

Cyrus the Great, Exiles and Foreign Gods

A Comparison of Assyrian and Persian Policies on Subject Nations¹

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Introduction

Cyrus, king of Persia (559-530 BC), conqueror of Babylon (539), has a good reputation, also among modern historians. Most textbooks, monographs, and articles on ancient history stress his tolerance towards the countries and nations he subdued. It is mentioned time and again that he allowed them freedom of religion, that he behaved respectfully towards Babylon and its temple cults, and that he reinstated several cults, especially that of the god of Israel in Jerusalem. This policy is often contrasted with that of the Assyrian kings, who are presented as cruel rulers, oppressing subdued nations, destroying sanctuaries, deporting gods and people, and forcing their subjects to worship Assyrian gods. Cyrus' acts supposedly inaugurated a new policy, aimed at winning the subject nations for the Persian Empire by tolerance and clemency. It was exceptional that Cambyses and Xerxes abandoned this policy in Egypt and Babylonia. In the prestigious Cambridge Ancient History volume on Persia, T. Cuyler Young maintains that Cyrus' policy "was one of remarkable tolerance based on a respect for individual people, ethnic groups, other religions and ancient kingdoms."²

¹ This contribution is an update of my article "Cyrus de Pers in Assyrisch perspectief: Een vergelijking tussen de Assyrische en Perzische politiek ten opzichte van onderworpen volken," *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 96 (1983): 1-27 (in Dutch, for a general audience of historians). It was based on a lecture given at the first *Achaemenid History* workshop, the *Colloquium on(?) Early Achaemenid History*, held in Groningen on May 29, 1981 and organized by Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg. Summaries of the lectures were published in *Persica: Jaarboek voor het Genootschap Nederland-Iran / Annuaire de la Société Néerlando-iranienne* 10 (1982): 273-84. For the study of Assyrian imperialism see also my "Assyriology and History: A Comparative Study of War and Empire in Assyrian, Athens, and Rome," in *The Tablet and the Scroll: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William W. Hallo*, edited by M.E. Cohen, D.C. Snell and D.B. Weisberg (Bethesda: CDL Press, 1993), pp. 262-70. I thank Jona Lendering for the translation of this article into English and for his inspiring comments.

² T. Cuyler Young, Jr., "The Early History of the Medes and the Persians and the Achaemenid Empire to the Death of Cambyses," in *The Cambridge Ancient History* (second edition), vol. 4: *Persia, Greece and the Western Mediterranean c. 525 to 479 B.C.*, edited by J. Boardman, N.G.L. Hammond, D.M. Lewis and M. Ostwald (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 42. In the same vein: M.A. Dandamaev and V.G. Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 348, 367. Older studies: A.T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948, 1970⁶), pp. 51-2, 57-8; R.N. Frye, *The Heritage of Persia: The pre-Islamic History of One of the World's Great Civilizations* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1963), pp. 78, 82, 120; *id.*, *The History of Ancient Iran*, Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft 3.7 (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1984) [non vidi]; R. Ghirshman, *Iran* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978³), p. 133; S. Moscati, *The Face of Ancient Orient* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1962), pp. 287-8; G.G. Cameron, "Ancient Persia," in *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East*, edited by R.C. Dentan (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966), pp. 92-3; J. Duchesne-Guillemin, "Religion et politique, de Cyrus à Xerxès," *Persica* 3 (1967-8): 1; I. Quiles, "La philosophie sous-jacente au message de Cyrus," in *Commémoration Cyrus. Actes du Congrès de Shiraz 1971 et autres études rédigées à l'occasion du 2500e anniversaire de la fondation de l'empire perse*, vol. 1, edited by J. Duchesne-Guillemin, *Acta Iranica* 1 (Téhéran; Leiden: Bibliothèque Pahlavi and Brill, 1974), pp. 19-23; J. Wolski, "L'empire d'Iran et l'histoire de l'antiquité," *ibid.* p. 74; A. Pagliaro, "Cyrus et l'empire perse," *Commémoration Cyrus: Actes du Congrès de Shiraz 1971 et autres études rédigées à l'occasion du 2500e anniversaire de la fondation de l'empire perse*, vol. 2, edited by J.

The most important document in this context is the Babylonian *Cyrus Cylinder*. This clay cylinder was probably intended for deposition in the foundation of the Imgur Enlil wall in Babylon. It was discovered in 1879 by Hormuzd Rassam in the Amran Hill (temple area) and acquired in 1880 by the British Museum.³ The document is one of the latest examples of an age-old Mesopotamian royal tradition of depositing such cylinders in the foundations of temples and palaces with the purpose of justifying the deeds of the king to the gods and to posterity.⁴ The *Cyrus Cylinder* is especially notable as a document in

Duchesne-Guillemin, *Acta Iranica* 2 (Téhéran; Liège; Leiden: Bibliothèque Pahlavi and Brill, 1974), pp. 3-23; G. Gnoli, "Politique religieuse et conception de la royauté sous les achéménides," *ibid.* pp. 117-190, esp. 154-5; M.A. Dandamaev, "La politique religieuse des Achéménides," in *Monumentum H.S. Nyberg*, vol. 1, edited by J. Duchesne-Guillemin, *Acta Iranica* 4 (Tehran; Leiden: Bibliothèque Pahlavi and Brill, 1975), p. 193. See for more relevant literature: P. Tozzi, "Per la storia della politica religiosa degli Achemenidi: distruzioni persiane de templi greci agli inizi del V secolo," *Rivista Storica Italiana* 89 (1977): 29 n. 29. Tozzi presents a less positive picture of the Achaemenid kings, quoted by H.W.A.M. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, *Yaunā en Persai: Grieken en Perzen in een ander perspectief*, Ph.D. diss., Leiden University (Groningen: Drukkerij Dijkstra Niemeijer, 1980), pp. 15-6; cf. below. A more nuanced picture of Cyrus is found in K.R. Veenhof, *Geschichte des Alten Orients bis zur Zeit Alexanders des Grossen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), pp. 288-91.

Since the publication of this article in 1983 a lot has changed thanks to the work of, among others, P. Briant, *Histoire de l'Empire perse, de Cyrus à Alexandre* (Paris: Fayard, 1996; English translation Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002), A. Kuhrt, "The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy," *JSOT* 25 (1983): 83-97; *ead.*, "Babylonia from Cyrus to Xerxes," in *The Cambridge Ancient History* (second edition), vol. 4: *Persia, Greece and the Western Mediterranean c. 525 to 479 B.C.*, edited by J. Boardman, N.G.L. Hammond, D.M. Lewis and M. Ostwald (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 112-38; *ead.*, "Cyrus the Great of Persia: Images and Realities," in *Representations of Political Power: Case Histories from Times of Change and Dissolving Order in the Ancient Near East*, edited by M. Heinz and M.H. Feldman (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007), pp. 169-91; *ead.* "The Problem of Achaemenid 'Religious Policy,'" in *Die Welt der Götterbilder*, edited by B. Groneberg and H. Spieckermann (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 2007), pp. 117-42; *ead.* "Ancient Near Eastern History: The Case of Cyrus the Great of Persia," in *Understanding the History of Israel*, edited by H.G.M. Williamson, Proceedings of the British Academy 143 (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007), pp. 107-27; J. Wiesehöfer, *Ancient Persia from 550 BC to 650 AD* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996), pp. 49-51; *id.* "Kontinuität oder Zäsur? Babylonien unter den Achaimeniden," in *Religion und Religionskontakte im Zeitalter der Achämeniden*, edited by R.G. Kratz (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser Gütersloher Verlagshaus 2002), pp. 29-48; Kratz, R. 2000, 'From Nabonidus to Cyrus,' in A. Panaino and G. Pettinato, eds., *Ideologies as Intercultural Phenomena: Proceedings of the Third Annual Symposium of the Assyrian and Babylonian Intellectual Heritage Project Held in Chicago, USA, October 27-31, 2000*. Melammu Symposia III (Milano: Università di Bologna & Isaio), 143-156.

However, the view of Cyrus as champion of religious toleration is persistent. Cyrus Masroori devotes an entire article on Cyrus' supposed policy of religious toleration, contrasting it with the policy of the Assyrian kings, in which he rejects Kuhrt's analysis of the cylinder (p. 22 and n. 49): C. Masroori, "Cyrus II and the Political Utility of Religious Toleration," in *Religious Toleration: "The Variety of Rites" from Cyrus to Defoe*, edited by J.C. Laursen (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), pp. 13-36. The view of Cyrus as human rights champion is also still strong in many books written for a general audience. The traditional contrast between Assyrian cruelty and Cyrus' 'course of mercy' is maintained by Tom Holland, *Persian Fire: The First World Empire and the Battle for the West* (London: Little, Brown Book Group, 2005) p. 12, who also, probably mistakenly, assumed that Cyrus had spared Croesus of Lydia (p. 14; see Wiesehöfer, *Ancient Persia*, p. 50). The story, told by Herodotus (I.87), that the Lydian king was saved from the pyre by a rain shower, is contradicted by Bacchylides (*Third Ode*), who says that Croesus was taken away to the Hyperboreans, i.e., the realm of the dead. The Nabonidus chronicle also suggests that Cyrus killed the king of Lydia (see n. 185). K. Farrokh, *Shadows in the Desert: Ancient Persia at War* (Oxford: Osprey Publishers, 2007), p. 44 still calls the *Cyrus Cylinder* "the world's first human rights charter." The website of the "Circle of Ancient Iranian Studies" provides an equally uncritical platform for the eulogy of Cyrus: www.cais-soas.com/ (accessed June 2009).

³ For a translation and more information on the Cyrus cylinder see the appendix at the end of this article. For the find spot of the cylinder see C.B.F. Walker, "A Recently Identified Fragment of the Cyrus Cylinder," *Iran* 10 (1972): 158-9.

⁴ It is strange that the cylinder was supposedly found in the Amran area (= temple area), while the document especially refers to the restoration of the Imgur-Enlil wall (inner city wall), so that one would expect it to be found somewhere in that area. The latest royal inscription of which we are aware is the *Antiochus Cylinder*, dated to 268 BC. It was found by Hormuzd Rassam, in 1880, in Borsippa. A recent transliteration by Marten Stol and myself can be consulted online, on the Livius website: www.livius.org/cg/

which Cyrus denounces his Babylonian predecessor Nabonidus as a usurper and proclaims himself as the true Babylonian king, appointed by Marduk himself.

The cylinder has raised interest from its discovery, but has received special attention in 1971 during a festival in Tehran in which the Shah of Persia celebrated the 2,500th anniversary of the Persian monarchy. Part of the celebrations was the presentation of a replica of the document to U Thant, then secretary general of the United Nations; it has ever since been on display since in the UN headquarters in New York as “the first declaration of human rights.”⁵ A state-organized conference intended as homage to Cyrus was held in Shiraz.⁶ In the same vein, Cyrus’ tolerance was treated by Cyrus Masroori in a volume dedicated to religious toleration.⁷ The discussions of this kind are valuable in that they challenge the usual Eurocentric approach to the history of the Near East in traditional scholarship, which tended to see all the blessings of modern civilization as coming solely from Greece and Rome. It is good to see that in the past decades this Eurocentric treatment of ancient Near Eastern history (including that of the Hellenistic period) has lost ground, among others by the work of the dedicatee of this volume, Matthew Stolper, as well as by Amélie Kuhrt and Pierre Briant. I hope to have done my bit in this as well. However, the worthy cause of deconstructing ‘orientalism,’ a term famously discussed by Edward Said,⁸ is not furthered by presenting fake documents (cf. n. 5) and unhistorical and anachronistic reconstructions.

The idea of Cyrus as the champion of religious tolerance rests on three fundamentally erroneous assumptions. In the first place, it rests on an anachronistic perception of ancient political discourse. In antiquity, no discourse on religious tolerance existed. Religion was deeply embedded in society, in political structures, in daily life. This is true for the ancient Sumerian city-states, for the Athenian city-state and for the Roman Republic. Especially for expanding empires, authorities had to face the problem of encompassing a variety of political constructs with their religious concepts embedded in them. Sometimes this led to harsh treatment of subdued people and destructions of temples, but empires typically accepted a certain amount of multiformity in order not to provoke rebellion. In addition, polytheism was the normal type of religion in antiquity, which made it easier to accept the existence and also to respect the power of foreign gods. It is not a coincidence that suppression of religion often had something to do with monotheistic religions (persecution of Jews and Christians, who refused to accept gods other than their own; persecution of pagans under Christian emperors). Persecution of religious

cm/chronicles/antiochus_cylinder/antiochus_cylinder1.html. The most beautiful flowers grow on the edge of the ravine: whereas the *Cyrus Cylinder* is written in plain Neo-Babylonian script, the *Antiochus Cylinder* is composed in Old-Babylonian monumental signs. See also A. Kuhrt and S. Sherwin-White, “Aspects of Royal Seleucid ideology: The Cylinder of Antiochus I from Borsippa,” *JHS* 111 (1991): 71-86.

⁵ This even led to the publication of a fake translation of the *Cyrus Cylinder* on the web (www.farsinet.com/cyrus/), in which mention is made of the Iranian god Auramazdā, Cyrus’ announcement of freedom of religion and the abolishment of slavery, none of which is present in the real *Cyrus Cylinder*. The fake translation is engraved on a plaque in The House of Iran, Balboa Park, San Diego. This plaque can be consulted on the web www.kavehfarrok.com/news/a-new-translation-of-the-cyrus-cylinder-by-the-british-museum/, where, perhaps surprisingly, a reliable translation made by Irving Finkel is also provided. The British Museum meanwhile has published an updated version of Finkel’s translation accompanied by a translation in Persian: www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/article_index/c/cyrus_cylinder_-_translation.aspx (all websites accessed 07/2010). For a completely new edition of the cylinder (with new fragments added) see: Irving Finkel (ed.), *The Cyrus Cylinder. The King of Persia’s Proclamation from Ancient Babylon* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013). See also the appendix to this article.

⁶ *Commémoration Cyrus: Actes du Congrès de Shiraz 1971 et autres études rédigées à l’occasion du 2500e anniversaire de la fondation de l’empire perse*, 3 vols., edited by J. Duchesne-Guillemin, *Acta Iranica* 1-3 (= 1. série, *Hommage universel*, vol. 1-3), (Téhéran;Leiden: Bibliothèque Pahlavi and Brill, 1974). Cf. note 2 above.

⁷ Masroori, “Cyrus II.”

⁸ E. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge, 1978).

beliefs and practices were usually related to would-be disturbances of order (as in the case of the suppression of the Bacchanalia in Rome in 186 BC or, possibly, the prohibition of the Jewish cult in the temple of Jerusalem by Antiochus IV in 168 BC).⁹

Secondly, it is too facile to characterize Cyrus' rule as one that had 'tolerance' as its starting point. Although it is indeed possible to describe his policy as positively pragmatic or even mild in some respects, it is also clear that Cyrus was a normal conqueror with the usual policy of brutal warfare and harsh measures. The will of the Persian king was law, and no principal right of participation in government was allowed.

Thirdly, the comparison with Assyrian policy is mistaken in its portrayal of that policy as principally different from Cyrus'. As we shall see, the 'Assyrian attitude' did not only consist of cruelty and intolerance, and the cult of Assyrian gods was not imposed on subdued peoples.

This article tries to place Cyrus' policy in its ancient Near Eastern historical context. I maintain that for centuries the principles of government remained essentially the same: the Assyrian Empire (745-612), the Babylonian Empire (612-539), the Persian Empire (539-331), the Graeco-Macedonian Empires of Alexander the Great, the Diadochi and the Seleucids (331-64) were not fundamentally different. Assyria did not all of a sudden vanish from the earth in 614-609 BC, but its place was taken over by later dynasties and rulers. Of course these had to adapt themselves to different circumstances, but the similarities are striking. Although I will concentrate on a comparison of Assyrian and Persian policies, because these are generally seen as opposites, I will occasionally digress on the other empires, to show that many Assyrian and Persian policies were common in the ancient Near East. I shall deal with three subjects: religious policy; the stance towards Babylon; and the treatment of new subjects (especially as regards deportation).

Persian religious policy

Babylonian documents praise Cyrus because he restored the cult of the supreme god Marduk, purportedly neglected by Nabonidus, the last king of the Babylonian Empire. The *Cyrus Cylinder* even states that the king had been chosen by Marduk to seize power in Babylon.¹⁰ The document also states that Cyrus returned the statues of the gods, which had been taken away by Babylonian conquerors from the cities of Mesopotamia and across the Tigris, to their home towns, that he ordered their temples to be rebuilt, and that he allowed "their people" to return home.¹¹ It may be useful to stress that the *Cyrus Cylinder* focuses on a limited group of cities, indicated by name, from Mesopotamia and the Transtigridian regions: countries in which, as we will see below, the Persians had a special interest. The cylinder does, therefore,

⁹ For the development in the Graeco-Roman world from a situation in which religious commitment was predicated on civic identity to "a situation of competition and potential conflict between religious groups based on voluntary commitment," see J. North, "The Development of Religious Pluralism," in *The Jews among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire*, edited by J. Lieu, J. North and T. Rajak (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 174-93, quotation from p. 187. A similar development is present in the ancient Near East from the early Sumerian city-states to the world empires in the first millennium BC. Still fundamental for the position of Judaism and Christianity in the Ancient world is A.D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933). For the relation of community and religion, the process of mobility of people and their gods, concept of syncretism, and the profusion of cults in the Roman empire, see J.B. Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 105-157. I owe these references to Jaap-Jan Flinterman.

¹⁰ *Cyrus Cylinder* (cf. appendix) ll.11-2

¹¹ *Ibid.* ll.30-2.

not prove that all gods and all people were allowed to return, and cannot be constructed as proof – as has often been done – that the Jews were allowed to go home in 539.

Reference to a return of Judahites from exile by order of Cyrus can be found in the Biblical books of *Isaiah*, *Chronicles*, and *Ezra*.¹² Although a return from exile under the Achaemenid Empire certainly took place, the historicity of a return under *Cyrus* is disputed.¹³ The biblical evidence concerning a return under Cyrus is feeble; the actual return and rebuilding rather seems to have taken place under Darius I and Artaxerxes I. Diana Edelman has argued that the author of *Second Isaiah* somehow must have known Cyrus' propaganda concerning the Esagila temple of Babylon and hence expressed similar hopes for the temple of Jerusalem, a point taken up later by the authors of *Ezra* and *Chronicles*.¹⁴

Greek authors give also a favorable judgment of Cyrus. Herodotus reports that the Persians called him a ‘father,’ because he was gentle and procured the Persians all kind of goods.¹⁵ The Babylonians, however, feared his onslaught.¹⁶ Xenophon produced a romanticized and very favorable life of Cyrus, the *Cyropaedia*, intended as a kind of “Fürstenspiegel.” Book VIII stresses the wickedness and decadence of the Persians after Cyrus. Ctesias, as far as his *Persica* is preserved, seems to present a heroic picture of Cyrus and his triumphs.¹⁷

It is unnecessary to deal much longer with this ‘positive’ aspect of Cyrus’ policy, because it is the subject of much secondary literature, as we have discussed above. However, there are certain negative aspects as well, which were dealt with for the first time by Pier Luigi Tozzi.¹⁸ He pointed out that the Persians destroyed several Greek sanctuaries such as the temple of Phocaea, whose destruction (an archaeological fact) most probably should be attributed to Harpagus, who captured the city in the 540s on the orders of Cyrus. Herodotus and Ctesias did not close their eyes to the sometimes brutal actions of Cyrus.¹⁹ Darius I, the king who supposedly contributed to the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem²⁰ and who supposedly protected the temple of Apollo in Magnesia against a governor who had taxed the peasants on the temple land,²¹ also destroyed temples, like the oracle at Didyma and sanctuaries of Eretria.²² In the Babylonian version of the Bisotun inscription Darius proudly mentions the numbers of

¹² *Isaiah* 44: 24-45: 8; *II Chronicles* 36: 22-3; *Ezra* 1 and 6: 1-5.

¹³ K.D. Jenner, “The Old Testament and its Appreciation of Cyrus,” *Persica* 10 (1982): 283-4; A.H.J. Gunneweg, *Geschichte Israels bis Bar Kochba*, third, revised edition (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1979), pp. 135-8; J.C.H. Lebram, “Die Traditionsgeschichte des Esragedest und die Frage nach dem historischen Esra,” in *Sources, Structures and Synthesis: Proceedings of the Groningen 1983 Achaemenid History Workshop*, Achaemenid History I (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten 1987), pp. 103-38; D. Edelman, *The Origins of the ‘Second’ Temple: Persian Policy and the Rebuilding of Jerusalem* (London: Equinox, 2005).

¹⁴ Edelman, *Origins of the ‘Second’ Temple*, pp. 162-208, argues that the return under Darius I is also not historical.

¹⁵ Hdt. III.89.

¹⁶ Hdt. I.109.

¹⁷ D. Lenfant, *Ctésias de Cnide: La Perse, L’Inde, autres fragments* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2004).

¹⁸ Tozzi, “Distruzioni persiane.”

¹⁹ Hdt. I.164 for the capture of Phocaea; Tozzi, “Distruzioni persiane,” pp. 19, 23-4. For a discussion see Kuhrt, “Cyrus the Great of Persia: Images and Realities,” p. 173. Ctesias reports that Cyrus had Croesus’ son killed before his father’s eyes, *FGrH* F9.4, Lenfant, *Ctésias de Cnide*, p. 110.

²⁰ *Ezra* 6.

²¹ Letter of Darius I to Gadatas: W. von Brandenstein and M. Mayrhofer, *Handbuch des Altpersischen* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1964), pp. 91-2. Pierre Briant now considers this inscription as a falsification of Roman date (Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, p. xviii, n. 15; *id.*, “Histoire et archéologie d’un texte: la lettre de Darius à Gadatas entre Perses, Grecs et Romains”), in *Licia e Lidia prima dell’ellenizzazione: Atti del Convegno Internazionale, Roma, 11-12 ottobre 1999* (Rome: Consiglio nazionale delle ricerche, 2003), pp. 107-44.

²² Hdt. VI.19, 101.

rebel leaders and soldiers whom he defeated, killed and executed.²³ In short, both cruelty and mildness belong to Persian policy since Cyrus.²⁴

Assyrian religious policy

The treatment of Assyria in modern secondary literature is as hostile as the treatment of Persia is favorable. The Assyrian rulers are pictured as notorious for their aggressive expansionism and the fear they inspired among the subdued nations. Israel and Judah are just two of the states that had to bear the consequences. They were reduced to the status of ‘vassal states,’ which meant that their kings were only allowed to remain on their thrones on the condition that they would recognize the Assyrian king as their lord, pay tribute, and refrain from a foreign policy of their own.²⁵ In 722, a rebellious Israel was punished: it was added to the Assyrian Empire and became a province under an Assyrian governor.

The Hebrew Bible is important for our knowledge of the policies of the Assyrian administration, as it offers information from the point of view of the vanquished. The prophets especially show that people were afraid of Assyrian aggression (cf., e.g. *Isaiah*, 10: 5-14; *Nahum*), and probably rightly so: the royal inscriptions of the Assyrian kings document cruel acts, the ruining of cities and temples, the destruction and deportation of the statues of the gods, torture (impaling, flaying) and the deportation of citizens. The inscriptions of Assurnasirpal II (884-859) especially contain such gloomy stories.

The royal inscriptions stress that the kings performed their conquests on behalf and by order of the supreme god Aššur. The kings offered their deity an account of their policy in, for example, compositions

²³ E.N. von Voigtlander, *The Bisitun Inscription of Darius the Great: Babylonian Version*, Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum, Part I, Inscriptions of Iran, Vol. II, The Babylonian Versions of the Achaemenian Inscriptions, Texts 1 (London: Lund Humphries, 1978), *passim*.

²⁴ The reputations of Cambyses and Xerxes are more complicated issues. Both have been accused of religious intolerance. For Cambyses and the purported killing of the Apis see n. 61 below. Xerxes destroyed the temples on the Athenian Acropolis (as a punitive measure for Athens’ support for the Ionian Revolt); this destruction is supported by archaeology. Late and potentially biased sources claim that Xerxes did the same with the Babylon temple(s). For the classical sources see Olmstead, *Persian Empire*, pp. 236-7 with n. 23. Sancisi-Weerdenburg argued that the references in the so-called Daiva Inscription of Xerxes, in which it is stated that Xerxes destroyed sanctuaries of false gods, do not refer to a specific event, but can better be seen as expression of royal ideology (disobedience to the king is punished and holy places of rebellious people will be destroyed), *Yaunā en Persai*, pp. 1-47, 266-7 (English summary), “The Personality of Xerxes, King of Kings,” in *Archaeologia Iranica et Orientalis: Miscellanea in honorem L. Vanden Berghe*, edited by L. de Meyer and E. Haerinck (Leuven: Peeters, 1989), pp. 549-561. The purported destruction of the temple of Babylon by Xerxes occurs in classical sources describing the entry of Alexander in Babylon in October 331 BC: Diod.Sic. II.9.4-5, 9; Strabo XV.3. 9-10, XVI.1.5; Arr. *Anab.* III.16.2-5, VII.17.1-4; The destruction of Babylon is *not* mentioned in the earlier sources on Persian History, Herodotus and Ctesias. Pliny, *NH* VI.121-2 says that the temple of Jupiter Belus was still standing in his time. Doubts concerning Xerxes’ destruction of the temple were expressed by A. Kuhrt and S. Sherwin-White, “Xerxes’ destruction of Babylonian temples,” in *Achaemenid History 2: The Greek Sources. Proceedings of the Groningen 1984 Achaemenid History Workshop*, edited by H.W.A.M. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and A. Kuhrt, (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten 1987), pp. 69-78. More recently, Waerzeggers convincingly argued that Xerxes took severe, targeted measures against the traditional temple elite in Babylon and a number of (but not all) Babylonian cities. The reason was their support for the insurrection of Bēl-šimanni and Šamaš-eriba in Xerxes’ second year of reign. See C. Waerzeggers, “The Babylonian Revolts Against Xerxes and the ‘End of Archives’,” *AfO* 50 (2003/2004): 150-73. For an evaluation of the condition and number of the temples in the early Hellenistic period see: R.J. van der Spek, “The Size and Significance of the Babylonian Temples under the Successors,” in *La Transition entre l’empire achéménide et les royaumes hellénistiques*, edited by P. Briant and F. Joannès, Persika 9 (Paris: De Boccard, 2006), pp. 261-306.

²⁵ Van der Spek, “Assyriology and History.” The best treatment of Assyrian religious policy is now S.W. Holloway, *Aššur is King! Aššur is King! Religion in the Exercise of Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

of the type ‘letter to god X.’ The one written by Sargon II after his eighth campaign, against Urartu, is best preserved.²⁶ It states that all gods on earth should pay homage to Aššur and come to his temple with all their riches.²⁷ We also learn from Assyrian sources that the kings habitually looted temples and seized the gods’ statues, which they brought to the temple of Aššur. The ‘letter’ of Sargon describes at great length how the (statue of the) Urartian god Haldia was taken away, together with his temple’s treasures.²⁸

On the basis of these sources and several texts from the Hebrew Bible, scholars have tried to prove that it was the policy of the Assyrians to *impose* the cult of their gods on subdued people.²⁹ This theory was proposed in 1908 by A.T. Olmstead³⁰ and has since been accepted by many students of Hebrew literature, like Oestreicher, who interpreted the reforms of king Josiah as an anti-Assyrian revolt,³¹ and by Jagersma in an overview of the history of Israel.³² Independently from each other, Cogan and McKay protested against Olmstead’s hypothesis,³³ McKay focusing on the Hebrew texts and Cogan on the Assyrian ones. Their arguments can be summarized as follows:

1. That the Assyrians *imposed* the cult of their gods is stated nowhere in the Hebrew Bible. Had the Assyrians encouraged the introduction of a new cult, the prophets would certainly have mentioned this. One might add that it is remarkable how *unsuccessful* the Assyrian propaganda concerning the head of the Assyrian pantheon was. In the entire Bible the name of the god Aššur does not occur, nor is his name preserved in any Greek or Roman text. It indicates that the eulogy of Aššur did not get far beyond the royal inscriptions and did not play an important role in the subject territories.
2. The Assyrian sources do not mention imposing the cult of Aššur either. What the Assyrian kings wanted to do was to exalt their royal god and emblem, Aššur. This could be achieved by Assyrian victories, destruction of temples and statues, deportation of statues, or imposing tribute on behalf of the temple of Aššur. Assyrian victories proved that their supreme god was more powerful than his rivals, which in turn legitimized their actions. This thought was common in the ancient Near East, and can also be encountered in the Hebrew Bible.³⁴ Destruction or deportation of the statues of the gods did not mean

²⁶ F. Thureau-Dangin, *Une relation de la huitième campagne de Sargon* (Paris: Geuthner, 1912); W. Mayer, “Sargons Feldzug gegen Urartu – 714 v. Chr.: Text und Übersetzung,” *MDOG* 115 (1983): 65-132; D.D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1926), §§139-78.

²⁷ Sargon, *Letter to Aššur* (cf. n. 24), ll. 314-6. See also below.

²⁸ Sargon, *Letter to Aššur*, ll. 346-425, Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, §§172-76.

²⁹ See for example *II Kings* 16: 18: Ahaz, the king of Judah, introduced a few changes in the temple of Jerusalem “because of the king of Assyria,” after he had submitted himself to Tiglath-Pileser III in Damascus in 732 BC and so became his servant (*II Kings* 16: 7). He also built a new altar in the temple of Jerusalem.

³⁰ A.T. Olmstead, *Western Asia in the Days of Sargon of Assyria, 722-705 B.C.* (New York: Holt, 1908), p. 171; *id.* “Oriental Imperialism,” *American Historical Review* 23 (1918): 755-62, esp. 757-8; *id.*, *History of Assyria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1923); *id.*, *History of Palestine and Syria* (New York: Scribner, 1931), p. 452.

³¹ *II Kings* 22-23; T. Oestreicher, *Das deuteronomische Grundgesetz*, Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie 27.4 (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1923), pp. 9-11, 37-58; *id.*, *Reichstempel und Ortsheiligtümer in Israel*, Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie 33.3 (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1923), pp. 35-7.

³² H. Jagersma, *A History of Israel in the Old Testament Period* (London: SCM Press, 1982), pp. 159, 163; repr. in *id. A History of Israel to Bar Kochba* (London: SCM Press, 1994).

³³ M. Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries B.C.E.*, Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series, 19 (Missoula, MT.: Society of Biblical Literature and Scholars Press, 1974); J. McKay, *Religion in Judah under the Assyrians* (London: SCM Press, 1973).

³⁴ *II Kings* 18: 33-5, “Has any of the gods of the nations ever delivered its land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah? Have they delivered Samaria out of my

that the cult could not be restored with a different statue, or with the original if it were allowed to return from exile. Where the Assyrian texts speak of the imposition of sacrifices to Aššur and the great gods, this invariably refers to supplying goods to the temples of Assyria, *not* to the establishment of a cult in a vassal state. The only indication for the imposition of a cult is the placing of the ‘weapon of Aššur’ in a newly conquered province.³⁵

3. Where the Hebrew Bible discusses the worship of foreign gods, it usually refers to Phoenician or Canaanite deities, seldom to Mesopotamian gods, and never to Aššur.³⁶ Nor is there a reference that introducing these cults was an Assyrian demand. McKay explained the introduction of foreign gods from the uncertainty of the times, which made the believers open to new deities.³⁷ Cogan stressed that Israel and Judah, when they were integrated into the world empire, developed more contacts with the outside world and were more inclined to accept foreign gods.³⁸

In 1982, Spieckermann tried to refute Cogan and Mackay’s positions.³⁹ He collected a number of Assyrian inscriptions that he took as referring to cultic impositions. Some of these indeed suggest some interference into the local cult (like the imposition of a royal stele with an image of the king and symbols of the gods in the palace of the king of Gaza – cf. n. 35), but none of them mentioning a clear-cut erection of an Assyrian temple or the restructuring of an indigenous temple into an Assyrian one. It is true that images of Assyrian kings and “weapons of Aššur” were erected in local temples (not only in provinces, as Cogan thought), but Holloway argued convincingly that these sacred objects functioned as reminder of Assyrian supremacy and as part of the ritual of loyalty oaths, stating that “neither administrative texts nor royal correspondence nor royal prophecies suggest that a cult of Aššur was established on foreign soil, nor do these sources provide evidence that Assyrian temples were constructed for Assyrian deities outside Mesopotamia.”⁴⁰ Also, the fact remains that the reforms in Judah and Israel do not concern Assyrian, but Canaanite gods; Aššur is not even mentioned once. Spieckermann’s assumption that behind the traditional list of Canaanite

hand? Who among all the gods of the countries have delivered their countries out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?”; *II Kings* 19: 12, “Have the gods of the nations delivered them, the nations that my fathers destroyed, Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the people of Eden who were in Telassar?” (I use the New Standard Revised Version with some adaptations).

³⁵ Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, p. 54. Sargon changed the name of the city Kišesim in the province of Parsuaš into Kar Nergal, brought there “the gods who advance before me” and erected a “statue of my majesty” (*Annals from Dur-Sharrukin – Khorsabad*, ll.93-4). In the city of Harhar, renamed Kar-Sharruken, he established “the weapon of Aššur, my lord, as their deity” (l.99); see A.G. Lie, *The Inscriptions of Sargon II, King of Assyria*, vol. 1: *The Annals* (Paris: Geuthner, 1929), pp. 16-7 and A. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad* (Göttingen: Cuvillier Verlag, 1994), pp. 102-5, 317-8. For a parallel see the *Display Inscription* (“Prunkinschrift”), 1.63 (Fuchs, *Inschriften Sargons*, 211, 347; Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, § 57). See also the inscription of Tiglath-Pileser III (not mentioned by Cogan and MacKay) on the capture of Gaza: “As to Hanūnu of Gaza (who had escaped to Egypt), [I took] his possessions and [his] gods. I made an image of the (great) gods, my lords, and a golden image showing me as king (on one royal stèle?). [I set (the stela / stelae) up] in the palace of the city of Ga[zal], and I counted (the stela / stelae) among the gods of their country.” See H. Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III, King of Assyria* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1994; revised edition 2008), pp. 188, 222-230, §3; I owe the reference and English translation to H. Schaudig, Heidelberg.

³⁶ The altar that Ahaz had built (cf. n. 29) was not an Assyrian altar. It was a holocaust altar, which was alien to the Mesopotamian tradition. The model of the new altar was the altar that Ahaz had seen in Damascus in Syria.

³⁷ McKay, *Religion*, pp. 70-1.

³⁸ Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, pp. 88-96.

³⁹ H. Spieckermann, *Juda unter Assur in der Sargonidenzeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982).

⁴⁰ Holloway, *Aššur is King*, 177, 198-200 (quote p. 200).

gods, Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven (*II Kings* 23: 4) lurk the gods Aššur and Ištar, really begs the question.⁴¹

At the same time, it is surprising that neither Cogan nor McKay recognized that the religious policy of Assyria was not unique; it was essentially identical to that of all ancient empires. McKay stated that “the religio-political ideal of the ancient Semites was not therefore identical to that of the later Greeks and Romans who did try to impose or encourage the worship of their gods throughout their empires”⁴² and Cogan also thought that the Roman policy was to impose their religion on other nations, because the “manner of imperial Rome” was: *cuius regio, eius religio*.⁴³ Now this may be Latin, but as a principle formulated at the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 (!), it has nothing to do with Roman policy. Both Cogan and McKay have obviously been influenced by more recent European history, in which a monotheistic faith determined religious policy. To make this clear, we must re-investigate the situation in antiquity.

Background of ancient religious policy

Religious intolerance was uncommon in ancient empires. This is a consequence of the polytheistic nature of their religions: a polytheist can easily accept other gods than his own. This phenomenon has been studied among others by the ancient historian Aalders,⁴⁴ who showed that polytheistic rulers are usually pragmatic in religious matters, but can repress foreign cults when they consider them to be hostile to the state. Several examples from the ancient Near East illustrate this. The acceptance of foreign gods is shown clearly in the Hittite and Assyrian treaties, which end with curse formulas invoking deities from both sides, who will unitedly punish the treaty-breaking party.⁴⁵ The relation between a ‘great king’ and his vassal kings was often laid down in treaties like these. A good example of how this could be effected is given in Sargon’s *Letter to Aššur concerning his 8th campaign* regarding Ullusunu, king of the Manneans. It is interesting to see how Sargon tries to get loyalty not only from this king but also from the common people by offering them a banquet, a procedure which Cyrus could have used as a model:

Before Ullusunu, their king and lord, I spread a groaning (lit. heavy) banquet table, and exalted his throne high above that of Iranzu, the father who begot him. Them (*i.e.*, the people of his land) I settled with the people of Assyria at a joyous banquet; before Aššur and the gods of their land they did homage to my majesty.⁴⁶

A second example concerns king Hezekiah of Judah, who apparently had concluded a treaty of vassalage, since he said after his ill-fated rebellion: “I have sinned; withdraw from me. Whatever you impose on me I will bear.” “I have sinned,” *i.e.*, he conspired against the gods by whom the oaths had been sworn,

⁴¹ Spieckermann, *Juda unter Assur*, p. 80 n. 107. In “Judah under Assyrian hegemony: A Reexamination of *Imperialism and Religion*,” *JBL* 112 (1993): 403-14, M. Cogan discusses and refutes Spieckermann’s book more elaborately.

⁴² McKay, *Religion*, p. 74.

⁴³ Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, p. 111.

⁴⁴ G.J.D. Aalders H. Wzn, “The Tolerance of Polytheism in Antiquity and its Limits,” *Free University Quarterly* 9 (1964): 223-42. See now also: Jan Assmann, *Of God and Gods: Egypt, Israel, and the Rise of Monotheism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008)

⁴⁵ Assyrian treaties: S. Parpola and K. Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*, SAA 2 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1988). This is not the place to mention all editions of the vast number of Hittite treaties. An accessible edition of a few examples is G. Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999²).

⁴⁶ Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, §149; ThureauDangin, *Huitième campagne*, ll.62-3.

among whom must have been Yahweh. This is also why Sennacherib could say to the inhabitants of Jerusalem: “Moreover, is it without the LORD that I have come up against this place to destroy it? The Lord said to me, Go up against this land, and destroy it.”⁴⁷ In other words, Sennacherib acts as the executor of God’s punishment.

Recognition of foreign deities can also be deduced from the ancient belief that the gods of an enemy could leave their city, angry at its inhabitants. Esarhaddon repeatedly stresses this in his inscriptions, justifying his father’s sacking of Babylon by stating that the gods of that city were angry because its citizens had seized the temple treasures to hire Elamites to fight against Assyria.⁴⁸ Deserting deities are also known from outside Babylonia. It is reported that Sanduarri, the ruler of Kundu and Sissu in Anatolia, was abandoned by his gods.⁴⁹ There is even a text by Assurbanipal, in which this king devotes an emblem to an *Arabian* goddess to express his gratitude for her assistance in the Assyrian’s war against an *Arab* king.⁵⁰ The same motif is known from Virgil’s *Aeneid*, in which we read about the vanquished gods of Troy⁵¹ and about gods who have left their city.⁵² Among several ancient nations, the idea that the gods can leave their city or country and can even desert to the enemy gave rise to rituals and prayers to the enemy gods, imploring them to abandon their country and go over to the other side. The gods could be lured with promises, for instance, a promise to build a temple. A ritual like this is known from Hittite⁵³ and Roman sources⁵⁴ and is known by its Latin name *evocatio*.

In the Bible, there is speculation about Yahweh deserting Jerusalem and joining the Assyrians in the story of the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem during the reign of Hezekiah. The Assyrian supreme commander (Rabshakeh = *rab šāqē*, lit. “chief cupbearer”) declares: “But if you say to me, ‘We trust in the LORD our God,’ is it not he whose high places and altars Hezekiah has removed, saying to Judah and to Jerusalem, ‘You shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem’?”⁵⁵ The implication apparently is that Hezekiah made Yahweh angry so that the God of Israel may likely forsake his people.

To be sure, I do not claim that these words are a verbatim transcript of the speech by the Assyrian commander. K.A.D. Smelik⁵⁶ has convincingly shown that this speech was drafted by the author of this

⁴⁷ *II Kings* 18: 14 and 25 . Compare *Ezekiel* 17: 11-21, where the prophet warns king Zedekiah of Judah of the wrath of Yahweh, because the king has broken the treaty with king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia.

⁴⁸ R. Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons, Königs von Assyrien*, AfO Beiheft 9 (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1956; reprint Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1967), p.14, §11, Episode 8 A + B and D, 43-46. Sennacherib had described this destruction in a rock inscription at Bavian: D.D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*, OIP 2 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1924), p. 78, ll.48-52. It seems remarkable that exactly at the beginning of this inscription Marduk and Nabû, the gods of Babylon and Borsippa, are invoked, while they hardly play a role in Sennacherib’s other inscriptions. It shows again the polytheistic way of thinking. Babylon may have been destroyed, but Sennacherib wants to have its god at his side. The same holds true, *mutatis mutandis*, for Xerxes. After he had destroyed the city of Athens in 480 BC, he ordered Athenian exiles who had come into Greece in his retinue to make offerings on the Acropolis “in their own fashion” (Hdt. VIII.54).

⁴⁹ Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons*, §27, Ep. 6, 22.

⁵⁰ K.3405 in Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 16-19. A more detailed treatment of this motif can be found in the first chapter of Cogan’s book (“The Assyrian Empire and foreign gods: The motive of divine abandonment”).

⁵¹ Verg. *Aen.* I.68 = VIII.11.

⁵² *Ibid.*, II.351.

⁵³ *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, edited by J.B. Pritchard, third edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 351-3.

⁵⁴ Livy, *Epon.* V.21; Macrob., *Sat.* III.9.2.

⁵⁵ *II Kings* 18: 22; cf. the above quoted passage *II Kings* 18: 25 (ad n. 47).

⁵⁶ K.A.D. Smelik, “‘Zegt toch tot Hizkia’: Een voorbeeld van profetische geschiedschrijving,” *Amsterdamse Cahiers* 2 (1981): 50-67; *id.*, “Distortion of Old Testament Prophecy: The Purpose of Isaiah XXXVI and XXXVII,” in *Crisis and Perspectives. Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Polytheism, Biblical Theology, Palestinian Archaeology and Intertestamental Literature*, edited

part of the Bible to be relevant to its theological message.⁵⁷ In ancient historiography, speeches are hardly ever accurate renderings of what was actually spoken and may serve a variety of ulterior purposes. Yet, an author may make a speech more convincing by working historical details into its *Sitz im Leben*. Given the many realistic details, this seems to be case in *II Kings*.⁵⁸

Returning to the matter of foreign gods, it is easy to multiply the number of kings who take the existence of such gods seriously. Alexander the Great,⁵⁹ Ptolemaic kings and some Roman emperors⁶⁰ had themselves depicted as pharaohs worshipping to the gods of Egypt. Even the well-known story of Herodotus concerning the Persian king Cambyses, who after his conquest of Egypt killed the Apis bull, may be unhistorical as he is also depicted and documented as a pious worshipper of the Egyptian gods, including the sacred Apis Bull.⁶¹

by A.S. van der Woude, *Oud-Testamentische Studien* 24 (Leiden: Brill, 1986), pp. 70-93; *id.*, *Converting the Past: Studies in Ancient Israelite and Moabite Historiography* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), esp. pp. 93-128. See also: N. Naaman, "Sennacherib's 'Letter to God' on his campaign to Judah," *BASOR* 214 (1974): 25-39.

⁵⁷ This message was that the cult centralization installed by Hezekiah, which certainly must have met opposition in his own country, was criticized by Judah's archenemy, the Assyrian king, which brought the domestic opposition against it in the same camp as the Assyrian pagan king.

⁵⁸ The Assyrian dignitaries have proper Assyrian titles (*tartan* = *turtānu* or *tartānu*, "military commander"; *rabsaris* = *rab ša rēši*, "head of court attendants"; *rabshakeh* = *rab šāqē*, "chief cupbearer"). It is indeed known that the Assyrians used propaganda when besieging cities. On a relief found in Sargon II's new Assyrian capital Dur-Šarrukin (Khorsabad), a writer is shown reading a proclamation from a siege engine in front of the besieged city. See Y. Yadin, *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands*, vol. 2 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963) p. 425 (I owe this reference to K.R. Veenhof). It is also known that the Assyrian kings sought to undermine their enemy's confidence in their deities (Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, pp. 9-21). There are several related Assyrian notions. 'Trust' is not only an important concept in the prophetic literature of Israel (Smelik, "Zegt toch tot Hizkia," p. 60), but also in Assyrian sources. In Sargon's *Annals*, it is said of Samaria that 'the people, together with their chariots and the gods in which they trusted, I counted as my booty' (Prism D from Nimrud (Calah) IV.25-49 in C.J. Gadd, "Inscribed prisms of Sargon II from Nimrud," *Iraq* 16 (1954): 179-80). Cf. H. Tadmor, "The Campaigns of Sargon II of Assur," *JCS* 12 (1958): 34. See for the historicity and the backgrounds of the Assyrian speeches in *Isaiah and Kings*: H. Tawil, "The Historicity of *II Kings* 19:24 (= *Isaiah* 37:25): The problem of *Ye'ōrē Māšōr*," *JNES* 41 (1982): 195-206; H. Leene, "רְאֵת en וְנָבֵעַ in Jesaja 37, 7: een kwestie van vertaalhorizon," *Amsterdamse Cahiers* 4 (1983): 49-62; P. Dubovský, *Hezekiah and the Assyrian Spies: Reconstruction of the Neo-Assyrian Intelligence Services and its Significance for 2 Kings 18-19* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2006), pp. 238-41.

⁵⁹ D.S. Russell, *The Jews from Alexander to Herod* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978⁵), p. 6; R.J. van der Spek, "Darius III, Alexander the Great and Babylonian scholarship," in *A Persian Perspective. Essays in Memory of Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg*, edited by W.F.M. Henkelman and A. Kuhr, *Achaemenid History* 13 (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2003), 289-342; M. Heerma van Voss, "Alexander und die Ägyptische Religion: Einige ägyptologische Bemerkungen," in *Alexander the Great: Reality and Myth*, edited by J. Carlsen, B. Due, O.S. Due and B. Poulsen (Rome: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 1993), pp. 71-3.

⁶⁰ See (the illustrations in): G. Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire* (London: Routledge, 2001); J. Quaegebeur, "Aspecten van de Romeinse aanwezigheid in het land van de Farao's," *Phoenix* 26 (1980): 106-31; *id.*, "Cultes Égyptiens et grecs en Égypte hellénistique: L'exploitation des sources," in *Egypt and the Hellenistic World: Proceedings of the International Colloquium, Leuven, 24-26 May 1982*, edited by E. van't Dack, P. van Dessel and W. van Gucht, *Studia Hellenistica* 27 (Leuven: Peeters, 1983); A.K. Bowman, *Egypt after the Pharaohs, 332 BC – AD 642, from Alexander to the Arab Conquest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

⁶¹ Hdt. III.27-29. Cf. K.A.D. Smelik and E.A. Hemelrijk, "'Who knows not what monsters demented Egypt worships?' Opinions on Egyptian Animal Worship in Antiquity as Part of the Ancient Conception of Egypt," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* vol. 17.4, edited by W. Haase (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1984), pp. 1853-2000; I. Hofman and A. Vorbichler, "Das Kambysesbild bei Herodot," *AfO* 27 (1980): 86-105. For a recent discussion of the Egyptian sources see A. Kuhr, *The Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Period*, vol. 1 (London – New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 122-4. As a *caveat* it is useful to remember that the foundation charter of the University of Leiden, founded in 1575 by the leader of the Dutch revolt against Philip II of Spain, William of Orange was nevertheless emitted in the name of the Spanish king (suggestion Jona

Recognition of foreign gods is, in short, completely normal in the polytheistic mind frame and missionary activity is not to be expected. Recognition could take place with the acceptance of a new god or with identification of a foreign god with a god of one's own pantheon. Indeed, the identification of foreign gods with gods of the own pantheon ('syncretism') is widely attested. Herodotus calls Marduk of Babylon Zeus Bēlos⁶² and Melqart of Tyre Heracles.⁶³

Complications mainly occurred when monotheists were involved or when religion played a role during an insurrection. This would lead one to expect that the kings of Judah (especially the kings who are said to have done away with foreign gods, like Hezekiah and Josiah) would have objected to oaths of loyalty to their Assyrian and (later) Babylonian overlords, but they apparently did not.⁶⁴ Problems, however, did arise in the Seleucid age, especially during the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164). This king had successfully invaded Egypt, but in 168 the Roman envoy Gaius Popillius Laenas ordered him to leave. In the meantime, a rebellion had started in Jerusalem, which may have had a pro-Egyptian character. On their return from Egypt, the Seleucid armies violently suppressed the insurrection and desecrated the temple by erecting a pagan cultic object, probably for the benefit of the garrison; in the Jewish literature it is called, with a wordplay on Ba`al Šamêm, *šiqquṣ mešomêm*, "the abomination that makes desolate."⁶⁵

J.-C.H. Lebram has offered an original reconstruction of the above events. His point of departure is *Daniel*, the only available contemporary source.⁶⁶ Lebram argued that Antiochus IV was not a religiously intolerant persecutor; on the contrary, he recognized the foreign god and the sacredness of his temple precinct. For the orthodox, monotheistic Jews – in the end the victorious party – it was, however, unacceptable that foreigners intervened with the cult, identified the God of the Covenant with Ba`al Šamêm or Zeus Olympius, and introduced their own cultic practices. It is against these aspects that the author of *Daniel* directs his accusations, and although he opposes violent resistance, some of his compatriots will have preached rebellion and resistance against the impure cult. People may even have been killed;⁶⁷ this may be the historical fact behind the martyrs' stories in *Maccabees*.⁶⁸ The so-called 'persecution decrees' quoted in these books⁶⁹ – they are not mentioned in *Daniel* – are only a construction to blacken Antiochus IV and justify the Maccabaean revolt. There is, according to Lebram, no evidence of

Lendering). Incidentally, a document from the Eanna temple in Uruk, dated to the third year of Cambyses, issued by the šatammu, mentions a messenger of the king asking to show old steles of former kings kept in Eanna. The document, BM 113249, is discussed by M. Jursa, "The transition of Babylonia from the Neo-Babylonian empire to Achaemenid rule," in *Regime Change in the Ancient Near East and Egypt: From Sargon to Saddam Hussein*, edited by H. Crawford, Proceedings of the British Academy 136 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 78. Its contents fit royal interest in the building operations of former kings, an interest which was strong in Neo-Babylonian kings such as Nabonidus.

⁶² Hdt. I.181-3; III.158.

⁶³ Hdt. II.44.

⁶⁴ *II Kings* 18: 14 and 25 (Hezekiah); *Ezekiel* 17: 12-19 (Zedekiah, who was not purely Yahwistic. Note that Ezekiel did not condemn the fact that he had a treaty with the Babylonian king – quite the contrary!)

⁶⁵ *Daniel* 11: 31; *I Macc.* 6: 1-9.

⁶⁶ J. Lebram, "Perspektiven der gegenwärtigen Daniel-forschung," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman period* 5 (1974): 1-33; *id.*, "Apokalyptik und Hellenismus im Buche Daniel," *VT* 20 (1970): 503-24; *id.*, "König Antiochus im Buch Daniel," *VT* 25 (1975): 737-72; *id.*, "Daniel/Danielbuch," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 8 (1981), pp. 325-349, especially pp. 337-41.

⁶⁷ *Daniel* 11: 31-5.

⁶⁸ *II Macc.* 6: 18 – 7:42.

⁶⁹ *I Macc.* 1: 41-49 and *II Macc.* 6: 1-9

a forced policy of Hellenization.⁷⁰

It is well known that Roman emperors have, in later centuries, persecuted Christians. Their motivation, however, was not per se religious intolerance, but was rather guided by their opinion that Christians were hostile to the state because they refused to sacrifice to the emperor and the state gods. This is also why Christians refused to serve in the Roman armies.⁷¹

The potential for conflict increased when the government itself was monotheistic. Typically, it was not satisfied with the *recognition of the state god's leadership*, but demanded *exclusive worship* of this deity. This may be observed with the Egyptian king Akhenaton, who tried to erase the name of Amûn, and with countless emperors and kings in the Christian world, who did not even accept differing opinions about the correct cult of the one state god.⁷²

Assyria and Babylonia

The recognition of foreign gods in the polytheistic religions does not mean that all gods were equally appreciated. The appreciation of foreign gods among the Assyrians varied from deity to deity and could change over time. To understand Cyrus' policy, it is useful to take a close look at this aspect of Assyrian religious policy.

The attitude towards foreign gods could vary from scorn to admiration and worship. Admiration was, in the first place, the prerogative of Babylonian deities. This comes as no surprise: Babylonia is where the Mesopotamian civilization originated. It was the country of the ancient Sumerian cities and Akkad, the city of the legendary king Sargon, who had once founded the first world empire. Babylonia was, in later ages, often and anachronistically, still called 'Akkad.' It was also the land of Babylon, which had in c. 1750 achieved world fame during the reign of Hammurabi. Traditionally, the Assyrians had close ties to Babylonia, because both countries had inherited the Sumerian pantheon, myths, literature, and cuneiform script. The Assyrian language was closely related to Babylonian.

The city god of Babylon, Marduk, was a comparatively young deity, who had developed into Babylonia's supreme god since Hammurabi's reign. He stood outside the Sumerian pantheon, and had been introduced, somewhat artificially, as son of Ea, replacing Enlil, the god of Nippur. Consequently, Marduk is often called 'the Enlil of the gods.' His position is comparable to that of Aššur, the god of the

⁷⁰ Since 1983 a flood of literature on this subject has appeared. See for a recent discussion: P.F. Mittag, *Antiochos IV. Epiphanes: Eine politische Biographie* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2006), pp. 225-81. Mittag likewise downplays Jason's and Antiochos' Hellenizing policy (esp. 246-7), though he does not refer to the work of Lebram. The author pays much attention to the question whether Jerusalem was turned into a *polis* (pp. 239-47), a useless exercise as the word *polis* was not a technical term before the Roman period. Cf. R.J. van der Spek, *Grondbezit in het Seleucidische Rijk* (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1986), pp. 45-54; *id.*, "The Babylonian city," in *Hellenism in the East: The Interaction of Greek and non-Greek civilizations from Syria to Central Asia after Alexander*, edited by A. Kuhrt and S. Sherwin-White (London: Duckworth, 1987), pp. 57-74, esp. 57-9.

⁷¹ Cf. Aalders, "The Tolerance of Polytheism"; G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, "Why were the Christians Persecuted?," *Past and Present* 26 (1963): 6-38 (reprinted in *Studies in Ancient Society*, edited by M. Finley (London: Routledge, 1974)), pp. 210-248; W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965); J. Speigl, *Der römische Staat und die Christen* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1970); L. de Blois, "De vroeg-christelijke vredesopvatting en het vraagstuk van de oorlog: Pacifisme en vreemdelingschap op aarde," in L. de Blois and A.H. Bredero, *Kerk en vrede in Oudheid en Middeleeuwen* (Kampen: Kok, 1980), pp. 24-36.

⁷² A.R. David, *The Ancient Egyptians: Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 158; B.G. Trigger, B.J. Kemp, D. O'Connor, A.B. Lloyd, *Ancient Egypt: A Social History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 220. D.B. Redford, *Akhenaten: The Heretic King* (Princeton University Press, 1984).

city of that name and the supreme deity of the Assyrians. In the Assyrian version of *Enuma Eliš*, the Babylonian creation epic, the name of Marduk is everywhere replaced with that of Aššur. From this, we may deduce that in the Mesopotamian divine world, Marduk was seen as a competitor of Aššur. The Assyrian deity is also called ‘the Enlil of the gods,’ and Ninlil, the wife of Aššur.⁷³

Taking the above into consideration we will examine the Assyrian policy towards Marduk and the Babylonian cities. The main source of our knowledge is the corpus of Assyrian royal inscriptions, which were written on palace walls and on clay cylinders or prisms buried in the foundations of temples and palaces. These texts are, obviously, very biased. They glorify the deeds of the king and legitimate them before the gods. Fortunately, this biased image can be corrected by state correspondence and the Babylonian chronicle series, which present a neutral point of view. For our purposes, the bias of the inscriptions is not a problem, since we actually want to reconstruct the policy the Assyrian kings were aiming at as well as the image they wanted to project.⁷⁴

Studying the relevant texts, we must in the first place focus on the role of specifically Babylonian gods like Marduk, and Nabû, his son, supreme god of Borsippa: what position do they have in the lists of gods in the royal inscriptions,⁷⁵ which epithets and which type of worship (prayers, sacrifices) do they receive, and to what extent are orders by Marduk and Nabû relevant to explain the kings’ acts? In the second place, we must look at the Assyrian policy towards the Babylonians: what kind of administration did they impose? Did they privilege or terrorize the population?

Surveying Assyrian history from the twentieth to the seventh century BC, it can be observed, firstly, that Marduk, after becoming Babylonia’s supreme god, obtained an increasingly important role in Assyria too. It is certain that in the fourteenth century, he had a temple in Assur.⁷⁶ Since the beginning of the ninth century, he is mentioned in the lists of deities in the Assyrian inscriptions.⁷⁷ It is remarkable that, in these lists, Marduk and Nabû achieve an increasingly higher status. Aššur remains the supreme god, but as time goes by, Marduk and Nabû (sometimes in inverted order) are mentioned more frequently and on higher places. Of course, this phenomenon can best be discerned in inscriptions dealing with Babylon, but

⁷³ Although she was locally known as Muliššu. See S. Parpola, “The Murderer of Sennacherib,” in *Death in Mesopotamia: Papers Read at the XXXVie Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale*, edited by B. Alster, *Mesopotamia* 8 (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1980), pp. 171-82. Note also that she had a rival, Šerûa. See G. van Driel, *The Cult of Aššur* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1969), 88, ll.20-2; 92, ll.33-6; 94, ll.24-7; 98, 1.27; 100, 1.13; 102, ll.53-7 (!).

⁷⁴ For the Sargonid attitude towards Babylonia see P. Machinist, “The Assyrians and their Babylonian Problem: Some Reflections,” in *Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin: Jahrbuch* 1984-5, edited by P. Wapnewski (Berlin: Wissenschaftskolleg, 1986), pp. 353-64; G. Frame, *Babylonia 689-627 B.C. A Political History*, PIHANS 69 (Leiden, Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut 1992), pp. 245-55; J.A. Brinkman, *Prelude to Empire: Babylonian Society and Politics, 747-626 B.C.*, Occasional Publications of the Babylonian Fund, 7 (Philadelphia: University Museum, 1984); Holloway, *Aššur is King*, pp. 343-88.

⁷⁵ Lists of gods are frequently inserted in the inscriptions. Often, the prologue contains an invocation of a number of deities; the conclusion often contains a curse formula, invoking the wrath of the gods for those who damage the inscription and their blessing for those who take care of it. In the main body of the texts, deities are often mentioned as lords or helpers of the king.

⁷⁶ Mentioned in an inscription of Marduk-nadin-ahhe, the royal scribe of Aššur-uballiṭ I (1365-1330); see A.K. Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, vol. 1 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1972), p. 43 no. 276. See also A. Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000-330 BC*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 350.

⁷⁷ Cf. the inscription of Tukulti-Nunurta II (890-884 BC) from Assur in A.K. Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, vol. 2 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1976), p. 106 §486 = id., *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC*, vol. 1: 1114-859 BC, RIMA 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), p. 164 no. 1: 8. See also A. Schott, “Die Anfänge Marduks als eines assyrischen Gottes,” ZA 43 (1936): 318-21; E.F. Weidner, “Studien zur Zeitgeschichte Tukulti-Ninurtas I,” AfO 13 (1939-41): 109-24, esp. pp. 119-23 (“Marduk und die Kassiten in Assyrien unter Tukulti-Ninurta I”); H. Fine, *Studies in Middle Assyrian Chronology and Religion* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1955), pp. 106-12.

it also happens in other texts. An 8th century building inscription by governor Bēl-Ḫarran-bēl-uṣ ur even begins with Marduk and Nabû,⁷⁸ even though this official was responsible for a province in the north (Guzana). Marduk's epithets become more honorable too: since Sargon II (722-705), he is called the "Enlil of the gods," an honor that was – until then – only used for Aššur.

Moreover, many Assyrian rulers honored Babylonian deities.⁷⁹ A remarkable example is Shalmaneser III (858-824), who, after assisting his brother-in-law, Marduk-zakir-šumi, in repressing a revolt, visited Cuthah, Babylon, and Borsippa. In his inscriptions, Shalmaneser gives the honor of having achieved victory to Marduk-zakir-šumi. The Assyrian king also mentions his sacrifices and public meals in the cities: "For the people of Babylon and Borsippa, his people, he established protection and freedom (*šubarē*) under the great gods at a banquet. He gave them bread (and) wine, dressed them in multicolored garments, (and) presented them with presents."⁸⁰ In Nimrud (the Assyrian capital Calah), a statue has been found, representing Shalmaneser shaking hands with his Babylonian colleague. Both men are presented in equal length, proving their equality.⁸¹

Assyrian kings fighting *against* Babylonia also recognized and honored the Babylonian gods, even after they had defeated their opponents. The first king to conquer Babylon was the empire builder Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727). It is remarkable that he did this only towards the end of his reign (729 BC), when a Chaldaean usurper occupied the throne in Babylon. Once Tiglath-Pileser had captured the city, he did not treat it like other subject towns. He did not appoint a vassal king or governor, but had himself crowned as king of Babylonia. In all aspects, he acted like a Babylonian king: in this new role, he sacrificed to the gods of Babylon. He even took part in the New Year's Festival, submitting himself to several humiliating rituals: he had to lay down his royal dignity, declare that he had done nothing against Babylon or its gods, and was hit in the face by a priest. During a procession, he had to grasp the hand of the statue of Marduk, a motif often referred to in the Assyrian royal inscriptions to describe that the king took part in the New Year's Festival.⁸²

Sargon II acted in the same way. He had to reconquer Babylon after the Chaldaean Merodach-

⁷⁸ Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, §§824-6; A.K. Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers from the Early First Millennium BC*, vol. 2: 858-745 BC, RIMA 3 (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1996), p. 241 no. 2.

⁷⁹ Cf. for a broader discussion with references see Brinkman, *Prelude to Empire*, pp. 22-7.

⁸⁰ Inscription on the great bronze palace gates in Imgur-Enlil (Balawat near Nimrud), VI.4. See Grayson, RIMA 3, pp. 27-32 no. 5. Earlier editions: A. Billerbeck and F. Delitzsch, *Die Palasttore Salmanassars II von Balawat*, Beiträge zur Assyriologie 6.1 (Leipzig: Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1908), p. 139; E. Michel, "Die Assur-Texte Salmanassars III. (858-824)," *WdO* 4 (1967): 32 V.5-VI.3; Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, §624. Cf. J.A. Brinkman, *A Political History of Post-Kassite Babylonia*, 1158-722 B.C., AnOr 43 (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1968), p. 197.

⁸¹ M.E.L. Mallowan, *Nimrud and its Remains*, vol. 2 (London: Collins, 1966), p. 447.

⁸² Brinkman, *Post-Kassite Babylonia*, pp. 240-3. For the inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III see now: Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III*. For the New Year's festival: J. Black, "The New Year Ceremonies in Ancient Babylon," *Religion* 11 (1981): 39-59; A. Kuhrt, "Usurpation, Conquest and Ceremonial: from Babylon to Persia," in *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies*, edited by D. Cannadine and S. Price (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 20-55; J. Bidmead, *The Akītu Festival: Religious Continuity and Royal Legitimation in Mesopotamia* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2002); K. van der Toorn, "The Babylonian New Year Festival: New Insights from the Cuneiform texts and their Bearing on Old Testament Study," in *Congress Volume Leuven 1989*, edited by J.A. Emerton, *Vetus Testamentum Supplements* 43 (Leiden: Brill, 1991), pp. 331-44. It must be noted that our main information concerning the ritual of the New Year's Festival comes from a document from the Hellenistic period; cf. M.J.H. Linsen, *The Cults of Uruk and Babylon: The Temple Ritual Texts as Evidence for Hellenistic Cult Practice* (Leiden, Boston: Brill; Styx 2004), pp. 215-37 (edition) and p. 11 (date). We therefore cannot be sure that the described rituals were exactly so en vogue in the Neo-Assyrian period.

Baladan (Marduk-apla-iddina) in 722 had taken the throne and had held it for twelve years.⁸³ Several Assyrian kings stress in their inscriptions that they acted on behalf of Marduk and Nabû. This is especially true for Sargon, who presents himself as chosen by Marduk to fight against Merodach-Baladan. We will return to this claim in the context of the *Cyrus Cylinder*. After Sargon had finally conquered Babylon in 709 BC, he honored the Babylonian gods and took part in the New-Year's Festival:

In the month of *Nisânu*, the month of the going forth of the lord of the gods, I took the hand(s) of the great lord, Marduk (and) Nabû, the king of all heaven and earth, and finished my march (lit. road) to the temple of the New Year's Feast. Outstanding bulls and fat sheep, geese, ducks together with (an) unceasing (supply) of (other) gifts, I presented (lit. spread out) before them. To the gods of the sacred cities of Sumer and Akkad I offered [pure] sacrifices. [In order to inflict a defeat upon] Marduk-apla-iddina (Merodach-baladan), son of Iakinu, [of Chaldaean extraction, the likeness of an evil demon] I turned to th[em (the gods)]; with prayers and [supplications I prayed to them. After I had accomplished the feast of my great lord Marduk, I departed without fear⁷ from] the sacred cities of Sumer and Akkad.⁸⁴

Marduk's role was not limited to Assyrian inscriptions regarding Babylon. This is shown especially by Sargon's famous *Letter to Aššur*, mentioned above, reporting his campaign against Urzana, prince of Muṣaš ir in Urartu, "who had sinned against the oath taken by Aššur, Šamaš, Nabû and Marduk." Because of the importance of this text, I quote it *in extenso*:

Trusting in the strong support of Aššur, father of the gods, lord of lands, king of the whole heaven and earth, begetter (of all), lord of lords, to whom, from eternity, the Enlil (lord) of the gods, Marduk, has given the gods of land and mountain of the four quarters (of the world) to honor him – not one escaping – with their heaped-up stores(?), to bring (them) into Ehursaggalkurkurra⁸⁵; at the exalted command of Nabû (Mercurius) and Marduk (Jupiter), who had taken a course in a station of the stars (portending) the advance of my arms (...) I set the road to Muṣaš ir.⁸⁶

This shows that Aššur is considered to be the supreme god of the world, to whom all other gods have to prostrate. This does not mean that places of worship for the Assyrian god had to be created all over the world; it means that the statues of the other gods could be brought to Assur, that the subject nations had to

⁸³ J.A. Brinkman, "Merodach-Baladan II," in *Studies Presented to A. Leo Oppenheim, June 7, 1964*, edited by R.D. Biggs and J.A. Brinkman (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1964), pp. 6-53; R.J. van der Spek, "The Struggle of King Sargon II of Assyria against the Chaldaean Merodach-Baladan (710-707 B.C.)," *JEOL* 25 (1977-78): 56-66.

⁸⁴ Cf. Brinkman, *Prelude to Empire*, pp. 53-4. For the inscriptions of Sargon II see: A. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons*; Lie, *Inscriptions of Sargon*; D.G. Lyon, *Keilschrifttexte Sargons, Königs von Assyrien* (722-705 v. Chr.), AB 5 (Leipzig: Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1883, reprint Leipzig: Zentralantiquariat der DDR, 1977); H. Winckler, *Die Keilschrifttexte Sargons nach den Papierabklatschen und Originalen neu herausgegeben* (Leipzig: Pfeiffer, 1989); C.J. Gadd, "Inscribed Prism," pp. 173-201, pls. xliv-li; H.W.F. Saggs, "Historical Texts and Fragments of Sargon II of Assyria: The 'Aššur Charter,'" *Iraq* 37 (1975): 11-20. For a comparison of the ceremonial entries of Sargon II, Cyrus, and Alexander in Babylon see: A. Kuhrt, "Alexander and Babylon," in *Achaemenid History 5: The Roots of the European Tradition*, edited by H.W.A.M. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and J.W. Drijvers (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1990), pp. 121-30. The quote is from the annals of Sargon in the Khorsabad palace, Room II pl. 29: 7-14, reconstructed from parallels in the inscriptions from Room V, pl. 9: 6b-14, the *Display Inscription* and the Nimrud prisms; cf. Van der Spek, "The Struggle of king Sargon," pp. 58-9. Cf. Lie, *Inscriptions of Sargon*, p. 56-9: 384-390 (Room II) + 13-15 (Room V); Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, §38; Fuchs, *Inschriften Sargons*, pp. 156-8 (ll.320-8), 332-3.

⁸⁵ The temple of the god Aššur in the city of Assur. Note that in Akkadian, the names of god, city and country are all Aššur. In this article I call the city Assur and the country Assyria.

⁸⁶ Sargon, *Letter to Aššur*, ll.314-21 (cf. n. 26). Translation: Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, §170.

pay tribute to Aššur's temple and to obey the Assyrian king, the enforcer of Aššur's decrees. It is remarkable that Aššur is presented as having received his supremacy from Marduk, and this in a text that is not related to Babylonia, from a period in which Sargon was not king in Babylon, to be read in the city of Assur on a special occasion.⁸⁷ Marduk is therefore in some sense superior to Aššur. One is reminded of the prologue to the *Codex Hammurabi*, in which we read that Anu and Enlil had given dominion of all people (*ellilūtu*, “Enlilhood”) to Marduk.⁸⁸ In both cases, a city god is recognized as the main god of the pantheon. In the Codex, this means that Marduk, not Enlil, is the active ruler of the world.. In Sargon's *Letter to Aššur* it is not Marduk rules the world, but Aššur. The lines quoted above attribute world rule to Aššur. It remains remarkable, however, that the Assyrian god receives his power from Marduk. Perhaps this can be explained from Sargon's policy to present himself as king of all of Mesopotamia (both Assyria and Babylonia) *vis-à-vis* Urartu, the object of his campaign.⁸⁹ This is corroborated by the statement, in l.60 that Sargon had received power from Aššur and Marduk, and the words of l.92, that the king of Urartu had broken his promise to the two gods. To stress that Aššur was the ruler of all Mesopotamia, his name is spelled in ll.13 and 63 of this inscription (and in many younger texts) as AN.ŠÁR. Anšar and Kišar were an ancient couple of gods, mentioned in the Babylonian creation epic; they were older than Anu and Enlil. By identifying Aššur to Anšar, the Assyrian god had become a normal, general Mesopotamian god, more than just a city god.

Nabû enjoyed similar favors from the Assyrian kings. Adad-nirari III (811-783) devoted a very large temple to him at Calah.⁹⁰ A dedicatory text by one of his officials has been found: “Trust Nabû, do not trust any other god.”⁹¹ From Assyrian personal names, in which the name of Nabû is often included, we can deduce that he enjoyed great popularity in this age.⁹² Under the Sargonid dynasty, Nabû became even more influential. On the occasion of the inauguration of the new capital Dur-Sharrukin, in 706, king Sargon organized a banquet for the gods who were to have their residence in the city. Among them was Nabû, but not Marduk.⁹³ Often, Nabû is named before Marduk. The last great king of Assyria, Assurbanipal, showed his faith in Nabû in prayers and in temple construction.⁹⁴

Not only the Babylonian gods, but also the Babylonians themselves could count, post-conquest, on Assyrian respect. In the twentieth century BC, the Assyrian king Ilu-šumma attacked Akkad (the future Babylonia). He tells that on that occasion he made an end to several unlawfully imposed duties (corvées

⁸⁷ A.L. Oppenheim, “The City of Assur in 714 B.C.,” *JNES* 19 (1960): 133-47, esp. 144-7.

⁸⁸ Codex Hammurabi, Prologue I.11-2. Cf. M.E.J. Richardson, *Hammurabi's Laws: Text, Translation and Glossary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

⁸⁹ Suggestion F.R. Kraus in 1975 (personal communication).

⁹⁰ Mallowan, *Nimrud and its Remains*, p. 261.

⁹¹ Inscription on two stone statues found in the Nabû temple of Calah made by “Bēl-tarš i-ilumma, governor of Calah, for the life of Adad-nārāri, king of Assyria, his lord and (for) the life of Sammuramat, palace woman, his mistress (^fsa-am-mu-ra-mat MUNUS.É.GAL NIN-šū).” The last line of the inscription (l.12) reads: “Whoever you are, after (me), trust in the god Nabû! Do not trust in another god.” See G. Frame, *Rulers of Babylonia: From the Second Dynasty of Isin to the End of Assyrian Domination (1157-612 BC)*, RIMB 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), pp. 226-7 no. 2002. Also in Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, §745. This is, incidentally, not an indication of monotheism; at most, it is a henotheistic text: Nabû is represented as the only reliable god and the only deity worthy of praise, but the existence of the other gods is not denied.

⁹² W. von Soden, “Der Nahe Osten im Altertum,” in *Propyläen Weltgeschichte*, vol. 2, *Hochkulturen des mittleren und östlichen Asiens*, edited by G. Mann and A. Heuss (Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 1962), p. 119.

⁹³ Winckler, *Keilschrifttexte Sargons*, 155-7 (“Prunkinschrift”); Fuchs, *Inschriften Sargons*, pp. 235-6, 353; Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, §72.

⁹⁴ Compare the inscription dedicated to Nabû in M. Streck, *Assurbanipal und die letzten assyrischen Könige bis zum Untergange Niniveh's*, VAB 7.2 (Leipzig: Hinrichs' sche Buchhandlung, 1916), p. 272 = Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, §§991-4 and the dialogue between Assurbanipal and Nabû in Streck, *Assurbanipal*, p. 342 = Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, §§1122-9.

and taxes).⁹⁵ We already noticed that Shalmaneser III organized banquets for the Babylonian population. Since the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III, most kings stressed that the Babylonian cities were free of taxes. Tax freedom, but also the fact that the Assyrian officials ignored this privilege frequently, is a common theme in official correspondence. A good example is a letter to Assurbanipal in which the following is said about the Babylonians:

The words that the Babylonians spoke to the king: ‘Ever since the kings, our lords, sat on the throne, you have been intent on securing our privileged status (*kidinnūtu*) and our happiness (*tub libbi*). (...) Whoever enters inside it, his privileged status (*kidinnūtu*) is secured. (...) Not even a dog that enters inside it, is killed. (...) And in having made our privileged status sur[passing ...] (...) So let the privileged status of the women who [...] al[so be established] with us by the name of Babylon.⁹⁶

The protection of the rights (*šubarû*) of the citizens of Sippar, Nippur and Babylon from taxation, forced labor, injustice, and breaking of treaties, against apprehensions of the king, is the subject of a document known as “The Advice to a Prince” (“Fürstenspiegel”).⁹⁷ The date of the composition is unknown, but it is to be noted that Sargon II claims to have established the freedom (*šubarû*) of these same cities Sippar, Nippur and Babylon already before he actually had conquered Babylon.⁹⁸ The author who composed this “advice” may well have come from the Babylonian circles who wrote letters to Sargon requesting him to intervene in Babylon (cf. below).

In many respects, Sargon can be compared to Cyrus. He conformed himself to Babylonian traditions, honored the Babylonian gods, attended the New Year’s Festival, awarded privileges to Babylonian cities, and returned the statues of the gods that had been taken away by Merodach-Baladan. There is even evidence that he came to Babylon at the invitation of influential individuals in Babylon, though not the highest officials such as the *šatammu*. The evidence comes not only from royal inscriptions, but also from letters sent to the Assyrian court. In the inscriptions of Sargon we read:

The people (lit. sons) of Babylon (and) Borsippa, the ‘temple-enterers’ (*ērib biti*), the *ummanê* officials, skilled in workmanship, who go before and direct (the people) of the land, (all these) who had been subject to him, brought the

⁹⁵ A.K. Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Third and Second Millennia BC (to 1115 BC)*, RIMA 1 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), p. 15 no. 1: 14-6, “He established the freedom (*a-du-ra-ar*) of the Akkadians” and p. 18 no. 2: 49-65, “I established the freedom of the Akkadians and their children. I purified their copper. I established their freedom from the border of the marshes and Ur and Nippur, Awal, and Kismar, Dēr of the god Ištar, as far as the city (Aššur)” = Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, vol. 1, §§37, 42.

⁹⁶ L. Waterman, *Royal Correspondence of the Assyrian Empire*, 4 vols. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1930-36), no. 878; new edition and translation in F. Reynolds, *The Babylonian Correspondence of Esarhaddon and Letters to Assurbanipal and Sîn-šarru-iškun from Northern and Central Babylonia*, SAA 18 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1983), pp. 130-2 no. 158; cf. P. Garelli and V. Nikiprowetzki, *Le Proche-Orient asiatique: Les empires mesopotamiens, Israël* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974), p. 141; Frame, *Babylonia*, pp. 36, 110.

⁹⁷ Transcription and translation in W.G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960; reprint Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1996), pp. 110-15.

⁹⁸ CAD Š/3 s.v. *šabarû*. References in Sargon’s inscriptions: 1. An inscription on the backside of a plate: Winckler, *Keilschrifttexte Sargons*, pl. 40: 2 = Fuchs, *Inschriften Sargons*, pp. 54-9 no. 1.3: 2; 2. a barrel cylinder inscription from Khorsabad: Lyon, *Keilschrifttexte Sargons*, no. 1: 4 = Fuchs, *Inschriften Sargons*, pp. 29-44 no. 1.1: 4; 3. a bull inscription: Lyon, *Keilschrifttexte Sargons*, no. 2: 5 = Fuchs, *Inschriften Sargons*, pp. 60-74 no. 2.1: 5; 4. *Bronze Inscription*: Lyon, *Keilschrifttexte Sargons*, no. 3: 7 = Fuchs, *Inschriften Sargons*, pp. 45-55 no. 1.2.1: 7. Cf. I.M. Diakonoff, “A Babylonian Political Pamphlet from about 700 B.C.,” in *Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger on His Seventy-fifth Birthday, April 21, 1965*, edited by H.G. Güterbock and Th. Jacobsen, AS 16 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), pp. 343-9.

“leftovers” (of the divine meals) of Bēl and Zarpanitu, (of) Nabû and Tašmetu, to Dur-Ladinnu, into my presence, invited me to enter Babylon and (thus) made glad my soul (lit. my liver). Babylon, the city of the En[lil of the gods], I entered amidst rejoicing and to the gods who dwell in Esagila and Ezida I brought pure, additional offerings before them.⁹⁹

Several letters suggest that this was not mere propaganda talk.¹⁰⁰ One such letter is written by a certain Bēlšunu, a temple official, to Nabû-ahhe-eriba, vizier (*sukkallu*) of Sargon:

Certain Babylonians, free citizens (*mar-banû*), friends who are loyal to the king and the vizier (*sukkallu*), my lord, have written to me from Babylon. Send us [go]od news, whatever is appropriate! (...) He (= Bēl) has ordained that the son of Yakin (= Merodach-baladan) be ousted [from] Babylon, and he has also spoken about the king’s entry to Babylon. Perhaps Bēl will act so the king can perform a ritual and hear him. Let my lord do everything possible so the army can come here and the king will obtain his objective. I am one who blesses my lord. I pray daily to Marduk and Zarpanitu for the good health of my lord.¹⁰¹

Another letter is from an unknown sender, “your servant” (who may have deliberately left out his name) to the vizier (*sukkallu*) of Sargon:

When will the king, my lord, come here and establish the privileged status (*kidinnutu*) of Babylon? (...) Why does my lord remain silent, while Babylon is being destroyed? Šamaš and Marduk have installed you for intercession in Assyria. Persuade the king to come here and to exempt (*lu-zak-ki*) Babylon for Marduk and (make) your name everlasting in Esaggil and Ezida.¹⁰²

It is an acceptable guess that Cyrus later likewise acted at the instigation of certain notables of the Marduk temple in Babylon. There are more examples of empires invading a country at the request and with the support of authorities of the land concerned. A good example is king Ahaz of Judah who invited Tiglath-Pileser III to help him against a coalition of king Resin of Aram and Pekah of Israel (*II Kings* 16: 7). The history of Roman imperialism is full of examples of cities that pleaded for Roman intervention, like Saguntum (against Hannibal, 218 BC), the Greek city Massilia (Marseilles) against neighboring Gallic tribes (125 BC), and numerous Greeks cities against Macedonia. An example of this is the request of Pergamum and Rhodes in 201 to intervene in Greece. After Rome had intervened with the help of Greek allies and the victory in the Second Macedonian war had been attained, Titus Quinctius Flamininus declared the Greek cities “free” at the Isthmian games of 196 BC.¹⁰³ In this and all other cases the request

⁹⁹ Annals of Sargon from Khorsabad: Lie, *Inscriptions of Sargon*, pp. 54-6: 371-376 = Fuchs, *Inschriften Sargons*, p. 154: 312-14 (translation pp. 331-2); Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, §§35, 40.

¹⁰⁰ As suggested by A. Kuhrt, “*Cyrus the Great of Persia: Images and Realities*,” p. 174; *ead.*, “*Alexander and Babylon*,” pp. 122-3.

¹⁰¹ ABL 844: 7-13, rev. 1’-16’ = M. Dietrich, *The Babylonian Correspondence of Sargon and Sennacherib*, SAA 17 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2003), no 20; G.W. Vera Chamaza, *Die Omnipotenz Aššurs: Entwicklungen in der Aššur-Theologie unter den Sargoniden; Sargon II., Sanherib und Asarhaddon*, AOAT 295 (Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2002), pp. 31-2, 252-4 no. 6.

¹⁰² ABL 1431: 13-15; rev. 11-16 = Dietrich, *The Babylonian Correspondence*, no. 21; Vera Chamaza, *Die Omnipotenz Aššurs*, pp. 28-31, 248-50 no. 3. For the supposed pro-Assyrian party see Diakonoff, “A Babylonian Political Pamphlet,” and Brinkman, “Merodach-Baladan II,” p. 20 n. 10. Brinkman is more cautious in his article “Babylonia under the Assyrian Empire, 745-627 B.C.,” in *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires*, edited by M.T. Larsen, Mesopotamia 7 (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979), pp. 223-250, esp. 236-7.

¹⁰³ Polybius XVIII.46; Livy XXXIII.32-3.

for intervention ended in incorporation in the Roman Empire.

The permission to exiled people to return home is not a new feature of Cyrus' policy. We know at least three Assyrian kings who allowed deported people to return to Babylonia (discussed below).

The friendly policy towards Babylonia was obviously not the only one the Assyrians pursued. Apart from the conquest of another country constituting a hostile act by itself, several kings did so in a particularly harsh way. The best-known example is Sennacherib, who, from the very beginning of his reign, broke with some of the policies of his father. He abandoned Sargon's new capital Dur-Sharrukin and used Nineveh instead, he consistently refused to mention his father in his inscriptions, and he had a different attitude towards Babylonia from his father. Their policies can be compared, however, because they had to deal with the same problems: both kings had, early in their reigns, to cope with the Chaldaean usurper Merodach-Baladan. Sargon expelled him after twelve years, Sennacherib after several months. Yet, their ensuing acts could not have differed more. As pointed out before, Sargon honored Babylonian gods, gained support from priests and servants of Merodach-Baladan, and awarded privileges to Babylonian cities. Sennacherib, on the other hand, did not mention Marduk and Nabû in the inscription on his campaign against Merodach-Baladan. According to this text, he captured the priests and the servants of Merodach-Baladan, looted the palace, and sacked the very cities that his father had privileged.¹⁰⁴ Sennacherib did not proclaim himself Babylonian king as previous kings had done, but appointed a Babylonian puppet,¹⁰⁵ later replaced by Sennacherib's son. His attitude became even harsher when the Babylonians captured this son and extradited him to Elam, Assyria's archenemy. In 689, Babylonia was punished cruelly. The city was utterly destroyed, a fact which Sennacherib describes at great length in two inscriptions.¹⁰⁶ Water from the Euphrates was led over the ruins, allowing the later Assyrian king Esarhaddon to say that "reed-marshes and poplars grew profusely therein and threw out many offshoots. There were countless birds of the sky and fish from the deep."¹⁰⁷ Maybe, the prophet Isaiah had this in mind when he wrote: "'I will rise up against them,' says the LORD of hosts, 'and will cut off from Babylon name and remnant, offspring and posterity,' says the LORD. 'And I will make it a possession of the hedgehog (KJV bittern), and pools of water, and I will sweep it with the broom of destruction,' says the LORD of hosts."¹⁰⁸

Sennacherib's successor Esarhaddon abandoned this policy, without condemning his father's approach, which he attributed to the wrath of Marduk, who, angry about the sins of the Babylonians, had seized the temple treasures.¹⁰⁹ In his inscriptions, Esarhaddon stresses that he had Babylon restored and repopulated. Landsberger¹¹⁰ has shown that this may be exaggerated, but it is a fact that a beginning was made with the reconstruction. Besides, it is interesting to observe that Esarhaddon found it necessary to create this image of himself.

Esarhaddon strove to be succeeded by his two sons: Šamaš-šuma-ukin became king of Babylon, while Assurbanipal received the rest of the empire. Vassal rulers were forced to accept this arrangement

¹⁰⁴ Luckenbill, *Annals*, pp. 48-55; 94-98 (Prism A1); *id.*, *Ancient Records*, §§255-67; note especially ll.48-53 = Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, §262.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 1.53.

¹⁰⁶ Luckenbill, *Annals*, p. 78 ll.48-52; *id.*, *Ancient Records*, §438.

¹⁰⁷ Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons*, p. 14, Ep. 7c: 4-14.

¹⁰⁸ *Isaiah* 14: 22-23.

¹⁰⁹ Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons*, p. 13, Ep. 4 = Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, §649.

¹¹⁰ B. Landsberger, *Brief des Bischofs von Esagila an König Asarhaddon*, Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afdeling Letterkunde, 28.6 (Amsterdam: Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1965), pp. 14-37.

under oath.¹¹¹ In their inscriptions, both kings always spoke positively about Babylon and its gods. Like Esarhaddon, Assurbanipal boasts that he had returned the statue of the god Marduk from Nineveh to Babylon. Among other texts, Cylinder L⁶, a display inscription dedicated to Marduk for the reconstruction of the walls called Imgur-Enlil and Nimit-Enlil, makes his relationship to Marduk explicit:

During my reign the great lord, Marduk, entered Babylon amid rejoicing, and in Esagila took up his eternal abode. The regular offerings of Esagila and the gods of Babylon, I provided for (lit. established). The privileges (*kidinnūtu*) of Babylon I maintained.¹¹²

It was probably this very inscription that Cyrus found when he restored the Imgur-Enlil wall of Babylon, if we may believe his own cylinder (*Cyrus Cylinder*, ll.38, 43). Assurbanipal remains respectful towards Babylon even after an insurrection by his brother had forced him to take the city in a protracted war. Rebels were pardoned and orders were given to restore the war damage.¹¹³

Why these changes in the Babylonian policy? Why did one king prefer the stick, and the other the carrot? Investigating this subject is worthwhile as it may help us understand Cyrus' attitudes towards, on the one hand, Babylon and its gods and, on the other hand, the other deities and nations in his empire.

Arguments for using the carrot are easy to find: a benevolent conqueror will more easily win the hearts and minds of his new subjects, who will feel no need to revolt. We can also imagine arguments for using the stick: a terrorized nation will be too scared to revolt.

There are other factors as well, however—factors that are often ignored by modern historians. First, the kings themselves clearly *believed* that there were religious reasons for their policies. Of course, religious beliefs have in the course of history often been manipulated. Liverani argued, with good reason, that the religious discourse of the pious king as the executor of the orders of the Assyrian gods was for Assyrian kings a hypostatic way of describing Assyrian absolute power.¹¹⁴ This view may, however, be too one-sided. Religious beliefs and fears are very real parts of human life and kings were not free from them. For what other reason do the royal inscriptions so often stress the importance of the gods' orders or the accord that the deities, by means of oracular prescripts, gave to a royal decision? For every important decision, the will of the gods was examined. Countless prayers survive, in which the Assyrian kings ask for divine advise before the beginning of a military enterprise.¹¹⁵ On more than one occasion, king Esarhaddon had himself replaced by a substitute king because an evil omen (like a lunar eclipse) would occur; in this way, the misfortune predicted by the omen would befall the substitute and not the real king.¹¹⁶ In a polytheistic worldview, *all* gods, the ones of the foreign nations included, can send prosperity and calamities. It is possible to use one's own gods to intimidate foreign deities, but one can also try to

¹¹¹ D.J. Wiseman, "The Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon," *Iraq* 20 (1958): 1-99; Parpola and Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties*, pp. 28-58 no 6.

¹¹² Cylinder L⁶: 10-2 in M. Streck, *Assurbanipal*, pp. 236-7; same phrase in Cylinder L²: 8-11 = Streck, *Assurbanipal*, pp. 230-1 = Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, §§963-4.

¹¹³ M. Streck, *Assurbanipal*, Rassam Cylinder, pp. 3-91, III.128-IV.109; Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, §§796-7.

¹¹⁴ M. Liverani, "The ideology of the Assyrian empire," in *Power and Propaganda. A Symposium on Ancient Empires*, edited by M.T. Larsen, *Mesopotamia* 7 (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979), pp. 297-317, esp. 301.

¹¹⁵ See for instance I. Starr, *Queries to the Sungod: Divination and Politics in Sargonid Assyria*, SAA 4 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1990).

¹¹⁶ Landsberger, *Brief des Bischofs von Esagila*, pp. 38-51, esp. 51; cf. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 626. The ritual is well known in the Near East. For a discussion see: K.A.D. Smelik, "The 'omina mortis' in the Histories of Alexander the Great," *Talanta* 10-11 (1978-9): 92-111; S. Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*, SAA 10 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1993), pp. xxii-xxxii (collection of references in the ancient Near East, the classical texts and beyond).

become friendly with them. When, for example, one builds a temple for a foreign god, and one makes his nation pray on your behalf, the god may return the favor. It is at least worth trying. The Biblical book of *Ezra* (6: 10) presents an image of Darius I mentioning, as an argument to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, sacrifices and prayers for the life of the Persian king and his sons. We encounter something similar in the *Cyrus Cylinder* when the conqueror announces his decision to send back the images of the gods that had been captured by Nabonidus.¹¹⁷

That religion could influence royal policy is also proven by the fact that Sennacherib and Esarhaddon consulted seers. One of the most interesting texts in this respect is a document dealing with an investigation of the causes of death of Sargon II.¹¹⁸ Sennacherib's father had been killed in action, but his body could not be retrieved. Obviously, the gods were angry, and three or four teams of *haruspices* had to find out which sin Sargon had committed to raise the divine wrath: "Did he sin against the gods of [Assyria ...] or against the gods of the land of Akkad (=Babylonia), or did he break oaths to the king of the gods (=Aššur)?"¹¹⁹ Unfortunately, the damaged tablet does not preserve the answer. In his 1958 article, Tadmor assumed that Sargon's sin was his pro-Babylonian policy, because there is a reference to the erecting of "a statue of Aššur (Anšar) and the great gods," something that is also recorded in Sennacherib's inscriptions. If Tadmor was right, Sennacherib's destruction of Babylon may be (partially) explained as a reaction to Sargon's sinful policy. Landsberger suggested that the text was written in the time of Esarhaddon, that it was a text made in order to support Esarhaddon's policy to rebuild Babylon and to return the statue of Marduk from Assur to Babylon. Sargon is criticized for his *neglect* of Aššur and Sennacherib confessed to have neglected Marduk.¹²⁰ In Parpola's final synthesis and edition of the document, Sargon is criticized of honoring Aššur too much at the expense of Marduk (cf. n. 118). I find this interpretation speculative at best.

In my view, king Sennacherib simply mentions three possible sins of Sargon: against Aššur, against Marduk or against the oaths sworn in a treaty. One may endorse Parpola's idea that the sin of Sargon was the breach of a treaty between Sargon and Merodach-Baladan.¹²¹ As discussed above, the breaking of a treaty was considered a great offence, one that could indeed arouse the anger of the gods. So the solution was to remedy all three possible sins: crafting a statue for Aššur and one for Marduk in order to reconcile those gods who were implored in the curse formula of a treaty between Assyria and Babylonia. The document has nothing to do with a preference for either Aššur or Marduk. An interesting feature of the

¹¹⁷ *Cyrus Cylinder*, ll.34-6; cf. P.-A. Beaulieu, "An Episode in the fall of Babylon," *JNES* 52 (1993): 241-61.

¹¹⁸ Transliteration and translation in A. Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*, SAA 3 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1989), pp. 77-9, no. 33; editio princeps: H. Tadmor, "The Sin of Sargon," *Eretz Israel* 5 (1958): 150-62 (Hebr.) and 193 (English summary); I owe the translation to P.A. Siebesma. Cf. P. Garelli, "Les sujets du roi d'Assyrie," in *La voix de l'opposition en Mésopotamie: Colloque organisé par l'Institut des Hautes Etudes de Belgique, 19 et 20 mars 1973*, edited by A. Finet (Brussels: Institut des Hautes Etudes de Belgique, [1973]), pp. 189-213, esp. 193-9. For a new edition and re-evaluation see: H. Tadmor, B. Landsberger and S. Parpola, "The Sin of Sargon and Sennacherib's Last Will," *SAAB* 3.1 (1989): 3-51. Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, follows this edition.

¹¹⁹ The reconstruction proposed in Tadmor *et al.*, "Sin of Sargon," p. 10, and adopted by Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, p. 77, reads: "was it because [he honoured] the gods o[f Assyria too much, placing them] above the gods of Babylonia [....., and was it because] he did not [keep] the treaty of the king of gods [that Sargon my father] was killed [in the enemy country and] was not b[uried] in his house?" I find this too speculative; it infers too much from lost lines. The crucial passages, in which mention is made of the statue of Marduk, are lost. In the case of Sennacherib's recommendation to posterity (in Parpola's view to Sennacherib's son Esarhaddon) *all* supposed references to Marduk and Babylonia are in the breaks.

¹²⁰ Tadmor *et al.*, "Sin of Sargon," pp. 33-4.

¹²¹ Tadmor *et al.*, "Sin of Sargon," pp. 48-9.

document is, furthermore, that Sennacherib complains that Assyrian scribes prevented him from making the statue of Marduk (if it is really Marduk): “As for me, after I had made the statue of Aššur my lord, Assyrian scribes wrongfully prevented me from working [on the statue of Marduk] and did not let me make [the statue of Marduk, the great lord]” (rev.21-3). Apparently Esarhaddon was to finish the job of his father by making (remaking?) the statue of Marduk and return it to Babylon. That Sennacherib had not finished the job is attributed to Assyrian scribes, a remarkable feature for a document found in Nineveh. So Esarhaddon reconciled with the gods, whose wrath Sargon had incurred by breaking a treaty sworn to Aššur and Marduk. Sennacherib already had tried to reconcile with Aššur by making a statue for this god, but had failed in the case of Marduk (with the lame excuse that he was prevented from doing so by the scribes). Esarhaddon now finally finished the job by making a statue of Marduk and leading it to Babylon. Landsberger and his followers consider the document as a defense of Esarhaddon’s policy.¹²² It might as well have been a document composed at the accession of Esarhaddon by some rival scribe or diviner meant as an exhortation to rebuild Babylon, as we shall see below.

Garelli¹²³ did not see a major break in Sennacherib’s religious policy as regards Babylon as a reaction to his father Sargon. In his view, the ejection of Sennacherib’s son to the Elamites and the great number of insurrections offered sufficient political justification for the sack of Babylon. De Liagre Böhl offered similar suggestions.¹²⁴ Garelli also doubted whether Sargon was really all that pro-Babylonian, since Sargon, by equating Aššur to Anšar, placed this god higher than Marduk.¹²⁵ Moreover, Garelli suggests that the Assyrian kings were not much interested in Babylon, and assumes that the “faction theory,” which maintains that Sargon and Esarhaddon were exponents of a pro-Babylonian faction and that Sennacherib was a representative of an Assyrian nationalist party, is mistaken. In this, he is supported by Landsberger, who argues that Esarhaddon’s pro-Babylonian policy was mere propaganda and that this king hosted the same feelings towards the ancient city as his father had done before him.¹²⁶

This does not explain, however, why Sennacherib never mentions Sargon in his inscriptions, why he abandoned Sargon’s new capital Dur-Sharrukin, why he changed his attitude towards Babylon *at the very start of his reign*,¹²⁷ and why Marduk and Nabû are almost absent from his inscriptions.¹²⁸ It is very difficult to explain Sennacherib’s hostility towards his father because we have no explicit statements about it, but it does not seem unreasonable to assume that he was aware of some ‘sin of Sargon,’ whatever it may have been.

A second example of the influence of religion and prophecy on policy is Esarhaddon’s decision to revoke his father’s resolution to destroy Babylon. As his motive, Esarhaddon mentions the clemency of Marduk: “Although he (Marduk) had written down seventy years as the length of Babylon’s desolation,

¹²² In the same vein Ann A. Weaver, “The ‘Sin of Sargon’ and Esarhaddon’s Reconception of Sennacherib: A Study in Divine Will, Human Politics and Royal Ideology,” *Iraq* 66 (2004): 61-66.

¹²³ Garelli, *Les sujets du roi d’Assyrie*, pp. 195-6.

¹²⁴ F.M.Th. de Liagre Böhl, “Ein Tauschurkunde aus dem fünften Regierungsjahr des Aššur-nādin-šumi (694 v. Chr.),” in *Orientalia Neerlandica: A Volume of Oriental Studies Published under the Auspices of the Netherlands’ Oriental Society (Oostersch Genootschap in Nederland) on the Occasion of the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of its Foundation (May 8th 1945)* (Leiden: Sijthoff, 1948), pp. 116-137, esp. 117-8.

¹²⁵ That this argument is not very strong, is suggested by Sargon’s letter to the gods in which Anšar (= Aššur) is said to have received dominion over the world from Marduk.

¹²⁶ Landsberger, *Brief des Bischofs von Esagila*, p. 16.

¹²⁷ Babylonian Chronicle from Nabonassar to Shamash-shuma-ukin, II.19-III.38. A.K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, TCL 5 (Locust Valley: Augustin, 1975), pp. 77-82 no. 1 = J.-J. Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, Writings from the Ancient World, 19 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), pp. 193-202 no. 16.

¹²⁸ Marduk is mentioned only thrice and Nabû only twice and that without any epithet.

the compassionate Marduk switched the number when his heart had come to rest, and ordered the repopulation of the city in its eleventh year.”¹²⁹

Letters found in Nineveh inform us about what appears to have been the true reason of Esarhaddon’s U-turn. It must be noted that his succession had not been easy. His father Sennacherib had appointed Esarhaddon as his successor, but an elder brother tried to prevent his accession. Esarhaddon even had to flee to exile. Meanwhile, Sennacherib was assassinated by his son Arda-Muliššu.¹³⁰ From his exile, Esarhaddon managed to capture Nineveh and seize the throne. The cardinal point is that there had been a seer who had issued a dual prophecy: that Esarhaddon would become king and that Babylon would be repopulated. In a letter it is stated that because the first part of the prophecy had come true, the new king had to make sure that the second part of the prophecy would be fulfilled as well.¹³¹ I suggest that the document concerning the *Sin of Sargon*, discussed above, originated from the circles of this same seer, sneering at Assyrian scribes who had prevented Sennacherib from doing the right thing.

It is clear that much of what the Assyrian kings said about their policy is too positive from an historical perspective. Yet, there is no doubt that Babylonian cities received a special treatment, different from the ways in which other parts of the empire were dealt with. As we have seen, only Sennacherib adopted – from the very beginning of his reign – a hostile and merciless approach towards Babylon. In his Babylonian policy, Cyrus thus followed age-old traditions, as described in the *Cyrus Cylinder*.

Cyrus and Babylonia

After the fall of the Assyrian Empire a Babylonian dynasty conquered Mesopotamia and chose Babylon as its capital. Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562) has become especially famous for refurbishing Babylon (and notorious because he deported the Judeans). The last Neo-Babylonian king, Nabonidus (556-539), may have met opposition in Babylon because of his exceptional behavior. He stayed out of Babylon for ten years, made Temā (Thaema) in Arabia his residence, and left the administration in Babylon to his son Belshazzar. As long as Nabonidus stayed away, the New Year Festival did not take place. In these years, temple grounds were subject to palace regulations.¹³² In addition, Nabonidus seems to have had a preference for the moon god Sîn at the expense of Marduk. He spent much on the building of temples for Sîn at Harran and Ur and even called Esagila and other temples “houses of your (= Sîn’s) godhead.”¹³³ In the propaganda text “King of Justice” Marduk is equated with Sîn.¹³⁴ It must be admitted that much of the

¹²⁹ Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons*, p. 15, Ep. 10 = Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, §650. (In cuneiform | < = 70; < | = 11).

¹³⁰ = Adar-d⁴NIN.LÍL = Adrammelek in *II Kings* 19: 37. Cf. Parpola, “Murderer of Sennacherib,” pp. 171-82.

¹³¹ Parpola, “Murderer of Sennacherib,” p. 179 n. 41. The letter is from prophet Bēl-ušezip, who had been imprisoned before and apparently risked his life with his prophecy: “I am the one who told the omen of the kingship of my lord the crown prince Esarhaddon to the exorcist Dadâ and the queen mother saying: ‘Esarhaddon will rebuild Babylon and restore Esaggil, and [honor] me’ – why has the king up until now not summoned me?” (ABL 1216 = Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*, no. 109: 14'-6').

¹³² Cf. the so-called edict of Belshazzar (YBT VI.103): D. Cocquerillat, *Palmeraies et cultures de l'Eanna d'Uruk* (559-520), ADFU 8 (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1968), pp. 37, 108. See G. van Driel, “The Edict of Belshazzar: An Alternative Interpretation,” *JEOL* 30 (1987-8): 60-4.

¹³³ References: H. Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon und Kyros' des Großen*, AOAT 256 (Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2001), p. 21, n. 90. For an interpretation of Nabonidus’ reign see P.-A. Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon, 556-539 BC.*, YNER, 10 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987) esp. pp. 43-65 (“The exaltation of Sîn in the inscriptions of Nabonidus”).

¹³⁴ Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*, pp. 579-88, P2 III 18, IV 26, VI 9.

anti-Nabonidus evidence comes from pro-Cyrus propaganda after the Persian take-over. The main documents are the *Cyrus Cylinder* and the so-called *Verse Account of Nabonidus*, a satirical pamphlet ridiculing Nabonidus' preference for Sîn and his pedantry as scholar.¹³⁵ Amélie Kuhrt correctly argued that a united opposition of the ‘Babylonian priesthood’ against Nabonidus cannot be asserted, first of all because a category ‘priesthood’ is a European concept which did not exist in Babylonia, secondly because the temple administration was largely dependent on royal supervision and benefaction, finally because there is hardly evidence from the time of Nabonidus himself.¹³⁶ However, some discontent with Nabonidus’ measures as regards the temple is to be expected and even if the *Cyrus Cylinder* and the *Verse Account* are part of Persian propaganda, they may well have had a kernel of truth, if only to render them more convincing. Beaulieu pointed out that many allegations in the *Verse Account* find their basis in Nabonidus’ own inscriptions. He concludes that vocal and active opposition against Nabonidus among at least part of the scribal circles must have existed.¹³⁷

It is Von Soden’s assumption that in Nabonidus’ time propaganda for and against the king existed side by side. The *King of Justice*¹³⁸ and the *Royal Chronicle*¹³⁹ are examples of pro-Nabonidus literature, the *Verse Account* is the voice of the opposition. Von Soden suggests that the latter was composed already before Cyrus’ conquest of Babylon by a scribe from these hostile circles or adapted from such a document shortly after.¹⁴⁰

The scribes and scholars from the anti-Nabonidus circles had hoped that, after the deposition of Nabonidus, Cyrus would radically get rid of the Babylonian king and his policies, and that he would give Marduk and Esagila a privileged position and perhaps depose the high officials, the *šatammu* (head of the temple administration) Zeria and the *zazakku* (registry official) Rimut, who were appointed by Nabonidus and seemingly are ridiculed as flatterers of Nabonidus in the *Verse Account* (but see below for a different interpretation). Caroline Waerzeggers recently argued that the *Cyrus Cylinder* must be interpreted as a document mirroring views and hopes of the local elite, more or less as a manifesto on what conditions the kingship of Cyrus was acceptable. Regardless of whether or not the initiative came from Cyrus or the

¹³⁵ Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*, pp. 563-78; English translations in Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 312-5; A. Kuhrt, *Persian Empire*, pp. 75-80.

¹³⁶ Amélie Kuhrt, “Nabonidus and the Babylonian Priesthood,” in *Pagan Priests: Religion and Power in the Ancient World*, edited by M. Beard and J. North (London: Duckworth, 1990), pp. 119-55.

¹³⁷ P.-A. Beaulieu, “Nabonidus the Mad King: A Reconsideration of his Steles from Harran and Babylon,” in *Representations of Political Power: Case Histories from Times of Change and Dissolving Order in the Ancient Near East*, edited by M. Heinz and M.H. Feldman (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007), pp. 137-66, esp. p. 160. Jursa, “The Transition of Babylonia,” pp. 73-94, downplays the extent of the discontent with Nabonidus’ policy, because there was no rift between temple authorities and the palace (the temple officials were mostly appointed by the king) and because many high officials stayed in power, among whom the *šatammu* and the *zazakku* of Esagila (cf. previous note). Jursa, however, has no explanation for the fact that these officials remained in office although they supposedly were ridiculed as sycophants in the *Verse Account*. Jursa is correct in his argument that a lot of continuity existed in the governance of Babylonia, as happens most of the time in regime change, but the realities of the power structure in Babylon probably were complex. Some circles will have supported Nabonidus and his name apparently had a positive connotation among the rebels against Darius I, others will have retained their jobs despite their allegiance to Nabonidus (note that Nabonidus himself was spared and exiled, not killed), and again others will have had a more radical antipathy against the last Babylonian king and may have written letters to Cyrus like the (partly anonymous) officials had done to Sargon II. The *Verse Account* may have been a scholarly satire coming from this group, but not intended for a wider audience.

¹³⁸ Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*, pp. 579-88.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 589-95.

¹⁴⁰ W. von Soden, “Kyros und Nabonid: Propaganda und Gegenpropaganda,” in W. von Soden, *Aus Sprache, Geschichte und Religion Babylonien*, Series minor (Istituto universitario orientale, Dipartimento di studi asiatici), 32 (Napels: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1989), 285-92, esp. 288.

priests the message is one of political hope, Cyrus' hope that he would be accepted as Babylonian king and the hope of the Babylonian elite that the new king would accept the duties belonging to this kingship as regards the temple. Hopes of both parties, Waerzeggers concludes, were destroyed within one generation.¹⁴¹ This view partially agrees with that of Amélie Kuhrt, who argued that surrender of Babylon to invading kings was more than once the result of negotiations between the local elite and the king, Sargon II in 709, Cyrus in 539 and Alexander the Great in 331 BC (cf. above n. 84).

Indeed, at least some of the expectations were not satisfied. Cyrus saw to it that Esagila was not damaged and that the normal rites could be performed, but he did not take part in the New Year's Festival in person. That Cyrus (or Cambyses?) appeared in Elamite (= Persian) attire at Cambyses' investiture ritual may have shocked some Babylonians (although the sources do not state so explicitly). Babylon lost the position it had enjoyed before Cyrus: it ceased to be the core of an empire; the new king represented a new power structure.¹⁴²

Cyrus continued Nabonidus' policy of exploiting the temple lands, he did not kill Nabonidus and did not remove Zeria and Rimut from office. Kristin Kleber observed that the *šatammu* Zeria was still in office in the 9th year of Cyrus and the *zazakku* Rimut in the 5th year of Cambyses. So she concluded that the composition of the *Verse Account* must have taken place much later, after the revolt of two rebels from the time of Darius I (522 and 521 BC), who both called themselves Nebuchadnezzar, son of Nabonidus.¹⁴³ The allusion to Nabonidus by these rebels would have been the occasion to compose this derogatory document concerning the last Babylonian king.¹⁴⁴ Taking into account Von Soden's and Waerzeggers' observations one may alternatively suggest that the *Verse Account* was not late, but rather early, just before or after Cyrus' accession. Zeria and Rimut would as shrewd politicians have welcomed Cyrus in Babylon and have praised Cyrus' rededication of Esagila to Marduk, if we accept Caroline Waerzeggers' proposal that in the *Verse Account* (V 18'-28') there is no question of sycophancy of these officials towards Nabonidus, but that it was Cyrus, who took away from Esagila the crescent of the moongod Sîn and was supported in this by Zeria and Rimut.¹⁴⁵

Subsequent generations cherished different opinions of Nabonidus, though. A negative judgment is still preserved in a prophecy text, the *Dynastic Prophecy*, an historical composition in the form of predictions from the downfall of Assyria to (at least) Alexander the Great, seemingly issued in the Neo-Assyrian period, but apparently being *vaticinia ex eventu* from the early Hellenistic period.¹⁴⁶ The

¹⁴¹ Lecture dd. 06/30/2010, VU University, Amsterdam.

¹⁴² *Nabonidus Chronicle* III.24-28 in the interpretation of A.R. George, "Studies in Cultic Topography and Ideology," *BiOr* 53 (1996): 365-95, esp. pp. 379-80; so also Kuhrt, *Persian Empire*, p. 51). I reject Von Soden's opinion that the *Nabonidus Chronicle* was a piece of pro-Cyrus propaganda. The document treats Nabonidus with a certain detachment. It is stressed that the king did not take part in the Akītu festival, but no judgment is given. It is also stressed that the other ceremonies were performed correctly (*ki šalmu*). The participation of the king in the New Year's ceremony in his 17th year is duly recorded and it was also done "correctly" (*ki šalmu* III.8). Negative reports about Cyrus are his slaughter of Babylonian people after the battle at Sippar (III.14) and his attendance of the investiture of Cambyses as viceroy in "Elamite" dress, but no judgment is given. Cf. A. Kuhrt, "Some Thoughts on P. Briant, *Histoire de l'Empire perse*," in *Recherches récentes sur l'Empire achéménide. Topoi*, Suppl. 1 (Paris: De Boccard, 1997), pp. 299-304. Cf. G. Tolini, "Quelques éléments concernant le prise de Babylon par Cyrus (octobre 539 av. J.-C.)," *Arta* 2005.003: 1-13.

¹⁴³ *Bīsotūn Inscription* I §16, III §49, IV §52 (Persian version, translation: Kuhrt, *Persian Empire*, pp. 141-58); lines 31-31; 85; 91-92 (Babylonian version, translation: Von Voigtlander, *The Bisitun Inscription*, p. 55-6 and 60).

¹⁴⁴ K. Kleber, "Zēria, *šatammu* von Esangila und die Entstehungszeit des 'Strophengedichts,'" *NABU* 2007/52.

¹⁴⁵ C. Waerzeggers, "Very cordially hated in Babylonia? Zēria and Rēmût in the *Verse Account*," *AoF* forthcoming.

¹⁴⁶ Col. II.16'. Editio princeps: A.K. Grayson, *Babylonian Historical-Literary Texts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), pp. 24-37; collated new edition: R.J. van der Spek, "Darius III," pp. 311-33 no. 5.

‘prophecy’ on Nabonidus is negative (“he will plot evil against Akkad”¹⁴⁷), while Cyrus is judged favorably (“During his reign Akkad [will live] in security”¹⁴⁸).

Berossus, on the other hand, does not seem to have had a negative view of Nabonidus’ religious policy.¹⁴⁹ As mentioned above, the Babylonian rebels under Darius I claimed to be Nebuchadnezzar, son of Nabonidus, implying that Nabonidus was a respectable Babylonian king. If Lambert was right, the pro-Nabonidus treatise *King of Justice* is preserved on a tablet copied in the Seleucid-Parthian period¹⁵⁰

It is possible that under these circumstances of internal conflicts in Babylonia, some Babylonian diviners and priests predicted Cyrus’ victory, explicitly linking this to the restoration of the cult of Marduk, and actually invited him to intervene, similar to the calls of their predecessors in the days of Sargon II. A comparable prophecy is known from a Hebrew source:

[I am the LORD] who says of Cyrus, “He is my shepherd, and he shall carry out all my purpose”; and who says of Jerusalem, “It shall be rebuilt,” and of the temple, “Your foundation shall be laid.” Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him and strip kings of their robes, to open doors before him and the gates shall not be closed. (...) “For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me.”¹⁵¹

Just like a seer could successfully urge Esarhaddon to make sure that the second part of the prediction would come true, a Jewish and a Babylonian prophet may have tried to achieve their aims through Cyrus.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ *Dynastic Prophecy* II.16'

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* II.24', *i-na BAL-e-šú KUR URI.KI šub-tum ni-i[h-tum TUŠ]*. Grayson understood this as: “During his reign Akkad [will not enjoy] a peaceful abode.” This cannot be correct. There is hardly room for an extra sign *ul* or *NU*, “not.” In addition, this is a sentence common in the omen literature, always used in the affirmative, and as this text is closely related to the omens it will have been in this context similarly. Cf. Van der Spek, “Darius III,” pp. 319-20. The expression in affirmative sense is preserved indeed in the *Cyrus Cylinder* itself: *KUR.KUR ka-li-ši-na šu-ub-ti né-eh-ti ú-še-ši-ab* (1.36, fragment B; cf. Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*, p. 554) and on a brick inscription of Cyrus: *KUR šu-ub-ti né-eh-ti ú-še-šib* (*ibid.*, p. 549, K1, 2^a: 6).

¹⁴⁹ Berossus *apud* Joseph., *Ap.* I.151-3.

¹⁵⁰ W.G. Lambert, “A New Source for the Reign of Nabonidus,” *AfO* 22 (1968/69): 1-8. Cf. Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*, p. 591; Beaulieu, “Nabonidus, the Mad King,” pp. 137-40.

¹⁵¹ *Isaiah* 44: 28 – 45:1 and 4.

¹⁵² Isaiah’s prophecy may of course be considered to have been *vaticinatio ex eventu*, but Babylonian and Jewish prophets could well have anticipated a Persian victory before 539. It is interesting to note that Beaulieu, “Nabonidus the Mad King,” argues that the Babylonian scholars wanted to challenge the royal monopoly in religious affairs, were hence opposed to Nabonidus’ plans, and thus ridiculed Nabonidus’ scholarship. We may detect a similar development in the Jewish scribal circles who denounced kingship (*I Samuel* 8), denounced all Israelite and many Judahite kings, esp. the last one, Zedekiah, and who managed to set up a temple state without kings under Persian rule at the instigation and inspiration of scribe Ezra. For the role of Jewish scribal circles in the creation of the Hebrew Bible cf. K. van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

Doubts on the historicity of the return of Jewish exiles under Cyrus are expressed by Edelman, *The Origins of the ‘Second’ temple*. Cf. n. 13 and 14. As a matter of fact, the prophet apparently knew that Cyrus would take Babylon without a battle (“to open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut”) as is stated in the *Nabonidus Chronicle* (Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, no. 7 = Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, no. 26 III.15) and the *Cyrus Cylinder* (I.17), which would date the prophecy after the battle of Sippar some days before the capture of Babylon, when it was decided to open the doors for the conqueror. The attempt of D.S. Vanderhoof to rescue Herodotus’ story that Babylon was taken by force on the basis of *Jeremiah* 51: 30-2 is unfounded. In this passage it is also stated: “The warriors of Babylon have given up fighting” (as they did after Sippar) and “One runner runs to meet another, and one messenger to meet another, to tell the king of Babylon that

The author of Deutero-Isaiah would have been as disappointed in Cyrus as his Babylonian contemporaries. Cyrus' promise (if it was made at all) to repatriate the Judaeans was probably not implemented before Darius I (cf. nn. 13 and 14). One might ask how the *Verse Account* could be preserved as long as Zeria and Rimut lived. If Waerzeggers' interpretation is correct (see above at n. 145), there is no problem, as the *Verse Account* is pro-Cyrus and Zeria and Rimut are supporting Cyrus' decision to rededicate Esagila to Marduk. But the *Verse Account* may also be the voice of a minority view. As a matter of fact, the Hebrew Bible is also the voice of a minority group in ancient Israel, the "Yahweh Alone party," yet well preserved.¹⁵³

The Cyrus Cylinder and Babylonia.

The *Cyrus Cylinder* is first and foremost a document intended to legitimize Cyrus' rule. In order to justify his conquest it was necessary to blacken his predecessor as much as possible. And so he did. Cyrus wanted to stress that Marduk, the god of Babylon, had turned his back on Nabonidus; from this it logically followed that Marduk had looked for and chosen a new king, who happened to be Cyrus. The reason was that Nabonidus had abominated the cult of Marduk in the temple of Babylon. A full quote of the start of the cylinder is illuminating:

[When Mar]duk, king of the whole of heaven and earth, who, in his ..., lays waste his][..... broa]d(?) in intelligence, [..... who inspects(?) the world quar]ters,[.....] −his [off]spring−, a insignificant (person) (i.e., Belshazzar) was installed for the lordship of his country −and?− [.....] a coun]terfeit (i.e. crown prince Belshazzar) he imposed upon them. A counterfeit of the Esagila he bu[ilt and]x for Ur and the rest of the cultic centers. ritual which was improper to them, [impure] fo[od offerings ir]reverently, he daily recited and offensively he interrupted the regular offerings; he [interfered with the rituals] he established in the midst of the cultic centers. On his own accord [lit.: in his mind] he e[nde]d the worship of Marduk, king of the gods..¹⁵⁴

his city is taken on every side" (to inform Nabonidus who had fled [*Nabonidus Chronicle III.15*?]). However, the author of Jeremiah expected total destruction of Babylon (51: 55-58), which did not happen. It must be admitted that Jeremiah 51 possibly was modified several times. It seems as though the oracle against Babylon was a reworked oracle originally intended for Nineveh. The fact that reference is made to the kings (plural) of Media in vs 11 and 28 and that the enemies are Urartu, the Manneans and the Skythians (vs 27) better fits the Assyrian period, as is suggested by Menko Vlaardingerbroek in his forthcoming dissertation (VU University Amsterdam) *The Greek and Biblical Perception of Mesopotamia. Idiosyncrasies and Distortions*. "He will make an end to the sounds of revelry" (vs 55) may either reflect historical reality (Akitu festival in Tashritu, as suggested by Van der Hooft (p. 359)), but may also betray knowledge of Herodotus I 191 and Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* VII 5.15, a story reworked in Daniel 5. Cf. D. Vanderhooft, "Cyrus II, Liberator or Conqueror? Ancient Historiography concerning Cyrus in Babylon," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, edited by O. Lipschits and M. Oeming (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), pp. 351-72. Vanderhooft is right, of course, in interpreting Cyrus as a conqueror (battle of Sippar!), not a liberator. Tolini argues on the basis of an administrative document concerning repairs on the Enlil Gate, that some force at least was necessary for Cyrus to take the city; cf. Tolini, "Quelques éléments concernant la prise de Babylone par Cyrus" and n. 142 above.

¹⁵³ M. Smith, *Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971); Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*.

¹⁵⁴ *Cyrus Cylinder*. ll.1-7. See Appendix below. It was Finkel who proposed the translation "counterfeit" for *tamšīlu* in l.5 (*ta-am-ši-li É.SAG.ÍL*) and l.4 ([.. *ta-am*]−*ši-li ú-ša-dš-ki-na se-su-un*. Cf. Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*, p. 551. "Counterfeit" has a more negative connotation than the usual translation "imitation" or "replica" and so better fits the context.

The gist of this is clear: Nabonidus had installed an unworthy viceroy in Babylon, had desecrated Esagila, he made a counterfeit of it. Marduk had become angry. The slander that Nabonidus had made a counterfeit of Esagila is also made in the *Verse Account*, another piece of anti-Nabonidus propaganda:

*a-na É.KUR ÈŠ tam-ši-lu si-mat lu-me-šil
É.HÚL.HÚL lu-um-bi zi-kir-šú ana ša-a-tú*

To the temple (=Esagila) he will make equal a temple (*eššu*) that is a counterfeit of a proper appurtenance, he will name it Ehulhul (= name of the temple of Sîn in Harran) for eternity.¹⁵⁵

This reminds us in some way of the attempt of the Assyrian Rabshakeh before Jerusalem to discredit Hezekiah's policy of cult centralization and find support among opponents of it (cf. above).¹⁵⁶ However propagandistic these statements may have been, they are likely to contain some kernel of truth. Hezekiah did take away shrines of Yahweh from the countryside for cult centralization.

But, the Cyrus cylinder continues – and I am paraphrasing now – with Marduk's pity for the people of Sumer and Akkad, who have become like corpses. Marduk decides to show his mercy. "He examined and checked all of the lands, and he searched constantly for a righteous king, his heart's desire. He took his hands, he called out his name: Cyrus, king of Anshan; he proclaimed his na[me] for the rulership over all" and orders him to march on Babylon (ll.11-15).

Phrases reminiscent of the *Cyrus Cylinder* can be found in the inscriptions of Sargon and Esarhaddon. In the Annals of Sargon, we read that the Chaldaean Merodach-Baladan, ruling in Babylon, ignored the will of Marduk for twelve years and even despised the god.

For twelve years against the will of the gods, he ruled and governed Babylon, the city of the Enlil (of the gods). Marduk, the great lord, saw (*i-t u-[ul]!*) the evil deeds of the Chaldaean that he hated, and the deprivation of his royal scepter and throne was established on his lips. Me, Sargon, the reverent king, he (Marduk) chose from all kings and he correctly appointed me. He lifted my head in the land of Sumer and Akkad. To cut off the feet of the Chaldaean, the evil enemy, he made strong my weapons. On the orders of my great lord Marduk, I prepared the weaponry, pitched my camp, and ordered [my soldiers] to march against the evil Chaldaean.¹⁵⁷

Here, Sargon is, like Cyrus, the chosen of Marduk. His predecessor is an evil demon, who rules against the will of Marduk, who is a foreigner, a Chaldaean. Note that the *Dynastic Prophecy* stresses the fact that Nabonidus established a "reign (*palû*) of Harran." Likewise, Esarhaddon claimed to have been chosen by Marduk from his brothers to become king.¹⁵⁸ The wrath of Marduk and his mercy to Babylon are mentioned most clearly in a text by this Assyrian king: "Marduk, the Enlil of the gods, became angry," but he had mercy and ordered the rebuilding of the city.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ *Verse Account* II.6; cf. Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*, p. 567. For a deviating English translation see Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 312-15 (translation A.L. Oppenheim).

¹⁵⁶ *II Kings* 18: 22; cf. the above quoted passage *II Kings* 18: 25 (cf. n. 47).

¹⁵⁷ Annals of Sargon's twelfth year: Lie, *Inscriptions of Sargon*, p. 43: 267-73; Fuchs, *Inschriften Sargons*, pp. 326-33, 255-66; Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, §31.

¹⁵⁸ See above p. 23-24 ad n. 130; Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons*, p. 16, Ep. 11; Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, §651.

¹⁵⁹ See above p. 23 and n. 129.

There is much irony in the observation that Merodach-Baladan adopted the same kind of propagandistic theology:

⁽⁸⁻¹¹⁾[At that] time, the great lord, the god Marduk, had turned away in divine wrath from the land of Akkad, and the evil enemy, the Subarian (= Assyrian), exercised the rule over the land of Akkad for [seve]n [years, unt]il the days had elapsed, the appointed time had arrived, (and) the great [lord], the god Marduk, became reconciled with the land of Akkad, with which he had become angry.

⁽¹²⁻¹⁵⁾He (the god Marduk) looked (with favor) upon Marduk-apla-iddina (II), king of Babylon, prince who reveres him, to whom he (the god Marduk) stretched out his hand, legitimate eldest son of Eriba-Marduk, king of Babylon, who has made firm the foundation(s) of the land. The king of the gods, the god Asari,¹⁶⁰ duly named him [to] the shepherdship of the land of Sumer and Akkad (and) personally said: "This is indeed the shepherd who will gather the scattered (people)."¹⁶¹

In the inscriptions of Sargon and in the *Cyrus Cylinder* (ll.22-8), the king enters Babylon without violence. Just like his Assyrian predecessor, Cyrus presents himself as the one who removes the yoke from the Babylonians and restores a damaged city. In ll.28-30, we read that the kings of all countries came to bring tribute to Cyrus and this returns in the *Dynastic Prophecy* (II.23'). Again, this is a topical remark, taken from the Assyrian annals; Sargon also mentions this in the context of his entering of Babylon.¹⁶²

In 1.33 of the cylinder it is stated that Cyrus allowed the gods of Sumer and Akkad that had been brought to Babylon by Nabonidus, to return to their own cities.¹⁶³ This is exactly what Sargon did in 707 with the gods of Ur, Uruk, Eridu, Larsa, Kisik and Nimid-Laguda whom Merodach-Baladan had seized and taken to Dur-Yakin.¹⁶⁴ It is understandable that Sargon and Cyrus publicly rejected their predecessors' policy to move gods from their temples to other places. Yet, what Merodach-Baladan and Nabonidus had done was not sacrilegious at all. It fits the polytheistic worldview of ancient man, discussed above. The move had two purposes. By collecting as many gods as possible into his city a threatened king could accumulate divine power, which would help his defense. At the same time it was a token of reverence to move the gods of cities that could not be defended and bring them to the most defensible city. Nabonidus' acts in this respect are neutrally mentioned by the *Nabonidus Chronicle*. After reporting that in the 17th year of Nabonidus the New Year's Festival was correctly performed, the text continues:

In the month [II-VI] Lugal-Maradda and the god[s] of Marad, Zababa and the gods of Kish, Ninlil [and the gods of] Hursagkalamma entered Babylon. Until the end of the month Ululu (29 August – 26 September 539 BC) the gods of Akka[d] from everywhere entered Babylon. The gods of Borsippa, Cuthah and Sippar did not enter.¹⁶⁵

Apparently, Borsippa, Cuthah and Sippar were considered to be too close to necessitate migration to

¹⁶⁰ Asari was an ancient Sumerian god, equated with Marduk.

¹⁶¹ Clay cylinder of Marduk-apla-iddin concerning repairs of the Eanna temple in Uruk. This document was found in the North-West Palace of Sargon in Calah (Nimrud) and may have been taken from Uruk as trophy by Sargon. Translation: G. Frame, *Rulers of Babylonia*, p. 137.

¹⁶² Lie, *Inscriptions of Sargon*, p. 55-7: 375-7; Fuchs, *Inschriften Sargons*, p. 155: 314-6 (translation p. 332).

¹⁶³ It is confirmed by the *Nabonidus Chronicle* (Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, no. 7 III.21-2); note that the removal of the gods is criticized in the *Verse Account VI.12-5* (Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*, pp. 572, 578).

¹⁶⁴ Van der Spek, "Struggle of King Sargon," pp. 65-6.

¹⁶⁵ *Nabonidus Chronicle* III.8'-12' (my translation; cf. www.livius.org > Mesopotamia); Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, no. 7; Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, no. 26.

Babylon. The operation was to no avail. One month later Nabonidus' army was defeated at Opis, Sippar was taken on October 10th and Babylon on the 12th. Between November 539 to March 538 "the gods of Akkad, whom Nabonidus had brought down to Babylon returned to their sacred cities," as is neutrally stated in the chronicle (III.21'-2'). It is Cyrus who constructs this as an act of piety and reconciling the gods' anger.

In line with the policy of Sargon and other kings, Cyrus saw to it that the rituals in Esagila were not disturbed and showed reverence to the Babylonian gods, as is stated in the *Cyrus Cylinder* and confirmed by the *Nabonidus Chronicle*. We also read in the *Cyrus Cylinder* that Cyrus sacrificed geese, ducks and turtledoves on top of the usual sacrificial birds (l.37). In this he also simply tries to outdo Nabonidus: in the *En-nigaldi-Nanna Cylinder*¹⁶⁶ Nabonidus makes a similar claim concerning sheep. The section closely mirrors a description of bird sacrifices by Sargon and other Assyrian and Babylonian kings.¹⁶⁷ Finally, we reach the purpose of the cylinder: it is a foundation text for the rebuilding of the wall known as Imgur-Enlil and/or a quay along the city's ditch (ll.38-9). It is remarkable that Cyrus explicitly and reverently referred to an Assyrian king: "An inscription with the name of Assurbanipal, a king who had preceded me, I saw in its midst" (l.43). There are indeed parallels with texts by this king; they were discussed by J. Harmatta, who showed that the royal titles used by Cyrus are Assyrian rather than Babylonian.¹⁶⁸ In this respect Cyrus even went into the footsteps of his wretched predecessor: Nabonidus himself spoke reverently about Assurbanipal.¹⁶⁹

One might ask why there is no reference to any Persian god in the Cyrus cylinder. Didn't the Assyrian kings always stress their allegiance to their supreme god Aššur (next to other gods such as Marduk) and stress the fact that foreign gods had to accept Aššur's supremacy? Didn't the Persian kings have their own tutelary deity in Auramazdā? In the Bisotun Inscription of Darius I, Auramazdā is the only god mentioned by name (apart from "and all the gods").¹⁷⁰ The answer is that the Cyrus cylinder was intended for Babylonian usage and conformed to local religion and practices. In this the cylinder is not unique. The Assyrian building inscriptions of Esarhaddon destined for Babylon do not mention Aššur at all; they are all about Marduk and other Babylonian gods.¹⁷¹ The same is true for the Babylon inscriptions of Assurbanipal, such as the L6 cylinder, discussed above.¹⁷² Darius I, for that matter, applied the same policy. In the copy of the Bisotun Inscription found in Babylon, the name Auramazdā was replaced by

¹⁶⁶ Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*, p. 377, II.18); cf. Beaulieu, *Reign of Nabonidus*, p. 131

¹⁶⁷ References: CAD K s.v. *kurkû* (KUR.GI.MUŠEN), "goose", CAD P s.v. *paspasu* (UZ.TUR.MUŠEN), "duck" and CAD S s.v. *sukanninu* (TU.GUR₄.MUŠEN), "turtledove." For Sargon see Van der Spek, "Struggle of King Sargon," p. 58, inscription from Khorsabad, Room V, pl. 9, l.12.

¹⁶⁸ J. Harmatta, "Les modèles littéraires de l'édit babylonien de Cyrus," in *Commémoration Cyrus: Actes du Congrès de Shiraz 1971 et autres études rédigées à l'occasion du 2500e anniversaire de la fondation de l'empire perse*, vol. 1, edited by J. Duchesne-Guillemin, *Acta Iranica* 1 (Téhéran; Leiden: Bibliothèque Pahlavi and Brill, 1974), pp. 29-44.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. for references see Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*, p. 708.

¹⁷⁰ Babylonian version: Von Voigtlander, *The Bisitun Inscription of Darius the Great. Babylonian Version*, pp. 44 and 61, lines 103 and 104; Persian version "the other gods who are": Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, p. 148-9, IV § 62 and 63.

¹⁷¹ Borger, *Inschriften Asarhaddons*, §§ 11-19, pp. 10-30.

¹⁷² Cylinders L¹ (rebuilding of Esagila and Eturkalamma, mentioning Marduk and Ishtar), L² (rebuilding of Esagila and Ebabbar in Sippar, found in Sippar [Abu Habbal], mentioning Marduk and Šamaš), P¹ (a barrel cylinder probably from Babylon mentioning the return of Marduk), L⁶ (repair of Esagila and the Imgur-Enlil wall), the Emah Cylinder (restoration of Emah, mentioning the goddess residing there, Ninnah [Streck, *Assurbanipal*, II, pp. 226-40]). Stelae S² and S³ (Esagila) only mention the fact that Assurbanipal acts at the command of Aššur, Šamaš and Marduk (*ibid.* pp. 240-8). On brick inscriptions from Babylon it is again Marduk and on bricks from Nippur Enlil (*ibid.* III, pp. 50-3; commentary I, pp. xl-xlv).

Bēl.¹⁷³ The Seleucid king Antiochus I was the last king of whom a clay cylinder is preserved. It was deposited in Borsippa and the concern is only Borsippa's god Nabû (cf. n. 4). No reference to any Greek god is made. As far as we know, Aššur, nor Auramazdā, Zeus or Apollo ever got a shrine in Babylon.

Cyrus' policy, however, was not just one of adoration of Babylon. In everyday life, he acted just like his predecessors. He may have entered Babylon peacefully, as is recorded by the Nabonidus chronicle and by the *Cyrus Cylinder*, but he could only achieve this after having defeated the Babylonian army at Opis and having slaughtered the people, again according to the *Nabonidus Chronicle*.¹⁷⁴ Cyrus did not abolish the tribute that the Chaldaean kings had ordered the temples to pay¹⁷⁵; in the *Cyrus Cylinder* Cyrus is praised for receiving "heavy tribute" from the whole world (ll.28-30). Cyrus made Babylon part of a satrapy with a Babylonian, later a Persian, satrap.¹⁷⁶ The Greek sources also do not unequivocally advocate Cyrus' clemency in Mesopotamia. Although Herodotus' story about Cyrus' conquest of Babylon (after a siege and by a stratagem of diverting the Euphrates) is probably unhistorical, he accentuates the great fear of the Babylonian population for the advance of Cyrus' army.¹⁷⁷ And even Xenophon, in his hagiographic description of Cyrus, describes how Cyrus "sent the companies of cavalry around through the streets and gave them orders to cut down all of whom they found out of doors, while he directed those who understood Syrian (*syristi*, Aramaic) to proclaim to those in their houses that they should stay there, for if anyone should be caught outside he would be put to death" (*Cyr.* VII 4.31). He also made the proclamation "that all Babylonians deliver up their arms; and he ordered that wherever arms should be found in any house, all the occupants should be put to the sword" (VII 4.33).

To summarize: to the best of our knowledge, Cyrus' propaganda and policy are highly traditional, with Babylonian as well as Assyrian precedents.

¹⁷³ Ursula Seidl, "Ein Monument Darius' I. aus Babylon," ZA 89: 101-4; "Eine Triumphstele Darius' I aus Babylon," in *Babylon: Focus mesopotamischer Geschichte, Wiege früher Gelehrsamkeit, Mythos in der Moderne*, Colloquien der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 2 (Saarbrücken: Saarbrückener Drückerei und Verlag 1999), p. 297-306. Cf. W.M.F. Henkelman, *Cyrus the Persian and Darius the Elamite: A Case of Mistaken Identity*, forthcoming in *Herodot und das Perserreich*, edited by R. Rollinger & B. Truschnegg (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz: 2011): ad n. 6.

¹⁷⁴ *Nabonidus Chronicle* III.12-14 (Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, p. 109): ⁽¹²⁾ ITI DU₆ ^mKu-raš šal-tum ina ÚH.KI (=U₄.KÚŠU/ÙH.KI) ina UGU [GÚ] ⁽¹³⁾ ÍD l̄-diq-lat ana ŠÀ ERÍN-ni KUR URI.KI ki DÙ-šú <<ERÍN.MEŠ URI.KI ki DÙ-šú>> UN.MEŠ KUR URI.KI ⁽¹⁴⁾ BAL.KI SAR SAR UN.MEŠ GAZ, "In the month Tašritu (27 September – 26 October 539), when Cyrus did battle at Opis on [the bank of] the Tigris against the army of Akkad, the people of Akkad retreated. He (Cyrus) plundered and killed the people." Cf. Lambert's translation: "In Tishri when Cyrus did battle with the army of Akkad at Opis on the [bank] of the Tigris, the soldiers of Akkad withdrew. He (Cyrus) took plunder and defeated the soldiers (of Akkad)" (W.G. Lambert, "Cyrus' defeat of Nabonidus", *NABU* 2007/14). Though this interpretation is possible, I find it unlikely. Although *nišū* exceptionally can mean "soldiers" (in Assyrian letters in the context of levying and assembling people for all kinds of duties; cf. CAD N/1 s.v. *nišū* 1d), the normal meaning refers to the people of city and countryside. I would say that in this passage a deliberate opposition is made between the Babylonian soldiers (ERÍN-ni = *ummani*) and the Babylonian people (UN.MEŠ = *nišū*). A parallel may be found in the *Diadochi Chronicle* (Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, no. 10: rev.29: UN.MEŠ BALA.KI), where it is stated that the population of Cuthah retreated due to the plundering by the army of Antigonus. In the *Ptolemy III Chronicle* (BCHP 11: 10-1) we see the same opposition: the common people of Babylon (UN.MEŠ) are slaughtered by the heavily armed Macedonian troops of the Egyptian army (^{lu}ERÍN.MEŠ KUR Ha-ni-i).

¹⁷⁵ Dandamaev, "Politique religieuse," pp. 52-3; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, pp. 67-76; M. Jursa, "The Transition of Babylonia from the Neo-Babylonian Empire to Achaemenid rule," in *Regime Change in the Ancient Near East and Egypt: From Sargon of Agade to Saddam Hussein*, edited by Harriet Crawford. Proceedings of the British Academy 136 (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 73-84.

¹⁷⁶ Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, p. 71.

¹⁷⁷ Hdt. I.190.

The Cyrus Cylinder and the Assur Charter of Sargon II

So far we have focused on Babylonia, as the *Cyrus Cylinder* is first of all a document from and concerning Babylon. As matter of fact, if one would look for a first declaration of human rights, the so-called *Assur Charter* has older credentials. It is a document in which Sargon II restores the privileges of the city of Assur, “the city of privilege” (URU *ki-di-ni*, ll.12, 23). The preceding king, Shalmaneser V, is denounced, the invoked god (in this case Aššur) has become angry with this imposter and has chosen Sargon in order to restore the ancient rights. The text starts with an evocation of the god Aššur, just as the cylinder probably started with the evocation of Marduk. It is stated that Aššur “to renew the cult of the temple, to make the ritual perfect, to make the cult center perfect, he steadfastly gazed on me amongst all the black-headed (people) and promoted me (Sargon)” (ll.13-14). The city of Assur, “whose people from ancient times had not known corvée nor forced labor, Shalmaneser (V), who did not reverence the King of the Universe, brought his hand to that city for evil, and so imposed hardship. He grievously imposed corvée and forced labor (upon) its people, (and) so counted (them) as people of serf status (ERÍN.MEŠ *hup-šiš*). At that time the Enlil of the gods in the anger of his heart overthrew his reign (BALA). Me, Sargon, the legitimate king, he promoted; he made me grasp scepter, throne (and) crown” (ll.31-5). “I conceived a desire to bring about the freedom (*zakūtu*) of those citizens” (1.38). The text of the charter was to be inscribed on a silver vessel (1.41).¹⁷⁸

Cyrus and the other nations

On both the fields of religious policy and everyday administration – not just regarding Babylon but also other nations – Cyrus has a good reputation, just like most of his successors. It is often presented as something special that the Persian kings did not intervene in the internal affairs of the foreign nations.¹⁷⁹ One has to remember two things, however.

In the first place, refraining from direct involvement in internal affairs was normal practice among ancient conquerors. Their aim was, above all, to accumulate land and wealth and eliminate any potential rival power. The subdued nations had to pay a certain amount of tribute – how this was collected did not matter – and had to be loyal to their new masters. As long as the subjects paid and were loyal, local rulers could usually remain on their thrones. Only when the vassal kings revolted, stopped paying tribute, or allied themselves to foreign nations, the great king saw a reason to intervene. A new vassal king would be appointed or the kingdom would be converted into a province.¹⁸⁰ The process of provincialization of the conquered countries sped up especially under Tiglath-Pileser III, and had been completed largely (but not completely¹⁸¹) during the Persian Empire. If anything, there is a tendency toward *more* involvement, not

¹⁷⁸ H.W.F. Saggs, “Historical Texts and Fragments of Sargon,” 11-20 (I owe this reference to H. Schaudig).

¹⁷⁹ Cf. n. 2; for a different view see now Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, pp. 79-84.

¹⁸⁰ The system of vassal states is best known in the Hittite empire of the Late Bronze Age thanks to numerous published vassal treaties. The literature is too vast to be mentioned here. For the Assyrian treaties see: Parpola and Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties*. Cf. R.J. van der Spek, “Assyriology and History.”

¹⁸¹ In Cilicia a local dynasty could – until 401 BC – stay in power (Hdt. I.28, 74; Xen. *Anab.* I.2.12; A. Erzen, *Kilikien bis zum Ende der Perserherrschaft* (Ph.D. diss. Leipzig, 1940), pp. 97-130). In Phoenician cities kings could remain seated on their thrones; see H.J. Katzenstein, “Tyre in the early Persian period (539-486 B.C.E.),” *Biblical Archaeologist* 42.1 (1979): 23-34; J.

less. The reorganization of the empire and the increasing burden of taxation during the Achaemenid period (esp. Darius I) seem to have had serious consequences.¹⁸² Cyrus appears to have been less an organizer than a conqueror; he did not introduce important new policies in the administration of the empire. The major changes came only in the reign of Darius I and especially after the revolts of the second year of Xerxes.¹⁸³

In the second place: Cyrus' clemency towards the subdued nations must not be exaggerated. The massacre among the Babylonians after the battle of Opis has already been mentioned. The *Nabonidus Chronicle* mentions how he looted the Median capital Ecbatana after he had captured it.¹⁸⁴ In 547, Cyrus killed the king of Lydia¹⁸⁵ and Lydians, Phrygians, and Urartians were probably deported to Nippur.¹⁸⁶ Although Herodotus reports otherwise, it is likely that Cyrus executed the Lydian king Croesus.¹⁸⁷

Elayi, "L'essor de la Phénicie et le passage de la domination assyro-babylonienne à la domination perse," *BagM* 9 (1978): 25-38. A third example of princes within the Persian empire are the Greek tyrants in Ionian cities.

¹⁸² Olmstead, *Persian Empire*, pp. 185-94 (whose interpretation of Persian "overtaxation" as leading to higher prices, however, is erroneous: overtaxation and hoarding lead to deflation rather than inflation); cf. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, pp. 388-471. See also H.G. Kippenberg, *Religion und Klassenbildung im antiken Judentum* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), pp. 42-77 and *Nehemiah 5: 4*. M. Jursa, C. Waerzeggers, "On Aspects of Taxation in Achaemenid Babylonia," in *Organisation des pouvoirs et contacts culturels dans les pays de l'empire achéménide*, edited by P. Briant and M. Chauveau, *Persika* 14 (Paris: De Boccard, 2009), pp. 237-269.

¹⁸³ Jursa, "The Transition of Babylonia from the Neo-Babylonian Empire to Achaemenid Rule," *passim*. Differently Lisbeth S. Fried, *The Priest and the Great King: Temple-Palace Relations in the Persian Empire* (Winona lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2004), pp. 8-48. She stresses new appointments by the Persian kings, but ignores the fact that Zeria, the šatammu, and Rimut, the zazakku, had remained in office.

¹⁸⁴ *Nabonidus Chronicle* II.2-4 (Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, no. 7; Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, no. 26).

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.* II.16 (Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, no. 7; Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, no. 26). The passage has long been taken to refer to Lydia, but many other readings have been proposed, most recently by Rollinger who argued that it did not regard Lydia but Urartu (*ina ITI GU₄ ana KUR -ú-[raš-tu il-li]k*); R. Rollinger, "The Median 'Empire,' the end of Urartu and Cyrus the Great's Campaign in 547 BC (*Nabonidus Chronicle* II.16)," *Ancient East and West* 7 (2008): 51-65. On March 12, 2013, I collated the tablet together with Mark Geller, Irving Finkel and Stefan Zawadzki, and we all agreed that the reading *Lu* is by far the most acceptable reading, while *ú* is impossible. It was also suggested by professor W.F. Lambert on 3 June 2010 (cf. Stefan Zawadzki, 'The portrait of Nabonidus and Cyrus in their(?) chronicle: When and why the present version was composed' in: Petr Charvát & Petra Maříková Vlčková eds., *Who was King? Who was not king? The rulers and ruled in the Ancient Near East* (Prague 2010) 142-154, esp. 147 n. 27). I now propose the following transliteration of the traces, including those on the right edge: II 16' ... *ina ITI GU₄ ana KUR Lu-ú-[du GI]N* ¹⁷LUGAL-šú GAZ bu-šá-a-šú il-qí šu-lit šá ram-ni-šú *ina ŠÀ*¹ (text: LU) ú-še-li [...] ¹⁸EGIR šu-lit-su ù <É> šar-ri *ina ŠÀ GÁL-ši* (*ušabši*), "in the month Iyyar (Cyrus) [mar]ched to Ly[dia]. He killed its king, he took its valuables (and) a garrison of his own he stationed in it¹". Afterwards he had his garrison and the royal treasury¹ (*bīt šarri*) in it." Note that the verb GAZ = *dâku* can either mean "to kill" or "to defeat," but in the context of an individual the translation "to kill" is to be preferred. So it appears that Croesus was killed, as can be derived from Bacchylides (cf. n.2).

¹⁸⁶ The Murashû archive provides evidence that deportees from Lydia, Phrygia, and Urartu were settled in Nippur. A document from 430 BC mentions the Sardian Midas (¹⁹*Mi-da-* ²⁰*Sa-par-da-a-a* (V. Donbaz, M.W. Stolper, *Istanbul Murashû Texts* (Leiden, Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 1997), p. 79, no. 3: 3). In Nippur was a *hadru* (group of military landholders) of Phrygians and Lydians (²¹*Muš-ka-a-a u Lud-da-a-a* BE X 90: 10f; PBS II/1 144: 31; CBS 5148: 3) and of Urartians and Melitenians (²²*ú-ra-áš-qa-a-a u mi-li-du-a-a*) headed by a *šaknu* (foreman) named *Iltammeš-barakku*: BE 10 107: 2, 3, 6, and Lower Edge; cf. M.W. Stolper, *Entrepreneurs and Empire: The Murashû Archive, the Murashû Firm, and Persian Rule in Babylonia*, PIHANS 54 (Leiden, Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 1985), resp. p. 79, no. 60 and p. 78, no. 53 and p. 250. Cf. I. Eph'al, "The Western Minorities in Babylonia in the 6th-5th Centuries B.C.E.: Maintenance and Cohesion," *Or* 47 (1978): 74-79.

¹⁸⁷ Hdt. I.86-7. See above n. 2.

Cyrus owes his good reputation to the presumed fact that he allowed exiles to return home. There are indeed indications for this, but again, we must not look at the facts in isolation. Allowing the return of exiles was not a new policy; and besides, the Persians were not above exiling other nations themselves.

Regarding Cyrus' decision to allow the exiles to return, we find evidence in the *Cyrus Cylinder* and the Hebrew Bible.¹⁸⁸ The cylinder was in the first place intended for Babylon, and this is the reason why it pays so much attention to this city. Yet, there is also an interesting section (ll.28-34) devoted to other nations, in which the return of exiles is mentioned:

[By his] exalted [command], all of the kings who sit upon thrones, of all the quarters of the world, from the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea, those who dwell [in distant regions], kings of Amurru (= the West), those who dwell in tents,¹⁸⁹ all of them, their heavy tribute they brought to me and in Babylon they kissed my feet. From [Babylon] to Assur and Susa, Akkad, the land of Ešnunna, Zamban, Meturnu, Dēr, as far as the border of Gutium, the cultic centr[es at the other si]de of the Tigris (the eastern bank), whose dwelling places had been in ruin since long, I made the gods, who had dwelled therein, return to their places and made them take residence forever. All of their people I gathered and returned them to their settlements. And the gods of the land of Sumer and Akkad, whom Nabonidus had made enter, at the anger of the lord of the gods, into Babylon, at the command of Marduk the great lord, in wellbeing, I made them dwell in their cellae, dwellings pleasing to their heart.

This is not a full amnesty for all exiles: the decree refers to the gods and people from several cities in Mesopotamia and Iran only. Yet, there is a parallel to the proclamation of Cyrus quoted in *Ezra* 1: 2-4.¹⁹⁰ In both cases, the restoration of the temple is mentioned first, the return of exiles is secondary:

Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: “The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem in Judah.³ Any of those among you who are of his people—may their God be with them!—are now permitted to go up to Jerusalem in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem;⁴ and let all survivors, in whatever place they reside, be assisted by the people of their place with silver and gold, with goods and with animals, besides freewill offerings for the house of God in Jerusalem.”

The edict in *Ezra* 6: 3-5 refers only to the rebuilding of the temple and the return of its vessels. Evidently, there can be no reference to the return of the statue of the Israel's God.

As we have seen, the return of the statues of the deities was nothing new: the Assyrian kings did the same, and not just with Mesopotamian statues.¹⁹¹ At the beginning of his reign, Esarhaddon issued a proclamation that closely resembles Cyrus' edict. The Assyrian king states that he is the one “who allowed the deported gods from the lands of Assyria and Elam to return to their homes, who brought them to quiet

¹⁸⁸ Biblical passages in which Cyrus' name is mentioned: *II Chronicles* 36: 22-23; *Ezra* 1: 1-8; 3: 7; 4: 3-5; 5: 13-17; 6: 13-14; *Isaiah* 44: 25-28; 45: 1-9; *Daniel* 1: 21; 6: 29; 10: 1. The historicity of the return under Cyrus is disputed; cf. nn. 13 and 14.

¹⁸⁹ The Babylonian scribes had a preference for archaic geographic designations. Amurru ('the West'), the biblical Amorites, were traditionally regarded as nomadic tribes who lived in tents, even though that was hardly true in the Cyrus' time. Gutium is an archaic designation for lands east of the Tigris.

¹⁹⁰ E.J. Bickerman, “The Edict of Cyrus in *Ezra* 1,” *JBL* 65 (1946): 249-75 interprets *Ezra* 1 as a oral proclamation and *Ezra* 6: 3-5 (in Aramaic) as the official edict. The authenticity of proclamation and edict is widely contested, e.g., by Gunneweg, *Geschichte Israels*, pp. 135-8; Edelman, *Origins of the ‘Second’ Temple*, pp. 151-208 *et passim*. But even if the edicts are not historical, they still give valuable information of the theological foundation of a return of exiles which is paralleled in the *Cyrus Cylinder*.

¹⁹¹ Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, pp. 35-41.

places until he had finished their temples, enabling the gods to live in their eternal abodes, who took all the necessary measures in the cult centers.”¹⁹² Variants to this text have: “I renewed their ornaments ... I renewed their income.”¹⁹³ We also read that Esarhaddon allowed several Arabian gods, which are mentioned by their names, to return.¹⁹⁴ Assurbanipal even gave a star emblem to an Arabian goddess in gratitude for her help against the Arabian leader Uate.¹⁹⁵ Another example is the restoration of the cult of Yahweh in Samaria by the Assyrians and the installation of an Israelite priest, as mentioned in the book of *Kings*.¹⁹⁶ The closest parallel comes from Nabopolassar, the founder of the Neo-Babylonian dynasty, who like Cyrus at his accession returned gods to Iran, as described in the Babylonian chronicle concerning the early years of Nabopolassar: “The accession year of Nabopolassar in the month Adar: Nabopolassar returned to Susa the gods of Susa whom the Assyrians had carried off and settled in Uruk.”¹⁹⁷

But let us return to the *Cyrus Cylinder*. With the gods, their worshippers returned. This policy has not been pursued by the Assyrian kings on a large scale, but is not unknown. The *Synchronistic History*, a history of the Assyrian-Babylonian conflicts from an Assyrian point of view, informs us about Adad-Nirari III: “He brought [back] the abducted peoples [*and*] assigned to them an income, a regular contribution (*and*) barley rations.”¹⁹⁸ When Sargon II captured Dur-Yakin, he freed the inhabitants of Sippar, Nippur, Babylon, and Borsippa, who had been imprisoned by Merodach-Baladan.¹⁹⁹ Esarhaddon allowed the return of the Babylonians, who had, during the reign of Sennacherib, been sold, expelled, or forced to flee, and he restated the city’s privileges.²⁰⁰

Apparently, both Assyrian and Persian kings found it expedient to allow people, every now and then, to return to their homes. This does not mean that they abandoned their policy of deportation. Cyrus probably deported the inhabitants of Sardis, the capital of Lydia: from the Murašû archive, we know that there was a community of Lydians (“Sardians”) in Nippur.²⁰¹ This deportation may have taken place after

¹⁹² Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons*, §27, Ep. 3: 23-6; Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, §507.

¹⁹³ Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons*, §47, 22-3; Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, §731; A. Goetze, “Esarhaddon’s Inscriptions from the Inanna Temple in Nippur,” *JCS* 17 (1963) p. 130: 1.11.

¹⁹⁴ Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons*, §27 Ep. 14: 6-16; Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, §536; Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, p. 35.

¹⁹⁵ Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, pp. 16-19.

¹⁹⁶ *II Kings* 17: 24-32; according to *Ezra* 4: 2 it was king Esarhaddon who did this.

¹⁹⁷ Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, no. 2: 15-17

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 21: IV.19-20 (= Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, no. 10).

¹⁹⁹ Winckler, *Keilschrifttexte Sargons*, 134-5 (“Prunkschrift”); Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, §40; Fuchs, *Inschriften Sargons*, pp. 189-248 (translation pp. 343-55); Annals of Sargon from Khorsabad: Lie, *Inscriptions of Sargon*, pp. 64-5: 8-9 = Fuchs, *Inschriften Sargons*, p. 169: 373-4 (translation p. 335).

²⁰⁰ Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons*, p. 25, Ep. 37; Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, §655. Two letters to Esarhaddon are relevant. The first is ABL 418 = Reynolds, *The Babylonian Correspondence*, no. 14: ll.10-14, rev. 1-13, a letter of Ubaru, governor (*šaknu*) of Babylon to the king: “I have entered Babylon. The people of Babylon welcomed me, and they bless the king every day, saying: ‘(He is) the one who returned Babylon’s captives and booty.’ Also the chiefs of Chaldea (*lúra-šá-ni šá KUR kal-du*) from Sippar to the mouth of the sea bless the king, saying: ‘(he is) the one who resettled Babylon.’ All the lands are happy before the king, my lord.” The second is ABL 702 = Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*, no. 169, a letter of Zakir complaining about Šillaya, appointee of the king, who wanted to collect taxes, ll.4-10: “The Babylonians and the(ir) governor (*šaknu*) Ubaru (said to them): ‘There is no such order of the king! Last year, in Calah, when you appealed to the king for the collection of old debts (incurred) while Babylon was still intact, he lost temper with you, (shouting): ‘What is there in Babylon (to collect)? The city was in ruins, and I have resettled it and established its freedom! (...) Šillaya does not wish the settling of Babylon’ (rev. 7). See also Landsberger, *Brief des Bischofs von Esagila*, pp. 32-4; M. Dietrich, *Die Aramäer Südbabylonien in der Sargonidenzeit (700-648)*, AOAT 7 (Kevelaer – Neukirchen-Vluyn: Butzon & Bercker and Neukirchener Verlag, 1970), p. 152.

²⁰¹ Cf. n. 186

the Lydian revolt of Pactyes, Cyrus' governor of Sardis.²⁰² According to Herodotus, Cyrus intended to enslave and sell all the Lydians; Croesus is said to have been afraid that this would happen. In the end, Cyrus decided to be lenient, but Pactyes and his fellow-rebels had forfeited their freedom. It was the Median Mazares who executed the order and proceeded to enslave the inhabitants of Priene.²⁰³

Herodotus' expression 'to enslave' can, in this context, only mean 'to deport,' even when it was not the custom in the ancient Near East to lower the status of those who were deported. More often, the people were settled *en bloc* in special settlements, where they could keep their own communities. It is understandable, however, that the Greeks equaled 'enslaving' and 'deportation'. They saw their compatriots disappear to unknown provinces of the Persian Empire, without knowing what happened to them. Because the Greeks had the custom to enslave their prisoners of war, they believed that the Persians had done the same. Besides, the deportations showed the power of the great king, who could treat his people at will, as one does with slaves.²⁰⁴

Deportations by Cyrus' Successors

Later Persian kings also deported people. Histiaeus, who became leader of the Ionian Revolt after the death of Aristagoras in 497, made the Ionians believe that Darius I intended to send the Greeks to Phoenicia and settle Phoenicians in Greece.²⁰⁵ Although Herodotus comments that this was not really among Darius' plans, we may deduce from his account that deportation was considered to be a possibility. Not much later,²⁰⁶ we read how the Persians threatened to enslave the Ionians, castrate their sons, deport their daughters to Bactra, and give their land to others. We know that Darius deported inhabitants of Thrace to Phrygia in Asia Minor,²⁰⁷ and sent people from Miletus to a town near the Persian Gulf.²⁰⁸ On that occasion, the temple of Apollo in Didyma was looted and sacked; the priests, the Branchidae, were sent to Bactria, where Alexander the Great met their descendants.²⁰⁹

In 490, the Persians captured Eretria, looted the temples, sacked the cities, and enslaved the inhabitants.²¹⁰ In Plato's *Laws*²¹¹ we read how this happened: the Persian soldiers gave each other a hand, made a line, and closed the people in as if in a net. The Greek uses a special verb, σαγηνεύω, from σαγήνη, "dragnet." The inhabitants of Chios, Lesbos, and Tenedos were terrorized in the same fashion,²¹² which was a well-known Persian custom. According to Herodotus there were islands in the Persian Gulf

²⁰² Hdt. I.154-6. Suggestion H.T. Wallinga (pers.comm. 07/24/1981), to whom I also owe the following references.

²⁰³ Hdt. I.161.

²⁰⁴ Cf. B. Oded, *Mass Deportations and Deportees in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1979); Eph'al, "Western Minorities"; J. Oelsner, "Zur Sklaverei in Babylonien in der chaldäischen, achämenidischen und hellenistischen Zeit," *AoF* 5 (1977): 71-80; M.A. Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia from Nabopolassar to Alexander the Great* (626-331 BC) (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1984).

²⁰⁵ Hdt. VI.3.

²⁰⁶ Hdt. VI.9.

²⁰⁷ Hdt. V.12, 14-16, 98.

²⁰⁸ Hdt. VI.19-29.

²⁰⁹ Strabo XI.11.4; Q. Curt. VII.5.28-35. Cf. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, pp. 434, 505, 955, 1027; F.L. Holt, *Alexander the Great and Bactria*, Supplements to *Mnemosyne* 104 (Leiden: Brill, 1988), pp. 73-4.

²¹⁰ Hdt. VI.101.

²¹¹ Plato, *Leg.* 698d.

²¹² Hdt. VI.31.

that were used to house deportees, for which he uses the technical term *anaspastos*.²¹³ The expression is also used when he describes the deportation of the Thracians (Paeonians),²¹⁴ and we also read this word when he tells that the inhabitants of Libyan Barca were sent to a village in Bactria.²¹⁵

A non-Greek source confirms deportation as a Persian policy: a Babylonian chronicle about Artaxerxes III tells that in 345 BC prisoners from Sidon reached Babylon and Susa.²¹⁶ This must have been the punishment for a revolt that took place during the reign of Artaxerxes. The landholding groups (*hadrus*) with geographical designations in Nippur, mentioned in the Murashû archive, betray deportations by Persian kings: Phrygians and Lydians, Urartians and Melitenians (cf. above n. 185), *Arūmaja* (an Iranian ethnic group), *Aššiāja* (Asians from Asia = western Asia Minor?), Carians (*Bannēšaja* – who were in Cambyses' army²¹⁷), Cimmerians, Tyrians, Arabs, Indians, and Skudrians²¹⁸

All this shows that the Persians never abolished deportation.²¹⁹ Besides, the Graeco-Macedonian rulers, who succeeded the Achaemenid kings, deported people too. Alexander's policy in Sogdia was ruthless.²²⁰ An inscription from Magnesia informs us that the inhabitants of this city were sent to Antioch-in-Persis.²²¹ Ptolemy I took many captives from Judaea and Samaria and settled them in Egypt.²²² Briant has pointed out that the Macedonian kings in the Hellenistic kingdoms replaced large groups of people in order to populate their newly founded cities.²²³ An example is the resettlement of Babylonians in Seleucia-on-the-Tigris.²²⁴ Another example is the deportation of Jews from Mesopotamia to Asia Minor by Antiochus III.²²⁵

The deportation of large groups of people is a policy that was pursued in the entire history of the ancient Near East, although it did not always happen on the same scale. The greatest and most numerous deportations took place during the reigns of the three kings who founded the Assyrian Empire: Tiglath-Pileser III, Sargon II, and Sennacherib. Later, the number of deportations decreased.²²⁶ This was to be expected, because deportation is especially useful for founding and stabilizing an empire. When it had been solidly founded, the necessity was no longer there. That the Assyrians achieved exactly this stability is proved by the fact that the Babylonians, Persians, and Macedonians could take over their world empire part and parcel. Cyrus benefited from earlier deportations, and could even permit himself a policy of repatriation.

²¹³ Hdt. III.93, VII.80.

²¹⁴ Hdt. V.12.

²¹⁵ Hdt. IV.204; cf. VI.9.

²¹⁶ Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, no. 9: 1-8 (= Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, no. 28).

²¹⁷ C. Waerzeggers, "The Carians of Borsippa," *Iraq* 68 (2006): 1-22.

²¹⁸ Stolper, *Entrepreneurs and Empire*, pp. 72-9; W.F.M. Henkelman, M.W. Stolper, "Ethnic Identity and Ethnic Labelling at Persepolis: The Case of the Skudrians," in *Organisation des pouvoirs et contacts culturels dans les pays de l'empire achéménide*, edited by P. Briant and M. Chauveau, Persika 14 (Paris: De Boccard, 2009), pp. 271-329.

²¹⁹ Cf. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, pp. 505-7.

²²⁰ Alexander destroyed seven Sogdian cities and deported the inhabitants to Alexandria-Eschate; cf. Holt, *Alexander the Great and Bactria*, p. 58.

²²¹ W. Dittenberger, *Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1903), no. 233; English translation: M. Austin, *The Hellenistic World from Alexander to the Roman Conquest: A Selection of Ancient Sources in Translation*, second augmented edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), no. 190.

²²² Joseph., AJ XII.7-8 (I owe the reference to Jona Lendering).

²²³ P. Briant, "Colonisation hellénistique et populations indigènes: La phase d'installation," *Klio* 60 (1978): 57-92.

²²⁴ Paus. XVI.1.3. Cf. R.J. van der Spek, "The Astronomical Diaries as a Source for Achaemenid and Seleucid History," *BiOr* 50 (1993): 97-8, where it is argued that contrary to accepted opinion *Astronomical Diary* -273 B does not refer to this deportation.

²²⁵ Joseph., AJ XII.3.4, §§148-53.

²²⁶ Oded, *Mass Deportations*, p. 19.

This was facilitated by the fact that the Assyrians had kept the communities of the conquered intact.²²⁷ The Neo-Babylonian kings deported their subjects even while keeping their urban organization intact.²²⁸ The Jews in Babylonia could keep and record their traditions. After that, repatriation was comparatively easy. This policy did not shock the people involved deeply: many people preferred to stay in their new countries. The Jewish community of Babylonia still existed in modern Iraq until recently, and the Jews of Persian Ecbatana still had a sanctuary of their own in the time of Flavius Josephus.²²⁹

Conclusion

The Persian attitude towards subject nations did not principally differ from the Assyrian attitude. Cyrus did not introduce a new policy.

Cyrus' much-praised religious 'tolerance' was not a new, but a time-honored policy pursued by many ancient Near Eastern kings, who wanted to have as many gods as possible on their side and hoped to gain the support of their worshippers. 'Tolerance,' in antiquity, was almost never a matter of principle. If a conqueror deemed it useful, he could also forcefully compel a nation into submission, and Cyrus did not abstain from this policy. Such a harsh policy incidentally does not constitute evidence for religious 'intolerance.' Destruction of temples, removal of cult images and the like were not intended to prove that a particular god did not exist, or to prove the correctness of a dogma or creed. Repression of religious practices was rare in antiquity; it was, however, at issue when a monotheistic religion (of the victor or the vanquished) was involved, when religion had become the vehicle of rebellion, or was considered to be hostile towards the state.

Regarding Babylon, Cyrus' policy was traditional as well. Showing reverence to the ancient city and its civilization was a policy that had also been pursued by earlier kings. Sennacherib and to some extent Nabonidus are rare exceptions. If the situation required it, the Persians could be merciless too. Xerxes' targeted measures against the rebellious temple elite of a number of Babylonian temples (but not against the cults as such), is a good example that also underlines the pragmatic nature of such measures.

Finally, we have seen that Cyrus' treatment of subdued nations did not introduce new elements. Non-interference with local government is a common characteristic of the empires of the ancient Near East. Still, the influence of the central government had a tendency to increase since the days of Tiglath-Pileser III. Cyrus did not abandon this policy. The policy of deportation exhibits a certain development: after the first mass deportations by the Assyrian conquerors, their number and volume gradually decreased since the days of Esarhaddon. Yet this policy never disappeared; the Seleucids still deported people. Cyrus' permission to the deportees to return was not innovative either: it belongs to a general policy of, on the one hand, punishment and intimidation and, on the other hand, pragmatic clemency – a policy that could be applied to both human beings and their gods.

It is also evident that it is misleading to treat categories, like "the Babylonians" or "the priesthood," as if they were always of one opinion and acted unitedly. As always, real society is and was more complex.

What created Cyrus' remarkable popularity? A partial explanation is Cyrus' policy of appeasement of local elites, a policy which he shares with other successful conquerors and founders of

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-5.

²²⁸ Eph'al, "Western Minorities."

²²⁹ Joseph. *Vit.* 11.

empires like Tiglath-Pileser III, Sargon II, Alexander the Great, T. Quinctius Flamininus, Julius Caesar, Augustus and others. With a shrewd policy combining (ruthless) military power, negotiations with local elites and sometimes real or fictional invitations to intervene, these conquerors were able to acquire a certain degree of acceptance from the subdued.²³⁰ This policy must entail tangible benefits for elites and citizens, like respect for age old traditions and confirmation of privileges, endowments to temples, tax exemptions, repatriation of peoples and their gods and this must be accompanied by efficient propaganda, in which the ousted ruler is depicted as violator of old traditions and privileges. When the reality of imperial rule becomes evident – conquerors demand income – and insurrections start, repression of local elites can be the result, like in the time of Sennacherib and Xerxes.

Cyrus was very successful in his propaganda and modern historiography is still influenced by it. This success is explained by the fact that relevant groups of people, i.e. relevant in the sense of their literary heritage, rightly or wrongly could ascribe benefits to this ruler: Babylonian scribes (*Cyrus Cylinder; Verse Account*), Jewish exiles who gratefully saw that the kingdom that had brought them into captivity was beaten (Hebrew Bible), Greek authors who had acquaintance with Persians regarding Cyrus as the liberator from the ‘Median yoke’ and who liked to make an opposition between the ‘father’ Cyrus and the evil Xerxes, the destroyer of Athens (Herodotus, Xenophon, Alexander historians). It is interesting to note how this propaganda works. The Babylonian sources hail Cyrus because he rescued Babylon from oppression by Nabonidus and saved the city, the Hebrew authors expected Cyrus to destroy it. In both cases Cyrus went his own way. He did not kill Nabonidus and he did not destroy Babylon.

It is the difficult task of modern historians to look through these images created by Cyrus himself and by groups with their different interests and biases to create a balanced picture. A way to do this is to examine Cyrus’ deeds and propaganda in the light of comparable policies and propaganda of preceding and succeeding kings of the same period and region. This does not mean that all kings and emperors pursued exactly the same policy. Different kings have different characters and have to cope with different problems. Some rulers are more inclined to clemency than others, and Cyrus’ reputation must have some basis in his deeds. What I have tried to show, however, is that this policy was part and parcel of well-established customs among ancient Near Eastern kings and that the interpretation of the *Cyrus Cylinder* as “the first declaration of human rights” is anachronistic and certainly a misnomer.

²³⁰ A. Kuhrt, “Alexander and Babylon,” pp. 121-30. Acceptance obviously does not imply absence of resistance. The fact that usurpers from the time of Darius I claimed to be sons of Nabonidus and the fact that polemic documents like the *Verse Account* were produced attest to that fact. Cf. Beaulieu, *Reign of Nabonidus*, p. 323.

Appendix: The Cyrus Cylinder

The text of the Cyrus cylinder is thus far known from two documents.

A1: Barrel clay cylinder (BM 90920; 1880-06-17,1941) found in Babylon by H. Rassam in 1879. Length: 21.9 cm, diameter 7.8 and 7.9 cm (edges) to 10 cm (middle). ll. 1-11, 36-45 are partly lost; ll. 24-31 contain a small gap.

A2: A fragment of this cylinder showed up in 1972 at Yale University (NBC 2504); its contains lines 36-40 of the main text and is now joined with it.

In 2010, two fragments from one large tablet were identified in the British Museum, the first by W.G. Lambert (BM 47176), the second by I.L. Finkel (BM 47134)

B1: BM 47134 (1881-8-30,656); part of lines 1-2; 42-45

B2: BM 47176 (1881-8-30,698); part of lines 33-37.

Editions

Editio Princeps:

A1: H.C. Rawlinson, *The Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia Vol. V. A Selection from the Miscellaneous Inscriptions of Assyria and Babylonia* (London: R.E. Bowler, 1875), no. 35 = V R 35.

A2: P.-R. Berger, “Der Kyros-Zylinder mit dem Zusatzfragment BIN II Nr.32 und die akkadischen Personennamen im Danielbuch,” ZA 65 (1975): 192-234.

Latest scholarly edition of A1-2: Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*, pp. 550-6, with references to earlier editions.

Previous English translation:

A. Kuhrt, *Persian Empire*, pp. 70-4.

Complete new edition including B1 and B2 with transliteration, translation, commentaries and studies of the object:

I. Finkel (ed.) *The Cyrus Cylinder. The King of Persia’s Proclamation from Ancient Babylon* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013).

Cf. also: I. Finkel, www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/article_index/c/cyrus_cylinder_-_translation.aspx

The translation below results from a reading class on texts of Nabonidus and Cyrus at VU University (Amsterdam), organized by Marten Stol and myself in fall 2009, for which our students Barend Maltha and Bastian Still prepared an edition, translation and commentary (forthcoming on www.livius.org). It is based on the edition of the cylinder fragments A1-2, combined with Finkel’s translations of B1-2 on the British Museum website. Each line contains ca. 55 signs, but in the later part of the cylinder the signs seem to be more widely spaced. In the transliteration two dots (..) represent the space for approximately one missing sign. See also www.livius.org/ct-cz/cyrus_I/cyrus_cylinder.html. We thank Irving Finkel for sharing the information concerning the new fragments with us and for suggestions of some of the translations prior to the publication of his new edition. Nevertheless, our translation diverges at some points from Finkel’s and any mistakes are our sole responsibility.

1. [When Mar]duk, king of the whole of heaven and earth, who, in his ..., lays waste his]

2. [.....] broa]d(?) in intelligence, [.... who inspects(?) the world quar]ters,

3. [...] -his offspring-, a insignificant (person) (i.e., Belshazzar) was installed for the lordship of his country.
4. -and? - [..] a coun]terfeit (i.e. crown prince Belshazzar) he imposed upon them.
5. A counterfeit of the Esagila he bu[ilt and ..]x for Ur and the rest of the cultic centers.
6. a ritual which was improper to them, [impure] fo[od offerings ..]ir]reverently, he daily recited and offensively
7. he interrupted the regular offerings; he [interfered with the rituals ..] he established in the midst of the cultic centers. On his own accord [lit.: in his mind] he e[nde]d the worship of Marduk, king of the gods.
8. He continuously did evil against his city [i.e., Marduk's city]. Daily [...] his [peo]ple; by the yoke, without relief he ruined all of them.
9. At their complaints, the Enlil of the gods [i.e., Marduk] became furiously angry an[d ..] their boundaries. The gods who dwell within them [i.e., the temple precincts], they abandoned their cellae,
10. out of anger [i.e., Marduk's] that he [i.e., Nabonidus] had made (them) enter into Babylon. Marduk, the ex[alted Enlil of the gods] relented. To all the inhabited places, of which the sanctuaries were in ruin,
11. and (to) the people of the land of Sumer and Akkad who had become (like) corpses he turned his mind and took pity on them. He examined and checked all of the lands,
12. he searched constantly for a righteous king, his heart's desire. He took his hands, he called out his name: Cyrus, king of Anshan; he proclaimed his na-me- for the rulership over all.
13. The land of Gutium, all of the Umman-manda (i.e., the Medes) he made (them) bow at his feet. The black-headed people, whom he (Marduk) had subjected into his (Cyrus') hands,
14. with justice and righteousness he (Cyrus) shepherded them time and again. Marduk, the great lord, caretaker of his people, looked joyfully upon his good deeds and righteous heart.
15. He ordered him to go to Babylon his city. He made him take the road to Tintir (= Babylon), and like a friend and companion, he walked at his side all the way.
16. His vast army, whose number cannot be known, like water (drops) in a river, went at his side, girded with their weapons.
17. Without a fight or a battle he made him enter Shuanna (=Babylon), his city. Babylon, he turned (away) from hardship. He delivered Nabonidus, the king who did not revere him, into his hands.

18. All of the people of Tintir (=Babylon), all the land of Sumer and Akkad, nobles and governors, they bowed to him and kissed his feet. They rejoiced at his kingship and their faces shone.

19. The lord by whose support all the dead were revived, he spared them all from hardship and distress, they greeted him friendly and praised his name.

20. I am Cyrus, king of the world, great king, strong king, king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four quarters,

21. son of Cambyses, great king, king of Anshan, grandson of Cyrus, great king, king of Anshan, descendant of Teispes, great king, king of Anshan,

22. the eternal seed of kingship, whose reign Bel and Nabu love, whose kingship they desire for their heart's pleasure. When I entered Babylon in a peaceful manner,

23. in rejoicing and celebration, I established my lordly abode in the royal palace. Marduk, the great lord, ~~estab~~-lished for me ~~as his~~ f[a]te a magnanimous heart, which lov~~es~~ Babylon. Daily I sought his worship

24. My vast army marched peacefully in the midst of Babylon. I did not allow any trouble maker in all of the la[nd of Sumer] ~~and~~ Akkad.

25. I shepherded in well being the city of Babylon and all its cultic centers. The citizens of Babylon [...] upon [w]hom he (i.e. Nabonidus) had imposed a yoke which was not decreed for them as if without di[vine inten]tion.

26. I put to rest their exhaustion, their burden(?) I released. Marduk, the gre[at] lord, rejoiced at [my good] deeds

27. and kindly sent blessings upon me, Cyrus, the king who worships him, and Cambyses, [my] offspring, [and] my enti[re] army,

28. so that we could go [about] in peace and wellbeing before him. [By his] exalted [command], all of the kings who sit upon thrones,

29. of all the quarters of the world, from the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea, those who dwell [in distant regions], kings of Amurru [i.e. the West], those who dwell in tents, all of them,

30. their heavy tribute they brought to me and in Babylon they kissed my feet. From [Babylon] to Aššur and Susa,

31. Akkad, the land of Ešnunna, Zamban, Meturnu, Dēr, as far as the border of Gutium, the cultic cent[ers at the other si]de of the Tigris [i.e. the eastern bank], whose dwelling places had been founded in ancient times, (or: in ruin: cf. line 10)

32. I made the gods, who had dwelled therein return to their places and made them take residence for ever. All of their people I gathered and returned them to their settlements.

33. And the gods of the land of Sumer and Akkad, whom Nabonidus had made enter, at the anger of the lord of the gods, into Babylon, at the command of Marduk the great lord, in wellbeing,

34. I made them dwell in their cellae, dwellings pleasing to the heart. May all the gods who I had made enter into their cultic centers

35. daily plead in front of Bel and Nabu to lengthen my days and may they speak words on behalf of my welfare, and may they say to Marduk, my lord that: "King Cyrus, who worships you and Cambyses, his son,

36. $x \neg x \neg [\dots \dots \dots]x$. May they be the providers of our shrines until distant(?) days, $x[\dots \dots (\dots)]$.” The people of Babylon blessed the kingship, (and) all of the lands (i.e. their population(s)) I made dwell in peaceful abodes.

37. [...] (l. 38) [Dai]lly I increased copiously (l.37) [the number of offerings with N] goose, two ducks, ten turtledoves, above the (former offerings of) a goose, ducks and turtledoves

38. [...] Dur-Imgur-Enlil, the great wall of Babylon, I sought to strengthen its [defe]nse.

39. [...] the quay of baked bricks on the bank of the city moat, which a former king ha[d] built, but had not completed its construction-work,

40. [...] who had not made it surround the city] on the outside, which a former king had not made, his (i.e. Cyrus') workmen, the lev[y of his land, in/to] Babylon.

41. [..... with bitumen] and baked bricks, I made anew
and [completed th]eir [work].

42. [...] splendid gates of cedar] with a bronze overlay, thresholds and door-sockets [cast in copper, I installed^{l.43} in all t]heir [gates].

43. [.....] an inscription of Assurbanipal , a king who went before [me, I saw in its midst].

44. [.....] in its place(?). May Marduk, the great lord, [*present to me*¹⁴⁵] as a gift [a long] life and the fullness of age, a secure throne and an enduring reign.

44. [.....] in its place(?). May Marduk, the great lord, [*present to me*¹⁴⁵] as a gift [a long] li[fe and the fullness of age, a secure throne and an enduring rei]gn