

# The Neo-Assyrian Empire: Its Military and Political Policies against Ancient Palestine\*

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*Abstract: Discussing the neo-Assyrian policies against ancient Palestine, this paper deals with various aspects: the coalition against Shalmaneser III, the motivation for the Assyrian military campaigns in the ninth century B.C.E., Assyrian policy change under Tiglath-pileser III, Tiglath-pileser III's campaign against Damascus and Samaria in 733-732 B.C.E., Assyrian rule over Philistia and Judah, mass deportation and its objectives. Sennacherib's campaign in Palestine is still open to discussion. We also overview Sennacherib's expedition to Philistia and Judah including the conquest of Lachish. In the decline of the Assyrian power, ancient Palestine again gained its independence.*

Keywords: Assyria    Palestine    Military    Policy    Israel

## 1. Introduction

The Neo-Assyrian empire expanded its territory with military might from the ninth century B.C.E. and reigned over almost all Mesopotamian states at its zenith around the eighth century and sixth century B.C.E. Assyrian foreign policy was influenced by the personalities of her kings or in times of royal weakness, of her officials. Following Hallo's scheme, it is convenient to divide the Neo-Assyrian period accordingly: (1)The rise of the empire associated with Shalmaneser III, which lasted for three decades; (2)Revolt and restoration under his son and grandson; (3)Forty more years of retreat, with three weak brothers succeeding each

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other on the throne; (4)The Assyrian resurgence under Tiglath-Pileser III, Shalmanaser V, and Sargon II; (5)Assyria in its height under Sennacherib and Esarhaddon; and (6)The last forty years of decline and, then, fall (Hallo 1960: 36).

In this paper, we focus on the empire's policy against ancient Palestine. Although Phoenicians, Aramaeans (Damascus), and Trans-Jordanians are related to our subject, we will not deal with them specifically; therefore, Israelites in the north, Judeans in the south, and Philistines will be treated in this paper. In section 2, in addition to the battle of Qarqar, we will discuss the motivation of the Assyrian military campaign. Following sections 3 and 4, we will survey change of Assyrian policy, the problem of the Syro-Ephraimite war, and Judah and Philistia under the Assyrians at the time of Tiglath-Pileser III. In conjunction with Sargon II, we will cast light on the Samaritans employed in the royal army (section 5). Discussion of deportation is placed separately (section 6). In section 7, the focus is on Sennacherib's campaign: the number of campaign against Palestine, and his action against Philistia and Judah. Finally, the decline and fall will be treated briefly in section 8.

## 2. The rise of the Neo-Assyrian empire (859-829 B.C.E.)

### 2.1 Shalmaneser III

When Shalmaneser III rose to the throne in 859 B.C.E., he inherited an empire on the ascent. While Assurnasirpal II was mostly interested in plundering, Shalmaneser annexed areas when possible, led his armies into western neighbors, and brought about the first encounter between Assyria and Israel. Ben Hadad II of Damascus had been attacking Ahab of Israel, but when faced with the common Assyrian threat, made peace with Ahab. Both formed the grand coalition under Jarhuleni of Hamath together with various states, and they fought Shalmaneser III at Qarqar on the Orontes River in 853 B.C.E.(Hallo 1960: 37-39).

According to the record of Shalmaneser III, the main components of the alliance were as follows: Hadadezer, king of Damascus, with his army of 1200 chariots, Irhuleni, king of Hamath, with 700 chariots, and Ahab, king of Israel, with 2000 chariots (Yadin 1963: 294). The fact that Ahab, king of Israel, had 2000 chariots, which exceeded the combined total of chariots in all other allied

forces probably suggests that the army included the chariots of the king of Judah (Yadin 1963: 300).

However, Na'aman (1976) doubts this suggestion. He thinks that even if Ahab could include Judah in his army, it was impossible that the force could be 2000 chariots. By discarding the historicity of the Monolith Inscription from Kurkh, Na'aman suggests that the number 200 is much more suitable to the reality of that period than the number 2000 (1976: 101-102).

Shalmaneser III claimed that he achieved overwhelming victory at Qarqar; however, there are some evidence that the alliance was successful. First, the Bible remains silent in this event. Had Ahab and the allies suffered the defeat, the author of the Book of Kings would have described it to condemn him for not being faithful to God of Israel. Second, Shalmaneser's next three campaigns were conducted near Assyria while Damascus and Israel resumed their old conflict. The alliance fought Shalmaneser again in 849, 848, 845, and 841 B.C.E. (Hallo 1960: 40).

The coalition collapsed, not because it was defeated in battle, but mainly because Ben-Hadad, its leader, was assassinated by Hazael, his general. Shalmaneser did not wait long. In 841 B.C.E., he invaded Aram, defeated Hazael and proceeded to Hauran. In this campaign, he received the tribute of Jehu, "son of Omri" (Tadmor 1975: 39-40). The black obelisk which celebrated the campaign depicts the envoy of Jehu kneeling in submission (Yadin 1963: 394).

## 2.2 Motivation of Military Campaigns

By the ninth century B.C.E., the motivation for military campaigns was a multifaceted affair, but the original reason was to defend Assyria itself. In the ninth century B.C.E., the main purpose was to gain goods. Equally important was to obtain craftsmen and laborers. Plunder includes comestibles, equipment and animals, especially horses (Crayson 1976: 135).

One major factor of campaign was the self-centeredness of the Assyrian king. He is the hero of the narratives and his unending desire for military honors led the army again and again onto the field of battle. This characteristic is closely related with the state cult, which asserted it was the god of Asshur who

led and assisted the king in his accomplishments. National pride, no doubt, was another contributing factor, especially in an empire ruled by a monarchy. Finally, deeply rooted in Assyrian mentality from ancient times was the very idea of military conquest. Because each king wished to conquer more than his fathers had conquered, Assyrian conquest tended to escalate (Grayson 1976: 135).

Yearly campaigns became the custom for a king. This practice was well founded by the ninth century B.C.E., to which the royal annals and the eponym chronicles are a tangible witness. The important thing was that a campaign had been carried out. It is certain that by the ninth century B.C.E. Assyria boasted a large military organization, which had to be maintained and kept active or else it would deteriorate (Grayson 1976: 135).

No firm answer is available for why certain areas were chosen for the year's military campaign. In most cases, the reason for a campaign is not mentioned and it is possible that no reason existed. As long as no trouble spots required immediate attention, an overall policy should have existed to direct military campaigns (Grayson 1976: 136).

Shalmaneser III seemed to have an apparent expansion plan. Two fronts, the west and the north, received his attention, but there was a preference for the western front. Throughout his reign, if he was not campaigning to the west, he was usually campaigning to the north. Long range policy might have existed behind this plan (Grayson 1976: 137).

The Assyrian army invaded Syrian states, for twenty years, from the first regnal year (858 B.C.E.), and booties and tributes were gained despite some setbacks. The Assyrians paid attention to Anatolia for the next few years until 831 B.C.E. A major policy decision, possibly caused by a complete change of circumstances, led to the shift of emphasis late in his reign (Grayson 1976: 137).

### 3. Revolt and Restoration (828-783 B.C.E.)

Shalmaneser's reign saw a disastrous end. All of Shalmaneser's western conquests were nullified because of a revolt Nineveh and the other Assyrian cities. Shamshi-Adad V and his son successfully quelled the revolt, but the region west of the Euphrates was lost (Hallo 1960: 41).

In 805 B.C.E., Adad-nirari III finally turned his attention against the Aramaeans of Damascus. Israel regarded him as a deliverer since it was oppressed by Damascus; Israel appears among the willing tributaries in this campaign. However, Adad-nirari III could not hold the west. This is suggested by the fact that his armies were engaged close to home after 796 B.C.E. (Hallo 1960: 42-43).

#### 4. Assyria in Retreat (783-745 B.C.E.)

On succeeding his father, Shalmaneser IV was faced with powerfully entrenched rulers in neighbouring countries. No change in the situation occurred when Assur-Dan III succeeded him. The Eponym Chronicle indicates the Assyrian weakness. Assur-nirari V succeeded the throne in 755 B.C.E., but Assur-nirari spent half of his rule in the land (Hallo 1960: 44).

#### 5. Assyrian Resurgence (745-705 B.C.E.)

##### 5.1 Tiglath-pileser III

Tiglath-pileser III was a usurper when he ascended the throne. The western states paid tribute to him in 743 B.C.E. at Arpad. Menahem of Israel was among the tributaries while Azariah of Judah was a prominent figure among the rebels (Hallo 1960: 47).

Tiglath-pileser III carried out one campaign against Philistia and two against Damascus during 734-732 B.C.E. Damascus had formed a coalition with Pekah of Israel. This coalition presumably attacked Ahaz of Judah because he refused to join it. Ahaz then called on Tiglath-pileser III for help and the Assyrians marched toward Palestine (regarding this Syro-Ephraimite war, see below) (Hallo 1960: 48-49).

Tiglath-pileser III conquered Ashkelon, Gezer, and Gaza, cities in ancient Palestine. He also razed Hazor in northern Israel and captured most of Israel's territory including all of Gilead and much of Galilee. The inhabitants were deported (Hallo 1960: 49-50). He claims that he deported all the men of the land of the House of Omri, but actually not all were deported (Oded 1979: 22).

Although Israel became a small vassal state, it was not incorporated into

the Assyrian provincial system. This might be the result of an incident in which a pro-Assyrian revolt in Samaria murdered Pekah and elevated the last northern king, Hoshea, as a loyal Assyrian vassal (Hallo 1960: 50).

## 5.2 Change of Assyrian Policy

In the days of Joash (2 Kings 13: 5) or Menahem (2 Kings 15: 19-20), Assyria was referred to as the ally or savior, but this was transformed drastically to the new mighty Assyria, “eraser of borders” (Isaiah 10: 31) (Tadmor & Cogan 1979 491).

Before the neo-Assyrian empire expanded during the latter part of ninth and first portions of the eighth century, imperial rule was exercised through the agency of vassal or client kingship. Each vassal was directly responsible to the suzerain for the area under his control. The royal messenger served as a link between suzerain and vassal. The viability and strength of the empire influenced the efficiency of the ambassadorial system. A vassal king was to be punished directly in case of rebellion (Holladay 1970: 49).

The neo-Assyrians transformed the previous scheme into a system where the populace was equal to the vassal. This means that the entire community was responsible for its action. Though messengers continued to go from king to king, they also proclaimed the will of the suzerain to the people of the land, adding a new dimension to their activity. Assyria minimized the potential for unilateral action on the part of the vassal king by this democratization of responsibility. By the time around 750 B.C.E., this was well-established practice in Syro-Palestinian states. Both vassal king and populace were punished in case of revolt (Holladay 1970: 50).

## 5.3 Problem of the Syro-Ephraimite War

In the traditional view, the war was intended to force Judah to join the anti-Assyrian coalition in the area. There are several objections against this view. First, if the aim of Damascus and Samaria was to form an alliance of states against Assyria, it is hard to understand why they should weaken themselves by a war against Jerusalem: thereby, they exposed their northern flank to the

Assyrian army (Oded 1972: 153).

Second, considering the political history of Syria and Palestine, wars resulted from disputes over territories and boundaries rather than from conflicts arising in the course of attempts to organize a coalition against a great power (Oded 1972: 153).

Third, 2 Kings 15: 37 informs us that the war against Ahaz was simply a continuation of the hostilities which had already commenced in the reign of Jotham. Hence, the siege of Jerusalem in Ahaz's reign was the climax of the war that had its origin in the political situation of Jotham's reign, and the intervention of the Assyrians marks the end of this war, and was thus not the cause of it (Oded 1972: 155).

Tiglath-pileser III's campaign against Damascus and Samaria in 733-732 B.C.E. had no direct connection with the Syro-Ephraimite war against Judah, which had started back in Jotham's reign (Oded 1972: 165).

#### 5.4 Philistia and Judah under the Assyrians

The first campaign of Tiglath-pileser III was the beginning of Assyrian rule in Philistia. A document at Nimrud describes early Assyrian relations with Philistia. It is a letter to Tiglath-pileser from an Assyrian official stationed near Tyre, which said that he had sent orders to the people of Sidon not to trade with Egyptians and the Philistines. The date of this letter is from 738 to 734 B.C.E. (Tadmor 1966: 88).

There is a question why Tiglath-pileser III moved as far south as Gaza in 734 B.C.E. It was probably because of commercial interests; the ways for the Assyrians to the Mediterranean seaports were blocked by Urartu and the Northern Syrian states (Otzen 1979: 254).

The Assyrians were apt to avoid establishing provinces in this corner of Palestine and instead they maintained the vassal system regardless of whatever happened. For instance, even when Hanun of Gaza fled from Tiglath-pileser III in 734 B.C.E. and sought help from Egypt, he was reinstated on his throne in Gaza when he returned from Egypt and became an Assyrian vassal (Otzen 1979: 256).

According to Otzen, it seems that there are two reasons why Hanun was

not deported and Gaza was not turned into a province. First, the Assyrians always wanted to keep the Philistine states as vassal states, so that they could constitute a block of buffer states against Egypt. Second, the commercial interests of Tiglath-pileser III forced him to preserve Gaza as an independent state (Otzen 1979: 256).

The idea of buffer state explains the treatment of Judah as well as the treatment of the Philistines. Israel was turned into a province in 730-720 B.C.E., whereas Judah never became a province even after participation in several later rebellions. As is the case with the Philistine states, the Assyrians also tried to maintain Judah as a vassal buffer state against Egypt, on which Judah borders in the Negev and Sinai. It is noteworthy that even though the Assyrians were provoked by a long series of rebellions in southern Palestine, they never departed from the fundamental idea of Tiglath-pileser III, namely, to establish and maintain buffer states (Otzen 1979: 256-257).

### 5.5 Sargon II

Shalmaneser V remained in the land during his first regnal year. In 725 B.C.E., he began his campaigns against Palestinian rebellion. Shechem was taken and Samaria was invested (Hallo 1960: 51), but he died while laying siege against Samaria.

After the fall of Samaria, Sargon II “led away as booty 27, 290 inhabitants of it” (Oded 1979: 3). The Israelites were resettled in Gozan, Media and Halah. Postgate indicates that the first two places are understandable: Gozan (Guzana) was a fertile area where the expansion of agriculture was extremely profitable since it had been deserted since the Aramaean incursions; Media was certainly an area whose own population had been deported. Halah is more puzzling, since this was a district in the center of Assyria, close to Nineveh and it was here that the new king planned to build a new capital, Dur-Sharrukin (Postgate 1977: 124).

When Sargon received news of Ashdod’s revolt, he dispatched his army under the leadership of the commander in chief, the Tartan. When the Assyrians approached Ashdod, Yamani fled to Egypt for help. However, since the Egyptians would not intervene, he was forced to continue to Nubia, but was detained there.

In the meantime, Ashdod and Gath were captured. To commemorate the victory a basalt stele was erected, fragments of which were discovered during the excavation. According to the Annals, Ashdod was organized as a new Assyrian province ruled by a governor; however, there is some evidence that alongside the Assyrian governors, local kings were ruling in Ashdod (Tadmor 1966: 94-95).

### 5.6 Samaritans in the royal army of Sargon II

The Horse Lists of Sargon II include the names of many of the top officials and the equestrian officers from Samaria and it is the only unit from outside Assyria proper that is known as a national unit under its own city name. This unit of Samaria is the only one out of seven separate units to be identified by using the name of a city or a national state. The unit of Samaria comprised 13 equestrian officers whose title, *raburate*, can be translated as “commander of teams” and is used at this period both for chariotry and cavalry officers. Two of the personal names are combined with the name of Yahweh (Dalley 1985: 31-32).

Parallel passage in the display inscriptions describes Sargon’s siege and conquest of the city of Samaria. He took as booty 27,290 people who lived there. He formed a unit of 50 chariotry from them, and he allowed the rest to pursue their own skills. He set his governor over them, and he imposed upon them the (same) tribute as the previous king. This passage shows that the deported Samaritans were allowed to pursue their own skills in Assyria, not in Samaria (Dalley 1985: 34-35).

The remarkable thing is that Sargon imposed a tribute no greater than that of his predecessor. This is lenient treatment in the light of Samaria’s rebellion: it had broken its oath of vassalage, had held out against the Assyrian army for two or three years, had joined a rebellion soon after its capture, and was now changing in status from a vassal kingdom to a province under direct rule. Another point noteworthy is that none of the texts of Sargon’s reign describes booty taken from Samaria. None of the Assyrian sources says that Samaria was burnt or rebuilt (Dalley 1985: 35-36).

According to Dalley, at the battle of Qarqar in 853 B.C.E., the Israelite forces were distinctive for possessing chariotry without cavalry; in Sargon’s royal

inscription it is significant that whereas Hamath and Carchemish employ both chariotry and cavalry, Samaria has only chariotry according to all the various cuneiform sources. Therefore, it appears that Samaria enjoyed considerable power from the reign of Ahab in the mid ninth century B.C.E. until the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C.E. supported by the use of chariotry without cavalry. The fact that the Samaritans restricted themselves to chariotry suggests a great degree of skill and confidence in that particular art (Dalley 1985: 38).

Sargon, according to his own royal inscriptions, formed a purely chariot unit from the conquered Samaritans, while he drafted both chariotry and cavalry officers from Hamath and Carchemish into his royal army. From Samaria, Sargon took 50 chariots to add to the *kisir-sharruti* according to the display inscription, and took 200 chariots according to the Nimrud prisms. The grouping in the Horse Lists shows that the Samarian equestrian officers were not split up into a variety of units to forestall disaffected groups (Dalley 1985: 38-39).

The Horse Lists have identified one Samarian, Sama. He was in a position to act as intermediary between his countrymen, whether in Assyria or in Samaria, and one of the high officials of the court at Kalhu, Dur-Sharrukin and Nineveh. It can be inferred that Sama, the Samarian commander of teams who served Sargon as a reliable soldier, was a close friend of the king and had access to the members of the royal family (Dalley 1985: 40-41).

## 6. Deportation

The policy of deportation had already existed before the time of Tiglath-pileser III, but it was under the neo-Assyrian empire that mass deportation became a regular practice of imperial policy and the important means of its domination of other peoples (Oded 1979: 2).

Deportation was not limited to any particular class or social group; various elements of the population of a conquered country were deported. Oded notes that the Assyrians deported men together with their families and they even tended to maintain the community framework of the deportees by transporting and resettling them in groups according to national and cultural affinities (1979: 22-23).

There were two aims for deporting the men together with their families.

First, the Assyrians tried to prevent deportees from escaping to their homeland, both while in transit and after being settled in exile. Second, the Assyrians tried to show deportees their prospects of the settling down in the new place, in a city or in the countryside, thereby restoring and building settlements in Assyria and the provinces (Oded 1979: 24).

There are three phenomena concerning the directions of deportation. First, Assyria was the main destination of deportees during the reigns of all the Assyrian kings. In eighty-five percent of all cases where the destination is known, deportees were brought to Assyria. The second phenomenon is a two-way deportation. In some instances, the Assyrians brought new deportees to a place which had been captured and from which there had been prior deportation. For example, after deporting Samaritans, Sargon II brought people from countries he had conquered. Third, is the phenomenon of scattering deportees from a certain city or country in several settlements and countries, and bringing deportees from several settlements and countries are also common practice (Oded 1979: 28-30).

Oded suggests that there are seven objectives of mass deportation. First, deportation served as a form of punishment for rebellion against Assyrian rule. Second, it reduced rival powers and weakened centers of resistance. Third, it promoted loyalty among the deported minority groups, since their settlement rights derived from the Assyrian king. Fourth, deportees enlarged the Assyrian army on the borders and highways where the Assyrian population was relatively small. Fifth, deportation brought craftsmen and unskilled laborers to Assyria. Sixth, it populated urban centers and strategic states in Assyria proper and throughout the empire. Seventh, it populated abandoned or desolate regions and helped make them suitable for agriculture (1979: 43-72).

The socio-economic and legal status of the deportees was not uniform and their conditions were not identical. For instance, texts regarding the deportation of Samaritans show the following points. Some of them were taken into the Assyrian army. Those who were craftsmen, administrators or peasants continued to be engaged in their occupations. An Assyrian officer governed and required tax from those brought to the land of Samaria (Oded 1979: 77). Because of scanty information concerning the Philistines, almost nothing about their status as

deportees can be known (Zadok 1978: 62).

## 7. Assyria at its Zenith (705-668 B.C.E.)

### 7.1 Sennacherib and Esarhaddon

Sennacherib's campaign against Hezekiah, the king of Judah, in 701 B.C.E. is well-recorded event in the Assyrian record and the Bible. After conquering fortified cities of Judah, Sennacherib deported "200,150 people great and small, male and female, horses, mules, asses, camels and sheep, without number" (Oded 1979: 1). He even annexed western border regions of Judah and transferred them to four Philistine cities; thus, a new balance of power between Philistia and Judah was created (Na'aman 1974: 35).

In 679 B.C.E., Esarhaddon launched his first campaign to Philistia and plundered Arsa, an unknown place near the Egyptian border. After sacking Sidon in 676 B.C.E., Esarhaddon established an Assyrian commercial colony near Sidon, the "Port of Esarhaddon." At this time, all the vassal kings of Syria and the coast were required to build the new city. Those kings included four kings of Philistia: Sil-Bel of Gaza, Mitini of Ashkelon, Ikausw of Ekron, and Ahimilki of Ashdod (Tadmor 1966: 97-98).

In 672 B.C.E., Esarhaddon forced his vassal kings to swear to support the accession of his sons in Assyria and Babylonia after his death. However, in 651 B.C.E., civil war broke out and when Assurbanipal won the bloody war, the period of Assyrian greatness was over (Hallo 1960: 60).

### 7.2 The problem of Sennacherib's campaign in Palestine

According to Assyriologists and Egyptologists, there was only one campaign of Sennacherib since only one campaign is mentioned in Sennacherib's known annals. However, some scholars suggest that there were actually two campaigns.

The account of II Kings 18: 13-19: 37 presents a problem: Is this the record of one campaign or two? For those who claim the two campaign theory, II Kings 18: 13-16 refers to the first campaign and II Kings 18: 17-19: 36 refers to the second. For those who insist that II Kings 18: 13-19: 36 refers to one campaign, these two sections go over the same ground twice (Shea 1985: 401). This

question has been debated for more than a century without consensus (Bright 1981: 298).

There are two variations of the one-campaign theory. If the Assyrians engaged the Egyptians twice, there was only one embassy to Jerusalem between those encounters. If the Assyrians engaged Egyptians only once, there are two embassies to Jerusalem and the engagement with the Egyptians was fought between them (Shea 1985: 401).

One thing that is accepted by all is that the events described in the entry in Sennacherib's annals for 701 B.C.E. correspond to the events described by II Kings 18: 13-16. There are four elements in this point. First, 701 B.C.E. was Sennacherib's third campaign and Hezekiah's fourteenth year (II Kings 18: 13). Second, fortified cities of Judah were conquered. Third, there was no conquest of Jerusalem. II Kings 18: 14-16 indicates that Hezekiah paid tribute but did not surrender Jerusalem, while the Assyrian annals refer only to the city's siege, not its conquest. Fourth, the amount of tribute Hezekiah paid is almost same in both II Kings 18: 14 and the annals. The former lists three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. The latter gives the same amount of gold with eight hundred talents of silver. This minor discrepancy can be easily attributed to scribal error (Shea 1985: 402).

Shea attempted to show new support for the two campaign theory. He listed three recent documents: an Assyrian text previously dated to Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II but now attributed to Sennacherib; a Palestinian text previously dated in the time of Nebuchadnezzar but now datable to the time of Sennacherib; and an Egyptian text previously attributed to Sheshonk I but now attributed to Tirhakah (Shea 1985: 417). However, redating texts will cause another continuation of debate. At present, we accept the one campaign until further confirming evidence and discussion are presented.

### 7.3 Sennacherib's campaign against Philistia

In 705 B.C.E., the two Philistine cities, Ashkelon and Ekron, took an active part in rebellion. In Ashkelon, the loyal Rukibiti was replaced by Sidqa, his younger brother. In Ekron, Hezekiah intervened, deposed the loyal Assyrian

vassal, took him captive to Jerusalem, and left the city in the hands of local nobility of the rebellion. In response to this, Sennacherib, in 701 B.C.E., advanced against Philistia (Tadmor 1966: 95-96).

The sequence of events is as follows: The king of Sidon fled to Cyprus when the Assyrian army approached. Most of the vassal kings of Phoenicia and Palestine paid the tribute. Mitini of Ashdod was the only Philistine king among them. The Assyrian army arrived at the territory of Ashkelon, and Ashkelon surrendered. The rebel king Sidqa was overthrown in an internal coup and a new vassal king ascended the throne. Sidqa and his family were deported, but Ashkelon was saved. Then, Sennacherib laid siege against Ekron; however, the Nubian king arrived for aid. Sennacherib fought against the Nubian army near Eltekeh. Sennacherib could not have achieved great victory since no cogent details of the defeat are given. Nevertheless, the Nubian king retreated. Ekron surrendered and after Padi was released by Hezekiah, Sennacherib reinstated Padi as the king of Ekron (Tadmor 1966: 96-97).

As Tadmor indicates, Sennacherib conducted lenient policy toward Philistia. A change of rulers, usually within one dynasty sufficed the Assyrians. The frequently rebellious cities were not annexed as provinces nor was their population exiled. In addition, Sennacherib expropriated territory from Judah and gave it to Ashdod, Ekron, and Gaza (1966: 97).

#### 7.4 Sennacherib's campaign against Judah

The Assyrian army advanced into the kingdom of Judah through its central section by setting up a line of approach and supply through the northern Shephelah. Capturing the key cities of Azekah and Gath, Sennacherib proceeded south and conquered the cities of the Shephelah including Lachish. A second force went up from Lachish through Beth-shemesh towards Jerusalem. This force was possibly reinforced by troops from the Assyrian province of Samaria. Tell en-Nasbeh, Gibeon, Ramat Rahel and Beth-shemesh were destroyed by this army, which laid siege to Jerusalem (Na'aman 1979: 86).

According to Eph'al, there were five methods by which an ancient city like Lachish was captured: 1.climbing over the wall, 2.breaching the wall, 3.

undermining the wall, 4.starvation by siege, and 5.stratagem. The Assyrian accounts of Sennacherib's campaign in Palestine ascribe the conquest of fortified cities of Judah to methods 1 and 3, and the battle for Jerusalem to 4 which requires protracted operation. According to the reliefs depicted in Room 36 of Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh, the conquest of Lachish was conducted by the breaching method. This method can be divided functionally and sequentially into three phases. First, a siege ramp was constructed against the city wall. Second, battering rams were brought against the wall. Third, the wall was battered and broken through, and troops went through the breach, spreading onslaught over the city (Eph'al 1984: 60).

According to the reliefs of Sennacherib, the Lachishite prisoners are led before the king. Some wear long garments and are bare-headed. These are singled out for displeasure and are beheaded or flayed alive. The others, if men, wear a peculiar head-dress consisting of a scarf, the end of which hangs down. These seem to be left to go free. This difference probably shows that the men in the long dresses must be Hezekiah's men, the Jews who led the city to resist and that the men with the peculiar head-dresses are native inhabitants of Lachish. A sculpture from a different part of the palace, depicting the procession to the Ishtar Temple, shows that some Lachishites were enlisted into the bodyguard of Sennacherib, where they were allowed to wear their own uniform (Barnett 1958: 163-164).

Two conclusions concerning the city of Lachish that can be drawn from the excavation are as follows: Lachish was a strongly fortified city, probably the strongest in Judah after Jerusalem in 701 B.C.E.; Lachish was conquered, burnt and razed to the ground by the Assyrian army in 701 B.C.E. Many Lachishites were killed by the Assyrian soldiers either in the battle, or after having been taken into captivity. Evidence for slaughter was found in Tomb 120, which contained a mass burial of about 1500 persons (Ussishkin 1977: 30-53).

Although Elat (1975) insists that Lachish remained the seat of a governor and occupation troops in the service of the Assyrian king, Ussishkin (1977) negates his idea. It appears plausible that the city was left ruined and deserted during a large part of the seventh century B.C.E. even though a few people might have

continued to live in the ruined city. The habitation remains were found only above the city gate so far (1977: 53).

## 8. Decline and Fall (668-609 B.C.E.)

Assurbanipal moved quickly to control the uprising of all the western territories in 640 B.C.E. When the Assyrian king approached, people in Judah slew the rebels and made Josiah king to avoid further Assyrian retribution. Josiah later began to conduct anti-Assyrian policy and at the death of Assurbanipal in 627 B.C.E., Josiah annexed the Assyrian provinces of Samaria, Gilead and Galilee (Hallo 1960: 61).

There is no reference to the Philistine cities from the latter part of Assurbanipal's reign. It seems that Ashkelon and Gaza paid tribute as long as Assyria prevailed in Ashdod and in Samaria. Assyria's rule rapidly declined after the death of Assurbanipal; Egypt and Judah now claimed Philistia (Tadmor 1966: 101).

## 9. Conclusion

We have discussed the neo-Assyrian policies against ancient Palestine in seven sections: In section 2, we saw how the coalition of western states opposed Shalmaneser III and that the motivation for the Assyrian military campaigns in the ninth century B.C.E. consisted of a number of interwoven factors.

After the intercession discussed in sections 3 and 4, Assyrian policy was changed under Tiglath-pileser II as we surveyed in section 5. We also clarified that Tiglath-pileser III's campaign against Damascus and Samaria in 733-732 B.C.E. had no direct connection with the Syro-Ephraimite war against Judah. Moreover, it should be noted that Assyrian rule over Philistia and Judah was dictated by their effort to establish buffer states against Egypt. It is remarkable that some deported Samaritans served Sargon II as his royal army.

Concerning mass deportation (section 6), we synthesized three phenomena about the directions of deportation and seven objectives of deportation. In section 7, we summarized the problem of Sennacherib's campaign in Palestine: There is a question of how many times the king conducted his military expedition.

Although we hold the position that there was only one campaign, this issue is still open to discussion. We also overviewed the king's expedition concerning Philistia and Judah including the conquest of Lachish. In the decline of Assyrian power, ancient Palestine, which had been tossed by military might, again gained its independence (section 8).

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