

tribute-paying dependencies. In a sense, the Assyrians seem to have used terror as a form of social control, and it is fortunate that modern man has progressed so far beyond them in his own activities. In any event, the Assyrian rulers did not underestimate the efficacy of blood-thirsty behavior in their attempts to maintain and extend their empire.

Shalmaneser III (859-824 B.C.) attempted to extend Assyrian rule in Syria, but was blocked by a coalition of south Syrian peoples--Phoenicians, Aramaeans, and Israelites. Shalmaneser himself was killed during an internal revolt in Nineveh, and his immediate successors concentrated their efforts on rebuilding the center of government; consequently, by 750 B.C. the western provinces had slipped out of Assyrian hands.

The final restoration of the empire was begun by Tiglath-Pileser III (744-727 B.C.), who seized Damascus, defeated the Israelites, and reduced most of the Levant through warfare. His successors continued his lead by waging a series of successful wars. Sargon II (721-705 B.C.) defeated the Egyptians twice, captured the capital of Israel (Samaria), and exiled and resettled the inhabitants of Judah. Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.) drove the Egyptians out of Palestine and sacked Babylon in 689 B.C. Esarhaddon (681-669 B.C.) conquered Egypt itself and placed his son on the Babylonian throne.

The well-coordinated system of political administration developed by the Assyrians became a model for the central rule of the Near East; many of its features were copied by the Persians and later by the empire of Alexander the Great. But constant rebellion caused by harsh measures and followed by even harsher punishments provided the empire with but a shaky foundation; each king, in fact, was required to reconquer the satellites who had rebelled upon the death of his predecessor. And the true beginning of the end began in the reign of Assurbanipal (669-633 B.C.), who lost both Egypt and Judah. Within a few decades implacable foes forced the Assyrian Empire into collapse; Medes joined with Persians in a refusal to pay taxes, the Chaldeans captured Babylon, and Nineveh was destroyed by the combined forces of Chaldeans and Medes in 612 B.C.

The Hebrew prophet Nahum rejoiced in the disintegration of Assyrian might, and many victims must have shared in his spirited claim:

*There is no assuaging your hurt,  
your wound is grievous.  
All who hear the news of you  
clap their hands over you.  
For upon whom has not come  
your unceasing evil?*

We might note the lack of sympathy in these words and the obvious relishing of sweet and vengeful justice.

The conquerors of Assyria had little to rejoice over, for they soon fell like dominoes before the Persians, the new masters of the East.