

The Assyrian-Hebrew Conflict (859 BCE – 705 BCE)

الصراع الآشوري العبراني (859 ق.م – 705 ق.م)

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Abstract:

The Assyrian Empire emerged as a major power in the first millennium BCE. It was able to control much of the ancient Near East, thanks to its economic capacities and military might.

This present study aims to investigate the expansion of the Assyrian Empire in the Near East and its imposition of control over these regions, in addition to its long struggle against the Hebrew kingdoms to subdue them. The Assyrian Empire possessed advanced military capabilities, strategies, and plans compared to other civilizations.

Keywords: : Assyrians, Hebrews, Near East, Arameans, Phoenicians .

ملخص:

ظهرت الإمبراطورية الآشورية كقوة عظمى في الألفية الأولى ق.م ، واستطاعت أن تسيطر على كثير من مناطق الشرق الأدنى القديم، لما كانت تمتلك من إمكانيات اقتصادية وقوة عسكرية في هذه الدراسة تطرقت الى توسع الإمبراطورية الآشورية في مناطق الشرق الأدنى وفرض سيطرتها عليها بالإضافة الى صراعها الطويل ضد الممالك العبرانية لإخضاعها، وخاصة أن الإمبراطورية الآشورية كانت تمتلك مقومات القتال و استراتيجيات الحروب ، والخطط العسكرية المتطورة بالمقارنة مع شعوب أخرى .

كلمات مفتاحية: الآشوريون ، العبرانيون ، الشرق الأدنى ، الآراميون ، الفينيقيون.

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1. Introduction

The Neo-Assyrian era was characterized by wars waged by the Assyrians to control trade routes and key centres of wealth in the ancient Near East, particularly the Levant, more precisely Syria.

The Jews are not mentioned in ancient Iraqi texts prior to this era. They gradually began to interact with events unfolding in Syria and Palestine, and their history was correlated to the Arameans of the region, as well as their wars and alliances.

The Assyrians emerged as a military power at the beginning of the first millennium BC, altering the course of events in the ancient Near East. The Jews are mentioned in the texts of King Shalmaneser III, considered the first Mesopotamian (Iraqi) king to have military ties with them. His victories are recorded in cuneiform texts, as well as inscribed on his two stelae: the Black Obelisk and the Karkh Obelisk. We also discussed the political stagnation that followed Shalmaneser III's reign and the subsequent circumstances that led to Adad-nirari III's ascension to power. We then examined his most significant military campaigns against the Jews after this period of political inactivity.

We also tackled the mention of the Jews in the texts of King Tiglath-Pileser III and the military actions he undertook, which characterized his reign, as it was almost the beginning of the end for the Kingdom of Israel (Samaria). At the end, Shalmaneser V devoted his efforts to eliminating Samaria. After the death of King Solomon, son of David, his kingdom split into two parts: the northern and the southern (1). 'Puckenhill,(1927) p. 144.)

The northern part, including Samaria, was inherited by the ten houses (2) (Bury (J.B.), (1965), , pp. 346-348.) that chose the name of their ancient ancestor for this region. Thus, the northern part became known as the Kingdom of Israel (3). (Doub Nov (Simon), *Precis d'Histoire Jules*, Trad I. Pougath, Editions. Kyoum (Paris, S.D.), p. 47.).

The southern part, which included Jerusalem, was inherited by the houses of Judah and Benjamin. They established a throne ruled by governors from the lineage of Solomon and the descendants of David. Since the king was from the house of David, which descended from the lineage of Judah, this region was called the Kingdom of Judah (4). (Even Philip, (1965), p. 84.).

2. The Aramean-Ephramean War

2.1 The Reign of Shalmaneser III (859-824 BC)

When the kings of the Syrian city-states realized the Assyrian threat, they formed a coalition of twelve kings, led by Ben-Hadad Bir - Idri, king of the Aramean kingdom in Damascus, which had strong influence in the region. (5) Baqrat, (1955), p. 274.

Ben-Hadad's fear of the Assyrians emerged from their interference in the affairs of the kingdom of Aleppo, which had submitted to Assyria, paying it tribute and even

acknowledging Assyrian sovereignty. Due to these unproductive circumstances, Ben-Hadad wanted to put an end to the Assyrians. (6) Baqrat, (1955) p. 274.

Akhab, king of Israel, and Gindibu, king of the Arabs, joined the coalition, as did the princes of the Phoenician cities, until the coalition army numbered approximately 60,000. A warrior was formed to confront and eliminate the Assyrians, as all members of this alliance had suffered heavy losses at their hands. (7) Ibid., p. 575.

The two armies met at the city of Qarqar, (8) (A place in Syria, north of Hama.) located north of Hama, in 853 BC. Shalmaneser III, King of Assyria, emerged victorious. Following this, the two armies dispersed, and Shalmaneser returned to his lands to celebrate his triumph. Some historians argue that the battle was not decisive, which led both armies to withdraw from the battlefield. (9) Addai Sher, (1936) p. 69.

During the reign of Hazael, (10) Hazael, (1951) p. 20.) son of Hadad, the power of the Aramean kingdom increased, especially since its king was a strong and warlike ruler. He was able to confront and even withstand the first attack launched against him by Shalmaneser III in 842 BCE, and then the second attack in 838 BCE. (11). Joseph (Flavus) pp. 127-128-129.

After that, Hazael attacked the kingdom of Israel, penetrating south into eastern Jordan and expanding his influence along the coast of the Palestinian plain. His aim was to control the trade routes leading to Egypt and Arabia.

Thus, the kingdom of Damascus was able to dominate the kingdom of Israel, which then fell under the yoke of servitude. Not only that, but they also imposed tribute on the kingdom of Judah. However, the Assyrian attacks on the Aramean kingdom continued unabated until it began to exhaust its strength and lose its territories, to the point that Hazael could no longer maintain control. (12) Pirot (Louis), (1908), p. 518.

Around 785 BCE, a powerful king, Jeroboam II, ascended the throne of the Kingdom of Israel. He aspired to restore his kingdom's borders and attacked Damascus and Hamath. The reign of Adad-nirari III (810-783 BCE) is limited to the Limmo List and the Tell el-Rimah Stele. Therefore, historians have not reached a consensus on this king's campaigns due to the lack of chronological organization in his records. (13) Baqrat, Introduction..., op. cit., p. 274.

2.2 The Reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC)

Tiglath-Pileser III (14) His name was mentioned in the Assyrian texts: Tukulti - apil Esarra Garelli (p) Nikiprowetzky (V), (1974), p. 252.) ruled Assyria for eighteen years, from 745 to 725 BC. During this period, he implemented a strict rule, which enabled him to realize the idea of a universal empire. To achieve the empire's true ambitions, he had to subdue the Arameans in the south, establish Babylon as the cultural and religious capital of the empire (15) Grollenberg (luc.H.), confront the pressure from the Urartian tribes in the

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north, and finally conquer Assyria and Palestine in the west (16). Elsevier, 1954 p.90.

This hypothesis seems very appropriate and reasonable to me, because these mentioned countries possessed abundant resources and were simultaneously a passage to Egypt and a gateway to the Mediterranean coast.

Unfortunately, the annals of this king were found in poor condition. Although their texts contain valuable information, they are incomplete and have gaps due to damage. However, thanks to our knowledge of the important events in the region and comparing them with others, we can give at least a brief idea of his military campaigns. Tiglath-Pileser conquered northern Syria in 740 BC and established the kingdoms of the empire.

In 738 BC, he destroyed the city-state of Hamath (17) (Amaud (D), (1970),

p. 194.), achieving a resounding success. But he was not content and continued to exert increasing pressure on the Aramean kingdom (18) Grollenberg (Luc H.), op-cit. p. 94. Amidst these turbulent circumstances, the power of Damascus, Israel, and Judah began to weaken. At that era, Ahaz, son of Jotham, son of Azariah, reigned over Judah. He nearly succumbed to Assyria, but Rezin, the last king of Damascus, and Pekah, son of Remaliah, king of Israel, prepared to fight Assyria. They asked Ahaz for help, and when he refused, they decided to attack Jerusalem, expel him, and install the Aramean Ben-Tebel in his place (19) Even Philip, (1965) p213.

The opportunity arose for the Assyrian king when relations soured between the three Syrian city-states: Damascus, Israel, and Judah. News spread throughout the house of David that the Arameans had invaded Ephraim. The inhabitants were alarmed by this terrifying news, and Ahaz was seized with panic, finding himself in a very precarious situation in Jerusalem. His son-in-law, Isaiah (20) (Isaiah's prophecy preceded this alliance.), reassured him and urged him to remain calm and trust in their God (21) Al-Khazen, Nassib Wahba, pp. 129–130. However, Ahaz was determined to seek strong assistance and send a gift from the palace temple to Tiglath-Pileser himself, writing him a covenant of submission and imploring him for help to escape his enemies. Ahaz went to Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, saying, “I am your servant Ahaz. Come up and deliver me from the hand of the king of Aram and the hand of the king of Israel who are attacking me.” Ahaz took all the silver and gold he found in the temple of the Lord and the treasuries of the king’s palace and sent it to Assyria as a gift (22). The Book of the Torah, 2 Kings, Chapter 16 (6–8). Thus, Ahaz was freed from his perilous situation before Jerusalem fell to the besieging Aramean and Israeli forces.

It is understood from the above that Tiglath-Pileser III refused Ahaz's request to attack Syria-Palestine until he found an opportunity to act there, as he intended to subdue the entire region. The Assyrian Chronicle of 734 BC states that Tiglath-Pileser III would send an expedition to Philistia (23). (Grollenberg, op-cit., p. 94; Noth (M), op-cit., p. 266.) Indeed, he went to Palestine in the same year, subduing Khatraka and many cities on the Phoenician coast, such as Byblos, Simyra, and Arqa (24). (It is a city near Tripoli, about 12 miles northeast of it, and is mentioned in classical sources as Arka.). Afterward, he subdued Elaka

and captured and plundered Gaza (25). (Roth (Cicil), (1957), p. 48.)

In Syria-Palestine, he clashed with the forces of Aram and Israel, and his campaign reached as far south as the southwest (26). (Grollenbert, op-cit., p. 94.) If we lack information about the details of this campaign, let us assume that the southern city-states were forced to pay tribute, as was the case with Judah.

The Assyrian state rose to prominence, especially after subjugating the Palestinian city-state of Gaza. Terror spread throughout Syria-Palestine, and Tiglath-Pileser III extracted tribute from the kings of the city-states he conquered on the condition that he transforms them into Assyrian kingdoms (27). (Al-Khazen, Nassib Wahba, op. cit., pp. 129-130.). In this regard, a text by Tiglath-Pileser III indicates that the king of Gaza was terrified of the Assyrian king and gained Egypt's support, but this text does not provide a date to determine the period.

Tiglat-Pileser III burdened Samaria with tribute payments and intensified Assyrian campaigns against Tyre, the city that controlled Mediterranean trade. Assyria gained several allies in its conflict with Tyre, especially the Phoenician states, which were angry with Tyre and rivaled it (28). (Arab Ma'an p19) Damascus, however, remained without any significant allies, so Tiglath-Pileser announced his advance against it in 733-732 BCE (29). (The Torah, Fourth Book of Kings, verses (9-16)).

As for Samaria, it was conquered after Damascus, and its inhabitants suffered the same fate. One Assyrian text describes the captivity of the people of Galilee and the destruction of Damascus: "As for Beth-Khumriah, I carried its people and all their possessions to Assyria. Their king, Pekah, was deposed, and Hoshea was appointed in his place... and I took from them a tribute of ten talents of gold and ten talents of silver" (30). (Najib Mikhail Ibrahim, (1965), p381.) Among the kings who submitted to Tiglath-Pileser and paid him tribute were Rezin, king of Damascus, and Menahem, king of Samaria (31). (Grollenberg (Luc, H.), op-cit. Noth; (M), op-cit., p. 265.) The Book of Kings travelling mentions the tribute the latter paid to Tiglath-Pileser.

The text indicates that he paid a thousand talents (32) (The two hills = 30 kg.) of silver, a sum he obtained by conscripting freemen into the army. He believed that the tribute would secure his usurped kingdom (33). (II Rois, XV, 19 follow; Pritchard (J), *Lumieres sur la bible*, (l'archéologie et l'ancien testament), copyright 1958 by Princeton).

The aim of the Aramean-Ephramean War, for both the Arameans and the Israelites, was to resist Tiglath-Pileser III. As for Ahaz, king of Judah, he may have feared the security forces established by the Assyrian king in neighbouring Philistia, and therefore refused to join Aram-Israel. Based on this refusal, Aram and Israel wanted to strip him of the throne and compensate him by bringing an Aramean into the alliance against the Assyrians.

3. The Assyrian Invasion of the Kingdom of Israel

3.1 The Kingdom of Israel during the Reign of Sargon II

Hoshea son of Elah assassinated Pekah son of Remaliah and seized control of Israel, ruling it for nine years. His reign was characterized by cruelty and tyranny, like that of his predecessors. He paid the annual tribute and other dues to the Assyrian king Shalmaneser V (726-722 BCE).

However, Shalmaneser discovered Hoshea's treachery, as the scriptures mention that he allied himself with the Egyptian king Shabaka against Shalmaneser V and refused to pay the tribute. This led Shalmaneser V to arrest and imprison him. He then marched on the Kingdom of Samaria in 724 BCE and besieged it for three years. It did not fall until after the death of Shalmaneser V and the ascension of Sargon II to the throne. It seems that Egypt encouraged his rebellion out of fear of the advancing Assyrian threat..

3.2 The Fall of the Israeli Kingdom

Shalmaneser V besieged the Kingdom of Israel in 724 BC and arrested its king, Hoshea son of Elah. He then exiled him along with a large number of his subjects, replacing them with new inhabitants. After Shalmaneser's death, Sargon II (34) (Sargon II assumed power in 721 BC. We do not know precisely his relationship with the previous king, Shalmaneser III. It is known that Shalmaneser conducted a military campaign in the west, which had a significant impact, and besieged the city of Samaria. Perhaps the commander of the Assyrian army at that time was Sargon II, who succeeded him to the throne, as Sargon himself claimed in his texts that he had captured Samaria. He may have usurped the throne illegitimately.) continued the siege until the Kingdom of Israel fell into his hands at the end of 722 BC and the beginning of 721 BC (35). (Doubinov (s), p. 49)

In this regard, he says in an inscription: “I besieged the city of Samaria and captured it, and I transferred 27,290 of its inhabitants. I seized fifty chariots of royal armor, then I populated it more than it had before, settling new inhabitants there from the lands I had conquered.” And I appointed my men as governors over it, and imposed tribute and taxes upon it, as the Assyrians do (36). (p444. The four Kings 18 (9-11), (1974).

From the above, we can deduce a similarity between the inscribed text and the text found in the Holy Scriptures. The two texts complement each other, and it is understood from them that the capital was occupied by the Assyrians and emptied of its essential essence, as the vital forces of the nation were transferred, and the void was filled by bringing in other peoples. These same peoples were brought from enslaved regions (37). (Parrot (André), (1955), p36.)

The problem here lies in the transferred peoples who were subjected to harsh treatment. But these actions were considered inevitable, dictated by the circumstances in which the region lived.

Thus ends the history of the Kingdom of Israel, to be replaced by the history of the Samaritans. While some of those deported rebelled against Assyrian slavery, others sought liberation. Samaria is among the names of the rebellious cities that united their forces at the instigation of Illubidi, king of Hamath. Other important rebellious cities included Arpad, Simirra, Damascus, Gaza, and Samaria. These cities received significant aid and support from Egypt (38). (Ibid., pp. 36-64; 43- Ricclotti (G); op. cit., p.445).

Regardless of the policy of deportation or forced relocation employed by Sargon II, he and his successors added to it a policy of settlement. They brought tribes from Babylonia, Elam, Syria, and Arabia to replace the captive Israelites. These displaced tribes later became known as the Samaritans, after Samaria, which was the name of the capital of the kingdom they inhabited (39). (Darwaza, Muhammad Izzat, (1958) p.180.) Sargon II was known for his shrewdness and resourcefulness. He consistently demonstrated his political acumen, skillfully exploiting situations by either retaining a loyal local prince from the defeated region or appointing one of his officers as governor (40). (Delaporte, Mesopotamia, p. 344.).

However, if he found himself unable to consolidate his rule through other means, he did not hesitate to resort to brutal force, destroying everything in his path, such as crops, trees, and villages (41). (Delaporte, ibid., p. 344.)

Some historical accounts indicate that Sargon II deported the inhabitants of Samaria to Assyria and resettled them in Kalakh, along the Khabur River (the Gozan River), and in the cities of Media (or the cities of Media) (42). (The four Kings 17:1-6).

According to the writings of the historian Josephus, Sargon II destroyed the Kingdom of Israel and sent its people captive to Media. He also brought settlers from the Chutians (43) (The Chutians were a people belonging to a kingdom in Persia, named after the Chuth River, along whose banks they lived.) to Samaria and all other parts of the former Kingdom of Israel (44). (Josephus (Flavius); Book IX, Chapter XIV, p. 251).

The Bible addresses this issue and the conditions that befell the region after the end of the Kingdom of Israel and the exile of its aristocratic classes. It specifies that the exile was to the lands of Mesopotamia and Media. According to the Torah, the Israelites themselves suffered greatly.

The exiled classes endured a painful fate and were later assimilated into the settled population (45). (The two Rols, XVII, 6.) It is well known that most Torah narratives are biased in favor of the Israelites. In the new kingdom of Samaria, a foreign aristocracy emerged, originating from Babylon itself, the Babylonian city of Kutha, and even from Hamath in central Syria, as well as from other unknown lands.

These foreign elements introduced their customs and traditions to Samaria, particularly their distinct religions, which differed from the Samaritan faith (46). (II Kings, XVII, 24; Ricciotti; op. cit., p. 444; Pritchard (James B). Lumières... op. cit., p. 62.) Over time, this aristocracy gradually assimilated into the Israelite population that remained in

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Samaria (47). (Rols, XII, 29-31.).

Assyrian lists dating back to the 7th century BCE record the names of the rulers of the kingdoms of Samaria and Megiddo. Rare documents have been found in Samaria's ruins, including a cuneiform text that identifies the title of an official, the Rabalani, the city chief. It is highly probable that the Assyrians subjugated the crown region, which was ruled by the new aristocracy that had settled in the kingdom (48). (Garelli (Paul), 1982 pp. 441-442.).

Some judicial documents, also bearing cuneiform script, were found in the excavations at Tell Djezer, dating back to the 7th century BCE. These documents contain the names of several local people and outsiders. This indicates a mixing of ethnicities within the new aristocracy (49). (Garelli (Paul), 1982 pp. 441-442.).

One of the aforementioned documents states that the governor of Gezer bore an Egyptian name. Undoubtedly, he had resided in this Canaanite city for a long time and became its ruler, despite his Egyptian origins (50). (II Rois; XVII, 24.) Comparing the cuneiform text with the Second Book of Kings confirms the accuracy of the biblical information.

In short, our conclusion regarding the Kingdom of Israel is that its kings and people deviated from the beginning due to political factors and the rift that occurred between them and the King of Jerusalem, and the tribes of Judah and Benjamin (51)(One of the twelve tribes of Israel, the most famous of whom was Saul.) who followed him. They established two main temples in Dan (52) (The city of Dan is located near Banias (Nablus). The city was formerly called Lashem, and the site is now called Tell Fadi. A river flows from the bottom of this hill. The Danites. From Gregory of Miletus, Abridged History of the Dynasties, undated, p. 33.) and Bethel (53) (Bethel is a city located north of Jerusalem, known especially for its connection to the history of the patriarchs and the Shesmatik temple of Jeroboam I. Today it is called Beitin.). to celebrate their festivals, bypassing the Temple in Jerusalem to avoid the consequences of mixing with other faiths. At each of these temples, they placed a golden calf, and they remained deviant until the end. At the conclusion of this study, based on cuneiform sources, scientific evidence proves that the Jews did not have a presence in Palestine at the beginning of the Neo-Assyrian period. Rather, they lived there as a minority among the indigenous population throughout their presence. They were never able to establish a state or city-state encompassing all of Palestine at any point in history; therefore, they were considered part of these peoples.

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- 52- The city of Dan is located near Banias (Nablus). The city was formerly called Lashem, and the site is now called Tell Fadi. A river flows from the bottom of this hill. The Danites. From Gregory of Miletus, Abridged History of the Dynasties, undated, p. 33.
- 53- Bethel is a city located north of Jerusalem, known especially for its connection to the history of the patriarchs and the Shesmatik temple of Jeroboam I. Today it is called Beitin.