ECKART FRAHM

ASSYRIA

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE WORLD'S FIRST EMPIRE

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Assyria's Most Important Rulers

The following list provides the names and regnal years of Assyria's most important rulers in the somewhat simplified rendering, without special characters, that is used for ancient Near Eastern names throughout this book. The number preceding each ruler's name indicates his position within the Assyrian King List (AKL), an Assyrian chronicle known from first-millennium BCE copies. The available manuscripts of the AKL come to an end with Shalmaneser V (no. 109); the numerals preceding the names of the kings following him continue the AKL's numbering system, running from 110 to 117. Ititi and Zarriqum are not mentioned in the AKL but are included in the list below because of their historical importance, while the names of several rulers who feature in the AKL but are otherwise poorly attested are excluded. If known, the names of the principal wives of the Neo-Assyrian kings are mentioned below as well, marked by italics.

The regnal dates of the kings from Tiglath-pileser I (no. 87) onward can be determined with complete accuracy, while there is a certain margin of error for those of the earlier kings. The dates provided for the Old Assyrian rulers follow Gojko Barjamovic, "Assur Before Assyria" (forthcoming).

In accordance with Mesopotamian calendrical practices, the first year given for a specific ruler is not his accession year but his first full year in office. Thus, Shalmaneser III (AKL 102) is said to have ruled from 858 to 824 BCE, even though he actually ascended the throne at some point in 859 BCE.

Third Millennium BCE

00	Ititi	twenty-third century
00	Zarriqum (or Sarriqum)	mid-twenty-first century

27	Sulili/Sulê	ca. 2025?

Old Assyrian Period

30	Puzur-Ashur I	ca. 2020?
31	Shalim-ahum	
32	Ilushumma	
33	Erishum I	ca. 1969–1930
34	Ikunum	ca. 1929–1916
35	Sharrum-ken (Sargon I)	ca. 1915–1876
36	Puzur-Ashur II	ca. 1875–1868
37	Naram-Sîn	ca. 1867–1834/1824
38	Erishum II	ca. 1833/1823–1809
39	Shamshi-Adad I	ca. 1808–1776
40	Ishme-Dagan I	ca. 1775–1736
40a	Mut-Ashkur	
40b	Rimush	
40d	Puzur-Sîn	

Transition Period

41	Ashur-dugul	
47	Adasi	ca. 1730

48	Belum-bani	ca. 1729–1719
54	Kidin-Ninua	ca. 1630–1616
57	Shamshi-Adad II	ca. 1597–1591
58	Ishme-Dagan II	ca. 1590–1574
59	Shamshi-Adad III	ca. 1573–1557
60	Ashur-nirari I	ca. 1556–1530
61	Puzur-Ashur III	ca. 1529–1505
62	Enlil-nasir I	ca. 1504–1491
69	Ashur-bel-nisheshu	ca. 1417–1409

Middle Assyrian Period

73	Ashur-uballit I	ca. 1363–1328
76	Adad-nirari I	ca. 1305–1274
77	Shalmaneser I	ca. 1273–1244
78	Tukulti-Ninurta I	ca. 1243–1207
79	Ashur-nadin-apli	ca. 1206–1203
80	Ashur-nirari III	ca. 1202–1197
81	Enlil-kudurri-usur	ca. 1196–1192
82	Ninurta-apil-Ekur	ca. 1191–1179
83	Ashur-dan I	ca. 1178–1133
84	Ninurta-tukulti-Ashur	ca. 1133?

87	Tiglath-pileser I	1114–1076	
89	Ashur-bel-kala	1073–1056	
92	Ashurnasirpal I	1049–1031	
93	Shalmaneser II	1030–1019	
94	Ashur-nirari IV	1018–1013	
95	Ashur-rabi II	1012–972	
97	Tiglath-pileser II	966–935	

Neo-Assyrian Period

98	Ashur-dan II	934–912	
99	Adad-nirari II	911–891	
100	Tukulti-Ninurta II	890–884	
101	Ashurnasirpal II	883–859	⚭ *Mullissu-mukannishat-Ninua* [i]
102	Shalmaneser III	858–824	
103	Shamshi-Adad V	823–811	⚭ *Sammu-ramat* (Semiramis)
104	Adad-nirari III	810–783	
105	Shalmaneser IV	782–773	⚭ *Hamâ*
106	Ashur-dan III	772–755	
107	Ashur-nirari V	754–745	
108	Tiglath-pileser III	744–727	⚭ *Yabâ*

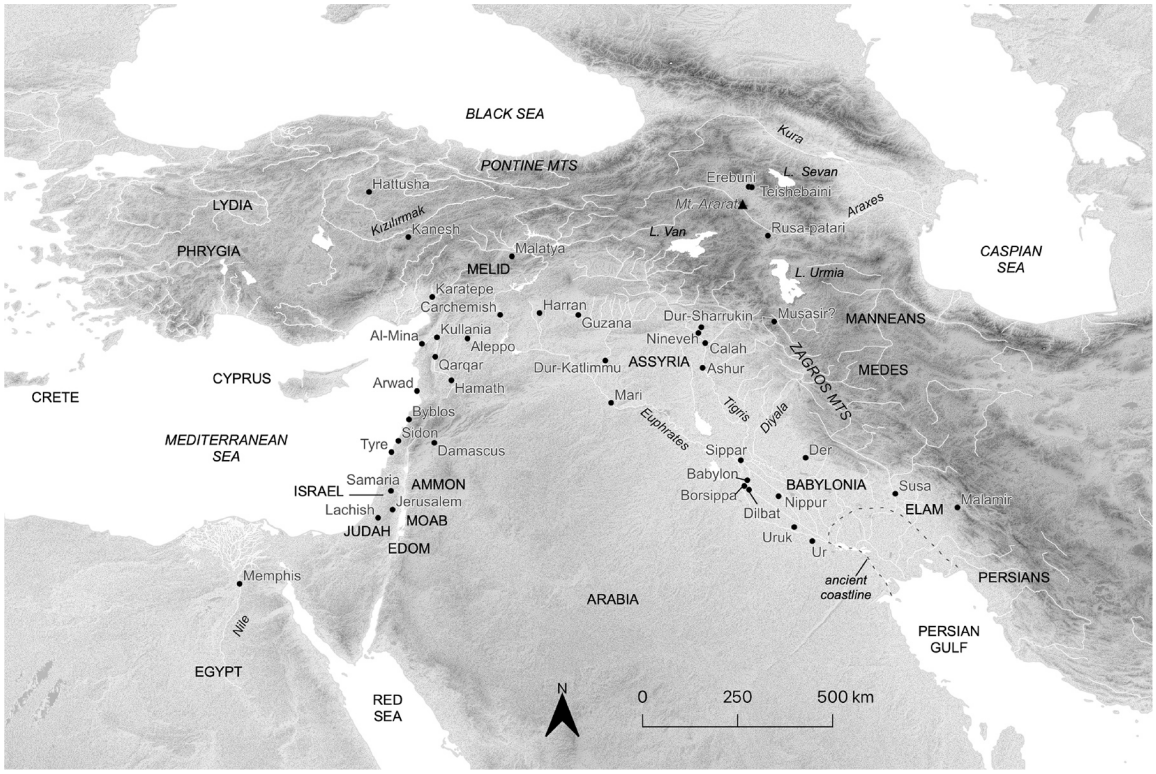
109	Shalmaneser V	726–722	⚭ *Banitu* (?)
110	Sargon II	721–705	⚭ 1) *Ra'imâ*
			⚭ 2) *Atalya*
111	Sennacherib	704–681	⚭ 1) *Tashmetu-sharrat*
			⚭ 2) *Naqia*
112	Esarhaddon	680–669	⚭ *Esharra-hammat*
113	Ashurbanipal	668–631	⚭ *Libbali-sharrat*
114	Ashur-etel-ilani	630–627?	
115	Sîn-shumu-lishir	627?	
116	Sîn-sharru-ishkun	626?–612	
117	Ashur-uballit II	611–609	

Footnote

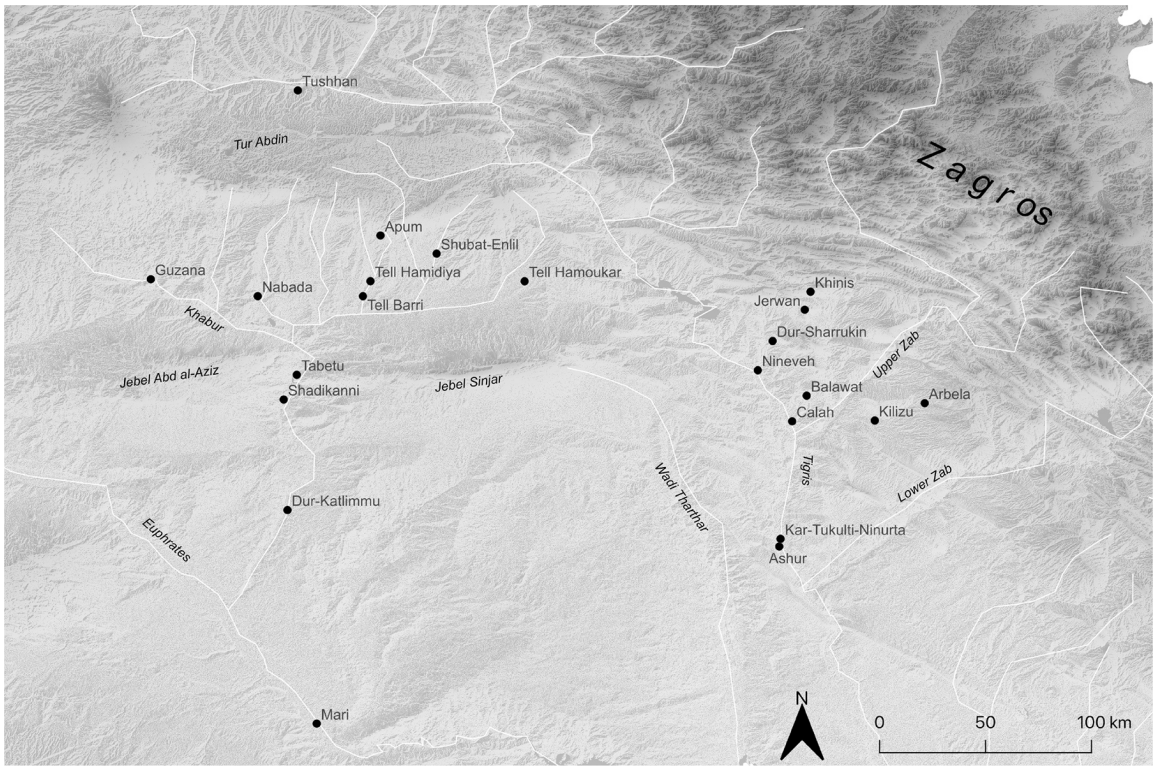
i The symbol ⚭ indicates marriage.

A Note on Translations

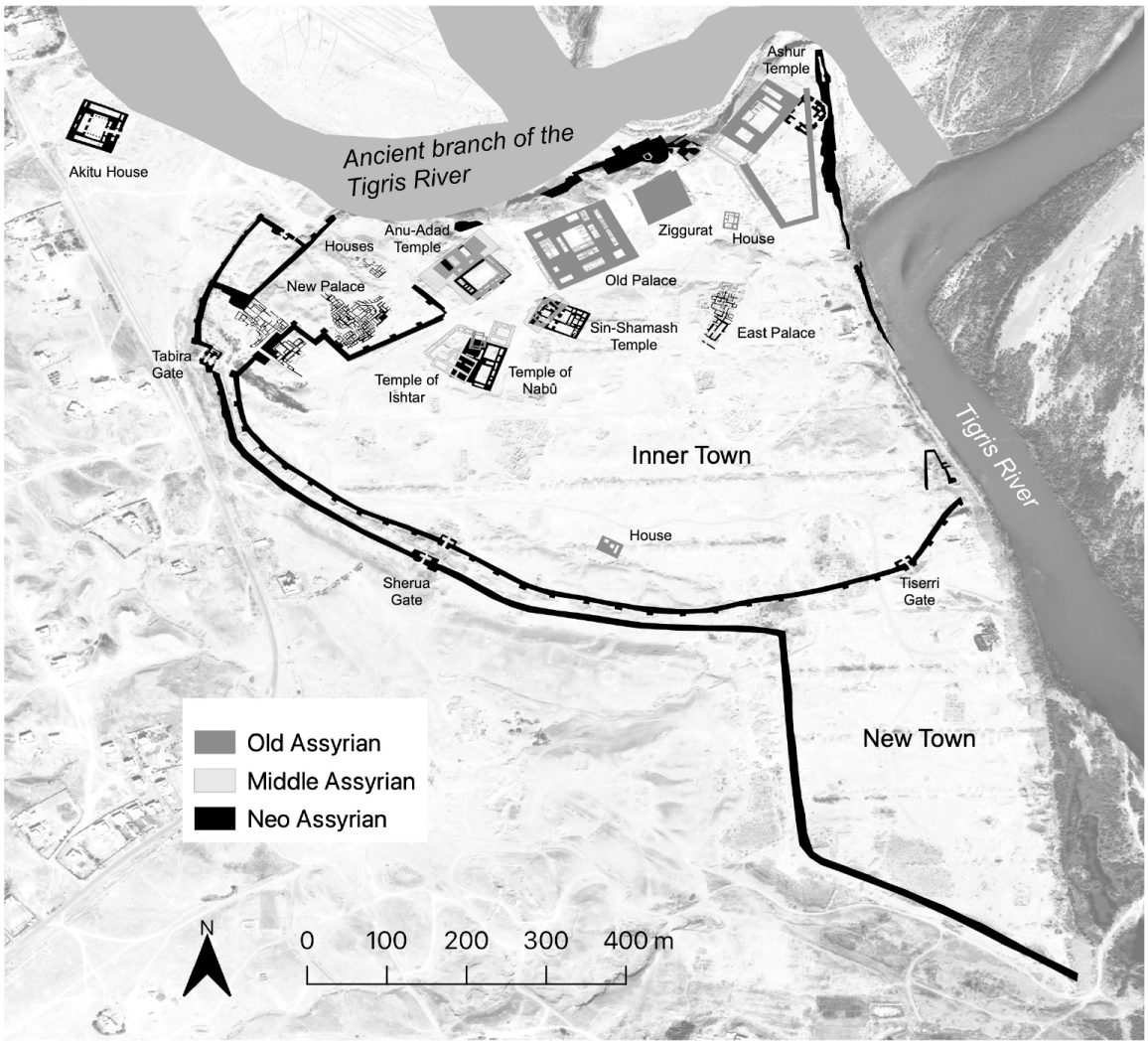
In translations of Assyrian and Babylonian texts, opening and closing square brackets—as in "[ancient]"—indicate restorations of broken passages, while parentheses—as in "(ancient)"—are used for additions provided to clarify the meaning of a given phrase. In cases in which restorations are not marked, endnotes explicitly say so. Translations draw on the quoted text editions, but where needed with adaptations by the present author. Translations from the Bible are based on the New Revised Standard Version, with occasional adjustments.



The ancient Near East.



Assyria’s heartland on the Tigris and adjoining territories on the Khabur River.



Ashur, Assyria's longtime capital and religious center.

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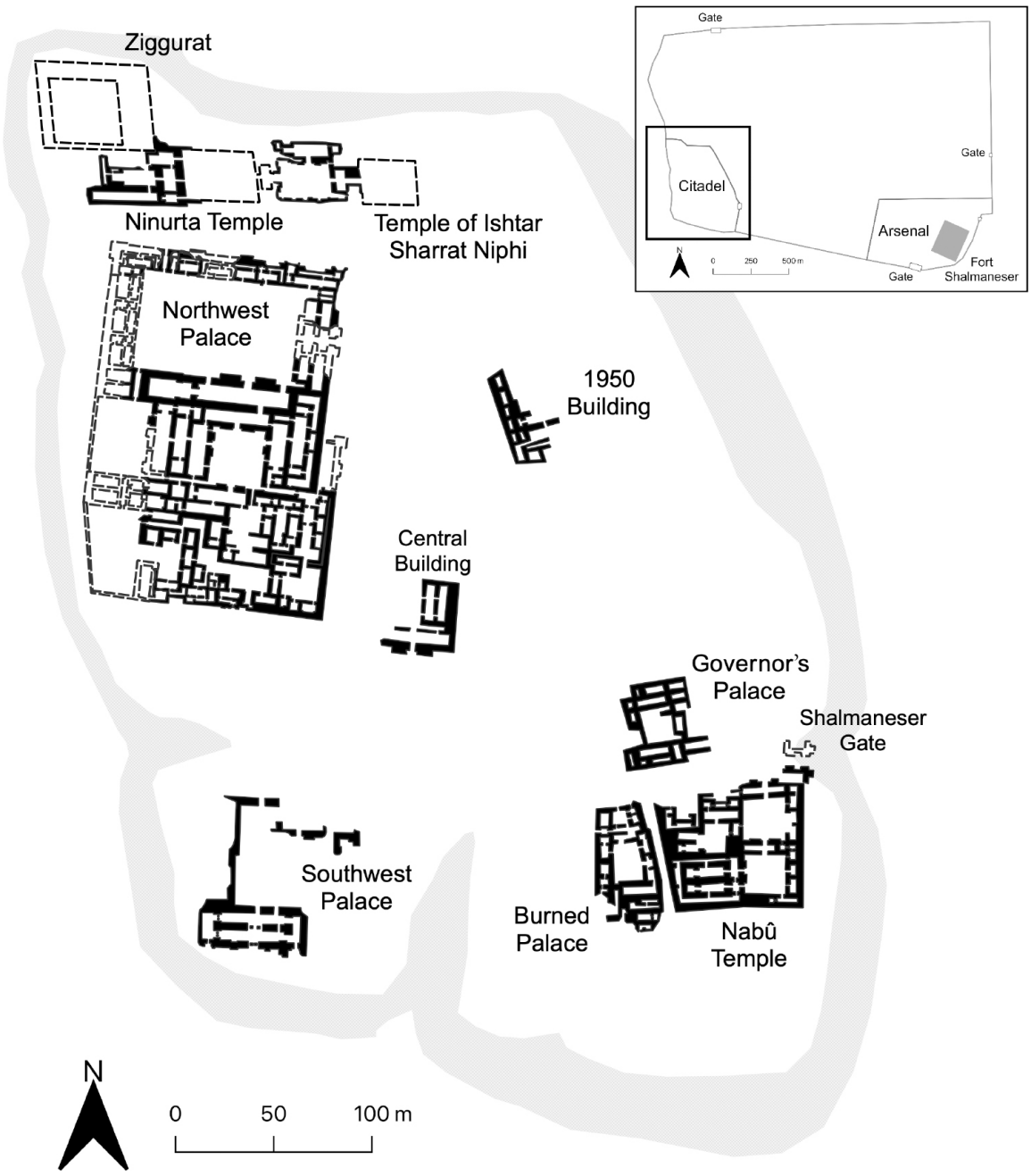
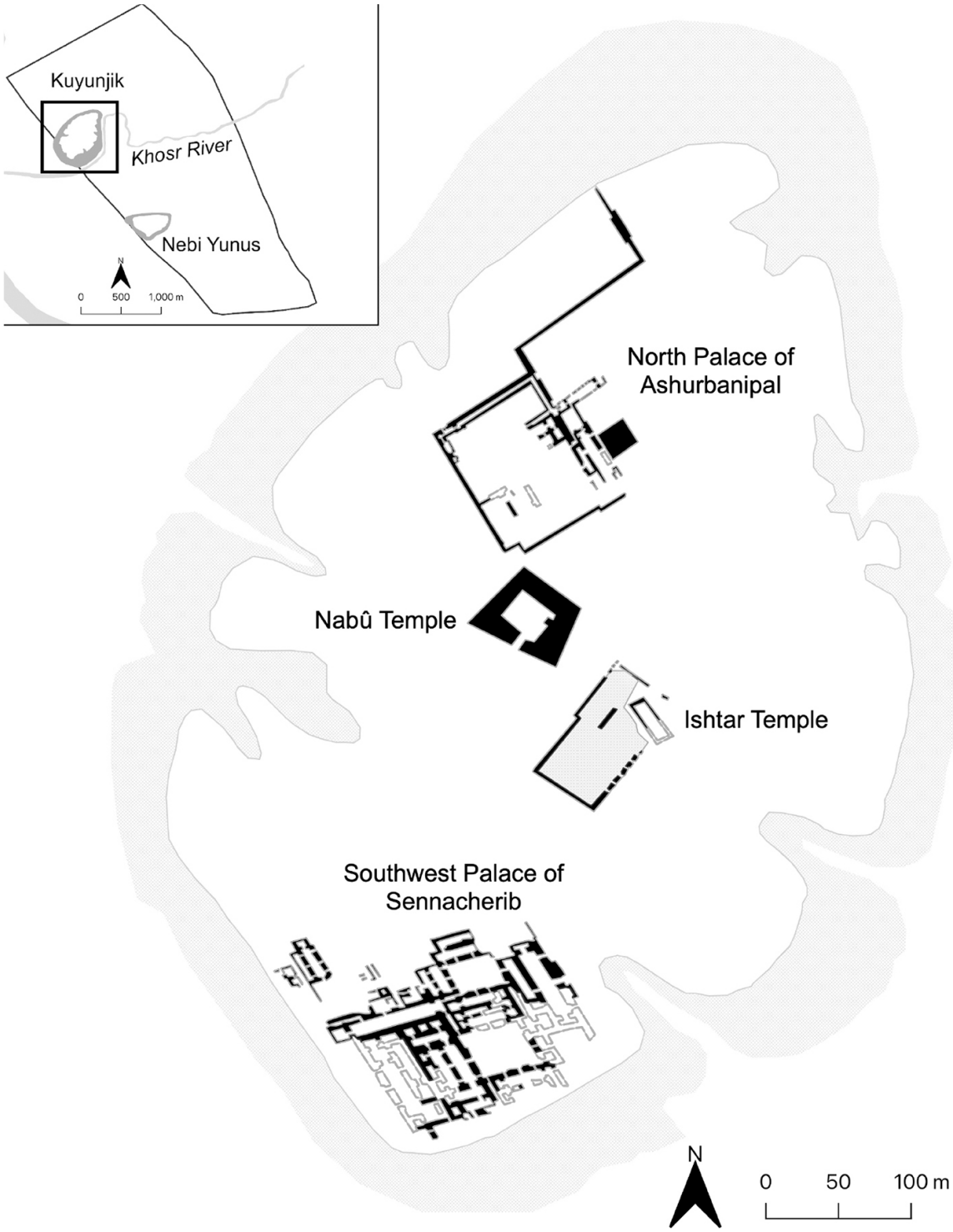


Calah, Assyrian capital in the ninth and eighth centuries BCE, with its citadel.



Nineveh, Assyria's imperial capital in the seventh century BCE, with its main citadel.

Introduction

In the summer of 671 BCE, an army dispatched by the Assyrian king Esarhaddon marched through Western Asia, crossed the Sinai Peninsula, and entered the land of Egypt. Pharaoh Taharqa managed to flee, but his wife, his crown prince, and many of his harem women were captured. Along with enormous amounts of booty and with political hostages, craftsmen, exorcists, and magicians numbering in the hundreds, they were brought to Nineveh, Esarhaddon's mighty capital on the Tigris River in northeastern Iraq.

It was an unprecedented triumph for Assyria. Two years earlier, King Esarhaddon had stated in one of his inscriptions that all his enemies "trembled like reeds in a storm," that their "hearts were pounding," and that "there was no rival whom my weapon could not face." Now, in the wake of his great victory over Egypt, the Assyrian king could make good on his braggadocio. He dispatched letters requesting gifts and professions of respect from rulers of several faraway territories in the Mediterranean—from Cyprus to Greece to what is now modern Spain. When they complied, Esarhaddon had every reason to claim, "I achieved victory over the rulers of the four quarters of the world—and sprinkled the venom of death over all my enemies."[1]

The Assyrian conquest of Egypt represented the culmination of a long historical journey. When that journey began, in the second half of the third millennium BCE, there were few signs that the country would one day achieve hegemony over almost all of Western Asia and some adjoining territories. In fact, Assyria was barely a country at all—in the beginning there was only the city of Ashur (see Plate 1). Located some 100 kilometers (62 miles) south of Nineveh, Ashur was home to a number of important temples—including that of a god likewise named Ashur—but it was not a major political player.

Around 2000 BCE, after spending several centuries under the heel of the powerful kingdoms of southern Mesopotamia, Ashur became politically independent. For the following three hundred years—the so-called Old Assyrian period—it was jointly ruled by a popular assembly and a dynasty of hereditary leaders. The city's role as a hub in the international trade in tin and textiles permitted Ashur to accumulate considerable wealth during this time.

A period of decline starting around 1700 BCE brought the Old Assyrian city-state and many of its institutions to an end, but the journey was not over. When Ashur got back on its feet in the fourteenth century BCE, it assumed a very different role: serving as capital of a territorial state eager to expand its borders through military means. This birth of Assyria in the proper sense of the term—its emergence as a land that included great cities such as Nineveh, Calah, and Arbela, and soon others much farther away—marked the beginning of a new era: the Middle Assyrian period. Now a full-fledged monarchy, Assyrians started to see their land as a peer of the most powerful states of the time, from Babylonia in the south to Egypt in the west.

During the eleventh century BCE, the Assyrian kingdom experienced a new crisis, this one caused by climate change, migrations, and internal tensions. It lost most of its provinces, especially in the west. But when the dust settled, it managed to rise from the ashes faster than any of the other states in the region. A number of energetic and ruthless Assyrian rulers of the Neo-Assyrian period (ca. 934–612 BCE) took advantage of the weakness of their political rivals, embarking on a systematic campaign of subjugation, destruction, and annexation. Their efforts, initially aimed at the reconquest of areas that had been under Assyrian rule before and then moving farther afield, were carried out with unsparing and often violent determination, cruelly epitomized in an aphoristic statement found in another of Esarhaddon's inscriptions: "Before me, cities, behind me, ruins."[2]

Again, there were setbacks. On several occasions—even in the otherwise glorious year of 671—internal and external revolts threatened Assyria's hegemony. In Israel and Judah, resistance to Assyria's military interventions resulted in the emergence of new, anti-imperial forms of religion, with long-term consequences unforeseen at the time. But by the

late eighth century, the Assyrians had managed to create a state that transcended all its predecessors in power, size, and organizational complexity.

During the last years of Esarhaddon's reign, Assyria ruled over a territory that reached from northeastern Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean to Western Iran, and from Anatolia in the north to the Persian Gulf in the south. Parks with exotic plants lined Assyrian palaces, newly created universal libraries were the pride of Assyrian kings, and an ethnically diverse mix of people from dozens of foreign lands moved about the streets of Assyrian cities such as Nineveh and Calah. Yet it was not to last. Only half a century after Esarhaddon's reign, the Assyrian state suffered a dramatic collapse, culminating in the conquest and destruction of Nineveh in 612 BCE.

Assyria's fall occurred long before some better-known empires of the ancient world were founded: the Persian Empire, established in 539 BCE by Cyrus II; Alexander the Great's fourth-century BCE Greco-Asian Empire and its successor states; the third-century BCE empires created by the Indian ruler Ashoka and the Chinese emperor Qin Shi Huang; and the most prominent and influential of these, the Roman Empire, whose beginnings lay in the first century BCE. The Assyrian kingdom may not have the same name recognition. But for more than one hundred years, from about 730 to 620 BCE, it had been a political body so large and so powerful that it can rightly be called the world's first empire.

And so Assyria matters. "World history" does not begin with the Greeks or the Romans—it begins with Assyria. "World religion" took off in Assyria's imperial periphery. Assyria's fall was the result of a first "world war." And the bureaucracies, communication networks, and modes of domination created by the Assyrian elites more than 2,700 years ago served as blueprints for many of the political institutions of subsequent great powers, first directly and then indirectly, up until the present day. This book tells the story of the slow rise and glory days of this remarkable ancient civilization, of its dramatic fall, and its intriguing afterlife.

TWO CENTURIES AGO, FOR A MODERATELY EDUCATED CITIZEN OF the West, Assyria was both much better known and much more poorly understood

than it is today. Nineveh was then a household name for most people. They were familiar with it from the Hebrew Bible, which portrayed it as the capital of the state that had sounded the death knell on the Kingdom of Israel. The Book of Jonah, popular and widely read, claimed that Nineveh was so large that it took three days to walk across from one end to the other—and that God had forgiven the Ninevites their sins when they repented. The Book of Nahum painted a much darker picture, comparing Nineveh to a debased prostitute and describing the city's impending destruction, brought about by God to punish Assyria's imperial hubris. In a variety of Greek and Latin texts from classical antiquity, Assyria appeared as the first in a long succession of empires, founded by King Ninus and his colorful wife Semiramis and destroyed by Babylonians and Medes during the reign of Assyria's last king, Sardanapalus, an effeminate debauchee.

Up to the mid-nineteenth century, most people in the West had a largely negative perception of Assyria. The world of ancient Israel, Greece, and Rome served as models of identity for them. From Jerusalem, they believed, their religious faith had arisen, from Athens, their methods of thinking, and from Rome, their political organization. Nineveh, much like Babylon or Carthage, embodied otherness—in the words of the Book of Nahum, it was "the bloody city, all full of lies and booty." But the Western image of Assyria was not entirely free of ambivalence. Disgust for the "oriental despotism" associated with Assyria was mixed with admiration for the alleged political and military accomplishments of the kingdom, and the imperial ambitions ascribed to King Ninus and his successors resonated with similar aspirations in nineteenth-century Britain and France.[3]

Missing from the picture were the voices of the ancient Assyrians themselves. After the second century CE, no one knew any longer how to read the cuneiform script in which the Assyrians, as well as the Sumerians, Babylonians, and other people of the ancient Near East, had recorded royal inscriptions, literary works, medical treatises, letters, title deeds, and administrative documents. The various languages these people had used, including Assyrian, were all forgotten. The physical traces of Assyrian civilization, from temples and palaces to private houses, had largely disappeared as well; they lay hidden under later settlements or under huge, grass-covered mounds no longer easily recognizable as remains of human

habitations. This was to some extent due to the destruction Assyria's main cities had suffered in the late seventh century BCE. But it also resulted from the fact that, much in contrast to ancient Egypt, whose temples and tombs were constructed of stone, all buildings in ancient Mesopotamia were made of mudbrick, which would crumble after a few generations, turning what were once urban centers of massive proportions into heaps of rubble.

THE "REAL" ASSYRIA—RATHER THAN THE DISTORTED IMAGE THE Bible and the classical texts conveyed of it—began to regain its place in the historical consciousness of the modern world on April 5, 1843, when a forty-one-year-old Frenchman by the name of Paul-Émile Botta sat down at his desk in the city of Mosul to write a letter. Botta was the French consul in Mosul, at the time a remote provincial town on the outskirts of the Ottoman Empire, but his letter was not about politics. Addressed to the secretary of the Société Asiatique in Paris, it was about a spectacular archaeological find. During the previous days, Botta revealed, some of his workmen had dug up several strange and intriguing bas-reliefs and inscriptions near the small village of Khorsabad, some 25 kilometers (15 miles) northeast of Mosul. At the end of his letter, Botta proudly announced, "I believe I am the first to discover sculptures that may be assumed to belong to the time when Nineveh was still flourishing."[4]

During the first half of the nineteenth century, several factors had triggered a renewed interest among Europeans in the lost civilizations of the ancient Near East. One important element was the Romantic spirit of the time, which sought escape from the mundanities of the here and now and indulged in a search for origins. Botta, the French consul and explorer, was very much under the spell of such yearnings. Like the famous Romantic poet Lord Byron, he had been in Greece during the Greek War of Independence. He had later traveled the world as a ship's doctor, and he was a passionate user of opium, on which he had written his doctoral dissertation. Man was "forced at all times to find ways of escaping from his real existence and move into a world of imagination," Botta had mused in that study, espousing the same escapist mood that later prompted his quest for Assyrian antiquities.[5]

At the same time, the nineteenth century had also brought to the fore a strong taste for historical inquiry, aiming at a reconstruction of the past "as it actually happened." Exploring ancient Assyria promised important insights into the historical truth of the stories told in the Bible and was thus an endeavor very much in line with the historicist spirit of the age.[6]

Finally, there was for the first time an opportunity to actually study Assyrian and other archaeological sites in the region. The rise of France and Britain to leading imperial powers enabled ambitious and ruthless European men eager to make their mark to travel to and explore faraway places. To be sure, the Ottoman state—unlike substantial swaths of Africa and Southeast Asia—was not an imperial province of any European country. But its political fragility facilitated interventions on the part of the great European powers—including some of a scholarly nature. The most famous of these was the archaeological exploration of Egypt during Napoleon's campaign of the years 1798 to 1801, which eventually led to the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphs by Jean-François Champollion in 1822.

Compared to Napoleon's scientific expedition to Egypt, in which a whole army of scholars participated, the rediscovery of Assyrian sites around Mosul in the 1840s and 1850s was a very lonely affair, drawing on the labor of a few European explorers and their local workmen. The results of their efforts, however, were spectacular. The first major breakthrough was owed to Botta, who uncovered at Khorsabad a massive Assyrian palace and parts of a city surrounded by a wall some 7 kilometers (about 4 miles) long. The city, as would eventually transpire, had been called Dur-Sharrukin in Assyrian times and had been built by the Assyrian king Sargon II (r. 721–705 BCE). Luckily for the excavators, the Neo-Assyrian kings had lined the mudbrick walls of their palaces with large stone blocks, or orthostats. This made it possible to easily trace the outline and structure of the buildings, which at Khorsabad were located close to the surface. The images found on the orthostats, and the sculptures of colossal winged bulls uncovered in several palace gates, provided the first glimpses into the world of the ancient Assyrians after the downfall of the Assyrian kingdom some 2,500 years earlier.[7]

In 1845, two years after Botta had initiated excavations at Khorsabad, a young Englishman by the name of Austen Henry Layard, an amateur

archaeologist and protégé of the influential British ambassador to Constantinople, Sir Stratford Canning, began exploring another Assyrian site, located some 32 kilometers (20 miles) downstream from Mosul on the eastern bank of the Tigris. Known to local people as Nimrud, it turned out to be a royal city by the name of Kalḫu (or Calah, as it is called in the Hebrew Bible). Within just a few months, Layard and his resourceful assistant Hormuzd Rassam, a Chaldean Christian from Mosul, uncovered on Nimrud's main acropolis hundreds of meters of bas-reliefs depicting royal campaigns, hunting expeditions, and mythological scenes, as well as numerous monumental inscriptions no one was initially able to read. They even found the platform for the throne of the ninth-century BCE Assyrian king Shalmaneser III, with an image of that king and a Babylonian ruler shaking hands, the first known pictorial representation of this widely used gesture.

The archaeological site closest to Mosul, a large area surrounded by massive walls on the other, eastern side of the Tigris, had initially yielded no major finds—even though it seemed from early on likely that it was here that Nineveh, Assyria's most famous city, had once prospered. Nahum's invectives notwithstanding, Nineveh's ancient name had never been entirely forgotten. The site where the city's ruins lay buried under layers and layers of earth and debris was known to the local population as Nuniya. Moreover, a mound by the name of Nebi Yunus on the southwestern edge of the site was the location of a mosque built over what people believed to be the burial place of the biblical prophet Jonah (Yūnus in Arabic), whose life's journey, according to scripture, had ended in Nineveh (see Plate 3).

Western visitors to the Middle East had been interested in the site of Nuniya, and its potential to yield ancient treasures, for quite a while. In 1820, the British resident for the East India Company in Baghdad, Claudius Rich, had spent some time in and around Mosul. At Nebi Yunus, he was shown relief slabs accessible from an underground kitchen, and he returned from his visit with a number of antiques, including a clay cylinder inscribed all over in a strange, unknown writing system. This created appetite for more. In fact, Botta's assignment to Mosul had originally been motivated by a desire to expand Rich's very limited earlier attempts to explore the area. Between December 1842 and March 1843, the French consul conducted