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Consensus to Empire: Some Aspects of Sargon II's Foreign Policy

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The largest and most dramatic expansion of the Neo-Assyrian empire occurred during a relatively short period: the four decades from Tiglath-pileser III's ascent to the throne up to Sargon's death (743–705). The brevity of the time span, and the enormous extent of the annexed territories, however, did not favour, as might be expected, and as had been formerly experienced in the Near East, the building of a short-lived, highly unstable structure. On the contrary, the empire which emerged after Sargon's death was stable and strong: after a pause during Sennacherib's reign, which did not receive any serious threat except from the Babylonian revolt, the expansion progressed with Esarhaddon, who finally was able to crush Egypt, one of the empires competing with Assyria for international pre-eminence. In a wider sense, and in a *longue durée* perspective, the unification of the Near East which was achieved by the Neo-Assyrian empire was to last – though occasionally disturbed by short-lived fragmentations – as a structural characteristic down to the end of the fourth century B.C., right to the end of Persian rule – and even later.

The reasons for such a high degree of stability represent a major historical problem, from the point of view both of the means which were adopted to attain it, and of the general context in which this passage from separation and local autonomy to unity took place. The means must be sought in external and internal policies, which were employed to build, to maintain and to strengthen the imperial structure which was being created and developed. As for the context, one must consider whether, and to what extent, the fragmented international *scenario* was politically, socially or culturally mature for an evolution towards unity.

As a matter of fact, the current view concerning Assyrian expansion is of one achieved through the total annihilation of local identities. This would be obtained, as it seems, in successive stages: first through direct military confrontation, and then through deportations, which aimed at weakening national cohesion and suppressing residual resistance among the defeated peoples. Besides, the international context of that period is on the whole conceptually reduced to a contrast between a masterful Assyrian expansion (with its imperialistic counterparts: Urarṭu, Egypt and Phrygia) and a periphery of independent or vassal entities, opposed to Assyria in a stubborn defence of their autonomy. In this light, the rebellions in annexed lands, which the Assyrians were obliged to suppress, would tend to confirm the obstinate permanence of national tendencies towards autonomy in spite of the effects of wars and deportations.

This picture – which also generally comprises the other Near Eastern empires – derives essentially from the self-representation offered by the Assyrian official accounts of the Royal Inscriptions (and to some extent, also by the Urarṭian). But these accounts were drafted according to a fixed manner of presentation, designed to show that an unhappy fate was to befall the unfaithful vassal or the obstinate enemy[1]: and this is an *a posteriori* assumption, which may not be used to exclude *a priori* that different policies were being directed to the same end. As a matter of fact, the very existence of faithful good allies of Assyria, like, e.g., the kingdom of Kummuḫu, clearly demonstrates that the objective was not necessarily sought exclusively through aggressive means. Furthermore, it must be recalled that, at least in the majority of the cases appearing in Sargon's inscriptions, disloyalty and enmity implied often requests for help addressed to other competing empires, or formal alliances. In this perspective, the defense of autonomy, which tends to be suggested by the current image of Assyrian expansion, merely appears as a conscious adhesion to another imperial system, since it seems most unlikely that ruling classes of countries opposed to Assyria were not aware of the political implications of their requests for help, e.g., to Urarṭu.

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[1] M. Liverani, *The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire*, in M.T. Larsen (ed.), *Power and Propaganda. A Symposium on Ancient Empires* (*Mesopotamia* 7), Copenhagen 1979, pp. 178–194; F.M. Fales, *The Enemy in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: the 'Moral Judgment'*, in H.J. Nissen – J. Renger (eds.), *Mesopotamien und seine Nachbarn* (BBVO 1), Berlin 1982, pp. 425–435.

Policies other than war and repression also must have been employed to enlarge, strengthen and maintain the expanding imperial structure. Through these, presumably, cohesion was obtained among the various forces, involved in the building and in the administration of the empire, including the ruling classes of recently annexed countries. A search for traces of such policies in Assyrian sources is the aim of this communication. Owing to the scarcity or even lack of sources for Tiglath-pileser III's and Shalmaneser V's reigns, the inquiry will be circumscribed to Sargon's reign, which is better represented both in official and in everyday administrative sources.

Some caveats, however, must be taken into account. It might be objected that Sargon's reign represents the last (even though the strongest) successful phase of the Assyrian expansion; consequently, that his inscriptions — particularly his Annals, composed at the close of his reign — are apt to distort past events in the perspective of the celebration of the successful conclusion of a long-term programme. Nevertheless, a comparison with sources written earlier in his reign (like the "Letter to the God", or the letters) offsets the risk of drawing general conclusions merely on the basis of the latest accounts. On the other hand, it must be recalled that some fluctuations surely occurred in the policies of the three kings who reigned during the period under examination. Continuity and diversity in Assyrian politics must thus be taken into account, considering the various stages of the expansion of the empire and the various international situations which accompanied it. With these caveats, however, Sargon's policies may be considered as an adequate model also for the analysis of the policies of the earlier reigns, and, even to a certain extent, of the policies of the other rival empires.

Our enquiry will depart from the analysis of Sargon's policies towards foreign aristocracies or ruling classes, as is revealed both by certain characteristics of Sargon's portrait which appears in his Royal Inscriptions, and by their implementation (a comparatively rarer case, attested in his correspondence).

The first feature to be noted is Sargon's reward of the loyal vassals, which is amply stressed in his Royal Inscriptions. It consisted in the granting of higher power or dignity, usually assigning rule over bordering territories, after the defeat of kings unfaithful to Assyria or as a sign of recognition for an approved behaviour. Thus, Mattî of Atuna was granted the bordering kingdom of Šinuḫtu after the rebellion of its king Kiakki[2]; Muttallu of Kummuḫu received Melid, after Tarḫunazi's defeat[3]; Ambaris of Bît-Burutaš received as a dowry Ḫilakku, after a period of praiseworthy behaviour in the Assyrian capital[4]. The reward was given also to repentant enemies. Ambaris may be again mentioned in this context, since his father had been deported to Assyria probably for his disloyalty to Tiglath-pileser[5]. But the most interesting situation is revealed by a letter of Sargon to Rusa of Urarṭu, written immediately after an Assyro-Urarṭian conflict which may be rather confidently identified with Sargon's seventh or eighth campaign[6]. An Urarṭian governor, who had defected to the Assyrian camp, was appointed by Sargon as *turtānu*, the "commander-in-chief", of the Assyrian army[7]; and the protest of the Urarṭian king, who was clearly requesting his return to Urarṭu, was ignored by Sargon[8]. Thus, even what was presented in official texts as the most bitter enmity, gave way to friendship and cooperation, and was acknowledged by a prestigious appointment.

The second noteworthy feature is the safeguard of throne and territory for submissive vassal kings. On one hand, Sargon strongly contrasted the external forces which were pressing against the legitimate vassal rulers. In this perspective, a long series of interventions in the north-eastern sector were planned to contrast Urarṭian pressure on the Mannean kingdom[9]; their final outcome was Sargon's eighth cam-

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2 Lie, p. 10, ll. 70–71.
3 Lie, p. 36, l. 221.
4 Lie, p. 32, l. 198.
5 Lie, p. 32, l. 195.
6 S. Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part I. Letters from Assyria and the West* (*State Archives of Assyria*, I), no. 8. The date is obtained from the mention of an Urarṭian attack on Mannea (l. 20': "Why [... did] you [lay] hands on Mannean territory?") and of a revolt against the Urarṭian king (Rev. 10: "[...] rebelled against you"). Urarṭian attacks to Mannea took place in 715 (Lie, p. 16, l. 101) and in 714 (TCL 3; Lie, p. 24, l. 136). For this dating, see my *I Cimmeri*, Padova 1990, pp. 30–37.
7 Rev. 5–8: "[As to] this governor of yours about whom you wrote me that he fled, once he was in Assyria I appointed him as 'commander-in-chief'".
8 Sargon's answer is very ironic: "Don't [*eunuchs*] die in the harem everyday?" (Rev. 9).
9 In 716 (Lie, pp. 12–4, ll. 78–90); in 715 (Lie, p. 18, ll. 102–103); in 714 (TCL 3).

paign, which resulted in a direct confrontation of the opponents in the battlefield and in the invasion of Urartian territory. On the other hand, Sargon was ready to contrast social groups who were threatening the legitimate dynastic succession in vassal kingdoms[10]. This occurred even if the rulers he was supporting happened to be removed shortly after for changing sides or for acts of disloyalty[11] – and this obviously implies that their loyalty was either fickle or not sound. The stress on the help afforded to the legitimate vassal dynasty is clearly expressed also when the vassal king (or his dynasty) has been eliminated by internal forces, a situation which requires the final annexation to Assyria[12].

Lastly, Sargon is portrayed as a promoter of the loyal vassal ruler to an ideologically higher rank of kingship: he officially bestows on him greater dignity, and equates him to a true Assyrian. This is all described in the unique scene of the banquet offered in Mannea by Sargon to the local king and to his people during his eighth campaign. The "Letter to the God" duly stresses that Assyrian and Mannean nobles joined in a common veneration of the god Aššur, after Sargon had solemnly proclaimed Ullusunu to be a king "greater" than his loyal father[13]. The promotion of a vassal king reached its peak with the establishment of a family bond with the Assyrian king: such was the case of the king of Tabal, who was given Sargon's daughter in marriage[14].

The images of Sargon as protector of repentant enemies, rewarder of faithful vassals, defender of legitimate kings, promoter of good allies, were exhibited in order to show the benign attitude of Assyrian rule and the advantages which derived from accepting its supremacy. Assyrian power was depicted as conducive to advancement and stability; and close cooperation with Assyria was shown as the only condition for peace and development. Behind these images was in fact an old tradition, which was clearly, though implicitly, referred to. The vassal rulers and external aristocracies were aware that, for a long time, Assyrian kings had been ready to bolster their allies outside their own empire[15]. But the emphasis given to these images and to their political implications in Sargon's inscriptions is as strong as it is unusual, particularly in comparison with the awesome image of the Assyrian king portrayed in the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III. Thence, we may conclude that these images represent the literary crystallization of a policy which was aimed at eliciting consensus in the external aristocracies, whose countries had not yet been absorbed into the imperial system.

Turning now our attention to the areas which were incorporated in the empire, Sargon's Royal Inscriptions exhibit, at first glance, a picture of an exclusively harsh Assyrian attitude. Following a well consolidated tradition, the incorporation is generally – though not necessarily – described as subsequent to a period of war, and followed by a series of punitive measures, like imprisonment and deportation. This pertains to the above mentioned commonly accepted image of a ruthless elimination of peripheral leading groups and of the total annihilation of local identity. But, to a closer inspection, it appears that Sargon exhibited to some of the recently incorporated groups the same reassuring and rewarding image he was showing to the autonomous vassal kings and their *entourages*.

Aristocracies of annexed countries were allowed to expect promotions and benefits from Sargon. As for the rulers, they were taught that even kings who had been dismissed for their disloyalty had the possibility of regaining their former status: the king of Tabal, who was reinstated and given more territory after his father's deportation to Assyria[16], is a good example. At a lower social level, the often stated in-

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[10] Sargon helped Daltâ of Ellipi to reestablish order in his country; the words used to describe his intervention (*utaqqi-ma dalḫtu mātišu*, Lie, p. 30, 183) are similar to those used to describe the quelling of the revolt of Daiukku against Ullusunu of Mannea (Lie, p. 18, 104: *Mannaiu dalḫu utaqqin*). Sargon helped Išpabara of Ellipi against his brother Nibê who had asked for Elamite intervention (Lie, pp. 72–74, V,4,15–V,3,3).

[11] As happened with the king of Kummuḫu; see fn. 3, above.

[12] In 716, Sargon attacked Ḫarḫar, whose local ruler (*bēl āli*) Kibaba had been expelled by local population (Lie, p. 16, ll. 96–97); an Assyrian governor was then installed. Aḫimiti was enthroned by Sargon as king of Ašdod, but later (711 or before) expelled (or killed) in an insurrection which brought Iadna, "not fit for the throne", to power (Lie, p. 40, ll. 252–262); Ašdod was then annexed to Assyria.

[13] TCL 3, ll. 62–63.

[14] Lie, p. 32, l. 198.

[15] Since Adad-nirari III's intervention in Syria, which surely led to his fixing the boundaries between Kummuḫu and Gurgum. See, lastly, S. Ponchia, *L'Assiria e gli stati transeufratici*, Padova 1991, pp. 46–49, 88–90.

[16] See fn. 14.

clusion into the Assyrian army (or, at a higher degree, into the king's own military *entourage*[17]) of soldiers belonging to subjugated kingdoms was clearly meant to show a benevolent attitude towards local military aristocracies. The incorporation into the army was an acknowledgment of their previous status; and the insertion in the king's own military *entourage* was a promotion to the most exclusive military rank, since it implied the passage from the service to one of the "lesser kings" to that of the "great king"[18]. Thus, this policy seems largely to have led to the moulding of an obedient army of requited and satisfied soldiers, rather than, presumably, of an unruly host of oppressed complaining subjects.

Then there is the account of fiscal and economic measures, which were presented in such a way as to show practical preoccupation for local welfare. As for the fiscal aspect, an example is the treatment of Babylon after Marduk-apal-iddina's defeat. Sargon proclaimed the remission of debts and granted exemption from the *ilku*-tax in Babylon[19] and in other cities of Southern Mesopotamia[20]. From an economic angle, his Royal Inscriptions stress his removal of obstacles to trade, which consisted in a commercial blockade caused by political contrasts with Assyria: he tells of having "opened the sealed Egyptian *fondaco*" in Samaria, and of having joined together there Egyptians and Assyrians to freely trade[21]. Finally, his preoccupation for resettling people wronged by external, anti-Assyrian intervention is shown in the announcement of the return to their original homes of the people exiled or deported by Marduk-apal-iddina[22].

So far, we have considered almost exclusively data directly offered by the Assyrian official accounts; and this might justify the doubt that we may have been considering only empty boasts pertaining to the propaganda or celebratory character of those texts. Such a doubt must be dispelled by searching for other examples, either taken from different sources (non-Assyrian texts, or texts linked with daily activities, like ordinary letters), or else by applying a subtler reading to the Royal Inscriptions themselves.

The modern reader of Assyrian texts may question the notion of legitimacy of vassal kings, since their claimed lawfulness may have represented an exclusively Assyrian political view, depending solely on the vassals' loyalty to Assyrian rule. However, it can be demonstrated that these kings had strong support in their own countries, in spite of their dependence from the Assyrian king. In Assyrian Royal Inscriptions, an Assyrian *débacle* — or of the pro-Assyrian party — is rarely admitted and described; nevertheless, war, civil strife or social riots leading to the expulsion or elimination of rulers loyal to Assyria are often referred to. War broke out often in the long internal dispute for the Mannean throne[23]; some kings loyal to Assyria disappeared from the scene, obviously because the ruling classes who had gained power (and designated a new king) had proceeded to his physical elimination[24]. War and such brutal measures indirectly imply that the legitimacy of pro-Assyrian rulers was deeply rooted in those countries. Considering that the intervention of a competing empire was often necessary to overcome the pro-Assyrian party, one must conclude in crediting the latter with considerable strength and popular support.

The high appreciation of the rewards given by the Assyrian king to loyal allies or vassals, both in prestigious and material benefits, is clearly expressed in the inscriptions of the pro-Assyrian king of

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17 Inclusion in the army: Lie, p. 72, ll. 11–12 (Kummuḫu); in the *kiṣir šarrūti*: Lie, p. 4, l. 15 (Samarian charioteers); p. 12, l. 75 (various military personnel from Karkemiš).

18 The formal distinction between "(lesser) kings" and "(great) king" (the king of Assyria, who is a *šarru dandannu*, "superpowerful king") is clearly stressed in Esarhaddon's "Letter to the God" in relation to the king of Šubria: Borger, *Ash.*, pp. 103–104, l. 30 ("and I, a superpowerful king, have written you three times ...". In this context too may be understood Sargon's despising sentence when speaking about the Anatolian rulers in a letter he sent to his governor of Cilicia (SAA 1, 1, ll. 29–30): "Let GNs command that all these kings should wipe your sandals with their beards".

19 G.B. Lanfranchi — S. Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part II. Letters from the Northern and Northeastern Provinces* (*State Archives of Assyria*, 5), no. 203, Rev. 14'–18'.

20 Ur, Uruk, Eridu, Larsa, Kisik, Nemed-Laguda (Lie, p. 64, ll. 11–12).

21 Lie, p. 6, l. 18, fragmentary, but well supplemented by the Nimrud Prism (C.J. Gadd, Iraq 16, p. 179), IV, ll. 46–49: [*ka*]*r*/[*k*]*a-ri* KUR.*mu-ṣur kan-gu ap-te-e-ma* [47][UN.MEŠ?] KUR.*aš-šur*.KI *ù* KUR.*mu-ṣur* [48][*it-ti*] *a-ḫa-meš ab-lul-ma* [49][*ú-še-p*]*i-šá ma-ḫi-ru*, "I opened the seal of the Egyptian *fondaco*, I mingled together Egyptians and Assyrians to make market" (AHw., p. 437b, suggests [*ka*?]-*ri*?).

22 Lie, p. 64, ll. 8–9 (citizens of Sippar, Nippur, Babylon and Borsippa captives in Dūr-Iakîn).

23 See above, fn. 9.

24 E.g., the pro-Assyrian Mannean king Azâ, who was killed, and whose corpse was exhibited on mt. Uauš (Lie, p. 12, ll. 80–81).

Sam'al Bar-rakib – thus providing us with a good external proof to what might be otherwise understood as a mere boast in the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions. In parallel with Sargon's exaltation of the Mannean king, Bar-rakib stresses his having been raised to a superior rank of kingship as a consequence of his alliance with Tiglath-pileser[25]. Vaunting his military role in the campaigns of the Assyrian king, he is proud to testify his "running at the wheel" of his Assyrian overlord, and even his father's death in the Assyrian war against Damascus[26].

Material advantages to be gained from military cooperation with Assyria were certainly also at hand. Bar-rakib attributes the new splendour of his "House" and his building of a new royal palace to the benefits he had received for his faithful alliance with the Assyrian king; and openly declares the annexation of border territories obtained under his aegis. Bar-rakib's boast of a new prosperity was addressed to the local *élite*; and it seems clear that, in general, the flow towards vassals of benefits from the Assyrian king – sharing of booty, direct payment for war alliance, etc. – reached the members of local aristocracies. On the other hand, the ruling *élite*, as Bar-rakib explains, had emerged from a period of social disorders or civil war; and further advantages were certainly obtained by expelling or weakening rival groups.

The model displayed by the king of Sam'al may be easily applied to other vassal lands; and we may delineate a general picture of a flow of material benefits to faithful countries deriving from their cooperation with Assyria. This caused the enrichment of certain groups, to the obvious detriment of others – ultimately soliciting a consensus in the winners for the Assyrian political overlordship.

This mechanism worked also with the ruling classes of recently annexed countries. The reinstatement of Ambaris as king of Tabal finds its counterpart in the request advanced by an Anatolian prince, addressed to the recently installed Assyrian governor of Cilicia, aiming at obtaining four districts[27]. His request was almost certainly not satisfied[28]; nevertheless, the prince's request shows that institutionally such a grant was considered possible. This must reflect a general situation: local aristocracies, though deprived of factual power by Assyrian annexation and reduced to a status of subjection because of their submission to an Assyrian provincial governor, were still able to detect a good disposition on the part of the Assyrian king.

The inclusion of military aristocracies or personnel in the Assyrian army was also productive of material benefits. The case of the Itu'eans may be used as a paradigm. After their subjugation both in Tiglath-pileser's and Sargon's times[29], they were employed as a select military group in the Assyrian army. During their service, or at the end of their career, they obtained land exempted from taxes, under the king's protection[30]. They were provided and equipped by the Assyrian administration, and probably took part in the share of war booty. Furthermore, there are indications that some specialized groups of military personnel could reach an even more elevated status in their career in the Assyrian army. Such is probably the case of a Samarian horse-breeder, who was in the king's son's service under Sennacherib[31].

From another angle, the incorporation in the Assyrian army of recently annexed peoples was certainly felt as definitely free from dangers of disloyalty by the Assyrian king himself. The Itu'eans were sent in some delicate border areas, where, together with other Aramaic groups, they largely outnumbered Assyrian soldiers[32]. In these border areas, they were mingled with soldiers of allied countries; and certainly they were living witnesses of the benefits gained through their loyalty to the Assyrian king. The mention of runaways in letters originating from various Assyrian provinces, which might suggest an endemic social disorder, caused by high numbers of deportees unsatisfied with their situation, does not

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[25] For Bar-rakib's exaltation, see KAI, no. 216, ll. 8–11; for his father Panammuwa's, see KAI, no. 215, ll. 10; 12.

[26] KAI, no. 215, l. 16. He was honoured with a funerary monument: *ibid.*, l. 18.

[27] SAA 1, no. 1, ll. 31–32 ("Kilar [has request]ed from me four districts, saying 'Let them give them to me'").

[28] *Ibid.*, ll. 32–35 (Sargon replies: "Should you give [these] four districts to Kilar, would he not become your equal, and what would you yourself be ruling over as a governor then?").

[29] Tiglath-pileser III: Tigl. III, p. 42, l. 5 (*Platteninschrift* I); p. 48, l. 4 (*Platteninschrift* II); p. 54, l. 5 (*Thontafelinschrift*). Sargon: Wi., p. 150, l. 71 (*Pavée des portes*); p. 98, l. 18 (*Prunkinschrift*).

[30] SAA 5, No. 17, ll. 4–7: "The king, my lord, told [me] the Itu'eans should be exempt; the bow field is exempt from straw and barley (tax)" (the translation slightly differs from the one given in SAA).

[31] S. Dalley, Iraq 47 (1985), pp. 40–41. For *murabbanu* as "horse-breeder/trainer", see *ibid.*, p. 41; and CTN 3, p. 173 *ad* II, 20.

[32] SAA 5, no. 215, ll. 21–22: in Mazamua were stationed 630 Assyrians soldiers and 800 Itu'eans and Gurreans.

essentially alter this picture. The numbers mentioned are generally low, the fugitives usually move to another Assyrian province, and a contrary movement towards Assyria from external areas is also attested[33]. Thus, the picture which emerges is that of a normal situation, and of a routine repressive practice.

Fiscal measures enhanced consensus not only through obvious immediate advantages deriving from tax exemptions or reductions, but also by stimulating local competition between conflicting parties and favouring the pro-Assyrian prevailing one. A recently re-edited letter shows that the debt-remission (*andurāru*) proclaimed in Babylon was not, as we might expect, generally welcome. A governor tells Sargon that some Babylonians are coming to him to protest for their loss of many debt-enslaved people; and suggests to threaten them with deportation[34]. The harshness of the governor, and the protest of the Babylonians, show that Sargon's aim was not only to adhere to the traditional Babylonian image of the king as dispenser of (economic) justice[35], but also to financially weaken the owners of large amounts of cash who had invested their capitals in loans. Sargon was obviously leaning on other social groups, which may easily be identified with the powerful Babylonian clergy. Its support unfailingly arrived: after Marduk-apal-iddina's sudden flight, Sargon was offered the remnants of the sacrificial meals and invited to enter Babylon[36] – a perfect parallel to the later triumphal approach of Cyrus to Babylon.

Finally, the removal of obstacles to trade allowed the prosecution of trade relations with hostile countries too. A small confirmation of what is stated in the Royal Inscriptions is to be found in a letter, which shows the Zikirtian king – an inveterate enemy of Sargon in the North-East – selling horses to Assyrian representatives[37]. Producers, owners, traders, and bankers, both of annexed or independent areas, who had had their activity hampered, were certainly the social targets of such measures devoted to solicit consensus.

At this point, we may try to draw some conclusions. We have noticed that a series of benefits, attested both in texts coming from outside Assyria and in Assyrian texts not strictly affected by propagandistic or celebratory aims, was given by Assyrian kings to external or recently annexed ruling classes. This flow was the factual background to portraying the image of a solicitous Assyrian king in Sargon's Royal Inscriptions. This image was turned to external and recently annexed countries in order to exalt the good qualities of Assyrian overlordship; and was ultimately aimed at fixing the concept of a "merciful" policy, which however had not been understood and had been contrasted by wicked enemies who, finally, had received their unavoidable punishment.

This image is a rather new feature of the Assyrian king, as opposed to the awesome and fierce images of Sargon's predecessors, Tiglath-pileser III included. Never before the positive aspects of Assyrian dominion had been so overtly declared. Thus, such an innovation must be attributed to changes of some sort in political reasonings, which had developed in Sargon's times or immediately before, on both Assyrian and non-Assyrian sides. Since what had changed was the depiction of the relations between the Assyrian king and the external kings or ruling classes, it may be easily inferred that also the concepts underlying these kinds of relations had changed.

As for the Assyrian part, the old and traditional scheme of an absolutely rigid conflict between Assyria and the external world, resulting in the fixed image of a king always frightful because faced always with rebels or enemies, was in Sargon's times felt as partially unnecessary. The political situation had developed in such a way that it was necessary to show that the Assyrian system was working *in favour* of its neighbours; and this depended ultimately on the growing conviction that it really did work in such a way.

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[33] For fugitives inside Assyria, see, e.g., SAA 1, nos. 23, 171, 179, 194, 235, 237, 240, 244, 245, 246; SAA 5, nos. 48, 79 (with the high number of 380 fugitives), 121, 218, 245. For fugitives towards Šubria (a well-known "sanctuary"), see SAA 5, nos. 32, 34, 52, 54, and obviously Borger, *Ash.*, p. 106, l. 34; towards Urarṭu, SAA 5, no. 36, and SAA 1, no. 30 (Rev. 3–5), which ironically shows an officer bearing a purely *Assyrian* name deserting to Urarṭu. For Urarṭian fugitives towards Assyria, SAA 5, no. 35, and again the quoted passage of Esarhaddon's text. For Karkemišian fugitives to Assyrian territory, see SAA 5, no. 183 (which will be subjected to a further study).

[34] SAA 5, no. 203, Rev. 14'–s. l.

[35] See simply the title *šar mīšarim* of the Babylonian kings, J.-M. Seux, *Épithètes royales akkadiennes et sumériennes*, Paris 1967, pp. 316–317 (cf. W.G. Lambert, *Nebuchadnezzar King of Justice*, Iraq 27 (1965), pp. 1–11).

[36] Lie, pp. 54–56, ll. 371–374. See also J. Brinkman, *Prelude to Empire*, Philadelphia 1984, p. 53.

[37] SAA 5, no. 169.

The turning point for such a development is surely marked by the victories of Tiglath-pileser against the Syro-Urartian alliance. Those dramatic times, in which the Syro-Anatolian states had gathered around Arpad, and had joined forces with the Urartian empire, were definitely over. The Assyrian victories had shown that the dangerous alliances of their enemies were ineffectual – a concept which since then permeated the Assyrian ideological framework, crystallizing in the *topos* of the ineffectual *kitru* of the enemies[38]. Thus, a widespread consciousness had developed that success depended on the cohesion of the Assyrian empire, that is of the various forces which cooperated to keep its unity – an idea reinforced by the lesson of the civil war stopped by Tiglath-pileser's ascent to the throne. Future clashes with external empires would have surely resulted in victories, just because of the readiness and effectiveness of the Assyrian king to care for his allies and because of his solicitous policies towards recently submitted individuals. Except for Babylon, and for limited areas in the west, such a result was effectively achieved. After Sargon's death, his son Sennacherib had to face only minor upheavals in the recently annexed areas, in spite of the extremely dangerous occasion of his father's death in the battlefield.

This Assyrian consciousness was superimposed on a disposition which had been prevailing in the political habits of external ruling classes. The necessity of Assyrian intervention to solve internal social competition or to eliminate external pressures had developed over a long time span: the most ancient example is that of the requested arbitration of Adad-nirari III in Syria[39] – which, despite its uniqueness due to the scarcity of sources of the times preceding Tiglath-pileser III, seems to indicate a general pattern in Assyrian politics. In this perspective, we may deduce that the benefits deriving from Assyrian intervention had become more and more evident to those leading groups who could gain advantages from it. These advantages materialized in a gradual replacement of the ruling classes: the Assyrian intervention supported some groups in countries not yet annexed, and inserted some selected groups drawn from the conquered ones in the ruling class of the empire. Thus, emerging *élites* in anti-Assyrian polities had the possibility of obtaining power with Assyrian support, either by weakening or by eliminating the local ruling class or royal family, and even preserving their local independence; or by defecting to the Assyrian side in case of overt conflict. On the contrary, reigning families and ruling groups needed Assyrian support to protect their power against emerging *élites* contesting their own dominant role.

Moving a step further from the single example of the Assyrian expansion, we must consider this socio-political mechanism of the whole near East. The groups which had opposed, or were still opposing, the Assyrian system had for a long time been forced to adopt similar methods. In practice, they had to look for help in other directions. Local leagues were easily recognized as ineffectual; and in this way the request for help from other imperial structures became absolutely necessary and finally unavoidable. The coalitions of Syro-Anatolian states leaded by Arpad, Sam'al, or Damascus, were the first, unsuccessful attempts; the connection of these coalitions with the Urartian empire on one hand, and on the other the various requests of help or alliance made by Syro-Palestinian and Anatolian polities to Egypt and to Phrygia, represent a further, though generally ineffectual, stage in this process.

Generally speaking, a propensity to rely on the strength and organisation of a major, supranational structure was increasing. In the broad framework of tightening international relations, the flow of ideological and practical benefits from the traditional centres of unified power to select groups of the peripheral areas solicited consensus towards the imperial structures. Ruling classes as yet not included in the empire became increasingly disposed to accept, or even to support directly, the expansion of a supranational structure. By supporting it, they tended to transform their concern for local independence and autonomy into the imperial acknowledgment of privileged spheres of competences inside the imperial structure itself. According to this perspective, the unification of the Near East in a supranational empire, first partially achieved by Sargon, was to become a political structural characteristic for many centuries to come.

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[38] See M. Liverani, *Kitru, katāru*, Mesopotamia 17 (1982), pp. 43–66; *Terminologia e ideologia del patto nelle iscrizioni reali assire*, in L. Canfora - M. Liverani - C. Zaccagnini (eds.), *I trattati nel mondo antico. Forma, ideologia, funzione*, Roma 1990, pp. 130–132.

[39] Pazarcik stela: see V. Donbaz, *Two Neo-Assyrian Stelae in the Antakya and Kahramanmaraş Museums*, ARRIM 8 (1990), p. 9, ll. 7–10.