



## ASSYRIA REVISED

This page is concerned with dispelling some of the misconceptions and myths which abound concerning the ancient Assyrians. These scholarly quotes and historical references show how the ancient Assyrians have been maligned and that much propaganda has been written about them. It is anyone's guess as to why some authors seem to be obsessed with continuing these myths about the ancient Assyrians. We encourage you to copy and distribute the material below or to link this page to help spread the truth about the Assyrians. If you have any similar references please email them to [AINA](mailto:AINA).



"Most readers in the Western world will have met the Assyrians in the Bible. There they are found as the imperial power which destroyed the kingdom of Israel, taking the so-called 'ten tribes' into captivity. A generation later they attacked Jerusalem, capital of the sister kingdom of Judah. It is this latter attack which inspired Byron's poem beginning:

*The Assyrian came down like the wolf on  
the fold,  
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple  
and gold.*

Largely in consequence of the Bible and of Byron's poem, the Assyrians have a reputation in the English-speaking world for ruthless barbarity. **They have been maligned.** Certainly they could be rough and tough to maintain order, but they were defenders of civilization, not barbarian destroyers." (H.W.F. Saggs, *The Might That Was Assyria*, p. 2)

"Furthermore, the Assyrian practice should not be considered in the light of the highest Christian ideals-which in the wars of the twentieth century A.D. have been so frequently forgotten- but by comparison with the contemporary standards, (of their time) of which instructive examples may be found in the book of Kings. Baasha, on taking the throne of Israel from Joroboam's successor, wiped out, with the approval of the prophets of Jehovah, the whole family of Jeroboam (1 kings xv. 25-30): Zimri, also with prophetic approval, did the same to Baasha's family on usurping the throne in his turn (1 kings xvi. 8-13), and in this case, as Zimri had a reign of only seven days, the royal assassin wasted no time in deliberating on the matter or attempting to contrive a convincing pretext to satisfy public opinion. When one king, Ahab, did show magnanimity to a defeated enemy, he was bitterly denounced by one of the prophets (kings xx. 30-40). ...Another Israelite monarch, Jehu having exterminated seventy sons of Ahab and all his surviving relatives, together with forty-two sons of Ahaziah and a great multitude of misguided but otherwise inoffensive followers of Baal, received the enthusiastic approval of influential section of the worshippers of Jehovah (2 Kings 1-30). As a final example of ancient standards, Menahem, on capturing a certain district, ripped up all the pregnant women (2 Kings xv, 16) without bringing down on himself any condemnation for this particular atrocity."... As to

comparison with contemporary warfare, there is very little in the more gruesome sections of the Assyrian royal annals that can not be equaled or exceeded from the records of events in Europe and Africa (Black and White) since 1939." (**H.W.F. Saggs, *The Greatness That Was Babylon*, pp. 239-240**)

"It must be noted, however, that these atrocities were usually reserved for those local princes and their nobles who had revolted and that in contrast with the Israelites, for instance, who exterminated the Amalekites for purely ethno-cultural reasons, the Assyrians never indulged in systematic genocides." (**Georges Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, Third Edition, p. 291**)

"The traditional picture that, I for one studied, is that of a brutal power which ruthlessly subjugated its subjects and neighboring countries. Assyrian culture is not a word usually mentioned in this context. In the recent years we are witnessing a change. I would say that the traditional position which is based on Assyrian royal annals and Assyrian palace reliefs was not totally wrong because it was conveyed to us by the Assyrians themselves, but it was awfully one sided and misleading. It's as if our own notion of the United States were founded based on the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War or its police function in South America. Today, we see Assyria in a more complicated and more many sided light. It emerges to us, above all, a country of nations, a multi national empire whose power, economic power played a decisive role, if not a more decisive role as military aspects. We know now that the empire did fight many wars, but most of them were very small scale, the army was not that big and most of the conflicts were solved by police forces, not by large scale interventions...The image of the Assyrians themselves has also changed. It has been known for a long time that the Assyrian king was the representative of God on earth. My own research indicates that this view was not limited to the king but also to the government, so that the Assyrian government portrayed itself or was pictured as the symbol of the heavens on earth. Reflecting this, the Assyrian high officials wore stamp seals which throughout display religious motifs, we see the tree of life, emblems of God etc., depicted on the seals. Most important of all, our picture has not under done a change only in terms of royal ideology, but we can see also a serious commercial power as archeological excavations carried out in Israel, for instance, have shown Assyrian economic involvement had dimensions that resemble notions that we have from modern powers that were not projected upon Assyrians previously." (***Assyria 1995 - The Video*, Dr. Simo Parpola, University of Helsinki**)

"The reader will soon notice that I actually like the Assyrians, warts and all: I make no apology for this. Though the Assyrians, like the people of every other nation ancient and modern, were sometimes less than kind to their fellow humans, I feel no compulsion to be continually advertising my own rightmindedness by offering judgment upon their every action or attitude in terms of current liberal orthodoxy." (**H.W.F. Saggs, *The Might That Was Assyria*, Preface**)

"A clear policy distinction was made between cities or territories which were newly being taken into the Assyrian orbit, and those already in the Assyrian orbit which had engaged in armed rebellion. It was only in cases of the latter sort, and then only in the most flagrant of these that such barbarous retribution was meted out to the conquered inhabitants."

"Elsewhere in Ashurnasirpal's annals, where the military action recounted was a matter only of conquest and not of putting down a rebellion, there is no mention of mass atrocities; the

reference in such cases is only to the taking of prisoners, with no indication of executions or mutilations."

"Anyone who has been brainwashed into believing that the Assyrians were uniquely sadistic should take a hard look at our own culture, as reflected in the following extract (quoted in the Financial Times) from a children's TV programme in 1978: 'No one shall take his life but me. I shall flay the skin from his living body and wear it about me like a cloak.' Such atrocities as there were in Assyria were not sadism but deliberate punitive measures authorized, indeed, ordered, by the central Assyrian government in the person of the king."

"There is no proven case of any atrocities committed by individual Assyrian soldiers as matters of mere sadism. It is true that there are some scenes on bas reliefs which do show the mutilation or barbarous killing (as by skinning) of prisoners, but the indications are that these represent what was done to ringleaders by order of the king, not random acts of barbarity by private soldiers. Indeed, there are indications that the king insisted on very strict discipline in the matter of treatment of prisoners-of-war, and one royal letter to an Assyrian administrator dealing with provisions for such prisoners actually warns the official: 'You shall not be negligent. If you are, you shall die.'" (**H.W.F. Saggs, *The Might That Was Assyria*, pp.262-3**)

"The lecture referred to Prof. Parpola's recent work which compares the Assyrian Tree of Life to the medieval Jewish Kabbalah, and suggests, amongst other ideas, a direct line of descent from Assyrian religion through Judaism into Christianity, finding the concept of a messianic figure or 'saviour god' in Assyrian religion. Though Prof. Gruenwald, an expert in Jewish mysticism, admits there is much work to do, he believes that Prof. Parpola's creative, remarkable and risk-taking study has 'cracked open' a very long-standing mystery, i.e. the origin of the Kabbalah." (**Margot Stout Whiting, *Assyria 1995 - The Glory and Fall of the Assyrian Empire***)

"Thus, the Assyrian king, in perpetrating actions - sometimes including atrocities - which put the enemy into panic, thought of himself as, in the most literal sense, putting 'the fear of God' into those who might have it mind to oppose Assyria. This represented a conscious use by the Assyrians of terrorism not for sadistic purposes, but for psychological warfare. ...The psychological aspect of Assyrian warfare is also brought out by the manner in which bas reliefs with war scenes were used. In Ashur-nasir-pal's palace at Calah, scenes of war predominated in the bas reliefs only in the hall which probably served as an audience chamber; it is a reasonable conclusion that this predominance of war scenes was to reinforce in the minds of visiting rulers and ambassadors their consciousness of Assyrian military might. In other rooms of the palace the scenes were mostly of religious or ceremonial topics." (**H.W.F. Saggs, *The Might That Was Assyria*, p. 249**)

"Amongst all the aspects of ancient Mesopotamian life, there are few which have been more widely misunderstood and misrepresented than the nature of Assyrian imperialism. Few historians or other writers who touch upon Assyria in the period between 900 B.C. and its final fall just before 600 B.C. can resist the temptation to gather up their skirts and add yet another shocked comment upon barbarism, brutality and unmatched ruthlessness of the Assyrians. It is rare to find any attempt to look at Assyrian warfare and imperialism as a whole in its perspective. Yet, as it is hoped to show below, when one considers the whole functioning of the Assyrian Empire, and particularly when one passes judgement in

accordance with the standards, not of our own times but of the other peoples of the ancient world, a very different picture emerges.

The Assyrian Empire was efficient and would not gladly bear those who wished to upset the civilised world order, but it was not exceptionally bloody or barbaric. The number of people killed or mutilated in an average Assyrian campaign in the interest of efficient administration was, even in proportion to the population, probably no more than the number of dead and mangled humans that most Western countries offer annually as a sacrifice to the motor-car, in the supposed interest of efficient transport." **(H.W.F. Saggs, *Everyday Life In Babylonia and Assyria*, p.99)**

"Most authors of the time have described the scenes of horror by the allied armies [Medes and allies] during their control of the Assyrian capital of Nineveh. However we read in others that the victorious armies removed the nobles, but of the rest of the city's residents - they remained in their former residences whereas a few left for the outskirts of the city. As for what was remaining of the Assyrian army, they were led by the brother of the King Ashurbanipal from the city of Ashur towards Haran, located Northwest of the city of Nineveh. From there they pushed further North in the district of Eysala for the purpose of being hidden from the eyes from neighbouring Urartu. The Medians however eventually took control of the latter and actually reached their very capital, Ushpi. Part of this Assyrian army remained in the mountains of Eysala, along with the peaceful populations from home who followed them there. The other portion of the army crossed the Euphrates and took refuge in the castle of Charchemish (currently Jarablus) where the Assyrian army was finally destroyed in 605BC. And from what is known, the Assyrians as a people were not destroyed by the invaders as we see proof from history contrary to that. B.G.Arsanis writes that during the destruction of state of Ashur, Assyrians took refuge in 'mountainous Assyria' (also called Kurdistan) where they lived for many years. In another book, the same author goes over the same point: "After the destruction of the empire, the Assyrians did not become extinct, but some of them took refuge in the mountains of Ashur; in Maqlub and Sinjar. And of them, ten leaders with their Assyrian armies moved out towards the city of Nissibin. And there, where the current city of Urfa sits, they founded a new state by the name of Osroyo (ie; the ten). From then on, it was usually referred to as Osroene.

Another author, the Assyrian Amir Menshey, reassures us that during the final wars a portion of the Assyrian army was successful in breaking the surrounding pressures of the invader and escape towards the mountains of Ashur where there exists many fortified defenses. **(K.B. Matveev, *Al-Ashuriyyun wal Mas'ala Al-Ashuriyya*, translated from Arabic by Odisho Aziz)**