nally 19 m high date from the 3rd century BCE. They are the best fortifications of the Greek world. The Athena temple was built approximately 530 BCE. The theater, the buleuterion, gymnasium, and the Roman bath, the Byzantine church built on the temple of Athena and the harbor are in good condition. Assos was famous for its wealth of grain and a special stone which accelerated the decay of dead bodies (slack lime).

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Beate Kowalski

Assumption of Mary

→ Dormition and Assumption of Mary

Assumption of Moses

→ Moses, Testament of

Assyria

1. Assyria in the Bible

The proper name *ʾAššûr* is the Hebrew equivalent of the Akkadian word *Aššūr* which denotes a) Ashur, the supreme god of the Assyrians, b) the city of Asshur, the ancient capital and principal cult center of Assyria (modern Qalʿat Šerqāṭ), and c) the land of Assyria (Akkadian *māt Aššūr*).

In the Hebrew Bible, the name of the god Ashur is attested only in the name of the king Esarhaddon (*ʾĒsar-ḥaddon* < *Aššūr-aḫu-iddina* 2 Kgs 19 : 37; Isa 37 : 38; Ezra 4 : 2), the orthography of which reflects the phonetical change *š* > *s* in the Neo-Assyrian language. In Gen 2 : 14, the word is understood as a reference to the city, since the river Tigris is said to run "east of Asshur," but this is not really conclusive. The list of the descendants of Shem mentions *ʾAššûr* as the ancestor of the Assyrians; his brothers include Elam and Aram (Gen 10 : 22; 1 Chr 1 : 17).

In the majority of cases, *ʾAššûr* has a geopolitical meaning denoting Assyria as a country (*ʾereṣ ʾAššûr* Isa 7 : 18), in particular the Assyrian Empire which was the strongest political power in the Near East during the monarchical period of Israel and Judah (e.g., 2 Kgs 15 : 29; 17 : 6; Isa 10 : 5; 31 : 8; Hos 5 : 13; 8 : 9). In biblical texts postdating the fall of the Assyrian Empire by the end of the 7th century BCE, the word *ʾAššûr* is still frequently used as the name of a superior foreign power (e.g., Num 24 : 22, 24; Isa 10 : 24; 19 : 23; Hos 14 : 4; Mic 5 : 5; cf. 1QM I, 6). The name may be taken as purely symbolic in these cases; sometimes, however, it may, in fact, refer to the Persian Empire (as in Ezra 6 : 22 where *melek ʾAššûr* means the Persian king) or to the Seleucid rulers. In the Septuagint, apart from the books translated from Hebrew, the Greek equivalent Ἀσσυρία is the dwelling place of Tobias and his family (Tob 1). In Judith, it stands for the empire ruled by Nebuchadnezzar, which actually was Babylonia.

Almost two thirds of the occurrences of *ʾAššûr* belong to the compound "king(s) of Assyria," either in plural as a collective (*malkê ʾAššûr*; 2 Kgs 19 : 11, 17; Neh 9 : 32 etc.) or in singular (*melek ʾAššûr*) denoting individual kings. The following Assyrian kings are mentioned by name: Tiglath-Pileser III, also called Pul (744–727 BCE, 2 Kgs 15 : 19, 29; 16 : 7, 10; 1 Chr 5 : 6, 26; 2 Chr 28 : 20); Shalmaneser V (726–722 BCE, 2 Kgs 17 : 3; 18 : 9; cf. Tob 1 : 2, 13, 15–16); Sargon II (721–705 BCE, Isa 20 : 1), Sennacherib (704–681 BCE, 2 Kgs 18 : 13; 19 : 16, 20, 36; Isa 36 : 1; 37 : 17, 21, 37; 2 Chr 32 : 1–2, 9–10, 22; cf. Tob 1 : 15, 18); Esarhaddon (681–669 BCE, 2 Kgs 19 : 37; Isa 37 : 38; Ezra 4 : 2; cf. Tob 1 : 21–22) and Ashurbanipal (Ezra 4 : 10). In addition, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II (604–562 BCE) is called king of Assyria throughout Judith.

The image of Assyria in the Hebrew Bible is that of supreme political and military power. Assyria is never mentioned in an unequivocally positive tone, even though it can be seen as the "rod of my [i.e., God's] anger" against unfaithful Israel (Isa 10 : 5). In general, Assyria and its kings appear as invaders and suppressors of people (Isa 10 : 24; Hos 8 : 9), and the fall of Assyria is celebrated both as a fait accompli (Nah 1–3) and as an eschatological event (Isa 14 : 24–27; Ezek 32 : 22–23).

In prophetic literature, especially in Isa (7 : 18; 10 : 24; 11 : 11, 16; 19 : 23–25; 27 : 13; 52 : 4) and Hos (7 : 11; 9 : 3; 11 : 5, 11; 12 : 2), *ʾAššûr* appears frequently in parallelism with *Miṣrayim*, Egypt (cf. also Jer 2 : 18, 36; Mic 7 : 12; Zech 10 : 10–11; Lam 5 : 6). While in a few cases the reference may be made to an existing bipolarity of political powers – to Assyria and Egypt (Isa 7 : 18?), or to Seleucids and Ptolemies (Isa 19 : 18–25?) – this parallelism usually symbolizes the two slaveries of Israel: the first in Egypt and the second in Babylonia, sometimes prophesying a renewed exodus (Isa 11 : 16; Zech 10 : 10–11).

Martti Nissinen

2. Geography and Climate

See →Mesopotamia

3. Archaeology

In modern usage the term "Assyria" is employed in a general geographical-cultural-historical sense. Thus, on the one hand "Assyria" refers to the central region of Assyrian culture and history; in the 2nd and 1st millennium BCE it extended along the middle section of the Tigris, approximately between Jebel Hamrin and Mosul, corresponding roughly to the northern part of modern Iraq. In a broader sense, it may designate those territories, varying in size, that were governed by the kings of Assyria from about 1400 up to 609 BCE. With regard to cultural history, the terms "Assyria" or "Assyrian" express in the broadest sense a distinction from the Babylonian culture which dominated Southern Mesopotamia.

Before archaeologists began to systematically explore Assyria in the middle of the 19th century, our knowledge of Assyria, the Assyrians and Assyrian culture was restricted to the hints given in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, in Greek and Roman authors of classical antiquity, and in Arabic sources. Since the 13th century and increasingly since the 17th century, people traveling through the Orient attempted to locate the major Mesopotamian cities (e.g., Nineveh). During the 19th century the growing interest in human history, the search for the origins of the biblical tradition, the interest in different, particularly non-European, cultures, the desire for prestigious, exotic artifacts and – last but not least – political and economic interests encouraged investigation into the ancient Near East, and thus also Assyria.

The first extensive excavations focused primarily on the impressive ruins of the large Assyrian cities and capitals from the 9th to the 7th centuries BCE, Dur-Sharrukin (Khorsabad, P. E. Botta), Calah (Nimrud, A. H. Layard) and Nineveh (Kuyunjik, C. J. Rich, P. E. Botta; A. H. Layard, H. Rassam), Imgur-Enlil (Balawat, H. Rassam). Investigation of large-scale palaces, temples and the enormous military and civil constructions initiated our appreciation and understanding of the Assyrians' monumental symbolic architecture. Sculptural ornaments of stone in palaces and temples, the *orthostates* covered with narrative series in relief and extensive inscriptions, sculptures in the round representing apotropaic genies and portraits of Assyrian kings, as well as Ashurbanipal's immense library at Nineveh are among the most impressive discoveries of those excavations. In the 20th century, excavations in the royal capitals continued, but now with attention to the much smaller city of Asshur (mod. Qalʿat aš-Širqāṭ), from which Assyria derives its name. In the first millennium BCE, new capitals were built and the function of Asshur as the center of Assyria was reduced to religious and cultic affairs. Again, the excavators focused primarily on the temples and palaces, which are situated in the northern area of the town, yet they also investigated the residential regions of the city. Since 1950, excavations have been undertaken in Assyrian provincial centers and military bases, such as Til Barsip (Tell Ahmar), Dur-Katlimmu (Tell Sēḫ Ḥamad) or Harbe (Tell Huwera). This work has elucidated the organization of the Assyrian provincial system. Gradually scholars have paid more attention to aspects of everyday culture, i.e., the conditions of the population that are not revealed when one excavates monumental or public buildings. In the course of grand-scale surveys, the settlement structures have also been investigated – not only those in the central Assyrian region, but also those of the territories governed by the Assyrians.

Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum

4. Texts

The three main periods of Assyrian history reflect the three linguistic phases of the Assyrian language: Old, Middle and Neo-Assyrian. The local Assyrian vernacular was for the most part used in everyday texts like letters and legal and administrative documents. However, the term "Assyrian texts" is here understood in a broader sense, referring not only to texts written in the Assyrian dialect of Akkadian, but generally to texts written in Assyria. Literary, scholarly and religious texts and royal inscriptions were mainly written in a form of Babylonian, in the so-called Standard Babylonian. Furthermore the use of the Aramaic language increased during the 1st millennium BCE.

a. The Old Assyrian Period. The Old Assyrian period (2000–1750 BCE) is exceptional in that only a small number of texts, including royal inscriptions, come from the capital Asshur and Assyria proper. Predominantly the Old Assyrian texts come from the Anatolian city of Kanesh, modern Kültepe, about 1,000 km from the city of Asshur. Over 22,000 documents have been found so far and the excavations are still continuing with only one fourth of the 30 hectare mound excavated. Kanesh was an Assyrian trade colony for long distance trade in textiles and tin, and the texts are for the most part business documents and letters of the Assyrian merchants. The material culture of Kanesh is local, and without the text finds, the site would not have revealed its nature as an Assyrian trading outpost.

b. Middle Assyrian Period. A typical feature of the Mesopotamian culture is the many law codes of which the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi is the best known but not the earliest. The only known Assyrian law collection is the Middle Assyrian Laws. The law is known from a collection of tablets (labeled A–O) found in Asshur. Best preserved and

of most general interest for the study of ancient societies is Tablet A. The tablet deals with legal matters concerning women and includes regulations about dress. According to the Middle Assyrian law married women had to be veiled in the streets, as unmarried women and prostitutes were not allowed to be veiled.

The new structure of the society with the increased power of the king and central role of the palace is reflected in Middle Assyrian Palace Edicts, provisions concerning the conduct of palace personnel. The expansion of the territorial state was recorded since the reign of Tiglath-Pileser I (1115–1076 BCE) in a new genre of royal inscriptions, the annals, chronologically organized detailed accounts of the military exploits of the kings.

c. The Neo-Assyrian Empire. The vast majority of cuneiform texts were written on clay tablets or inscribed on stone on palace walls or stele. During the 1st millennium BCE, texts were also written in the Aramaic alphabetic script on perishable materials, like wax tablets and papyrus, but virtually all of these texts have disappeared.

The royal inscriptions of Assyria are the major source of the history of the era, and also for biblical history as the inscriptions record the relations of Assyria with Israel and Judah. The view of the royal inscriptions is balanced by a sizable corpus of Assyrian correspondence. The correspondence consists of some 3,000 items and falls into two main categories: letters from scholars and various religious authorities and political and administrative letters. The scholarly letters are mainly addressed to the kings Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. This material is central for understanding the ideological aspects of Assyrian kingship. Of the latter group of political and administrative letters about 1,300 can be attributed to the reign of Sargon II.

The letters from governors and other high officials to the king give a vivid inside view of the day to day running of the empire. The letters deal with a variety of topics in the administration of Assyrian provinces: supplying the workforce and materials needed for the major building projects of the empire, reallocation of deportees, agricultural matters, disputes inside the administration and military intelligence reports from the borders of the empire. The correspondence reveals the central role of the king in the administration of the empire.

The epistolary material is further augmented by legal and administrative documents, international treaties, royal grants and decrees, astronomical reports and oracular queries. Other texts like prophecies have lately been of great interest to biblical scholars. Assyrian texts are now to a large extent available in modern editions and new research has dramatically changed our view of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. The traditional view emphasizing the cruelty of Assyria has given way to a multifaceted view of an ancient empire that successfully ruled the Near East for nearly three centuries and constituted a model for later empires.

Many of the literary texts come from the Assyrian capital Nineveh where they had belonged to the library of King Ashurbanipal. Indeed, much of the Mesopotamian literature known to us originates from the Ashurbanipal Library. This library was systematically collected for Ashurbanipal and texts were copied in a unified format. Major parts of the texts are scholarly in nature, including omen collections, lexical and medical texts. The best known, however, are the literary works survived as copies from this library, most notably the great Mesopotamian epics, the *Enuma Elish* and the *Gilgamesh Epic*. The 11th tablet of the *Gilgamesh Epic* tells the story of the flood and the wording runs in close, often word to word, parallel with the biblical account.

The Nineveh finds were made already by the 19th century and unfortunately the exact find context of the texts was not recorded. Modern excavations in other capitals like Asshur and Calah and in several smaller Assyrian cities have revealed true archives and private libraries found in situ.

Raija Aulikki Mattila

5. History

Archaeological findings, monuments and written sources reflect Assyria's history in extremely varying quantity and perspective. Historians divide the nearly 1,500 years of Assyrian history into three chronological epochs, thus creating an historical construct. *Old Assyrian* refers to the period 2000–1750 BCE; the term *Middle Assyrian* covers the time 1400–1000 BCE; the period 1000–609 BCE is called *Neo-Assyrian*. These three epochs differ with regard to not only cultural and intellectual history, but also socio-economic and historical-political conditions, although one notices persisting traditions and strong continuity in all respects. Different ethnicities and cultures exerted influence on the region that was later to become the center of Assyria. Besides the Semitic-speaking groups (Akkadian and Amorite), the Hurrians lived here. The influence from Southern Mesopotamia, which was dominated by the Sumerians, and from neighboring Iran should also not be underestimated.

From our present state of knowledge, Assyria's history began 100 km south of Mosul in Asshur, situated on the western bank of the Tigris. The settlement had already existed for a long before the 2nd millennium BCE, when Assyria became an independent state, and the 1st millennium BCE, when the Assyrian Empire arose. We have only fragmentary information about the situation of the place and its surroundings in prehistoric times and in the early historical period. In the 3rd millennium BCE, there was a sanctuary of the goddess Ishtar, which attracted the interest of the greater

region. The inventory of this cultic building proves the connections with the area of Southern Mesopotamian culture, and at the same time it hints at independent developments in Northern Mesopotamia. The formation of two empires in the later 3rd millennium BCE – the empire of the kings of Akkad (23rd century BCE) and that of the kings of Ur (21st century BCE) – affected the city of Asshur as well, which at least temporarily lost its independence.

a. 2000–1500 BCE. The city of Asshur gained political autonomy with the end of the reign of the dynasty III of Ur, if not before this time. It then had the benefit of its favorable geographical location. The municipality of Asshur developed into a center of interregional trade between Iran, Southern Mesopotamia and Anatolia. The most important mercantile goods were tin from Iran, and wool and textiles from Mesopotamia. These goods were sold for iron ore, precious metals and semi-finished manufactured articles in Anatolia. Information about the development and function of the commercial empire is based on the approximately 22,000 "Kültepe texts" from the archives of Assyrian merchants in Anatolian trading stations. So far the most important site of these is *kārum* (Akkadian "trading centre") *kaneš* (modern Kültepe). A dense network of such large and small commercial centers (emporia) covered Anatolia and was connected with the parent city of Asshur by way of intermediate stations in Upper Mesopotamia. Contracts with the respective native rulers regulated the conditions of this trade with regard to all economic, political, legal, and pragmatic details. The city of Asshur benefited from the wealth which was streaming into and through the city thanks to this trade; it established itself as a powerful centre of commerce in Upper Mesopotamia. Reduced taxes were systematically granted to merchants coming from the towns of Southern Mesopotamia, which guaranteed a regular influx of goods from Babylonia.

The political organization of this trading state clearly differed both from the older and the contemporary forms of government elsewhere in Mesopotamia. Not territorial, but rather commercial interests defined its structure. The ruler was regarded as viceroy of the city-god Ashur and as the supreme representative of the city of Asshur. With regard to domestic affairs, however, he seems to have held more the position of a *primus inter pares* than that of an absolute ruler. Decisions regarding both domestic and foreign affairs were made by an assembly consisting of representative members of those families which were economically influential in the city of Asshur. The ruler generally acted on behalf of this municipal assembly. An annually replaced functionary was in charge of controlling economic affairs; the respective year was also named after him.

In 1850–1800 BCE, the political situation changed in the region along the Tigris, and neighboring municipal states gained influence. About 1830 BCE, the Assyrian emporium in *Kaneš* was in part destroyed by fire, and the delicate system of long-distance trade deteriorated. The city of Asshur was subjugated by the Amorite Shamshi-Adad I (1808–1776 BCE), king of the adjacent municipal state of Ekallatum, and became part of his empire which comprised the entire Upper Mesopotamia. Protected by Shamshi-Adad I, commerce with Anatolia was renewed, although under restricted conditions. The political situation within Asshur itself had changed as well: Shamshi-Adad I made use of the title "King" (Akkadian *šarrum*) and demonstrated his absolute claim for government by introducing titles of Babylonian rulers (as "King of All," for instance). With theological sophistication he laid emphasis on his claim by equating the city-god Ashur with the ancient Sumerian imperial god Enlil of Nippur. Moreover, he apparently had his ancestors included in the list of Assyrian kings in order to support the legitimacy of his reign in Assyria. After the death of Shamshi-Adad I, the history of Assyria and its hinterland becomes obscure, since we lack sources for this period. Although the Assyrian list of kings transmits the names of the kings of Asshur in an uninterrupted sequence, we know almost nothing about the political, social, and economic situation of the city and its surroundings.

b. 1500–1000 BCE. In the late 16th century BCE, as the Hurrian minor principalities formed the state of Mitanni under the sovereignty of a (grand) king, the city of Asshur was at least temporarily part of a large hegemonic power. But as the kings of Mitanni focussed their attention on Egypt and Hatti, the rulers of Asshur succeeded in initiating international contacts on their own with Kassite rulers in Babylonia and with the Egyptian Pharaoh, taking small step by small step. The Assyrian king Ashur-uballit I (1353–1318 BCE) emphasized his territorial claims by repeated military attacks against Mitanni, and he adopted the title of "King of the Land of Asshur." This formed the material and ideological foundation of an independent state named "Assyria."

Expansion of territory became an important instrument of the Assyrian kings' political power. Long-distance trading, which had been the main source of Assyrian revenue for a long time, became nearly insignificant. Instead the community focused on agriculture and compensated the lack of raw materials and resources by conquering additional regions. This new claim for territory is accompanied by a fundamental reorganization of the community's administration and policy. The king ruled with absolute power, responsible only to the city-god. A complex economic bureaucracy and a

well-organized territorial administration now characterize the Assyrian realm. Apparently, administrative practices of ancient Assyrian times were combined with structures of administration common to Upper Mesopotamian kingdoms. Members of the royal family or members of the old influential families were appointed to the most important positions. As a rule, conquered territories first received the status of vassals and only were gradually integrated in the Assyrian Empire and provincial system. This development reached a first climax during the 13th century with Adad-nirari I (1297–1265 BCE), Shalmaneser I (1264–1234 BCE), and Tukulti-Ninurta I (1233–1197 BCE). Hanigalbat, the centre of the former kingdom of Mitanni, was definitively conquered, and Assyria's realm of influence now extended to the river Euphrates in the west, thus directly bordering on Hittite country. To the north and to the east, Assyrian rulers pressed forward against the tribes living in the mountains. In ca. 1215 BCE, they conquered Babylon. This first zenith of Assyria's territorial power is reflected in a number of ambitious enterprises, the most momentous being the foundation of the new capital and residential city of Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta (Telūl alʿAqār) by Tukulti-Ninurta I. This undertaking failed, however, just before it was finished because of domestic political resistance and the murder of Tukulti-Ninurta.

The collapse of the Hittite kingdom, the shifting of population in the Syrian area thereafter, and domestic problems restricted Assyria's attempt at expansion during the 12th century BCE. Nevertheless, already Tiglath-Pileser I (1115–1076 BCE) was in a position to extend the borders of the Assyrian realm. The Aramaic groups within the population had begun to pose problems. Meanwhile, they had organized minor communities in the area of the Upper Khabur and along the Euphrates, and they represented a latent danger to the borders of the Assyrian Empire and its trade.

c. The 1st Millennium BCE until the Fall of the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrian kings' military campaigns during the 11th and 10th centuries BCE were regularly directed towards the north western area with the intention to re-establish the contacts with the Mediterranean region. In addition, the attempt at further expansion was aimed at the regions in the north and north east (Zagros), which were abounding in natural resources. Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE) and his son Shalmaneser III (858–824 BCE) subdued the Levant. Spoil seized during the campaigns as well as tributes and taxes from the conquered regions became Assyria's most important economic sources. Population deportation, a practice that was a common instrument of Assyrian imperial policy, was intensified. Precious metals, wood, ivory, manufactured articles of any kind, but especially men capable of labor – as well as highly specialized craftsmen and engineers – made it possible for the Assyrian kings to exhibit a new dimension of luxury and splendor. Ashurnasirpal founded a new capital, Calah (Nimrud), situated on the eastern bank of the Tigris, and it was to become the center of the Assyrian empire for nearly 150 years. The place had already been the residence of an Assyrian provincial governor during the 2nd millennium BCE; but only in the 1st millennium BCE was a new type of city created covering an area of more than 350 hectares and including an artificially constructed citadel mound. About the same time, the kingdom of Urartu arose in the region between Lake Van and Lake Urmia; this was to become a constant, dangerous adversary of Assyria until the end of the 8th century BCE.

During the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (745–727 BCE) Assyria's imperialism gained a new universal quality. The system of Assyrian provinces was extended, and the deportation of groups of subdued nations intensified. Babylonia, Media/Persia, Urartu, Southern Anatolia, Syria, and Palestine were the targets of his imperial policy. Tiglath-Pileser III conquered Babylonia; in the preceding decade the relationship to Babylonia had been characterized more by cooperation. Tiglath-Pileser III himself assumed the title of "King of Babylonia." During the reign of his son and successor Shalmaneser V (727–722 BCE), Israel became part of the Assyrian Empire. The circumstances of Sargon II's enthronement remain obscure. Sargon II carried on Assyria's imperial policy; he succeeded in definitively subduing Assyria's main adversary, Urartu. He founded a new capital, Dur-Sharrukin (Khorsabad) and thus relocated Assyria's political center, which had been situated in Nimrud, to a place further north.

Sargon II was killed in 705 BCE, during a campaign directed against Anatolian Tabal. This event troubled caused great concern for his son and successor Sennacherib (704–682 BCE) so that he eventually abandoned his father's capital Dur-Sharrukin and relocated the Assyrian royal capital to Nineveh. The hydraulic constructions that were made in the course of the city's rebuilding belong to the Assyrian kings' most expensive technical undertakings. During his reign Sennacherib pursued the imperial policy at the borders of the kingdom as well. In 689 BCE conflicts concerning the leadership in southern Mesopotamia accumulated: In the past the Babylonians had already tried repeatedly to bring the Assyrian dominance to an end. Afterwards Sennacherib conquered the city of Babylon in 689 BCE and devastated it completely. As expected, this added a new religious and ideological dimension to the military-political conflict between Asshur and Babylon.

Sennacherib's son Esarhaddon (681–669 BCE) tried to abolish this act of hubris by rebuilding

Babylon and re-establishing cultic practices. At the zenith of power the Assyrian Empire included Mesopotamia and the Fertile Crescent, parts of Egypt, Southern Anatolia and the west of Iran. But structural problems within this enormous empire became increasingly visible. The exterior border lines were under constant threat, for example, from the Scythians and Cimmerians in the north, the Mannean tribes in the Zagros mountains, by the revolt in the Levant which Egypt had encouraged, and by Elam's support of Babylonia.

During Ashurbanipal's reign (669–631 BCE) the Assyrian Empire managed to remain somewhat stable for about two decades by means of military operations. Domestic problems, however, (especially the conflict with Ashurbanipal's brother Shamash-shum-ukin, who had been appointed king of Babylon) resulted in internal destabilization, culminating in the chaos that accompanied the succession to the throne. There were rebellions in vast parts of the Assyrian Empire, primarily in southern Mesopotamia. There resistance against Assyria had been stimulated and strengthened by the Chaldaean Nabopolassar. In the course of just a few years "Assyria" was reduced to its central region on the banks of the Tigris and the western regions up to the Euphrates. In 614 BCE Median forces sacked and destroyed the city of Asshur. During the following years the remaining major cities in the Assyrian central region were subjugated as well. In 609 BCE the Assyrian Empire came to a definitive end with the conquest of the city Haran by Babylonian and Median forces and the death of the last Assyrian king, Ashur-uballit II.

6. Society, Religion, and Culture

The inhabitants of Assyria and its surroundings called themselves "men of Asshur." They were subjects of the king of Assyria and therefore at the same time subjects of the god Ashur. When Assyria became an independent state, further ethnic groups were added to the Assyrians, yet they too were considered "people of the land of Asshur." The Assyrian spoke a variant of Akkadian called "Assyrian," although in the 1st millennium BCE, the Aramaic language increased in importance. Part of the population settled permanently within cities and rural communities, while the rest was committed to a nomadic or semi-nomadic way of living. The society consisted of different social classes defined by their level of freedom or bondage (dependency, slavery, or temporary slavery due to economic misfortune) and by different degrees of socio-economic influence.

The family, led by a male chief, was the most important social institution. It formed an economic unit which might be integrated into larger units, e.g., the palace or the sanctuary. Besides agricultural activities, craftsmanship and trading made up the main fields of professional activities. Although within Assyrian society there always existed forms of private property, the population's labor was essentially at the disposal of the state (i.e., its central institutions of the palace and temple) – either directly (by compulsory labor) or indirectly (by taxation).

Whereas during the period of the ancient Assyrian trading empire the king's power was restricted by municipal-communal institutions like the city hall or the city assembly, from the Middle Assyrian times on the royal palace became the ideological, political, and economic centre of the empire. These palaces, which were as monumental as they were expensive, represented the Assyrian king's omnipotence by both their enormity and their decorations, which consisted of precious and symbolic materials and narratives in relief. In addition, financially and politically influential family clans, whose members in part held political positions, were active in the economy. Their influence may be traced back to ancient Assyrian traditions, although the basis and form of the Assyrian economic system had fundamentally changed. After the decline of the ancient Assyrian trading empire, the economy was based on agricultural products, taxation, and compulsory services, as well as spoils of war, tributes and (long-distance) trade. A highly specialized bureaucracy and a carefully organized system of provincial administration secured control of these resources.

The king was the head of the Assyrian state. The ruler's position was legitimized both transcendentally and immanently. Apparently, in Assyria only members of one family had a claim to the royal throne. Apart from one exception to the rule, the throne was handed down within the male line of descent of this family (chiefly from the father to the son). Being an absolute ruler, the king not only functioned as an intermediary between men and the gods; in his own person he also combined supreme political, military, legal, and religious powers. In ancient Assyrian times his power of authority was restricted by the municipal assembly. In later epochs the king is surrounded by a group of men who had important functions in government; among these were the supreme general, the grand vizier, the principal cupbearer, and the leading herald. An extensive royal household guaranteed that the royal court functioned well. Wise men exerted an immense influence on political decisions at the Assyrian court. They were specialized in different fields of knowledge, and the Assyrian kings consulted them regularly.

As the independent state came into being, the army increasingly gained importance. It had been conceived in part as a standing army probably already in Middle Assyrian times. Persons rendering seasonal military service, mercenaries, and prison-

ers of war completed and extended these forces. Annual campaigns made it necessary to spend enormous means for maintaining the troops. Even though the king was the army's official commander-in-chief, the multitude of military campaigns and both cultic and domestic obligations made him delegate the leadership of these military excursions to his confidents. In return they were entrusted with landed estates and provincial administration.

With regard to administration the Assyrian domain was divided into provinces. Each had a center of its own already in Middle Assyrian times. A well established network of public roads and a hierarchical military-civil administration secured the connections between the periphery and the political center of the empire.

Apart from institutions of political organization (structures of administration), the establishment of norms (e.g., of the metric system) contributed to the unification of the Assyrian empire. The chronological system differed from the Sumerian and Babylonian traditions inasmuch as the individual calendar years were named after a person (eponym). The choice of the eponym was directly tied to the socio-economic position of his family. In Neo-Assyrian and presumably already in Middle Assyrian times, the names of the years were reserved for functionaries of national administration. From this time on, the ruler after his ascension to the throne was the first eponym. The sequence of eponym years was fixed in (eponym) lists. Legal documents, administrative texts, letters, and royal inscriptions were dated exactly. Together with the list of Assyrian kings, the eponym lists were the basis of Assyrian chronology. These lists allow us to reconstruct the history of the empire with relative precision.

As in all ancient Near Eastern communities, religion played an important part in Assyrian culture as well. Available sources, however, throw light primarily upon the official religious practice of the state; personal piety and private cultic activities are known only to a limited extent. The polytheistic nature of Assyrian religion was reflected in a differentiated cultic system. A hierarchy of cultic professionals and economically independent sanctuaries were characteristic of Assyria as well. The Assyrian king was expected to regularly attend the cultic institutions. Building activities, donations, and the establishment of new institutions are traditional themes of Assyrian royal inscriptions. Being the supreme priest of the god Ashur, the king also had a fixed position among cultic personnel.

The organization of the Assyrian pantheon essentially corresponds to common Mesopotamian traditions. Thus, we regularly find cults of major deities such as Ishtar, Ninurta, Sîn, Shamash, Ea or Enlil, in the major Assyrian cities, above all in Asshur. Contrary to the practice in Southern Mesopotamia, however, the god Ashur presided over the pantheon. Originally, Ashur had been the city-god of Asshur, having local – at most regional – relevance. But with the rise of the Assyrian independent state he gained a new quality, becoming the "Assyrian state/imperial god." This development was probably initiated when attributes of the god Enlil were transferred to Ashur during the reign of Shamshi-Adad I. Since Middle Assyrian times this syncretism is explicitly theologically confirmed, as Ashur is equated with the supreme Babylonian deity, Marduk, on the one hand, and with Anshar, the father of deities, on the other. He not only rises to the leading position in the Mesopotamian pantheon, but he is also found at the beginning of creation. Possibly, it is the vague nature of this god's personality (there are, for instance, no mythological narratives about him that have come down to us) that made him extremely successful as he combined other deities' aspects within his own identity. His role as the Assyrian ruler's god may be traced back to Old Assyrian times: the ruler of Asshur considered himself to be viceroy of the god Ashur. This commissary relationship was an important basis of legitimating Assyrian imperialism. In contrast to other deities who were worshipped in many places, the worship of Ashur focused on the city of Asshur since Middle Assyrian times. In Assyrian religious ideology the god's temple was taken to be the center of the world and of the Assyrian cosmos – and as a symbol of the cosmic order in general. It was not only the sanctuary of the god Ashur, but also included small chapels for other major deities of the pantheon.

Within Assyrian religion it was above all Ishtar who had a prominent position beside Ashur. In different hypostases she was worshipped in the central Assyrian region in three large sanctuaries, namely at Arbela, Nineveh, and Asshur. In addition, there are a number of minor cultic locations, where to some extent she was worshipped in the shape of other goddesses. Besides Ninurta and Shamash, Ishtar also plays an important part in Assyrian royal ideology in the 1st millennium BCE. Her sanctuary at Arbela was a place where people frequently sought prophetic oracles.

There is much less information about private forms of cultic activities and personal piety in the various classes of the population. The names of the Assyrians reflect the polytheistic nature of Assyrian religion. Evidence from private houses attests mainly to magic practices intended to protect against the vicissitudes of life. Special attention was focused on the king in this respect. Assyrian rulers employed the facilities of divination when they were faced with a decision. This is best documented in the time of the Sargonid dynasty. Because sources with comparable structures are lacking, it is impossible to say whether the importance of divina-

tion within political procedures is a phenomenon typical of this special era only. For the most part kings consulted practitioners of extispicy and astrologers (they promoted the latter during the 1st millennium BCE) when they made decisions on both domestic and foreign affairs. Prophetic oracles were of special interest to the king personally since they were considered to be a special form of direct communication between the king and the deity. We find a structural complement in the Assyrian rulers' letters addressed to a deity. They are formalized descriptions of the royal *res gestae* which are stylized as if the rulers were rendering an account of their actions in the presence of the deity who had granted them kingship.

A characteristic of Assyrian royal inscriptions is that they describe in detail not only military campaigns but also non-sacral royal building programs. We find analogies to this in the narrative decorations in the palaces. Authorized by Assyrian kings, these accounts describe aspects of Assyrian government and power politics. The Assyrians' reputation of being a nation of cruel warriors is based on these works. However, this reputation is unfounded inasmuch as it downplays Assyria's manifold social achievements.

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7. Assyria and the Bible

a. Israel and Judah in Assyrian Records. Israel enters the Assyrian historical records in the inscriptions of King Shalmaneser III (858–824 BCE) who continued the expansion of Assyria towards the west, begun by his predecessor Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE). The first historical source recording an encounter of Assyria with Israel is the Kurkh Monolith, i.e., Shalmaneser III's account of the battle of Qarqar (Ḫirbet Qerqūr) in Syria, by the river Orontes, in the year 853 BCE, mentioning "Ahab, the Israelite" (Akk. *Aḫabbu Sirʾialāia*) as one of the twelve kings from Syria and Phoenicia he defeated. The alliance was led by Adda-Idri (Hadad-Ezer) of Damascus and Irhulenu of Hamath. The event is not mentioned in the Hebrew Bible; whether Adda-Idri should be equated with the Ben-Hadad in 1 Kgs 20–22 is unlikely (Pitard: 114–25).

Twelve years later, in 841 BCE, Shalmaneser III is said to have received tribute from Baʿal-Manzer, king of Tyre, and Jehu, "son of Ḫumri" (*Iāūa mār Ḫumri*). The tribute of Jehu is also mentioned in Shalmaneser III's Black Obelisk, which depicts Jehu kissing the ground before the feet of the Assyrian king. The designation of Jehu, king of Israel, as "son/descendant of Ḫumri" indicates that the Assyrians, against the biblical account of Jehu's revolt (2 Kgs 9), saw him as a descendant of the Omride dynasty (*Bīt Ḫumri*).

Joash, king of Israel, is probably referred to in a stele found at Tell ar-Rimāh, which gives an account of the campaign of Adad-nirari III (810–783 BCE); according to the stele, Mariʾ of Damascus and Joash of Samaria (*Iūʾāsu Samerināia*), together with the rulers of Tyre and Sidon, paid tribute to him, presumably in the year 797 BCE (Tadmor 1973; cf. Weippert 1992). In another inscription, Adad-nirari III lists "the land of Ḫumri," i.e., Israel, among the nations subdued by him. In the Hebrew Bible, 2 Kgs 13 : 25 describes the confrontation between Joash and Ben-Hadad, the contemporary king of Damascus, who may be identical with Mariʾ (Millard 1987–1990); however, there is no mention of Joash's tribute to the Assyrian king.

Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727 BCE), also called Pul(u) in Babylonia as well as in the Hebrew Bible (2 Kgs 15 : 19; 1 Chr 5 : 26), reorganized the military and provincial organization of Assyria and, by means of annual military campaigns, increased Assyria's control in the Near East, developing it into a full-scale empire. In his several inscriptions (Tadmor 1994), he gives an account of his military and political activities in Syria-Palestine. Menahem, the Samarian (*Meniḫimme Samerināia*), is mentioned in two inscriptions among Syrian, Phoenician, and even Tabalean and Arabian rulers who paid tribute to Tiglath-pileser III; it has usually been assumed that this happened in 738 BCE when the Syrian cities of Arpad, Kullani and Hatarikka (biblical Hadrach) were annexed as Assyrian provinces, but the evidence does not unambiguously support this dating (for different views, see Loretz/Mayer; Tadmor 1994: 274–76).

According to the Hebrew Bible (2 Kgs 15 : 19–20), "King Pul of Assyria came against the land," and Menahem, King of Israel, gave him a thousand talents of silver. The tribute-paying is in line with the Assyrian records, which, however, never indicate that Tiglath-Pileser III would have set foot in Israel by that time. A few years later, however, he marched south west to the Wadi of Egypt (*naḫal Muṣri*, modern Wadi el-Arish). The subjugation of Gaza in 734 BCE was followed by a two-year siege of Damascus, whose king Raḫianu (Aramaic *Raḏyān*, biblical Rezin) had attempted to form an anti-Assyrian alliance. Damascus fell in 732 BCE, and as the result of the campaigns of 734–732 BCE, Syria-Palestine was brought under direct control of Assyria. According to both the Hebrew Bible (2 Kgs 15 : 29–30; 1 Chr 5 : 26) and the inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III, Israel (*Bīt Ḫumria*) was reduced to a rump state consisting of little more than the capital Samaria, and a considerable number of the population was deported; the desolation of Galilee is visible also in the archaeological record (Gal). Pekah (*Paqaḫu*), king of Israel was killed or overthrown and replaced by Hoshea (*Awsēaʾ*); Tiglath-Pileser III claims to have installed Hoshea, while 2 Kgs 15 : 30 says he conspired against Pekah and killed him.

Tiglath-Pileser III's campaigns had an effect even on Judah: the first king of Judah appearing in

the Assyrian records is Ahaz (*Iaū-ḫāzi*) mentioned in a long list of tributary kings from the year 729 BCE. The *Azrī-Iāu* mentioned in an inscription of Tiglath-Pileser III was formerly identified with Azariah, king of Judah, but this assumption was based on an erroneous joining of a fragmentary tablet to the inscription, providing the name with the attribution "Yaudi;" the person in question may actually be the king of Hatarikka (thus Na'aman 1995). The Assyrian sources have nothing to tell about the anti-Assyrian alliance of Aram and Israel who, according to the Hebrew Bible, attacked against Judah ca. 735 BCE (the so-called "Syro-Ephraimite war"; 2 Kgs 16 : 5 and Isa 7 : 1–9), neither do they report the encounter of Ahaz and Tiglath-Pileser III in Damascus related in 2 Kgs 16 : 10–18.

The fall of Samaria in 722 BCE is recorded by the Assyrians, but there is a discrepancy between the sources about who actually conquered the city. The Babylonian Chronicle says Shalmaneser V (726–722 BCE) ruined Samaria, while Sargon II (721–705 BCE) in his inscriptions repeatedly lays the claim of having destroyed the city, calling himself "the conqueror of Samaria and the whole land of Bit Ḫumria." The Hebrew Bible is no less ambiguous; according to 2 Kgs 18 : 9–10, Shalmaneser V besieged Samaria for three years, but it is not clear whether Shalmaneser V or Sargon II is referred to as *melek ʾAššûr* in 2 Kgs 17 : 5–6, 24–27; 18 : 11. Obviously, the exact historical circumstances were not clear to the biblical writer who, according to Tadmor, mixed up two events: the conquest of Samaria by Shalmaneser V in 722 BCE, and the renewed capture of Samaria by Sargon II in 720 BCE (Tadmor 1958; Cogan/Tadmor: 199–200; cf. Becking 1992; Younger 1999; for a different view, see Na'aman 1990).

Both the inscriptions of Sargon II and the Hebrew Bible refer to a mass deportation of the inhabitants of Israel to Assyria. The deportations of Israelites – both by Tiglath-pileser III and by Sargon II – result in a number of Hebrew names in Neo-Assyrian documents from different parts of the empire, including Halah (*Ḫalaḫḫu*), Gozan (*Guzāna*) on the river Habur and the "cities of the Medes" mentioned in 2 Kgs 17 : 6; 18 : 11 (Becking 1992: 61–93; 2002; Younger 1998; Oded). Some of these people occupy prestigious positions in the military and civil administration. The repopulation of Samaria with people from Babylonia related in 2 Kgs 17 : 24 cannot be directly reconciled with Assyrian sources; however, Sargon II mentions in his annals to have settled certain Arab tribes in Samaria, and there is some further evidence of Assyrian deportations to Samaria (Na'aman/Zadok).

The inscriptions of Sargon II do not mention Judah, but a letter to him reports the entering of a Judean emissary to Calaḫ with a tribute (Parpola 1987: 92). Dalley (2004) has presented some evidence for good relations between Assyria and Judah at this time, most importantly the royal tomb excavated at Nimrud (ancient Calaḫ) in 1988–1989. In the tomb two female bodies were found, together with inscribed objects belonging to Iabâ, the queen of Tiglath-Pileser, and Atalia, the queen of Sargon. Dalley takes it to be probable that both names are Hebrew and the Assyrian kings, thus, had Judean wives (1998; 2004); however, the Hebrew origin of the names and, hence, the ethnicity of the queens, is not certain (Achenbach; Younger 2002).

After the death of Sargon II, his son Sennacherib (705–681 BCE) undertook in 701 BCE a campaign to the West in order to quell a revolt of several Syrian and Palestinian rulers, Hezekiah of Judah (*Ḫazaqi-Iāu Iaudāia*) among them, against Assyrian dominion. According to the inscription of Sennacherib, he captured 46 fortified cities and carried off 200,150 people from Judah. The most important of these cities was Lachish (cf. 2 Kgs 18 : 14, 17), the capture of which is presented iconographically on the wall reliefs of Sennacherib's palace (Uehlinger 2003). The biblical (2 Kgs 18 : 13–16) and the Assyrian records tally remarkably with each other about the conquest of the Judean cities and the heavy tribute Hezekiah paid to Sennacherib, thus retaining the restricted independence of Judah as a vassal state of Assyria. The alleged siege of Jerusalem related in 2 Kgs 18 : 17–19 : 36 par. Isa 36–39 (cf. 2 Chr 32 : 1–23), ending with a miraculous defeat of the Assyrian army, presents more historical problems (for different interpretations, see Gonçalves). Sennacherib says to have locked Hezekiah up "like a bird in a cage." While this expression is traditionally interpreted in the light of the biblical account as a reference to the siege of Jerusalem (Gallagher), many scholars now interpret it as denoting a blockade which required only a minor military operation, denying the actual siege (e.g., Massmann; Mayer; Knauf).

There is no direct reference to the death of Sennacherib in Assyrian sources, but 2 Kgs 19 : 37 par. Isa 37 : 38 tells that, while worshipping in the temple of his god Nisroch (i.e., Ninurta? cf. Uehlinger 1999), he was murdered by his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer who then escaped to the land of Ararat. This is in reasonable agreement with information deductible from cuneiform records, according to which the murderer of Sennacherib was his eldest son Arda-Mullissi (cf. MT *ʾAdrammelek*) whom his younger son Esarhaddon had replaced as the crown prince and who, therefore, incited a civil war (Parpola 1980). Moreover, Assyrian prophecies and inscriptions related to Esarhaddon's rise to power not only indicate that the rebelling brothers were two, but also that they fled to an unknown land (Nissinen 1998: 14–30).

During the reigns of Esarhaddon (681–669 BCE) and his son Ashurbanipal (668–627 BCE), the

Assyrian Empire was at its height, and Judah remained a vassal state of Assyria. Both kings mention Manasseh, king of Judah (*Menasê/Minsê šar Iaudī*), once in their inscriptions, Esarhaddon among 22 kings who contributed to his building projects, and Ashurbanipal among tribute-payers and military supporters on the occasion of his Egyptian campaign in the year 667 BCE. These are the only references of Judah in the Assyrian sources from this period; this may indicate a lack of conflicts and the loyalty of Manasseh to his Assyrian overlords during his long reign. This was also the period of the thorough establishment of the Assyrian cultural influence in Judah.

b. The Legacy of Assyria in the Bible. Due to its long period of supremacy in the Near East, Assyria left an enduring cultural and religio-political heritage to the contemporary and subsequent civilizations within its broad sphere of influence. The fall of Assyria at the end of the 7th century BCE by no means terminated the Assyrian cultural impact. The transfer of the political power to the Babylonians and later, in the 6th century BCE, to the Achaemenids, did not bring about a fundamental change in the religio-political structures and the underlying royal ideology.

The highly developed Assyrian military strategy, as well as the sophisticated administrative structure, was the foundation of the military and civil organizations of the Babylonians and the Achaemenids, and even those of Byzance and Ottoman Turkey. The heritage of Assyria, however, was not merely of military and political, but also of intellectual and religious nature. The Babylonian wisdom and literature was sheltered, promoted and mediated by the Assyrians, and Assyria was the channel through which the Mesopotamian cultural influence spread both to Persia and to the West: Syria-Palestine, Asia Minor and, what is often ignored Greece and Classical Antiquity (Lanfranchi; Panaino; Rollinger; Parpola 2003). Even after the fall of the Assyrian Empire, the Mesopotamian religious tradition lived on in Mesopotamia and Syria, leaving perceptible traces in early Christianity, Gnosticism (Parpola 2001) and Islam (Hämeen-Anttila).

Assyrian cultural hegemony was established by means of both diplomacy and military force. The long political and cultural influence of Assyria on Israel and Judah (Spieckermann; Cogan) finds manifold reflections in the Hebrew Bible. The Assyrian treaty practice and ideology was introduced in Israel and Judah when their rulers paid tribute to Assyria as vassal kings. It is evident from the close parallelism of Deuteronomy and the Neo-Assyrian treaties that the ancient Near Eastern treaty ideology, especially in its Assyrian form, served as the model of the biblical theology of covenant (Weinfeld; Veijola; Steymans; Otto). Moreover, the close affinity of the biblical legislation to the Mesopotamian law collections – Book of Covenant (Exod 20 : 23–23 : 19) to the Code of Hammurabi (Wright) and Deuteronomy to the Middle Assyrian Laws (Otto) – suggests a more or less direct literary dependence.

Recently, the Assyrian prophetic oracles (Parpola 1997) have established themselves as a primary point of comparison for biblical prophecy. The affinities between Assyrian prophecy and the Hebrew Bible are manifold and often due to the common cultural background (Nissinen 1993; Weippert 2001). Nevertheless, the characterization of Assyria in Isa 1 corresponds to the image promulgated by the Assyrians themselves (Machinist), and the similarities between the Assyrian oracles and Isa 40–55 imply a close cultural contact during the Babylonian exile. The same is true for the conspicuous familiarity of Ezek 1 with Assyrian and Babylonian iconography (Uehlinger/Müller Trufaut).

The wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible has plenty of largely still unexplored cognates in Mesopotamian wisdom, hymns, prayers and lamentations. For instance, the Song of Solomon has a very close affinity to the Neo-Assyrian *Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmētu*, which gives new relevance to the quest for the precursors of biblical love poetry in the Mesopotamian sacred marriage tradition (Nissinen 2001). Mesopotamian mantic wisdom, known to us from Neo-Assyrian texts such as the *Underworld Vision of an Assyrian Prince*, belongs to the roots of apocalypticism (Kvanvig 1988), to which also the post-factum predictions in the literary predictive texts (deJong Ellis 1989), of which the Marduk Prophecy and the Šulgi Prophecy derive from Neo-Assyrian sources, contribute.

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8. Literature

Reputed in Milton for its kings' "wealth and luxurie" (*Paradise Lost* 1.722) and its geographical expanse (*Paradise Regained* 3.269–79), the Assyrian Empire is mainly viewed negatively in Western literature. Dante displays on the purgatorial terrace of pride the murder of Sennacherib by his sons and the flight of the routed Assyrians, together with their slaughtered remains, after Judith's beheading of Holofernes (*Purgatorio* 12.52–54, 58–60). Shakespeare reinforces the unfavorable image through a passing epithet ("O base Assyrian knight" [*2 Henry IV* 5.3.101]) and violent simile ("swift as stones / Enforced from the old Assyrian slings" [*Henry V* 4.7.55–65]). Olmstead (1923: 645) alleges that the modern "impression of Assyrian character" was conditioned by the opening of Byron's *The Destruction of Sennacherib*, long a required reading in schools: "The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold." This poem, which goes on to celebrate the divine annihilation of the Assyrian force (2 Kgs 19:35), is satirized by the poet Ogden Nash. A result of Byron's excessive similes and metaphors, quips Nash, was

> … that whenever you mention Old Testament soldiers

to people they say Oh yes, they're the ones that
a lot of
wolves dressed up in gold and purple ate them.
(*Very Like a Whale*)

Bibliography: ■ A. T. Olmstead, *History of Assyria* (New York 1923).

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See also →Ashur (Deity); →Ashurbanipal; →Asshur (City); →Asshur (Person); →Assyrian Church, Reception of the Bible in; →Babylonia; →Calah; →Esarhaddon; →Four Empires; →Mesopotamia; →Nebuchadnezzar; →Nineveh; →Sargon; →Sennacherib; →Shalmaneser; →Tiglath-Pileser

Assyrian Church, Reception of the Bible in

In the Orthodox Church, the interpretation of the Bible is regulated by the interpretation methods of the early School of Antioch which were adapted by the church. At the synods of the 6th century CE, the methods and exegesis practiced by Theodore of Mopsuestia were made authoritative for any biblical interpretation. Methodically, emphasis is placed on typology rather than on allegorical interpretation. Special characteristics of the Assyrian tradition are its interest in historical aspects, its greater skepticism towards traditional opinions and its diligent attempts at reconstructing the historical framework for biblical texts. At the same time, however, the commentaries and interpretations of biblical books by Syrian church fathers remained in use, especially those by Ephraem the Syrian and Narsai. In the 6th century, there were, from the perspective of Antiochene theology, both orthodox commentaries (Babai, Ahob of Qatar, Gabriel of Qatar) and commentaries written by reforming circles (Henana of Adiabene). The latter deliberately renounced the exegesis proposed by Theodore of Mopsuestia and were condemned at different synods. However, even in later exegetic literature they remained influential, and not only as an antithesis to the main traditions. The *scholia* by Theodore bar Konai refer to all the writings and texts of the Peshitta. By means of an inquiry-response system, he comments on every topic of the biblical tradition which seems important to him. Besides several anonymous commentaries, the comments by Išoʿbar Nun (823–28 Catholicos Patriarch of his church) on the whole Bible, also composed in an inquiry-response form, and those of Išoʿdad of Merw (9th century), were of great influence, even beyond the confessional boundaries of the Assyrian church of the East. The West-Syrian tradition took up citations, especially from Išoʿdad's commentaries.

Another part of the Assyrian tradition are the commentaries of ʿAbdallāh ibn aṭ-Ṭaiyib (d. 1043), written in Arabic, which based themselves on the more ancient Assyrian commentaries. After the 9th century, there is evidence for the existence of lectionaries. Prior to this, the captions of the Gospels used to contain information on their liturgical use in the ecclesiastical year. The *Gannat Bussame* ("Garden of Delights") of a Turkish exegete of the 13th century constitutes an ample commentary on the lectionary and its biblical texts. It contains several citations of lost biblical commentaries.

While Assyrian literature played almost no role at all in the divulgation of the early biblical text, it paved the way for printed editions of the Bible in Syrian literature in the 19th century. The Bible edition printed in Urmia in 1852 was based on the Peshitta. For the first time, it contained a translation of the biblical text into Neo-Syrian which is, however, grounded on the Hebrew text rather than on the Syrian one. On the basis of the edition of Urmia, a new edition was elaborated and published by the American Trinitarian Bible Society in 1913. The Chaldeans and Assyrians, who are allied with the Catholic Church in Rome, published their own Bible edition in three volumes between 1887 and 1892. It was the basis for the Maronite edition printed in Beirut in 1952. The edition published by the Dominicans in Mosul between 1887 and 1892 was ordered by the Syrian-Catholic archbishop of Damascus and the Chaldean archbishop of Diyarbakır. Subsequently, there was an increasing body of homiletic literature that prospered in all Assyrian churches, but that was especially present in the periodicals and writings of the so-called Nestorian Presbyterians. However, Catholic and Anglican and, at a later stage, Russian-Orthodox (i.e., the "Nestorians" united with the Russian church) publications were of great importance as well. At the same time, there are still handwritten commentaries of the Bible even today. An example of this is the short commentary on biblical wisdoms by Johannes Pascha whose manuscripts are preserved in Berlin.

Biblical interpretation was not limited to commentaries. From the beginning, Assyrian poets rearranged biblical texts and used them for creating chants for the community, so that biblical traditions could be commemorated by singing during liturgy. Ephraem the Syrian introduced women choirs to this effect. A novella on Joseph which has been attributed to Ephraem the Syrian shows that the poets worked with great artistic freedom in order to make the biblical text accessible to the people. Because of their artistic inspiration, these writers tended to adapt biblical writings quite freely. Such adaptations of biblical stories flourished during the so-called Syrian Renaissance. They were collected in "song books" and quickly became popular. They have remained a permanent feature of liturgical celebrations and in the treasury of