

4. Assyrian Involvement in Edom

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During the 14th to 12th centuries BC, Assyrian kings had some control over upper Mesopotamia as far as the Euphrates bend below Carchemish. Although adventurers like Tiglathpileser I crossed the Great River, reached the Mediterranean and received tribute from coastal towns like Byblos and Sidon, they do not record penetration further south-east as far as Damascus or Transjordan. Tadmor (Palmyra) was their closest approach from the east.¹

When the Neo-Assyrian kings resurrected their country's power from the end of the 10th century BC, their primary goal was to reassert their rule over regions their ancestors had governed to the east, the north, and the west. In doing this, they had to overcome the various small states, notably Aramaean ones, which had taken root in those regions in the interval. As they moved forward, the Assyrians faced hostility from the powers neighbouring those they conquered, and the desire for a secure Assyrian frontier was probably as strong a motive for further campaigns as the aim to reign over a greater realm than their fathers and the indulgence of imperialist ambitions.

Shalmaneser III built on his predecessors' achievements, establishing a firm base at the Euphrates from which he could venture into western and southern Syria. His actions provoked the local kings to form a coalition, led by Damascus, with whom Assyria now had her first military conflict (853 BC). At the Battle of Qarqar, the allies Damascus led included Israel, Arabs and Ammonites under Ba'asha son of Ruhubi, but not states still further south, Judah, Moab and Edom (Luckenbill 1926:para.611; *ANET*:278f.).² Recently M. Weippert has drawn attention to the identification of this 'ba'-sa mār ru-ḥu-bi *KUR**a-ma-na-a-a* as a ruler of an area in the Anti-Lebanon north of Damascus (Weippert 1987). Tiglathpileser III mentions a *KUR**am-ma-na/am-ma-na-na* as a source of boxwood, and Sennacherib names it as a source of alabaster (as *KUR**am-ma-na-na*), apparently in that area (see Honigmann 1932 for the location). As well as the similarity of place name, Emil Forrer followed Eduard Meyer in equating the patronym with Rehob, father of Hadad-ezer of Sobah, named in 2 Sam. 8:3, suggesting Rehob was the dynastic family name of kings of Sobah (cf. Aḥuni son of Adini for the ruler of Bit Adini in texts of Ashurnasirpal and Shalmaneser III, but without further place name). He also noted that Ammon appears regularly in Assyrian texts as Bit Amman. While these points have force,

lack of adequate evidence precludes certainty, and the widely held identification of Ba'asha as an Ammonite ruler is still supportable (Rendsburg 1991). The earliest Assyrian reference to Bit Amman is in a text of Tiglathpileser III, over a century after the Battle of Qarqar, when these southern states were much more familiar to Assyrian scribes than they had been in the reign of Shalmaneser III. That the scribe of Shalmaneser met the place for the first time might be indicated by the inclusion of Ba'asha's patronym, the only one in the list of the allies at Qarqar. However, Assyrian involvement with Damascus brought greater contact with the kingdoms controlling the King's Highway to the south, for Damascus had influence over them, and so they were potentially hostile to Assyria's interests.

The first mention of Edom in existing Assyrian inscriptions occurs on the Nimrud (or Calah) Slab of Adadnirari III. Here a list of subjugated states includes Tyre, Sidon, Israel (Bit Humri), Edom and Philistia. These were most likely places linked with Damascus which fell in line with her in submitting to Adadnirari. (Note that Adadnirari's text does not claim a campaign to Palestine. E. Unger's reading of line 12 as *ana māt pa-la-aš-[tu]* was corrected by H. Tadmor in 1959 to *ana māt ḥat-te-e* 'to Hatti-land', i.e. Syria.³) Uncertainty remains about the date of Adadnirari's triumph, but the later one, 796 BC, still seems preferable to 805 (see Hawkins 1982:400). The text is a summary rather than a comprehensive account of a campaign, so its silence about the other Transjordanian kingdoms and Judah may not be meaningful for their history; they may have submitted also.

While Assyria did not completely withdraw from Trans-Euphratean affairs over the next half century, her interference was reduced, although her kings evidently reckoned that they were still the overlords of the area. Recorded are a campaign to Damascus in 773 BC, and regulation of affairs further north, and the treaty between Ashurnirari V and Mati-el of Arpad in 754 (see Hawkins 1982:400; Donbaz 1990:9).

The picture changed with the accession of Tiglathpileser III in 745 BC. The policy of consolidating the hold over unruly areas through the provincial system brought Assyrian bureaucracy into much of Syria, including Damascus from 732 BC. Continual reporting to the king gave a higher level of intelligence at the centre and so enabled swifter responses to troubles on the frontiers. In a list of

tributary kings from later in Tiglathpileser's reign appears Qaus-malak of Edom, giving the earliest example of a personal name honouring the national deity of Edom which can be securely dated.

The progress of Assyria's advance can be observed by comparing a stela of c. 737 BC with the text on a clay tablet which reports Edom's tribute five years or so later. The former lists Damascus, Samaria, and a queen of the Arabs as tributaries, but not the three Transjordanian states, nor Judah, whereas the latter, although fragmentary, includes those four and Gaza, naming the king of each.⁴ Assyria's involvement with Edom at this moment was almost certainly the consequence of Judah's king Ahaz buying Tiglathpileser's help to remove the threat Damascus and Samaria were posing to Jerusalem. At the time, according to 2 Chr. 26:17, 'the Edomites had again come and attacked Jerusalem and carried away prisoners', and according to 2 Kings 16:6, Edomites had occupied Elath after the Aramaeans had taken it from Judah.

So far as surviving records tell, Edom played no part in the uprising following the death of Shalmaneser V in 722 BC. Sargon's announcements of the successful suppression of the revolt, centred on Samaria and Hamath, in 720 BC, do not mention Edom. Probably from the earlier part of Sargon's reign, between 720 and 715 BC, dates Nimrud Letter XVI, reporting the arrival of envoys from the west in Nimrud, bringing tribute. It mentions those of Edom, Ashdod and Eqrn together. To the same years may belong a list of wine allocations from Nimrud, noting in sequence men of Ashdod, Edom and Gaza.⁵

The collocation of Edom with Ashdod in these two administrative documents may be relevant to Edom's occurrence in the prism inscription of Sargon which tells of the rebellion of Yamani of Ashdod. Yamani sought support from his neighbours in Philistia, Judah, Edom and Moab. Sargon names these states as tributary to him, a claim the Nimrud Letter supports, but does not reveal whether they sided with Yamani or remained faithful to their overlord (Winckler 1889:188.29; Luckenbill 1927:para.195; Oppenheim in *ANET*:287; Kaperà 1987; Weippert 1987:99 n.27).

There appears to be no doubt that Edom's rulers realized the wisdom of loyalty to Assyria thereafter. When Sennacherib advanced on his campaign to quell the revolt led by Hezekiah of Judah, king Ayarammu of Edom bowed before him with the kings of Moab, Ammon and many other places (701 BC). King Qaus-gabri was equally submissive to Esarhaddon about 673 BC and to Ashurbanipal about 667.⁶ (Note that the only report from Ashurbanipal's reign is in Prism C which can be dated about 646 BC. Although this text was written some 20 years after the event, there is no reason to doubt the accuracy of

its list of tributary kings; it is not simply a copy of the list in Esarhaddon's prism; see Cogan 1991:122–123.)

It was only under Ashurbanipal that Assyrian troops actually entered Edom, so far as the sources show. In the war against Arab tribes (c. 660 BC), his forces pursued the attackers throughout Transjordan; the places they scoured, listed in Prism A of the 'annals', include both *āl'ú-du-me* and *āl'sa'-ar-ri*, which are to be understood as the regions of Edom and Seir, despite the 'city' determinatives which stand before them. The facts that these places are only listed in the latest of Ashurbanipal's prism inscriptions (Prism A, to be dated c. 643 BC), several years after the event, and that the text is the latest in a series of re-writings, do not affect Assyrian knowledge of the places. (Differences between the various prism 'editions', such as the capture of Ammuladin, king of Qedar, by the Moabite king, according to Prisms B and C, by kings of Amurru, according to Prism A, and by Ashurbanipal himself, in his Letter to Ashur, simply show a process, hidden by the formulation of many texts, whereby the agent becomes less individual and eventually his actions are attributed to the king on whose behalf, or in whose name, they were performed. The important fact for the composers of all the versions was that the Assyrian king gained superiority over insubordinate or hostile rulers, the means mattered less (Streck 1916:II 64.109; Luckenbill 1927:para.818; Oppenheim in *ANET*:298; Oded 1970:184–186; Weippert 1973–74:61f.))

Edom stands in one other Assyrian text, a list of place-names which offers no other information, does not place it in any meaningful order, and may, in fact, be no more than an exercise list (K 4384, iii 11, see Forrer 1921:52–53). (It is worth observing that the name Edom is not actually preserved on the small tablet from Nineveh K 1295. This notes amounts of tribute in gold and silver from men of Ammon, Moab and Judah, followed by tribute from another state, but only the gentilic ending of that name remains; while the common restoration [*u-du-ma*]-aya is possible, other names could also be restored, e.g. [*as-du-da*]-aya or [*ha-za-ta*]-aya; Harper 1902:VI 632; Oppenheim in *ANET*:301; photograph in Mitchell 1988:56.)

In surveying Assyrian references to Edom, it is striking to observe the absence of personal names compounded with the name of Edom's national god Qaus from the administrative and legal archives of Assyrian cities, and of names or persons qualified as Edomite. This suggests that the Assyrians had not deported people from there in any number and that there was little direct contact between the regions. There is a similar paucity of Moabite names.⁷ Here

may be signalled Assyria's non-involvement in Edomite affairs. So long as the vassal state paid its tribute regularly and its king appeared when required, as Esarhaddon summoned Qaus-gabri to bring building material to Nineveh, Assyria would not interfere in its affairs. Assyrian vassal-states no longer fought each other in the ways they had done as independent kingdoms (cf. Israel and Judah, Aram, Edom, Moab) and so became more stable. The demand for regular tribute would also encourage a more settled economy to meet it. This situation is clear in other states subject to Assyria, also (Millard 1972:8). Assyrian influences might well appear in those states; the presence of objects such as the engraved *Tridacna* shell, dimpled pottery and even building styles, may indicate Assyria's cultural impact, but indirectly rather than at first hand (Bennett 1982). If Edom was producing copper for Assyrian consumption in large quantities, then the returns in Assyrian exports and money could have been quite large, unless all was counted as tribute, enabling the local king to build a fine citadel at Buseirah.

Although not a matter of involvement, Assyrian texts may shed light on another moment in Edomite history. Assyria never put Edom under direct rule, always calling its leaders kings. The Bible reports a different situation, at a stage in the time of Jehoshaphat of Judah (c. 870–848 BC) when 'there was no king in Edom, a deputy was king' (1 Kings 22:47). Although other renderings of the passage can be offered,⁸ this commonly accepted one may gain in comprehensibility through comparison with two monuments quite recently recovered, and some known longer. First is the now well-known Tell Fakheriyeh statue. On it Hadda-yith'i is entitled 'governor of Guzan', like his father, in the Assyrian text, but 'king' in the Aramaic, presumably reflecting the way the respective language groups should perceive the ruler. That statue is datable about 840 BC (Abou-Assaf *et al.* 1982). The second inscription is one of several set up at a settlement on the mid-Euphrates by Ninurta-kudurri-usur about 750 BC. He plainly announces himself as 'governor of Suhi' (*amēlšakin māt suhi*); however, he then says that the gods gave him the 'kingship of Suhi' (*LUGAL-ú-tu šá māt-su-ši*). The editors of this text considered 'kingship' here a scribal error for 'governorship', and a mistake it may be, yet still a mistake that may reveal the scribe's subconscious attitude to Ninurta-kudurri-usur. The phraseology of this man's compositions echoes the epithets of Assyrian kings, and the governor recites a genealogy tracing his line ultimately to a son of Hammurabi a thousand years before (Cavigneau and Ismail 1990: no.2 pp.343–357, 412–417, i 6). Were the names and titles

missing, such an inscription might be assigned to an Assyrian monarch. That is true, too, of the stela of Bel-harran-bel-usur and the records of Shamshi-ilu the turtan, from the same period, except that the first mentions his overlords, and the status of the second is clear from other documents, although he does not state it in his own (Unger 1917; Luckenbill 1926:para.823–827; Thureau-Dangin 1936:141–151). A governor ruling a definable realm, perhaps previously a kingdom, could evidently enjoy a standing as good as a king's in the eyes of his subjects, and that would be especially true if he were a member of the local dynasty (as may be suspected at Guzan). Understanding 1 Kings 22:47 in the light of these contemporary monuments may ease the problem found by many commentators in 2 Kings 3:4–27 where an unnamed king of Edom accompanies Jehoshaphat and Jehoram of Israel on a campaign against Moab. This 'king' need be no other than the 'deputy who was king' of 1 Kings 22:47. Such is, in fact, a natural understanding of the narratives of Kings, and avoids the apparent contradiction in the appearance of an Edomite king at a time when there was not one. This also explains his anonymity and the way he is attached to Jehoshaphat without any introduction. Thus Assyria may contribute to Edomite history without any direct involvement!

Notes

1. Grayson 1972: paras.512 (Adadnirari I, c. 1307–1275), 528 (Shalmaneser I, c. 1274–1245), 694 (Tukulti-Ninurta I, c. 1244–1208); Grayson 1976: paras.34, 81, 83 (Tiglathpileser I, c. 1114–1076), 234, 261 (Ashurbel-kala, c. 1073–1056).
2. Detailed references to the cuneiform sources from this point onwards are given by Weippert 1987.
3. Unger 1916:10, taf.II, III, followed by Luckenbill 1926:para.734, Oppenheim in *ANET*:282, and some text books on the history of Israel and Judah. See Tadmor 1969:47–48, and further Tadmor 1973:145.
4. Rost 1893:72.11; Luckenbill 1926:para.801; Oppenheim in *ANET*:282; Levine 1972 for the stela of 737 BC.
5. Saggs 1955:134–135, pl.XXXIII; cf. Donner 1957:163–164, and note the improved reading in Postgate 1974:117–118. Dalley and Postgate 1984:no.135; also Weippert 1987:100, n.36, 37.
6. Luckenbill 1924:30, ii 55–57; Luckenbill 1927:para.239; Oppenheim in *ANET*:287–288. Borger 1956:Nin.A v.56; Luckenbill 1927:para.690; Oppenheim in *ANET*:291. Ashurbanipal Prism C: Streck 1916:138, line 26; Luckenbill 1927: para.876; Oppenheim in *ANET*:298.
7. F. Israel cites one case, noticed by F.M. Fales, in Johns 1898:I 427.7 ¹*qa-ú-su*, a tablet dated in 694 BC, see

Israel 1987a:no.2. For Moabites see Zadok 1978, and the absence of Chemosh names from Neo-Assyrian documents, Israel 1987b:section 3. Edomites, Ammonites and Moabites are equally absent from Oded 1979. Of course, people bearing other names could not easily be identified as Edomite as opposed to Moabite etc.

8. Bartlett 1989:115–116, where 'There was no king appointed in Edom. King Jehoshaphat made ships...' (with the Septuagint), or 'There was no king in Edom. A deputy of king Jehoshaphat made ships' (with repointing) are alternatives.

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