

FAUST, A. — *The Neo-Assyrian Empire in the Southwest. Imperial Domination and its Consequences*. Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York, 2021. (24 cm, XIII, 373). ISBN 978-0-19-884163-0. \$ 115.00.

In this handsomely produced volume, illustrated by 21 useful figures and maps, Israeli archaeologist Avraham Faust offers an assessment of a peripheral area of the Assyrian Empire that covers only some 25,000 square kilometres (6) but whose commemoration of the interaction with the Assyrians – in the form of the Biblical narratives – continues

to deeply shape the modern appreciation of this ancient state. The topic of this monograph matches that of the 2018 volume *The Southern Levant under Assyrian Domination*, which the author co-edited with Shawn Zelig Aster as the proceedings of a 2015 workshop that brought together a group of scholars based in Israel. The new volume is an extended version of Faust's joint introduction with Aster and his own contribution to the 2018 book. In our review in *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 151 (2019: 155-158; quoted), Poppy Tushingham and I remarked on the lack of a clear geographical definition of the "Southern Levant". Faust is now more explicit and starts off by saying that "the Southern Levant – the lands of the Bible – formed the southwestern margins of the [Assyrian] empire" (1) and later specifies that "in modern terms, the southwestern periphery of the Assyrian empire incorporates the southern tip of Lebanon, as well as much of Israel, the Palestinian authority, and the western part of Jordan" (6). This area, albeit with a very marked focus on the regions in modern Israel that is owed to that country's high level of archaeological activity, is investigated in Faust's new book in ten chapters that are described as the result of two decades of research, which first began to take shape in 2002 (xi).

The introduction (= Chapter 1; 1-34) contextualises the volume in the study of empires, a booming field of research since the mid-1990s, and then summarises the Assyrian Empire's historical development and its organisation (8-22), drawing on some of the rich literature on the subject. Faust owes his view of the empire mainly to works based on textual sources close to the Assyrian crown and not on the substantial work on Assyrian-period settlements and infrastructure outside of the core region, which has emerged in the last thirty years from fieldwork in Syria, then Turkey and finally the Kurdish Region of Iraq and sheds light onto life in the provinces and client states; this is presumably in part due to the long gestation period of the book. Differences between the Assyrian texts' top-down view on the constituent parts of the empire and the results of archaeological fieldwork are apparent in all these regions, and by seeing this disconnect as highly specific to his area of study, Faust is limiting his analysis in ways that may obscure key aspects. One notes also, in the introduction and throughout the book, a tendency to cherry-pick verbatim quotes in a way that distorts rather than engages with the views of others. An example that draws on my own work is the use of a context-free half sentence from my *Ancient Assyria: A Very Short Introduction* (2015) that deportation "could indeed be regarded as a privilege rather than a punishment" in order to set up a supposed counterargument introduced by "This, however, is difficult to accept" (22). The subsequently expressed views reflect the generally held views on the empire's self-serving use of mass resettlement that I share, as Faust must realise having read not only my 2015 book but also my 2019 paper "The 'Lost Tribes of Israel' in the context of the resettlement programme of the Assyrian Empire" (in S. Hasegawa, C. Levin and K. Radner, eds., *The Last Days of the Kingdom of Israel*, Berlin 2019, 101-123; quoted elsewhere in the book but curiously not here). The reader should note the most recent study on the matter by K. Sano, *Die Deportationspraxis in neuassyrischer Zeit* (Münster 2020; not referenced). Instances of the cavalier use of other people's voices can be found throughout the volume, and also in the subsequent summary of the academic discourse on the empire's rule of the south-

western regions (23-26) that focuses on the supposedly mainstream "Assyrian peace paradigm", and the author's rejection of it. As already noted in our review of the 2018 volume, which contains a shorter version of this same section, the idea is not prevalent among specialists of the Assyrian Empire. The updated version now offers a paragraph, introduced with "Despite its prevalence, however, this view is clearly not shared by all scholars" (25), with a selection of dissenting voices (including the influential Assyrian specialists A.K. Grayson and M. Liverani), but nevertheless arrives at the conclusion that "Still, the 'Assyrian peace' paradigm is very dominant" (26). The only discernible reason for insisting on this point is Faust's apparent eagerness to be seen as revisionist. As a potted historiography of the subject, the section falls short, as does any summary of past research in which the author's views are not properly contextualised within the broader discourse. Here and in general, the discussion would have gained in relevance if Faust had juxtaposed the discourse within Israeli archaeology with that of research on the Assyrian Empire more broadly. The introduction goes on to present the primary sources and the chronology (26-31) and closes with a synopsis of the book's chapters (31-34).

Chronologically, the volume covers the period from the first contacts between the Assyrian Empire with the regional polities in the 9th century BCE to the empire's collapse in the late 7th century BCE. Chapter 2 discusses the time "Before the Empire: The Southern Levant in the Eighth Century BCE" (35-59) in a region-by-region analysis of settlement history and demography that then focuses on urbanization, economy and social structures in Israel and Judah. Faust emphasises the increases in settlement and population throughout the area and aptly highlights the regional differences. Chapter 3 is entitled "'Ah, Assyria, the Rod of My Anger': The Assyrian Takeover of the Southwest" (60-72) and starts off in the 9th century BCE when the inscriptions of Shalmaneser III of Assyria (858-824 BCE) first mention the region and then draws on Assyrian and Biblical texts to trace the Assyrian conquests until the reign of Sennacherib (704-681 BCE). Chapter 4 is the counterpart to Chapter 2 and deals with the situation "Under the Empire: Settlement and Demography in the Southwestern Periphery of the Assyrian Empire in the Seventh Century BCE" (73-115). Faust argues that for the first time, the southern regions, which he sees as geographically and climatically disadvantaged and which were linked to the Assyrian crown in a client state relationship, eclipsed the northern regions that now were part of the provincial system of the empire economically and demographically. The chapter has an appendix entitled "The Causes for Settlement Decline" (110-115), which looks at the possible roles of death (in battle, through famine and epidemics, by execution), refugees and deportations.

Chapter 5, entitled "Prosperity, Depression, and the Empire: Economic Developments in the Southwest during the Seventh Century BCE" (116-138), seeks to reconstruct the region's economy and trade activities in the time of the Assyrian hegemony. The available data is more limited than that harnessed for chapters 2 and 4 but Faust is able to make a good case that the southern regions, which were in a client relationship to the Assyrian Empire, were more prosperous than the northern regions, which had been integrated as provinces in the 8th century BCE. The importance of the Mediterranean trade, via the Phoenician ports, emerges clearly too. Chapter 6 is called "Assyrians in the Southwest?"

The Evidence for Assyrian Administration and Presence” (139-180) and draws attention to the fact that evidence for Assyrian material culture, including cuneiform documents, is quite sparse in the region under study. For once, comparison is made with other regions of the empire, namely with Dur-Katlimmu on the Khabur, Til-Barsip on the Euphrates, and Kinalua on the Orontes (149-151), where the Assyrian presence is more readily observable archaeologically, but it remains unclear why these three sites were picked among dozens of possible candidates. Picking e.g. the equally well-excavated provincial capitals Carchemish and Sam'al would have produced a markedly different picture where the Assyrian presence would have been far less pronounced locally; it would have been sensible to also look at sites within Assyrian client states, such as e.g. Godin Tepe in western Iran (see H. Gopnik and M.S. Rothman, *On the High Road: The History of Godin Tepe*, Costa Mesa CA 2011). In addition to the cuneiform texts (139-145), the focus of this chapter is on possible Assyrian palatial and military architecture (151-160) and the so-called Assyrian Palace Ware (160-164).

Building on the evidence discussed in the previous sections, Chapter 7 is devoted to “The Empire in the Southwest: Reconstructing Assyrian Activity in the Provinces” (181-213) and seeks to extrapolate how the empire manifested itself in certain micro-regions. One is somewhat surprised not to find reference to the influential 1998 article by Mario Liverani (“The Growth of the Assyrian Empire in the Habur/Middle Euphrates Area: A New Paradigm”, *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 2: 81-98; used elsewhere in the volume), as the mechanisms that Faust sees at play largely correspond to Liverani’s interpretation of certain sites as network nodes. Chapter 8 switches the perspective from the Assyrian Empire to the local populations and investigates “Local Responses to the Empire: From Armed Resistance to Integration” (214-238) by drawing primarily on the Biblical evidence. In Chapter 9, entitled “They Make a Desolation and They Call It Peace”: Re-Examining the Nature of the Imperial Peace” (239-258), Faust returns to his deconstruction of the concept of the “Assyrian peace”, framed by lengthy discussions that harness Gibbon’s views on the Roman Empire and Kipling’s on the British Empire. From this chapter, it emerges more clearly than from the introduction that the term is almost exclusively used by scholars dealing with Israel and Judah; in the historian’s view, the discussion would have gained in interest from acknowledging this and making it a more central part of the analysis. Chapter 10 (“Empire by Design? Imperial Policies and Planning and the Conquest of the Southwest”, 259-281) and Chapter 11 (“A Province Too Far? The Assyrian Empire, Its Southwestern Margins, and the Dynamics of Imperial Expansion, Conquest, and Rule”, 282-300) form a pair and offer a concluding analysis that contextualises the southwestern region within the empire, with the focus very much on food production and the transport of the resultant goods. The first chapter argues that the Assyrian provinces were primarily designed to support the central region through the supply of agricultural produce, and the second argues that the southwestern regions were too far away from the centre, impossible to connect to the riverine network that constituted the backbone for the transport of such goods, and that this was the key reason why the Assyrian Empire neglected the provinces it had created in that region. But is it really realistic to assume that agricultural produce from the provinces was destined to be transported to

the empire’s core? The logistical challenges for such a system would have been immense for a great many of the ca. 70 Assyrian provinces in existence in the 7th century BCE. What the intensive archaeological work conducted in the hinterland of the consecutive imperial capitals Kalhu, Dur-Sharrukin and Nineveh instead showcases is that from the late 8th century BCE onwards, the agricultural capacity of the core region was dramatically increased through the creation of large-scale, interregional systems of canals and aqueducts (see D. Morandi Bonacossi, “Water for Nineveh. The Nineveh Irrigation System in the Regional Context of the ‘Assyrian Triangle’: A First Geoarchaeological Assessment,” in H. Kühne, ed., *Water for Assyria*, Wiesbaden 2018, 77-115). Again, more interest in the fieldwork conducted elsewhere in the empire could have usefully sharpened Faust’s analysis and opened up alternative scenarios. More than anything, this book brings to attention the urgent need to properly integrate the results of Israeli Iron Age research into the study of the Assyrian Empire.

The indices consist of an index of names, which somewhat unexpectedly lists all modern authors whose works are quoted in the book (347-354), a more useful index of places (355-361) and a subject index, which also includes personal names such as Ahab, Ashurnīrārī (a bizarre rendering) or Tuba’il (362-373). The index of places would have greatly benefitted from the addition of cross references, the use of which is sparse and unsystematic, especially as there is no discernible rationale as to under which name a site is quoted (Assyrian, Biblical, or modern). E.g., there are entries both for Dur-Sharrukin and Khorsabad, thus featuring both a version of the Assyrian name and the modern village lending its name to the ancient ruins. In the case of Kalhu / Nimrud / Calah, we even get entries for the Assyrian, the modern and the Biblical name, while the city of Guzana is listed under this Assyrian name and the Biblical rendering Gozan, but not under the widely used ruin name Tell Halaf. As different pages are listed in each entry, and in the absence of any cross references, the reader has to bring a high degree of existing knowledge to the table in order to identify all relevant passages. For the city of Kinalua, there is also an entry under the ruin name of Tell Tayinat, and in this rare case, even cross references, but not to the third entry for the Biblical rendering Calneh. Many sites appear in the index only under an ancient name, sometimes with the ruin name added, e.g. “Tušhan (Ziyaret Tepe)”, but often without, such as Sam'al, whose widely used ruin name Zincirli is nowhere to be found. In the case of the entries for Tell Aḥmar and “Til Barsip (Tell Aḥmar)”, and for Sheikh Hamad and “Dur-Katlimmu (Tell Šēḥ Ḥamad)”, the use of different spellings for the modern names obscures the identification. This general haphazardness massively reduces the usefulness of the place index. But it also highlights that the compilation of the indices did not prompt the author to check and harmonise the spellings of names across the volume.

That this is a book underpinned by a serious research effort is clear from the fact that Faust references around a thousand journal articles, book chapters and monographs, collected in a lengthy bibliography (300-346) that forms in itself a useful research resource. It will be clear from the previous discussion that not all of this literature has been used reliably wherever appropriate in the book. One must also note that a disregard for diacritics distorts the names of many authors, e.g. Tamás Dezső (not Dezso), Denyse

Homès-Fredericq (not Homes-Fredriq), Ulrich Hübner (not Hubner), Hartmut Kühne (not Kuhne) or Josef Wiesehöfer (not Wiesehofer), here and throughout the volume; and in the rare instances that works in languages other than English or Hebrew are offered at all the titles can be badly mangled, such as A.M. Bagg's 2007 volume *Die Urts-und Gewässernamen der neoassyrischen Zeit* (quoted under RGTC 7/1). When discussing the sources for his study (26-30), Faust focuses only on the primary material but should perhaps have made explicit the linguistic constraints that necessitated sidelining the substantial bodies of relevant secondary literature in languages other than English and Hebrew.

Despite its limitations, the book under review will be of great relevance to all those with an interest in the history and archaeology of Israel and Judah and their immediate neighbours, but also to those who study the Assyrian Empire and its mechanisms of governance and exploitation, and any archaeologist working with materials from this kingdom's centre, provinces and client states. The fact that modern Israel, from where the bulk of the archaeological data analysed in Faust's book derives, is split into regions that once were provinces of the Assyrian Empire and others that were client states until the empire's end makes the material very important for any attempt to assess these two different strategies of imperial control and their local manifestation and impact. Much remains to be done.

LMU Munich,
21 December 2022

Karen RADNER

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