

ABSTRACT:

The Reign and Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, an Assyrian Empire Builder (744–727 BC)

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The inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BC) have attracted scholarly interest since the very dawn of Assyriology, with the first discoveries at Nimrud by Layard in the mid-19th century. The search for new evidence for this Assyrian monarch, who played a crucial role in stories told in the Bible, was of prime importance in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Since then, it has become fully apparent that his reign marked the beginning of the imperial phase of Assyria, and that this period of time should be regarded as a watershed in the history of the ancient Near East.

The kingdom of Assyria first formed as a territorial state, along with its provincial system, in the fourteenth–thirteenth centuries, in the Middle Assyrian Period. From the twelfth century to mid-eighth century, Assyria's territorial holdings were repeatedly reduced and expanded, but the extension of the “Land of the god Aššur,” i.e., Assyria Proper, was confined to the borders established at the height of Assyria's power in the Middle Assyrian Period. Assyria's fortunes changed dramatically when Tiglath-pileser III ascended the throne. In the course of his eighteen-year reign, this king reshaped the political map of the ancient Near East. With his vigorous annual campaigns, he annexed large territories in Syria and Palestine in the west, as well as other lands in the north, east, and south. He created many new provinces beyond the “traditional” borders of Assyria and utterly transformed the demographic nature of the entire Near East through unprecedented, large-scale “two-way” deportations of conquered peoples. Towards the end of his reign, he conquered Babylonia, and not only took the traditional title “king of the lands Sumer and Akkad,” but also declared himself “king of Babylon” and participated in the *akītu*-festival at Babylon by taking the hand of the god Marduk, something none of his predecessors had done.

The preparation of a new edition of the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III and his son and successor Shalmaneser V, with the late Hayim Tadmor, for the Royal Inscriptions of Neo-Assyrian Period Project, which is under the direction of Professor Grant Frame (University of Pennsylvania), has given the speaker an opportunity to study anew this rich, yet fragmentarily preserved corpus of historical texts. This Assyrian king's texts were inscribed on a variety of objects made of stone (wall and floor slabs, steles, rock faces, bull colossi, beads, etc.), clay (tablets, bricks, etc.), and metal (lion weights). Following Tadmor's historiographic criteria for classification of the

corpus, Tiglath-pileser III's inscriptions fall into three categories: (1) Annals, texts whose historical narrative is arranged chronologically; (2) Summary Inscriptions, texts whose narrative is arranged in a predominantly geographical pattern; and (3) Miscellaneous Texts, texts classified as labels, dedicatory inscriptions, as well as other texts that are too fragmentarily preserved .

Most of his inscriptions originate from Nimrud, ancient Kalhu, in particular from Tiglath-pileser III's palace, which he had constructed towards the end of his reign. The walls of this once majestic palace, which Layard referred to as "Central Palace," were lined with large sculpted and inscribed stone orthostats; those slabs were not only carved with bas-reliefs, but also with the king's annals (the "Kalhu Annals"), long narrative accounts of Tiglath-pileser III's annual victories on the battlefield. Some of that palace's floors were decorated with large slabs inscribed with text summarizing his many deeds. Unfortunately, the structure of the "Central Palace" had been severely disturbed in antiquity; a later Assyrian king (Esarhaddon) began dismantling its superstructure and had its sculpted and inscribed wall slabs removed so that they could be reused in his own royal residence. Moreover, the archaeological context of many of the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III from Kalhu were unfortunately never properly recorded, thus making the reconstruction of the best historical source for this period (the "Kalhu Annals") very complicated, especially since only one-third or less of the original text is preserved today. Gaps in the annals are, however, can be filled in by other annalistic texts, especially those written on a stele from Iran and on a rock face at Mila Mergi (in Iraqi Kurdistan), as well as by passages in his summary inscriptions. Interweaving these and other texts of Tiglath-pileser III with chronographic texts, especially the Eponym Chronicle and the Babylonian Chronicle, we can securely reconstruct the accomplishments of Tiglath-pilser III in historical order.