

Marduk – his anger lasted but a moment – turned (the Book of Fate) upside down and ordered its (the city's) restoration in the eleventh year . . . I summoned all of my artisans and the people of Karduniash (Babylonia) in their totality. I made them carry the basket and laid the headpan upon them. In choice oil, honey, butter, wine, wine of the shining mountains, I laid its foundation walls . . . Babylon the city under feudal protection, Imgur-Bel, its wall, Nmitti-Bel, its outer wall, from their foundations to their turrets, I built anew." (Luckenbill 1989, 242-44).

In this text, Esarhaddon was not only the rebuilder of Babylon, but also Marduk's earthly representative. The

text is also revision since the true destroyer of Babylon, Sennacherib, is never mentioned by name.

Assyrian Warfare and Tactics

The Assyrians rebuilt and refurbished old cities such as Ashur and Babylon and created new cities like Kalah and Sargonville, but what allowed them to make those great works of art and architecture was a level of brutality that has rarely been matched in history. The Assyrians were notable during the Neo-Assyrian period for developing new battlefield and control tactics, as well as inventing new weapons, to the extent that they were arguably the first people in history to turn warfare into a science. The Assyrians' tactics had psychological components, and

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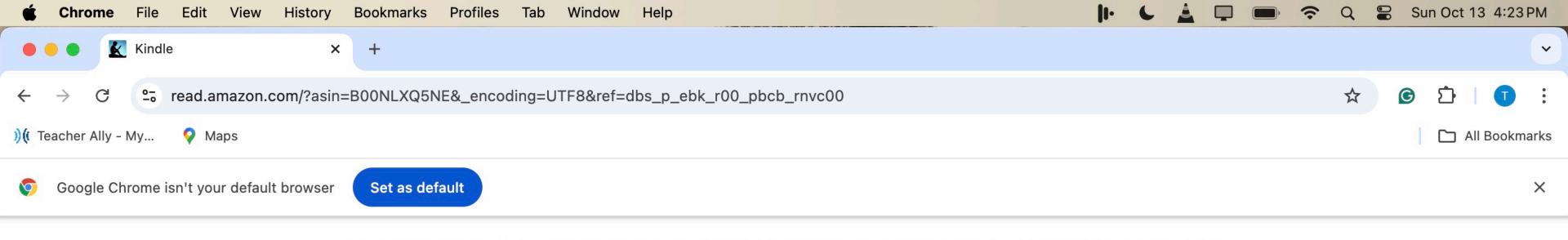












the army and the government were so intertwined that the one fed the other. If anything, it was the army that gave the empire's government a reason to exist.

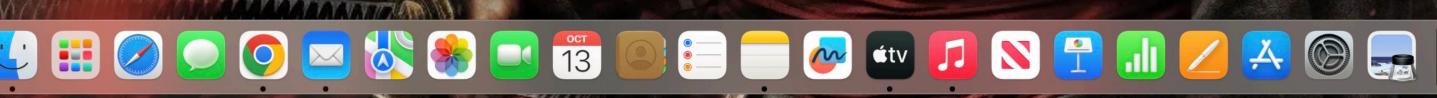
Like most groups that rely on warfare, the Assyrians had unusually martial element in their society. Any adult Assyrian male could be conscripted into military service, and all state offices were designated as military posts (van de Mieroop 2007, 230). Kings played an active role in the military and usually fought in campaigns; in fact, they did not stay behind the lines, and Sargon II was even killed in battle (van de Mieroop 2007, 230). In earlier periods, military campaigns were only fought during the summer after the harvest (when peasant men

could be spared to fight and mountain passes were clear), but by the later Neo-Assyrian period, the presence of a standing army meant that the Assyrians could go to war at any time (van de Mieroop 2007, 230). Since Assyria was a landlocked country it had to rely on mercenary sailors, primarily Phoenicians, who transported the army longer distances and fought sea battles (van de Mieroop 2007, 230).

The Assyrian army had a clear advantage over most of their enemies due to their advanced weapons, which were unmatched at the times in terms of technology. A number of pictorial reliefs from the ruins of the various Assyrian royal palaces relate details that are

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not mentioned in the annals, particularly the type of weapons the Assyrians used to lay siege to well defended cities. In one relief scene from the palace at Kalah, which is now housed in the British Museum (WA 115634+118903) and dated to the reign of Tiglathpileser III, the Assyrians are depicted besieging a walled city with an incredible weapon. The weapon is a wheeled siege machine that has giant spears projecting from its front, presumably to "lever away at the fortifications of the town" (Curtis and Reade 1995, 60). The machines were moved by men who were protected by a leather covering where water was probably stored inside to protect the machine from fire attacks (Curtis and Reade 1995, 60). On the other side of the relief Assyrian

soldiers are depicted using ladders to successfully scale the wall of the city (Curtis and Reade 1995, 60). Numerous other examples exist in relief of clever siege engines that the Assyrians used to break down their enemies' city walls, but what really made the Assyrian army feared was their treatment of enemy populations.



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The Assyrian treatment of enemy populations approached a level of brutality that would have made Genghis Khan blush. Usually, the Assyrian army would approach an enemy territory with an overwhelming force, and if they did not surrender, the cities and villages that were deemed easy targets were attacked first. Once captured, the unfortunate inhabitants of a resistant region were summarily tortured, raped, beheaded, and flayed by the victorious Assyrians and then had their corpses publicly displayed (van de Mieroop 2007, 231). Some reliefs in the British Museum discussed above depict such an episode, with several of the inhabitants of the vanquished city impaled on pikes outside the city walls (Curtis and Reade 1995, 61).

After torturing and killing the inhabitants, the Assyrians would then raze the houses, salt the fields, and cut down the orchards. To add insult to injury, the survivors were then forced to pay a yearly tribute (van de Mieroop 2007, 231). A specific example of these tactics was when the king of Kadmuhu, which was just to the north of Assyria, was captured, flayed, had his skin displayed publicly on the walls of the city Arbela, and had his throne given to an Assyrian lackey (Kuhrt 2010, 2:480). If the survivors were lucky, they were allowed to remain in their homelands, but many were forced to move hundreds of miles away by the Assyrian kings.

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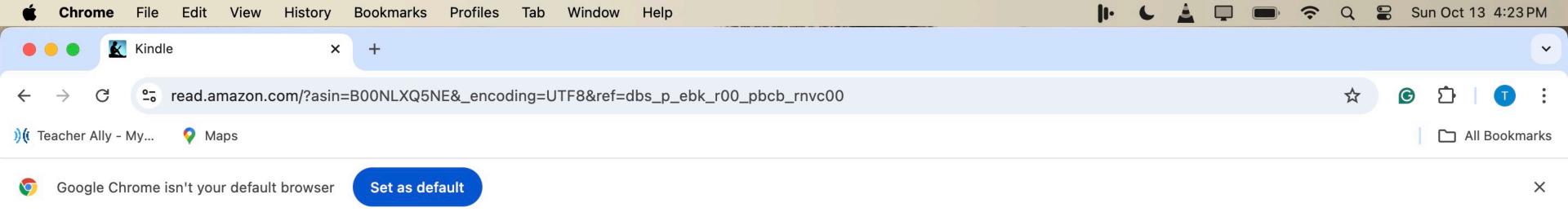




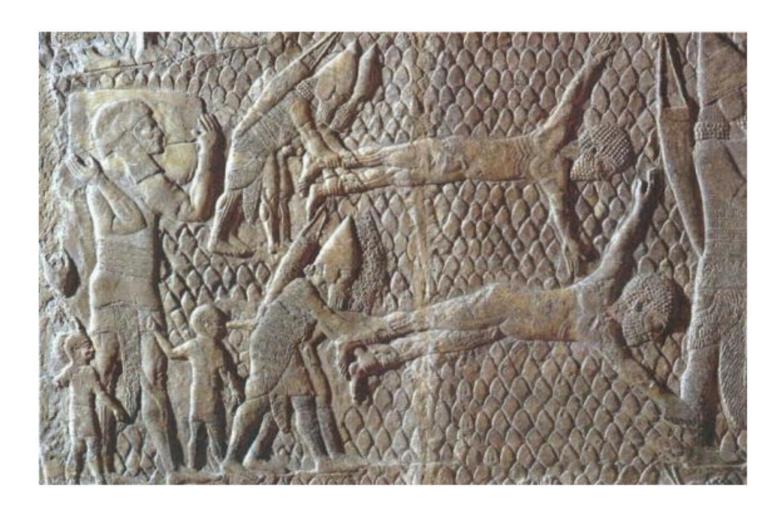








THE ASSYRIANS: THE HISTORY OF THE MOST PROMINENT EMPIRE OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

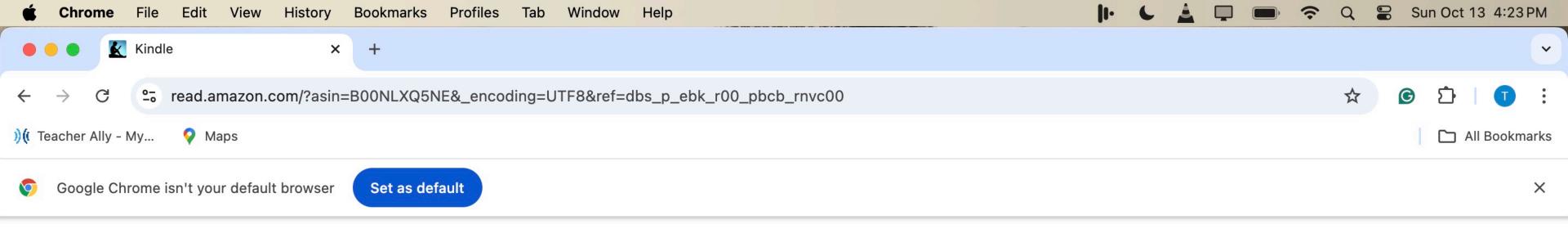


A relief depicting the Assyrians flaying their enemies

The Assyrian practice of forced removal of entire populations is believed to have been first used during the reign Shalmaneser I (ca. 1274-1245 BCE) during the Middle Assyrian period (van de Mieroop 2007, 182). Later, Tukulti-Ninurta I (ca. 1244-1208) used this practice to send people from northern Syria to work on public projects in the Assyrian homeland (van de Mieroop 2007, 182), but it was during the Neo-Assyrian period that the practice was used to punish rebellious populations and as an implied threat against any who thought of opposing the Assyrians. It is estimated that during the last three centuries of the Assyrian Empire, approximately 4.5 million people were deported from their homelands (van de Mieroop 2007, 233).

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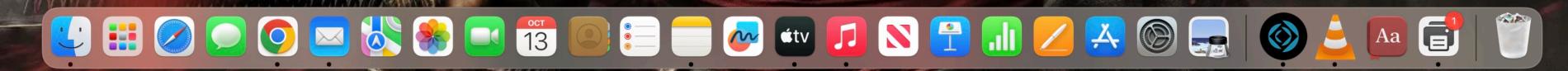
The massive population removals are credited by some scholars as the reason for the extensive spread of the Aramaic language, which eventually replaced Akkadian as the *lingua franca* of the ancient Near East (van de Mieroop 2007, 233).

The Assyrians were known to brutalize their enemies, but they also were known to destroy their enemies' gods. One of the most calculated warfare methods that the Assyrians used against their enemies involved the taking of religious artifacts, known as "despoliation" of their enemies' cult statues. Most of the peoples of the ancient Near East kept statues of their deities in specific temples that they believed was essentially the avatar of

the deity on earth. When a people lost a battle or war, it was usually blamed on divine abandonment, an idea demonstrated in the text that discussed Esarhaddon rebuilding Babylon after his successor, Sennacherib, destroyed the city. The destruction was not blamed on Sennacherib – the Assyrian king was never even mentioned – but instead on the Babylonians who disrespected Marduk, who in turn left them to be destroyed by the Assyrians. A similar situation can be seen in 2 Kings, where the Israelites have disobeyed Yahweh's law; the Biblical account says the deity used the Assyrians to invoke his wrath on his petulant people.

Cognizant of this philosophy, the Assyrians would

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add to their enemies defeat – and by extension of the prevailing theology, the abandonment by their gods – by stealing the divine cult statues of their enemies' most important gods, thereby ensuring that the god could not return (Kuhrt 2010, 2:513). This method was done by the Assyrians to their enemies over 30 times (Cogan 1974, 25), and the statues most revered by the vanquished were then repatriated to Ashur, Nineveh, or another important Assyrian city and held as trophies (Cogan 1974, 25). The despoliation of cult statues was extremely humiliating to a people who suffered such a fate since it symbolized that the vanquished had been forced into submission.

The submission of people the Assyrians defeated and/ or colonized was formalized, ritualized, and documented in texts known as "loyalty oaths." As a superpower, the Assyrian king was in a position to dictate the terms of most agreements and receive unilateral concessions from the other parties. However, there were cases when the Assyrian king was forced out of necessity to grant certain concessions to the other party (Parpolla 1988, xvi). These oaths were bound by blood, and to break one meant that the wrath of the Assyrian army would fall on the violator.

The loyalty oaths could be quite lengthy when they invoked the Assyrian pantheon, enumerated what were

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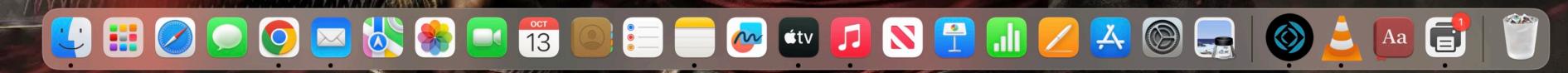


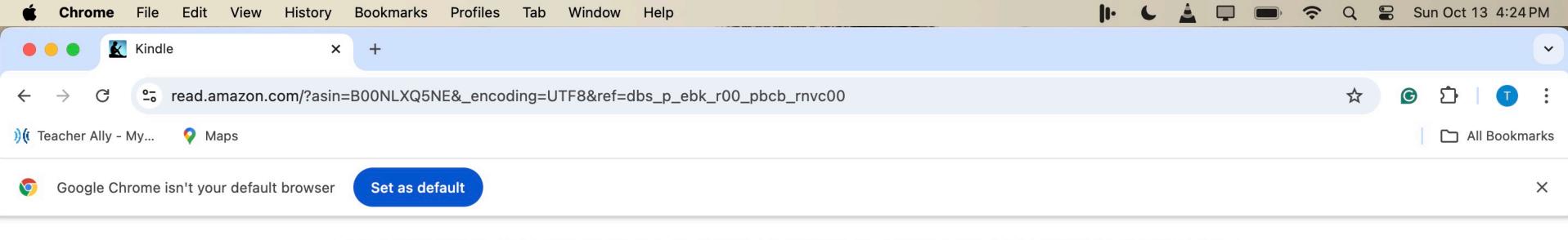


considered violations of the oath, and also gave a litany of punishments for transgressors. A treaty between Esarhaddon and the ruler of a land called Uarakazabanu is a detailed example. Part of the text reads, "(This is) the treaty which Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, has established with you before the great gods of heaven and earth, on behalf of the crown prince designate Ashurbanipal, the son of your lord Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, who has designated and appointed him for succession . . . If you do not serve the crown prince designate Ashurbanipal, whom Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, has presented to you and ordered you (to serve), on behalf of whom he has made this binding treaty with you, if you sin against him, lift your hands with evil

intent against him, set afoot a rebellion, or wrong or evil plans against him, if you remove him from the kingship of Assyria, and help one of his brothers, younger or older, to take the throne of Assyria in his stead, and install another king, another lord over yourselves and swear to the oath of loyalty to another king or lord . . . Just as (this) oil enters your flesh, so may they make this oath enter your flesh, the flesh of your brothers, your sons and daughters. Just as one cuts off the hands and feet and blinds the eyes of those who blaspheme against the god or the lord, so may they bring about your end, may they make you sway like a marsh reed, may they tear you out like blood from the bandage of the enemy . . . May they [slaughter] you, your women, your brothers, your

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THE ASSYRIANS: THE HISTORY OF THE MOST PROMINENT EMPIRE OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

sons and daughters like kids. Just as the squeak produced by this door pivot, so may you, your women, your sons and daughters never rest nor sleep, not even your bones should stay together." (Prichard 1992, 535-40).

The grim and graphic language of the oaths was reinforced by the knowledge of what happened to previous peoples who the Assyrians slaughtered in the past. Any ruler who was under Assyrian hegemony only needed to read the oath he signed to realize what results he could expect if he decided to rebel. The oaths also therefore served as a psychological weapon against potential rebels.

Assyrian Kingship and Religion

The concept of kingship was at the center of Assyrian society, and like most ancient societies, it was inextricably enmeshed with religion. The Assyrian king was never deified like the pharaohs in Egypt, but absolute royal power became part of the development of kingship in Assyria and was linked to the acquisition of empire (Kuhrt 2010, 2:505).

Although not divine, the Assyrian king was chosen and allowed to rule by the divine, and as texts relate, he was also given the ends of the earth. Numerous Assyrian texts refer to the king as the "King of the Universe," as in this example from the reign of Esarhaddon: "Esarhaddon, king of the universe, king of Assyria,

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