

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF TIGLATH-PILESER III: NOVELTY OR CONTINUITY?

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Although the traditional habit has been to refer to the Sargonid empire, it is now admitted that the latter was really set up by Tiglath-pileser III, the first sovereign who succeeded in extending Assyrian domination over vast territories, divided into provinces headed by governors appointed by, and reporting to the central government. Sargon II successfully carried on the same policy and henceforth, though some alterations were made on the borders of outlying areas, the essence of the empire remained unchanged. However, was this deliberate purpose to dominate conquered territories permanently a new policy, quite different from the practice prevailing in the previous centuries, as it appears at first sight? I would like to present the best specialist of that period with a few remarks on the subject, without pretending to enlighten him, but rather with the hope of inspiring him with either a confirmation or a systematic refutation of these views.

The first point to be considered is the strange parallelism between the reigns of those who "founded" the empire. Both came to power through a "*coup d'Etat*" and even their real ancestors are unknown. While Tiglath-pileser III describes himself as the son of Adad-nirari III in one of his inscriptions (*KAHI*, 21), which is most unlikely, since 38 years elapsed between their respective reigns, he is referred to as the son of Assur-nirari V, his immediate predecessor, in the king lists. But these usually tend to describe all kings as their predecessors' sons, whereas B. Landsberger clearly showed that some of them were brothers.¹ However, in these lists, Assur-dan III is referred to as the brother of Shalmaneser IV, himself the son of Adad-nirari III, and we cannot rule out the possibility of Tiglath-pileser's being his predecessor's son in spite of J.A. Brinkman's hesitations to admit it.²

Similar uncertainties concern Sargon's ascendancy: he describes himself as the son of Tiglath-pileser III in the inscription published by E. Unger.³ This official document can raise the same doubts as in the previous case and some authors have suggested that he could have been the rebel *šakin māti* referred to in *ABL* 473.⁴ There is no evidence of this and it seems easier to admit, as J.A. Brinkman does, that he did not belong to the direct lineage and had adopted the name of *šarru*

1 *JCS* 8 (1954), 42-43.

2 *Prelude to Empire*, Philadelphia 1984, 40.

3 *Sargon II. von Assyrien der Sohn Tiglatpilesers III*, Istanbul 1933, 16 ff.

4 Cf. R.C. Thompson, *Iraq* 4 (1937), 35-42; W. von Soden, *ZA* 43 (1936), 255; H. Tadmor, *JCS* 12 (1958), 37, note 138, who thinks that the letter has been written later.

kênu, "legitimate king," precisely because he was not the one.⁵ Both Sargon and Tiglath-pileser could therefore have eliminated members of their own family before coming to power.

On the other hand, both found themselves confronted with the same political problems and took similar steps. In the early part of their reigns, they both deemed it necessary to interfere in Babylonia, although not with equal success. The drawn battle of Dêr (720 B.C.E.) did not enable Sargon to restore the Assyrian domination which Tiglath-pileser had imposed on it as early as 745, though the latter had then neither deposed Nabonassar nor occupied Babylon itself.⁶ However, these campaigns enabled both of them to ensure the safety of their own rear before taking action in Syria. Practically all territories approximately situated south of the Carchemish–Antioch line were placed by Tiglath-pileser under Assyrian control either by annexation or by forcing them to pay tribute. Sargon, while being obliged to interfere in the same areas, pushed his predecessor's achievement a stage further in Northern Syria or in the vicinity of Asia Minor, and in the last stages of their reigns, in 729 and 709 respectively, both succeeded in imposing themselves as Babylonian kings. At the end of these series of strangely similar campaigns, the Sargonids found themselves in control of a real empire which they tended to extend and centralize further. But one can wonder whether these achievements were the results of a deliberate purpose. Tiglath-pileser's first move seems to have been prompted by the consequences of his own "*coup d'Etat*" and, in this respect, the part played by the *turtânu* Shamshi-ilu must be taken into account.

This figure became an eponym under Shalmaneser IV in 780, Assur-dan III in 770 and Assur-nirari V in 752. Now, there is every reason to believe that the political situation deteriorated under the reign of Assur-dan III, who changed the eponyms' order and remained "in the country" (*ina mâti*) in 768 and 764.⁷ With the exception of Shamshi-ilu, none of the traditional officials appear on the eponyms list. This is probably the fact which caused the rebellion between 763 and 758 and it is typical to see Assur-nirari V remain "in the country" from 753 until 750 while restoring the traditional order. It may be the sign of a political reorganization and I had wondered⁸ whether these rebellions had not been fomented by the high officials of the realm. It would have been just the reverse of the 827 revolt caused by the small nobility, jealous of the privileges granted to high dignitaries, governors of the newly created provinces, wider and therefore wealthier. One must also take into account the fact that Shamshi-ilu's name and titles were hammered out on his inscription at Til Barsip, apparently after the

5 PKB, 245; *Studies Oppenheim*, 30–31, and *Prelude to Empire*, 45.

6 PKB, 231.

7 Though I admit with A.R. Millard and H. Tadmor, *Iraq* 35 (1973), 62, that the expression refers to the place where the king stood at the end of the year, even if a capital had been conquered before, many successive mentions might have a political significance. This is especially the case of Assur-nirari V. See hereafter.

8 P. Garelli–V. Nikiprowetzky, *Le Proche-Orient asiatique. Les empires mésopotamiens—Israël*, Paris 1974, 231.

Kalhu revolt in 746. But, judging by the reform of Assur-nirari V, one cannot rule out that the latter had been forced to separate from his *turtānu*, who would have fomented a rebellion, crushed by Tiglath-pileser.

Whatever happened, an important factor should be taken into consideration, and that is the suggestion made by A. Lemaire and J.-M. Durand to identify Shamshi-ilu as Bar Ga'yah, king of KTK (*kit(t)a/i/uka*), which would be Til Barsip.⁹ This suggestion is most likely to prove right in spite of the qualifications expressed against it and which cannot be examined in detail here.¹⁰ Supposing it right, Bar Gay'ah's three stelae and the Assyrian treaty concluded between Assur-nirari V and Mati-ilu, king of Arpad, could correspond to four changes of reigns. Stele III could be the oath taken by Atar-shumki, Mati-ilu's father, to Bar Ga'yah representing Adad-nirari III at the time when in 796 the frontiers of Arpad were fixed. The other two stelae, of undetermined order, would represent Mati-ilu's oaths to the Assyrian king at the time of the accession of Shalmaneser IV in 783 and Assur-dan III in 772. The treaty written in Assyrian was concluded between Mati-ilu and Assur-nirari V in 754. It is quite possible that in the first three cases, Assyrian treaties were also drawn up, similar to the 754 one. In this case, it is the Aramaean text which would be missing. But there is every reason to believe that Shamshi-ilu acted as the representative of the Assyrian king since he was still *turtānu*. This shows how important this character was, being an Aramaean king at Til Barsip, as well as an Assyrian general and governor of the province of Harran.

His example shows the nature of the relationship between Assyria and the Aramaean kingdoms in the eighth century B.C.E. King Zakkur of Hamath had extended his influence up to Hazrak (Hatarikka), half-way between Hamath and Arpad. Trapped in by a coalition formed by the kings of Que, Unqi, Malatya, Sam'al and Ben Hadad, the son of Hazael, king of Damascus, he was miraculously relieved by Adad-nirari III in 805. The Assyrian king makes his way to the South and gets the support of Tyre, Sidon as well as king Joash of Israel, anxious to cancel the treaty imposed by Hazael on his father. Damascus is forced to pay tribute, return the towns captured to Joash and grant him commercial advantages. Under Shalmaneser IV and Assur-dan III, military expeditions are directed to Damascus, but without great consequences, and twice against Hazrak, a strategic position on the way to the river Orontes. But the kingdoms continue to exist. Assyria is then threatened by Urartu, whose power is then on the ascent, and her own interest dictates a comparatively moderate attitude towards the Aramaean kingdoms.

The solution was to maintain under Assyrian control Arpad, the close neighbor who dominated the whole area between the land of the Euphrates and the river Orontes. The best thing for this purpose was to induce this neighbor to conclude agreements with the king of Til Barsip, who was at the same time an Assyrian general. But the latter would not then allege his Assyrian titles since he concluded as a sovereign his treaty with the king of Arpad. It is in his Assyrian inscription

9 *Les inscriptions araméennes de Sfiré et l'Assyrie de Shamshi-ilu*, Genève-Paris 1984.

10 Cf. E. Lipiński, *OLZ* 81 (1986), 351-354 and F.M. Fales, *RA* 80 (1986), 88-93.

that he could boast his titles, which show at the same time the plurality of offices: he was a general (*turtānu*), chief herald (*nāgīru rabū*), manager of the temples (*šatam ekurrāti*), commander of the large armies (*rab ummāni rapši*); he governed (*šāpiru*) the Hatti countries, i.e. Northern Syria, the Gutu area and the whole of Namri (near the Zagros). He did not even mention the king of Assyria and Kār-Šulmānašared was the town of his lordship (*āl bēlūtia*). Using the services of such a figure could make agreements with neighboring princes easier, but the position would remain uncertain. Assyrian domination depended on the respect of such treaties by independent sovereigns.

The 746 “*coup d’Etat*” changed the whole figure. Mati-ilu was no longer bound by his oath of allegiance to Assur-nirari V, since the king had been eliminated and if the *turtānu* Shamshi-ilu fell victim to the same purge, the attitude of the king of Arpad can be even better explained. He joined the coalition formed by Sarduri of Urartu which included Sulumal of Melitene, Tarhulara of Gurgum (Marash) and Kushtashpi of Kummuh. Practically all Northern Syria, from Arpad to Melitene, adhered to the coalition. It was utterly defeated, but Sarduri was able to escape.

The steps then taken by Tiglath-pileser are instructive. He annexed the territories between Arpad and the coast near Antioch and Hamath. All the others, including Sam'al, Carchemish, Damascus, Samaria and the Phoenician cities were left independent, though forced to pay tribute. In short, he annexed the nearest conquered territories, thus enabling him to cut off possible future enemies, and he imposed his authority on more remote sovereigns without deposing them. That is what he had done in Babylonia after seizing the power: he had annexed the areas along the Tigris down to the Uknu and the Persian gulf, while leaving Nippur under the control of Babylon, where apparently he did not even go.¹¹

In short, until 738, Tiglath-pileser had adopted a flexible policy, which after all was not so new. When Shalmaneser III had started his Syrian campaigns in 858, he had annexed the territory of his closest neighbor, Bīt Adini, turning Til Barsip into Kār-Šulmānašared, but he could not carry this annexation policy further because his opponents were too powerful, as the battle of Qarqar in 853 clearly showed, being in fact a real setback. Tiglath-pileser III followed the same plans, but the balance of forces in his favor enabled him immediately to annex the territories adjoining Bīt-Adini, where he posted permanent garrisons in order to launch faster counter strokes in case of need.

This did not always prove possible. For two years, from 737 until 735, Tiglath-pileser was forced to launch military campaigns against the Medes and Urartu, without significant results, except the fact that he ensured better protection of the realm in the areas most exposed to raids from Urartu. He unfolded his annexation plan in the Syro-Ephraimite war: Rezin of Damascus, Pekah of Israel and the Philistine cities formed a coalition which Ahaz of Judah refused to join, calling Tiglath-pileser to his aid. In 734, the latter invaded and immediately conquered the Philistine territories.

11 Cf. PKB, 231–232.

Now it is worth noting that, though he imposed six of his high officials as governors on these territories, they were not truly and properly annexed. In particular, such was the case for Byblos, Şimirra and Arqâ, who retained their own sovereigns, even though they were under the control of some *bēl piḫati*, a feature which shows that the presence of such officials cannot be considered as evidence of the annexation of a territory as an Assyrian province.¹² The annexation developed gradually as rebellions occasioned new campaigns. But they were not systematic, as exemplified by a list of tributaries dated to the late period of Tiglath-pileser's reign, which included the sovereigns of Byblos, Arvad, Ammon, Moab, Ashkelon, Judah, Edom, Gaza and Tyre.¹³ Through annexation and control of nominally independent territories an empire is slowly built up, but this does not reflect a systematic alteration of the previous expansion plans.

Sargon carried on the same policy in annexing cities like Samaria and Hamath which had rebelled. And from 715, he could pay attention to the northern border on which Urartu represented a permanent threat. He did not fight that kingdom straight out. In 714, his famous eighth campaign took place, which enabled him to weaken that opponent all around its borders, but more particularly in the West, towards Cilicia and Cappadocia, where he tried to take territories away. That is where he applied the policy adopted by Tiglath-pileser in Syria and Palestine. He managed to extend his domination over Tabal, Malatya and Gurgum, and he annexed Cilicia. Once again one sees a mixture of territories turned into provinces and kingdoms just paying tribute. However these successes encouraged a policy of unification which his successors endeavored to impose to the whole empire.

One can, however, wonder whether such a distinction between the founders of the Empire and the Sargonids is so clear-cut, when considering the deportations of populations. Without reaching the figures of Sennacherib, those ordered by Tiglath-pileser and Sargon affected several hundred thousand people.¹⁴ Strictly speaking, the differences are almost insignificant, but the spirit in which they were carried out, at least officially, is completely different. Both Tiglath-pileser and Sargon tried to treat the conquered people as their own subjects and B. Oded rightly recalls¹⁵ that they repeated the phrases used by Tiglath-pileser I, Assur-dan II and Shalmaneser III: "I counted them among the people of Assyria," in other words according to Sargon's Annals: "I imposed tribute and contributions on them similar to those paid by the Assyrians."¹⁶ Such sentences later disappeared, perhaps because the rise of Assyria, especially after its victory over Urartu, had increased its national pride and their sovereign's self-confidence. Here again one can find a complete change of attitude and behavior between the Sargonids and their predecessors.

12 Cf. *ANET*, 283–284 (1–34).

13 *ANET*, 282 (56–63).

14 Cf. B. Oded, *Mass Deportations and Deportees in the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, Wiesbaden 1979, 20.

15 Cf. B. Oded, *ibid.*, 81–85.

16 Cf. B. Oded, *ibid.*, 89.

All these particulars tend to qualify the opinion one generally has on the action and achievements of Tiglath-pileser III. Even though this sovereign was able to set up a *de facto* empire, dividing the conquered territories into provinces, it is not certain that he tried to change his predecessor's policy drastically along the lines of a preconceived plan. It is perhaps the success of the actions conducted in the traditional spirit of the past which accounted for the change in the political situation and induced his successors to draw new conclusions. The Assyrian Empire may have been the work of the Sargonids more than one usually thinks.

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