TIGLATH-PILESER III,
FOUNDER OF THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE
ARCHAEOLOGY AND BIBLICAL STUDIES

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Number 31
TIGLATH-PILESER III, FOUNDER OF THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE

Josette Elayi
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ABBREVIATIONS

AB  Anchor Bible
ABS  Archaeology and Biblical Studies
ADPV  Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins
AfO  Archiv für Orientforschung
AHL  Ancient History of Lebanon
AJA  American Journal of Archaeology
AMI  Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran
ANES  Ancient Near Eastern Studies
ANESSup  Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement
AnOr  Analecta Orientalia
AnSt  Anatolian Studies
AOAT  Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AoF  Altorientalische Forschungen
BaF  Baghdader Forschungen
BASOR  Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
Bib  Biblica
BO  Bibliotheca Orientalis
BM  Tablets in the British Museum
CAH  Cambridge Ancient History
CBQ  Catholic Biblical Quarterly
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHANE</td>
<td>Culture and History of the Ancient Near East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRAI</td>
<td>Comptes rendus de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRIR</td>
<td>Culture and Religion in International Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td>Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTN</td>
<td>Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFI</td>
<td>Délégation Archéologique Française en Iran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ErIs</td>
<td>Eretz-Israel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HANE/S</td>
<td>History of the Ancient Near East/Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIMA</td>
<td>Revue Internationale d’Histoire Militaire Ancienne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSAO</td>
<td>Heidelberg Studien zum Alten Orient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HW</td>
<td>History of Warfare</td>
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<tr>
<td>IEJ</td>
<td>Israel Exploration Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JA</td>
<td>Journal Asiatique</td>
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<tr>
<td>JAOS</td>
<td>Journal of the American Oriental Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JCS</td>
<td>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JESHO</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JNES</td>
<td>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSS</td>
<td>Journal of Semitic Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KASKAL</td>
<td>KASKAL: Rivista di storia, ambiente e culture del vicino oriente antico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MVÄG</td>
<td>Mitteilungen der Vorderasiatische Ägyptischen Gesellschaft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NABU</td>
<td>Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utiles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ND</td>
<td>Nimrud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEA</td>
<td>Near Eastern Archaeology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMC</td>
<td>Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBO</td>
<td>Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OIP</td>
<td>Oriental Institute Publications</td>
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</table>
ABBREVIATIONS

OLA  Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
OLZ  Orientalistische Literaturzeitung
OPSNKF  Occasional Publications of the Samuel Noah Kramer Fund
OrAnt  Orients Antiquus
PEQ  Palestine Exploration Quarterly
PUF  Presses Universitaires de France
Qad  Qadmoniot
RA  Revue d’Assyriologie et d’Archéologie orientale
RAI  Rencontres Assyriologiques Internationales
RGTC  Répertoire Géographique des Textes Cunéiformes
RlA  ReAllexicon der Assyriologie
ABBREVIATIONS


SAAB  State Archives of Assyria Bulletin
SAAS  State Archives of Assyria Studies

SANTAG  SANTAG: Arbeiten und Untersuchungen zur Keilschriftkunde
SEL  Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici sul Vicino Oriente Antico
Sir  Studia Iranica
TA  Tel Aviv
TAVO  Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients
Trans  Transeuphratène
WdO  Die Welt des Orients
WVDOG  Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft
ZA  Zeitschrift für Assyriologie
ZAR  Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte
ZÄS  Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache
ZDMG  Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft
ZDVP  Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins

Key to Transliterated Words

Kibrāt  Akkadian words are indicated by italics.
DINGIR  Sumerian word signs are indicated by capital letters
Explanation of Symbols

[] single brackets enclose restorations.

() parentheses enclose additions in the English translation.

... a row of dots indicates gaps in the text or untranslatable words.

When personal names are not presented in transcription or transliteration, their spelling is simplified for convenience, for example, sh instead of š or šš and h instead of ḫ.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates (BCE)</th>
<th>Year of Reign</th>
<th>Campaigns and Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>745</td>
<td>Accession year (first <em>palû</em>)</td>
<td>Accession to the throne on the thirteenth day of Ayyâru (May). Measure of the <em>andurâru</em>. Campaign against Babylonia and Aramean tribes. New policy of deportations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>744</td>
<td>Year 1 (second <em>palû</em>)</td>
<td>Campaign to Central Zagros. First Median campaign. Parsua and Bit-Hamban annexed. Submission of Iranzu, king of Mannea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>743</td>
<td>Year 2 (third <em>palû</em>)</td>
<td>Campaign against the coalition of Mati'-ilu of Arpad and Sarduri II of Urartu. Defeat in the kingdom of Kummuhu. Arpad besieged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>742</td>
<td>Year 3 (fourth <em>palû</em>)</td>
<td>Arpad besieged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>741</td>
<td>Year 4 (fifth <em>palû</em>)</td>
<td>Arpad besieged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>740</td>
<td>Year 5 (sixth <em>palû</em>)</td>
<td>Fall and annexation of Arpad. Allegiance of several western rulers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>739</td>
<td>Year 6 (seventh <em>palû</em>)</td>
<td>Campaign against Ulluba. The fortress was seized. Foundation of Ashur-iqîsha.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>738</td>
<td>Year 7 (eighth <em>palû</em>)</td>
<td>Revolt of Tutammu of Unqi. Capture of Kullania. Annexation of Unqi, Hatarikka, and Simirra. Tribute sent by all the western rulers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>737</td>
<td>Year 8 (ninth <em>palû</em>)</td>
<td>Second campaign against Media. Creation of the provinces of Parsua and Bit-Hamban.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>736</td>
<td>Year 9 (tenth <em>palû</em>)</td>
<td>Campaign to the foot of Mount Nal on the Urartian border. Capture of some Urartian fortresses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>735</td>
<td>Year 10 (eleventh <em>palû</em>)</td>
<td>Campaign into the heart of Urartu after the failure of diplomatic negotiations. Sarduri was enclosed in his capital Turushpa, which was not captured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Campaign/Event</td>
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<tr>
<td>731</td>
<td>Year 14 (fifteenth palû) Campaign against Aramean and Chaldean tribes of central and southern Babylonia. Attack of the tribes of Bit-Shilâni, Bit-Sha’allî, and Bit-Amûkkâni. Siege of Shapiya.</td>
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<tr>
<td>730</td>
<td>Year 15 (sixteenth palû) Preparation of the campaign against Babylonia.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>729</td>
<td>Year 16 (seventeenth palû) Defeat of Mukîn-zêri, king of Babylon. The king “took the hands of Bêl,” meaning he ascended the Babylonian throne under the name of Pulû.</td>
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<tr>
<td>728</td>
<td>Year 17 (eighteenth palû) Tiglath-pileser participated in the akîtu-festival. Campaign against the city […]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>727</td>
<td>Year 18 (nineteenth palû) Campaign against the city […] Death of Tiglath-pileser III in the month of Tebêtu (January). Shalmaneser V ascended the throne.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Tiglath-pileser III reigned over Assyria for eighteen years, from 745 to 727 BCE. He is considered by most modern historians as the true founder of the Assyrian Empire. He was the first Assyrian king to be mentioned in the Bible, although a contemporary Assyrian inscription mentions King Shalmaneser III as the one who led his army into battle in 853 against a coalition of Levantine states, including Israel’s king Ahab.\(^1\) Tiglath-pileser is mentioned in 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles under both his Assyrian name and his Babylonian name. Pulû (\(pw\)) appears in 2 Kgs 15:19, and Tiglath-pileser (\(tght\ pl’sr\)) appears in 2 Kgs 15:29, 16:7, 10. There is an intrusive \(n\) in 1 Chr 5:6 and 2 Chr 28:20 (\(tght\ pl’n’sr\)).\(^2\) Pulû and Tiglath-pileser were viewed as references to two different kings in 1 Chr 5:26. The biblical references, although inconsistent, are not surprising. Both Israel and Judah were impacted geopolitically by Assyrian expansionist policies in the eighth century BCE. While Ahaz, the king of Judah who had voluntarily allied himself with the Assyrians, was allowed to keep his throne, much of Israel’s former territory was transformed into the Assyrian provinces of Dor, Megiddo, and Gilead, with Israel becoming a puppet kingdom of Assyria.\(^3\) The contemporary Aramaic and Phoenician inscriptions of Sam’al (Zincirli) also mention Tiglath-pileser. Again, this is not surprising. Sam’al’s King Panamuwa II was Tiglath-pileser’s vassal ruler who paid Assyria tribute, while Panamuwa’s son Bar-Rakib was ceremonially installed on Sam’al’s throne by

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1. RIMA 3:23, A.0.102.2, ii.91.
the king of Assyria. The inscriptions of Sarduri II, king of Urartu, relate not only his victory against Ashur-nârârî V but also his confrontation with Tiglath-pileser in 743, including an interpretation of the outcome that is quite different from that of the royal Assyrian inscriptions. Babylon was more directly concerned with Assyrian expansionism. Therefore, the Babylonian Chronicles briefly mention several previous Assyrian kings, such as Ashur-bêl-kala, Adad-nârârî III, Tukulti-Ninurta II, Ashurnasirpal II, and Shalmaneser III. Yet as many as twenty-six lines of Chronicle 1 are devoted to the reign of Tiglath-pileser. The Babylonian King List A also refers to two years of Pulû’s reign over Babylon. The Ptolemaic Canon mentions five years of reign by Poros or Pulû.

Tiglath-pileser is absent from classical sources, which mention only Ninus (a mythic figure), Sardanapalus, Semiramis, and Sennacherib. Berossus, the Babylonian priest who published the Babyloniaca during the reign of the Seleucid king Antiochus I, cites a Chaldean king named Phulos or Pulû. Berossus refers to him only as king of Babylon, not as king of Assyria.

Unlike the reign of his predecessor Ashur-nârârî V, about which there is virtually no information, the Assyrian inscriptions related to the history of Tiglath-pileser’s reign are numerous and even overabundant. Most of them are housed in the museum collections such as those in the Iraq Museum in Baghdad, the British Museum in London, and the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin. Still others are scattered across Europe and the United States in various museums, such as the Louvre Museum in Paris, the Hamburg Museum, the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, the Archäologisches Institut der Universität Zürich, Yale Babylonian

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Museum in New Haven, the Detroit Institute of the Arts, the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, the Israel Museum, the Aleppo Museum, and the Raqqa Museum, and there are others held in private collections. Several inscriptions are still unpublished. Tiglath-pileser’s inscriptions can be divided into two categories: royal and nonroyal. The so-called Kalhu Annals were written near the end of his reign on sculpted slabs that decorated the rooms and corridors in his palace at Nimrud (Kalhu). Series A of the Kalhu Annals was etched on seven lines, between the upper and lower registers of the slabs, and Series B in twelve lines. Series C was written across the sculpted figures of the slabs. Since many slabs were destroyed or removed from their original positions in antiquity, the text that has survived represents barely one third, if not less, of the full textual corpus. The annals are complemented by other annalistic-style texts, such as those inscribed on a stone stela originating from western Iran, a rock inscription from Mila Mergi in Iraqi Kurdistan (the earliest annalistic account), and a statue from Nimrud. There are also summary inscriptions preserved on pavement slabs and clay tablets and miscellaneous fragmentary texts that could be regarded as display inscriptions.

In 1851, Austen Henry Layard was the first to publish Tiglath-pileser III’s inscriptions. Following the publications by Henry Rawlinson, Edwin Norris, George Smith, and Eberhard Schrader, Paul Rost published a book in 1893, which for many decades served as the standard for the study of this king. The first modern, comprehensive edition is that of Hayim Tadmor published in 1994; it was followed by the revised and expanded edition of Tadmor and Shigeo Yamada in 2011. All of these royal inscriptions generally provide detailed accounts of Tiglath-pileser’s military campaigns presented in chronological order and of his building

12. RINAP 1:3; Paul Rost, Die Keilschrifttexte Tiglat-Pilesers III (Leipzig: Pfeiffer, 1893); ARAB 1.761–826 (translation in English).
operations. Allusions can also be found to Tiglath-pileser’s reign in the royal inscriptions of his successors.\textsuperscript{14}

Two problems are associated with Tiglath-pileser’s royal inscriptions: dating and propaganda. The annals are reconstructed from four or five different versions.\textsuperscript{15} The largest gaps extend over several years: the fourth and fifth palûs (742–741), the seventh palû (739), the tenth palû (736), the twelfth palû (734), and the fourteenth palû (732) are totally missing. Numerous smaller gaps occur in the account covering certain years. However, most of the gaps can be supplemented by combining the different sources, and the chronology of the reign can be established on the basis of information preserved in the Assyrian Eponym List.\textsuperscript{16} The summary inscriptions generally follow a geographical arrangement, without exact year distinctions. Propaganda is the second problem that the historian has to address when analyzing the different sources in order to identify distorted information.\textsuperscript{17} Such information has to be extracted from its ideological and literary frame. This is very difficult, especially when an event is attested in one source only.

The nonroyal inscriptions are much less distorted by propaganda, but they are often undated. The stela from Tell Abta on the Wadi Tharthar, engraved by the palace herald Bêl-Harrân-bêlu-usur, mentions Tiglath-pileser’s name.\textsuperscript{18} Some chronographic texts, such as the Eponym List, the Assyrian King Lists, the Babylonian King List, and two Babylonian Chronicles, are useful for dating events.\textsuperscript{19} There are also administrative documents, land grants, an inscribed duck weight, and royal correspondence sent to the king by state officials, spies, and other correspondents. These items were discovered in Nimrud, in the so-called North-West Palace, the Governor’s Palace, and the Burnt Pal-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} PNA 3.2:1330 (with bibliography).
\item \textsuperscript{15} Tadmor, \textit{Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III}, 27–39.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Frederick Mario Fales, “Tiglath-pileser III tra annalistica reale ed epistolografia quotidiana,” in \textit{Narrare gli eventi}, ed. Franca Pecchioli Daddi and Maria Cristina Guidotti (Rome: Herder, 2005), 163–92.
\item \textsuperscript{18} RIMA 3:241–42, A.0.105.2.
\item \textsuperscript{19} SAAS 2:43–46 and 59; Grayson, “Konigslisten und Chroniken,” 101–15, §3.9; 90–96, §3.3; Grayson, \textit{Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles}, 70–72, Chronicle 1; 183, Chronicle 24.
\end{itemize}
ACE. A few letters written after Tiglath-pileser’s death allude to events from his reign.

Nonwritten documentation dating from Tiglath-pileser’s reign is also historically important. Information is provided by the reliefs from his palace in Nimrud, the so-called Central Palace, which included a “cedar palace” and “a bīt-ḫilāni, a replica of a palace of the land of Hatti.” The reliefs are partly representations of the Assyrian king’s conquests, focusing on spectacular actions and occasionally accompanied by an epigraph, similar to our modern-day comics. The Central Palace was discovered in November 1845 and was then excavated in 1845–1847 and again in 1849–1851 by Layard. Sir Stratford Canning paid for the first excavations at Nimrud. Hormuzd Rassam, who had been Layard’s assistant in his excavations, worked at Nimrud in 1853–1854 and made some finds in the center of the mound: “In the … Center Palace, I discovered heaps upon heaps of all kinds of sculptures.” The Central Palace was then excavated by William Kennett Loftus in 1854 and again in 1878–1879 by Rassam. Excavations were carried out in this palace in 1975–1976 by a Polish expedition conducted by Kazimierz Michalowski.

Several modern scholarly works, large and small, mention Tiglath-pileser III. Every general history of Assyria or Mesopotamia includes short studies, the last one being the useful book written by Eckart Frahm. The first one was Abraham S. Anspacher’s Tiglath Pileser III, published...
in New York in 1912; this succinct account, based on Rost’s first publication of Tigrash-pileser’s inscriptions, gives an overview of some of his military campaigns. Most of the works, for example those of Michael Astour, Stephanie Dalley, Stefan Zawadski, Jacob Kaplan, and Sajjad Alibaigi, were related to a specific historical feature of Tigrash-pileser’s reign, such as his ascent to the throne, the Assyrian army, and military expeditions. Several other works, such as those of Albrecht Alt, Ernst Vogt, Mordechai Cogan, Nadav Na’aman, Gershon Galil, and Luis Robert Siddall, focused on expeditions to Israel and Judah. Works by Richard D. Barnett and Julian E. Reade focused on Tigrash-pileser’s palace in Nimrud.

My specific aim in this book is to study, for the first time, the history of Tigrash-pileser’s reign, which was fertile in events, in all its facets—political, military, economic, social, ideological, religious, technical, and artistic—knowing that some aspects are considerably more documented than others. However, just like the history of Sargon’s reign, that of Tigrash-pileser is poorly documented with respect to his family background, his youth, and the period before he ascended the throne. Hence it is difficult to propose a comprehensive assessment of the psychological factors that shaped his character and how, in turn, those factors influenced his approach to politics.


The history of Tiglath-pileser’s reign belongs to a trilogy, along with that of Sargon II and that of Sennacherib, that is, grandfather, father, and son. The present book provides an understanding of the course of Tiglath-pileser’s reign in relation to his personal choices and the context of his time. Several issues are raised and answered whenever possible: Was Tiglath-pileser a usurper? In what circumstances did he ascend to the throne? What were his qualities and skills? What were his shortcomings? What did he attempt to achieve, and how did he go about fulfilling his objectives? Did he have a clear plan or program at the beginning of his reign? Can he be considered the true founder of the Assyrian Empire? How did he manage to build the empire? Did he think it was more important to expand or to embellish the empire? Was he more a conqueror or an administrator? Was he more a reformer or a conservative? Were his achievements more novelty or continuity? What can be said of his personal evolution during his reign? In what areas did he succeed or, conversely, fail?

Concerning my conception of history, my methodology consists in adapting to the specific topic of the book and to the available sources. My approach is multidisciplinary: political, strategic, economic, geographic, and ethnographic, along with text studies and onomastic analyses when necessary. I always adhere closely to the documents available, because only then is it possible to move on to a historical synthesis, which I provide in a partial summary at the end of each chapter. The progression of the present book is built around decisive events and determining facts. I was forced to make choices from a mass of overabundant data that to me appeared fundamental and relevant for the topic. Some facts and minor features had to be omitted because of the limited framework of the book. Among the different scholarly explanations, I have selected those which, in my opinion, offer the most plausible interpretations. However, different interpretations are also mentioned and sometimes discussed. In a few cases, given the current state of research, I have been unable to choose between several interpretations.

In order to determine whether Tiglath-pileser was the true founder of the Assyrian Empire, chapter 1, “The Kingdom of Assyria in 745 BCE,” first


must determine what constituted the state of Assyria and what condition it was in when he ascended the throne. To be able to answer this question, we need to compare the Assyria of 745 with that of 727. Chapter 2, “Was Tiglath-pileser III a Usurper?,” investigates the question of Tiglath-pileser’s legitimacy because his ascent to the throne is far from clear. This in itself poses several problems. This chapter encompasses the study of Tiglath-pileser’s name, his family, his youth, his previous function, his physical portrait, and his personality, based on inscriptions, even if distorted by royal propaganda. Chapter 3, “Tiglath-pileser III’s Ascent to the Throne,” examines the difficult historical context of Tiglath-pileser’s early regnal years and the first measures he adopted to solidify his position. Chapter 4, “The Neutralization of High Dignitaries,” explains how high dignitaries such as Shamshi-ilu had become powerful and how Tiglath-pileser proceeded to restore royal power. Chapter 5, “The Strategy of Conquest,” investigates the king’s objectives, his careful preparation of military strategy, and the place of the West in his strategy. In chapters 6–10, the book follows a chronological order, mainly based on the various texts of the annals. Chapter 6, “The First Phase of the Campaigns (745–744),” analyzes Tiglath-pileser’s priority campaigns, the creation of new provinces, and the new measure of deportation of populations. Chapter 7, “The Second Phase of the Campaigns (743–738),” analyzes the subsequent campaigns conducted against the coalition of Syria and Urartu, with the creation of new western provinces. Chapter 8, “The Third Phase of the Campaigns (737–735),” analyzes the campaigns against Media and Urartu and the creation of the new buffer-state concept. Chapter 9, “The Fourth Phase of the Campaigns (734–732),” covers the different campaigns toward the western states of Damascus, the Phoenician and Philistine cities, Israel, and Judah. Chapter 10, “The Fifth Phase of the Campaigns (731–727),” deals with the campaigns against Chaldean and Aramean tribes, concluding with the conquest of Babylonia. Chapter 11, “The King Is Dead! Long Live the King!,” focuses on the mysterious death of Tiglath-pileser and the designation of a crown prince, Shalmaneser V. Chapter 12, “Building Activities,” examines the building projects initiated by the king. Finally, “Conclusion: Assessment of Tiglath-pileser III’s Reign,” offers an assessment of Tiglath-pileser’s reign, his contribution to the transformation of the kingdom of Assyria into the Assyrian Empire, and the positive and negative consequences of his decisions and actions.

At the end of the book, readers will find research aids: a selected bibliography for each chapter; an index of ancient texts used; an index of the
personal names cited, followed by brief comments and dates of reign for situating them both in a diachronic and synchronic perspective; and an index of modern authors cited. Three maps locating the geographical references in the book are provided within the body of the book, together with a chronology of Tiglath-pileser’s reign on pages xv–xvi.