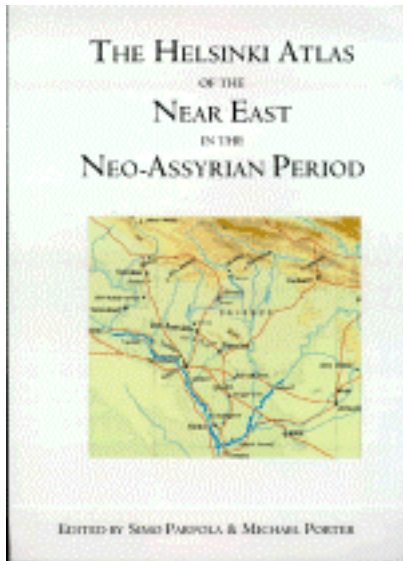


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**Parpola, Simo, and Michael Porter, eds.**

***The Helsinki Atlas of the Near East in the Neo-Assyrian Period***

Finland: Casco Bay Assyriological Institute, 2001.  
Pp. xiv + 46. Paper. \$29.95. ISBN 9514590503.

Alan C Lenzi  
Brandeis University

The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project ([www.helsinki.fi/science/saa/cna.html](http://www.helsinki.fi/science/saa/cna.html)) and the Casco Bay Assyriological Institute ([www.cba-inst.org/index.html](http://www.cba-inst.org/index.html)) have made an important contribution to Near Eastern Studies with this volume. The editors should be congratulated for producing an attractive, affordable, and useable tool for those concerned with the Neo-Assyrian period. The *Atlas* covers an area of the Near East circumscribed by Urartu, the Caspian Sea, Media, Elam, the Persian Gulf, the Arabian desert, the northeast corner of Egypt, Cyprus, Cilicia, and northern Syria (approx. 30° to 40° N latitude, 32° to 52° E longitude). The *Atlas* includes an introduction (vii–ix), a technical note about cartographic methods (xii), two map indices (xiii), a legend (xiv), thirty-three color maps (each 7 by 10 inches), a gazetteer (3–35), and bibliography and abbreviations (36–46). The *Atlas* also comes with a color, fold-out map (approximately 28 by 40 inches) tucked into a pocket at the back of the book. (This map may also be purchased separately.)

The fold-out map represents a printout of “a single, seamless, digital map” (ix) created as an AutoCAD drawing and linked to a database of toponymic information. The thirty-three maps included in the *Atlas* are snapshots of this map (“printed ... from specific views of the AutoCAD drawing” [ix]). For maps 1 through 17 of the *Atlas*, the “Overview Maps,” these snapshots are identical to the same area on the fold-out map; both use a scale of 1:2,000,000. Maps 18 through 33, “Detail Maps,” only differ from the others in that they use a scale of 1:1,000,000.

The database the editors used to create the *Atlas* includes over three thousand toponyms extracted from *Neo-Assyrian texts*.<sup>1</sup> This database forms the heart of the *Atlas* as well as the larger cartographic project from which it derives: “the preparation of a Digital Map of the Ancient Near East” (ix). This database and the editors’ ambitious project has potential to produce diachronic geographical perspectives on the growth of the Assyrian Empire and “in its fully-developed form ... will allow the production of paper maps on demand ... but could also incorporate any kind of data with a geographical component, whether pottery series, seed-types, or major archaeological excavations” (ix). (See [www.cba-inst.org/DigiMap/index.html](http://www.cba-inst.org/DigiMap/index.html) for a prototype.)

The editors selected seven hundred toponyms for inclusion in the present *Atlas*. Each toponym (in Akkadian orthography) was plotted on the map and given a level of certainty ranging from 1 (“certain”) to 4 (“conjectural or speculative”). The goal of the map in this regard is not to be definitive but rather to “stimulate further efforts in historical geography and provide a solid cartographic base from which such efforts can proceed” (vii).

Apparently the production of the *Atlas* itself has already begun this process. The editors plotted each toponym and also utilized a team of ten reviewers and many other scholars (all listed in the volume) to look over their work before publication. These scholars offered corrections, suggestions, and even debate about the locations of several toponyms.

Unfortunately, despite the editors’ desire to map “the Assyrian Empire at its greatest extent” (vii), Egyptian toponyms were excluded from the *Atlas*. The editors write, “We decided early in our work that an atlas that appeared in print in timely fashion was preferable to one that was perfect but took years to complete, and there are, accordingly, desiderata that remain unfulfilled because of time pressure” (viii). This commitment may also have led to some of the problems in the *Atlas* noted below.

The second half of the *Atlas* contains a very useful gazetteer divided into two parts. Part 1 lists the toponyms by their Neo-Assyrian names, part 2 by their modern (or classical) names. This double gazetteer will be one of the most endearing attributes of the *Atlas* to biblicalists who do not know Akkadian and nonarchaeologically inclined Assyriologists.

The gazetteer is a wealth of information. Both parts list all seven hundred toponyms alphabetically, label them by type (e.g., city, mountain, region), give alternate name(s), indicate the level of certainty for each location, specify latitude and longitude, give the number of the best map in the *Atlas* to see each location along with grid coordinates for

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<sup>1</sup> Parpola’s efforts in this regard extend back to the publication of his *Neo-Assyrian Toponyms* (AOAT 6; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Verlag Butzon & Bercker Kevelaer, 1970).

locating it on that page, and finally note significant bibliography. Thus, under Ursalimmu in part 1 one finds the following information: capital | Yerūšalaim, Jerusalem | 1 | 31° 47.47' N 35° 10.28' E | 7 | D5 and one entry of bibliography. In part 2 the same information may be found under the entries Jerusalem and Yerūšalaim.

In order to test the utility of the *Atlas* for biblical scholars, I read through the translations of Neo-Assyrian historical texts in *ANET* (275–301, 532–41, 558–60) alongside the *Atlas*. The idea was to determine whether the *Atlas* contributed positively to my reading of these texts. The results were encouraging. A majority of the toponyms in these texts appear in the *Atlas*, but even when several toponyms in the course of a text do not appear, the *Atlas* can still facilitate following the geographical aspects of the text. The *Atlas* is clearly the best handbook available for this purpose. Finally, for those without Akkadian, only occasionally did a problem arise in determining a toponym's Akkadian equivalent based solely upon the spelling offered in *ANET*.

Although the editors have done a great service with this atlas, I would offer the following comments in hopes of contributing to the editors' ongoing work. My comments are not intended to detract from the enormous gratitude with which I greet this volume. Moreover, since my competence does not fall in the domain of historical geography of the Near East, I limit myself to comments about presentation and utility.

First, the gazetteer's alphabetical order is mixed up: instead of using the standard Assyriological order s, š, ſ, the gazetteer lists these letters in reverse. Second, there are several typographical errors in the toponymic information when one compares the map to the gazetteer. A representative sample follows. In orthography, Ḥaidālu / Ḥīdālu on the map (M) is spelled Ḥaidalu / Ḥīdālu in the gazetteer (G); Samsimuruna (M) versus Samsimūruna (G); Kilizi (M) versus Kilīzi (G); Mat Akkadī (M) versus Māt Akkadī (G). In specific designations, Arbail is a provincial center (M) versus a city (G); Iadnānu (Cyprus) a mountain (M) versus a region (G); Aršaškun a city (M) versus a capital (G); Arwāda a capital (M) versus a city (G).

A larger problem lies in the fact that the map's legend does not correspond to the "types" assigned each toponym in the gazetteer, and no explanation of the relationship between the two is offered. Thus, cities on the map may be designated a "city" or a "town" in the gazetteer, but there is no explanation for this differentiation. Toponyms designated "province" in the gazetteer, defined as an "Assyrian Province—so designated if the area in question ever became an Assyrian province," were found to correspond to an Assyrian province, a regional polity, or an overregional area according to the map's legend. Oddly enough, the legend's example of an Assyrian province, Māt Turtāni, is designated a "territory" in the gazetteer. A "district" in the gazetteer is defined as "An administrative unit, corresponding to the Akkadian *nagû/nagiu*." "District," however, is not employed in the map's legend at all. The gazetteer's "district" may correspond alternately to the map's

foreign province, regional area, or even Assyrian province designations. For clarity's sake, I think the gazetteer and map in future editions should employ only one means of classifying the toponyms or at least provide clarification for using the two systems.

As for the presentation of the map, I offer a few suggestions. The legend relies upon italicization and incremental differences in font size to differentiate its various classifying designations of toponyms, and all of these appear in black ink (except the names of bodies of water). The legend's designations would be easier to distinguish on the map if color were introduced into its current scheme. Also, the modern borders on the map need to be darker if they are to be of use. Finally, I noticed three outstanding omissions of regional toponyms: Amurru, Māt Aššūr (listed in the gazetteer, but not on the map), and Māt Šumeri (which should be included even if it is by this period only a literary expression of a traditional, geographical word pair).

Although I have noted some problems with the *Atlas*, these can in no way offset the importance and value of this volume. Again, the editors should be congratulated for producing an attractive, affordable, and useable tool, one that many biblicists and historians of ancient Israel will find indispensable. As for the developments of the larger, ongoing project, we look forward to its fruit.