

Empires and Exploitation: The Neo-Assyrian Empire

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INTRODUCTION

The Neo-Assyrian (hereafter NA) empire is the name given to a polity centred on the upper Tigris river which at its height in the seventh century BC controlled territory extending from the Zagros mountains in the east to the Levant (Syria-Palestine) and much of Egypt in the west; from the Persian Gulf in the south to the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates in south-eastern Anatolia in the north. It was the largest polity seen in Western Asia up until that time. The NA period is technically a linguistic designation, denoting the third and last period of the Assyrian dialect of Akkadian (the Old Assyrian period c. 2000-c. 1800; the Middle Assyrian period c. 1400-c. 1050), although this period is coincident with the empire in which the texts were generated. While dates for the beginning of the empire can be disputed, it is generally accepted that the empire existed from the late tenth century until the late seventh century (c. 934-c. 605), some three hundred years. It was therefore also the most durable empire seen until then in Western Asia. There had been a smaller Assyrian empire for part of the Middle Assyrian (hereafter MA) period which extended across northern Mesopotamia (now northern Iraq, north-eastern Syria and south-eastern Turkey) and after which the NA empire was initially fashioned. Previous to this the empires based in Mesopotamia were centred in the south (Babylonia) and, while extending along the Euphrates river valley into northern Syria, were much more modest in their territorial reach. The best known of the southern-based empires are those founded by Sargon of Akkad (c. 2340-c. 2159; discussed by Mann 1986: 130-178) and Hammurabi of Babylon (he of the famous 'law code'; 1863-1712 [middle chronology]).

Since the NA empire is likely to be the area least familiar to members of our group, I offer by way of background a historical sketch that identifies some pertinent aspects of imperialism and exploitation. This is followed by attention to aspects of economic organization within the empire. Two sections then deal with the ideology of

NA imperialism; first, in respect to administrative organization and conceptions of territory/space, which also reflects Assyrian views on those who inhabited that space; and, second, resistance to the identity ascribed to a client state, drawing on the only example available – Judah as represented in certain texts from the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). Finally, there are very brief reflections on the character of NA imperialism in comparison with earlier forms evidenced in Western Asia, engaging Michael Mann’s discussion of this. It goes without saying that the whole paper is provisional in nature, and obviously over ambitious in its scope. I am not at all sure if this is the kind of paper Ian and Walter were after! In any case, I look forward to the discussion it might generate.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The history of the NA empire has been divided a number of ways, depending on whether a reign has been interpreted as marking the beginning of a new epoch or as belonging with the reigns that preceded it. Some of these divisions are fairly arbitrary, so I offer here one way of organizing the period (partially indebted to Kuhrt 1995, cf. Liverani 1988a):

1. From Territorial State to Imperial Power — 934-745.
 - a) Recovery of areas dominated in the MA Period — 934-884 (Ashur-dan II, Adad-nirari II, Tukulti-ninurta II);
 - b) Extension of control to areas further west, south and east — 883-824 (Ashurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III);
 - c) Internal problems in Assyria — 823-745 (Shamshi-Adad V — Ashur-nirari V).
2. Imperial Expansion and Consolidation — 744-c.630.
 - a) Second expansion and further provincial organization — 744-722 (Tiglath-pileser III and Shalmaneser V);
 - b) Imperial apogee — 721-c. 630 (Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhadon, Ashurbanipal);
3. The Fall of Assyria — c. 630-609
(Ashur-etel-ilani, Sin-shar-ishkin, Ashur-uballit II)

The following are observations on each of the above epochs that might be relevant to our discussions on imperialism and exploitation:

Period 1a). What seemed to be driving expansion westwards, northwards, and eastwards from the Assyrian heartland was a desire to reclaim territories that had been gained in the MA period after the demise of the Hurrian state of Mitanni/Hanigalbat in the mid-14th century. Assyria had lost control of these territories in the mid-11th century after the death of Tiglath-pileser I. Around this time Assyria with the rest of Western

Asia and the eastern Mediterranean was plunged into something of a 'dark age' usually connected to climatic change (Neumann and Parpola 1987) and events surrounding the movements of the Sea Peoples. When written sources reappear in the early first millennium a quite different political landscape obtains in Western Asia. Whereas before 1200 there was a group of major powers (Egypt, Hatti, Assyria [replacing Mitanni], Babylonia] involved in international diplomacy and rivalry (see the Amarna letters), no such polities now existed. The Hittite empire was defunct, Egypt had retreated within its traditional borders, and Babylonia was stable but lacked rulers with imperial aspirations. In the place of city states in Syria-Palestine, over which Egypt and Hatti had struggled for dominance in the mid- to late-second millennium, there was a series of independent kingdoms (such as Israel, Aram, Moab, Edom). A similar political geography was evidenced across northern Mesopotamia (Aramean kingdoms) and into northern Syria (Neo-Hittite and Aramean kingdoms). As at the end of the MA period, Aramean pastoral nomads were found across northern Mesopotamia, as well as there being Aramean and Chaldean tribes in Babylonia.

There were no major powers contesting control of northern Mesopotamia, which was obviously a prerequisite for Assyrian expansion. Assyria had a clear military advantage over the smaller polities in northern Mesopotamia as it was able to muster more resources to overpower these smaller states if they were not immediately intimidated into submission. It was only through the forming of coalitions among the smaller states, as was done by northern Syrian kingdoms in period 1b) and by Syro-Palestinian kingdoms in periods 1b) and 2a), that these states had a chance of successfully resisting Assyria. Quite often these coalitions were initially successful, but they proved difficult to maintain in the longer term. Once they broke up due to internal wrangling or Assyrian meddling to win favour with some of them, the Assyrians subsequently subjugated their territories.

If one considers this period as the (re)taking of territory viewed as being Assyrian on the basis that it had been controlled in the MA period, it is interesting that there was no attempt to integrate all of this territory into Assyria immediately. The 'control' was not marked by the immediate institution of provincial administration. Rather it took the form of a series of raids through Assyrian territory collecting tribute and confirming local leaders as Assyrian administrators/governors. The royal annals record these (usually) annual 'tours' of Assyrian controlled areas, and the itineraries in the annals give us a clear idea of the borders of Assyria. Even though it was viewed as properly Assyrian territory, the Assyrian kings took advantage of the internal organization of these territories developed in the interim between the MA and NA periods. The formation of

kingdoms in this region, as with the rest of northern Syria and Palestine in the aftermath of the demise of the great second millennium powers, was not seen as something that needed to be completely overturned, but rather as something that could be exploited. The problem was that these territories were not submissive to Assyria rather than their having the wrong form of political organization.

It is likely then that this first period should be viewed as a return to the conditions of the MA period. From the perspective of Assyria this might not be viewed as imperialism since these territories had rebelled against their long-standing overlord (the result of resistance to the Assyrian army can be seen in Appendix, Assyrian text no. 2 [from Period 1b]). They had tried to withdraw from the natural condition of belonging to Assyria. The significance of the above is that it is possible to construe the Assyrian empire as beginning in the 14th century (MA period), then with a hiatus in the 11th century, followed by recovery in the 10th century (Postgate 1992). Thus the mechanisms of imperialism may in fact derive from an earlier period than the first millennium. That the NA kings saw themselves as standing in a tradition that reached back into the MA period is evidenced not only by the occasional reference by name to military exploits of MA kings but also by reference to the fact that ‘Assyrians’ lived in these territories and had been displaced by Arameans and others. The Assyrian king was seeking to return to political normalcy by re-asserting Assyrian rule and returning Assyrians to towns and lands from which they had been displaced. So one motivation for the territorial expansion in this period, as well as in the next, was the correction of perceived political anomalies. Another motivation would seem to be economic since the annals register the tribute exacted from these traditionally subjugated areas as well as the booty taken in one-off raids into territory (notably in Babylonia) that Assyrian kings recognized could not be retained. Also, in reconstituting ‘Assyria’, polities abutting the territories under Assyrian control began to send gifts acknowledging Assyria’s status.

Period 1b). The first half of this period (reign of Ashurnasirpal II, 883-859) saw the continued expansion westwards, northwards and southwards to the limits of Assyrian control marked out in the MA period (see map), as well as the development of the imperial administrative system. In this period the construction of garrisons on borders or at strategic points in Assyria was undertaken. Unsurprisingly, borders became contested places, not the least because prior to NA annexation many of these subjugated polities had developed political and economic arrangements with their neighbours which Assyrian hegemony interfered with. Territories outside Assyria proper (say, west of the Euphrates river in central north Mesopotamia) were often initially related to in terms of treaty

agreements (at least sometimes intimidated into such on the threat of Assyrian invasion), which afforded Assyria income in the form of tribute and the opportunity to intervene in their client's affairs if the partner did not meet treaty obligations. In that event, a client state (commonly termed 'vassal' in the scholarly literature) might have its ruler replaced with a more compliant member of the indigenous ruling house or may be turned into a province.

It is in this period the lines of the NA administrative system, characterized by client states and provinces, clearly appear. The development of provincialization marked a higher level of integration. Here the Assyrians ruled directly through their own Assyrian appointees, commonly from the elite families. Why move from using the local political structures to having an Assyrian ruler? One argument is that this was a more efficient means of domination and economic exploitation. When relying on local rulers and structures there was a cost incurred by the annual 'visits' needed to collect/demand the tribute. Provincialization, as a system in which the tribute moved naturally, without the costs of direct coercion but certainly dependent on the threat of coercion if there was a rebellion, would arguably lower the costs of running the empire. In theory, however, the system of clientship should have delivered this 'natural', regular sending of tribute. Perhaps one aspect of provincialization in this period was the reinforcement of ties to the crown afforded by the appointment of members of the leading Assyrian families to governorships or other administrative positions. Also, this practice arguably extended the territory of 'Assyria' since these lands were now ruled by Assyrians, not by locals. Here we may observe the beginnings of a changing notion of 'space' as the royal inscriptions begin to reflect on what constituted 'Assyria' and 'Assyrians'.

The character of Assyrian control in this period continues to be debated. It is indisputable that over time members of the ruling Assyrian families were installed as provincial governors. Provincialization across northern Mesopotamia was, however, sporadic, with client states and provinces intermixed. For Liverani (1988b) the control of newly acquired territories was a web or a network with a series of control points/nodes ("islands", "outposts") connected by roads but with much of the territory not directly under Assyrian administrative control. From these centres the Assyrians could strike out against Aramean tribes or others who were causing problems. Thus, "the empire is not a spread of land but a network of communications over which material goods are carried" (Liverani 1988b: 86). This can be contrasted with the more common view of Assyrian expansion and administrative control as an 'oil stain' that slowly spread across northern Mesopotamia and which covered everything in its path. It is a question of how tightly controlled these holdings were in administrative practice.

In the second half of this period (reign of Shalmaneser III, 858-824) a number of north Syrian states beyond the Euphrates bend, which had marked the limit of Assyrian control, were made clients. A coalition of these states successfully challenged Assyrian influence, but only for a time. A second coalition drawing on states from southern Syria and Palestine were also able to resist Assyrian demands for only a time. These polities were not provincialized but remained clients. This period also saw the beginning of direct Assyrian involvement in Babylonian political affairs, with Shalmaneser intervening militarily to secure the Babylonian throne for the incumbent royal house against a usurper. The Babylonian king returned the favour in the next period. Assyrian engagement with Babylonia peaks in period 2b), but the relationship is problematic throughout period 2. In short, once able to subdue Babylonia in period 2a), Assyrian rulers proved unable to develop an effective means of maintaining hegemony over the region.

Period 1c). This period is particularly interesting in reflecting on the structure and cohesion of the empire. In the late MA period central weakness led to the subjugated territories in northern Mesopotamia freeing themselves and establishing independent polities of their own. Period 1c) also exhibited central weakness, marked by wrangling over the kingship and the cessation of annual military campaigns; however, there is no evidence for a similar loss of holdings (we know this because when the annals start again Assyria does not have to reassert authority over these territories), although the western client states took advantage and ceased sending tribute. How was it possible for the weak centre to hold on to its territorial gains? Perhaps part of the answer is that the administrative structure (provincialization) could continue to function regardless of events in the centre so long as the governors' commitment to the centre was maintained. That is, a weak centre did not mean that the Assyrian governors declared independence, nor were the local populations in a position militarily to overthrow the governors. Perhaps, then, 'weak centre' is incorrect if the centre can still command the allegiance of the provinces despite there being turmoil among the Assyrian elite concerning who should be king.

Period 2a). Period 2 is commonly identified as the NA empire proper. The frontier of Assyria continued to press westwards, northwards and southwards beyond the limits set in period 1b), confronting other sovereign territories that had not traditionally been under Assyrian control (see map). Claims to them could not therefore be made on the basis of tradition, although it could be affirmed that at some previous time Assyrian kings

had received occasional tribute or gifts of recognition from such territories (including in period 1b). Perhaps, on the western frontier at least, the borders were unstable and so in order to secure them the area beyond the periphery needed to be brought under Assyrian control (Lampirchs 1995). Thus the frontier kept moving. Did Assyria somehow 'blunder' into confrontation with those territories neighbouring to the west, north (Urartu) and east (Elam) due to border conflicts, or was there some overarching policy goal that Assyria was trying to attain, but which it was in fact not successful in fully realizing until period 2b)? It is widely thought that there was a specific purpose in pushing westwards beyond the Euphrates in period 2, although not in fulfilment of some long-held 'policy' from period 1, and that its primary motivation was economic. Assyria sought a stranglehold on all the trade routes in Western Asia. It wanted to divert to the centre the luxury goods and as much as possible of the surplus produced in subjugated territories, which were then largely devoted to the building of palaces and new royal cities (the first of which was constructed as early as period 1b). Driving westward to the Mediterranean it gained access to the Phoenician sea-ports with their exotic wares and to Lebanese cedar, while pushing north into eastern Anatolia and east into the Zagros it obtained control over mineral deposits. In the West, at least, trade had to pass through Syria-Palestine, either coming from the Aegean or further west in the Mediterranean, or coming from the south-west (Arabia). That trade was probably both state controlled and in private hands (maybe no difference since the 'private' operators may in fact have been government officials) and the Assyrians were thus dependent on these other states for the goods. Demands for tribute may have been a way of enforcing terms of trade (in one direction) that were economically advantageous for Assyria. Assyria obtained the goods/materials it wanted for 'free' (minus the costs to enforce compliance, which could be high; notice that the Assyrians had to keep going back to the West to militarily enforce these demands). This is not primarily about the control of territory, but of goods and surpluses. I would contend that at this stage the Assyrians were not thinking that they needed more land, or that they wanted to appropriate and redeploy the labour available there.

The last point is significant since it is commonly supposed that Assyria had a voracious appetite for territories and populations, not just for extracting their surpluses through ruthless military aggression. Here we need to make a distinction between those territories east of the Euphrates bend and those to the west. Territories to the east were indeed incorporated into Assyria. Territories to the west were not initially, and the Assyrians did not want to run these territories. That is to say, the westward push was not some sort of land grab, nor a grab for labour. Assyria would have preferred these

territories to remain under their indigenous ruling houses and to send tribute and goods to the centre of the empire. This was the purpose of the system of clientship.

In this system the Assyria king intimidated the kings of the smaller western polities into submitting to his overlordship, legally binding themselves to the service of the Assyrian king through the swearing of oaths of obedience by both the local and imperial gods. Part of the act of obedience was the annual sending of tribute to the Assyrian king. Thus the Assyrians were to be guaranteed regular tribute income and access to trade goods without the costs of regular military 'trips' to extort it, unless the client broke the agreement and refused to pay. In return for submission, the local polity retained a level of self-determination and territorial integrity. The system did not work, however. The Assyrians may have felt that the coercive power of oaths sworn by the gods, coupled with the threat of military intervention if the oaths were broken, would have effectively bound the client; but it did not. This is why the Assyrians in periods 2a) and 2b) moved to the provincialization of the western polities. It was not out of the desire (or a specific policy) to control these lands directly (otherwise they could have been provincialized from the outset), rather it was in response to the failure of the client system. If a kingdom repeatedly dishonoured the oaths made by refusing to pay the tribute, then the polity had to be dissolved and turned into a province ruled by an Assyrian governor. In that way the flow of income to the centre could be assured. The ideological underpinnings of this system will be explored below.

Period 2b). This period saw a continuation of practices evidenced in the previous period, including an expanding frontier and further provincialization. Babylonia proved to be an intractable problem, not the least due to political destabilization there by Elam (to the east of Babylonia). Babylonia was seen to be closely connected culturally to Assyria, with major temples of deities revered by the Assyrians established in Babylonian cities. Assyria's culture was recognized as younger than Babylonia's and to be in some sense derivative of it. Babylonia was effectively turned into a province in period 2a), regained its independence in period 2b) (reign of Sargon II), only to be subjugated soon after (reign of Sennacherib). Assyrian kings were so concerned to legitimate their rule there that more than one Assyrian king in period 2 assumed the throne of Babylon and ruled (perhaps in name only) the two states concurrently. The *kiddin* „tu status of the ancient cities with their long-standing legal rights and tax concessions were recognized by the Assyrians. Assyria never did resolve how to govern Babylonia. When Shamash-suma-ukin, the brother of Assurbanipal, was installed as king of Babylon it led to a bloody civil war between them.

Babylonia was the only subjugated territory in which the Assyrian king assumed the indigenous kingship. Other recalcitrant territories were quashed and indigenous kingship eradicated; and while it is true that the city of Babylon was razed by Sennacherib out of frustration at the population's recalcitrance, it was almost immediately rebuilt by Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal who claimed to have been called by Marduk, the god of Babylon, to restore cultic normality to Babylonia. They undertook rebuilding projects in this conquered territory, and sought to have themselves portrayed as legitimate kings of Babylon rather than foreign usurpers (Frame 1992: 64-65, 67-78, 104-108, 111-113.). To this end they not only had royal inscriptions written proclaiming such, they also adopted the titulature of the king of Babylon as evidenced in economic and legal texts written during their reigns. There were also deportations (mainly of Arameans and Chaldeans), but the royal inscriptions make it clear that Babylonia was a special place culturally and so had to be treated in a special way. This marks a different conception of Babylonia as a territory/space within the orbit of Assyrian control. Nominally one might expect the king of Assyria to be the king over all the subjugated territories. While this is so, the important thing to note is that in all locations other than Babylonia, this was done either by the Assyrian king recognizing the local king as a client and thus retaining him, or by eradicating the indigenous monarchy and replacing it with the Assyrian king ruling via an appointed Assyrian governor. The Assyrian king did not have himself crowned king according to the rites of the subjugated territory. This was afforded Babylonia alone. The local traditions of legitimate kingship were not set aside as they were when other territories were made into provinces. They were retained in Babylonia, and the Assyrian king was seemingly at pains to legitimate himself by keeping them (though not necessarily all of them; see, for example, absence from the annual *akītu* ritual at which the Babylonian king was normally required; Kuhrt 1987: 40-46).

Period 3. The rapid demise of Assyria from its zenith under Ashurbanipal (668-631) to its defeat at the hands of the Medes and the Babylonians (612-605) has long confounded historians. The sources are scant and problematical. In the late 620s Babylonia again wrested independence from Assyria. It has been thought that some military or organizational weakness must have been exploited by Assyria's enemies, but what seems likely is that Assyria could not withstand a loosely coordinated two-pronged attack by two strong armies, particularly from directions in which it was less well defended (the south and east). It is noteworthy that the administrative system stayed in place, inherited by the Babylonians who continued to use it successfully, as did the

Achaemenid Persians later. The empire did not end, therefore. Rather, its centre shifted from the upper Tigris south to Babylon, arguably continuing under the Persians with its centre shifted again.

ASPECTS OF ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION

Economic activity was at least partially interrelated with administrative organization, but it is here that problems with sources are clearly in evidence. Postgate's assessment of the relative value of the sources for our knowledge of various aspects of the Assyrian economy and society is still accurate some twenty years after he wrote (Postgate 1979: 195):

Good — palace sector;

Fair — army, state labour, administration, tribute, taxation, land holding;

Poor — social structure, city economy, village economy, prices and currency;

Bad — non-state labour, crafts and industries, trade (this may be pushed up a category or so).

In the administration of the empire (Pecirkova 1977; Pecirkova 1987) there was a clear distinction between, on the one hand, Assyria (the home provinces) and the northern Mesopotamian provinces which paid taxes of various kinds and, on the other hand, the subjugated client states from which tribute was exacted. There were some similarities in organization since the king placed each province under the control of a governor (Postgate 1980), or in client states, particularly earlier in the empire and in territories more distant from the Assyrian heartland, under a member of an indigenous ruling house as a loyal servant of Assyria. Beneath the governor and his bureaucracy were local town and village mayors. Some agricultural lands were placed at the disposal of governors, leading bureaucrats of the central administration, and members of the leading Assyrian families, often including the labour to work the land (for example, Appendix, Assyrian text no. 4). While it is possible through the annals and economic and administrative texts to see what goods, materials and labour were being moved around the empire and to what purposes, it has proven particularly difficult to model the economy. The problems with the sources noted by Postgate are compounded by the lack of any useful figures. Many texts are full with numbers, but we commonly lack any context in which to put them. Too often we can read a text, but not really know what it is about. Scribes did not normally put headings on texts to identify them. Economists and some other historians may complain that Near Eastern specialists are being too timid, displaying the innate conservatism of the field. Maybe so. But it is very difficult to judge the scale of an economy when unsure of the significance of many of the figures, or if suspicious as to

their accuracy. Take the numbers of persons deported from subjugated lands according to the Assyrian royal inscriptions, which might help us to estimate the population of the Near East at that time if we knew what percentage of the conquered population they represented, and if we could trust the numbers given. It could also offer a rough guide to the size of the population brought into northern Mesopotamia to work on newly expanded agricultural areas. Should the figure of approximately 1.5 million deportees be taken seriously? The important study by Adams (1981) on settlement patterns in southern Babylonia has shown a positive demographic trend during the first millennium, but I do not believe he or anyone else has ventured a figure for the population of the region.

Postgate's assessment of the value of the Assyrian sources for an understanding of the economy has been mentioned above. Here I sketch some aspects of socio-economic organization, particularly as it pertains to Assyria proper and the northern Mesopotamian provinces. The administration of a region came to be concentrated in one centre as we see the emergence of provincialization. Whether it was a deliberate policy of the Assyrians is unknown, but it is a form of organization that was adopted and developed by ensuing empires. There are rational economic reasons for such a development. Rather than all taxes, labour service and other incomes going into the centre and then back out to the provinces, provincial heads (governors) organized their own local regions to use the incomes, to accumulate wealth in the provincial capital, and to send only a certain amount back to the centre. This is arguably a NA innovation and may be one of the reasons for the longevity of the empire.

This is not the only example of the crown/government acting rationally to reduce transaction costs. Administration procedures were streamlined in the provision of *ilku* (the "performance of military or civilian service for the state, or the payment of contributions as a commuted version of that service" Postgate 1974: 91; incumbent on land owners and probably all 'Assyrians'). The government would determine a man's *ilku* obligation and then leave it to the individual to make the relevant payment direct to its eventual recipient. This system relieved the government of the physical burden of collecting and distributing the items, and enabled it, in theory at least, to calculate exactly how many soldiers and animals could be supported, without ever handling the relevant materials themselves (Postgate 1979: 203-204).

The *iāk ru* system is another example. In this system craftsmen converted raw materials under the direct control of the government into the finished products needed by it. Instead of maintaining a large body of ration-drawing personnel, requiring considerable supervision, the policy seems to have been to allocate quantities of raw material to craftsmen, and to define their obligation to supply finished products with a

commercial-style debt note. The system worked more on the principle of commercial, or rather fiscal, obligations (Postgate 1979: 205). This can be compared with Neo-Babylonian temples where credit/loan documents were also used when entrusting valuable materials (gold, jewelry) to craftsmen. These men were, however, on the payroll of the temples as shown by ration lists (Renger 1971).

In comparison to the above examples of rational economic action, Assyrian villages display elements of economic activity being embedded in social conventions; for example, communal restraint on the private sale of land (Postgate 1989). There are also instances of the crown acting on the basis of such conventions, although the impact on economic life is difficult to judge: (i) (*an*)*duraru*: a royal edict cancelling the enslavement of free citizens for private debt; (ii) *kiḍinn, tu* status of certain Babylonian cities recognized the long-standing rights of their citizens, including curtailment of the king's authority to exact taxes, fines, labour service and army service (Kuhrt 1995: 610-17). Neither of these would have been driven by an economic policy. Both probably reflected the traditional role of the Assyrian king and had important legitimating value.

Postgate (1979) sees three sectors of the economy: Palace Sector, Government Sector, Private Sector. This tripartite division has not convinced everyone (cf. Liverani below). The government sector seems to overlap both the other two rather than being completely discrete. For example, when a high government official is involved in trading activities for personal gain, one must assume that this is part of the private sector, not part of the government sector, even though it may be his government position that affords him opportunity to trade (Cole 1996: 56-68 cf. Oppenheim 1967). However, when an official trader is sent out by the crown to undertake trading activities this must be seen as part of the palace sector (Elat 1987).

Palace sector — all things owned by the royal family. Included in this sector as consumers are the royal palaces, royal family, domestic staff, administrators and military, court officials. Income was in the form of booty, tribute, 'gifts', produce and rents from lands owned, credit activities, slave sales, appropriations and confiscations. Expenditures were on subsistence of palace residents and staff, equipment of military staff, luxuries, gifts, regular temple offerings, building operations.

Government sector (including the army) — drew on the private sector to provide resources for civil and military operations via taxation and conscription, *ilku* and *iāk ru*. The backbone of the government sector was the provincial system. The government subordinates were responsible for the collection of payments of all kinds from their province, and for conscription and supply of soldiers and civil labourers.

Village inspectors were responsible to the provincial administration for the assessment of taxation. There is no evidence of a conscious effort by the crown to control or monopolize trade, although both the crown and government officials were involved in it via agents.

Private sector — hard to document because of scarcity of sources.

Liverani (1984), has used a two sector model of "Palace" and "Family" to examine trends in land tenure and inheritance from the mid-third through mid-first millennium. He sees two processes at work in the first millennium that I believe are apt particularly for the Neo-Assyrian period (at least in the Assyrian homeland and northern Mesopotamia) (see also Fales 1984a, 1984b; but cf. Postgate 1989). First, the palace sector directed to members of the palace organization (high officials at court and in the provinces) land, labour and surpluses as it decentralized control of its lands (Liverani 1984: 39-40). Some (most?) of these lands may well have been prebendary holdings accompanying the office, rather than actually 'owned' by the officials (Postgate 1989: 147). Much of the labour on these estates would have been deportees from elsewhere in the empire, some of whom were put to work in (new) royal cities. The agricultural land around these cities was not sufficiently large to feed the population so new agricultural lands, including some in quite marginal areas (successful crops two in five years), were opened up (see Appendix, Assyrian texts no. 4). The legal status of these deportees was not 'slave' but 'dependent labour', since they were tied to a particular estate. Postgate views them as "helots", borrowing a category applied to Western Asia by Diakonoff.

One way to interpret this development is as a risk management strategy on the part of the crown. In order to increase land under cultivation officials were 'granted' lands and workers, and manage the risk. In return the state draws an income in the form of taxes. Temples in Babylonia may well be filling a similar role. These institutions can also pass the risk along, and that is what we see with firms such as the Murashûs in Babylonia in the Achaemenid Persian period. They managed royal and temples lands and leased them out to others. They also offered a service to look after the military and other obligations that were attendant on the land. In return they sent rents back to the land owners.

The second process noted by Liverani is the erosion of the connection between land lot and a family or kinship group, which had characterized earlier periods. Eventually land becomes freely alienable. The upshot of this is that

some families are completely deprived of landed property (and enslaved for debts), while other families accumulate large extensions of land which in the 'free'

sector come to be the exact counterpart to the large landed properties belonging to the high officials in the Palace sector (Liverani 1984: 42).

Both processes led to landed property being concentrated in the hands of only some individuals or families, in comparison with the second millennium when landed properties were equally distributed among different family units in the family sector, and centralized by the great organization in the Palace sector (Liverani 1984: 40).

There are regional differences in economic organization as is borne out in patterns of land holding. Land in the south was held “either by the great organizations or by private absentee landlords who lived in cities and usually rented it out to poor tenant farmers. Farmers who lived on their own fields were the exception.” In the north (Assyria/Syria) “farmers seemed to have lived mainly in villages which were held either in feudal tenure or in private possession by the lord of the manor — the king, his high officials, members of his family” — who formed a thin layer of ruling class that could be replaced by newcomers without effecting the economic structure of the region (Oppenheim 1977: 86).

There is a third region beyond Mesopotamia also to be considered. That is the Syro-Palestinian coast. Coastal regions, led by the Phoenician cities Tyre and Sidon, had a different climate and therefore produced different agricultural products. Most significant, however, was the role of the Phoenician cities as trade centres, which was promoted by the Assyrians' demand for exotic goods, and then exploited by the ensuing empires. Via these centres the eastern empire could control Mediterranean commerce (Frankenstein 1979; Sherratt, Sherratt 1993). Their significance to Assyria was such that they were never brought into the provincial system but were instead permitted to retain a level of self-determination as client states, even after episodes of rebellion. Phoenicia was not the only area of the Levant whose economic activity was stimulated by Assyrian imperialism. According to Hopkins (1997: 29):

The luxury goods demanded as tribute payments held more consequences for agricultural economics than short-term impoverishment; they incited the search for high value materials. These commodities had to be procured on the international trade network. To enter this network demanded intensive investments in exportable agricultural products. Thus Assyrian power pushed dependent polities to produce more and pulled them towards specific products. These influences were joined by increasing population densities, urbanization, and political centralization in spurring agricultural industrialization and commercialization. In Israel and Judah, the intensification of olive and wine production stands out. Terrace technology advanced, reclaiming denuded hillside slopes. The terraces were accompanied by hundreds of rock-cut presses

throughout highland regions where wine production progressed at industrial sites . . . and dispersed farmsteads.

This is an aspect of the economic impact of imperialism on subjugated peoples that deserves closer attention. As will be pointed out below, another aspect of economic exploitation was the emerging Assyrian view of the populations of provinces as labour that could be best utilized on projects (usually agricultural projects, although there is evidence for building projects such as new royal cities) in other parts of the empire. This concern with the efficient use of labour is sometimes couched in terms of political expediency: people have to be moved from their homeland in order to quell rebellion. However, these people are usually those deemed to be less economically productive and so are put to use in fertile agricultural areas. (for example, urbanites who have been using up the local surplus; Arameans, Chaldeans and other pastoral nomads who were not sedentary agriculturalists and who are settled to become such). This view of subjugated populations has an ideological underpinning. It is closely connected to an ideological view of the territory of subjugated peoples. It is to this ideology that attention is now turned.

ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IMPERIAL IDENTITY

One topic that has been of considerable interest to students of the NA empire is the ideology of Assyrian imperialism. The annals and other royal inscriptions, together with artistic representations on the walls of Assyrian palaces depicting victorious battles and the king's reception of subjugated peoples with their tribute, lend themselves to this analysis. A number of themes have been identified: royal ideology, the legitimacy of the king to subjugate foreign lands and to appropriate surpluses; the rule of the god Assur (= Assyria) as bringing 'order' to nations that are disordered (that is, outside Assyrian control); defining 'Assyria'; the view of foreigners (Liverani 1979). I here want to focus on the conceptualization of territory and the people who inhabited it, exploring how administrative organization reflected and reinforced an emerging ideology of imperial identity that was imposed on Assyrians and subjugated peoples alike. The ruling elite sought to organize space/territory and people for their own economic benefit, to maximize agricultural output through a more efficient use of labour on newly opened cultivatable lands, to enhance the flow of luxury goods and raw materials to the centre, and to keep the costs of running the empire as low as possible by lessening the threat of internal revolt. Administrative practices with the attending imperial ideology served as mechanisms for integrating the empire and for attaining these goals. While the roots of

administrative organization and imperial ideology can be seen to lie in the MA period (see Appendix, Assyrian text no. 1), both developed over time as the NA elite sought to justify and control an expanding empire.

By definition the empire contained territories and peoples who were not originally part of the Assyrian polity, and from the perspective of the Assyrian elite the compliance of both subjugated peoples and Assyrians was needed to aid the smooth running of the empire. The ideology of empire needed to be impressed on both the Assyrians and the subjugated populations since for the Assyrian ruling elite they were part of a single system. Not everyone in that single system was equal, or treated equally, of course. In discussing how administrative organization reflected and reinforced the emerging ideology of imperial identity I want to simplify matters somewhat by concentrating on period 2 only. The reason for this is the wide agreement that at this stage the administrative practices of the Assyrians were fully formed. Within period 2 I am interested in how subjugated polities moved from the status of 'client' to that of 'province' and how the appropriation of lands and peoples was justified. How were the territories and peoples to be viewed and how should they be integrated into the empire? What was the relationship between the centre (in this case the Assyrian homeland) and the periphery (the subjugated territories)? By period 2b this is not an issue for any territory east of the Euphrates since all these lands had been provincialized. They were, for all intents and purposes 'Assyria', although as noted above it may still be able to make a distinction between lands west of the Tigris river and those east of it (the Assyrian homeland). That case cannot be argued here. A fuller treatment of this topic would not only attempt to tease out such distinctions in notions of space between the Assyrian homeland and the near provinces, it would also need to explore the Assyrian view of Babylonia with its peculiar treatment (see above the historical overview period 2 b).

The administrative status of subjugated territories reflected their particular relationship to the Assyrian king and their position within the Assyrian 'symbolic universe'. As noted above, it has been commonly accepted that there were two categories of Assyrian administration over subjugated territories. In the first, rulers of territories who willingly submitted to Assyrian overlordship were made clients of the king. They were bound to the Assyrian king by oaths sworn by both the local and the Assyrian gods. This made the relationship one that was divinely sanctioned, although in effect it meant that the client was no longer a sovereign state. To be a client was to come within the economic and ideological orbit of Assyria. It was to recognize that Assyria was your overlord to whom homage was due in the form of annual tribute; it was also to recognize

the legitimacy of Assyrian sovereignty in terms articulated by the Assyrians themselves: that Assur, the great lord, the lord of all gods (including the gods of the client territory) had commissioned the Assyrian king to superintend this land, which the deities of this land themselves affirmed. The legitimacy of the local king to rule now depended on his loyalty to the great king, which itself was construed as an act of obedience to the local gods. As the local gods served Assur, the imperial deity, so the local king served the viceroy of Assur, the king of Assyria. The earthly political reality was to mirror the cosmic political reality. If the oath was broken by non-payment of tribute (= rebellion), the Assyrians were justified in undertaking drastic action against the perpetrators who had committed an offence against the gods. This in part explains the confiscation of cult statues from recalcitrant clients. If a people did not know how to honour their deity by keeping the oaths sworn by that deity, then clearly that deity needed to be taken into Assyrian care. Indeed, the Assyrian king claims that the local deity had called on him to punish the deity's own people because of oath breaking, a motif that becomes central to the explanation in biblical literature as to why Yahweh permitted the destruction of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah (see also Appendix Assyrian text no. 7). The removal of the deity from its shrine was not a mark of disrespect, rather it was interpreted as the result of that deity's will — he/she wished to go to Assyria to pay homage to Assur. The local deity is said to have abandoned its people because of the affront of oath violation and to have permitted the Assyrian army to capture the kingdom, destroy its monarchy, and take the local god back to Assyria where it would be properly cared for. (And as the deity was being removed to Assyria or elsewhere in the empire, so too that deity's people would follow it into exile.) The spoliation of the divine images of rebellious vassals and the destruction of shrines was thus viewed as just punishment for unwillingness to submit to Assur and his king.

The result of this action to restore divine order normally would be incorporation into the Assyrian provincial system, the second category of administration, with the attendant loss of autonomy. Peoples who rebelled were seen as criminals against the divine order and thus had to be severely punished (Appendix, Assyrian text no. 8). Their indigenous leaders had forfeited the right to rule the territory and for the sake of good order and the wellbeing of gods and people, the territory had to be ruled directly by an Assyrian governor and incorporated into the provincial system. Much of the local population would be deported and peoples from elsewhere in the empire relocated to the region.

There has been a long-running debate over whether the Assyrians imposed on client states the obligation to worship Assyrian gods as a gesture of submission and as a

means of 'Assyrianizing' them. The balance of evidence is, in my opinion, against this imposition (Cogan 1974: 42-110; McKay 1973: 60-66; Cogan 1993; Holloway 1992; against Spieckermann 1982). Client states, as distinct from provincial territories in northern Mesopotamia, were spared direct Assyrian interference in religious affairs, even though tribute payments and loyalty oaths were required to demonstrate allegiance to the Assyrian overlord. Religion was clearly used by the Assyrians as a tool of subjugation, and Assyrian gods were used to that end. The use of the client states' own deities as an ideological tool of subjugation, as part of the imposition of Assyrian ideology to recast national self-understanding, might also be seen as a form of 'Assyrianization'.

Assyrian hegemony was never expressed solely in terms of superior military power, but always in terms the will of Assur and the divine mandate to bring territories under the nominal control of Assur (Appendix, Assyrian texts nos. 1, 3, 6). Military supremacy was a reflection of that. Assyrian royal inscriptions were thus deeply concerned to defend the legitimacy of domination. Arguably, the ideological reason for not immediately incorporating these territories into the provincial system was out of respect for the deities of these lands. These deities had not wronged Assur and had arguably served him appropriately in the heavenly realm, where all things are done in good order. Thus, on the ground as it were, these polities were afforded the opportunity of serving Assur's viceroy, the Assyrian king (a service marked the prompt payment of annual tribute). If they did so, well and good. But if they did not, then they had offended divine order and their own gods.

As noted in the historical overview above (Period 2a), the Assyrians arguably preferred the territories west of the Euphrates to remain in client status. This form of subjugation as an administrative tactic expressed an Assyrian imperial ideology that ascribed an identity and location to these polities within the Assyrian world-view. The changing of status between client and province demanded a change in the view of territory and also in the view of the subjugated population. What had been a client state with a modicum of autonomy and territorial integrity was now incorporated under direct Assyrian control, as were its people. This was not only another level of administrative integration into the empire; the territory and people occupied a different place/level in the Assyrian world-view. It marked a different relationship between the empire and the territory/people and moved the territory into a different category of 'space'. 'Client' as an ascribed identity with certain characteristics was replaced by 'province' as a different ascribed identity with different characteristics. Clients had been accorded the right to retain national ideology and territorial integrity, and thus their 'national' identity, albeit within the context of the Assyrian 'symbolic universe'. But once incorporated into the

provincial system the Assyrian claim was that the territory and people now belonged to the Assyrian empire. This then becomes the ideological justification for deportation since subjugated peoples were informed that they were now, after a fashion at least, ‘Assyrians’ and that they now lived in ‘Assyria’, so they could rightly be moved anywhere within that realm without ever leaving ‘their’ territory, and even take their gods with them. Their status was not the same as ‘ethnic’ Assyrians, however (as noted above on p. 13). Peoples and deities were no longer tied to a particular place but now belonged to the empire. In breaking the traditional nexus of people, place and gods (divine rule), the Assyrian elite dissolved the basis for existing national/ethnic identity and ascribed to subjugated peoples a new identity. Deportation was a mechanism for breaking old and constructing new identities since peoples from various locations were mixed together in new settlements. Thus deportation achieved two complementary goals for the central administration: it dissolved national/ethnic identities which were potentially fragmentary to the empire (even though client status sought to bring all such polities within a single ‘symbolic universe’), and it legitimated the movement of labour within Assyria to locations where it could be more economically exploited. So far as I can tell, this attitude towards and use of provincialization and deportation was an innovation, certainly on this scale. It also might be termed ‘Assyrianization’, if by that one means turning populations from whatever they were (‘Israelites’, ‘Bīt Adinians’, etc) into ‘Assyrians’ (see Appendix, Assyrian texts nos. 3, 4).

Provincialization was qualitatively different from clientship both administratively and ideologically. In considering the evidence from NA royal inscriptions pertaining to the incorporation of territories and peoples into the empire, Machinist (1993) reviews a number of key phrases such as “accounted to/with the people of Assyria/my land”, “added to the border of Assyria/my land/a particular district or province of Assyria”, “I (= the king) imposed upon them my yoke/the yoke of my rule/the yoke of Assur, my lord”, imposed taxes on subjugated peoples “like Assyrians”, among others. He concludes that “the terms ‘Assyria’ and ‘Assyrian’, in the royal inscriptions, are not really, or at least essentially, ethnic terms, but political ones, defining a region and people that manifest the required obedience [to Assur/the Assyrian king]” (Machinist 1993: 89). This of course need not contradict ‘Assyria’ as also referring specifically to the Assyrian homeland in contradistinction to the subjugated territories, or ‘Assyrian’ as referring specifically to the indigenous inhabitants of the homeland. In the latter case ‘Assyrian’ is arguably an ethnic designation (Smith 1986). It is perhaps notable, although unremarked by Machinist since he was concerned solely with royal inscriptions, that in NA administrative texts subjugated peoples, including those who had been deported to the

Assyrian homeland, are never termed 'Assyrians'. They are always denoted by their ethnic designation or by reference to their place of origin.

Despite the evidence of the administrative texts, the royal inscriptions make clear that the Assyrian elite viewed subjugated peoples and lands, particularly when they had been incorporated into the provincial system, as 'Assyrians' and 'Assyria' respectively. This was a direct challenge to the identity affirmed by the subjugated peoples themselves. The Syro-Palestinian kingdoms, for example, had articulated 'national'/ethnic identities, if Israel and Judah are anything to go by, which clearly articulated a political and social identity tied to a particular place (the kingdom ruled over by the divinely appointed indigenous king) and (a) particular national god(s). Assyrian hegemony contravened that, initially by imposing client status, and more violently by turning the state into a province.

Even clients were under considerable political and ideological stress. Their national ideologies averred that the national gods had constituted the kingdom and legitimated its ruling house. Assyrian hegemony called into question the sovereignty of the chief national deity since political realities were thought to reflect the relationship between deities in the heavenly realm. In short, Assyrian hegemony showed that the local deity was not as powerful as Assur and that that deity's people and polity were beholden to Assur and thus to the Assyrian king. While it must be admitted that provincialization undermined national/ethnic identity, the question can be raised concerning those states in a client status. What effect did that status have on their understanding of their national identity?

RESISTANCE TO IMPERIAL IDEOLOGY

Telling subjugated people who they are (that is, articulating their identity for them) is of course an expression of hegemony and is an act of oppression. It is an aspect of the ordering of empire, which is one of the central motifs in the Assyrian royal inscriptions, and it goes hand in hand with the ordering of space within the empire. Assyrian views of subjugated peoples were not, of course, these people's own self-understanding. But the voices of subjugated peoples in antiquity, as well as in more recent times, are commonly muted, so it is often difficult to hear their reaction to the hegemonic discourse that sought to articulate their identity for them and placed them within the ordered space of empire. In the case of the Assyrian empire, I believe we have the voice of one people (well, at least an elite from one people) - the Judeans - and the following briefly explores some aspects of Judeans' construction of their identity in the context of Assyrian imperialism.

Over the past thirty years considerable research has been conducted by anthropologists, sociologists, and cultural studies scholars into the construction, maintenance and transformation of ethnicity — a form of identification distinguished by its emphasis on real or assumed bonds of kinship, descent from a common homeland, and an assertion of a common culture (at least shared historically, if not currently). The vast majority of studies have focused on the modern world with particular interest on the role of ethnicity in the formation of modern nation-states, the impact of colonialism on ethnic identity, the persistence of ethnic identities within post-colonial or multi-ethnic nations that are attempting to achieve cultural/symbolic integration, and the complex relationships between ethnicity and other forms of identity such as class and gender. Ethnicity has been shown to be neither primordial nor static. The cultural expression of ethnicity changes through time, and contact with outsiders, particularly dominant external groups, plays a significant role in the definition and ascription of ethnicity.

Attention has been given to issues of ethnicity in the study of ancient Western Asia as they pertain to the formation and interactions of polities such as city-states, territorial states, and ‘tribal’ collectives. Of these polities, ancient Israel, both as a putative collection of tribes and as an emerging monarchical state, has received the greatest scholarly interest. With the rise of Assyrian political hegemony in the early first millennium Western Asian polities confronted real challenges to their political autonomy, territorial prerogatives, and cultural integrity. All were, in one form or another, subjugated by the Assyrians. While the forms of subjugation employed by the Neo-Assyrian empire have been studied with respect to their ideological justification, and their political, economic and administrative rationales, their effects on the (re-)construction of ethnic identity has received little attention to date. This topic, historical in orientation but informed by the theoretical conceptions and insights of recent anthropological and sociological research into ethnic identity, demands further research.

For much of the century c.735-630, Judah remained a client state within the Assyrian empire. That is, it had sworn to be submissive to the Assyrian king as reflected in the regular payment of tribute, handing control of foreign policy to the Assyrians, and an acceptance of an imperial ideology that recognized the Assyrian king’s divine charge to bring peoples under his political control, thus bringing them under the deity Assur’s control. In return Judah retained the symbols of independent statehood - king, capital, borders. For clients to resist Assyrian rule was a crime against the order of the cosmos and also against their own deities, who were willingly in submission to Assur. The extreme punishments metered out by Assyrian kings against those who resisted them or who rebelled were believed justified due to the enormity of the crime the perpetrators had

committed. Judah's sister state Israel revolted against Assyria and was then incorporated into the Assyrian provincial system with most of its population deported. The threat of a similar fate and the overall burden of client status, gave rise in Judah to a reconstruction (some would say a reaffirmation, but I find this contention problematic) of ethnic identity as evidenced in texts such as Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy is ostensibly a series of discourses by Moses given at the end of forty years wandering in the wilderness by the people of Israel. Moses and the people stand at the edge of the land that was promised to their ancestors but which Moses will not enter. Only these, his final, words will accompany them. He instructs the people on how to live in the land so that "it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you are to possess" (Deut 5:33). Deuteronomy is situated at the end of the Torah, the last book of the Pentateuch. In its canonical position it presumes the events that have been recounted in Genesis through Numbers, and it foreshadows a number of central themes that are to be taken up in the books that follow (Joshua through II Kings). It is both the final statement of the Torah and the bridge to the later history of Israel. I want to remove Deuteronomy from this canonical context, in which it was placed probably sometime in the Hellenistic period, in order to read it on its own; which was the way it was originally received. I also want to read it in historical context, since its setting at the end of the Exodus and wilderness wanderings is fictional. The text actually belongs to the period of Judah's clientship under Assyria and is a reaction to that condition. I contend that, among other things, Deuteronomy reformulates and affirms Judean identity at a time when this identity is under pressure.

In Deuteronomy Judean identity is cast in terms of a shared history in which the Judeans' putative ancestors recount the founding myth of their community and undertake obligations that bind them in perpetuity to one another and to the national deity. Their sole right to the land they inhabit is affirmed as divinely sanctioned, but their right to occupancy is not inviolable. They might be evicted from the land as a divine punishment, yet this land would nevertheless remain theirs alone and they would return to it. Against the Assyrian presumption that a subjugated people and its land were not indissolubly joined, thus permitting peoples to be displaced and mixed with others, Deuteronomy articulates a Judean identity that seeks to maintain Judean particularity and to equip the group with mechanisms to withstand the threat of land loss (it may also offer strategies to endure an inevitable loss of homeland, but I leave that aside here). This narrative informs Judeans living in the late Assyrian period of their common history and religion, their shared ancestry, the boundaries set for inclusion in the group, and their relationship to their homeland; all characteristics of ethnic identity. This understanding of Judean

identity arose in direct response to Assyrian hegemony and can be construed as an act of ideological resistance to imperialism.

Let me draw out some arguments in support of this and say something about the character of Judean identity that is articulated in this text. First, Deuteronomy is in form and language an adaptation of the Assyrian client treaty (McCarthy 1978; Steymanns 1995; and see parallels adduced in Appendix s.v. Deuteronomy). Leaving aside the details of this, as noted earlier the subjugation of clients by Assyria was legally ratified by the imposition of various treaties with the accompanying swearing of oaths. Deuteronomy adapts the literary form and the vocabulary of a treaty but places the deity Yahweh, the God of Judah, in the place of the Assyrian king. This is the main reason why this text has to belong to the Assyrian period, not to the period of Moses (which on the Bible's internal chronology must have been about 600 years earlier). The writer(s) are therefore deliberately taking an instrument of Assyrian subjugation, the client treaty, and using it as a mechanism to bolster Judean commitment to their national deity and to reinforce national identity. This is a classic example of using the tools of the oppressor to resist him. Deuteronomy exploits imperial understandings of power relationships and places Yahweh in the position usually occupied by the Assyrian king. Rather than Judeans being beholden to the king of Assyria, they must be beholden to Yahweh, their god. Rather than being subjects of the Assyrian king, they are subjects of Yahweh. Rather than obey the prescriptions of the Assyrian king as written in the vassal treaty, they must obey the prescriptions of Yahweh as written in Deuteronomy (another 'client treaty'). If the Assyrian treaty tells clients who they are as an act of subjugation, then Deuteronomy tells Judeans who they are as an act of resistance.

But why *this* fictional setting, using Moses and the end of the wilderness wanderings? The answer lies, I believe, in the fact that a major stress for Judeans under Assyrian hegemony was the threat of deportation and land loss. They had already seen what had happened to their sister state Israel, as well to most other of the small territorial kingdoms in Syria-Palestine. Incorporation into the provincial system was not only political death, it was accompanied by deportation that would mean mixing with other peoples as a means of integrating the empire, and, as a result, loss of traditional identity. 'Place' commonly figures in conceptions of identity, as mentioned earlier, and land loss and deportation were threats to identity. Deuteronomy is set just as the people are about to occupy the land, as a juxtaposition to their current circumstance in which they are just about to, or under threat to, leave the land (deportation). Moses in Deuteronomy spends a lot of time giving instructions to the people on what to do to keep possession of the land

once it is occupied. This, I take it, is a message to Judeans in the Assyrian period on how to retain the land.

Deuteronomy imagines a past, a specific historical moment - Moses addressing Israel on the edge of entering the land - as the context in which Judah's present crises can be addressed. For Deuteronomy, God and Moses speak from the past to *current* concerns - how to resist Assyrian imperialism, how to forestall deportation. The past is useable since the answers to current problems can be found there, by the writer(s) of Deuteronomy placing them there. The choice of Moses as one of the two speaking voices in Deuteronomy (the other is Yahweh; the people are present but do not speak) is predicated on the fictional historical setting of the text, but it also gives the writer(s) an opportunity to articulate an identity for the people that has the authority of Israel's putative origins. The status of Moses at the time of Deuteronomy's writing was at least that of the leader of Israel during the Exodus and wilderness wanderings, regardless of what anyone knew of the texts that now make up the first four books of the Pentateuch. The first few chapters of Deuteronomy recount these events, with Moses at the head of the people. This was Israel before there was a king or state; the Israel that was able to resist the might of Egypt (mentioned number of times in the text); the Israel that met God at Mt Horeb (Deuteronomy's name for Sinai; also mentioned a number of times in the text). This is 'original' or, if you like, 'ideal' or 'pristine' Israel. I don't think it ever existed; it is an 'imagined community', a construction of Judeans in response to Assyrian hegemony.

Importantly, this is an Israel, we are told, that holds its fate in its own hands. Disobedience to the divine precepts delivered by Moses will result in land loss, whereas obedience will ensure divine favour, protection and a long life in the land. Thus the text casts the current political situation between 'states' (Assyria and Judah) in a new light. The threat of land loss is not really to do with the relationship between Judah and the Assyrian empire, it is actually about the relationship between Judeans and Yahweh, their god. Political events are nominally at least, and from our perspective somewhat naively, brought under the control of Judeans as they understand themselves to be empowered to control their own fate.

This leads me to my second main point - the character of Judean identity. One might have expected from a text written in the period of the Judean monarchy, as Deuteronomy was, that the rallying point for resistance to Assyrian imperialism would be state ideology. Judah had a perfectly good state ideology; one much like neighbouring states, including Assyria. It had two related components. The first was a royal ideology that promised to David and his descendants that they would occupy the throne for ever.

The deity would defend them from the attacks of foreign nations and from usurpers. The second element was the election of Zion (Jerusalem) as the site where the deity would reside on earth. That was where the temple, symbol of the divine presence, was built; beside the king's palace. The king and god lived side by side in the capital city. The presence of the deity legitimated kingship and the state, and the deity would defend the city and state from attack because he resided there.

But we read nothing of this state ideology in Deuteronomy. Why? I do not believe it is because Deuteronomy is necessarily anti-monarchical. Indeed, monarchy may be fine as a form of governance. I think the writers of Deuteronomy drop royal-state ideology because they do not believe it to be effective in this situation. No other states had been able to resist Assyria; and Judah itself was already an Assyrian client. There was no point in pitting Judean royal-state ideology against Assyrian royal-state ideology. By being set in a time before there was a state or king, and thus before state ideology, Deuteronomy affirms that 'original' or 'ideal' or 'pristine' Israel was an ethnic group, not a state. With pressure on an identity centred on royal-state ideology, Deuteronomy articulates another, more ancient and more authoritative identity that will possibly save the day. In resistance to Assyrian demands for allegiance, Deuteronomy affirms an allegiance that is temporally prior and also 'higher'. Judean identity is characterized by allegiance to Yahweh, and allegiance to another, temporal power cannot be permitted to impinge on that. As vassals of Yahweh, who share a common religious history and commitments, Judeans are a special people, 'chosen' by Yahweh. It is not by shoring up the boundaries of the state, or by getting more people into the army, or rallying around the king, that Judeans will retain their land. It is by affirming their ethnic identity, with boundaries marked out by a myth of descent ("the land promised to our ancestors"), connection to a specific territory, a shared history, and specific cultural/religious practices (cultic centralization; eradication of "foreign" highplaces; observing holidays and legal practices; all of which Deuteronomy itself presents). Ethnic identity is a cultural construct, perpetually renewed and renegotiated through discourse and social praxis. I am not saying that Judean ethnic identity did not exist before Deuteronomy, since ethnic identity arguably underpins 'national' identity. I *am* saying that the expression of ethnic identity we see *in Deuteronomy* arises in the context of and in response to Assyrian hegemony and the fear of deportation, political death and absorption into the empire (and is arguably in competition with royal-state ideology and identities attached to it).

To conclude this section, allow me to give just one example of this expression of ethnic identity, to give this point a little more substance. Deut 7:1-6 (see Appendix s.v. Deuteronomy) affirms that the Israelites are a people quite distinct from the peoples of

Canaan whom they will dispossess. The Israelites must keep separate from these peoples. They must defeat them, destroy them, and on no account intermarry with them. These people worship foreign gods which will lead the Israelites astray, since they must have allegiance to Yahweh alone. We can see from later in Deuteronomy, as well as from other texts, that this is a justification for the destruction of shrines outside of Jerusalem and the centralization of worship there; which is a topic for another time. What is interesting is that this passage emphasizes elements of ethnic identity - not marrying outside Israel; these peoples not belonging to the land given to Israel - at a time when none of the peoples mentioned existed (indeed, some of them may never have existed). In fact few "foreigners" lived in Judah at all. Does the passage therefore commend earlier generations of Judeans for dutifully eradicating these original 'foreign' inhabitants from the land? I do not think so. The text reaffirms a particular understanding of ethnic boundaries by warning about and declaring war on non-existent foreigners, and, more real, foreign influences and practices. It also reflects the well-attested phenomenon of identifying the 'enemy within' the community which poses a threat to the successful negotiation of the current crisis. Here in Deut 7, as well as in Deut 13 and elsewhere, this 'enemy' is identified as any who encourages, practices or permits cults other than that of Yahweh (and in places other than Jerusalem?). Certain Judeans, including the royal court as it happens, act like 'foreigners' or 'outsiders' in their religious practices. It is only by becoming like that normative community addressed by Moses on the edge of the promised land and eliminating those who refuse to conform to the precepts there delivered, and who thereby threaten the very existence of the community, that Israel can hope to retain its land.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: WHAT'S 'NEW' ABOUT THE NEO-ASSYRIAN EMPIRE?

In his study of ancient Near Eastern imperialism, Michael Mann devotes most of his attention the late-third millennium empire of Sargon of Akkad (Mann 1986: 130-178). This is understandable, not only because it is the earliest of the 'empires', but also because it affords Mann the opportunity to lay out his interpretative strategy for this and later empires. I am somewhat surprised, though, that he devotes comparatively little space (only some seven pages) to the much better attested NA empire. In any case, since he has treated both empires, it affords me an opportunity to relate my discussion in this paper to his work and to reflect on the relationship between the NA and earlier Western Asian empires.

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

By comparison, the NA empire was marked by a strategy that “combined ruling through the army and a degree of compulsory cooperation with a diffused upper-class ‘nationalism’ of their own core” (p. 231). Mann notes regarding this empire that “the ‘army option’ [was] pursued to its most ferocious known limits in our historical traditions”, marked by large conquests, the control of subjugated populations “by threat and occasional use of ruthless militarism”, and deportations (p. 234). The compulsory cooperation resulted in a number of claimed economic benefits through expenditure on the building of palaces, royal cities and other administrative centres, through investment in the provision of plows and the acquisition of draught horses, and through the storing of grain reserves. While the above two strategies have much in common with earlier empires, for Mann the NA empire introduces a new element: “a form of ‘nationalism’” (p. 235). This is not “a cohesive ideology that spreads vertically through all classes of the ‘nation’”, since Assyria was too hierarchical a society in comparison with the Greeks whose nationalism “was dependent on rough equality and a measure of political democracy”. It was only the Assyrian upper classes — nobility, landowners, merchants, officials — who together with the army conceived of themselves as belonging to the same nation. “*They* seem to have participated in a common ideology, a normative community that diffused universally among the upper classes” (p. 235, author’s emphasis). “Their community seems to have ended abruptly at the boundaries of what was called the Assyrian nation, consigning the outer provinces to a clearly subordinate status. This was probably the most novel technique of rule, adding to the cohesion of the empire’s core. Ideological power as immanent *ruling-class morale* seems to make its clearest historical entry so far in this narrative” (p. 235, author’s emphasis; cf. pp. 160-61). Thus with the emergence of ‘nationalism’ “more diffuse, universal sources of social identity grew at the expense of particularistic, local ones” (p. 236).

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

One could therefore view clientship not simply as an example of ruling through a conquered elite (as in earlier empires), but as a means, articulated through imperial ideology, of integrating this elite within a empire-wide ruling class culture. The conquered elite now belonged to the Assyrian ruling elite, albeit on the second tier. They were legally recognized as ruling their territory under the patronage of the Assyrian king, and they became representatives of Assyrian rule and imperial values/ideology. Subjugated peoples and their rulers who were submissive and continued to be obedient were applauded for their moral virtues and for acting "like Assyrians". The ideology underpinning clientship articulated a relationship between Assyria and the subjugated polity that simultaneously placed the latter in a position inferior to Assyria while drawing the ruling elite into an association with the Assyrian king and the imperial ruling structures.

Provincialization can also be viewed similarly. It did indeed reinforce the status of the territory as something considerably less than Assyria proper, as Mann avers; but it also integrates the territory and population closely with Assyria, spreading the notion of Assyria beyond the boundaries of the home provinces. This is seen most clearly for provinces east of the Euphrates bend, but it is arguable also for provinces in Syria – Palestine. Provincialization in particular led to the peoples and territories becoming 'Assyrian', even if that 'Assyria' can be distinguished in some sense from the homeland.

Earlier empires espoused religio-political ideologies to legitimate the subjugation of neighbouring territories. But I do not think that prior to the Assyrians there was an attempt to articulate an imperial ideology that sought to integrate the subjugated polities into the ruling class world-view and then, if necessary, to change where they 'fitted' into that world-view (moving from client to province). Assyrian imperial ideology was diffused across the empire and should be seen as an innovative means of integrating the empire, expressing power, and maintaining control. We might want to draw a distinction

between an Assyrian national/ethnic identity and an Assyrian imperial identity, although the two are obviously related. All subjugated territories and peoples find a place in the latter, whether in the administrative category of client or province. These peoples may not have had a place in ethnic/national Assyria, but the issue needs further research.

APPENDIX

ASSYRIAN TEXTS

1. Tiglath-pileser, the mighty king, king of the universe, who is without a rival, king of the four quarters (of the world), king of all princes, lord of lords, shepherd, king of kings, the exalted priest, on whom a shining sceptre was bestowed through the command of Shamash, by which he has come to rule the nations . . . Assur and the great gods, who have made my kingship great, and who have bestowed might and power as my gift, commanded that I should extend the boundary of their land, and they entrusted to my hand their mighty weapons, the storm of battle. Lands mountains, cities, and princes, the enemies of Assur, I brought under my sway, and have subdued their territories. With sixty kings I . . .ly fought, and established (my) victorious might over them. I was without equal in battle, or a rival in the fight. Unto Assyria I added land, unto her peoples, people. I enlarged the frontier of my land, and all their lands I brought under my sway. (Tiglath-pileser I, MA period)

2. In strife and conflict I besieged and conquered the city. I felled 3,000 of their fighting men with the sword. I carried off prisoners, possessions, oxen, and cattle from them. I burnt many captives from them. I captured many troops alive: I cut off some of their arms and hands; I cut off of others their noses, ears and extremities. I gouged out the eyes of many troops. I made one pile of the living and one of the dead. I hung their heads on trees around the city. I burnt their adolescent boys and girls. I razed, destroyed, burnt, and consumed the city. (Ashurnasirpal II, 883-859; period 1b)

3. When Ashur, the great lord, chose me in his steadfast heart and with his holy eyes and named me for the shepherdship of Assyria, he put in my grasp a strong weapon which fells the insubordinate, he crowned me with a lofty crown, and he sternly commanded me to exercise dominion over and to subdue all the lands insubmissive to Assur. . . . I uprooted 17,500 of his troops. I took for myself Ahunu together with his troops, gods, chariots, and horses, brought them to my city Assur, and regarded them as people of my land. (Shalmaneser III, 858-824; period 1b)

4. Of those Arameans whom I despoiled, X thousand to the province of the *turtanu*, 10,000 to the province of the Palace-Herald, X thousand to the province of the Chief Cupbearer, X thousand to the province of Barhalzi, 5,000 to the province of Mazamua I divided and settled therein. I made them of one mouth. I considered them as inhabitants of Assyria. I placed upon them the yoke of Assur my lord, as upon the Assyrians. The abandoned settlements in the periphery of my land, which had gone to ruin during the reign of my royal ancestors, the kings of Assyria, I restored. (Tiglath-pileser III, 744-727; period 2b)

5. The population of the four quarters, of foreign tongue and divergent speech, inhabitants of mountain and plain, all of whom the light of the gods, the lord of all,

shepherded, whom I had carried off with my powerful sceptre by the command of Assur, my lord - I made them of one mouth and put them in its [= the new city's] midst. Assyrians (lit., sons of Assyria), versed in all the proper culture, I ordered as overseers and supervisors to give them instruction in fearing god and king. (Sargon II, 721-705; period 2b)

6. May Shamash, king of heaven and earth, elevate you to shepherdship over the four regions! May Assur, who gave you the sceptre, lengthen your days and years! Spread your land wide at your feet! . . . Assur is king — indeed Assur is king! Ashurbanipal is the representative of Assur, the creation of his hands. May the great gods make firm his reign, may they protect the life of Assurbanipal, king of Assyria! May they give him a straight sceptre to extend the land and his peoples! May his reign be renewed, and may they consolidate his royal throne for ever! (Assurbanipal, 668-631; period 2b)

7. The goddess X, beloved of Telhunu, priestess of the land of Arabia, who, angered at Haza'el, king of Arabia, . . . handed him over to Sennacherib, my own grandfather, and caused his defeat. She [= the goddess] determined not to remain with the people of Arabia and set out for Assyria. . . .

As for Tabua, he [= Esarhaddon] enquired of the Shamash oracle: . . . Then he gave Tabua back to him [= Haza'el] together with his goddess. Eshardaddon had a star of red gold made, which was studded with precious stones, . . . and presented it for a healthy life and long days, the prosperity of his descendants, the constancy of his rule, and the overthrow of his enemies. He showed kindness towards captured gods of all lands, whose sanctuaries had been trampled, so that the gods might grant him the blessing of long life and permit his offspring to rule over humanity. (Assurbanipal, 668-631)

8. The rest of Arabia which had fled in from of my weapons, Erra the strong overcame them. Disaster broke out among them so that they ate the flesh of their children to keep from starving. All the curses which are written in the oath in the naming of my name and those of the gods, you [= the god] decreed for them exactly as their terrible destiny: a camel-foal, a donkey-foal, a calf, a lamb might suck at seven milk-giving animals yet could still not satisfy their bellies with milk. The people in Arabia asked each other: “Why has such a disaster fallen on Arabia?” — “Because we did not abide by the great oaths of Assur, and sinned against the kindness of Ashurbanipal, the king who pleases the heart of Enlil!” (Assurbanipal, 668-631; period 2b)

DEUTERONOMY

You shall put these words of mine in your heart and soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and fix them as an emblem on your forehead. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the Lord swore to your ancestors to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth. (Deut 11:18-21)

The Lord your God you shall fear; him you shall serve, and by his name alone you shall swear. Do not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who are all around you, because the Lord your God, who is present with you, is a jealous God. The anger of the Lord your God would be kindled against you and he would destroy you from the face of the earth. (Deut 6:13-16)

[While you stand on the place of this oath, you shall not swear the oath with your lips only but shall swear it wholeheartedly; you shall teach it to your sons to be born after this treaty; you shall not feign incurable illness but take part in this treaty of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, concerning Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate. In the future and forever Assur will be your god, and Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate, your lord. May your sons and grandsons fear him. (Vassal treaty of Esarhaddon)]

[You shall speak to your sons and grandsons, your seed and your seed's seed which shall be born in the future, and give them orders as follows: "Guard this treaty. Do not sin against your treaty and annihilate yourselves, do not turn your land over to destruction and your people to deportation. May this matter which is acceptable to god and humanity be acceptable to you too, may it be good to you. May Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate, be protected for his lordship over the land and the people, and may his name later be proclaimed for the kingship. Do not place any other king or any other lord over you." (Vassal treaty of Esarhaddon)]

When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are about to enter and occupy, and he clears away many nations before you — the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations mightier and more numerous than you — and when the Lord your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, then you must utterly destroy them. Make no covenant with them and show them no mercy. Do not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for that would turn away your children from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. But this is how you must deal with them: break down their altars, smash their pillars, hew down their sacred poles, and burn their idols with fire. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. (Deut 7:1-6)

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