
ETHNICITY IN THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE : A VIEW FROM THE NISBE, (II): “ASSYRIANS”

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ABSTRACT

This is the second of three planned articles on ethnicity in the Assyrian empire, with ethnicity involving the identification of group identities and/or differentiations on the basis of mutual contact, as observed from the protagonists' viewpoint or from that of the surrounding social order, along the Barthian model. On a documentary basis, the Assyrian empire lends itself in a unique manner as observation point for the study of the mechanisms of ethnicity in the ancient Near Eastern context. The article focuses, like the others, on the study of “ethnic-group terms” as identifiers of ethnicity within the Neo-Assyrian period, and specifically on those terms to which the “gentilic” suffix (nisbe) was applied. The particular theme chosen for this article regards the ethnic-group term “Assyrian” (Aššurāyu and other designations) as utilized in both official (royal) inscriptions and “everyday” (or state archival) documents from the Neo-Assyrian empire. The attempt is to bring forth the flexibility, and even at times the ambiguity, of the definition that the Assyrians offered of themselves in different official or discursive contexts, as well as in the light of diachronical variations and shifts. After a lengthy overview of the sources, it may be concluded that the “everyday” and official documents differ in their definition of “Assyrians”, due to chronological, compositional, and contextual factors involving the two textual corpora. Although some ranges of meanings of Aššurāyu or its synonyms show overlaps between them, only the state archival texts indicate “Assyrians” as members of the élite classes of the Empire, entitled to professional and juridical privileges on the basis of the king's favor; whereas the royal inscriptions are unique in pointing out the king's role as rescuer of poor “Assyrians” who had been left stranded or who had lost their possessions abroad. Summing up, a decided pride/relish in inborn/inbred group particularities, combined with a proactive (and ultimately optimistic) impulse to expand “Assyrian-ness” through the addition of external personnel to the commonwealth, characterize in a singular manner the Assyrians among ancient Mesopotamian peoples.

RESUMEN

Éste es el segundo de los tres artículos proyectados sobre etnicidad en el Imperio asirio, dedicados a la idea de etnicidad, a la identificación de identidades de grupo y/o diferenciaciones percibidas en el contacto mutuo, tal y como se observa desde el punto de vista de los protagonistas o desde el del orden social circundante, según el modelo barthiano. Gracias a la documentación que proporciona, el Imperio asirio se presta singularmente como punto de observación desde donde estudiar los mecanismos de etnicidad en el contexto del Oriente Próximo antiguo. El artículo se centra, como los otros, en el estudio de “términos de grupos étnicos” como identificadores de etnicidad durante el período neoasirio y, específicamente, en aquellos términos en los que se aplicaba el sufijo “gentilicio” (nisbe). El tema particular elegido para este artículo concierne al término de grupo étnico “asirio” (Aššurāyu y otras denominaciones), tal y como se empleaba tanto en inscripciones oficiales (reales) como en documentos “cotidianos” (o archivos estatales) del Imperio neoasirio. Se pretende clarificar la flexibilidad, e incluso a veces la ambigüedad, de la definición que los asirios ofrecían de sí mismos en distintos contextos oficiales o discursivos, así como a la luz de las variaciones y giros diacrónicos. Tras una larga revisión de las fuentes, se puede concluir que los documentos “cotidianos” y oficiales difieren en su definición de “asirios” debido a factores cronológicos, compositivos y contextuales, incluyendo los dos corpora textuales. Aunque algunas variedades de significados de Aššurāyu o sus sinónimos muestran superposiciones entre ellos, sólo los textos de archivos estatales

¹ I would have been pleased to dedicate an article such as this to my teacher Mario Liverani already a long time ago, as a token of heartfelt thanks for all he taught me and for his tangible assistance to my career during the 40 or so years of our common work and friendship. Unfortunately, a series of misunderstandings and delays has –one way or another– hitherto prevented a *Festschrift* in his honor such as the present one to be assembled. I am thus particularly grateful that this has now come to pass, thanks to the felicitous editorial initiative of Joaquin Cordoba and Vanna Biga for *Isimu*.

contemplan a los "asirios" como miembros de la elite del Imperio, con derecho a privilegios profesionales y jurídicos basados en el favor del rey; mientras que las inscripciones reales son las únicas que señalan el papel del rey como salvador de los "asirios" pobres, que habían sido marginados o que habían perdido sus posesiones en el extranjero. En resumen, un decidido orgullo/deleite por las particularidades innatas de su grupo, combinado con un impulso interesado (y en última instancia optimista) por expandir la "asirianidad" mediante la integración de población externa a su comunidad, caracteriza de modo singular a los asirios entre los pueblos de la antigua Mesopotamia.

KEYWORDS

History of the Ancient Near East, Neo-Assyrian empire, ethnicity, "Assyrians", state archival texts, official royal inscriptions, Assyriological analysis.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Historia del Oriente Próximo antiguo, Imperio neoasirio, etnicidad, "asirios", textos de los archivos estatales, inscripciones reales oficiales, análisis asiriológico.

A. Ethnicity in the Assyrian empire: a view from the *nisbe*

In a first of a series of planned essays dealing with ethnicity in the Assyrian empire,² I started out from the by now commonly received anthropological definition of ethnicity as a highly flexible notion along both geographical and historical guidelines –a notion involving the identification of group identities and/or differentiations on the basis of mutual contact, as are observed from the protagonists' viewpoint or from that of the surrounding social order.³ I thereupon noted that ethnicity has come to represent a pivotal conceptual and problematic focus of our times, and as such has permeated social and ethno-anthropological studies in their entirety: thus also encompassing the horizon of Antiquity, especially due to the diachronic perspective on the formation and differentiations of identities that the ancient record has to offer, with the intriguing applications and unforeseeable results that may ensue. In this light, it is of obvious interest for Assyriologists and historians of the ancient Near East to single out specific markers of inter- and intra-group categorisation, embodiment and group perceptions within the domain of the written or iconographic evidence at their disposal.

The Assyrian empire between the 9th and 7th centuries BC, with its vast blend of peoples progressively falling under the "yoke of Assur",⁴ and/or being moved to and

² F. M. Fales, "Ethnicity in the Assyrian Empire: A View from the Nisbe: (I): Foreigners and "Special" Inner Communities", in D.S. Vanderhooft – A. Winitzer (Eds.), *Literature as Politics, Politics as Literature: Essays on the Ancient Near East in Honor of Peter Machinist*, Winona Lake (Eisenbrauns) 2013, 47-74. It was there announced that only a second article in the series would follow; however, further work on the subject-matter proved that the material to be investigated was so vast and complex as to warrant two more contributions. The third article of the series, which is still in press at the time of this writing, regards "Aramaeans and related tribalists"; it also forms part of a *Festschrift*, and is equally dedicated to an unquestionable master of our studies. This introductory paragraph is similar, with limited variations, in all three articles.

³ This view of ethnicity, which was paradigmatically innovative on previous approaches, is due to Fredrick Barth (F. Barth (Ed.). *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, Boston (Little, Brown) 1969, 9-38). As recalled e.g. by G. Emberling ("Ethnicity in Complex Societies: Archaeological Perspectives", *Journal of Archaeological Research* 5/4 [1997], 295), studies on ethnicity may nowadays be subdivided into those preceding or following the Barth paradigm shift (B.B. / A.B. = "before/after Barth"), i.e. between research on "culture as a whole" or, instead, focused on "subgroups of people". Cf also fn. 9, below.

⁴ For a general history of the Assyrian empire, cf. F.M. Fales, *L'impero assiro: storia e amministrazione (IX-VII sec. a.C.)*, Roma-Bari (Laterza) 2001; a history of the period (but also of the previous MA one) constituted, in a sort of "patchwork" pattern, by a variety of interrelated perspectives is offered in J.N. Postgate, *The Land of Assur & the Yoke of Assur. Studies on Assyria: 1971-2005*, Oxford (Oxbow books) 2007.

fro for military and economic reasons, lends itself in a unique manner as observation point for the study of the mechanisms of ethnicity in the ancient Near Eastern context. This is particularly significant because we are nowadays in the position to view this period –in its vast geographical scenario and great socio-economic complexity– not only through the filter of the official discourse of Assyrian royalty, but also through the lens of many hundreds of documents dealing with “everyday” administrative practice, which were retrieved in the archives of capitals and provincial cities. In particular, as I have previously maintained, “the great variety of ethnic identities which marked the population of the Assyrian Empire, as deriving from military conquests and planned displacements, may be gauged through two essential markers: personal names in a linguistic perspective, and the “labels” of geographic/ethnic provenience which were attached to individuals or groups within the written documentation.”⁵ On the other hand, despite earnest work of some three decades on personal names of the Assyrian empire, I have come to be skeptical on the actual amount and validity of information offered by this category of material on the subject of ethnicity (at least in the definition of the term given above).⁶

For this reason, the aim of this article, like the other ones in the series, is that of focusing on the less studied category of “ethnic-group terms”⁷ as identifiers of ethnicity within the Neo-Assyrian empire: in particular, I will concentrate on toponyms, ethnonyms, and other locational terms in the Assyrian written record to which the ending commonly known as “gentilic” was applied. This is a suffix of relation or pertinence, present in virtually all Semitic languages as affirmative for nouns, called “*nisbe*” (*an-nisbah*) in the original Arabic rendering), which has the form *-āy/ -āyum* in Akkadian, with a possibly restricted use to designate peoples and inhabitants of specific places.⁸

⁵ Fales, “Foreigners and “Special” Inner Communities”, *cit.*, 50.

⁶ Again taking up a point already made in the first article of this series, I have come to believe that the study of onomastics in the framework of ethnicity is far from foolproof in general, and shows specific pitfalls when applied to linguistic-cultural contexts which are only available to us in written form. The following, which are in no way exhaustive, may be underscored: (a) the PN reflects cultural parameters of the parents of the bearer, not of the bearer himself, and thus only the study of family onomastics in a sequential-generational light –i.e. with case-studies which are not frequent to come by throughout the written record– may lead to some conclusion regarding the continuity / discontinuity of this or that ethnicity marker; (b) the divine names which are invoked in the PNs represent only in few, and very specific, cases acceptable clues for the detection of elements of ethnicity (e.g. Yahwistic names of deportees: cf. e.g. F.M. Fales, “West Semitic Names in the Šeḫ Ḥamad Texts”, *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 8 [1993], 139-150), and are most often, to the contrary, open to more than one conclusion, or to none at all; (c) the purely linguistic (mainly predicative) elements of the PN may be in some cases of primary value for pinpointing the existence of a specific ethnic identity vis-à-vis others (e.g. the Amorite PNs in Ur III society and at Mari; the Hurrian PNs in Mittanian society), but any deduction regarding the presence/relevance of this or that identity in a statistical or geographical light should be presented with the utmost caution (cf. e.g. F.M. Fales, “West Semitic Names in the Assyrian Empire: Diffusion and Social Relevance”, *Studi epigrafici e linguistici sul Vicino Oriente antico* 8 (1991), 99-117). For the personal names of the Neo-Assyrian empire, see nowadays the exhaustive repertoire in *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, Gen. Ed. S. Parpola, Eds. K. Radner and H.D. Baker, I-III, Helsinki 1998-2011 (henceforth PNA).

⁷ For this terminology and its applications, specifically in a linguistic-philosophical perspective, I refer to S. Nuccetelli, “Reference and Ethnic-group Terms”, *Inquiry* 47 (2004), 1-17.

⁸ W. von Soden, GAG, §56p. Alongside it, we find the traditional Akkadian ending *-ī, -īum*, which is of strictly adjectival use (thus taking on full declension), and shows a semantical range extending beyond the mere indication of peoples and inhabitants of specific places, to mark a wider “belonging” of the subject to a specific structure, a profession, or other (*ibid.*: §56q). For the aims of this paper, it may suffice to note that, at least as regards the Neo-Assyrian period, there would seem to be a certain overlap between the two forms, with *-ī, -īum* prevailing in the ARI.

In very essential terms, the *nisbe* represents an explicit identifier in terms of ethnicity, although –of course– its attestations cannot be expected to yield an “objective” historical picture of the jigsaw puzzle of the ethnicities which formed the Assyrian empire, but merely the totally subjective, and even merely occasional, perception and communication of such ethnicities.⁹ For this and other reasons, the range and extent to which the *nisbe* was applied to different locational and social entities attested in the documentation of the Neo-Assyrian period requires a series of in-depth contextual evaluations. From these we may draw a tentative historical-anthropological framework on how the dominating level of Assyrian society –which constitutes our main “informer” on Assyria itself through its textual material– perceived the existence of itself and of all “others”, whether living beyond its borders or interspersed in its very midst. The opposite point of view –that of the “others” regarding the Assyrian overlords of their age– would of course also be of the utmost interest; but, due to the general paucity and the nature of the written sources at our disposal, it remains much more elusive, and may be evoked only through brief flashes, with no real consistency over time and space.¹⁰

The particular theme chosen for this article regards the ethnic-group term “Assyrian” (*Aššurāyu* and other designations) as utilized in the texts of the Neo-Assyrian period. This theme has already been dealt with in the recent past, from two quite different points of view. On one hand, Peter Machinist studied the “Assyrians on Assyria” with a prioritary attention

⁹ As in the other two articles of the series, a Barthian-type approach to ethnicity is followed here, and more specifically a definition of the term which is based on the study of past and present ethnicities by S. Jones (*The Archaeology of Ethnicity: Constructing Identities in the Past and Present*, London (Routledge) 1997, xiii and *passim*): “all those social and psychological phenomena associated with a culturally constructed group identity” –the latter being the common ground of “any group of people who set themselves apart and/or are set apart by others with whom they interact or co-exist on the basis of their perceptions of cultural differentiation and/or common descent”. This appealing relativistic definition was already taken up and discussed for the Ancient Near East by the late G. Van Driel (“Ethnicity, how to cope with the subject”, in W. Van Soldt [Ed.], *Ethnicity in Ancient Mesopotamia* (= papers of the XLVIII *Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* [2002]), Leiden 2005, 1-2), as well as by M. Roaf (“Ethnicity and Near Eastern Archaeology: the Limits of Inference”, in *ibid.*, 308-309) –although the latter pointed out how the concept of ethnicity, in its frequently uncertain balancing act between the competing notions of genetic background (*ethnos*) and cultural build-up, retains an intrinsic dualism in the scholarly literature. *Contra*, according to a recent work of B.A. Brown (“Culture on Display: Representations of Ethnicity in the Art of the Late Assyrian State”, in B.A. Brown – M.H. Feldman (Eds.), *Critical Approaches to Ancient Near Eastern Art*, Berlin 2014, 517), the dissociation of these two notions is considered a given nowadays, although this author is forced to admit that even recent studies –e.g. Z. Bahrani, “Race and Ethnicity in Mesopotamian Antiquity”, *World Archaeology* 38 (2006), 48-59– still conflate concepts of race and culture when dealing with ethnicity in the Ancient Near East. In my opinion, it may be moreover noted that some of the latest developments in world history –with the many concurrent factors of ethnic identity (affirmed/rejected), ethnic discrimination/oppression/“cleansing”, ethnification of specific cultural groups (e.g. “Muslims”), and the persistence/resurgence of truly racial biases– have forced specialists of the field to revise previous more broad-minded views, and to conclude that “the relationship between race and ethnicity is complex. Ideas of ‘race’ may or may not form part of ethnic ideologies... Quite clearly, there exist important ethnic differences which are not thought of as ‘racial’ in the sense of being based on group-specific, immutable characteristics. ... On the other hand, ... the boundary between what is perceived as natural, biological differences between groups, and acquired, cultural differences is often fuzzy in practice. Ethnic differentiation frequently entails, to a greater or lesser extent, the existence of folk notions of inborn group differences that are assumed to explain some cultural differences” (T.H. Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism. Anthropological Perspectives. Third Edition*, London-New York (Pluto Press) 2010, 5-6).

¹⁰ See, e.g., fn. 18 below.

to the royal inscriptions, and to their constitutive ideological-political discourse with its internal variations (also taking after the results of the “Italian school” headed by M. Liverani).¹¹ On the other hand, Simo Parpola discussed the theme of a “national and ethnic identity” in the Assyrian empire, with a decided emphasis on the overall coherence and clarity of the ensuing historical-cultural picture, mainly viewed in the light of the “everyday” texts.¹²

In taking up the matter again, I will of course refer, when necessary, to features and issues that were usefully brought forth by the quoted scholars –who were however both noticeably engaged in illustrating the Assyrian world-view in essential terms to a wider audience.¹³ Not being similarly bound, I will attempt a comprehensive “fly-over” of the textual documentation from the period in question, such as is available at present in a particularly vast array –not only enhanced in its absolute quantity, but also extremely accessible in the type/quality of its overall presentation. I will therefore deal, firstly, with the “everyday” texts from Nineveh and elsewhere which may be grouped within the so-called “State archives of Assyria”,¹⁴ and then I will examine the Assyrian royal inscriptions (ARI) from the main cities of the reign and the empire.¹⁵

As for the methodology in use, I aim to focus on the “group-identity” terms for the ancient Assyrians in the particular light of research on ethnicity: I will thus attempt to bring forth the various nuances of the *nisbe* and its cognate designations for “Assyrians” as they are employed in the texts *per se* and, at times, in parallel/opposition to other ethnic-

¹¹ P. Machinist, “Assyrians on Assyria in the First Millennium B.C.”, in K. Raaflaub (Ed.), *Anfänge politischen Denkens in der Antike: die nahöstliche Kulturen und die Griechen*, München 1993, 77-104.

¹² S. Parpola, “National and Ethnic Identity in the Neo-Assyrian Empire and Assyrian Identity in Post-Empire Times,” *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies* 18 (2004), 5-22, plus charts (the entire text is electronically published in http://www.jaas.org/edocs/v18n2/Parpola-identity_Article%20-Final.pdf; accessed 18/03/2015).

¹³ Machinist described the Assyrian case within a conference for a multidisciplinary audience of ancient historians, also entailing a discussion session (see “Assyrians on Assyria”, *cit.*, 77 fn. 1). Parpola’s contribution, while originally presented at an international conference of specialists (see “National and Ethnic Identity”, 5, initial footnote), was then published as an article extended to the problem of the survival of “Assyrian identity” until modern times for the benefit of the present-day “Syriac” and “Assyrian” Aramaic-speaking communities (see esp. 21-22, §4, “The Assyrian Identity Today”). The Finnish scholar’s contribution ended (p. 22) with a forceful political-cultural appeal: “Disunited, dispersed in exile, and as dwindling minorities without full civil rights in their homelands, the Assyrians of today are in grave danger of total assimilation and extinction. In order to survive as a nation, they must now unite under the Assyrian identity of their ancestors. It is the only identity that can help them to transcend the differences between them, speak with one voice again, catch the attention of the world, and regain their place among the nations”. It must be noted, alas, that the dangers hinted at by Parpola more than a decade ago have only increased in the intervening years, and are now dire both for western (Syrian-based) and for eastern (Iraq-based) communities of Arameans under the pressure of diverse –but homogeneously hostile and warmongering– Islamist groups.

¹⁴ The texts will be quoted by volumes of the *State Archives of Assyria* series, Gen. Ed. S. Parpola, Helsinki 1987-2012 (SAA, nos. I-XIX) and by text number therein (with line numbers when required).

¹⁵ The texts of the ARI will be quoted by page and line numbers from the volumes of the most recent series of editions, viz. (a) the *Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia. Assyrian Periods*, Gen. Ed. A.K. Grayson, Toronto 1987-1996 (RIMA), vols. 1-3 (early kings to Shalmaneser IV) (b) the follow-up series *Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period*, Gen. Ed. G. Frame, Winona Lake 2011-2014 (RINAP), vols. 1 (Tiglath-pileser III/Shalmaneser V), 3/1-2 (Sennacherib), and 4 (Esarhaddon). For the remaining kings, the ARI of Sargon II have received recent, although not comprehensive, editions: the quoted examples are drawn from A. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad*, Münster (Cuvillier) 1994 (=IS). For Assurbanipal, still not republished in a comprehensive critical edition, I have availed myself of examples drawn from the edition of Prisms E, B₁₋₅, D, and K, by A.C. Piepkorn, *Historical Prism Inscriptions of Ashurbanipal, I*, Chicago 1933 (=AS 5). Also the Babylonian royal inscriptions, published in the series *Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia. Babylonian Periods* (RIMB), and specifically in vol. 2 (relevant to the period 1157-612 BC), Toronto 1995, have been consulted.

group descriptions. To be as clear as possible on this point: there can be no doubt, from the very outset, that *Aššurāyu* and all the other designations examined here represent markers of an “Assyrian” self-identification;¹⁶ from this point of view, therefore, the final result of this contribution may –at least on the face of it– be expected to have a certain compatibility with the theme of Machinist’s study (“Assyrians on Assyria”). However, my approach to this topic intends to elicit much more closely answers to the following question: “with how many, and with which, specific nuances did the Assyrians employ the ethnonym ‘Assyrian’?”. In practice, I will seek to bring forth the flexibility, and even at times the ambiguity, of the definition that the Assyrians offered of themselves in different official or discursive contexts, and possibly also in the light of diachronical variations and shifts. Thus the present study also follows a line of investigation carried out in previous contributions of mine, on some multi-faceted expressions of political terminology to be found in Neo-Assyrian texts, from the institutional notion of *bēt bēli* to the diplomatic and policy implications which lay behind the act of “speaking kindly” to a foreign king/chief.¹⁷

B. The attestations

Three different markers of “Assyrian” identity are employed both in the “everyday” texts in Neo-Assyrian dialect (NA) and in the official inscriptions in Standard Babylonian (SB). They are: (1) a straightforward *nisbe* ((KUR.)*Aššurāyu* in NA, (KUR.)*Aššurī* in SB); (2) an expression which refers to “the people of Assyria” (UN.MEŠ KUR.^(d)*Aššur*); and (3) an expression which means “of Assyrian stock, descent” (DUMU.(MEŠ.)KUR.*Aššur*). As was also noted by previous authors, these three designations were to a certain extent interchangeable; although, as I will point out, choices in this regard may in some cases be attached to particular nuances explicitly sought by the writers of the texts. In general, the *nisbe* enjoys the majority of references as the form prevalently employed in the “everyday” texts, but also occurring in the official documents.¹⁸ To the contrary, forms (2) and (3) above are prevalent in the ARI, whereas their presence is marginal in the SAA material.

¹⁶ The further issue of the Assyrian empire as a societal compound of multiple ethnicities (with their relevant languages, cults, etc.) is obviously outside of the scope of the present contribution, save for some features which will be examined in §3a, below. See the first and third articles in this series.

¹⁷ F.M. Fales, “*bīt bēli*: an Assyrian Institutional Concept”, in E. Rova (Ed.), *Patavina Orientalia selecta*, Padova (Sargon) 2000, 231-249: id., “‘To Speak Kindly to him/them’ as Item of Assyrian Political Discourse”, in M. Luukko, S. Svärd, R. Mattila (Eds.), *Of God(s), Trees, Kings, and Scholars. Neo-Assyrian and Related Studies in Honour of Simo Parpola*, Helsinki 2009, 27-40.

¹⁸ In this light, it may be further noted that in Babylonian official inscriptions, the few mentions of “Assyrians” exclusively present the *nisbe* in the singular to designate the king of Assyria (and presumably, by synechdoche, his representatives and army) –similarly to an Assyrian usage already noted for Urartians and other ethnicities in the letters from the reign of Sargon II (see Fales, “Foreigners and “Special” Inner Communities”, *cit.*, 60-61). Thus, e.g., the ruler (“governor”) of Sūḫu around 750 BC, Ninurta-kudurri-ušur, states in one of his inscriptions (RIMB 2, 304: S.O.1002, 3: 11’-14’) that the restoration of the local cults was one of his deeds: “I brought out [the gods] of (both) the landside and the hillside of the city Anat [who] had gone to the town Ribaniš on account of the Assyrian (LÚ.Aš-šur-KI-a-a), and I settled them in their [dwelling(s)], (just) as (they had been) before”; see also *ibid.*, 316, S.O.1002.9, II, 14-17, as well as *ibid.*, 318, S.O. 1002.10, 22-23, although here it is stated that the statue of the local goddess Anat had been “cached in a secret place”. The account of the preceding Assyrian takeover of the city Anat is given *ibid.*, 307, S.O.1002.4, 7-13: “Then] the inhabitants of the city Anat [rev]olted [against the land of Sūḫu. They jo]ined hands [with the Assyrian] and [broug]ht the Assyrian (LÚ.Aš-šur-KI-a-a) up [to the city Anat]. The Assyrian took the city Anat [neither by force nor by ba]ttle; [(rather) the men –the citizens of the city themselves– gave (it) t]o the Assyrian. [Afterwards, the Ass]yrian exiled them and [scattered th]em [over (all) the lands]. The same passage is *ibid.*, 308, .S.O.1002.5, IV,1-7, to which the following –ll. 7-9– is added: “From (the time of) PN1, PN2, (and) PN3 - three governors (in all) - [for fifty years, the city Anat] was (under the control) of the Assyrian” (LÚ.Aš-šur-KI-a-a); and a further parallel is *ibid.*, 315-316, S.O. 1002.9, I, 9-25.

All in all, I envisage three main usages of the designation “Assyrian” in the SAA texts, which are:

- (1) as an institutional-hierarchical marker, i.e. to set apart members of the standing personnel of the Assyrian empire, both in its armed forces and in its civilian services;
- (2) as a more generic positional-institutional marker, i.e. with reference to the condition of belonging -or, alternatively, being forcibly included- within the complex of the population of Assyria;
- (3) as a marker of typological/qualitative value, vis-à-vis other such markers going back to different traditions, techniques, etc.

These three usages will be examined in the following pages, first in the “everyday” texts (§§1-3a), and then in the royal inscriptions (§§1-2b). Obviously, not all attestations in the written record of this age allow for a clear-cut classification along the three lines pointed out above; or, turning the argument around, a certain number of attestations could fit in a more or less likely manner into one or the other bracket (this goes especially for usages nos. (1) and (2)). However, even taking account of such possible ambiguities, a final overview of the definitions of “Assyrians” in both categories of texts will be conclusively attempted.

In the SAA texts:

The main sources within the “everyday” texts of the Assyrian empire which illustrate concepts of ethnicity are passages from the royal correspondence, mainly with the ruler as addressee; they casually portend views issuing from a variety of senders on the matter at hand. A “top-down” perspective on “Assyrians” is, instead, to be found in treaties or loyalty oaths which offer lists of possible enemies of the Crown, which in point of fact correspond to full-length classifications of the Assyrian élite. Finally, some administrative documents, from Nineveh and elsewhere, present random notations on “Assyrians” and their specificities –as do, to an even smaller extent, the legal documents of the time.

1a. “Assyrians” (in the plural) as an institutional-hierarchical marker.

This particular usage, in which the concept of “Assyrians” is closely connected to the protecting “cover” of the State machine, is particularly clear from passages such as SAA 2, 6:162 (in the so-called “Vassal-treaties of Esarhaddon” in favor of the succession of Assurbanipal).¹⁹ Here a classification of all peoples and groups possibly hostile to the Assyrian dynastic line is indicated along a twofold division opposing “internal” components of the empire to their “external” counterparts; and close to the beginning of the list, we find the couplet LÚ.Aš-šu-ra-a-a and LÚ.da-gíl-pa-ni šá KUR.Aš-šur. This couplet should thus indicate a political-institutional distinction between “(full-fledged) Assyrians” and “vassals of Assyria” –i.e. between those living in the lands under the full political control of Assyrian kingship, and the inhabitants of the vassal or client statehoods that were allied to Assyria, although they retained a formally independent rulership.²⁰

¹⁹ See most recently on this text F.M. Fales, “After Ta’yinat: the New Status of Esarhaddon’s *adê* for Assyrian Political History”, *Revue d’Assyriologie* 106 (2012)[2013], 133-158, and esp. 141-142.

²⁰ From the same period (under Esarhaddon, with Assurbanipal as crown prince), a series of extispicy queries to the god Šamaš (SAA 4, 139 and ff.) similarly bear lists of “any enemy at all”, i.e. of all categories of inner and outer personnel which might turn possibly hostile to the ruler. While all the copies of such texts are organized along the fixed array of (1) “eunuchs”/“bearded men” — (2) royal entourage — (3) royal family — (4) military personnel (in detail) — (5) civilian professions (in detail) — (6) foreign corps of the army (by ethnonym), one exemplar, albeit quite fragmentary (SAA 4, 145: 6’), also presents the designation Aš-šur-KI-a-a before the mention of foreign peoples, i.e. as a possible summary of categories 1-5 preceding it. But an alternative possibility is that the expression could implicitly refer to scribes, since the ethnic-group term *Ar-ma-a-a* follows it, and since this same sequel is given in SAA 4, 144:9 for LÚ.DUB.SAR.MEŠ. Thus this example could fit in category 3a below.

An extension (or specific application) of this distinction ran, at least from a certain period onward, through the armed forces under the command of the king and his highest military officers.²¹ This dualism may be most clearly observed in the well-known "Mazamua letter" (SAA 5 215), in which the military and civilian personnel present in Mazamua (an area located near present-day Suleimaniyah in Iraqi Kurdistan) is listed for king Sargon's benefit, reaching –after all the combatant ranks and the quartermaster and mixed military/civilian troops are counted– the total of "630 Assyrians" (KUR.Aš-šur-a-a), to which 360 Gurreans and 440 Itu'eans are thereupon added, for a grand total of 1,430 "men of the king".²² The matching of "Assyrians" with "Itu'eans" (the special army corps –of tribal origin– functioning as military police)²³ is present elsewhere in Sargon's letters: cf., from the Assur province, we find a mention of a "bow-field" of the Itu'ean (prefect?), to which a field "in tenancy" of the Aš-šur-a-a is opposed (SAA 5, 16: 5-11). Slightly variant expressions of the same concept are attested in plea to the ruler from Syria, SAA 1 176: 28-31, "Now, may the king my lord give me Assyrian people and Itu'eans (UN.MEŠ KUR.Aš-šur-a-a LÚ.I-tú-'a-a-a) so that I have them take hold(?) in the steppe"; with the following significant addition (ll. 31-33), "no Assyrian (KUR.Aš-šur-a-a) city overseer nor gate guards are (present) in Šupite". From all these contexts, in a nutshell, we may derive the notion of "Assyrian" as indicating a core (official/regular/maximally reliable) role or function within the imperial structure, whereas the Itu'eans and other foreign auxiliaries, while being similarly part of the *šāb šarri*, are distinct from them; the passage regarding Šupite would also point to a policy requiring "Assyrians" to be a fixed component in the process of provincial organization and rule.

Other texts employing the ethnonym *Aššurāyu* are decidedly less clear in their reference to a particular institutional-hierarchical status, which however may be surmised in the main. Thus, "Assyrian" military are at times mentioned on their own: see e.g. SAA 5, 273: 3'-6' (fragmentary), where it is stated that "the Assyrians (KUR.Aš-šur.KI-a-a) came out of the fort and inflicted a defeat on the enemy". Finally, in a list from Nineveh in connection with ceremonial banquets (SAA 7, 149: R. II': 4'-10'), various "Assyrian" military officers are noted (through the quite rare abbreviation KUR.AŠ). Letters from the Babylonian front seem to employ idiosyncratic writings to single out the horizon of the "Assyrian" military: thus, we find the protest of the Aramean tribe of the Litamu, viz. "Why do the Assyrians (LÚ.KUR.Aššur.KI) keep on attacking our towns?" (SAA 17 106: 11; and also LÚ.KUR.Aššur.KI.MEŠ, SAA 17 177:4', in fragmentary context).

Purely civilian lines of activity seem, instead, to be hinted at in SAA 5, 293: Obv. 7 – Rev. 2, where a reply to a query by king Sargon concerning a precious piece of furniture to be finished elicits the response: "Had it been at the disposal of the Assyrians (LÚ.Aš-šur-a-a) we would have... quickly finished it!" –whereas the blame for slowness seems to be laid on the "Babylonians" (DUMU.MEŠ.KÁ.DINGIR)". Notice also the letter SAA 13, 3 (to Assurbanipal) in which a "coppersmith of the Assyrians" (*te-bi-ru šá Aš-šur-a-a*)

²¹ The phase in question surely comprises the reign of Sargon himself, who is noted for the outright addition of foreign corps to his army (see the chapter "New Light on the Composition of Sargon's Army", in S.M. Dalley – J.N. Postgate, *Tablets from Fort Shalmaneser*, London 1984, 27-47), but should be extended in its beginnings to the previous reign of Tiglath-pileser III (see S.M. Dalley, "Foreign Chariotry and Cavalry in the Armies of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II", *Iraq* 47 (1985), 31-48). In point of fact, the earliest mentions of the addition of auxiliary troops to the empire is to be found in the annals of Assurnasirpal II: cf. M. Liverani, *Studies on the Annals of Ashurnasirpal II. 2. Topographical Analysis*, Roma 1992, 157.

²² SAA 5, 215, Obv. 21-Edge 23. Cf. J.N. Postgate, "The Assyrian Army in Zamua", *Iraq* 62 (2000), 89-108 (=id., *The Land of Assur & The Yoke of Assur*, cit., 261-280). Just to make the picture clearer, the relevant percentages of the individual groups are: Assyrians = 44,1%, Gurreans and Itu'eans = (25,2 + 30,7) = 55,9%.

²³ Cf. J.N. Postgate, "Itu", in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* V (1976-1980), 221-222.

is mentioned (R. 1) in connection with the *zazakku* of Babylon, expected to perform work for the Assur temple;²⁴ whereas an “Assyrian master-builder” (LÚ.e-tin-nu Aš-šur-KI-a-a) is required for the work on the temple of Dēr (SAA 10, 349, Rev. 24). Quite illuminating in this connection is also a formula from the edict in favor of Nergal-āpil-kumū’a, dating to the early 9th century.²⁵ This formula states that nobody, save for the king, shall exercise authority over an Assyrian craftsman (LÚ.um-ma-ni KUR.Aš-šur-a-a), an “enterer”, and a performer of the *ilku*-service (SAA 12, 82: Obv. 9’-10’); and in a parallel text (*ibid.*, 83: R. 23-24) it is further specified that “from among these Assyrian craftsmen, ‘enterers’ and performers of the *ilku*-service, Nergal-āpil-kumū’a shall give (some) as chariot fighters and bodyguards” to the king. Thus, the implications are, that the *Aššurāyu* could be moved internally within the Assyrian administration, taking on different tasks –even from the civilian to the military domain.

The inherent link between the condition of “Assyrian” and a privileged status in the eyes of the king is to some extent clarified by a letter to Esarhaddon (SAA 16, 67: R. 10’). The (unknown) writer of the text, worried that the ruler may not believe his previous statements, falls back on a fully topical expression implying recourse to an external eye-witness, but he employs it here with a unique development: “May an(y) Assyrian (Aš-šur-a-a) whom the king my lord trusts, ask *etc.*”. Further, in another letter to Esarhaddon (SAA 16, 64), which lays out the “ground rules” for filing an appeal to the king for royal intervention (lit., “to ask for the utterance of the king”, *abat šarri zakāru*), one case, which is treated in detail (Obv. 8-11), regards any “servant of an Assyrian” (*ur-du ša Aš-šur-a-a*) as possible appellant: “If one is a servant of an Assyrian, his master should be told in no uncertain terms, ‘He rests in the king’s protection –nobody may litigate against him!’”.

On the other hand, it may be noted that the *nisbe* was not the sole marker used to designate “(full-fledged) Assyrians” in the institutional-hierarchical perspective traced above: a few texts present a juxtaposition (or perhaps an equation) of this status with that of being “of Assyrian stock”, through the expression DUMU.KUR.Aššur.²⁶ Specifically, the loyalty oath promulgated by the dowager queen Zakutu for her grandson Assurbanipal indicated –as counterpart of the Crown– the totality of imperial personnel, which included the “royal seed”, magnates and governors, bearded and eunuchs, the royal entourage, the military, and “all those who enter the palace”, ending up with the comprehensive category of DUMU.MEŠ.KUR.Aššur, LÚ.qal-lu and LÚ.dan-nu, i.e. “(all) those of Assyrian stock”, both “lowly” and “great” (SAA 8, 3).

At least two more cases in which the same expression occurs may be pointed out. The first is an oracle text (SAA 9, 3.2) which opens with the clause, “Listen, o Assyrians! (DUMU.MEŠ.KUR.Aššur)” followed by good tidings on the military success of “your king”. The second case comes from a well-known letter by the exorcist Adad-šumu-ušur to Esarhaddon (SAA 10, 185), portending the blessings of the scholarly clique of the court

²⁴ Cf. PNA 1/I, 320b.

²⁵ For the complex “biography” of Nergal-āpil-kumū’a, see PNA 2/I, 941b.

²⁶ Parpola, “National and Ethnic Identity”, *cit.*, 7, would see in DUMU.MEŠ.KUR.Aššur a designation of Assyrian “citizens”: but this “nationally-oriented” slant on Assyrian political terminology seems anachronistic and forced to me –and moreover, this interpretation creates some confusion with the indication DUMU.(MEŠ.)URU.GN which may be, in point of fact, more closely related to a status of citizen or denizen (cf. fn. 25, below).

for the king's (totally unorthodox) choice of successors to the Assyrian and Babylonian throne ("What had not been done in heaven the king, my lord, has done on earth"), and ending with a somewhat slavish account of how the Elamites (NIM-KI-*a-a*), formerly quite haughty in their dealings with the Crown, had now become "worried", while "the Assyrians" (DUMU.MEŠ.KUR.Aššur, Rev. 3) had let out a sigh of relief at the positive dynastic prospects for the future.

In the latter two cases, it is possible that the use of DUMU.MEŠ.KUR.Aššur reflected a search for a "higher" form of expression than the one employed in day-to-day communication through the pure and simple *nisbe*: not by chance, this designation also occurs in literary utterances in the NA dialect which circulated at the Court as foundational material of political-ideological worth.²⁷ On the other hand, the Zakutu oath seems to point directly to Assyrian descent as a unifying criterion of all the courtiers responsible for the well-being of Assurbanipal. Thus, we might single out a blend (or semantic juxtaposition) between hierarchical status and long-established birthright as common identifying trait of the "(full-fledged) Assyrians" as a political and social élite.

To be sure, it may be observed that pure and simple designations of "Assyrians" by birth(right) are rarely attested elsewhere. As already specified in the first article of this series, *nisbes* (as well as *nisbe*-type personal names) denoting birthplaces within the territory of the Empire refer most frequently to a specific city, such as Nineveh, Ḫarrān, Arbail, or Assur (indicated as URU.ŠĀ.URU = **Libbāli*): on this count see further, e.g., the address of a letter to Tiglath-pileser III, "[To the king], our lord: your [ser]vants, the mayors, the city scribe, the principals of the city Assur and the Assurites (URU.ŠĀ.URU-*a-a*), young and old", SAA 16 97:1.²⁸

Not by chance, therefore, the rare cases at our disposal for the land of Assyria as a birthplace occur in comparisons with origins abroad, as in the letter SAA 10, 118 from the scholar Bel-ušeziḫ to king Esarhaddon, "Now his son Bēl-aḫḫē-(e)riba —his mother is Borsippa ([BĀR.SIPA.KI]-*i-ti*), but his grandmother was Assyrian (Aš-šur-KI-*a-a*), and he himself is Borsippa-born ([DUMU.BĀR.SI]PA.KI)".²⁹ A further case stems again from

²⁷ Specifically, in a text of royal propaganda describing the submission of Elam to Assurbanipal, which bears the conclusive formula "I unified (the whole) of Elam; I settled Assyrians (DUMU.MEŠ.KUR.Aš-šur.KI) there, and imposed tax and tribute upon them" (SAA 3, 31, Rev. 15-17), and in a letter from the god Aššur to Assurbanipal regarding the "war of the brothers", SAA 3, 44, 30 (DUMU.MEŠ.KUR.Aš-šur.KI, in fragmentary context).

²⁸ The *nisbe* in this sense is used in parallel to –and in point of fact, less often than– the combination of DUMU + city-name, usually translated "citizen", which may be retained *faute de mieux*; its full semantic range seems to imply both origin and permanent residence in the named city, i.e. rather more in the sense of "denizenship". For a certain number of such cases in the "everyday" texts involving both Assyrian and Babylonian cities, see e.g. SAA 1 1 65ff., "As for Aplayu, let your messenger bring him and his people to me, whether (they are) citizens (DUMU) of Babylon, Borsippa, Kish, Nippur, Uruk, Der, or (...)"; SAA 5 203, R. 14'-16', "Citizens of Babylon have come to (visit) the king, my lord"; citizens of Babylon, SAA 10 348: R. 2 and *passim* (also citizens of Borsippa and Cutha); SAA 10, 353 (Borsippa); SAA 10 367 (Babylon); SAA 11 26, SAA 11 155, SAA 11 174 (citizens of Babylon); SAA 13 202, DUMU.MEŠ URU.KASKAL, "citizens of Harran"; SAA 14 215 R. 10, LÚ.KAŠ.LUL DUMU.URU.NINA, "PN, cupbearer, citizen of Nineveh" (after other witnesses, all of palace personnel from Nineveh), DUMU.URU.NINA also in SAA 14 308: 6'; and cf. SAA 14 425: Rev. 24, DUMU.URU.Arba-il. More widely, see also SAA 14 321: R. 3, DUMU-URU-šú-nu, "their fellow citizen". Finally, with reference to a vaster territorial entity, cf. SAA 10 294, R. 20, DUMU ma-a-ti šu-u, "He is a compatriot".

²⁹ See already Fales, "Foreigners and 'Special' Inner Communities", *cit.*, 72.

the so-called “Vassal-treaties” of Esarhaddon: after the “political” opposition between a LÚ.*Aš-šu-ra-a-a* and a LÚ.*da-gíl—pa-ni šá KUR—Aš-šur* pointed out in §1a, above, we find the one traced between a DUMU.KUR.*Aššur* and a DUMU of any other land (SAA 2, 6: 16), which meant to set apart the birthplace of the subject, inside or outside Assyria.³⁰ Finally, a similar opposition would seem to underlie a protest in a letter from an official to the king concerning shepherds who were lax in making their regular deliveries of sheep to the temple, “if these people, who are of Assyrian stock (DUMU.MEŠ.KUR.*Aššur*), refuse to have reverential fear of the king my lord, how will peoples of foreign origin (DUMU.MEŠ.KUR.KÚR) behave toward the king my lord?” SAA 13, 19: rev. 3-6.³¹

2a. “Assyrians” (mainly in the plural) as a more generic positional-institutional marker.

This use of the *nisbe* and other markers refers to the pure and simple status of belonging –or even, alternatively, to the condition of being forcibly included– within the common population of Assyria. Its attestations in the SAA texts are not particularly extensive.

A first group of cases shows the *nisbe* as applied generically to the common people, observed in their doings faraway from the capital cities, and mainly occupied in the rural sector.³² In a letter, the astrologer Balasî seeks to comfort a worried Esarhaddon, who had heard of a possibly evil omen occurring in central Assyria and written, “In the city of Ḫariḫumba, lightning struck and ravaged the fields of the Assyrians (KUR.*Áš-šu-ra-a-a*)” (SAA 10, 42, 6-9), by answering him that all is well in the Palace, and asking “when has the king ever visited Ḫariḫumba?” (*ibid.*, 14-15). But the royal query (possibly based on an omen of the series *Šumma ālu*),³³ is the object of a further letter (SAA 10, 69) by another astrologer, Nabû-aḫḫē-erība, who takes up again the king’s words “concerning the large field of the Assyrians” ([*ša* LÚ/KUR.*Áš-š*]u-ra-a-a, Obv. 8).³⁴ A further case in this connection is represented by the somewhat fragmentary document SAA 12, 48, defined by its editors as a “hybrid, all-in-one text: land grant, decree of offerings, votive donation, and royal appointment”,³⁵ issued by a ruler whose name is lost, in favor of the temple of Zababa and Baba in Ḫuzirina (on the Balikh). A badly preserved clause reads as follows: “Concerning the tenure of this area [...], I settled Assyrians (*Aš-šur-a-a*.KI) there” (Rev. 6-7). This formulation might suggest the possibility (especially if viewed against the background of similar expressions in the ARI) that the action described in the document regarded a new urban foundation. However, the following lines (Rev. 9-11: “at that time I assigned Ken-Adad, the priest of Adad in Assur, as priest there, and I placed craftsmen under the authority of the priest Ken-Adad”) indicate on the other hand that the royal

³⁰ For this double designation see already the discussion by Machinist, “Assyrians on Assyria”, *cit.*, 82, who could not clarify it explicitly, but called attention to a possible parallel in the Middle Assyrian laws, which distinguish between the categories of *amīlu* and *Aššurāyu*, possibly to be understood as social markers (patrician vs. commoner). Wisely, however, the American scholar did not venture to apply *tout court* this (moreover uncertain) distinction to the NA case.

³¹ For another possible example of disloyalty of “Assyrians” (*Aš-šur-a-a*), cf. SAA 16, 68, s. 1 (in fragmentary context, perhaps from Guzana).

³² This particular usage of “Assyrian” could, in point of fact, have been of long tradition, perhaps even going back to the Middle Assyrian period: cf. the remarks by Machinist discussed in fn. 27, above.

³³ S. Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1983, 44-45.

³⁴ The reference to a plural subject for *Aššurāyu* in these two passages may be desumed from Nabû-aḫḫē-erība’s further explanation, “The farmers who seeded the fields do not revere Adad any more; that is why he caused a lightning bolt to strike down and devastate the field” (*ibid.*, Obv. 13- Rev. 2).

³⁵ L. Kataja – R. Whiting, Introduction, xxix.

endeavor was focused on a restructuring of the territory and of the shrine –and thus that the “Assyrians” mentioned in the text simply referred to the rural *plebs*, as in the previously quoted cases.

Other examples, instead, regard “Assyrians” who happened to be outside of Assyrian territory, for a variety of reasons (POWs, fugitives, merchants, etc.). In this connection, account should be taken of the fact that –however imprecise and/or ideologically motivated may the royal utterances on the geographical confines of the empire have been–³⁶ a “land of Assyria” was, in point of fact, endowed with decided concreteness in the mental projections of the Assyrian ruling class, presumably in relation to its defensibility by means of fortresses and garrisoned points of various types located at the frontiers with the outer world.³⁷ Perhaps to define Assyria as an “uniformly structured political entity with well-defined and well-guarded borders”, as Parpola does,³⁸ is overstating the matter, since numerous cases –e.g. the pillaging *hybris* of the Ḫaṭallu-Arameans in the middle Euphrates area in the mid-8th century recorded in the “Suhu Annals”,³⁹ or the undisturbed presence of Arabs in the central and southern Jezirah, as well as in inner central Syria, denounced in letters from Sargon’s reign⁴⁰– prove that Assyrian territory was all but permeable and open to penetration in various sectors. However, it is fair to say that, at least in some zones (especially along the mountain ranges to the N-NE facing Urartian territory and Mannea) a clear geographical boundary (*mišru*, *taḫūmu*) between Assyria and “the others” was perceived as such. In particular, numerous queries to the god Šamaš (SAA 4, *passim*) express the hope that the imperial army may be allowed to return safe and sound to the *mišir* KUR.Aššur (or KI KUR.Aššur); whereas decided landmarks of the territory itself are indicated in its “fortresses” (*birtu*, cf. e.g. SAA 4, 264), or –in a maritime environment such as Phoenicia– its “ports” (*kāru*, e.g. SAA 16, 127).

As a byway in relation to this topic, it may be noted that the frontier of KUR.Aššur obviously lay in the background of the following passage, from the corpus of correspondence dating to Tiglath-pileser III’s reign, “I have rece[iv]ed the sealed letter which the [k]ing, my lord, sen[t] to me, and I have g[one and] asked Par[n]i-aldê about the Assyrian messenger[s] (LÚ.A.KIN.MEŠ ša KUR.Aššur) who [we]nt [to Urartu], about whom the kin[g], my [lo]rd, [gave me] o[r]ders” (SAA 19, 76, 12-16). And it was also implied in a denunciation to Sargon concerning the complex smuggling activities carried out by the people of Kummû (SAA 5, 100: Obv.12- Rev. 5): “The inhabitants of

³⁶ Useful observations on the ideological and mental vision of the geography of the empire offered by Assyrian rulers in their official inscriptions are given e.g. by A. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II., cit.*, 396-398 (“Die Grenze des Reiches”) and by P. Villard, “Les limites du monde connu à l’époque néo-assyrienne”, in L. Milano *et. al.* (Eds.), *Landscapes: Territories, Frontiers and Horizons in the Ancient Near East*, II, Padua (Sargon) 2000, 73-81. See especially, and most recently, M. Liverani, “The Sargon Geography and the Late Assyrian Mensuration of the Earth”, *SAAB* 13 (1999-2001), 57-85.

³⁷ Cf. e.g. B. Parker, “Garrisoning the Empire: Aspects of the Construction and Maintenance of Forts on the Assyrian Frontier”, *Iraq* 59 (1997), 77-87, with previous bibliography.

³⁸ Parpola, “National and Ethnic Identity”, *cit.*, 6.

³⁹ Most recent edition in *RIMB* 2, 291-294 (S.1002:1).

⁴⁰ On this topic, see F.M. Fales, “Pastorizia e politica: nuovi dati sugli Arabi nelle fonti di età neoassira”, in A. Avanzini (Ed.), *Problemi di onomastica semitica meridionale*, Pisa 1989, 119-134; id., “Central Syria in the Letters to Sargon II”, in U. Hubner - E.A. Knauf (eds.), *Kein Land für sich allein: Studien zum Kulturkontakt in Kanaan, Israel/Palästina und Ebir-nari für Manfred Weippert zum 65. Geburtstag*, Freiburg – Göttingen 2002, 134-152. A later study by R. Byrne, “Early Assyrian Contacts with Arabs and the Impact on Levantine Vassal Tribute”, *BASOR* 331 (2003), 11-25, appears to ignore these two contributions.

Bususu⁴¹ purchase Assyrian luxury items (*ša-ḫi-ta-a-te ša KUR.Aš-šur.KI*) in Kalḫu and Nineveh and sell them to these Kummeans. These Kummeans enter the town Aira of the domain of Kaqqadanu, ruled by Saniye –a city lord subject to the governor of Kalḫu– and from there bring (the goods) to to Urarṭu. From over there they import luxury items here”.

Going back to the main theme, however, the (generally distressing) condition of “Assyrians” trapped in foreign lands seem to have come, off and on, to the attention of the ruling class of the empire (as also indicated by various passages in the ARI). Thus, a letter from Babylonia describes the fate of “servants of the king my lord”, both *KUR.Aš-šur-a-a* and *KUR.Ta-bal-a-a*, who have been sold in the city of Sadiru of Bit-Amukani, and indicates the retrieval of 180 of them and their forwarding to an Assyrian emissary (SAA 15, 268, Obv. 3’-4’ and 10’-11’). Elsewhere, the news regards Assyrians (*KUR.Aš-šur*) and people from Birati (*URU.Bir-ta-a-a*) taken prisoners by the Babylonians in Cutha (SAA 18, 147: 8-9). From the same archive, a further letter refers to *LÚ.KUR.Aš-šur.MEŠ*, defined as “servants of the king who came to Birati to do business”, prior to being taken prisoners by the Arabs (SAA 18, 148: 7, 11).

The last example to be pointed out for this generic categorization of “Assyrians” is of particular relevance, since –if the suggested restoration of its text were found acceptable– it would represent the sole explicit case in the SAA texts in which the act of institutional “Assyrianization” (*lit.*, “to reckon” someone “as an Assyrian”, with the use of the verb *manû*) is described.⁴² The text stems from the archive of letters from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III: as for 29 deportees of the Aramean tribe of the Puqudu present in the province of Našibina, the order of the governor Inurta-ila’i to the palace scribe runs as follows, “Let them be reckoned [as *Assyrians*], and let them be brought and appointed where [their] people (already) are” (SAA 19, 56, R. 1). As will be seen in §2b, below, this act of forced “Assyrianization” is one of the most frequently described in the ARI, from late Middle Assyrian times onward.

3a. “Assyrian” (singular or plural) as a marker of typological/qualitative value, i.e. used to indicate or imply a difference on other traditions, techniques, etc.

In the administrative archives of the NA period, the *nisbe* may here and there be found as a designation of types of goods or staples possibly going back to a native tradition of manufacture. This seems to be the case of the forty “Assyrian sweets” (*mut-qi-i-tú aš-šur-i-tú*) which crop up in a fragmentary and undated record of pots and foodstuffs for the royal palace, paired by the same quantity of sweets of “Aramean” tradition (*ar-mi-i-tú*), SAA 7 145, I’, 7-8. According to a recent study of NA food practices by S. Gaspa, the *mutqītu* presents the same root as *muttāqu*, known from Middle Assyrian as well as from Middle- and Neo-Babylonian sources, and which should have represented a type of sweet bread made of wheat, sesame oil, and date honey or date syrup.⁴³ It is thus possible that the two varieties of *mutqītu* indicated in the text were characterized by the different appearance of their loaves, quite evident as such, e.g. of a thin type, whether of loose-knot

⁴¹ This town is stated a few lines previously (Obv. 10-11) to have lain in the domain of the (Assyrian) Chief Cupbearer.

⁴² Parpola, “National and Ethnic Identity”, *cit.*, 7, speaks of the quoted process as that of becoming Assyrian “citizens” (see fn. 22, above), whereas his use of the term “Assyrianization” (*ibid.*, 4-5) regards rather the cultural influence exercised by the Assyrian State.

⁴³ S. Gaspa, *Alimenti e pratiche alimentari in Assiria: le materie alimentari nel culto ufficiale dell’Assiria del primo millennio a.C.*, Padua (Sargon) 2012, 57.

("pretzel") or stick ("baguette") shape vs. a homogeneous (rounded or elongated) shape, or perhaps by different degrees of leavening agents ("puffy" vs. flat). However, the presence of varying ingredients should not be ruled out as well.⁴⁴

A quite different context, instead, is that of the lists of offerings to be presented daily to the temple of Assur:⁴⁵ each of these inventories regards "commodities present on a certain day in a certain department of the temple".⁴⁶ A fairly regular item in these inventories was the *budê*-confection, of which a variety was decidedly "Assyrian" (*aš-šur-a-a*), offered in a 2-*sutu* jar (DUG.2BÁN), whereas another one was "(of/from) Carchemish", offered in a "flagon" (DUG.*ma-si-tú*): this couplet may be found in SAA 7 207, Rev. 1'-2' (offerings of day 19), *ibid.*, 208, Rev. 2'-3' (day 21), *ibid.*, 216, Rev. 4-5 (date lost); *ibid.*, 217, Rev. 2-3 (date lost), *ibid.*, 218, 3-4 (fragmentary). The mention of containers in both cases indicates that the *budê* was the product of transformation of fruit into preserves or into sweet sauces; the two types of confections always occur in the quoted lists between the *hinhinu*-cereal and dairy products, and the presence of a cereal component is hinted at in a Neo-Babylonian text.⁴⁷

Although apparently dissimilar, both these instances of "Assyrian" vs. "alien" foodstuffs might in fact go back to a very simple opposition, that between an indigenous, ancient, and "eastern" tradition of food preparation, against an exotic, novel, and "western" variety, such as had been introduced into the Assyrian heartland through conquests and the massive influx of deportees settled in the northwestern Jezirah.⁴⁸ In effect, both categories invoked for the non-Assyrian foodstuffs, i.e. "Aramean" and "from Carchemish", recur – as we shall see presently – in other classifications of goods or activities; and it might be surmised that they were but inner variants of a single facet within a perceived dualism (between "native" and "imperial" values) which cut across various sectors of the culture and mores of late Assyria.

The sphere of language and writing represents a further fertile domain for the identification of purely "Assyrian" characteristics vis-à-vis ones set in parallel/opposition to them. Thus, an administrative list of precious objects/fixtures connected to different deities revered in Nineveh (or Assur) includes 1 NU–MAN SAR *aš-šur-a-a*, which may be understood as "one royal statue, (with) Assyrian inscription" (SAA 7, 62, I, 14'). The designation "Assyrian" recurs again in connection with writing-boards in a letter concerning the copying of tablets for the Nineveh royal library (SAA 10, 101, 8-9): here the reference to a specific language/script is quite clear, since a –quite unique– opposition between Babylonian and Assyrian writing-boards ([GIŠ.Z]U.MEŠ URI.KI-ú-ti/[GIŠ.ZU].MEŠ *aš-šur-KI-ú-ti*) is indicated. Further proof that Assyrian cuneiform script

⁴⁴ These reflections –otiose or not as they may be– stem simply from random observations of mine on bread production in the Near East of the present. In any case, a certain technical ability for the preparation of this product was no doubt implied, since a specialist (*ša-mutqītīšu*) is attested as a witness in a legal document (SAA 6, 262, 4: cf. Gaspa, *Alimenti e pratiche alimentari*, cit., 191).

⁴⁵ For these texts, SAA 7 182-219, see the introductory remarks by J.N. Postgate in SAA 7, xxxv-xxxvi; and, most recently, S. Gaspa, "Organizing the Festive Cycles at the Aššur Temple: Royal Dispositions for the Provision and Processing of Foodstuffs in First Millennium BC Assyria", *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 18 (2009-2010), 91-144.

⁴⁶ As first stated by G. van Driel, *The Cult of Aššur*, Leiden 1969, 207.

⁴⁷ For the *budê* see Gaspa, "Organizing the Festive Cycles", cit., 110, fn. 77; and for a more detailed analysis, id., *Alimenti e pratiche alimentari*, cit., 189-191.

⁴⁸ This geographical and cultural opposition regarding both foodstuffs was already noted by Gaspa, *Alimenti e pratiche alimentari*, cit., 191.

was recorded alongside other forms of language and writing at this time derives from a letter to Esarhaddon concerning malfeasance in the western province of Guzana (SAA 16, 63, 12-14): “(In the reign of) the father of the king, my lord, they wrote the silver quota of the shepherds on a document in Assyrian (*ni-ib-zi Aš-šur-a-a*) and a document in Aramaic (*ni-ib-zi Ār-ma-a-a*)”.

This reference leads, in its turn, directly to a full set of further ones, in which scribes –LÚ.DUB.SAR(MEŠ) or LÚ.A.BA(MEŠ)– indicated as *Aš-šur-a-a* are placed in opposition to “their ‘Aramean’ counterparts (e.g. SAA 3 33, Rev. 22’; SAA 4, 144, 9), within the framework of a factual Assyrian/Aramaic bilingualism for the implementation of administrative, legal, and possibly epistolary documents of public and private scope on multiple media.⁴⁹ A letter from Tiglath-pileser III’s time is explicit on this count, with a request for “scribes of the palace (LÚ.um-ma-nu ša É.GAL), whether versed in Assyrian (LÚ.Aš-šur-a-a) or in Aramaic (LÚ.Ar-ma-a-a), who have come to your land” (SAA 16, 154, 3-7). Conclusively, it may be noticed that, similarly to the case of the foodstuffs above, also the majority of these quotes on languages and writing techniques also points to a forced correlation between a “native”/older tradition and an “alien”/secondarily introduced one, within the multi-cultural and supra-regional scenario of late Assyria.⁵⁰

A final evaluation should be reserved to the sphere of measures, both regarding weight and dry capacity.⁵¹ An “Assyrian” mina (MA *Aš-šur-a-a*) is attested in SAA 7, 48, 5; and it would seem reasonable to oppose this measure to that of the “mina of Carchemish”, a western ponderal standard well known from legal documents of the 7th century.⁵² More complex, on the other hand, is the dry measure of the “Assyrian *qa*” (e.g. SAA 14, 397; *ibid.*, 425; and *passim* in legal documents from Nimrud and elsewhere),⁵³ which has no known “western” counterpart for the time being.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Cf. F.M. Fales, “Multilingualism on Multiple Media in the Neo-Assyrian Period: a Review of the Evidence”, SAAB 16 (2007), 95-122; on the scribal profession in NA texts, see already K. Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden als Quelle für Mensch und Umwelt*, Helsinki 1987, 80-124, and esp. 83 fn. 434, for the “Aramean” scribes; and add, e.g., the couplet mentioned in a letter from Tušhan (S. Parpola, “Cuneiform Texts from Ziyaret Tepe (Tušhan), 2002-2003”, SAAB 17 [2008], 75, ll. 4-5).

⁵⁰ In this same context, the case of women musicians and performers of various ethnic origins at the Assyrian Court, already discussed in Fales, “Foreigners and ‘Special’ Inner Communities”, *cit.*, 64-66, should be also recalled.

⁵¹ For the mensural standards in use in the NA period, cf. J.N. Postgate, *Fifty Neo-Assyrian Legal Documents*, Warminster (Aris & Phillips) 1976, 63-72; M.A. Powell, “Maße und Gewichte”, in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* 7, Berlin (de Gruyter) 1987-1990, 457-517.

⁵² Cf. most recently P. Vargyas, “The Mina of Karkemiš in Neo-Assyrian Sources”, SAAB 10 (1996), 9-14 (for a hypothesis on the absolute ponderal value of the standard); F.M. Fales, “Prices in Neo-Assyrian Sources”, SAAB 10 (1996), 11-53 (full database of the sources); K. Radner, “Money in the Neo-Assyrian Empire”, in J.C. Dercksen (Ed.), *Trade and Finance in Ancient Mesopotamia*, Leiden 1999, 127-157 (where the idea is put forth, that this standard came into common use only/especially following the defeat and assimilation of Carchemish to the empire); C. Zaccagnini, “The Mina of Karkemiš and Other Minas”, SAAB 13 (1999-2001), 39-56 (correlation of the Carchemish standard with specific weights); F.M. Fales, “The Assyrian Lion-Weights: A Further Attempt”, in press (with a different hypothesis on the absolute ponderal value of the standard).

⁵³ Cf. Postgate, *Fifty Neo-Assyrian Legal Documents*, *cit.*, 68. The extra-Ninevite references are: ND 2335, R.2; CTN 3, 11, 3; *ibid.*, 44, E.8; *Iraq* 32, 7, l. 4’; ND 5459, 2; ND 5474, 2; ND 5447, 2; ND 5449, 2; ND 5452, 2; ND 5454, 2; ND 5455, 2; ND 5456, 2; ND 5458, 2. See also SAAB 9, 99, 5, I am grateful to the *Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus* project and its director Prof. Simo Parpola, for providing me with these references from its electronic database, and to Dr. Mikko Luukko for assembling them for me.

⁵⁴ It may be conclusively noticed that additional categories of “Assyrian” goods –which are difficult to explain in the light of possibly distinctive technical features– comprise “boats” (SAA 1, 56) and doors (SAA 6, 183). The reference to Assyrian consignments in SAA 7, 166, 14, is obscure.

In the ARI:

Typically of the overall style of the ARI, which present a world-view from the exclusive perspective of the Assyrian king, there is no adequate counterpart in this corpus for the use of the *nisbe* or other expressions to designate elite components of the reign, and later of the empire, in opposition to a more generic use of such terms, as is the case in the “everyday” documents seen above (§§1a-2a). “Assyrians” in the king’s employ are rarely, if at all, endorsed as such outright (the attestations rather regard “eunuchs” and/or “governors” in special positions or roles):⁵⁵ and the almost exclusive reference to an institutional function for the Assyrian population –newly acquired or extant as the case may be– is the collective responsibility for the performance of duties for the ruler and his protective deity. Thus, despite the fact that the chronological range of the ARI regarding “Assyrians” spans several centuries (from Tiglath-pileser I onward), a certain immutability of formulaic attestations concerning the population of the land may be observed, in the light of a basic tenet: one of the main efforts flaunted by each successive Assyrian ruler was that of expanding “the land of Assur”, not only by adding territories to the reign, but also by adding elements of the conquered foreign populations to the sum total of “Assyrians”.⁵⁶

This said, I will nonetheless attempt to offer a bird’s-eye view on “Assyrians” in the ARI, keeping as close as possible to the distinctions in terms of ethnicity established for the SAA texts above. No counterpart to the particular acceptance of “Assyrian” in §3a, above, is however present in the ARI.

1b. “Assyrians” (in the plural) as an institutional-hierarchical marker.

Perhaps the most explicit passage on a leading role reserved to those who were “Assyrians” of long standing vis-à-vis the mass of newly conquered peoples, may be sought in the inscriptions of Sargon II: “The people of the four (quarters of the world), of foreign tongue and divergent speech, inhabitants of mountain and plain, all those whom the Light of the gods, the lord of all, shepherded, (and) whom I had carried off with my powerful sceptre by the command of Assur, my lord –I amalgamated them (*lit.*, made them of one mouth) and located them in its (=Dur-Šarruken’s) midst. People of Assyrian stock (DUMU.MEŠ KUR.Aš-šur.KI), fully competent to teach them how to tackle assignments (and) to fear god and king (alike), I dispatched to them as inspectors and overseers”.⁵⁷

A few more examples, albeit of quite different tone and content, might be connected to this same general category. The first source I would like to quote bears an account of the gathering of foreign peoples in the new royal capital Kalhu by Assurnasirpal II: “I took people which I had conquered from the lands over which I had gained dominion, from the land Suhu, (from) the entire land of Laqû, (from) the city Sirqu which is at the crossing of the Euphrates, (from) the entire land of Zamua, from Bit-Adini and the land Hatti and from Lubarna, the Patinu. I settled (them) therein” (RIMA 2, 276, ll. 15-17).⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Or else “troops of Assyria” (ERIM.HI.A-at KUR.Aš-šur.KI) driven without pause by their king to battle, as e.g. in a summary inscription of Tiglath-pileser III (RINAP 1, 85, no. 35, l. 28’) or in the account of Sargon’s VIII campaign.

⁵⁶ As e.g. explicitly stated by Tiglath-pileser III: “I increased the territory of Assyria by taking hold of (foreign) lands, (and) added countless people to its population. I constantly shepherd them in safe pastures”, RINAP 1, 86, no. 35, 15’-17’.

⁵⁷ IS, 43-44 (Cylinder inscriptions), ll.72-77; *ibid.*, 72 (Bull inscription), ll.92-97; *ibid.*, 47-48 (Bronze tablet), ll. 49-54. Notice that the designation DUMU.MEŠ KUR.Aš-šur.KI is only employed by Sargon in this passage.

⁵⁸ See also *ibid.*, 281, ll.48-52, and 285, ll. 2-6.

To be sure, no “Assyrians” are mentioned here, and this passage might consequently be considered totally alien from Sargon’s utterance on the assemblage of peoples for Dur-Šarruken. On the other hand, some features link it to the latter, since it similarly records the initial stage of a process of amalgamation of many foreign peoples, by making them converge in an uniform manner on a new urban foundation, although it omits mentioning how they were subsequently trained in the rules and mores of the country. A more articulated process is the one illustrated in the annals of Tiglath-pileser III, concerning a number of Aramean tribes from the lower Tigris area apportioned within different Assyrian provinces: “From those Arameans whom I deported, I distributed and settled [...],000 to the province of the general-in-chief, 10,000 to the province of the palace herald, [...],000 to the province of the chief cupbearer, [...],000 to the province of the land Barhalzi, and 5,000 to the province of the land Mazamua. I united them, reckoned them with the inhabitants of Assyria, and I imposed upon them the yoke of the god Assur my lord as Assyrians (GIŠ.ni-ri Aš-šur EN-ia ki-i šá Aš-šu-ri)” (RINAP 1, 27-28, no. 5, ll. 11-12).⁵⁹

A structural “moment” which may be sequentially placed “after” the above description of the ingathering of different populations is, on the other hand, attested in accounts which mention the introduction of people already classified as “Assyrians” into a conquered territory. This process is described by Assurnasirpal II concerning the North Syrian city of Luhutu, and it also bears the interesting additional notation of a banquet (perhaps slightly less opulent than the famous one in Kalhu) staged in the newly conquered settlement: “I reaped the barley and straw of the land Luhutu (and) stored (it) inside. I staged a banquet in his palace. I settled people of Assyria (LÚ.MEŠ-e KUR áš-šu-ra-a-a) in (the city)” (RIMA 2, 218, ll. 82-83). A shorter formula along similar lines is given by Shalmaneser III concerning the repopulation of fortresses on the Euphrates, “I seized the cities Tīl-Barsip, Alligu, [Nappigu], (and) Rugulitu as my royal cities. I settled Assyrians (LÚ.áš-šu-ra-a-a) therein, (and) founded palaces as my royal residences within” (RIMA 3, 199, ll. 33-34); the same formulation is to be found for Pitru and Mutkinu (*ibid.*, l. 38). And finally, in a comparable vein, Sargon describes the repopulation of the conquered territory of Am(ba)ris of Tabal as follows, “I settled therein Assyrians, who fear my lordship (LÚ.aš-šur-KI-ú pa-liḫ be-lu-ti-ia ina ŠĀ ú-še-šib); I placed my eunuch (as) governor over them, (and) tribute and tax I imposed upon them” –with a terminology which, as may be seen, goes back full circle to the particularly explicit one presented at the beginning of this section.⁶⁰

2b. “Assyrians” (mainly in the plural) as a more generic positional-institutional marker.

The majority of attestations for “Assyrians” in the ARI falls under this category. The standard phraseology depicts an action on the part of the king implicitly presented as meritorious: that of adding the subjected populations to the body of Assyrian subjects. Inner variants reflect changes over time, with emphasis on the “land of Assur” in earlier sources and on the “people of Assyria” later; some connected institutional features, coherent with the difference in overall political outlook of the different rulers, may also be singled out.

The earliest examples stem from the reign of Tiglath-pileser I, who states “I added territory to Assyria (and) people to its population (UGU KUR ^da-sur ma-a-ta UGU UN.MEŠ-ša UN.MEŠ lu-rad-di) in a summary of his conquests (RIMA 2, 13-14, 59-60). The same formula recurs *ibid.*, 27, ll. 31-32, but with a perhaps not irrelevant addition (ll. 33-35): “I brought contentment to my people (UZU.MEŠ UN.MEŠ-ia ú-ṭi-ib), (and)

⁵⁹ Cf. 2b, below. A possible duplicate is in *ibid.*, 83, no. 35, ll. 1’-4’ (fragmentary).

⁶⁰ IS, 200, Display Inscription, 32.

provided them with a secure abode".⁶¹ Within the actual records of the king's conquest, we also find the first occurrence of the *topos* on "reckoning" (*manû*) the captives with the land's population: "I took the remaining 6,000 of their troops who had fled from my weapons (and) submitted to me and counted them as people of my land (*a-na UN.MEŠ KUR-ti-ia am-nu-šu-nu-ti*)", regarding Katmuhu (RIMA 2, 14, ll. I 85-88).⁶² A similar formula –with a more marked emphasis on the process of deportation– is applied to the people of Kasku and Urumu, *ibid.*, 17: III, 2-6: "I took them, together with their property and 120 chariots and harnessed horses, (and) reckoned them with the people of my land (*a-na UN.MEŠ KUR-ti-ia am-nu-šu-nu-ti*)"⁶³.

The inscriptions of Adad-nirari II show the innovative mention of the "land of Assyria" as benefiting from the addition of conquered settlements and people: after the account of having brought back "in my presence" the enemy leader Nur-Adad, "together with his extensive troops as hostages", the king (RIMA 2, 151, 79) describes the fate reserved to the land of the Temannu Arameans, "I granted (his) cities with people to Assyria (and) reckoned them (accordingly)" (URU.MEŠ-*ni iš-tu UN.MEŠ KUR aš-šur áš-ruq-šú-nu mi-nu-su am-nu*). The fixed phrase on "reckoning" is continued by Tukulti-Ninurta II (RIMA 2, 168, 4', and 178, 133), who goes back directly to a clause by Tiglath-pileser I, seen above: "I added territory to Assyria (and) people to its population" (UGU KUR ^d*a-sur ma-a-ta UGU UN.MEŠ-ša UN.MEŠ lu-rad-di*).

The motif –like many others of its kind– finds a decided expansion under Assurnasirpal II. A recurring formulation may be found in a summary of conquests in the general region of Zamua:⁶⁴ "I reckoned (the people) from the passes of Mount Babitu to Hašmar as people of my land. In the lands over which I gained dominion I regularly appointed my governors. They (=the people) performed servitude (*ur-du-ti ú-pu-uš*) (and) I imposed upon them corvée", RIMA 2, 222, ll. 124-125;⁶⁵ see also *ibid.*, 327, l. 6, referring to the same general region: "in the lands and highlands over which I gained dominion I regularly appointed my governors; I received their (=the people's) tribute (and) they performed servitude". As for Shalmaneser III, the object of comparable descriptions regards mainly the conquest of Bit-Adini and the defeat of the Aramean Ahunu, an enemy of long standing: "I took as my own Ahunu with his troops, chariots, cavalry, (and) rich palace property beyond measure. I transported (it) across the *Euphrates* (text "Tigris") and brought (it) to my city, Aššur. I reckoned them among the people of my land (*a-na UN.MEŠ KUR-ia am-nu-šú-nu*)," RIMA 3, 22, ll. 74-75.⁶⁶ Shamshi-Adad V employs a

⁶¹ A further variant is *ibid.*, 35, 8', where the "addition" formula is merely followed by the "secure abode", without the clause on "contentment". Similar in spirit would, much later, be a clause of self-praise in the Saba' stele of Adad-nirari III (RIMA 3, 208, ll. 7-9; see also *ibid.*, 212, l. 2): this king stated that, thanks to his pious acts, the gods "made his shepherdship as pleasing as a healing drug (*šam-me TI.LA*) to the Assyrians (UN.MEŠ KUR.*aš-šur*)". To be noted is the use of the verbal form *uṭṭib*, which takes directly after the passage by Tiglath-pileser I.

⁶² The motif of "reckoning" foreigners "with the people of Assyria" was studied in close connection with the practice of mass deportation by the Assyrian armies in B. Oded, *Mass Deportations and Deportees in the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, Wiesbaden 1979, 77, 83, 85, and *passim*.

⁶³ The "reckoning" of the Urumu and the Abešlu is attested also in *ibid.*, 33, l. 22.

⁶⁴ Cf. Liverani, *Studies on the Annals of Ashurnasirpal II*, *cit.*, 46, 52.

⁶⁵ See also *ibid.*, 225, ll. 16-17 (clause on corvée absent); 230, ll. 44-46 (with URU before Hašmar); also *ibid.*, 275-276, ll. 11-12; 280-281, ll. 29-32; 285, ll. 10-13 (clause on corvée absent).

⁶⁶ See also, still for Bit-Adini, *ibid.*, 30 (*am-nu*), *ibid.*, 91 (*am-nu-šú-nu*), *ibid.*, 105, 107, 111, 118, and notice *ibid.*, 103, *a-na UN.MEŠ-še-ia am-nu-šú*, which Grayson translates "with my people" –but perhaps it is just a case of a scribal mistake, with -še- for KUR; for Nairi and Zamua, *ibid.*, 28-29 ("people of my land"); for Hatti, *ibid.*, 103 ("people of my land", with *am-nu-šu*).

similar formula for the conquest of the city of Me-Turnat; “I led those people out and brought them with their property (and) gods into my land. I reckoned them as people of my land”, RIMA 3, 187, ll. 6-8.

With Tiglath-pileser III, the motif of “reckoning” foreigners as people of Assyria finds a further expansion, regarding the imposition of duties *kī ša Aššurī*, “like Assyrians”. See the passage already quoted in §1b, above; but also the following ones, regarding Bit-Sangibutu and other peoples, “I imposed upon them [tribute] and tax like the Assyrians (*ki-i šá aš-šu-ri e-mid-su-nu-ti*), RINAP 1, 46, no. 14, ll.8-10, or “I reckoned them as inhabitants of Assyria (*it-ti UN.MEŠ KUR.aš-šur am-nu-šú-nu-ti*); I imposed over them service and corvée like Assyrians (*il-ku tup-sik-ku ki-i šá aš-šu-ri e-mid-su-nu-ti*)”, *ibid.*, 70, no. 27, l. 2.

Sargon took up his predecessor’s phraseology verbatim, albeit at times splitting it up in separate contexts: for the first element –“My eunuch as governor I placed over them; I reckoned them with Assyrians (UN.MEŠ KUR.aš-šur)”–, see especially the Annals (IS 130: 240-241, Gurgum; *ibid.* 135: 254, Ashdod; *ibid.*, 147: 286c, Dur-Athara) as well as other texts (IS 63: Bull inscription, 20-21, Hamath, Kummukh, Ashdod, etc.). The second part of the phraseology (imposition of duties *kī ša Aššurī*) also appears in his Annals (with *biltu* and *maddattu*: IS 87:10, Tabal; *ibid.*, 88:17, Samaria; 125: 204; with *tupšikku*, Bit-Burutash and Hilakku) as well as in other texts bearing summaries of conquests (IS, 34: Cylinder 16; *ibid.*, 46: Bronze tablet 25: *ibid.*, 56: *Plattenrückseite*, 11-13, all with *biltu* and *maddattu*).⁶⁷

The subsequent rulers were, instead, quite frugal in the use of the label “Assyrian” within their royal texts –although, probably not by chance, the rare contexts to be retrieved suggest applications of the ethnonym with some overlaps on the nuances of §1b, above. Sennacherib makes various references to the specialists in his army, but does not grace them with the ethnonym. In his so-called “autobiographical apology”, Esarhaddon mentions “the Assyrians (UN.MEŠ KUR.aš-šur.KI), young and old”, as gathered by his father Sennacherib for an oath in view of the succession to the throne (RINAP 4, 12: l. 15),⁶⁸ and –after his victory over his brothers– recalls that “the Assyrians (UN.MEŠ KUR.aš-šur.KI), who had sworn by the treaty, an oath bound by the great gods, concerning me, came before me and kissed my feet” (*ibid.*, 14: ll. 80-81). Assurbanipal uses the ethnonym for regular troops, when he recalls, e.g., that Šarru-lu-dari, “whom my father had made king in Egypt,had plotted evil against the Assyrians” (DUMU.MEŠ KUR.aš-šur.KI, AS 5, 36: II 5), and that his nephew Tašdamanê, “mustered his battle array to fight my troops, the Assyrians (DUMU.MEŠ KUR.aš-šur.KI), who were in Memphis” (*ibid.*, 38: II 14).

Finally, I would range in this same bracket some mentions of “Assyrians” who happened to find themselves outside of Assyrian territory, for a variety of reasons –and whose lot prompted a decided action by the ruler –mainly positive, but not always so. The most explicit of such mentions begin with the reign of Assurnasirpal II: “I brought back the enfeebled Assyrians (UN.MEŠ KUR.aš-šur *an-ša-te*) who, because of hunger (and) famine, had gone up to other lands, (or) to the land of Šubru. I settled them in the city Tušha” (RIMA 2, 202, ll. 7-8; also *ibid.*, 243, ll. 21-24).⁶⁹ Another passage by this king describes his outright resettlement at Sinabu and Ta’idu (in the upper Tigris valley) of

⁶⁷ See also fn. 59, above, for a further case in the Display inscription.

⁶⁸ See also *ibid.*, 45; l. 8’, fragmentary.

⁶⁹ This text has *an-na-te*: cf. critical apparatus *ibid.*

"Assyrians" who had encountered dire political circumstances in the recent past: "I resettled in their abandoned cities (and) houses Assyrians (LÚ.MEŠ-e KUR.aš-šur-a-ia) who had held fortresses of Assyria in the land(s) Nairi (*ša ina KUR na-i-ri bi-ra-te ša aš-šur ú-kallu-ú-ni*), (and) whom the Aramaeans had subdued. I placed them in a peaceful abode" (RIMA 2, 261, ll. 91-95).⁷⁰ A variant of this motif –regarding "Assyrian" regular troops (cf. above)– may be found much later, in Assurbanipal's annals, which relate how "Indabigaš, who sat on the throne of Elam after Tammartu, recognized the power of my arms, which I made bitter against Elam. The Assyrians (DUMU.MEŠ KUR.aš-šur.KI), whom I had sent to help Nabû-bêl-šumâte, son of Merodach-baladan..., whom Nabû-bêl-šumâte, through deceit, during the night, had seized (and) forcibly restrained – Indabigaš, king of Elam, let them go forth out of prison" (AS 5, 80: 77-83, 85-88).

Now for the less kindly views of "Assyrians" on the part of their rulers. A different type of recall of past political circumstances, since in this case it involved the "Assyrians" living in the country itself, may be found in the annals of Shamshi-Adad V, when describing the revolt of his brother Aššur-da'in-apla against their father Shalmaneser III: "He (=the rebel) won over to his side Assyrians, above and below (UN.MEŠ KUR ^daš-šur e-liš ù šap-liš), and he made (them) take binding oaths (*ta-me-tu*)" (RIMA 3, 183, ll. 42-43). A veiled critique of the "Assyrians" who had changed sides –perhaps less by coercion than through self-interest– is apparent here.

Much less nuanced, on the other hand, is the attitude of Esarhaddon vis-à-vis a particular group of "Assyrians" in his so-called "Letter to the Gods", relevant to the military campaign against Šupria of 673 BC.⁷¹ The *casus belli* was represented by Esarhaddon's intention to reclaim Assyrian fugitives to the northern buffer state. A totally damnatory reference to these people is already present in a more fragmentary text, which mentions "...The Assyrians (UN.MEŠ KUR.aš-šur.KI) who had committed sins, [...] robbers, thieves, murderers [...] those people, who did not fear the oath of his lord..." (RINAP 4, 51: 7, II', ll. 3'-5'). The more extended version, on the other hand, while mentioning these transgressors in greater detail, lacks the specific designation of them as "Assyrians" (RINAP 4, 80: 33, 1-2: "...who did not keep the oath of the god Aššur, who did not fear my lordship [...], robbers, thieves, or those who had sinned, those who had shed blood..."). As for the Šuprian ruler, he appears to have initially failed to abide by Esarhaddon's injunction; but after a further enraged message by the Assyrian king, he pleaded to be forgiven, offering to pay a heavy price; "For each runaway fugitive of Assyrian stock (1-en ḫal-qu mun-nab-tú DUMU KUR.aš-šur), let me replace him one hundred-fold!" (*ibid.*, 81: I 16). In a further attempt, he maintained that his advisors had misled him, so that "I did not return to you the people of Assyrian stock, your servants (DUMU.MEŠ KUR.aš-šur ARAD.MEŠ-ka)!" (*ibid.*, 82: 22). But for one reason or another, Esarhaddon was in no way appeased by the other's entreaty, and thus he unleashed an armed reprisal against Šupria, at the end of which –among other consequences– a dire fate awaited the fugitives (*ibid.*, 84: 23'-27').

⁷⁰ Interestingly enough, a similar stance was adopted by Esarhaddon concerning the previously displaced "Babylonians" in a description of the restoration of the southern holy city: "I gathered the bought people who had become slaves (and) who had been distributed among the (foreign) riffraff (and) reckoned them (again) as Babylonians (*a-na LÚ.TIN.TIR.MEŠ am-na*, RINAP 4, 208: 23-24).

⁷¹ Most recent edition: RINAP 44, 80-86, no. 33. For the historical circumstances behind this text, cf. e.g. E. Leichty, "Esarhaddon's 'Letter to the Gods', in M. Cogan – I. Eph'al (Eds.), *Ah Assyria... Studies Hayim Tadmor*, Jerusalem 1991, 52-57.

C. Conclusions

The detailed reading-out of sources from the NA period regarding the ethnic-group term “Assyrian” which was carried out above yields an ample set of conclusions –not all of which, it must be said, had been brought up by scholars previously engaged with this subject, or even, more widely, with the historical-cultural phase under discussion. Wishing to illustrate such findings in the most succinct manner, I would single out the following features:

–(a) in absolute terms, the sources of the “everyday” texts in the NA dialect and those of the official inscriptions in the SB dialect are far from showing mutual compatibility as regards the definition of “Assyrians” and their underlying conception(s). Specifically, the SAA materials point to a richer and more nuanced gamut of meanings attached to the concept of “Assyrian(s)” than the ARI;

–(b) this discrepancy could be tied to chronological factors (the ARI have a long textual history, whereas the SAA texts only span the late 8th and 7th century BC), but is presumably mainly due to a certain rigidity in the continuous proffering of fixed and traditional ideological tenets in the official inscriptions from one king to the next –only slightly mitigated by new *topoi* and thematic variations–, whereas the “everyday” documents seem to reflect more closely the current forms and “moods” of political terminology, even in their most minute shifts. Only the ARI of the last Assyrian kings give a few hints of the influence of these very “moods” in their formulations.

–(c) To be sure, the “Assyrians” in the ARI are consistently portrayed in the light of a “high-level” group identity –since, after all, to be an “Assyrian” was an absolute privilege, and to become one was a major favor conferred by the ruler on subjected peoples. However, it may be noted that the description of conditions in connection to this status revolves regularly around the “reverential fear” of god and king, and around the compulsory execution of duties (tax, tribute, corvée, etc.) for the State. Thus, the concrete prospects facing the newly incorporated “Assyrians” in the royal inscriptions come overall forth as quite flat and unappealing, while on the other hand only rare words appear to be spent on the “pleasure” or “contentment” tied to be(com)ing an “Assyrian”.

–(d) Almost to the opposite, the SAA documents bring to light a particular characterization of “Assyrians” corresponding to the élite classes of the Empire, and as such entitled to professional and juridical privileges on the basis of the king’s favor. These “(full-fledged) Assyrians”, who seem to blend the factor of descendance with their established professional lot, are depicted as standing out tall within a surrounding “lower” social horizon populated by foreign auxiliaries and deportees.

–(e) However, these élite classes are not the sole “Assyrians” to make their appearance on the screen of the “everyday” texts: another application of the *nisbe* seems to regard a more generic designation of the commoners of the empire. These people are viewed by the local ruling class in a somewhat distant manner, whether they be tilling the land in far-off regions or be in captivity abroad –perhaps in line with a traditional socio-political separation between the “palace” and the “populace”.

–(f) In some contrast with this outlook, on the other hand, a few attestations in the ARI are ready to point out the king’s role as a rescuer of the “exhausted/enfeebled” Assyrians who had been left stranded abroad, or who had lost their possessions due to changing political circumstances. Of course, this topical complex is meant to exalt the positive action of the ruler in rebuilding territorial integrity, while at the same time he reestablishes a previously disrupted course of justice; however, insofar as this action of his is said to concern “Assyrians” of long standing, it may be written up as an interestingly positive marker in the ARI regarding ethnicity. To the opposite, any betrayal of imperial policy by “Assyrians” is implacably condemned in the same texts.

–(g) Finally, the SAA documents are clear on the fact that “Assyrian” was also a quality brand –whether applied to foodstuffs, to scribal activities, or to weights and measures– which referred to native and traditional modes of technical execution, although the same sources indicate that such modes had progressively been flanked and matched by newer and imported counterparts, in connection with the great expansion of imperial territory. At all events, this particular expression of an “Assyrian way of life” is absent from the ARI.

Summing up, I would like to single out the fact that the comprehensive profile of the “Assyrians”, as variously portended in the sources of the NA period, manages to blend two elements which might seem at first sight contradictory. These are: (1) a decided pride/relish in inborn/inbred group particularities, i.e. in all those features –from birthright to exclusiveness in world-view to dominance of (or security within) their own land, down to a “native” manufacturing tradition– which made “Assyrians” feel different from, and in fact superior on, the outer world in their ethnicity, and (2) a continuously proactive (and ultimately optimistic) impulse to expand “Assyrian-ness” through the addition of external personnel to the commonwealth, granting to it the basic rights (mainly personal obligations) tied to Assyrian ethnicity itself, despite the unavoidable mutations in the overall cultural buildup of the empire that this operation could risk entailing. Possibly only the Romans and the Ottomans would –throughout the long subsequent history of imperial systems– demonstrate a comparable admixture in the complex workings of ethnicity, between a major self-esteem in their innate qualities/capacities and a conscious sophistication of their culturally expansive design.

But it is not to be ruled out that the ongoing intellectual dialogue held between Mario Liverani and myself for various decades on the subject of Assyria may yet lead to further outlooks or attain wider-ranging conclusions, thus helping the self-identification and the achievements of this ancient civilization to survive in historical memory –even beyond the present tragedy of the physical destruction of its monuments by a benighted barbaric horde within its very homeland.