</i>
ASSF	Acta Societatis Scientiarum Fennicae
<i>Atiqot</i>	<i>‘Atiqot</i>
AUU	Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis
AW	<i>Antike Welt</i>
AYBRL	Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
<i>BaghM</i>	<i>Baghdader Mitteilungen</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BBVO	Berliner Beiträge zum Vorderen Orient
BES	<i>Bulletin of the Egyptological Seminar</i>
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BibOr	Biblica et Orientalia
BiE	Biblische Enzyklopädie
<i>BiOr</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Orientalis</i>
BM	tablets in the collections of the British Museum
BMes	Bibliotheca Mesopotamia
BMRP	British Museum Research Publication
BN	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BO	<i>Bibliotheca Orientalis</i>
BCSMS	<i>Bulletin of the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies</i>
bull	inscription on a bull colossus at Khorsabad
CAD	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> . Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1956–2006.
CAH	Cambridge Ancient History
CahRB	Cahiers de la Revue biblique
CANE	Sasson, Jack M., ed. <i>Civilizations of the Ancient Near East</i> . 4 vols. New York: 1995. Repr. in 2 vols. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000.
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
chr.	chronicle
CNIP	Carsten Niebuhr Institute Publications
CRIR	Culture and Religion in International Relations
CSSH	<i>Comparative Studies in Society and History: An International Quarterly</i>
CTN	Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud
CWA	<i>Current World Archaeology</i>

CWA	Cambridge World Archaeology
DASOR	Dissertation Series of the American Schools of Oriental Research
<i>DHA</i>	<i>Dialogues d'Histoire Ancienne</i>
<i>DoArch</i>	<i>Dossiers d'Archéologie</i>
<i>ErIs</i>	<i>Eretz-Israel</i>
<i>FO</i>	<i>Folia Orientalia</i>
GAT	Grundrisse zum Alten Testament
GBLC	Guide Belles Lettres des Civilisations
GG	Groundwork Guides
<i>GM</i>	<i>Göttinger Miszellen</i>
HANE/M	History of the Ancient Near East/Monographs
HANE/S	History of the Ancient Near East/Studies
HEO	Hautes Études Orientales
<i>HiMA</i>	<i>Revue Internationale d'Histoire Militaire Ancienne</i>
<i>Hist.</i>	Herodotus <i>Historiae</i>
HSAO	Heidelberger Studien zum Alten Orient
HW	History of Warfare
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
inscr.	inscription
IOUsm	Istituto Universitario Orientale, Seminario di Studi Asiatici, Series Minor
<i>Iran</i>	<i>Iran: Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies</i>
<i>IrAnt</i>	<i>Iranica Antiqua</i>
<i>JA</i>	<i>Journal Asiatique</i>
<i>JAAS</i>	<i>Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies</i>
<i>JAH</i>	<i>Journal of Ancient History</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JARCE</i>	<i>Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt</i>
<i>JBQ</i>	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
<i>JCS</i>	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
<i>JEgH</i>	<i>Journal of Egyptian History</i>
<i>JEOL</i>	<i>Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Gezelschap (Genootschap) Ex oriente lux</i>
<i>JFA</i>	<i>Journal of Field Archaeology</i>
<i>JHebS</i>	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>

JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSSSup	Journal of Semitic Studies Supplement Series
K.	tablet in the Kouyunjik collection of the British Museum
KAI	Donner, Herbert, and Wolfgang Röllig. <i>Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften</i> . 2nd ed. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1966–1969.
KAW	Kulturgeschichte der antiken Welt
<i>Kemet</i>	<i>Kemet: Die Zeitschrift für Ägyptenfreunde</i>
l(l).	line(s)
LAOS	Leipziger altorientalistische Studien
MC	Mesopotamian Civilizations
MemPhil	Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society
Mesopotamia	Mesopotamia: Copenhagen Studies in Assyriology
MSym	Melammu Symposia
<i>NABU</i>	<i>Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires</i>
ND	field numbers of tablets excavated at Nimrud (Kalḫu)
<i>NEA</i>	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i>
<i>NEAEHL</i>	Stern, Ephraim, ed. <i>The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land</i> . 5 vols. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1993–2008.
<i>NeHeT</i>	<i>Revue numérique d'Égyptologie</i>
no(s).	number(s)
NS	new series
OAC	Orientis Antiqui Collectio
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OeO	Oriens et Occidens
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
<i>OLP</i>	<i>Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica</i>
OPSNKF	Occasional Publications of the Samuel Noah Kramer Fund
<i>Or</i>	<i>Orientalia</i> NS
<i>OrAnt</i>	<i>Oriens Antiquus</i>
OSEE	Oxford Studies in Early Empire
<i>PA</i>	<i>Památky Archeologické</i>
<i>PapyVind</i>	<i>Papyrologia Vindobonensia</i>
<i>PEFR</i>	<i>Publications de l'École Française de Rome</i>
PIHANS	Publications de l'Institut Historique-Archéologique Néerlandais de Stamboul

pl(s).	plate(s)
PNA	Baker, Heather, and Karen Radner, eds. <i>The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire</i> . Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1998–.
PPP	Peshdar Plain Project Publications
pr.	prism
QGS	Quaderni di geografia storica
Qad	<i>Qadmoniot: A Journal for the Antiquities of Eretz-Israel and Bible Lands</i>
RA	<i>Revue d'Assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale</i>
RAI	Rencontres Assyriologiques Internationales
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
REA	<i>Revue des Études Anciennes</i>
REG	<i>Revue des Études Grecques</i>
ResAnt	<i>Res Antiquae</i>
RGTC	Répertoire Géographique des Textes Cunéiformes
RIMA	Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Period
RIMA 1	Grayson, Albert Kirk, Grant Frame, Douglas Frayne, and M. P. Maidman, eds. <i>Assyrian Rulers of the Third and Second Millennia BC (to 1115 BC)</i> . RIMA 1. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987.
RIMA 2	Grayson, Albert Kirk, ed. <i>Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC I (1114–859 BC)</i> . RIMA 2. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991.
RIMB	Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Babylonian Period
RIMB 2	Frame, Grant, ed. <i>Rulers of Babylonia: From the Second Dynasty of Isin to the End of Assyrian Domination (1157–612 BC)</i> . RIMB 2. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995.
RINAP	Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period
RINAP 1	Tadmor, Hayim, and Shigeo Yamada, ed. <i>The Royal Inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727 BC) and Shalmaneser V (726–722 BC), Kings of Assyria</i> . RINAP 1. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011.
RINAP 3	Grayson, Albert Kirk, and Jamie Novotny, eds. <i>The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704–681 BC)</i> . 2 vols. RINAP 3. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012–2014.
RIA	Ebeling, Erich, et al., eds. <i>Reallexicon der Assyriologie</i> . Berlin: de Gruyter, 1928–.

- ROMOP Royal Ontario Museum Occasional Papers
 RSF *Rivista di Studi Fenici*
 SAA State Archives of Assyria
 SAA 1 Parpola, Simo. *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part I*. SAA 1. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1987.
 SAA 4 Starr, Ivan. *Queries to the Sungod*. SAA 4. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1990.
 SAA 5 Lanfranchi, Giovanni Battista, and Simo Parpola. *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part II*. SAA 5. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1990.
 SAA 6 Kwasman, Theodore, and Simo Parpola. *Legal Transactions of the Royal Court of Nineveh Part I: Tiglath-pileser III through Esarhaddon*. SAA 6. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1991.
 SAA 7 Fales, Frederick Mario, and John Nicholas Postgate. *Imperial Administrative Records, Part I: Palace and Temple Administration*. SAA 7. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1992.
 SAA 11 Fales, Frederick Mario, and John Nicholas Postgate. *Imperial Administrative Records, Part II*. SAA 11. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1995.
 SAA 12 Kataja, Laura, and Robert Whiting. *Grants, Decrees and Gifts of the Neo-Assyrian Period*. SAA 12. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1995.
 SAA 15 Fuchs, Andreas, and Simo Parpola. *The Neo-Babylonian Correspondence of Sargon II, Part III: Letters from Babylonia and the Eastern Provinces*. SAA 15. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2001.
 SAA 17 Dietrich, Manfred. *The Neo-Babylonian Correspondence of Sargon and Sennacherib*. SAA 17. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2003.
 SAA 19 Luukko, Mikko. *The Correspondence of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II from Calah/Nimrud*. SAA 19. Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2012.
 SAAB *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin*
 SAAS State Archives of Assyria Studies
 SAAS 2 Millard, Alan. *The Eponyms of the Assyrian Empire: 910–612 BC*. SAAS 2. Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1994.

SAAS 3	De Odorico, Marco. <i>The Use of Numbers and Quantifications in the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions</i> . SAAS 3. Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1995.
SAAS 6	Radner, Karen. <i>Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden als Quelle für Mensch und Umwelt</i> . SAAS 6. Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997.
SAAS 8	Fuchs, Anreas. <i>Die Archives des Jahres 711 v. Chr. nach Prismenfragmenten aus Ninive und Assur</i> . SAAS 8. Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1998.
SAAS 11	Mattila, Raija. <i>The King's Magnates: A Study of the Highest Officials in the Neo-Assyrian Empire</i> . SAAS 11. Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2000.
SAAS 23	Svärd, Saana. <i>Women and Power in the Neo-Assyrian Palaces</i> . SAAS 23. Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2015.
SAOC	Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations
<i>SciAnt</i>	<i>Scienze dell'Antichità: Storia, archeologia, antropologia</i>
ScrHier	Scripta Hierosolymitana
<i>Sem</i>	<i>Semitica</i>
SHANE	Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East
<i>Syllis</i>	<i>Syllis: Zeitschrift für Unterwasserarchäologie</i>
Sm.	tablet in British Museum, excavated by George Smith at Kouyunjik (Nineveh)
SMEA	<i>Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolica</i>
SSN	Studia Semitica Neerlandica
<i>StMes</i>	<i>Studia Mesopotamica</i>
StOr	Studia Orientalia
StPohlSM	Studia Pohl Series Maior
TA	<i>Tel Aviv</i>
TAVO	Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients
TCL	Textes cunéiformes. Musée du Louvre
TMO	Travaux de la Maison de l'Orient
<i>Trans</i>	<i>Transeuphratène</i>
TransSup	Transeuphratène Supplement
UISK	Untersuchungen zur indogermanischen Sprach- und Kulturwissenschaft
VA	Vorderasiatisches Museum
VDI	<i>Vestnik Drevney Istorii [Journal of Ancient History]</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>

VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WA	<i>World Archaeology</i>
WBJb	<i>Jahrbuch: Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin</i>
WZKM/S	Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes Sonderband
ZA	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie</i>
ZÄS	<i>Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde</i>
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>
ZDPG	<i>Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>

Key to Transliterated Words

<i>kibrāt</i>	Akkadian words are indicated by italics.
DINGIR	Sumerian word signs are indicated by capital letters

Explanation of Symbols

[]	single brackets enclose restorations.
⌈ ⌋	raised brackets indicate partially visible signs.
()	parentheses enclose additions in the English translation.
...	a row of dots indicates gaps in the text or untranslatable words.

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INTRODUCTION

The imperialism of the great states of the Near East began to manifest itself in the third millennium BCE, with King Sargon of Akkad or Agade, who built the Sumerian-Akkadian Empire and was the precursor and model of the Assyrian kings.¹ In the second millennium, it was the Hittite Empire that extended over part of Turkey and northern Syria.² Samsî-Addu (Shamshi Adad I), king of Ekallatum, conquered the entire upper Mesopotamia and proclaimed himself “king of the world” (*šār kiššáti*).³ However, the action of these kings was still limited to the conquest of regional hegemonies, and the conquered territories did not on the whole recognize the authority of a central government.⁴ Although Naram-Sin of Akkad, the grandson of Sargon, asserted his claims to sovereignty over the five parts of the earth (the center: Agade, and four peripheral countries), the desire for universal domination essentially characterized the first millennium. It was especially formalized in the Assyrian inscriptions of King Ashurnasirpal II (883–859), with the excesses of an over-reaching pride—yet he

1. Joan Goodnick Westenholz, *Legends of the Kings of Akkade*, MC 7 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997); Aage Westenholz, “The Old Akkadian Period: History and Culture,” in *Akkade-Zeit und Ur III-Zeit*, ed. Walther Sallaberger and Aage Westenholz, OBO 160.3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Fribourg: Presses Universitaires, 1999), 17–117.

2. Billie Jean Collins, *The Hittites and their World*, ABS 7 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007).

3. RIMA 1:47–76; Pierre Villard, “Shamshi-Adad and Sons: the Rise and Fall of an Upper Mesopotamian Empire,” *CANE* 2:873–83. On royal epithets, see, e.g., Marie Joseph Seux, *Épithètes royales akkadiennes et sumériennes* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1967), 13–14.

4. Some scholars consider Akkad as the first known world empire: Mario Liverani, *Akkad, the First World Empire: Structure, Ideology, Traditions*, HANE/S 5 (Padova: Sargon, 1993). Other scholars prefer to speak of imperialism, not of empire, e.g., Jean-Jacques Glassner, *La Mésopotamie*, GBLC (Paris: Belles Lettres, 2002), 29–32.

contributed no more than his predecessors to the rise of Assyria.⁵ The true founder of the Assyrian Empire was King Tiglath-pileser III, who reigned from 744 to 727.⁶ Upon his accession to the throne, he initiated a series of military operations to conquer a vast continental territory with ocean access. This action consisted of more than merely episodic raids to bring in booty; he actually created a genuine imperialist-dependent system, a strong and effective source of considerable wealth. The Assyrian Empire was the first known “universal” empire of ancient times, in other words, large, centralized, and structured. Although it is sometimes said that the first universal empire was the Persian Empire or the empire of Alexander, this can only be said through ignorance of the Assyrian Empire. Its inevitable evolution, in an agonistic conception of sovereignty, was, first, the ongoing mechanism of conquests to annex “the four regions (of the world)” (*kibrāt arba’i*), and, second, the growing weight of the Assyrian administration which oppressed the conquered states, providing a land base for the political system.

The term *empire* is used for convenience by modern historians as the Assyrians called their country the “land of Assyria” (*māt Aššur*). This term comes from the German *Reich* and was born in the context of nineteenth century Prussia, based on the concept of the Holy Roman German Empire, with an emperor appointed by God, the supreme and almighty legislator.⁷ As defined by James Laxer, a Canadian specialist in political economy, “An empire exists when one nation, tribe or society exercises long-term domination over one or more nations, tribes or external societies.... The ability of the empire to determine what happens, the outcomes in the societies under its control, is what distinguishes an empire from

5. Albert Kirk Grayson, “Studies in Neo-Assyrian History,” *BO* 33 (1976): 134–45; *RIMA* 2:189–393.

6. Paul Garelli, “The Achievement of Tiglath-pileser III: Novelty or Continuity?,” in *Ah, Assyria...: Studies in Assyrian History and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography Presented to Hayim Tadmor*, ed. Mordechai Cogan and Israel Eph’al, ScHJer (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991), 46–57. However, John Nicholas Postgate considered that there was continuity between the Medio-Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian periods; John Nicholas Postgate, *The Land of Assur and the Yoke of Assur: Studies on Assyria 1971–2005* (Oxford: Oxbow, 2007).

7. Christian Karl Josias von Bunsen, a Prussian diplomat and scholar, seems to have been the first to use it for the history of ancient Egypt; see *Ägyptens Stelle in der Weltgeschichte*, 5 vols. (Berlin: Gotha, 1844–1857).

other forms of political organization.”⁸ This definition of the concept of empire may be applied to the Assyrian state from the moment it was large enough and characterized by a programmatic supremacy, continuing hegemonic expansion, and a solid state-structure. These conditions were only met for the Assyrian state under Tiglath-pileser III. The history of the Assyrian Empire thus extends from 744 to 610 BCE, that is, a little less than a century and a half. After Tiglath-pileser III, his successors Shalmaneser V, Sargon II, and the Sargonids (Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Ashurbanipal) consolidated the Assyrian Empire. At the end of its history, it included the entire Near East, Elam, the Zagros, Turkey including Capadocia, Cyprus, and Egypt.

The Assyrians had a deplorable reputation for ferocity. The Bible is mostly responsible for this reputation; it considered the Assyrian king as the armed wing of Yahweh, who destroyed the kingdom of Israel as punishment for its idolatrous behavior, beginning with the reign of King Jeroboam. An oracle of Isaiah also announced his action against the kingdom of Judah: “The Lord will raise against them the powerful and abundant waters of the River—the king of Assyria and all his army. It will rise everywhere above its bed, it will cross all its banks, it will invade Judah” (Isa 8:7–8).⁹ The reputation for ferocity was amplified with the discovery of archaeological remains and texts in Iraq during the nineteenth century. They contain vivid descriptions of brutality, such as those of Ashurnasirpal II’s campaigns, who boasted of having “dyed the mountain as red wool with the blood of slain enemies.” “I have impaled them on stakes,” he wrote, “I have skinned them and I have spread their skins on the walls of their cities,” or “I sliced their hands, their fingers, their noses, their ears, I tore out their eyes, I cut their heads and I stacked them to form pillars.”¹⁰ In fact, the Assyrian civilization has been reduced to these acts of sadism through the dreadful vision that Europe had of the fading Ottoman Empire.¹¹ The modern judgment about this civilization was all the more unfavorable as it was compared with the “Greek miracle” of Hellenic-centric thinking. The Assyrians even gained a reputation for lacking an artistic and intellectual impulse and were viewed

8. James Laxer, *Empire*, GG (New York: Greenwood, 2006), 9.

9. Unless otherwise noted, this and all translations are mine.

10. RIMA 2:216–21, A.O.101.1, i.52–53, 87–89, 117–118.

11. Frederick Mario Fales, *Guerre et paix en Assyrie: Religion et impérialisme* (Paris: Cerf, 2010), 44; Francis Joannès, “Assyriens, Babyloniens, Perses achéménides: la matrice impériale,” *DHA Suppl.* 5 (2011): 28–29.

as incapable of abstraction. For example, the monstrous winged bulls of Khorsabad (Dûr-Sharrukîn), the capital of Sargon, were compared with the delicate Greek statues of Phidias. The Assyrian mathematical texts have long been considered as disparate and approximate recipe lists without demonstration and symbolism because they were evaluated in comparison with the Greek models. However, recent studies have shown their specificity and importance, specifically by the operations, the global algorithmic level, the solution strategy, and the calculation technique (base 6). Even if the calculation in base 10, a system emanating from Indian mathematicians, has become widespread today, base 6 has not completely disappeared (60 seconds in a minute, 60 minutes in an hour, and 360 degrees in a circle). The science of numbers, arithmetic and algebra, was founded by the Sumerians and brilliantly developed by the Assyrians.¹²

It was King Sargon II (*Šarru-kîn*) who played an important and prestigious role in the history of the Assyrian Empire, providing its driving force at the peak of its renown. Three kings named Sargon existed in Mesopotamia. Sargon I, king of Assyria around 1920–1881 BCE, is little known.¹³ Sargon, king of Akkad or Agade, around 2335–2279 according to the middle chronology, was so famous in the ancient world that he became legendary. Finally, Sargon II, who ruled from 722 to 705 and who bore the same name as his illustrious ancestor, is now the best known.¹⁴

It has often been said that a historian depends on his or her sources; this is especially true in ancient history, where they are often very lacunar and irregular. The historian of the Assyrian Empire, especially of Sargon's reign, is fortunate to have extensive documentation, sometimes even an overabundance. Without having performed a precise count of the Akkadian tablets that were found, they are estimated at half a million, and their number has increased with more recent discoveries. "Yet we have not found and exploited only a fraction, perhaps digitally huge but proportionally ridiculous," wrote Jean Bottéro.¹⁵ Indeed, Sargon, like all Assyrian

12. See, e.g., Igor Mikhailovich Diakonoff, "Some Reflections on Numerals in Sumerian towards a History of Mathematical Speculation," *JAOS* 103 (1983): 83–93.

13. RIMA 1:45–46.

14. I shall specifically write Sargon II only when there might be confusion with Sargon I or Sargon of Agade. Some scholars date the beginning of Sargon's reign in 721, his first full year; I prefer to date it in 722, his accession year, even though it is an incomplete year.

15. Jean Bottéro, *L'écriture, la raison et les dieux* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 35:

kings, was anxious to leave to posterity the glory of his reign, in a spirit of emulation, striving to outdo the exploits of his predecessors. He had very detailed annals written, and all kinds of royal inscriptions on stone or metal material bear witness to his actions.¹⁶ Stelae and rock reliefs were

“dans un sous-sol inépuisable, une gigantesque bibliothèque d’un demi-million de pièces pour le moins.”

16. Official inscriptions: David Gordon Lyon, *Keilschrifttexte Sargons: König von Assyrien (722–705 v. Chr.)* (Leipzig: Heinrich, 1883); Hugo Winckler, *Die Keilschrifttexte Sargons*, vols. 1–2 (Leipzig: Pfeiffer, 1889); Franz Heinrich Weissbach, “Zu den Inschriften der Säle im Palaste Sargon’s II. von Assyrien,” *ZDMG* 72 (1918): 161–85; François Thureau-Dangin, “Les annales de la salle II du palais de Khorsabad, révision du texte d’après les estampages de Botta,” *RA* 24 (1927): 75–84; *ARAB* 2.1–230; Arthur Gotfred Lie, *The Inscriptions of Sargon II, King of Assyria: Part I; The Annals* (Paris: Geuthner, 1929); Andreas Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad* (Göttingen: Cuvillier, 1993); *SAAS* 8; *RIMB* 2:143–52; Grant Frame, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sargon II, King of Assyria (721–705 BC)*, *RINAP* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, forthcoming); Karen Radner, *State Correspondence in the Ancient World: From New Kingdom Egypt to the Roman Empire*, *OSEE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 64–93.

Other inscriptions: Cyril John Gadd, “Inscribed Prisms of Sargon II from Nimrud,” *Iraq* 16 (1954): 173–201; Hayim Tadmor, “Fragments of an Assyrian Stele of Sargon II,” *Atiqot English Series* 9–10 (1971): 192–97; Louis D. Levine, *Two Neo-Assyrian Stelae from Iran*, *ROMOP* 23 (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1972), 38–39; Giorgio Raffaele Castellino, “Il frammento degli Annali di Sargon II,” in *Malatya III: Rapporto preliminare delle campagne 1963–1968, il livello eteo imperiale e quelli neoetei*, ed. Paolo Emilio Pecorella and Giorgio Raffaele Castellino, *OAC* 12 (Rome: Centro per le antichità e la storia dell’arte del Vicino Oriente, 1975), 69–73; Henry William Frederick Saggs, “Historical Texts and Fragments of Sargon II of Assyria. I: The ‘Aššur Charter,’” *Iraq* 37 (1975): 11–20; Zdzisław Jan Kapera, “The Ashdod Stele of Sargon II,” *FO* 17 (1976): 87–99; *SAA* 6; Grant Frame, “The Inscription of Sargon II at Tang-i Var,” *Or* 68 (1999): 31–57; John David Hawkins, “The New Sargon Stele from Hama,” in *From the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea: Studies on the History of Assyria and Babylonia in Honour of A. K. Grayson*, ed. Grant Frame and Linda Wilding, *PIHANS* 101 (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2004), 151–64; Grant Frame, “The Tell Acharneh Stela of Sargon II of Assyria,” in *Tell Acharneh 1998–2004: Rapports préliminaires sur les campagnes de fouilles et saison d’études*, ed. Michel Fortin, *Subartu* 18 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 49–68; Kathleen Abraham and Jacob Klein, “A New Sargon II Cylinder Fragment from an Unknown Provenance,” *ZA* 97 (2007): 252–61; Grant Frame, “A New Cylinder Inscription of Sargon II of Assyria from Melid,” in *Of God(s), Trees, Kings, and Scholars: Neo-Assyrian and Related Studies in Honour of Simo Parpola*, ed. Mikko Luukko, Saana Svärd, and Raija Mattila, *StOr* 106 (Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 2009), 65–82.

intended to testify to the conquests and to mark the limits of the Assyrian Empire. Two unusual official inscriptions are the Letter to Assur and the Assur Charter. On the walls of his palace, representations were made of his conquests with spectacular actions in reliefs, sometimes accompanied by an epigraph, which prefigured our modern comics.¹⁷

To these numerous documents are added thousands of clay tablets, remarkably preserved in the arid soil of the Iraqi desert: letters and legal and economic documents. These clay tablets are written in cuneiform characters in the Neo-Assyrian dialect of the Akkadian language. Between 1,155 and 1,300 letters and fragments of letters are attributed to Sargon's reign, but only some of them are authored by Sargon.¹⁸ In contrast to the royal inscriptions, they report daily events aimed at informing the Assyrian king, and they lack explanations of the context. Therefore, they are difficult to interpret, but they are the only sources for some regions. In fact, the Assyrian scribes also wrote on boards of wood covered with wax, or exceptionally of ivory. These boards were lighter; bound together by hinges like books, they were easier to read and store, and they were reusable. Scribes also wrote with ink on sheets of papyrus and parchment scrolls. These categories of material were not very suitable for the cut reeds used on clay tablets. A bas-relief depicts two scribes in the process of recording spoils of war: one was writing on a hinged writing-board, probably in Akkadian, the other on a papyrus or parchment scroll, possibly in Aramaic.¹⁹ However, the passage of time has been disastrous for fragile wooden, papyrus, and leather material; they have all disappeared, except for a few wooden boards, for example, discovered in Nimrud (Kalhu).²⁰ Only the stone, metal, and clay inscriptions remain today. A question arises: What

17. Paul-Émile Botta, *Monuments de Ninive*, vols. 3–4 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1849); Pauline Albenda, *The Palace of Sargon King of Assyria: Monumental Wall Reliefs at Dur-Sharrukin, from Original Drawings Made at the Time of Their Discovery in 1843–1844 by Botta and Flandin*, Synthèse 22 (Paris: Recherches sur les Civilisations, 1986).

18. SAA 1:xi (1,300 letters); SAA 5; SAA 15; Bradley J. Parker, *The Mechanics of Empire: The Northern Frontier of Assyria as a Base of Imperial Dynamics* (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001), 84; Natalie Naomi May, "Administrative and Other Reforms of Sargon II and Tiglath-pileser III," *SAAB* 21 (2015): 93–94 (1,155 letters).

19. SAA 1:103, fig. 28 (BM 124955); see SAA 17:2.

20. Laurie E. Pearce, "The Scribes and Scholars of Ancient Mesopotamia," *CANE* 4:2265–78.

proportion of perishable texts have we lost compared with the preserved texts? It is impossible to know. The history of Sargon can only be written using the existing documentation. There are also external sources, such as Babylonian, Urartian, Egyptian, biblical, and Greek.

The nonwritten documentation is important, too. Little evidence survives from the renovation by Sargon of Ashurnasirpal's palace in Nimrud, where he resided at the beginning of his reign. The main information is provided by the palace of Khorsabad, first excavated by Paul-Émile Botta and V. Place.²¹ This discovery was made quite by chance. Indeed, Botta was excavating a site which he had not identified and which did not deliver immediate results; he did not know that it was in fact the prestigious city of Nineveh (Mosul). Losing patience, in 1843 he moved his excavation site to Khorsabad, where he made the first soundings. He was lucky to discover in this new site a part of the palace of Sargon. Place excavated almost all the royal palace, as well as urban doors, walls of the lower town and of the acropolis, and part of "Palace F." In the twentieth century, in the 1930s, American surveys aimed to verify Place's results; the conclusion was that the excavations had been well conducted, relative to that period, and that corrections to be made were marginal.²² An Iraqi Mission in 1993 resumed the excavations of the palace, about which we lack details.²³ Some reliefs from the palace, associated with four campaigns, are now in the Iraq Museum, the Louvre Museum, and the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. A large number of reliefs were lost in a ship that sank in the Tigris while transporting them; however, they do survive in drawings made during the excavations.²⁴

The purpose of this book is to study the history of Sargon's reign, which was fertile in events in all its aspects, but mainly political, economic, social,

21. Nicole Chevalier, "L'activité archéologique des consuls de France au XIX^e siècle en Assyrie," in *Khorsabad, le palais de Sargon II, roi d'Assyrie*, ed. Annie Caubet (Paris: Documentation française, 1995), 79–106.

22. Gordon Loud, *Khorsabad: Part I; Excavations in the Palace and at a City Gate*, OIP 38 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936); Gordon Loud and Charles B. Altman, *Khorsabad: Part II; The Citadel and the Town*, OIP 40 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938); Karen L. Wilson, "Oriental Institute Discoveries at Khorsabad (1929–1935)," in Caubet, *Khorsabad, le palais de Sargon II*, 107–31; Pauline Albenda, "Dur-Sharrukin, the Royal City of Sargon II, King of Assyria," *BCSMS* 38 (2003): 5–13.

23. Francis Joannès, *Dictionnaire de la civilisation mésopotamienne* (Paris: Lafont, 2001), 249.

24. Albenda, *Palace of Sargon*.

military, and religious. This study will enable the course of his reign to be understood in relation to the context of its time and his personal choices. To what extent did relationships between the different areas and events affect Sargon's decision making? What did he attempt to achieve, and how did he go about fulfilling his objectives? As a matter of fact, the history of Sargon's reign coincides with his personal history, for apart from his filiation nothing is known of his life prior to his ascent to the throne. Several issues emerge and, wherever possible, are answered: Did he have a clear plan or program at the beginning of his reign? Or did he respond to various challenges in different areas as and when they arose? What can be said of his evolution during his reign? How did he manage to lead the Assyrian Empire at the peak of its power? Was it by consolidating and expanding it through successive conquests? What can be said about Sargon himself? What were his qualities and skills? What were his shortcomings? To what extent and in what fields was he a conservative or an innovator? In what matters can it be said that he succeeded or failed?

My methodology is adapted to the specific topic of this book and to the available sources.²⁵ The approach is multidisciplinary: political, geographic, ethnographic, strategic, economic, along with textual studies, onomastic analyses, and other related disciplines. My historical approach is not immediately theoretical but primarily "down-to-earth," that is to say, very close to the documents. After their analysis, it is possible to move on to a historical synthesis, with a partial synthesis at the end of each chapter. Synopses reflecting the beginning and end of his reign will enable the reader to measure changes, gradual or sudden, and their results. The limited framework of a book constantly forced me to select from a mass of overabundant data, accompanied by a consistent series of comments, which impressed me as fundamentally essential. Some facts and minor features were sacrificed through necessity. This is especially true with the letters; where there are several unsolved problems of reading, attribution, dating, and interpretation, I have selected and analyzed only those letters relevant for the topic at hand. The book's format and progression are centered on decisive events, the determining facts, and the interpretations that seemed to me the most plausible given the current state of research. Other proposed interpretations are presented in

25. For my conception of history, see Josette Elayi, "Être historienne de la Phénicie ici et maintenant," *Trans* 31 (2006): 41–54.

footnotes; sometimes I concluded that it was impossible for me to choose between several hypotheses.

Chapter 1 (“Portrait of Sargon”) strives to encompass the character of the king before putting him into action. Through his official inscriptions and through his representations on the walls of his palace, Sargon wished to convey a specific image of himself. After having analyzed all his conquests and the achievements of his reign, it will be possible to determine to what extent this image is true or distorted by propaganda. Chapter 2 (“Sargon’s Ascent to the Throne”) explains the basis on which he managed to establish his empire. His ascent to the throne is far from clear, and several problems are posed: Did he choose his name himself? Was he or was he not a usurper? Why did he have to face such massive opposition? Chapter 3 (“Heir to the Assyrian Empire”) presents the state of the Assyrian Empire when Sargon inherited it. It is important to assess its extent, as well as the changes and innovations accomplished during his reign. After this, the book follows a geographical progression; even though the Annals are chronological, their chronology is often questionable. Further, all the other inscriptions are based on a geographical order; however, in the study of each area (starting from west and moving counterclockwise until finally reaching the south), the decisive chronological stages of his reign have been highlighted: chapters 4 (“The Conquest of the West”), 5 (“The Northwest of the Empire”), 6 (“The Wars in the North of the Empire”), 7 (“Neutralization of the Eastern States”), and 8 (“Recurring Problems in the South”).²⁶ The purpose of these chapters is not to analyze itineraries or military strategy, but mainly to place the campaigns in a geopolitical frame. What was Sargon’s purpose in each campaign? What was the economic and strategic potential of the different areas? How did actions in one part of the Near East affect what happened elsewhere? How did the result of each campaign contribute to the building of the empire? Chapter 9 (“End of Reign”) focuses on the last three years of Sargon’s reign, with the inauguration of the palace of Khorsabad, at a time when he was at the height of his glory, power, and wealth. This chapter is also devoted to unsolved questions: How can the king’s death be explained? What was the so-called sin of Sargon? Chapter 10 (“Chronological Synthesis of Sargon’s Reign”) provides, as far as possible, a chronological frame for the events

26. This order seems to me more logical than the order of the summary inscriptions of the bulls, starting from east counterclockwise to Babylonia: Fuchs, *Inschriften Sargons II*, Stier 1–106.

of Sargon's reign. It proposes a synthesis of his motivations and strategy during the different periods of his reign, and the steps and reasons of his evolution. Finally, the book concludes with an assessment of Sargon's contributions to the evolution of the empire ("Conclusion: Assessment of Sargon's Reign"). Research sources are available to readers at the end of the book, in line with the publishing requirements: a selected bibliography for each chapter; an index of ancient texts used; an index of the personal names cited, with brief comments and dates for situating them both in a diachronic and synchronic perspective, and finally, an index of modern authors cited.

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