

THE ROLE OF ASSYRIA IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST DURING THE REIGN OF MANASSEH¹

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Introduction

Under Sennacherib (704-681 B.C.), Esarhaddon (680-669), and Ashurbanipal (668-627),² Assyria played a dominant role in the ancient Near East during the long reign of Manasseh, king of Judah (c. 696-642).³ While the Assyrian kings were not without challenges and even setbacks, expansion of the Neo-Assyrian empire reached its zenith in this period.

The present article explores from an Assyrian point of view the relationship between the kingdoms of Assyria and Judah during the time of Manasseh. The primary question here is this: What was the significance of Judah to Assyria during this time? My main sources of information are selected Assyrian texts, which can be divided into several categories:

1. Assyrian historical texts which explicitly refer to Manasseh, king of Judah,
2. Assyrian historical texts which imply the involvement of Manasseh by referring to the collective kings of Syria-Palestine,
3. A tribute payment record which mentions Judah and appears to date from the time of Manasseh,
4. The treaty of Esarhaddon establishing the succession of Ashurbanipal.

¹This article is a slightly revised version of a paper presented at a Society of Biblical Literature/American Schools of Oriental Research panel on "The Age of Manasseh" in San Francisco, 1992.

²On the chronology of the last kings of Assyria, including Ashurbanipal, see, e.g., J. Oates, "Assyrian Chronology, 631-612 B.C.," *Iraq* 27 (1965): 135-159.

³E. Thiele dates Manasseh's reign 696-642 B.C., including a coregency with Hezekiah 696-686 (*The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983], 176). J. H. Hayes and P. K. Hooker date Manasseh's reign 698-644 B.C., without a coregency (*A New Chronology for the Kings of Israel and Judah* [Atlanta: John Knox, 1988], 68, 80).

*I. Assyrian Historical Texts Explicitly Referring to
Manasseh, King of Judah.*

In extant Assyrian texts, Manasseh and his kingdom of Judah are explicitly mentioned only in lists of subservient kings or states.⁴ This fact itself is important: For the half-century in question, Judah functioned as a cog in the great Assyrian wheel, not carrying out any independent activity worthy of mention by the Assyrian scribes.

*A. Building Materials Delivered to Nineveh for
Esarhaddon's Arsenal.*

In a prism inscription of Esarhaddon (Nin. A, V, 55ff.),⁵ Manasseh is listed among the 12 kings of Syria-Palestine and 10 kings of Cyprus who were forced by Esarhaddon to provide corvée labor in order to deliver timber and stone from the West for the rebuilding of the royal arsenal⁶ at Nineveh. The year in which this event occurred is not specified,⁷ but the fact that Sidon is not included in the list suggests that the date is not earlier than the revolt of that city and its destruction by Esarhaddon in 677/676.⁸ Some implications of the text are as follows:

1. Assyria exploited resources, including manpower, from western territories under its control for the enrichment of the Assyrian homeland.

2. Judah was treated as a firmly controlled vassal state rather than a more independent satellite, which it was during Hezekiah's reign before the invasion of Sennacherib in 701.⁹

3. Manasseh was only one of 22 western kings called upon to do the bidding of the Assyrian overlord. In this text Manasseh appears as *me-na-si-i šār ia-ú-di*, "Manasseh, king of the city, i.e., city-state, of Judah." It is tempting to suggest that this reference to Judah as a city-state

⁴J. M. Miller and J. H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 365.

⁵For translit. and Germ. trans., see R. Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons Königs von Assyrien*, Archiv für Orientforschung, Beiheft 9 (Graz: Im Selbstverlage des Herausgebers, 1956), 60. "Me-na-si-i" = Manasseh is found here in line 55. For Eng. trans., see ARAB = D. D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1927), 2:265, and ANET, 291.

⁶In line 40, *É.GAL ma-šar-ti* = "arsenal" (CAD, 10/1:358).

⁷Esarhaddon's inscriptions are not arranged chronologically (see, e.g., A. Spalinger, "Esarhaddon and Egypt: An Analysis of the First Invasion of Egypt," Or 43 [1974]: 296).

⁸H. Tadmor suggests that the corvée work for the royal arsenal was performed in the same year as the attack on Sidon ("Philistia under Assyrian Rule," BA 29 [1966]: 98).

⁹See Miller and Hayes, 371.

emphasizes the territorial insignificance of Judah within the Neo-Assyrian empire. However, the determinative URU, "city," is applied to all of the western states listed here (lines 55-71), so Judah is not singled out. Furthermore, in a number of versions of the same text¹⁰ and in Column I of Ashurbanipal's Cylinder C,¹¹ "Judah" and the names of all the other western states are preceded by the determinative KUR (= *mātu*), "country" (lines 24-45). In reality, the western states were a mixture of city-states—e.g., those of Philistia and Phoenicia—and larger states which could be called countries. However, in the historical lists just mentioned, careful distinctions between city-states and countries are not made; all of the states are simply lumped together as one or the other. In any case, it is clear that Judah is only one of many western vassals.

4. In spite of the rebellion of Hezekiah against Sennacherib, which prompted the latter's invasion, Judah continued as a kingdom to be passed on to Manasseh; it was not turned into an Assyrian province as was the northern kingdom of Israel. We cannot be sure what status Sennacherib would have imposed upon Judah had he captured Jerusalem in 701. However, the overall Assyrian policy toward western states was to allow them to retain their respective identities as vassals, except for cases in which there were compelling reasons to do otherwise. The kingdoms of Israel and Damascus are examples of such exceptions. These may have been reorganized as Assyrian provinces due to their proximity to the Assyrian heartland. Here, tight control would rule out the possibility that the security of Assyria itself could be threatened from the West.

For Assyria, several advantages of maintaining vassals can be suggested:

a. While tighter provincial control would more effectively have prevented the development of revolts—and, in fact, Eph'al points out that "we hear almost nothing about provincial uprisings"—imposing provincial rule on an expanding empire was affected by practical constraints. Running a province required far more Assyrian effort and personnel than were necessary for keeping a vassal ruler in line through intimidation and other forms of manipulation.

b. Preexisting administrative and commercial systems were valuable for maintaining healthy economies which could be exploited through taxation and payment of tribute for the benefit of Assyria.¹² Thus, for

¹⁰On variants in line 55, see Borger, 60.

¹¹For translit., see M. Streck, ed., *Ashurbanipal und die letzten Assyrischen Könige bis zum Untergange Ninivehs* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1916), 2:138, line 25. Cylinder C will be discussed further below.

¹²J. N. Postgate observes: "The economic structure of any empire will consist of the

example, Esarhaddon and earlier Assyrian kings encouraged private trade in various parts of the empire.¹³ The commercial systems of the Phoenician and Philistine city-states were especially vital to the Assyrians. In fact, the Assyrians were to a considerable degree incapable of dominating the rich Mediterranean trade without the cooperation of the Phoenicians and Philistines, whose maritime skills and special trade links were essential to that enterprise.¹⁴

c. The states of southern Palestine—i.e., the Philistine cities, Judah, Ammon, Moab, and Edom—may have retained vassal status partly because they could serve as buffers against Egypt.¹⁵ Indeed, the building activity of Manasseh recorded in 2 Chr 33:14 may have been permitted or encouraged by Assyria in order to counter an Egyptian threat.¹⁶

The persistence with which the Assyrian policy toward western states was retained by the Assyrian kings is remarkable. Rebellion by a western vassal would result in his punishment or even his replacement for a time by a puppet ruler, but the state would not be turned into an Assyrian province.¹⁷ In fact, the Assyrian kings were known occasionally to pardon vassals who plotted against them. For example, the Rassam Cylinder tells how Ashurbanipal reinstated Necho as a king in Egypt after he and other appointees of Esarhaddon had left their offices in view of an uprising led by Taharqa, the Kushite king (690-664) who had been defeated by

imposition of an administrative pattern upon underlying and largely unchanging economic realities" ("The Economic Structure of the Assyrian Empire," in *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires*, ed. M. T. Larsen, Mesopotamia: Copenhagen Studies in Assyriology 7 [Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979], 214).

¹³Postgate, 206-207.

¹⁴S. Frankenstein, "The Phoenicians in the Far West: A Function of Neo-Assyrian Imperialism," in *Power and Propaganda*, 272, 286; I. Eph'al, "Assyrian Dominion in Palestine," 287; M. Elat, "Phoenician Overland Trade within the Mesopotamian Empires," in *Ab, Assyria . . .*, ed. M. Cogan and I. Eph'al, Scripta Hierosolymitana 33 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991), 24-25.

¹⁵See B. Otzen, "Israel under the Assyrians," in *Power and Propaganda*, 256.

¹⁶M. Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries B.C.E.* (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1974), 70; cf. E. Nielsen, "Political Conditions and Cultural Developments in Israel and Judah during the Reign of Manasseh," in *Fourth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1967), 104; R. Nelson, "Realpolitik in Judah (687-609 B.C.E.)," in *Scripture in Context II: More Essays on the Comparative Method*, ed. W. W. Hallo, J. C. Moyer, and L. G. Perdue (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 181. I. Eph'al, on the other hand, takes the position that Manasseh's building activity was anti-Assyrian (*The Ancient Arabs* [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982], 159).

¹⁷B. Otzen, 255, 257-258. Cf. H. Tadmor, "Philistia under Assyrian Rule," 97, on Sennacherib's lenient policy toward the Philistine cities of Ashkelon and Ekron: "a change of rulers, usually within one dynasty, sufficed the Assyrians; the frequently rebellious cities were not annexed as provinces nor was their population exiled."

Esarhaddon.¹⁸ Subsequently, however, Necho and the other Egyptian vassal kings broke their oaths to Ashurbanipal and plotted to expel the Assyrians from Egypt with the help of Taharqa. When Assyrian officers got wind of the plot, they arrested the kings "and put them in iron cuffs and fetters." They were brought alive to Ashurbanipal in Nineveh, where all of them were put to death except Necho, who was pardoned and reinstalled as king in Sais with a more favorable treaty than before.¹⁹

There is striking similarity between Necho's treatment and the description of Manasseh's experience in 2 Chr 33:11-13.²⁰ According to this biblical passage, at some time during his reign Manasseh was captured by Assyrian officers, bound with fetters, and brought to Babylon, apparently to the Assyrian king. The exact nature of his offense is not stated, but it is likely that Manasseh had plotted against Assyria or was at least suspected of doing so. Verse 12 refers to his being in distress, alluding to the uncertainty of his fate. The fact that he was allowed to return to Jerusalem as king (verse 13) indicates that he was pardoned and reinstalled by the Assyrian monarch.

While the Chronicles account of Manasseh's capture and release is in harmony with what is otherwise known about Assyrian treatment of western vassals,²¹ attempts to precisely locate the context of this episode within the framework of Assyrian history have yielded inconclusive results.²² So the historicity of the Chronicles account is plausible but lacks direct extrabiblical corroboration.²³

¹⁸For Eng. trans., see *ARAB* 2:293-294 and *ANET* 294. Cf. A. Spalinger, "Esarhaddon and Egypt," 324-326.

¹⁹*ARAB* 2:295; *ANET* 295.

²⁰See M. Elat, "The Political Status of the Kingdom of Judah within the Assyrian Empire in the 7th Century B.C.E.," in *Investigations at Lachish: The Sanctuary and the Residency (Lachish V)*, ed. Y. Aharoni (Tel Aviv: Gateway, 1975), 66-67.

²¹See Elat, 68.

²²The range of suggestions is summarized by Miller and Hayes (374, 376): "the rebellion of Sidon in 677/676 B.C.E., during the reign of Esarhaddon, the treaty-swearing conclave held in 672 B.C.E., the rebellion of Baal king of Tyre in 668/667 B.C.E. against Ashurbanipal (*ANET* 295-96), the period of major Assyrian trouble with the Arabs in the 640s (*ANET* 297-98), the rebellion in Babylon of Ashurbanipal's brother Shamash-shum-ukin in 652-648 B.C.E., or the troubles with Elam in 654-646 B.C.E."

²³See W. Schniedewind, "The Source Citations of Manasseh: King Manasseh in History and Homily," *Vetus Testamentum* 41 (1991): 452, n. 11.

B. Ashurbanipal's First Campaign against Egypt

According to the Rassam Cylinder (I, 68-74),²⁴ in the course of his first campaign against Egypt (c. 667-666 B.C.), Ashurbanipal received renewed allegiance and gifts from the 22 western kings, whom he then obliged to provide logistical support for his campaign. Cylinder C (I, 24-45)²⁵ supplements the Rassam Cylinder at this point by listing the 22 vassal kings, including *mi-in-si-e šar^{kur}ia-u-di*, "Manasseh, king of (the land of) Judah" (line 25). Implications are as follows:

1. In the Rassam Cylinder (col. I, line 70), the designation of Manasseh and the other kings as *ardāni dāgil panīya*, "servants who are my subjects," explicitly refers to their status as vassals.²⁶

2. Assyria exploited its western vassals for the support of its military campaigns against Egypt. The goal of Ashurbanipal's first campaign was the reconquest of Egypt, which had been subjugated under Esarhaddon in 671, but had rebelled under Taharqa, who had reestablished himself in Memphis. The texts reflect two factors which called for the involvement of Judah and other western states in Assyria's plan for subduing Egypt:

a. The long route to Egypt lay through or near a number of Syro-Palestinian states. Safe passage for the Assyrian army depended upon the attitude of these states to Assyria. Ashurbanipal required renewed allegiance to Assyria at this time because he needed the assurance that his flanks would not be attacked and his return from Egypt would not be blocked. While the coastal road passed through Philistine rather than Judean territory, the proximity of Judah to that vital artery meant that her pacification was important for its security.

b. Moving a large army from Mesopotamia into Egypt involved overcoming formidable logistical obstacles. Supplying such a force far from home was a sufficient challenge, but in addition, the inhospitable Sinai region had to be traversed on land or bypassed by sea. Therefore, assistance from vassals in the form of provisions, reinforcements, and means of transportation—i.e., animals and ships—was vital to ensure that sufficient troops would reach Egypt in fighting condition.²⁷

²⁴For translit. and Germ. trans., see Streck, 2:8-9. For Engl. trans., see *ARAB* 2:293 and *ANET* 294.

²⁵For translit. and Germ. trans., see Streck, 2:138-141. For Eng. trans., see *ARAB* 2:340-341 and *ANET* 294. On the historical value of this list, see Cogan, 68, n. 17.

²⁶Frankena, 151.

²⁷See I. Eph'al, "Assyrian Dominion in Palestine," 280. Cf. Eph'al, *The Ancient Arabs*, 137ff., on the indispensability of the Arabs and their camels for this operation.

II. Assyrian Historical Texts Referring to the Collective Kings of Syria-Palestine.

A. Building "Port Esarhaddon" after the Destruction of Sidon.

A prism of Esarhaddon published by Heidel²⁸ states that the kings of Syria-Palestine were obliged by Esarhaddon to provide corvée work for the building of "Port Esarhaddon" at Sidon after the Assyrians suppressed a revolt and destroyed the city (677-676 B.C.). Implications are as follows:

1. As in the inscription dealing with the rebuilding of Esarhaddon's arsenal (see above), this account shows control over and exploitation of western vassals, including Manasseh, by the Assyrian overlord for a building project.

2. Involving the vassal kings in a project at Sidon, which had just been destroyed because of its rebellion against Assyria, would increase the effectiveness of that destruction as a deterrent to additional rebellions in the West.²⁹

3. The new port was part of an Assyrian design to dominate Mediterranean trade.³⁰ Since the port of Sidon refused to serve Assyrian interests, it was eliminated and replaced.

B. Pacification of Syro-Palestinian Kings by Esarhaddon in Connection with His Successful Campaign against Egypt.

The Nahr El Kelb Stele, near Beirut, commemorates the victory of Esarhaddon over Taharqa in 671 B.C. Lines 31-35 of the fragmentary inscription read as follows: "Ashkelon . . . which Taharqa to their fortress . . . Tyre . . . 22 kings . . ." Implications are as follows:

1. It appears that some of the 22 western states had joined an anti-Assyrian conspiracy with Taharqa, whose vigorous policies threatened Assyrian domination of Syria-Palestine and the lucrative commerce based there. The need to counter this threat motivated the invasion of Egypt by Esarhaddon.³¹

²⁸For translit. and Eng. trans., see A. Heidel, "A New Hexagonal Prism of Esarhaddon," *Sumer* 12 (1956): 12 (lines 31-34), 13. For this event, cf. *ARAB* 2:211 and *ANET* 290.

²⁹Nelson, 179-180.

³⁰See Tadmor, 98.

³¹See G. Smith, *The Assyrian Eponym Canon* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1875), 169; and Spalinger, "Esarhaddon and Egypt . . .," 298-300. Cf. A. Spalinger, "The Foreign Policy of Egypt Preceding the Assyrian Conquest," *Chronique d'Égypte* 53 (1978): 22, 33, 36, 42-43.

2. Due to the broken nature of the text, we do not know whether or to what extent Manasseh was implicated. In any case, it is likely that the extensive Assyrian military activities in Palestine connected with this and other Egyptian campaigns would have dampened enthusiasm in Judah for the contemplation of independent action.

3. The Assyrian conquest of Egypt in 671 further inhibited independent action on the part of Judah by removing the only potential superpower support for an anti-Assyrian movement by the Palestinian states.

III. A Tribute Payment Record Which Mentions Judah.

A text from Nineveh reports tribute payments by Judah and its neighbors to an Assyrian king,³² probably Esarhaddon or Ashurbanipal. The Ammonites paid two minas of gold, the Moabites one mina of gold, and the Judeans ten minas of silver, etc. Pfeiffer comments on the implications of the report:

The nations seem to be ordered according to the amount paid, beginning with the largest. The sums are surprisingly small and must represent payments of annual tribute rather than war indemnities. The fact that Judah pays less than the Moabites and less than half of the amount sent by the Ammonites, sanctions the inference that this report should be dated after 701 B.C., when Sennacherib had materially reduced, impoverished, and depopulated the kingdom of Hezekiah. It is safe to assume that the payment was made either to Esarhaddon . . . or to Ashurbanipal . . . by Manasseh³³

Thus, this record most likely reflects the economic conditions prevailing in Judah during at least part of Manasseh's reign. The factors which created these conditions deserve further comment:

1. Pfeiffer refers to the effects of Sennacherib's invasion. In his annals, Sennacherib claims to have taken 46 fortified cities of Judah, as well as many other settlements, deporting a large number of people and reducing Judah's territory by giving portions of it to the Philistine city-states,³⁴ apparently to establish a more equal balance of power between Judah and Philistia.³⁵ The territorial reduction and depopulation of Judah, along

³²For translit. and Eng. trans., see R. H. Pfeiffer, "Three Assyriological Footnotes to the Old Testament," *JBL* 47 (1928): 185. For Eng. trans., see *ANET* 301.

³³Pfeiffer, 185.

³⁴For translit. and Eng. trans. of the Oriental Institute Prism, col. III lines, 18-34, see D. D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1924), 32-33. Cf. *ANET* 288.

³⁵N. Na'aman, "Sennacherib's 'Letter to God' on his Campaign to Judah," *BASOR* 214

with an increase in various kinds of payments imposed by Sennacherib,³⁶ would have drastically affected the economic well-being of the country.

2. During Manasseh's reign, Judah controlled neither the coastal nor the Transjordanian caravan routes, which passed from Egypt and Arabia to Mesopotamia via Palestine and Syria. These were in the hands of the Philistine and Transjordanian states (including Moab and Ammon) as well as Arab tribes. Therefore, Judah's economic plight could not be mitigated by a flow of middlemen's income from the most lucrative trade arteries.³⁷

In spite of these significant disadvantages, it is possible that Judah could have enjoyed a measure of financial prosperity in the course of over half a century of relative peace and fairly stable trade relations with other countries, including Assyria. Seventh-century Palestinian pottery found at Nimrud and Assyrian pottery of the same period found in Palestine testify to the existence of commercial relations between Israel-Judah and Assyria.³⁸ I have not found clear evidence as to the kinds of Judean products which were in demand by the Assyrians, but Ezek 27:17 lists exports from Judah and Israel which were traded to Tyre at a slightly later period, including a kind of wheat, along with honey, oil, and resin.³⁹ Unlike Tyre, Assyria had extensive agricultural land for producing its own food, especially grain.⁴⁰ This factor, plus the distance between Judah and Assyria, would limit Assyrian imports of Judean agricultural products to items regarded as luxuries.⁴¹

Archaeological evidence for an extensive mid-seventh-century royal building program in Judah suggests that significant economic recovery had been accomplished by the latter part of Manasseh's reign. At this time

(1974): 35-36; Otzen, 258.

³⁶Oriental Institute Prism, III, lines 35-36; see Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*, 33. Cf. ANET 288.

³⁷A. Rainey, "Manasseh, King of Judah, in the Whirlpool of the Seventh Century B.C.E.," public lecture, Berkeley, California, Feb. 10, 1992.

³⁸R. Amiran, *Ancient Pottery of the Holy Land* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1970), 291. E. Nielsen believes that in spite of obligations to the Assyrians, Manasseh's reign was a period of prosperity (106).

³⁹For discussion of economic implications of this passage, see M. Liverani, "The Trade Network of Tyre According to Ezek. 17," in *Ab, Assyria . . .*, 72-75.

⁴⁰Postgate, 197.

⁴¹As evidence of Judean trade with Mesopotamia, M. Cogan refers to the following: "A sale of wheat, transacted in Nineveh in the spring of 660, was measured *ina* GIŠ.BAR *ša* māt laudi—'according to the Judahite sūtu'" (*Imperialism and Religion . . .*, 92). However, with the translit. and Germ. trans. of this document by J. Kohler and A. Ungnad, see their note on the identity of *laudi*: "In Nordwest-Syrien, nicht Judal" (*Assyrische Rechtsurkunden* [Leipzig: E. Pfeiffer, 1913], 210).

fortifications were constructed and a number of sites such as Arad VII, Horvat 'Uza, and Radum were established. Tatum sees this building program reflected in 2 Chr 33:14, which describes how Manasseh added to the walls of Jerusalem and stationed military commanders in fortified cities.⁴² Tatum recognizes that if this identification of archaeological data with 2 Chronicles 33 is correct, it would support at least one aspect of the historicity of the biblical chapter, which presents the building initiatives of Manasseh in connection with reforms which he made following his return from capture by the Assyrians.⁴³

IV. The Treaty of Esarhaddon Establishing the Succession of Ashurbanipal.

In 672, Esarhaddon established the succession of his son, Ashurbanipal, through a long and detailed treaty imposed upon at least some of his vassals.⁴⁴ Divine witnesses to the treaty include a number of Mesopotamian deities (lines 13-40) and especially Aššur, who is called "father of the gods, lord of the lands" (line 25). In fact, a vassal is commanded thus: "In the future and forever Aššur will be your god, and Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate, will be your lord" (lines 393-4). Implications are as follows:

1. According to Frankena, the treaty ceremony would have been attended by Esarhaddon's western vassals, including Manasseh,⁴⁵ but Tadmor finds no clear evidence that such a treaty was ever actually imposed upon Manasseh.⁴⁶

2. If this treaty or another formal loyalty oath similar to it had been imposed upon Manasseh, he would have been obliged to accept Aššur as his god in the sense of acknowledging the supremacy of Aššur along with the lordship of Ashurbanipal.⁴⁷

3. The treaty does not impose cultic regulations. McKay and Cogan

⁴²L. Tatum, "King Manasseh and the Royal Fortress at Horvat 'Uza," *Biblical Archaeologist* 54 (1991): 136-145.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 137.

⁴⁴For translit. and Eng. trans., see S. Parpola and K. Watanabe, eds., *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths* (Helsinki: Helsinki Univ. Press, 1988), 28-58.

⁴⁵Frankena, 151.

⁴⁶H. Tadmor, "Treaty and Oath in the Ancient Near East: A Historian's Approach," in *Humanizing America's Iconic Book*, ed. G. Tucker and D. Knight (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1982), 151. Cf. M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, *II Kings*, AB 11 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1988), 272.

⁴⁷Frankena, 151.

have argued that Neo-Assyrian treaties and other sources do not convincingly attest imposition of religious practices upon vassal kingdoms, and therefore the religious practices carried out in Judah under Manasseh, as described in 2 Kgs 21:3ff. and 2 Chr 33:3ff., did not result from Assyrian imposition.⁴⁸ Spieckermann, on the other hand, argues that vassal kingdoms such as Judah, like Assyrian provinces, were subject to interference by Assyria in the area of religion.⁴⁹ His most direct pieces of evidence are Assyrian royal inscriptions. For example, Tiglath-pileser III claims to have seized the gods (images) of Gaza and to have set up images of Assyrian gods in the palace there,⁵⁰ and Ashurbanipal claims to have established in Egypt regular offerings to Aššur and other Assyrian gods.⁵¹ However, even if Assyria did at times impose its cultic practices on vassals, 2 Kings 21 and 2 Chronicles 33 do not mention such imposition by Assyria.

Conclusion

As a vassal state within the Assyrian empire, Judah under Manasseh continued to carry on a political and economic life of her own. At the same time, Judah was controlled by the Assyrian overlords for their economic, political, and military benefit as part of their policy for exploiting western Asia. Thus, there were ongoing economic obligations to Assyria as well as duties to provide whatever special assistance the Assyrian king should demand.

Judah was useful to Assyria in the sense just described and also as a minor trading partner, but the fact that the coastal road to Egypt and the Transjordanian caravan routes did not pass through Judean territory made her less significant for Assyrian political and commercial interests than states such as Philistia and Phoenicia. With regard to Assyrian interests at this time, M. Cogan refers to Judah's "non-strategic geographic location." But Judah's position was not completely nonstrategic. A loyal Judah could help to counter an Egyptian incursion from the South; and, on the other hand, reemergence of Judean power and expansionism could threaten both the coastal and Transjordanian routes. Thus, it was to

⁴⁸See J. W. McKay, *Religion in Judah under the Assyrians 732-609 BC*, Studies in Biblical Theology, 2d series, vol. 26 (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1973), 60-66; and Cogan, 42-49; cf. 56, 60-61.

⁴⁹H. Spieckermann, *Juda unter Assur in der Sargonidenzeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 307-372.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 326.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 338.

Assyria's best interests to keep Judah strong enough to serve as an effective buffer against Egypt, weak enough so that she would not threaten her neighbors, and above all, to keep her loyal.

Manasseh's lack of independent action does not imply that his personal inclinations were "pro-Assyrian." His country was reduced, impoverished, weakened, and firmly in the Assyrian grip; with Assyrian military garrisons probably stationed near Jerusalem.⁵² Thus, his ability to accomplish effectively anything anti-Assyrian in nature was severely limited.⁵³ Lest Manasseh should forget the consequences of rebellion, which Judah under his father had learned firsthand in 701, the extensive western military activities of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal would have refreshed his memory.

⁵²See, e.g., Elat, 63-64, 69; R.A.S. Macalister, *The Excavation of Gezer* (London: John Murray, 1912), 1:22ff.

⁵³See Nielsen, 105.