

Biblical Assyria and Other Anxieties in the British Empire

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Abstract

The successful “invasion” of ancient Mesopotamia by explorers in the pay of the British Museum Trustees resulted in best-selling publications, a treasure-trove of Assyrian antiquities for display purposes and scholarly excavation, and a remarkable boost to the quest for confirmation of the literal truth of the Bible. The public registered its delight with the findings through the turnstyle-twirling appeal of the British Museum exhibits, and a series of appropriations of Assyrian art motifs and narratives in popular culture - jewelry, bookends, clocks, fine arts, theater productions, and a walk-through Assyrian palace among other period mansions at the Sydenham Crystal Palace. Unfortunately for the evangelically-inclined, “the monuments” did not confirm the received narrative of the Bible with uniform transparency. King Pul of biblical fame failed to appear in the cuneiform texts, thus sparking an international twenty-year hunt that illuminates deeper anxieties in British imperial civilization.

Introduction

[1] British imperialism in Western Asia exercised a staggering impact on biblical studies through, among other exploits, the excavation of Assyrian palaces and the unveiling of the results before the insular public via exhibits in the British Museum and published illustrations of the antiquities themselves. In terms of heritage, the Assyrian monuments attested to the veracity of the biblical tradition that was being challenged on several fronts. In terms of prestige, the ingathering of antiquities from the palaces of the very Assyrian kings railed against by the biblical prophets into the British Museum constituted a victory over the French, who had failed to procure these artifacts for their own glorification, and the despised Ottoman Empire, whose myopic disdain for its pre-Islamic past prompted it to discard its own cultural heritage. This study seeks to illuminate a fascinating moment in early Victorian social history through the exploration of British rapport with the world of ancient Assyria. As the Assyrian kings of the Old Testament appeared in the cuneiform records like scheduled stops along the railway line, they were hailed as epical testimonies to the integrity of the received biblical history. When one biblical king failed to board the train, however, both scholarly panic and denial were given free rein until the absentee monarch was recovered and rehabilitated. This is a story about the British race to conquer the biblical world by annexing both the physical remains of the Assyrian imperial past and its hermeneutical keys, the impact that appropriation had on English society, and the avid quest for missing King Pul that illustrates the essential fragility of the entire enterprise.

[2] It bears repeating that the vogue for biblical confirmation through ancient monuments was a seasoned pastime in the British Isles many decades before the first western spade was sunk in Mesopotamia. For example, William Stukeley, student and first biographer of Sir Isaac Newton, made something of a career out of surveying - rather accurately - Avebury and Stonehenge, in an early eighteenth century quest for evidence that could link the Britons of Celtic fame with the

peoples and the received timeline of the Bible (see Piggot; Force: 248-53). He states in the preface to his work on Stonehenge:

My intent is (besides preserving the memory of these extraordinary monuments, so much to the honour of our country, now in great danger of ruin) to promote, as much as I am able, the knowledge and practice of ancient and true Religion; to revive in the minds of the learned the spirit of Christianity.

Antiquarianism, nationalistic pride, sheer joy in the spectacle of the past, and the Bible efficaciously served up to the present through the monuments: save for the florid syntax, the sentence might have been penned at any time in the nineteenth century and carried complete conviction.

[3] Napoleon's brilliantly conceived invasion of Egypt in 1798, with its startling propaganda blitz of Islamic and Jewish toleration, and the triumphant reclamation of ancient Egypt that would spark more than a century of European Egyptomania, was dust and ashes to British sensibilities (figure 1). Having neatly evicted Napoleon from the eastern Levant and stolen as many of his display-worthy portable antiquities as possible, a new dynamic would evolve in the playing out of the Great Game in the Middle East. France and Great Britain would wage conventional warfare and messy diplomatic effrontery not only over Ottoman territory, but over the very proprietorship of the past. The past was ancient Greece and Rome of course, but above all, the past was the biblical narrative, the Land of Goshen in Pharaonic Egypt, the puny but god-ridden Kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the Judea of Jesus, and the Mesopotamia ruled by the merciless kings of Assyria and Babylonia. The general whereabouts of historical Assyria had never been forgotten; what was unknown was whether there were any Assyrian antiquities worth digging for. Pragmatic hindrances included the prospect of infidels digging up Muslim tells and the persistent problems of financing the operations. Again, the French government stole a march on the British in 1843 by subventing the excavation of spectacular reliefs and architectural remains from the eccentric palace of Sargon II in Khorsabad (figure 2). The first antiquities went on display in the Louvre in 1847; the final publication of the expedition in 1849-1850, published in three elephant folios at a cost equivalent to \$810 in 1988 (figure 3),¹ was intended for the libraries and salons of the truly well-to-do. This elitist perspective on the first presentation of Assyria in France accounts for its muted national reception.

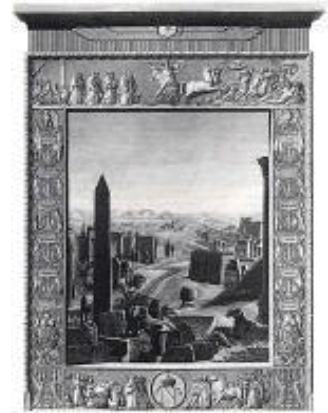


Figure 1. Frontispiece from *Description de l'Égypt* (1809)



Figure 2. Great Assyrian Hall at the Louvre, ca. 1863, in *Le Tour de Monde* (1863). Used by permission of the Louvre, Paris

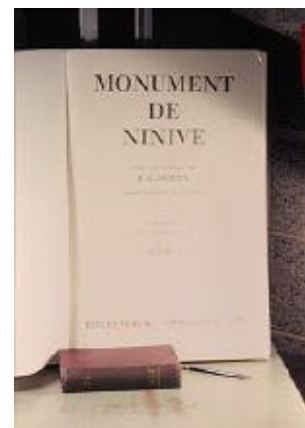


Figure 3. (Botta and Flandin: Frontispiece)

¹ The increase in the consumer-index of British guinea/pounds from 1850 to 1988 is roughly 455% (Mitchell: 846).

Victorian Assyria

[4] A growing stream of English periodical articles beginning in February of 1846 would keep the British public abreast of young Austen Henry Layard's archaeological exploits in Mesopotamia, niggardly funded by British Museum Trustees, dubious of the aesthetic worth of "the Assyrian marbles" (figure 4; see "Fine Arts"). Although the intrinsic ethnological fascination of artifacts from a major civilization of the ancient world was never entirely lost sight of, two themes consistently mesmerized the public's attention: nationalism and biblical proof. The success of the French excavations at Khorsabad and the triumphant display of the spoils at the Louvre constituted an affront to British imperial supremacy. For the honor of King and Country, it was imperative that sober Englishmen should hoist the British Jack over ancient Assyria by procuring the finest monuments for the British Museum and blaze the way in deciphering the inscriptions written in the baffling wedge-shaped signs.²



Figure 3. *Illustrated London News* (August 28, 1847: 144)

[5] Early Victorian England, reeling from challenges to traditional religious authority brought about by the accelerating social ills of the industrial revolution, disturbing revelations of natural science, and German "higher-criticism," vigorously sought for past certainty in the literal proof of the Bible. Why did Christian England unselfconsciously promote the exploration of the Bible-kingdom of ancient Assyria? This was a country in which a religious census on a randomly-chosen Sunday would reveal over 60% of the population in church,³ in which most households owned Bibles (Bowen; Knight: 36-41; Hyam: 90), and whose grass-roots constituency identified Britain's moral mission to colonize Asia and Africa with the spread of Christian civilization (Hyam: 91-97).⁴ The world of Homer may be fabulous, but the nations that assailed ancient Israel were certainly not. The biblical texts are awash with images of the remorselessly aggressive Assyrian Empire and its evil monarchs, from the skewed historiography of 2 Kings

² E. A. Wallis Budge set an example of nationalistic boosterism difficult to equal: "The English built the main edifice of Assyriology, and other nations constructed the outlying buildings. . . . The object of this book is to tell the general reader how [Henry C.] Rawlinson founded the science of Assyriology, how it was established solely by the Trustees of the British Museum, and to show how the study of it passed from England into Germany and other European countries, and finally into America, where it has taken deep root" (ix, xi). The book contains a wealth of unique anecdotal information regarding the founders of Assyriology, concealed in a minefield of misinformation and basic ignorance of the factual history of the topic at hand.

³ The figure of 60% church attendance derives from the famous Religious Census of England taken March 30, 1851. The study was underwritten by Secretary of State Lord John Russell, and thus had the authority of the British state behind it (those who failed to respond to the first questionnaire received a second; however, no one was jailed for refusing to participate). The questionnaire was prepared and analyzed by Howard Mann. Out of a total population of 18 million, church attendance that Sunday for the Church of England was tallied up as 5,292,551, for the main Protestant dissenting churches, 4,536,264, and for Roman Catholics, 383,630, the latter figure widely decried as too low. Mann extrapolated that about 5 million people, who were free to do so, did not attend church (Gibson: 168-71).

⁴ The British government never directly sponsored Catholic or Protestant missions, and was circumspect in limiting missionary work to existing Christian groups in Muslim countries. Nevertheless, Protestant evangelicals and a broad swathe of the British public held a rather uncomplicated notion of the global triumph of their Christian civilization, progressive, humanitarian, and militarily invincible.

and Isaiah to the rhapsodic images of their liquidation in Nahum, to the category-blasting parable of a repentant Nineveh in Jonah. Biblical Assyria was part of the living imagination of any reasonably schooled nineteenth century westerner.

[6] The typological injection of the Bible into literature, the arts, and even politics, such an unconsciously systemic facet of Victorian civilization (Landow), had scooped up ancient Assyria in its project.⁵ Prior to the excavations, evangelical writers harped on the theme of the utter desolation of the sites of ancient Nineveh and Babylon (figure 5) and the degeneracy of the present inhabitants as visible, palpable proofs of biblical prophecy fulfilled. For example, in his exceedingly popular work, *Evidence of the Truth of the Christian Religion*, Alexander Keith takes the cities prophesied against in the Bible, reproduces the prophecies themselves in italics, and links them in a narrative compounded of travelers' tales and his own sonorous moralizing in a "demonstration" of the prophecy's fulfillment.⁶ One writer for the *British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, entranced by the practical benefits of the monuments in the ongoing crusade against unbelief, boasted that

The historical basis of the Old Testament scriptures has been confirmed in a manner and to a degree which may bid defiance to all of the present or future advocates of infidelity or skepticism . . . On a sudden the Pharaohs of ancient Egypt have rolled off their hieroglyph-encrusted swathes, and the Assyrian monarchs have reappeared in serenely majestic sternness, attesting by their visible presence, and the indelible records of their times, the terrible reality of the events recorded in Scripture, and proclaiming from their long-silent tombs that Moses and Isaiah had spoken nothing but the truth (quoted by Bohrer: 272).

From this time forward, distinctive line-drawings and engravings of authentic Assyrian ruins and artworks will replace the fanciful drawings of Greco-Roman or Islamic subjects that formerly illustrated "antiquities of the Bible" handbooks (Nevin: 220-32; Cox: 125; Barrows: 312-13; Bissell), weekly devotional literature (Kitto: 3:59-98), and a wealth of light-from-the-biblical-monuments literature (Harper; Walther; Kellner; figure 6).



Figure 5. Watercolor of Babylon by J. M. W. Turner (ca. 1834). Used by permission of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Figure 6. Jonah Preaching to Nineveh (Peltz: 285)



Figure 7. (Layard 1849: 1:Frontispiece)

⁵ A painting by the Pre-Raphaelite William Holman Hunt, *The Finding of Our Saviour in the Temple*, sports a rarely noticed example from Assyria. On the supporting wall of the Jerusalem Temple, behind Joseph and Mary, is a common Assyrian ornamental rondel consisting of pine cones and water-lily blossoms. The message: the Temple itself, together with its Jewish leadership, is fated to fall before Christ's revelation even as Nineveh was doomed in the Old Testament.

⁶ One example will suffice: "You find here [Tyre] no similitude of that glory for which it was so renowned in ancient times. You see nothing here but a mere Babel of broken walls, pillars, vaults, &c. Its present inhabitants are only a few poor wretches, harbouring themselves in the vaults, and subsisting chiefly upon fishing, who seem to be preserved in this place by Divine Providence, as a visible argument how God hath fulfilled His Word concerning Tyre" (Keith: 240, quoting from Maundrell's *Journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem*).

[7] Layard's reward for his harrowing exploits in Mesopotamia led, more or less directly, to a knighthood, a career in the Foreign Office, and a seat in Parliament. The immense success of Layard's publications traded upon the image of the resourceful English *sahib* abroad and the biblical proofs of the monuments, augmented by the competent marketing strategy of his publisher, the respected John Murray.⁷ For Layard's first volume, *Nineveh and Its Remains*, Murray spent approximately £7 for editing Layard's lucid and engaging prose travelogue, but over £300 to have master engravers, working from Layard's site sketches, prepare hundreds of eye-catching illustrations of local tribesmen excavating the looming tells (figure 7), scenes from the palace reliefs themselves, palace floorplans and maps, and romantic vignettes of Arabs and native Christians in their picturesque costumes (figure 8; Bohrer: 139). One barometer of the success of Layard's book was attendance at the British Museum. Samuel Birch, a British Museum officer and first president of the Society for Biblical Archaeology, wrote Layard in 1849 that "All the world is mad to see the monuments - and the cry is 'the bulls - the bulls'" (quoted in Saggs: 314; figure 9). By following the redoubtable Layard in his perilous quest for buried treasure with volume in hand, the humblest British subject could in pilgrim-fashion retrace the path of the monuments from the British Museum located in the capital of the British Empire across oceans of time and space to the very capital of the Assyrian Empire thundered against by the prophets of Israel. It was all quite thrilling, and became a profitable best-seller for Murray (Bohrer: 212-15).

[8] The marketing of Assyria in mid-century England was a multi-media affair. It soon became possible to purchase, for fine gentlemen, gold lapel studs with embossed winged Assyrian bulls and, for the ladies, bracelets and necklaces sporting royal and mythological motifs from the palace sculptures (figure 10; Bohrer: 338-44). As early as 1853, Charles Kean staged an ambitious London production based on Lord Byron's tragedy *Sardanapalus, King of Assyria*, that literally translated whole pages of fine lithographs illustrating Layard's works into theatrical stage sets (figure 11; Bohrer: 345-56).⁸ Dreamy backdrops of monumental buildings fronting the Tigris framed actors with square-cut beards moving in halls flanked by the ubiquitous giant winged bulls, familiar to visitors of the British Museum. At this time, British



Figure 8. (Layard 1849: 2:Frontispiece)



Figure 9. *Illustrated London News* (October 26, 1850: 392)



Figure 10. English bracelet ca. 1867 imitating Assyrian palace motifs. Used by permission of the Louvre, Paris



Figure 11. *Illustrated London News* (June 18, 1853: 493)

⁷ On the life of Austen Henry Layard, see Layard (1903); Waterfield; Saggs, ed. (1-64); Fales and Hickey; and Bohrer (21-35, 50-61, 117-229).

⁸ In its review of the play *The Times* (June 14, 1853, 3) would observe that "The researches of Mr. Layard have not only rendered ancient Assyria an object of interest to professed antiquaries, but have actually brought it into fashion . . . the fashion of the Royal Crown of Nineveh is as familiar as the pattern of the last new Parisian bonnet . . . [Byron's] *Sardanapalus* itself has no great powers of attraction, but it is an admirable peg whereon to hang those Assyrian antiquities of which Lord Byron never dreamed. Taking, therefore, this tragedy as his pretext, Mr Kean has plunged the London public into the very heart of Assyrian life" (quoted by Bohrer: 354).

stage censorship forbade theatrical performances based on the Bible, but it was perfectly in order, and profitable box-office revenue, to stage the downfall of Assyrian kings, particularly if they are confused in the public's mind with the Ottoman Sultan and other Oriental despots.

[9] In 1854, seven years after the arrival of the first Assyrian antiquities from Layard's excavations, the Sydenham Crystal Palace opened. Arguably the world's first commercial amusement theme park, the Crystal Palace housed a Fine Arts Court, a series of galleries with three-dimensional walk-through architectural tableaux of ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, Moorish Spain, Byzantium, medieval Europe, the Renaissance, and the Italian Baroque. Squeezed incongruously between Moorish Spain, "Aboo Simbel Tomb & Colossal Figures," and Byzantium was a Nineveh Court, a mongrel structure compounded of polychrome Assyrian-style reliefs and an upper storey anachronistically based on the Hall of Columns at Persepolis (figure 12). Up until 1867, when the Nineveh Court burned, it was possible, for the price of admission, for a Victorian family to stroll through the throne room of a mock Assyrian palace and pretend they were back in ancient Assyria (Bohrer: 422-43).⁹

The Assyriologists

[10] All of the first generation of Assyriologists were, without exception, biblically engaged, and sought to harmonize the emerging contours of the Neo-Assyrian Empire with the Assyria enshrined in the Old Testament. Jules Oppert (figure 13), appointed Professor of Assyrian philology and archaeology at the Collège de France in 1869, published numerous articles on biblical regnal chronology as well as commentaries on the books of Esther and Judith (on the life of Oppert, see Muss-Arnolt; Bezold; Lehmann-Haupt). The brilliantly gifted linguist Edward Hincks (figure 14) served as Rector of Killyleagh, County Down, Ireland, for 55 years; he was the first scholar correctly to identify "Jehu son of Omri" in the Black Obelisk inscription, and also made lively contributions to the biblical chronology debate (on the life of Hincks, see Davidson; Lane-Poole 1921-22a; Cathcart).

[11] Henry Creswicke Rawlinson (figure 15), a British career soldier and diplomat, published dozens of articles in the *Athenaeum* and the imperial drum-beating *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* that dealt with "biblical Assyria" in light of Assyro-Babylonian inscriptions (on the life of Rawlinson, see Flemming; Lane-Poole 1921-22b; Larsen: *passim*). In the early days of decipherment, Rawlinson confidently harmonized biblical, classical and historical Assyria into a



Figure 12. Sydenham Crystal Palace (Wyatt: after 20)



Figure 13. Jules Oppert (Budge: 206)



Figure 14. Edward Hincks (Budge: 92)



Figure 15. H. C. Rawlinson (G. Rawlinson 1898)

⁹ The Nineveh Court was designed by James Fergusson, a businessman and Orientalist autodidact who authored *The Palaces of Nineveh and Persepolis Restored*, and whose perspectival drawing of Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh constituted the fold-out frontispiece of Layard's *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon*. It is no wonder that the use of Layard's name in connection with the Nineveh Court was eagerly sought by the promoters of the Sydenham Crystal Palace.

richly woven tapestry of scriptural confirmation, constantly evolving as it incorporated the latest revelation from the “monuments.” Texts and images alike will verify the Bible:

[W]hen I shall have accurately learnt the locality of the different bas-reliefs that have been brought from Koyunjik (an acropolis of Nineveh), I do not doubt but that I shall be able to point out the bands of Jewish maidens who were delivered to Sennacherib, and perhaps to distinguish the portraiture of the humbled Hezekiah.

Thus, for example, when Rawlinson was baffled by his failure to read correctly the royal Assyrian name of Shalmaneser in the cuneiform inscriptions, and influenced by 2 Kings 17:3-6’s apparent attribution of the destruction of Israel to that king, he could harmonize the royal inscriptions of Sargon - which spoke of the conquest of Samaria and the deportation of the Israelites - with the exploits of Shalmaneser recounted in Josephus and the Old Testament. In other words, he resorted to the traditional scholarly expedient of assuming that Sargon was an alias for Shalmaneser (1851).

[12] Eberhard Schrader (figure 16), Professor of Old Testament at Zürich, Giessen, Jena, and Professor of Oriental Languages at Berlin, the justly called father of Assyriology in Germany, published in 1872 what was arguably the single most accessible source of nineteenth century Assyriological research for Old Testament specialists, *Die Keilinschriften und das Alte Testament*. Arranged as a commentary by canonical order of biblical books, chapters, and verses, Schrader walked the reader through the Old Testament, stopping at each verse where comparative philology, mythology, geography, or historical examples could shed light (on the life of Schrader, see Meyer; Renger: 151-57).

[13] The 1872 London lecture of the “intellectual picklock” George Smith (figure 17) on the eleventh tablet of the Gilgamesh epic, featured in the 1873 issue of the *Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* as “The Chaldean Account of the Deluge” (2: 213-34) captured the public’s thirst for biblical confirmation of Genesis. Sensing profits from afar, *The Daily Telegraph* footed the bill for Smith to dig in the Mesopotamian ruins until he found the missing portions of the cuneiform tablet, which, against all rational odds, he did. He published the text in *Transactions* the following year (on the life of Smith, see Sayce 1876; Hoberman; Evers; on the story of his sensational finds, see Moorey: 11-12; Rogers: 278-84).

[14] All of these men began their Assyriological investigations confident in the literal historical accuracy of the biblical narratives. The Ussherite dates printed in most Protestant Bibles were perceived as useful benchmarks, but, since the numbers were clearly based on fallible human reason, not divine revelation, they were subject to correction when challenged by pertinent extra-biblical sources, like the Assyrian eponym canon. Assyro-Babylonian inscriptions of an historical nature for the most part were dealt with as if their facticity was above reproach, except in those rare instances when the tenets of “biblical Assyria” were jeopardized. A hermeneutic of suspicion regarding the historiographic shaping of



Figure 16. Eberhard Schrader (Budge: 224)



Figure 17. George Smith. *Illustrated London News* (April 10, 1875: 338)

the Assyrian royal inscriptions themselves would not, with isolated exceptions, be exercised until the twentieth century.

The Curious Case of Missing King Pul

[15] The Assyrian king Pul, who received tribute from Menahem of Israel in 2 Kings 15:19-20, posed no special difficulty prior to the decipherment of the royal Assyrian annals. Among biblical commentators and historians of the ancient world writing prior to 1850, Pul was universally recognized as the first Assyrian conqueror to trouble Israel, followed immediately by Tiglath-Pileser (see Schroerer: 144, 468-69; Winer: 2:259-60, 2:611-12; Kenrick: 374-75; Milman: 302-5). In 1852 Hincks read “Menahem of Samaria” as tributary to the king whose sculptures had been reused in the Southwest Palace of Nimrud.¹⁰ This decipherment permitted Layard a year later to publish an engraving of an Assyrian king on his chariot with the caption “Bas-relief, representing Pul, or Tiglath-Pileser” (figure 18; 1853: 619).¹¹ The identification, made before the cuneiform name of the king could actually be read, proved to be correct. While the events enumerated in the translations of the badly mutilated inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III seemed to corroborate the military history of “biblical Assyria”, “King Pul” proved too entrenched in the scholarly imagination for the first Assyriologists *not* to find him in the “monuments.” For example, through a false reading of the royal Assyrian name Adad-nirari III as “Phal-lukha,” and by equating this with biblical Pul, Rawlinson linked the name Semiramis of Greek legend with Israelite history, a charmingly absurd example of “biblical” and “classical” Assyria stealing a march on “historical Assyria” (1854a).¹²



Figure 18 (Layard 1853: 619)

¹⁰ Rawlinson, disturbed by the unbiblical collocation of Rezin of Damascus with Menahem of Samaria, assented to Hincks' reading but proposed that the Assyrian scribe mistook Menahem for Pekah (1859b: 1:375 n. 2). His brother George Rawlinson, whose fidelity to the “received literal history” of the Old Testament led him to adopt several forced synchronizations, observed that “The comparative chronology of the reigns of Sennacherib and Hezekiah is the chief difficulty which meets the historian who wishes to harmonize the Scriptural narrative with the Inscriptions” (1859: 1:384 n. 2). In spite of the silence of Sennacherib's annals, H. C. Rawlinson, who had read the Taylor and Bellino prisms, maintained the traditional exegetical position that Sennacherib had campaigned twice in Palestine (1851: 903). George Rawlinson loyally followed his brother's lead in this matter (1868: 119-21).

¹¹ In his text Layard asserts that “[t]his Assyrian king must, consequently, have been either the immediate predecessor of Pul, Pul himself, or Tiglath Pileser, the name on the pavement-slab not having yet been deciphered” (1853: 617).

¹² The mother - not the wife! - of Adad-nirari III was Sammu-ramat, the origin of the legendary Greek Semiramis: the name of mother and son figured together in a votive inscription described by H. C. Rawlinson (1854b: 1:465). Rawlinson later repeats this correlation (1859a: 1:519). Herodotus (i, 184) believed Semiramis lived some five generations before Nitocris, a date that corresponds roughly (very roughly) to the Ussherite dating of Pul; hence, Rawlinson's chain of associations. George Rawlinson, to his credit, dismissed Ninus and his wife, Semiramis, as real historical personages (1859: 1:364); George Smith, writing during the brief time that H. C. Rawlinson's theory of the identity of “Phal-lukha” attracted any adherents, also grappled with the Old Testament, the classical sources, and the “monuments” (1857: 19-23, 65-67). Layard, in his authoritative essay on Nineveh in the 8th edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1858), follows H. C. Rawlinson in his equation of Pul = ?Phal-lukha, complete with prefixed question mark. With some reservation, Rawlinson still maintained the identity of the inscriptions of “Vul-lush” (= Adad-nirari III) and Pul in 1861 (IR 35 nn. 1-3), followed by W. H. Fox Talbot. Rawlinson abandoned his identification of “Iva-lush III” with Pul in 1862, a revision based on his work with the eponym canon (1862a: 725).

[16] The industrious Rawlinson, beginning in 1862 in a series of articles devoted to Assyrian and Babylonian chronology,¹³ believed himself capable of providing the means for solving the vexatious puzzle of the lengths of the reigns of the Assyrian kings (see especially, 1862b, 1863, 1867a, 1867). During the Neo-Assyrian era, calendar years were named after a fixed rota of officials, comparable to the use of the names of Greek archons and Roman consuls for the same purpose. These eponyms were systematically recorded in lists, or canons, sometimes with parenthetical notices of events of military or political importance. Rawlinson had access to four overlapping canon lists; combined, they covered what we now know to have been the late tenth century through the beginning of Assurbanipal's reign in the seventh century (for the modern edition, see Millard, and the discussion by Finkel and Reade). The Assyrian eponym canon not only made it possible to illuminate the sequence of kings from the heretofore obscure ninth century monarchs to the resplendent Assurbanipal of the lion-hunt sculptures, but it also enabled students of history to state how many years, say, Tiglath-Pileser III and Shalmaneser III occupied the throne. In 1872 the German academic Schrader published an accurate synoptic transliteration of the canons complete with BC dating as an appendix to his *Keilinschriften und das Alte Testament*. The indefatigable George Smith would canvass the brief but contentious history of interpretation in his 1875 monograph, *The Assyrian Canon*.¹⁴

[17] In cuneiform script, Tiglath-Pileser's name usually required five or more different characters for its representation (figure 19; for the options, see Brinkman: 240 n. 1544). The Assyrian name for Tiglath-Pileser does not correspond to Pul, as even the most enthusiastic assyriological tyros were forced to admit. Publication of the Assyrian eponym canon, begun in 1862, failed to break the suspense. Pul could not be found in the Assyrian records. Numerous explanations were put forward to King Pul:

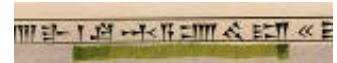


Figure 19. Name of Tiglath-Pileser in cuneiform characters

The Assyrian eponym canon is flawed - Pul was skipped in a forty-odd year hiatus (Oppert continued to campaign for this well into the 1880s);¹⁵

“The compiler of the [Assyrian eponym] canon was a blunderer” (Hincks, quoted in Bosanquet 1874: 2);

Pul was a Chaldean suzerain whose reign was skipped by the Assyro-phile canon authors (Bosanquet 1865: 152-53);¹⁶

¹³ “I am glad to be able to announce to those who are interested in the comparative chronology of the Jewish and Assyrian kingdoms, the discovery of a Cuneiform document which promises to be of the greatest possible value in determining the dates of all great events which occurred in Western Asia between the beginning of the ninth and the latter half of the seventh century B.C.” (H. C. Rawlinson: 1862a: 724). Rawlinson originally believed that the “canon” consisted of a list of the annual high priests of Assyria.

¹⁴ “. . . I believe myself that the [Assyrian eponym] canon is a complete and accurate document” (Smith 1875: 72).

¹⁵ Oppert and his followers, in the face of the Assyrian eponym canon's conclusive evidence against it, would doggedly maintain a biblically-based conviction in Pul's reality, a parade example of the authority of biblical Assyria over historical Assyria (1868: 308-28; 1887). F. Finzi follows Oppert, but uneasily leaves open the possibility that Pul corresponds to Tiglath-Pileser (35-37). George Rawlinson, in his review of Lenormant's *Manuel*, would spend almost a quarter of his essay fulminating over Oppert's pernicious legacy in the matter of Pul's non-appearance in the Assyrian eponym canon (1870: 95-99).

¹⁶ “Such appears to be the simple explanation of a difficulty, which has led Dr. Hincks and M. Oppert to suggest, that the names of not less than thirty or forty archons at Nineveh have been omitted from the Assyrian Canon,

Pul is to be identified with an eighth century monarch preceding Tiglath-Pileser whose name appears in the Assyrian eponym canon (Smith 1869: 9-10).¹⁷

Pul and Tiglath-Pileser are identical (H. C. Rawlinson and Schrader).¹⁸

[18] Schrader's identification in the 1870s of the scriptural and Ptolemaic canon entity Pul with the scriptural and cuneiform entity Tiglath-Pileser III (generally known as Tiglath-Pileser II at the time) wins almost universal acceptance. In truth, this identification was anticipated a decade earlier by H. C. Rawlinson (a point of nationalistic honor defensively raised by Smith 1875: 13, who was well aware of Schrader's position). Unlike Schrader, however, Rawlinson never expressed his opinion about the positive correlation as an unqualified statement, waffling over the possibility that biblical Pul was a "general" of Tiglath-Pileser (1863: 245).¹⁹ Schrader's lucid prose exposition, on the contrary, left no room for equivocation. The interregnum of Pul "hat in Wirklichkeit nie existiert" (Hommel: 19).²⁰ Since Pul corresponds to Tiglath-Pileser, the historical integrity of the Bible is perceived as intact, and the Assyrian eponym canon will be used henceforth by biblical pundits fearlessly, and recklessly, to date biblical and related historical events.

[19] The scholarly consensus from 1875 to the present, that Pul was another name by which the contemporaries of Tiglath-Pileser knew him,²¹ may well be "correct", i.e. biblical Assyria more

between the reigns of Asshur-zallus [= Ashur-nirari V] and Tiglathpileser, in order to make room for the supposed reign of Pul" (Bosanquet: 153; see also 58-61). Bosanquet's "methodology" entailed the utmost freedom in juggling Assyrian regnal dates to match his preconceptions of Israelite and Judahite timelines. Smith, with fatal courtesy, states: "The chronological system of Mr. Bosanquet is impossible; but assyriologists are under great obligations to him for the noble manner in which he supports their labours" (1875: 11).

¹⁷ Smith, while conceding that "Sir Henry Rawlinson has suppressed the Biblical Pul king of Assyria, who took tribute from Menahem", nevertheless advocates that Vul-nirari (Ashur-nirari V) corresponds to Pul since, according to Smith, he ascended the throne in 755, thus providing a plausible synchronism with Menahem of Israel. The phonetic similarity between Vul- and Pul satisfactorily accounted for the form of the biblical citation in Smith's opinion.

¹⁸ In 1872 Schrader skillfully marshaled the evidence for his hypothesis "... daß Phul und Pör und widerum Phul und Tiglath-Pileser ein und dieselbe Person sind" (1872: 133, and see 124-28, 131-33; 1875: 321-23; 1878: 422-23, 458-60; 1880: 3-4).

¹⁹ Although the eponym canons left no room for Pul's reign, a fact that the doggedly logical Rawlinson could not ignore, his discomfort with the notion of abandoning Pul is patently evident: "But even if the separate name of Pul be thus eliminated from the royal Assyrian lists, our difficulties are not ended. There is much still to be done before we can fully reconcile the Hebrew accounts of this period of history with the contemporary cuneiform annals" (1863: 245). In subsequent articles in the *Athenaeum* which deal with Assyrian chronology, he avoids mentioning the name Pul altogether. That Rawlinson's notions regarding the identity of Pul and Tiglath-Pileser gained the attention of other scholars is borne out by Wattenbach, writing in 1868, who asserted that "...es scheint, daß er [Pul] nicht verschieden ist vor Tiglath-Pilesar II, der Name verstümmelt aus Pulitser, der assyrischen Form des Namens" (23).

²⁰ Sayce conceived of Pul as a mere copyist's error for Tiglath-Pileser in his groundbreaking essay on Babylonia (that encompasses Assyria) in the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. By the turn of the century, however, he had moderated his views in keeping with the consensus that Pul was the name by which Tiglath-Pileser was known in Babylonia (1901).

²¹ To be sure, the defense of the independent historicity of biblical Pul - that Pul does not correspond to Tiglath-Pileser - continues to the present. Most of the proponents are motivated by the summons of biblical inerrancy, and utilize arguments that, for the most part, pit them against the academic study of Assyriology and the Bible (see McIntyre, and the refutation by Storck).

or less equals historical Assyria. On the other hand, one must pause to wonder what the exegetes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries might have done with Sargon, mentioned only once in Isaiah 20:1, had his name stubbornly refused to be read in the cuneiform inscriptions of Assyria (see Holloway). The failure of Assyriology to confirm the independent reality of King Pul touched a raw nerve in a Bible-fearing Europe,²² sparking a twenty year fox-and-hound hunt through textual and archaeological sources for the missing king.²³ Schrader's elegant solution, essentially the harmonization of biblical higher criticism and assyriological spadework later canonized by William Foxwell Albright and his disciples as the American School "backgrounds method," was symptomatic of an overweening Victorian desire to retain a static biblical exegesis for battling the menace of Nineveh and its remains, and modernity.

[20] The concept of *prestige* appears to synthesize the disparate threads of British imperialism, biblical confirmation *vis-à-vis* Mesopotamian archaeology, and the anxieties that encompassed them both. All empires, whether Neo-Assyrian or British, are based in part on the fiction of comprehensive and legitimate domination of foreign territories and their nationals, as if any human hand were capacious enough to grasp the globe of imperial will-to-power. In 1867 in a speech delivered to Parliament, the decipherer Rawlinson spells out his estimation of political prestige as a tool of empire:

I look on "prestige" in politics very much as I look on credit in finance. It is a power which enables us to achieve very great results with very small means at our immediate disposal. "Prestige" may not be of paramount importance in Europe, but in the East, sir, our whole position depends upon it. It is a perfect fallacy to suppose that we hold India by the sword. The foundation of our tenure, the talisman - so to speak - which enables 100,000 Englishmen to hold 150,000,000 natives in subjection, is the belief in our unassailable power, in our inexhaustible resources; and in any circumstance, therefore, which impairs that belief, which leads the nations of the East to mistrust our superiority, and to regard us as more nearly on an equality with themselves, inflicts a grievous shock on our political position (G. Rawlinson 1898: 252).²⁴

[21] Like the British colonial system, any tradition of biblical exegesis carries its own cachet of prestige, based in part on the collective fiction that its hallowed interpretation of history and theology lies beyond the logician's realm of mere falsification and verification. To threaten the

²² On the relative omnipresence of Bibles in Victorian households, irrespective of whether the owners were dissenters, Anglicans, or even literate, see Knight: 36-46. The ideological mission of Victorian imperialism cherished by many evangelicals, the edification of the globe through the spread of progressive Christian civilization on the British model, had its domestic correlate: in the period between 1840 and 1876, an unprecedented 7,144 Anglican churches were restored and an additional 1,727 were built at a cost of £25 1/2 million, a sum amassed mostly by private donation.

²³ The search for Pul included an anti-modernist imprimatur by the Catholic Church. G. Massaroli, expanding on a series of essays that originally appeared in *Civiltà Cattolica*, self-consciously endeavors to defend the truth of scripture by arguing that Pul and Tiglath-Pileser are two distinct individuals (1-59) as well as maintaining the (by then) bravely reactionary claim that Sargon and Shalmaneser V are identical (60-143), flaunting or dismissing inscriptional evidence as the need arose.

²⁴ One is reminded of the American space race, a function of Congressionally-funded Cold War "prestige politics," the crude message being if the United States can successfully send a manned vehicle to the moon, it can reliably lob a thermonuclear weapon into a rival nation's sovereign space.

empire of traditional hermeneutics, whether through modern geological theories or the failure to locate King Pul in Assyrian royal inscriptions, rocked the prestige of the entire edifice like the Indian Sepoy Mutiny of 1857.²⁵ The military mutiny was answered with a horrifying display of high-profile revenge retaliation, and “missing” King Pul was retrieved as an alias in the cuneiform texts and re-ensconced in the exegetes’ pantheon of “forensically” demonstrated *dramatis personae*. But the anxieties of both empires could not, and can never, be quelled by simple strength of arms or adamantine proofs from the monuments.

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²⁵ For examples of the noisy defense of Britain’s imperial rule, expressed through lurid narratives and sensationalizing illustrations of Muslim and Hindu barbarity and incompetence of self-governance, see Brantlinger: 199-224; Hyam: 134-44. Over 500 books on the topic appeared between 1857 and 1862. “The awful atrocities . . . almost give rise to the impious doubt whether this world is under the government of an all-wise and just Providence” (Richard Cobden, quoted in Hyam: 139).

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