

Institution: University College London
Unit of Assessment: 30 – History
Title of case study: Taking Assyrian history beyond academia
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>From the 9th to the 7th century BC, the Assyrian empire dominated the ancient world. Its infrastructural and administrative heritage shaped the Middle East for millennia and its history illuminates key features of imperialism in general. But limited access to the ancient sources has severely inhibited the study of Assyria: cuneiform script and Akkadian language are taught in only c. 50 universities worldwide and text editions are rarely accessible outside of these institutions. The literature available to wider audiences is very limited. Professor Karen Radner has transformed this situation by making the results of her research available via two websites designed to open up the study of Assyrian history to non-specialist users. These significant new educational resources have benefited hundreds of thousands of users from around the globe.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Professor Karen Radner joined UCL in 2005. Since 1995, she has published extensively on the political, administrative, social, economic, legal and cultural history of the kingdom of Assyria. The sources for this first world empire illuminate not just Assyrian but world history, and Radner's work has contributed to the historiography of Anatolia, Cyprus, Egypt, Iran, Iraq and Syro-Palestine. One major focus of Radner's research has been the power relations and interactions between the king and his subjects (e.g. [a]), the theme underpinning the first web resource <i>Knowledge and Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire</i> (see below).</p> <p>Much of Radner's recent work concentrates on the reconstruction of the administrative makeup of the Assyrian Empire, the mechanisms of which previous scholarship had left largely unexplored. Her research identified key strategies and innovations and analysed them as principal factors in explaining the state's characteristic stability and longevity. In 2008, Radner was awarded AHRC funding for the research project <i>Mechanisms of Communication in an Ancient Empire: The Correspondence between the King of Assyria and his Magnates in the 8th Century BC</i>. Her research assistants on this project were Assyrian specialists Dr Mikko Luukko (Researcher, 2008-2012) and Silvie Zamazalová (PhD candidate). Based on the analysis of the Assyrian state correspondence which allows us to analyse the practicalities of running the state but also the interplay of socio-economic, political and ideological forces driving imperial expansion and cohesion, this project focused on the practical and ideological aspects of the delegation of power and the mechanisms of Assyrian control and state communication in the late 8th century BC. Among the research publications which this project produced are [b] and [c], a study of the buffer states of the empire and a new standard edition of one part of the state correspondence. The second web resource, <i>Assyrian Empire Builders</i> (see below) forms the core dissemination strategy for the AHRC project's outcomes to non-academic audiences and contains adapted extracts and digests of these and many other publications by the project team.</p> <p>A further dimension of Radner's work includes her role as editor of <i>The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire</i> (Helsinki, 1997–1999) and her many publications on the historical geography of the Middle East (e.g. [d] and [e]). Her work on personal and geographical names fed directly into the glossaries, and the Google Earth and Google Maps data, featured in both web resources. In the web resource <i>Knowledge and Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire</i>, the section 'Cuneiform Revealed' derives from Radner and Robson's editorial work on <i>The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture</i> [f], a volume that examines the Ancient Middle East through the lens of cuneiform writing and emphasises the importance of seeing textual sources also as material artefacts.</p>
<p>3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)</p> <p>[a] K. Radner, 'The Assyrian king and his scholars: The Syro-Anatolian and the Egyptian Schools', <i>Studia Orientalia</i> 106 (2009), 221–238. Submitted to REF 2014. Peer-reviewed journal.</p> <p>[b] K. Radner, 'Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Musasir, Kumme, Ukku and Šubria – the Buffer</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

States between Assyria and Urartu', in S. Kroll et al., eds., *Biainili-Urartu*. Acta Iranica 51 (Leuven 2012) 243–264.

Submitted to REF 2014. Review: <http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2013/2013-01-02.html>

[c] M. Luukko, *The Correspondence of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II from Calah/Nimrud*. State Archives of Assyria 19 (Helsinki 2012).

Latest volume in a series of discipline standard editions of Neo-Assyrian texts established in 1989. Available on request.

[d] K. Radner, 'An Assyrian view on the Medes', in G. B. Lanfranchi et al., eds., *Continuity of Empire (?): Assyria, Media, Persia*. History of the Ancient Near East Monographs 5 (Padua 2003) 37–64.

Reviews: *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran und Turan* 37 (2005) 445–452 (B. Jacobs); *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 63 (2006) 556–560 (S. W. Holloway); *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 125 (2005) 517–533 (M. W. Waters); *Münstersche Beiträge zur Antiken Handelsgeschichte* 24/1 (2005) 113–116 (K. Ruffing); *Orientalia* 74 (2005) 436–440 (H. Koch); *Topoi* 15 (2007) 530–539 (R. Boucharlat). URL: <http://tinyurl.com/n2qnyef>.

[e] K. Radner, 'How to reach the Upper Tigris: The Route through the Ṭūr Abdīn', *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 15 (2006): 273–305.

Peer-reviewed journal. Quality of paper is also indicated by its being reprinted in Ö. A. Cetrez et al., eds., *The Assyrian Heritage: Threads of Continuity and Influence*. Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis: Studies in Religion and Society 7 (Uppsala 2012) 53–85. URL: tinyurl.com/oj3vo8r.

[f] K. Radner and E. Robson (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture* (Oxford University Press 2011).

Submitted to REF 2014. Major work of reference from leading academic publisher.

Key grant:

PI: Professor Karen Radner. *Mechanisms of Communication in an Ancient Empire: The Correspondence between the King of Assyria and his Magnates in the 8th Century BC* Funder: AHRC (AH/F016581/1). Duration: 10/2008–3/2013. Amount: £394,747.73. Led to [b], [c] and the *Assyrian Empire Builders* website.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Radner's research has had a significant impact on education in, and public engagement with, the history of the Middle East via two major online resources, used by non-academic audiences worldwide as a primary portal to Assyrian history. Both provide access to the original texts and offer tools for working with these documents; one also offers an independent learning course in the cuneiform script. Since the sites' launch, access data has been monitored as part of a dissemination strategy designed to further worldwide interest in the field of Assyrian history.

In 2007, Radner teamed up with Dr Eleanor Robson (then Cambridge, now UCL) and online cuneiform text corpus pioneer Steve Tinney (UPenn, Philadelphia) to create a teaching website. Funded by Higher Education Academy e-learning grants in 2007 and in 2009 (Subject Centres for Philosophical and Religious Studies and for History, Classics and Archaeology) as well as UCL and Cambridge University, the site *Knowledge and Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire (K&P)* [1] focuses on cultural history. It supports non-specialist use of a fully searchable digital text corpus of 2,100 texts from the Assyrian state archives of the 7th century BC, and offers 15 introductory essays on key topics in Assyrian politics (by Radner) and scholarship (by Robson); the site also makes the underpinning research itself (e.g. [a]) and many other research publications available for download. In 2009, 'Cuneiform Revealed' was added, enabling users to teach themselves the cuneiform script and the Akkadian language in 10 lessons – the only such resource available worldwide and the most popular part of the site.

The global reach of this aspect of the impact can be clearly demonstrated by Google Analytics. The statistical data which follow refer to the period 1/1/2008 to 15/12/2012, when the site was housed on a server of the Higher Education Academy. After the devolution of HEA, the site migrated to a UPenn server; apart from an initial dip, the access data for the new site are largely in line with previous usage, but they are not included here, to avoid double counting [2]. During this

Impact case study (REF3b)

period, the site attracted 194,202 visits by 142,260 visitors from 202 countries, that is, all existing states save ten (North Korea, Western Sahara and eight Central African states); 7,028 visits came from the countries of Western Asia, the region of the ancient Assyrian Empire. These visitors viewed 610,409 pages; repeat visitors accounted for 26.8% of visits (52,013). In 2012, *K&P* had over 5,000 unique visits per month.

Important evidence for *K&P* reaching non-specialist audiences is that the majority of visitors who came to the site by referral, as opposed to directly or via a search engine, were referred by Wikipedia, Facebook, stumbleupon.com and other such general-interest sites rather than by the many academic websites that link to the site. Impact beyond academia is further demonstrated by the visits from regions where Ancient Near Eastern History is not studied or taught at all: e.g., the Philippines (3,099), India (2,792), Brazil (1,643), Romania (1,136), Pakistan (741) and Indonesia (648), to name but a few countries, or indeed South America (2,800) and Africa (1,894): entire continents without any academic tradition in the subject. Users in these regions can only have been non-specialists. This evidence for widespread popular interest suggests that even in countries where Assyrian history *is* taught at universities a high proportion of users of *K&P* are non-academic. This is confirmed by the geographical distribution of the 42,780 visits from within the UK: far from being confined to the 'golden triangle', users came from 833 towns across the country.

The *significance* of the impact lies in essence in the simple fact that *K&P* makes possible the teaching and independent study of a foundational part of world history that was previously almost inaccessible to most of the world, and limited to a small body of specialists at best. In other words, the evidence for reach among non-academics, cited above, is at the same time the best evidence for significance. Corroboration and illustration come from the interest shown by the media. Not long after the site was launched, it attracted the interest of the editors of BBC Radio 4's *In Our Time*, who invited Radner to discuss aspects of her work on the programme, chaired by Melvyn Bragg (15/5/2008). The programme remains available on-line, and the main BBC page includes a link to *K&P*, which accounts for 457 visits with an average duration of 5:55 minutes. Its availability on this and other sites means that the programme has had an audience well beyond the UK, and comments left on the BBC page are highly enthusiastic ('a really fascinating look at a topic deserving of much greater attention') and thoughtful (one listener suggested a comparison between Assyrian and modern elites of knowledge) [3]. In April 2012, another non-academic user of the website, journalist Tiago Cordeiro, was sufficiently inspired to interview Radner for the Brazilian monthly magazine *Superinteressante* (circulation c. 460,000) [4].

The second website, *Assyrian Empire Builders: Governors, diplomats and soldiers in the service of Sargon II and Tiglath-pileser III, kings of Assyria (AEB)*, focuses on administrative, political and military history in the 8th century BC. It makes available a fully searchable on-line corpus of c. 1,400 letters of the Assyrian state correspondence, and provides context and explanatory materials in 30 introductory essays by Radner and her project team [5]. The *reach* of this site is only slightly less wide than that of its older counterpart: from 1 January 2010 to 31 July 2013, it had attracted 77,941 visits by 54,465 visitors from 170 countries, who viewed 162,711 pages. Repeat visitors accounted for 30.1% of visits (23,495). In 2013, the site had over 3,000 unique visits per month. *AEB* is among Google's first three search results for all obvious search terms, such as 'Assyrian Empire', 'Tiglath-pileser III' and 'Sargon II'. Again, referral traffic generated by Facebook and other non-academic sites demonstrate appeal to non-specialist audiences.

One aspect of the *significance* of *AEB* is indicated by a notable difference to the visitor pattern of *K&P* [2]. This is the high number of visits from Sweden (sixth highest with 2,039 visits, after 34,749 visits from the USA, 9,038 from 482 towns in the UK, 3,022 from Germany, 2,636 from Canada, 2,580 from Australia), where Ancient Near Eastern Studies is taught only at the University of Uppsala. Academic usage cannot account for these numbers and the explanation is likely to lie in the high number of refugees from Iraq granted asylum in Sweden, including Northern Iraqi Christians who trace their origins back to the ancient Assyrians and therefore have a pronounced interest in regional and political history. The significant impact of Radner's research on Middle Eastern expatriate communities, not only Iraqi Christians in Sweden but also other Christian and Syriac-speaking population groups originally from the Middle East, is corroborated by the fact that websites maintained for and by these expatriate communities such as *Assyriska ungdomsörbundet*

Impact case study (REF3b)

i Sverige, Christians of Iraq or Assyrian International News Agency: News and Analysis of Assyrian and Assyrian-Related Issues Worldwide make frequent use for their postings of AEB materials or studies accessible through AEB download links, such as Radner's article on the Tur Abdin mountain range [e], a key site for Syriac-speakers [6]. Expatriate Kurds are another group that makes frequent reference to AEB materials and downloads in blogs and web forums such as *WorldNews* and *ForumBiodiversity* [7], especially when discussing possible links between modern Kurds and ancient Medes where Radner's article [a] is cited. (Radner herself does not endorse any direct link.)

The site is also intensively used in countries of Western Asia itself, which account for 4,260 visits, the highest number after North America and Northern and Western Europe. An illustration of its significance here is that the commissioning editor of the popular Turkish monthly magazine, *Aktüel Arkeoloji Dergisi*, after a visit to AEB, asked Radner to adapt website materials on the Assyrian Empire's political presence and cultural influence in Anatolia (which were in turn based on [e]), for publication in its May/June 2012 issue [8].

A further use of AEB is in the education of younger children. In Britain, 561 visits to the sites followed links from children's reference book publisher Usborne's "quicklinks" site [9]. In Australia, the website is used for teaching ancient history at high schools, among them St Gregory's College Campbelltown and Shore Sydney Church of England Grammar School, whose teachers sought direct contact with Radner: "The boys love your work and so do I. You make it very accessible to us non academics." [10].

In sum, the impact of Radner's research as disseminated via *K&P* and *AEB* has had a truly global reach and has been highly significant in contributing to the cultural heritage of several ethnic and religious groups, but above all in making possible for the first time the study Assyrian history in detail at all levels, from school to university to independent self-taught students.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- [1] *Knowledge and Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire (K&P)*: <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/saao/knpp/>; previously at <http://knp.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/>.
- [2] Google Analytics reports available on request.
- [3] Main BBC page for In Our Time 'The Library at Nineveh': <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00b7r71/>; BBC iPlayer: http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b00b7r71/In_Our_Time_The_Library_at_Nineveh/. Referrals from BBC page: see Google Analytics report, p. 43; listed under [2]. Archived comments on programme: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/features/in-our-time/comments/b00b7r71/>.
- [4] Tiago Cordeiro, "Assírios", in: *Superinteressante* 309A: *As Maiores Batalhas da Bíblia* (special issue), September 2012, p. 16. <http://abr.ai/17e6hJA>.
- [5] *Assyrian Empire Builders: Governors, diplomats and soldiers in the service of Sargon II and Tiglath-pileser III, kings of Assyria (AEB)*: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/sargon/>.
- [6] Examples of citations on expatriate websites: <http://www.aina.org/ata/20100111165243.htm> (1 November 2010); <http://www.auf.nu/viewarticle.php?id=800> (11 December 2009).
- [7] Examples of citations on expatriate Kurdish websites <http://www.forumbiodiversity.com/showthread.php?t=6592> (7 July 2010).
- [8] "Assurlular Urartular," *Aktüel Arkeoloji* 30 (May/June 2012), pp. 56–67. Abstract: <http://www.aktuelarkeoloji.com.tr/?/=994>.
- [9] AEB listed on website of the reference publisher Usborne: www.usborne.com/quicklinks/; see Google Analytics, p. 27; listed under [2].
- [10] Personal testimony from Australian schoolteacher, available on request.