

THE TERMS “ASSYRIA” AND “SYRIA” AGAIN

ROBERT ROLLINGER, *Leopold-Franzens-Universität, Innsbruck*

SINCE antiquity there has been a debate about whether there is a linguistic connection between the words “Assyria” and “Syria.” In 1617 John Selden suggested that the name “Syria” is simply a corruption of “Assyria.”¹ Konrad Nöldeke restated this assumption in 1881 in a meticulous reexamination of the question.² The results of Nöldeke’s study were generally received as authoritative. The debate, however, was kept alive in the following century. Eduard Schwartz examined some of the Classical authors’ statements in greater detail³ and agreed with Nöldeke’s conclusions. Payton Helm, in his 1980 survey of the current state of the debate, reaffirmed the conclusions of Nöldeke and Schwartz.⁴ In 1981 John A. Tvedtnes denied the by now established connection between “Assyria” and “Syria” in an article published in this journal. He focused on the ancient Egyptian term *Ḥrw* for his proposed etymology:⁵ “The development *Ḥrw* → *Ša(i)ri* is not totally unexpected, for we have numerous other examples of *ḥ* → *š* (in addition to *h*) in Coptic. And herein lies what is possibly the correct derivation of the Greek *Suria*. It may well have come from the Egyptian *Ḥrw* at a time when the latter was already pronounced similarly to its Coptic counterpart (i.e., **Šuri*).”⁶ This opinion did not, however, remain unchallenged. In a rejoinder, which also appeared in this journal, in 1992, Richard Frye argued that Tvedtnes’ explanation is a most unlikely one:⁷ “It is conceivable, of course, that the Egyptians had a term for the Hurrians which they confused with later Assyria/Syria, but both the vocalization of the word ‘Syria’ and the reconstructed Middle Egyptian word **Šuri* present problems, while the identification of Assyria with Syria does not.”⁸ In this context Frye reiterated the main arguments put forward by Nöldeke, Schwartz, and Helm, i.e., that, in Greek, usage of the terms “Assyria” and “Syria” was applied almost interchangeably for an area that was roughly the same as that covered by the Assyrian empire. Only the “Syrians” of Cappadocia and northern Anatolia around Sinope posed some problems. Frye assumed that these “Syrians” may have been descendants of the Assyrian trading posts established at the beginning of the second millennium B.C.⁹ Helm speculated about an independent

¹ John Selden, *De Dis Syris*, Syntagma 2 (Leipzig, 1617), Prolegomena.

² Theodor Nöldeke, “ASSURIOS SURIOS SUROS,” *Hermes* 5 (1881): 443–68.

³ Eduard Schwartz, “Einiges über Assyrien, Syrien und Koilesyrien,” *Philologus* 86 (1931): 373–99 (= *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band 2 [Berlin, 1956], pp. 240–69). See also idem, “Noch einiges über Assyrien und Syrien,” *Philologus* 87 (1932): 261–63 (= *Gesammelte*

Schriften, Band 2, pp. 270–72).

⁴ Payton R. Helm, “‘Greeks’ in the Neo-Assyrian Levant and ‘Assyria’ in Early Greek Writers” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1980), p. 34.

⁵ John A. Tvedtnes, “The Origin of the Name ‘Syria,’” *JNES* 40 (1981): 139–40. Earlier attempts to derive the name “Syria” from a separate root are collected by Helm, “Greeks,” pp. 31 f.

⁶ Tvedtnes, “Origin,” p. 140.

⁷ Richard N. Frye, “Assyria and Syria: Synonyms,” *JNES* 51 (1992): 281–85. The article is reprinted together with a “Postscript” in *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies* (JAAS) 11/2 (1997): 30–36.

⁸ Idem, “Assyria and Syria,” p. 281.

⁹ *Ibid.*

origin of the name in this special case.¹⁰ Schwartz and Nöldeke thought that the Assyrian empire may have included Cappadocia and the areas farther north.¹¹ There were also slight differences concerning the original meaning of the terms “Assyria” and “Syria” in the Greek sources. Frye believed that the Greeks equated the Assyrian empire with its Aramaic-speaking population and that therefore there was an ethnolinguistic origin. Nöldeke and Schwartz, however, supposed that the original meaning was a political or, at least, geographical one. But nearly all the scholars—Nöldeke and Schwartz as well as Helm and Frye—were convinced that the term “Syria” from “Assyria” developed in a Greek context, just as their argumentation exclusively exploited Greek sources of Classical and late antiquity. Helm put it this way: “Nothing in the early references to Συρία and Ἀσσυρία indicates any trace of a distinction between them, which one might certainly expect if the terms derived from origins as different as Sur (a coastal trading city) and Aššur (an inland military power).”¹² Thus the explanation of Helm and his predecessors was, on the one hand, well founded but, on the other hand, remained hypothetical, since there was no way for their assumptions to be put to the test.

New evidence regarding the origins of the term “Syria” has emerged recently, however, with the publication of a Hieroglyphic Luwian and Phoenician bilingual inscription from a monument found in Turkey by Recai Tekoğlu and André Lemaire in Çineköy, in the vicinity of Adana.¹³ The monument depicts in bas-relief a male god, i.e., the storm-god Tarhunzas/Baal, who stands on a chariot pulled by a pair of bulls.¹⁴ The bilingual inscription below offers the key to identifying the historical context. The statue was dedicated by Warikas/Urikki, king of Hiyawa/Adana, i.e., Cilicia, who is well known from the Neo-Assyrian texts of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727) and Sargon II (721–705).¹⁵ He is also named in the Phoenician stela of Hassan-Beyli¹⁶ and in the famous bilingual inscription from Karatepe, which gives an account of the work of his subordinate ruler Azatiwada.¹⁷ The Çineköy inscription introduces Warikas/Urikki not only as a successful king, but also as an ally of his Assyrian overlord and characterizes this special relationship in terms that hint at some close bond.¹⁸ The Luwian version has Warikas/Urikki proclaim:

§VI And then, the/an Assyrian king (su+ra/i-wa/i-ni-sa(URBS))and the whole Assyrian “House” (su+ra/i-wa/i-za-ha(URBS)) were made a fa[ther and a mo]ther for me, §VII and Hiyawa and Assyria (su+ra/i-wa/i-ia-sa-ha(URBS)) were made a single “House.”¹⁹

¹⁰ Helm, “Greeks,” pp. 32 f.

¹¹ Schwartz, “Einiges über Assyrien,” p. 374 (= *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band 2, p. 241). Nöldeke, “ASSURIOS,” p. 444.

¹² Helm, “Greeks,” p. 32.

¹³ Recai Tekoğlu and André Lemaire, “La bilingue royale louvito-phénicienne de Çineköy,” *Comptes rendus de l’Académie des inscriptions, et belles-lettres, année 2000* (Paris, 2002), pp. 960–1006. See now also Giovanni B. Lanfranchi, “The Luwian-Phoenician Bilingual of Çineköy and the Annexation of Cilicia to the Assyrian Empire,” in Robert Rollinger, ed., *Von Sumer bis Homer: Festschrift für Manfred Schretter zum 60. Geburtstag am 25. Februar 2004*, AOAT 325 (Münster, 2005), pp. 481–96.

¹⁴ Tekoğlu and Lemaire, “Bilingue,” pp. 962–64, figs. 1–3. Cf. also Sanna Aro, “Art and Architecture,” in H. Craig Melchert, ed., *The Luwians*, Handbuch der

Orientalistik, erste Abteilung, Der Nahe und Mittlere Osten, Band 68 (Leiden and Boston, 2003), p. 327.

¹⁵ Tekoğlu and Lemaire, “Bilingue,” pp. 1003 f. with references. See also John David Hawkins, *Corpus of Hieroglyphic Luwian Inscriptions*, vol. 1, *Inscriptions of the Iron Age* (Berlin and New York, 2000), pp. 41 f., and his “Scripts and Texts,” in Melchert, ed., *The Luwians*, p. 148.

¹⁶ André Lemaire, “L’inscription phénicienne de Hassan-Beyli reconsidérée,” *Rivista di studi Fenici* 11 (1983): 9–19.

¹⁷ Hawkins, *Corpus*, pp. 45–71. For the unpublished stela of Incirli, see E. Carter, “The Incirli Stela: A Preliminary Report on the Incirli Stela,” www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/nelc/stelaside/stelainfo.html.

¹⁸ Cf. Lanfranchi, “Bilingue.”

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 483; Tekoğlu, “Bilingue,” p. 968 (transliteration), p. 972 (translation).

The Phoenician version reads as follows:

Line 7: And the king [of Assur and (?)]

Line 8: the whole “House” of Assur (ʔŠR) were for me a father [and a]

Line 9: mother, and the DNNYM and the Assyrians (ʔŠRYM)

Line 10: were a single “House.”²⁰

These lines both offer a glimpse of the ideology of an Assyrian vassal kingdom on the fringes of the empire and are an essential aid for any attempt at explaining the linguistic relationship of the terms “Assyria” and “Syria.” Luwian “su+ra/i-wa/i-ni-sa(URBS)” and “su+ra/i-wa/i-za-ha(URBS)” are equivalent to Phoenician “ʔŠR” and “ʔŠRYM”: the Luwian forms are clearly truncated versions—by way of aphesis—of the Phoenician ones. The observation that the loss of A-mobile is a characteristic phenomenon in *nomina propria* of the Anatolian milieu was first made by Paul Kretschmer,²¹ who, of course, could not have known the inscription of Çineköy.²² He also did not focus on this particular problem—rather, he attempted to demonstrate that Hittite Ahhiyavā has to be equated with the Cilician Ὑπαχαιοί of Herodotus 7.91.²³ The inscription of Çineköy may also shed new light on this intractable problem—although it is not our concern here²⁴—since the land of Cilicia is called “Hiyawa,” which seems in some way related not only to Ὑπαχαιοί, but also to Ahhiyavā.²⁵ More important in the context of the present study, however, is the fact that the inscription of Çineköy provides incontrovertible proof that the Luwians used to pronounce “Assyria” without the initial aleph.²⁶ Since a second Luwian inscription presents the toponym in the form “a-sú+ra/i(REGIO)-wa/i-na-ti(URBS),”²⁷ it is evident that “Sura/i” and “Asura/i” are simply variant versions of one and the same name; however, we should see this conclusion in a broader context. As demonstrated by Nöldeke and others, the Greek usage of “Assyria” and “Syria” was almost interchangeable. Furthermore, Simo Parpola has recently shown that in late seventh-century B.C. Aramaic documents from Assyria the name Aššūr (pronounced Assūr and generally written ʔsr) could also appear as “Sūr” (written sr).²⁸ If we

²⁰ Lanfranchi, “Bilingual,” p. 483; Lemaire, “Bilingue,” p. 994 (transliteration and translation).

²¹ Paul Kretschmer, “Nochmals die Hyparchäer und Alaksandus,” *Glotta* 24 (1936): 218 f.

²² Dropping of unstressed vowels at the beginning of words is also quite well attested in Neo-Assyrian. See Simo Parpola, “National and Ethnic Identity in the Neo-Assyrian Empire and Assyrian Identity in Post Empire Times,” *JAAS* 18/2 (2004): 16–17 with n. 55.

²³ See also Paul Kretschmer, “Die Hyparchäer,” *Glotta* 21 (1933): 213 ff. Cf. now the comments by Susanne Heinhold-Krahmer, “Ahhiyawa – Land der homerischen Achäer im Krieg mit Wiluša?,” in Christoph Ulf, ed., *Der neue Streit um Troia: Eine Bilanz* (Munich, 2003), pp. 199 f.

²⁴ For the so called Ahhiyavā-controversy, see now the detailed study by Susanne Heinhold-Krahmer, “Ist die Identität von Ilios und Wiluša endgültig erwiesen?,” *Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici (SMEA)* 46/1 (2004): 29–57.

²⁵ Tekoğlu and Lemaire, “Bilingue,” p. 1006. Heinhold-Krahmer, “Ahhiyawa – Land der homer-

ischen Achäer,” p. 209 f. For Hiyawa, see also Julien de Vos, “Les mentions des Louvites dans les sources égyptiennes,” *Colloquium Anatolicum* 3 (2004): 153–57. Concerning the etymology of Ahhiyavā, cf. Onofrio Carruba, “Ahhiyā e Ahhiyawā, la Grecia e l’Egeo,” in Theo P. J. van den Hout and Johan de Roos, eds., *Studio Historiae Ardens: Ancient Near Eastern Studies Presented to Philo H. J. Houwink ten Cate on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 7–21.

²⁶ The abbreviated form is also documented in Karkamiš A 6, 3. § 6, which has “su+ra/i-za-ha(URBS).” See Hawkins, *Corpus*, p. 124. Thus the term cannot be interpreted as “Urartu” as suggested by Hawkins, *ibid.*, p. 126 ad § 6, but must refer to “Assyria.” See n. 29 *ibid.*

²⁷ Karkamiš A 15b, 4. § 19. See *ibid.*, p. 131. For the other toponyms in this text, cf. my article “Assyrios, Syrios, Syros und Leukosyros,” *Welt des Orients* 36 (2006): 73–83.

²⁸ Parpola, “National and Ethnic Identity,” pp. 16 f. with n. 55.

add this material to our considerations, it becomes clear that the inscription of Çineköy does not only represent another argument in favor of the derivation of “Syria” from “Assyria,” but also points to the origins of this development. It may seem surprising, therefore, that the significance of the Çineköy inscription concerning this question has not yet been recognized. It is true that Tekoğlu saw the close parallel between the two forms “Sura/i” and “Asura/i,” but he used it only to show the meaning of the term “Sura/i” in Luwian inscriptions.²⁹ The inscription of Çineköy, however, contains much more information. It testifies to the fact that the abbreviation was already current in the last third of the eighth century B.C., and it demonstrates that the original linguistic and historical context was not a Greek or an Assyrian one but the multilingual milieu of southern Anatolia and northern Syria at the beginning of the Iron Age.³⁰ This milieu was characterized by several small kingdoms where Luwians, Phoenicians, and Arameans played a dominant role.³¹ In the eighth century B.C. they came increasingly under Assyrian political pressure.³² It was about the same time that

²⁹ Tekoğlu, “Bilingue,” p. 980: “l’identification d’ ʾŠR avec su+ra/i-ia-sa(URBS) = Assur/Assyrie est maintenant évidente,” with references to the other Hieroglyphic Luwian texts; similarly, Heinhöfer-Krahmer, “Ahhiyawa – Land der homerischen Achäer,” p. 210. It must be emphasized, however, that the conclusions drawn by Tekoğlu, “Bilingue,” pp. 980 f. with n. 24, are still somewhat problematical. It is true that, in light of Çineköy, “su-ra/i-za” should now be understood as “Assyria” in other Luwian inscriptions and not as “Urartu” as in Hawkins, *Corpus*, p. 126. This is also true for the inscriptions Karkamiš A 6, 3. § 6 (*ibid.*, p. 124). But it remains doubtful whether this “Sura/i” may be regarded as identical with the toponym written “sù-ra/i” in Karkamiš A15b, 4. § 19 (*ibid.*, p. 131) because it is immediately followed by a second toponym, which obviously refers to Assyria: “a-sù-ra/i.” Since both terms point to two distinct systems of writing, they must represent different toponyms. Tekoğlu was fully aware of this fact, and he tried to solve the problem the following way: “a-sù-ra/i(REGIO)-wa/i-na-ti(URBS) SCRIBA-li-ia-ti, à côté de sù-ra-i-wa/i-na-ti(URBS) SCRIBA-li-ia-ti-i dans Karkémish A 15b, 3 §19, est une répétition et peut renvoyer à l’écriture babylonienne sans suggérer que toutes les occurrences de a-sù-ra/i(REGIO)-wa/i(/-ni)- doivent être babylonienne(nnes).” This explanation seems rather improbable. It is far more plausible to assume that the characters “su” and “sù” are not homophonous. Thus only “su-ra/i” should be taken as an abbreviation for “Assyria” but not “sù-ra/i.” This is also true for Assur letter e 4. § 27 (Hawkins, *Corpus*, pp. 536, 549). One may, of course, ask how best to explain the meaning of “sù-ra/i.” Hawkins’s suggestion of taking it to represent the Hieroglyphic Luwian version of Urartu seems best. See John David Hawkins, “Assyrians and Hittites,” *Iraq* 36 (1974): 68, n. 6. Cf. also Gernot Wilhelm, “sura/i in Kargamiš und das urartäische Gentiliz surel,” *SMEA* 31 (1993): 135–41. To foreign ears “su-ra/i” and “sù-ra/i” may have sounded similar, and this may be the reason for the existence of the “Cappadocian Syrians” in

Greek sources. See now, in detail, my article “Assyrios, Syrios.”

³⁰ Parpola, in “National and Ethnic Identity,” p. 17, argued for a Neo-Assyrian origin of the “abbreviation.”

³¹ Cf. Wolfgang Röllig, “Asia Minor as a Bridge between East and West: The Role of the Phoenicians and the Arameans in the Transfer of Culture,” in Günter Kopcke and Isabelle Tokumaru, eds., *Greece between East and West: 10th–8th centuries BC* (Mainz, 1992), pp. 93–102; Anthony Green and Arnulf Hausleitner, “Gottheiten in Tell Barsip,” in Thomas Richter, Doris Prechel, and Jörg Klingner, eds., *Kulturgeschichten: Altorientalische Studien, für Volkert Haas zum 65. Geburtstag* (Saarbrücken, 2001), pp. 145–70; see also my article “Homer, Anatolien und die Levante: Die Frage der Beziehungen zu den östlichen Nachbarkulturen im Spiegel der schriftlichen Quellen,” in Ulf, ed., *Der neue Streit um Troia*, pp. 330–48, and my article “Hethiter, Homer und Anatolien: Erwägungen zu Il. 3, 300f. und KUB XIII Nr. 3, III 1f.,” *Historia* 53/1 (2004): 1–21; Hannes D. Galter, “Militärgrenze und Euphrathandel: Der sozioökonomische Hintergrund der Trilinguen von Arslan Tash,” in Robert Rollinger and Christoph Ulf, eds., *Commerce and Monetary Systems in the Ancient World: Means of Transmission and Cultural Interaction, Oriens et Occidens, Band 6 = Melammu Symposia 5* (Stuttgart, 2004), pp. 444–60; Hannes D. Galter, “Der Himmel über Hadattu: Das religiöse Umfeld der Inschriften von Arslan Tash,” in Manfred Hutter and Sylvia Hutter-Braunsar, eds., *Offizielle Religion, lokale Kulte und individuelle Religiosität*, AOAT 318 (Münster, 2004), pp. 173–88. See now also the various contributions in Mirko Novák, Friedhelm Prayon, and Anne-Maria Wittke, eds., *Die Außenwirkung des spät-hethitischen Kulturraumes*, AOAT 323 (Münster, 2004).

³² Hélène Sader, *Les états araméens de Syrie depuis leur foundation jusqu’ à leur transformation en provinces assyriennes*, *Beiruter Texte und Studien* 36 (Beirut, 1987); idem, “The Aramaean Kingdoms of Syria: Origin and Formation Process,” in Guy Bunnens, ed., *Essays on Syria in the Iron Age*, Ancient

the Greeks established closer contacts with these regions in which Cilicia also played a crucial role.³³ It also seems that these Greeks encountered "Sura/i" and "Asura/i" (by now the fully evolved equivalents for one and the same region) and rendered them in Greek as "Syria" and "Assyria." These terms were used in subsequent centuries as interchangeable toponyms, although both terms also began to carry special connotations as was demonstrated by Nöldeke, Schwartz, and others.³⁴ Since antiquity, scholars have both doubted and emphasized this relationship. It is the contention of this paper that the Çineköy inscription settles the problem once and for all.

Near Eastern Studies, Supplement 7 (Louvain, Paris, and Sterling, Virginia, 2000), pp. 61–76; Edward E. Lipiński, *The Aramaeans: Their Ancient History, Culture, Religion*, OLA 100 (Louvain, Paris, and Sterling, Virginia, 2000); Wolfgang Röllig, "Aramäer und Assyrer: Die Schriftzeugnisse bis zum Ende des Assyrischen Reiches," in Bunnens, ed., *Essays on Syria*, pp. 177–86; and Trevor R. Bryce, "The Luwians in Their Iron Age Context," in Melchert, ed., *The Luwians*, pp. 93–127.

³³ See my article "The Ancient Greeks and the Impact of the Ancient Near East: Textual Evidence

and Historical Perspective," in Robert M. Whiting, ed., *Mythology and Mythologies: Methodological Approaches to Intercultural Influences*, Melammu Symposia 2 (Helsinki, 2001), pp. 233–64.

³⁴ See again the important study by Parpola, "National and Ethnic Identity," pp. 5–40. Cf. also Wolfhart Heinrichs, "The Modern Assyrians—Name and Nation," in Riccardo Contini, ed., *Semitica: Serta Philologica Constantino Tsereteli dicata* (Turin, 1993), pp. 99–114, and John Joseph, "Assyria and Syria: Synonyms?," *JAAAS* 11/2 (1997): 37–43.

