The Neo-Assyrian Empire, arguably the first world-empire, is often presented by scholars as a fundamentally new phenomenon. Here, I will argue that the foundations of Neo-Assyrian success reach back in part into the short-lived preceding Middle Assyrian imperial state. This continuity can be seen in a range of imperial practices in conquered territories and in a “culture of empire” that has its roots in the Late Bronze Age. Other components of the Neo-Assyrian repertoires of rules were first developed in the Iron Age, however. This chapter will bring into sharper focus how the Neo-Assyrian Empire can be understood in its historical context to better understand its remarkable success.

CONCEPTUALIZING THE MIDDLE TO NEO-ASSYRIAN TRANSITION

The idea that the Neo-Assyrian Period is separate and distinct in character from the preceding Middle Assyrian Period is found in many studies (Roaf 1990; Bedford 2009; Cline and Graham 2011; Herrmann and Tyson, this volume). Arguments for drawing such a distinction between the two periods can indeed be found in both philological and archaeological data sets. In particular, textual data are plentiful in the twelfth century BCE and from the ninth–sixth centuries BCE but are much less abundant in the intervening period (Postgate 1992; Radner 2004, 53). Likewise, in many
regions in Upper Mesopotamia, the archaeological sequence shows a gap separating Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian occupation. This is true, for example, for the Upper Tigris region, the Balikh Valley, and parts of the Khabor Triangle (Parker 2001; Szuchman 2007; Tenu 2009; Matney 2010).

At the same time, we now have many archaeological sequences that suggest a greater degree of continuity from the Middle Assyrian Period to the Neo-Assyrian Period than previously thought in much of the Assyrian heartland and the central and southern Habur region, at sites such as Tell Sheikh Hamad, Tell Barri, and Tell Taban (D’Agostino 2009; Kühne 2013; D’Agostino 2015). Further north and west, in the Upper Habur, the Upper Tigris, and the Balikh, there is some evidence from sites such as Tell Fekheriyah and Tell Halaf that Assyrian material culture continued deep into the Iron Age and was used by groups who would self-identify as Arameans as late as the tenth century BCE (Novak 2013).

Furthermore, the dunnu (a privately owned agricultural estate, the owners of which usually lived elsewhere and used the proceeds as a source of income) of Giricano had Assyrian texts dating to between 1073 and 1026 BCE, more than a century after the Late Bronze Age “collapse” of ca. 1200 BCE (Cline 2014). There is little to suggest unstable conditions at Giricano, and the transactions the estate was involved in point to business as usual (Radner 2004, 73). Giricano, at least, evidences continuity of Middle Assyrian traditions of the Late Bronze Age on into the Iron Age.

Eventually, the Upper Tigris, Upper Habur, and the Balikh were lost to Assyria for about two centuries, during which period regional states dominated these areas (Szuchman 2007). The memory of these lost former Middle Assyrian territories seems to have been an important topos in Assyria in the Iron Age, and the initial wars of conquest in the Neo-Assyrian Period were presented as a reconquista in which Assyrian lands and Assyrian communities were liberated from their oppressors (Liverani 1988; Postgate 1992; Fales 2012). So from an Assyrian perspective, the Middle Assyrian Period was perceived as an ideal representing the essence of the Assyrian project rather than a qualitatively distinctive period in history.

To most scholars who argue for a disjunction between the Middle and Neo-Assyrian Periods, the crux of the matter appears to be that the Neo-Assyrian state qualifies as an empire—because it was an expansive state that dominated a large number of vassal states that were not provincialized—whereas the Middle Assyrian state was much smaller in scale and as a rule converted conquered territories into provinces (Postgate 2010, 20; Koliński 2015; Kühne 2015, 59). However, the real disjunction between Assyria as a relatively small state and its expansion into the first world-empire arguably took place within the Neo-Assyrian Period, starting with the reign of Tiglath-pileser III from 744 BCE and lasting until 727 BCE, when the Neo-Assyrian Empire finally fell (Postgate 1992; Kühne 2015). From a historical perspective one could therefore argue that the early Neo-Assyrian state—that is, before the expansion under Tiglath-pileser III—was not only consciously modeled on its Middle Assyrian predecessor but also very similar in its scale and aspirations (figure 2.1).

In the end, the assessment of the degree to which the Middle Assyrian state is perceived as similar to or different from the succeeding Neo-Assyrian state depends on both the data set one focuses on and the phenomena one is interested in. In this chapter the focus is the Assyrian “repertoires of rule” in both periods and the degree to which they are different or similar. “Repertoires of rule” (Burbank and Cooper 2010, 6) are the practices applied by imperial states in conquered territories to create and maintain their dominance. Are there, then, specific repertoires of rule that appear first in the Middle Assyrian imperial state which might explain the remarkable longevity and success of the Assyrian state in the Late Bronze and Iron Ages?

COMPARING REPERTOIRES OF RULE IN THE MIDDLE AND NEO-ASSYRIAN PERIODS

In the long-term perspective of ancient Near Eastern history, the Assyrian Empire, ca. 1350–612 BCE, appears to represent a decisive turning point.
Whereas earlier empires were relatively short-lived, here a state emerged that lasted for about seven centuries, rose from humble origins, and ultimately came to dominate much of the ancient Near East. How, then, did the Assyrian state become so successful, and in what ways did it differ from other polities in the ancient Near East?

If one were to compare Assyrian repertoires of rule with those of contemporaneous empires of the ancient Near East, such as those of Mitanni, the Kassites, the Hittites, and the Egyptians, the most striking differences are not to be found in the core areas or metropolitan regions (Doyle 1986). All of these empires invested heavily in the construction of large monumental capitals, developed elaborate courts, and undertook considerable efforts toward the development of an imperial ideology. The Assyrians stand out, however, for how they dealt with conquered territories and how they transformed provinces and peripheries.

Thus, while other empires in the ancient Near East operated in a hegemonic fashion (Higginbotham 2000; Glatz 2009, 2013; Heinz 2012; Von Dassow 2014), ruling a series of vassals through a system of indirect rule, the Assyrians used a territorial system of domination (Parker 2001; Koliński 2015), annexing neighboring regions as provinces. While it is possible to qualify this distinction, for example, Egypt also used territorial repertoires of rule in Nubia (Smith 2003; 2013) and the Hittites appear to have done the same in their heartland (Glatz 2009, 2013), the systematic way territorial repertoires of rule were put to use by the Assyrians is quite exceptional in the ancient Near East.

So how did the Assyrian Empire achieve and maintain its control over the conquered territories? To what degree are repertoires of rule continuous from the Middle to the Neo-Assyrian Period? To facilitate this discussion, it is useful to distinguish between “hardware” and “software” types of hegemonic practices. These categories are for heuristic purposes only and are not intended as a new interpretive framework.

“Hardware” refers to changes in infrastructure, landscapes, and societies that were effected to serve the (perceived) needs of the empire (table 2:1). These include:

1. Development of the imperial core through policies of agricultural development, settlement of populations, and the creation of monumental capitals
2. Modification of existing settlement systems, including the destruction of some cities, the modification of others, the foundation of new cities, and the construction of forts and fortification systems, to facilitate the control of alien territories and to control access to imperial lands
3. Agricultural development of regions previously little cultivated by means such as the establishment of agricultural estates, agricultural colonization, and the construction of (complex) irrigation systems
4. Demographic policies in which existing population centers are in part replaced by new ones and populations are broken up through deportation and colonization policies that frustrate the cultural capacities of conquered populations to form an alternative to the imperial system
5. Construction of an imperial road and relay system to facilitate communications, trade, and military campaigns

“Software” refers to changes in culture promoted by the empire and the practices of government that help consolidate imperial hegemony. These include:

1. Techniques of administration, such as the development of a homogeneous system of administration that facilitates control by the imperial core and the deployment of administrators throughout the imperial lands
2. Organization of the imperial elite
3. Use of a vassal system
4. An ideology that legitimated imperial domination to both the dominators and the dominated, and investment in propaganda media
5. A policy of co-opting local elites into the interests of empire by providing them with clear incentives for collaboration
6. A culture of empire in which the imperial culture is distinguished from and considered superior to that of dominated societies. In this system there are possibilities and incentives for outsiders to opt into imperial culture and associate with the empire.

The “hardware” repertoires of rule for the Middle and Neo-Assyrian Periods are remarkably similar. In both periods we can document the development of the imperial core region through the construction of large canals for agricultural development and the foundation of new capitals (Bagg 2000; Wilkinson et al. 2005; Mühl 2015). The construction of the large new capital of Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta in the Middle Assyrian Period, estimated to have measured ca. 480 hectares (Dittmann 2011) and for which major canals were constructed, has striking similarities to later construction of the capitals of Kalhu (which in fact seems to have had a Middle Assyrian predecessor [Bagg 2000, 311] and Dur-Sharrukin in the Neo-Assyrian Period (Bagg 2000; Wilkinson et al. 2005; Almweel 2008).

Moving beyond the core region, in both periods we can document Assyrian efforts to modify existing settlement systems, for example, through the
TABLE 2.1. Overview of hardware type repertoires of rule in the Middle and Neo-Assyrian Empires

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Repertoires of rule—hardware</th>
<th>Middle Assyrian</th>
<th>Neo-Assyrian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development of imperial core</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destruction of cities</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modification of cities</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation of cities</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation of rural settlements</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural colonization</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deportations</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road networks</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

destruction or abandonment of major existing settlements, such as Tell Brak in the Middle Assyrian Period and Babylon in the Neo-Assyrian Period, and the creation or redevelopment of new centers, such as Dur-Katlimmu and Kulushinas (Tell Amuda) and Tashan (ZiyaTepe) in Middle Assyrian times and cities such as Nineveh and Tell Bartsip in the Neo-Assyrian Period (Wilkinson et al. 2005; Sauchman 2007; Tenu 2009, 2015; Harmançah 2012; Kühne 2013). In both the Middle and Neo-Assyrian Periods we can document the creation of a series of forts along the frontiers and in the newly occupied territories (Parker 1997; Tenu, Fenollós, and Caramelo 2012; Tenu 2015).

For both periods we can document significant investments in the agricultural development of previously marginal or uncultivated territories. Major canals for irrigation purposes were built in the Middle and Neo-Assyrian Periods (Bagg 2000; Wilkinson et al. 2005; Kühne 2013), and this is true even if one excludes the controversial Lower Habur canal from consideration. Further, we have clear data for agricultural colonization in both periods, for example, along the Balikh and in the upper Tigris (Wiggermann 2000; Parker 2001, 2003; Radner 2004). Although the scale of the "infilling of the landscape" was much more pronounced in the Neo-Assyrian than in the Middle Assyrian Period (Wilkinson et al. 2005), the same process can be documented in the area close to the capital in the Middle Assyrian Period (Postgate 1982, 308; Mühl 2013).

The deportation of populations from one part of the empire to another is well attested in both the Middle and Neo-Assyrian Periods (Wiggermann 2000; Postgate 2013) and can be regarded as one of the key Assyrian strategies. While deportations are often portrayed as repressive, divide-and-rule policies (Na’aman 1993, 117), it is also possible that at least some of these population movements consisted of voluntary colonizations in which groups were provided with clear incentives (Parker 2001, 2003; Düring, Visser, and Akkermans 2019). For example, at Tell Sabi Abyad the migrants included both šı̈lbulu (serfs, probably predominantly Hurrians) and alajtu (free men with Assyrian names), and the latter were free to move elsewhere (Wiggermann 2000). While the šı̈lbulu did not have this freedom, it is possible that at least some of them regarded agricultural colonization as an attractive opportunity. In any case, the demographic policies of the Assyrians were clearly an instrument to change realities on the ground in specific regions.

Finally, an imperial road system, complete with relay stations, seems to have been created first in the Middle Assyrian Period and been further expanded in the Neo-Assyrian Period (Pfälzner 1993; Kessler 1997; Faist 2006; Kühne 2013). For any empire the construction of such a road system, facilitating fast sharing of information over large distances and the swift transport of military personnel, is essential to maintain control over large territories (Taagepera 1978; Colburn 2013).

In all these “hardware” repertoires of rule, we can draw clear parallels between the Middle and Neo-Assyrian Empires, displaying strong continuity. Further, the similarities are not of the generic type—in that any empire would make use of these repertoires of rule—but they are specific to Assyria. Here, for example, we could compare Mitanni and Middle Assyrian repertoires of rule to illustrate this point. Unlike the Assyrian state, the Mitanni state appears to have preferred to rule through indirect means. Most of Mitanni’s territory consisted of a series of vassal polities that were ruled by either a king or a council. Only in exceptional cases did the Mitanni state convert conquered territories into provinces, for example, when a vassal proved unreliable, as was the case with the polity of Aleppo (Von Dassow 2014, 20–22). The Mitanni state did not have a standardized bureaucracy; instead, rather different recording procedures were used in Ugarit and Arrapha (Postgate 2013). Institutions such as the dîmû (a privately owned agricultural estate, the owner of which usually lived elsewhere and used the proceeds as a source of income) denoted radically different forms of estates in the empire; in Nuzi they were owned by wealthy absentee families, but in Ugarit they were royal estates owned by the local dynasty (Koliński 2002). Thus, the Mitanni state had a diversity of political forms and institutions across its territories, lacked an overarching state system, and was not engaged in practices such as deportation, agricultural colonization, or the creation of new cities. Similar arrangements seem to have characterized Hittite and Egyptian repertoires of rule in the Levant, as well as those of the Kassites in Babylonia. In short, the Assyrian
reertoires of rule were exceptional in the degree to which landscapes and societies were actively reengineered. In part, these social engineering practices explain Assyrian successes.

For the "software" repertoires of rule, the situation is somewhat different (table 2.2). Some of the elements are present in both the Middle and Neo-Assyrian Periods, but in others we see clear transformations. The creation of the provincial system starts in the Middle Assyrian Period and continues into the Neo-Assyrian Period (Llop 2011). At least in the areas conquered in the Middle Assyrian Period, the standard policy was to provincialize the occupied territories rather than to rule by indirect means (Kolińska 2015). Largely the same region was ruled through the provincial system in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, except for its final stages, when it was expanded far beyond (Bedford 2009; Barjamovic 2013, 148). These provinces were also symbolically incorporated into the land and cult of Aššur, as demonstrated by the Aššur temple offerings, which were brought from all provinces (Postgate 1993). However, as Pongratz-Leisten (2011) has argued, there was no homogeneous religious system across the Assyrian provinces, and local religious practices remained dominant in most places. In her view there was a significant accommodation to local religious systems by the Assyrians, an accommodation that is not evident from the official state propaganda.

In both periods small vassal kingdoms were tolerated by the Assyrians within and between their provinces, as exemplified by the examples of the Land of Mari in the Middle Assyrian Period and Guzana in the Neo-Assyrian Period (Novak 2013; Shibata 2015). The prevailing consensus on Assyrian tolerance toward these vassals in the land of Aššur is that the local dynasties switched allegiance to Aššur at critical moments in history and were rewarded for their continuing loyalty. Local dynasties appear to have been linked to the royal

Table 2.2. Overview of software type repertoires of rule in the Middle and Neo-Assyrian Empires

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Repertoires of rule</th>
<th>Middle Assyrian</th>
<th>Neo-Assyrian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provincial system</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great families</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vassal system</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporation into the land and cult of Aššur</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-optation of local elites</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture of empire</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological propaganda</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

house through marriages (Shibata 2015), and in the Neo-Assyrian Period local elites were co-opted through ideological means and through incentives for the improvement of their positions and careers (Parker 2011; Pongratz-Leisten 2013).

From the beginning of the Middle Assyrian Period, the Assyrian repertoires of rule include something that I would call a "culture of empire," by which I mean something different from state propaganda and its ideological justification. Instead, the focus is on a cultural framework that would have operated at a less discursive (or subconscious) level and structured social interaction between Assyrians and with others. At the core of this is a distinction between an Assyrian "high" culture, on the one hand, and vernacular traditions, on the other, which were culturally elaborated. This normative distinction contributed enormously to the legitimation of the empire. The association among an empire, a cultural idiom, and concepts of civilization is well-known from many empires (Zimansky 1995; Stein 2005; Mattingly 2011).

In administrative and legal documents, being Assyrian was a clearly demarcated status that entitled the person in question to certain rights and obligations that set the individual apart from non-Assyrians (Postgate 2013, 22-27). In the newly conquered territories in the west, Assyrians were usually free men and non-Assyrians were often serfs (Wiggermann 2000, 174). Assyrian status seems to have been independent of class. Apart from Assyrian administrators there is evidence for Assyrian agricultural colonists in the western territories, as at Tell Sabi Abyad, where two Assyrian farmers settled with their families (Wiggermann 2000), and at Tell Chuera, where there were similarly designated settlers (Jakob 2009, 98). These latter Assyrians might have included both poorer members of Assyrian society and groups that had gradually opted into an Assyrian identity (Postgate 2013, 38). The fact that this "opting in" occurs suggests that being Assyrian was considered a desirable status in contemporary society.

With the emergence of the Middle Assyrian Empire, we can also document the spread of a particular type of material culture. This includes Middle Assyrian pottery (Pflügner 1997; D'Agostino 2008, 2015; Tenu 2013; Duistermaat 2015), house forms (Bartl and Bonatz 2013; Akkermans and Wiggermann 2015), and burial traditions (Sauvage 2005; D'Agostino 2008; Tenu 2009; Bonatz 2013; Düring, Visser, and Akkermans 2015). These "Assyrian" types co-occur with vernacular ceramic repertoires, burial traditions, and house forms (Sauvage 2005; Tenu 2013; Düring, Visser, and Akkermans 2015; D'Agostino 2015; Jakob 2015).

The spread of Assyrian artifacts and traditions can be most convincingly linked to the presence of Assyrian colonists across the Middle Assyrian Empire. In part, the spread of Assyrian artifacts and customs was a function
of necessity, especially where empty landscapes were colonized, but it should also be explained in part by the desire of Assyrians to distinguish themselves in how they lived, cooked, ate, and buried their dead, and through the style of the artifacts they used.

Assyrian-style artifacts and practices might have been associated with and important to Assyrian elites in particular, who occupied the key positions in the conquered lands of Hangalbat (Harrak 1987, 195–205). Indeed, typically Assyrian material culture seems to have been concentrated mainly in administrative centers where the elite tended to settle (Tenu 2013; D’Agostino 2015; Jakob 2015).

This does not mean the entire elite of the Assyrian Empire consisted of people from Assyrian stock, but it entails that in their official capacity they would have needed to present themselves as Assyrians. Interestingly, we have some evidence for non-Assyrian elites taking up Assyrian names and practices (Shibata 2015) and for Assyrian elites who buried themselves in decidedly non-Assyrian fashion (Wicke 2013; Düring, Visser, and Akkermans 2015). In contrast, non-elite Assyrians demonstrably adhered to Assyrian ways in how they ate, dressed, and were buried (Wicke 2013; Düring, Visser, and Akkermans 2015).

The concept of a “culture of empire” might help explain why Assyrians felt it was legitimate to reengineer conquered territories and societies and what motivated participants to contribute to this project. Further, by giving poor members of Assyrian society and even non-Assyrians the possibility to associate with and benefit from the Assyrian project, the allegiance of such groups could be obtained.

In contrast to these patterns of continuity, the role of great families appears to have changed significantly. Whereas in the Middle Assyrian Period the execution of government was delegated largely to the major Assyrian houses, in the Neo-Assyrian Period the king assumed a much more central position, and the military apparatus was used to create a state administration in which written bureaucracy was less important (Postgate 2002). The attempt to eliminate alternative powerful lineages seems to have been largely successful and to have led to a situation in which the collapse of the court equaled the collapse of the empire (Liverani 2001).

Another significant difference between the Middle and Neo-Assyrian repertoires of rule is in the realm of state propaganda. Neo-Assyrian elites went to great efforts to communicate imperial ideology through visible means such as victory stelae, rock monuments, statues, and elaborately carved and inscribed palace decor. They may also have used other means to communicate imperial ideology, such as processions and proclamations (Parker 2011, 2015; Harmanşah 2012, 2013; Pongratz-Leisten 2013).

One can ask, however, what the efficacy of this imagery and associated practices was, who the target audiences were, and whether we can even qualify them as propaganda. Much of the imagery was placed within the palace and was accessible only to a small segment of Assyrian society, that is, the elite and palace personnel. It is an open question whether elite visitors would have had the possibility or the inclination to take in the rich totality of images and understand the messages they were meant to convey. In all likelihood, few of these visitors would have been able to read the inscriptions placed on the orthostats. This is best illustrated by the famous boast of King Ashurbanipal that he could read and write (which was probably true [Livingstone 2007]). The boast suggests that such skills were exceptional among the Assyrian elite. Likewise, the efficacy of Assyrian rock art monuments—often in extremely remote locations—as propaganda statements can be questioned. Whatever our interpretation of the efficacy of the Neo-Assyrian visual programs, this type of investment in visual imagery is almost completely absent in the Middle Assyrian Period (Pittman 1996, 350–53), and this difference is significant.

In conclusion, in the “software” repertoires of rule, there is some continuity as well as a number of transformations and innovations within the Assyrian tradition. Nonetheless, the overarching picture is that of a historical development in a continuous Assyrian tradition rather than a fundamentally new development in the Neo-Assyrian Period.

DEALING WITH DIVERSITY

In the discussion so far, I have argued, first, that most of the repertoires of rule found in the Neo-Assyrian Period have clear antecedents in the Middle Assyrian Period and, second, that there were a number of innovations in the Neo-Assyrian period. To structure this discussion, I have followed a checklist approach, noting whether particular repertoires of rule are present or absent. The danger of such an approach is that we might reduce imperial systems to a list of blanket strategies. In this section I would like to highlight (1) the heterogeneity of the Assyrian Empire in both the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age and (2) the parallels between the patchwork solutions used in both periods.

Recent studies of European colonial empires—the Ottoman, Habsburg, and Russian Empires and that of ancient Rome—have demonstrated that empires were not administrated homogeneously (Maier 2006; Burbank and Cooper 2010; Bang and Bayly 2011; Mattingly 2011). Instead, they were constituted by
a patchwork of institutions and personnel that differed greatly from one part of the empire to the next. The particular situation in any region was the result of specific historical circumstances and was determined in part by the activities of key individuals. Thus, while it appears that these empires had a homogeneous system of administration, there were great differences in the forms imperial government took on the ground as a result of local factors (also Herrmann and Tyson, this volume).

Thirty years ago, Liverani (1988, 86) stated that the Assyrian Empire was "not a spread of land, but a network of communications over which material goods are carried." Liverani envisaged the empire as consisting of a series of Assyrian strongholds in essentially alien landscapes and populations, and he argued that military campaigns were primarily undertaken to support and expand this network of Assyrian settlements. In a very similar vein, Bernbeck (2010) has recently compared the Assyrian Empire to that of the United States, arguing that both are systems in which military bases were instrumental in controlling alien territories. By contrast, Postgate (1992) responded to Liverani’s characterization by arguing that the area of Hanigalbat was under the direct territorial control of the Assyrians and was considered part of the land of Aššur, unlike the regions beyond, which were controlled through vassals. Postgate argued that while Assyrian presence was necessarily concentrated in certain nodes, the provinces were homogeneously administered. Since Liverani and Postgate formulated their ideas, a massive amount of new data has become available and many systematic studies dealing with Assyria have appeared (Parker 2001; Szuuchman 2007; Tenu 2009; Postgate 2007b, 2013; Düring 2013). As a result, we are in a much better position to evaluate how homogeneous or heterogeneous Assyrian repertoires of rule were in conquered provinces and peripheries.

For the Neo-Assyrian Period we have a number of archaeological studies that investigate the variable impact of the Assyrian Empire in provincial and peripheral regions. Parker (2001, 2003, 2015) has argued for a modified version of Luttwak’s hegemonic empire in which regions brought under the direct control of the Assyrians need not have been spatially contiguous. For example, the Assyrians imposed direct territorial control over the Upper Tigris and the northern Habur and Balikh, but the intervening Tur Abdin Mountains remained outside the effective control of the Assyrians, for reasons that were in part strategic, in part logistic, and in part economic.

Parker’s work in the Upper Tigris region was based primarily on data obtained in the extensive reconnaissance survey undertaken by Algaze and colleagues (2012) ahead of dam construction projects. In subsequent years, much additional research has been done at a range of sites, such as Ziyaret Tepe, Üçtepe, Kavuşan Höyük, Giricano, Boztepe, Salat Tepe, Kenan Tepe, Gre Dimos, Mïslânumantepe, Hirbemerdon, and Hakemi Use. As a result, Matney (2010), building on earlier work by Parker (2003, 2006), recently reconstructed the configuration of the Neo-Assyrian Empire in the Upper Tigris, showing a coexistence (Pongratz-Leisten 2011) has demonstrated that Middle Assyrian religious practices and iconographic conventions in the provinces did not follow mainstream Assyrian standards and that local gods remained important. Jakob (2015, 180–82) has recently illustrated how precocious Assyrian control in the western provinces really was at that time by discussing a number of letters from Harbe (Tell Chuera). These letters describe the repeated attacks of enemy troops descending from the mountains to the north on the cities of Harbe and Nîrîja and the Assyrian official Sin-muddâmêr without troops to halt them. These raiding troops from the mountains also plundered trading caravans when the opportunity presented itself. In these ways they posed a real threat to the power of local Assyrian officials.

Interestingly, the evidence of patchy control coexists with evidence for formidable changes in settlement and demography in specific regions. In the Balikh Valley, for example, significant changes in the settlement pattern have been subjected to a detailed analysis by Lyon (2000; also Kolífskis 2015). In the Mitanni Period (ca. 1500–1350 BCE), there were a substantial number of settlements in the valley. At some point in the Late Bronze Age, most of the sites appear to have been abandoned. When the Middle Assyrian state took control of the area, many of the sites in the southern Balikh were reoccupied. It is possible that the southern Balikh functioned as a buffer zone with the Hittites, who were entrenched further west along the Euphrates (Luciani 1999–2001; Lyon 2000). In the northern Balikh Valley, where rain-fed agriculture is possible, there were clear shifts in the settlement system: many large "urban" sites were not reoccupied, and new settlements were mostly small rural places (Lyon 2000).

One clear example of an important rural settlement is the Tell Sabi Abyad damu (figure 2.2). This was an agricultural estate to which 900 people were
attached, only a few of whom lived in the central settlement (Wiggermann 2000). From the *dunnu* a large landholding was farmed, measuring about 36 km² and producing about 300 tons of barley per annum. Thus, large-scale farming took place for surplus production in a landscape previously little cultivated. This was made possible through the deployment of a large labor force and the investment of substantial resources. The cultural landscape was profoundly altered. The existing settlement system was reshuffled. Large numbers of people were brought into the area, creating a new demographic reality, and large-scale farming estates were established. Given that Tell Sabi Abyad was only one of a series of *dunnu* estates established in the valley—although probably the largest—what happened can best be described as social and landscape engineering.

The Balikh is not, however, representative of the broader situation in the western provinces (compare Kolinski 2005) (figure 2.3). In some areas, such as the Balikh and the Lower Habur—at Dur-Katlimmu—the Assyrians went to great efforts to develop agricultural surpluses and settlements in previously marginal territories (Kühne 2015). In areas such as the Upper Habur, the Assyrians largely superimposed their administration upon the existing settlements and agricultural practices (Szuchman 2007; Tenu 2009, 2015). As a result, settlement continuity can be shown for sites such as Tell Barri and Tell Fekheriye (D'Agostino 2008; Tenu 2009; Bonatz 2013). The Assyrians even incorporated previously independent polities, such as “the Land of Mari,” centering on Tell Taban, with a local dynasty serving under the Assyrian king (Shibata 2015). Finally, in the Assyrian heartland, there appears to have been expansion or intensification of agricultural production, with the construction

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**Figure 2.2. Late Bronze Age occupation at Tell Sabi Abyad in level 6A (ca. 1200-1184 BCE)**

**Figure 2.3. Map of the Middle Assyrian Empire with various repertoires of rule used by Assyria indicated**
of new canals and the foundation of new settlements (Migli 2011; Mühl 2015). The Assyrian repertoires of rule outlined here suggest that neither Liverani nor Postgate was right because both argued that Assyrian repertoires of rule were relatively standardized. More recent data and syntheses point to a flexible approach toward controlling conquered territories, in which what happened on the ground depended on a range of practical and strategic considerations. In both the Middle and Neo-Assyrian Periods we can see similar patterns: first, with heavy investments in the (agricultural) development of the Assyrian heartland, including the construction of major canals that enabled the cultivation of previously little-cultivated zones, facilitating a more densely populated imperial core; second, the development of peripherics with agricultural potential, such as the Balikh in the Middle Assyrian Period and the Upper Tigris in the Neo-Assyrian Period; third, the depopulation or neglect of peripheral or buffer zones at the edge of empire, as was the case initially in the Balikh in the Middle Assyrian Period, in the Neo-Assyrian Period in the northern part of the southern Levant (Faus, this volume), and in buffer zones such as the Garzan and Bohtan River Valleys (Parker 2001). Finally, in some regions the Assyrian administrators accommodated preexisting densely populated and productive regions and intervened relatively little, as in the Upper Khabur in the Middle Assyrian Period or the Levantine Phoenician cities in the Neo-Assyrian Period (Bagg 2011, 287–94). Thus, although we see heterogeneous effects of Assyrian domination in both the Middle and Neo-Assyrian Periods, this heterogeneity is spatially distributed (what repertoires of rule are applied where) similarly.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

To what degree can we trace the origins of the highly successful Neo-Assyrian Empire back to its more obscure predecessor in the Late Bronze Age? In this chapter I have argued that if we focus on the repertoires of rule used by the Assyrians in the Middle Assyrian Period and the Neo-Assyrian Period, we can document clear continuities in changes effected on the ground, including elements such as the destruction of cities, the modification of cities, the foundation of new settlements, agricultural development of previously uncultivated regions, deportations, the construction of road networks, and the development of relay systems. Likewise, the ways in which the administration was organized were parallel in many respects, including institutions such as the provincial system; the occasional use of vassals; the cultic incorporation of conquered territories into the land of Aššur, symbolized in food offerings to the Aššur temple; and the co-opting of local elites. An important ingredient of Assyrian imperialism consisted of a normative distinction between Assyrian culture, on the one hand, and normative traditions, on the other, that we find expressed in things such as burial habits and legal statues in both the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age. There are also some differences in the repertoires of rule between these two periods. The role of great families was reduced in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, and (investment in) propaganda became much more significant in the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Nonetheless, there is strong continuity between the practices of the Middle Assyrian Empire and the Neo-Assyrian Empire.

The Assyrian Empire was not a homogeneously administrated territorial empire, nor was it a network empire. Instead, it is better described as a patchwork, in which repertoires of rule were applied in a flexible manner (Sinopoli 1994; Burbank and Cooper 2010), depending on a range of strategic, logistical, and economic considerations, as well as the nature of the preexisting society and economy and how well they could be made to serve the needs of the empire. Importantly, the manner in which the repertoires of rules were applied in different parts of the empire is structured in ways that are very similar in the Middle and Neo-Assyrian Periods. I argue, then, that the imperial practices that generated the unprecedented Neo-Assyrian territorial expansion and consolidation are rooted in an Assyrian cultural-political repertoire that first took shape in the fourteenth century BCE.

NOTES

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1. Some of the elements mentioned here also occur in Smith and Montiel (2007), but in a different ordering.

2. Postgate’s model, in which a distinction is made among a core territory that is incorporated into the metropolitan state, the land of Aššur, and an outer zone under the yoke of Aššur, mirrors an influential distinction between territorial and hegemonic rule put forward by Luttwak (1976).

3. Although it is possible that Tutul/Tell Bi’a was under Assyrian control for some time (Tene 2015).
WORKS CITED


This study discusses the characteristics and behavior of the Assyrian Empire in the Upper Tigris Borderland (figure 3.1) and the relationship established with the local communities of the region. This relationship commenced at an early stage of the imperial growth. Therefore, this chapter will also take into account the Middle Assyrian Period (MAP) (ca. fourteenth–tenth centuries BCE) in addition to the Late or Neo-Assyrian Period (NAP) (ca. tenth–seventh centuries BCE).

The interaction between the Assyrians and the local population is divided into two main approaches, one of conflict and one of compromise. These two strategies do not necessarily form a chronological sequence, since both sides will adopt one or the other repeatedly during the centuries under examination, with constant negotiation between harsh conflicts and solutions of compromise. Nevertheless, at a macroscopic level it is possible to classify the time frame starting from the end of the Middle Assyrian Period to the beginning of the Neo-Assyrian Period as a phase of violent conflict between the empire and the local groups of the Upper Tigris Borderland while classifying the rest of the Neo-Assyrian Period as a phase of compromise between these two parties. Using the conflict and compromise approaches as general frameworks, the chapter aims first to analyze the specific spheres and dynamics of interaction established between the Assyrians and local communities as well as with the Upper Tigris Borderland territory. Second, once delineated, this relationship is