

CHAPTER XIII

ASSYRIAN DOMINION IN PALESTINE

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A. THE ASSYRIAN CAMPAIGNS AND ACTIVITIES IN PALESTINE AFTER THE CONQUEST OF SAMARIA

OUR KNOWLEDGE OF Assyrian rule in Palestine in the 8th–7th centuries B.C.E. is based mainly on biblical data and the comparatively few relevant Assyrian inscriptions. Since the principal concern of these sources is political and military, they convey few details about the administrative and economic structure and everyday life. Due to the paucity of the sources, it is difficult to distinguish the characteristic approach of each Assyrian king to Palestine and southern Syria. It is therefore sometimes impossible to avoid generalizations, which may be insufficiently based, in surveying the structure and directions of Assyrian rule in Palestine.

Following the establishment of Assyrian hegemony in Palestine and southern Syria which began with Tiglath-pileser III's campaign in southern Philistia (734) and in the course of which the kingdoms of (Aram-) Damascus (732) and Israel (720) ceased to exist and the other kingdoms of the area were reduced to vassal-dom, the Assyrian instruments of authority and modes of administration in the region were set up and perfected.¹ In addition to their political and administrative activities in the western extremities of their empire, the kings of Assyria from time to time had to mount military expeditions to suppress revolts. Among the considerations for such revolts were the geographical proximity of Egypt and the hope for its support in time of crisis, and also the supposition that the Assyrian authority would be prevented from undertaking comprehensive military action in the west because of the internal upheavals concomitant with its change of kings and because of its wars in distant regions. In general, we find that the revolts against Assyrian rule in Palestine and southern Syria were not confined to a single political entity in the area but that several participated simultaneously and always included some kingdoms of Philistia, the area closest to Egypt. The Egyptian rulers at this period—the end of the XXIVth Dynasty and the period of the XXVth (the Nubian) Dynasty—generally encouraged the anti-Assyrian activities and even dispatched military units to Palestine (inscrip-

tions of Sargon and of Sennacherib mention clashes between the Assyrian and Egyptian armies at Raphia in 720 and in 701 near Eltekeh; for the possibility of an Egyptian army reaching the vicinity of Ashkelon during the reign of Esarhaddon, see below p. 280).

The appearance of the Assyrian army in Palestine after the conquest of the kingdom of Israel by Sargon and the establishment of the province of Samirina is connected with the anti-Assyrian developments in the kingdom of Ashdod: in 713, Azuri king of Ashdod stopped paying tribute to the king of Assyria. In reaction, an army commanded by Sargon's general was sent against Ashdod (cf. Isa. 20:1: "In the year that *Tartān* [= ^{lu}*turtānu*, the Assyrian commander-in-chief], who was sent by Sargon the king of Assyria, came to Ashdod and fought against it and took it"). In place of Azuri, the Assyrian authorities enthroned his brother Aḥimiti who, however, was assassinated after a few months on the throne in a revolt in Ashdod led by Yamani, who did not belong to the local royal family. The fear that the rebellion against Assyria would spread to other areas of Palestine and Transjordan led Sargon to nip the revolt speedily in the bud. In 712 the Assyrian army conquered Ashdod, Ashdod-Yam (^{uru}*Asdudimmu*), and Gath (^{uru}*Gimtu*, today Tell es-Şafi?).² Inscriptions of Sargon state that, at the conclusion of the campaign, an Assyrian province was organized in Ashdod and its cities (Lie, *Sargon*, lines 259–262); but the reference to Mitinti (West Semitic *mtt*) king of Ashdod in inscriptions of Sennacherib describing his campaign in Palestine in 701 leaves some doubt that a political and administrative Assyrian provincial framework actually existed in Ashdod in the time of Sargon. The references to the establishment of a province seem only to allude to administrative steps taken by the Assyrian authorities in order temporarily to fill the gaps in the administrative and ruling structure in the kingdom of Ashdod, caused by the rebellion, in which the pro-Assyrian elements in the royal family and their supporters had suffered; when these elements were again strengthened, Ashdod resumed its status as a vassal kingdom.

Sargon also promoted the Assyrian presence in Palestine in the economic sphere to achieve maximum advantage from his control over international commerce, whose routes passed through the western edge of his empire. He established an Assyrian trading colony in northern Sinai (in the vicinity of el-'Arish?) and sought to encourage trade between its inhabitants and Egypt.³ Similarly, he settled Arabs in Samaria and apparently also in the neighborhood of the Brook of Egypt (*Nahāl Muşur*, Wadi el-'Arish), undoubtedly in order—with their assistance—to increase imperial profits from the Arabian trade which flowed to the Mediterranean and Phoenicia.⁴

Some time after the beginning of Sennacherib's reign (705–681), a widespread rebellion led by Hezekiah king of Judah and Šidqâ king of Ashkelon broke out in

the western part of the Assyrian Empire. Lulî (Elulaios) king of Sidon also took part in this rebellion, as did anti-Assyrian elements in Ekron; the latter overthrew their king, Padi, who was loyal to Assyria, and handed him over to Heczekiah. Regarding the other Assyrian vassals in the west—the kings of Samsimuruna, Arvad, Byblos, Ashdod, Ammon, Moab, and Edom—Sennacherib's inscriptions only mention that when he and his army reached the vicinity of Tyre, these kings brought "their heavy presents fourfold" and expressed their subservience to him. The high rate of the tribute is explicable if we assume that it covered a period of several years during which these kings had not paid; but there is no way of telling if they were in fact among the instigators of the revolt or whether they ceased paying tribute after the revolt had already broken out in neighboring countries. In any case, when they found that Sennacherib was near at hand, they hastily appeared before him to save themselves and their lands from the Assyrian king. The inscriptions of Sennacherib, which describe the subjugation of the rebellion and the punishment of the participants, do not say that any of these kings were dethroned, which might confirm the possibility that they maintained a purely passive attitude to the revolt.

Sennacherib found no time to suppress the revolt in the west before 701, when his third campaign took place (in 703–702 his army was engaged in fighting in Babylonia and in the region east of the Tigris); his long delay in responding gave the rebels considerable time to strengthen themselves and prepare for the anticipated campaign.⁵

When Sennacherib reached Palestine, he captured Joppa, Azuru, Bene-berak, and Beth-dagon, the cities of Šidqâ, the rebellious king of Ashkelon, whom he exiled with his household, enthroning Sarruludari son of Rukibtî, the former king of Ashkelon. Sennacherib's inscriptions do not say that Ashkelon itself was captured; possibly there might have been a revolution in which pro-Assyrians and moderates overthrew Šidqâ and handed him over to Sennacherib. The Assyrian annals relate that when Sennacherib was fighting Philistia, a supporting army arrived, sent by the king of Egypt, probably Shebitku of the XXVth (Nubian) Dynasty. After this army had been defeated near Eltekeh, Sennacherib resumed his war with Philistia, captured Eltekeh, Timnah, and Ekron and punished those inhabitants who had joined the rebels (for a more detailed discussion of the war of Sennacherib with Philistia, see chaps. IX and XI in this volume).

Data about the continuation of Sennacherib's war in Palestine are derived from biblical and external sources which are varied in their literary and historiographical nature and conflict fundamentally in content.⁶ It is difficult to arrive at a clear and reasonable picture of the continuation of the campaign, because the basic data about the chronological and historical details are sometimes incongruent and appear in various ways in sources independent of each other.

From the Bible (II Kings 18:13 = Isa. 36:1; II Chron. 32:1; see also II Kings 18:17; Isa. 36:2; Micah 1:8–16), from Sennacherib's inscriptions about his third campaign, and also from a relief discovered in his palace in Nineveh, it clearly emerges that when Sennacherib continued his campaign in Palestine in 701, he invaded Judah and captured many of its cities—particularly in the west—including Lachish, where he made his headquarters. Many inhabitants were deported, and some of the cities torn from Judah and annexed to the kingdoms of Gaza, Ashdod, and Ekron (according to the Bull Inscription from Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh, the kingdom of Ashkelon also received a slice of territory cut out of Judah). Details differ concerning the conclusion and results of Sennacherib's military activities in Palestine: on the one hand we find that Hezekiah surrendered to Sennacherib and paid him tribute (II Kings 18:13–16 and the Annals of Sennacherib),⁷ and on the other, that Sennacherib returned home, his objectives unrealized, after his army had suffered a setback not of a military but of a miraculous nature (II Kings 19:35–36 = Isa. 37:36–37; II Chron. 32:21; Herodotus II, 141).⁸ The discrepancy in these and other basic data in the various sources has led some scholars to postulate two Assyrian campaigns in Palestine in the time of Sennacherib: one in 701, ending in the suppression of the rebellion in the country and the surrender of Hezekiah, and the other, after 689, ending in the defeat of the Assyrian army.⁹ But this view, although solving some of the difficulties in understanding this episode, still does not explain them all: If Assyria had suffered a setback in Judah after 689, then Judah would have become independent, whereas it is clear from the Bible and the Assyrian royal inscriptions that Manasseh king of Judah was a vassal of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. Nor does a single known source even hint at a second campaign of Sennacherib in the west. The theory of two campaigns implies grave confusion in the biblical tradition, which artificially combines two campaigns into one, at a time when it was still possible to know how many there had in fact been.

No rebellions or wars are known to have occurred in the provinces and vassal kingdoms in Palestine from the conclusion of Sennacherib's war almost to the end of Assyrian rule in the country. But the continual Egyptian undermining of Assyrian rule in Palestine and Phoenicia—as demonstrated, *inter alia*, by the revolt of Baal king of Tyre who had close political connections with Tirhakah king of Egypt—and certainly Esarhaddon's vigorous military policy made Egypt a target for the Assyrian army. Esarhaddon campaigned against Egypt in 674, 671, 669 (he died en route during this third campaign), and his son Ashurbanipal fought there in 667 and 663.

The political and military developments in southern Palestine before the conquest of lower Egypt are far from clear. The Esarhaddon inscriptions and the

Esarhaddon Chronicle indicate that a number of years before the first expedition to Egypt (which took place, as mentioned, in 674) Esarhaddon captured the town of ^{uru}Ar-ša-a in the area of the Brook of Egypt (Wadi el-'Arish) and deported its king Asuhili and his advisors to Nineveh. It may be advisable to date this event according to the Esarhaddon prisms, from which it emerges that Aršâ was captured a few years after Esarhaddon began his reign and perhaps two years or less before his first campaign against Egypt in the seventh year of his rule (cf. Babylonian Chronicle, col. iv, 16); if this is true, then the statement in the Esarhaddon Chronicle that Aršâ was captured in the second year of his reign (obv. 7-8) would have to be rejected. The preference for the chronological data deduced from the inscriptions of Esarhaddon over those in the Chronicles concerning his activity in southern Palestine gives weight to the idea that Aršâ was captured as a preliminary to the war against Egypt.

From two inscriptions found in Nineveh containing questions to Shamash, the Assyrian oracular deity, it is clear that while Esarhaddon was at home he was preparing to confront Egyptian forces in the Ashkelon region.¹⁰ Unfortunately these inscriptions are defective, lacking dates and other details to indicate exactly when they were written. It is noteworthy that nothing in the Esarhaddon inscriptions or elsewhere gives evidence of an actual confrontation between the Assyrian and Egyptian armies, either near Ashkelon or anywhere else in Palestine. It would appear that Esarhaddon received information that an Egyptian army was either in Philistia or preparing to go there, but when the Assyrian king arrived with his army in Palestine, the Egyptians were in Egypt. At first sight, it might be assumed that the kings of Gaza and Ashkelon, and perhaps some other vassal kings of Palestine, collaborated with the Egyptians. But the references to Šil-Bêl king of Gaza in the inscriptions of Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Ashurbanipal, in connection with events between 701 and 667 B.C.E., indicate that he reigned continuously during this period, a condition difficult to imagine if he had rebelled against Esarhaddon. In any case, the capture of Aršâ and even Esarhaddon's first expedition against Egypt might have occurred in reaction to the presence of an Egyptian army in Palestine.

In the period of Esarhaddon's and Ashurbanipal's wars with Egypt, Palestine assumed special importance as a result of the difficulties of moving a large army across northern Sinai and the nature and condition of the challenge at the other side of the desert. Palestine was a vital logistic base for assembling troops and supplies on the edge of the desert, in addition to being the sole transit route to Egypt. Ashurbanipal availed himself in his first campaign against Egypt of the forces of the vassal kings in the west and also of their ships,¹¹ undoubtedly in order to transport supplies along the coast of northern Sinai and perhaps along the Nile inside Egypt itself. Awareness that Palestine was important to the conquest

of Egypt and had to be dominated during Assyria's frequent wars there (five expeditions in eleven years) is also indicated by the administrative and political machinations of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal to strengthen their control over the vassal kingdoms in the west of their empire (for Ashdod and Tyre, see below, pp. 286–287) and to solidify and stabilize the Assyrian provinces by settling new exiles there (cf. Ezra 4:2, 9–10).

Shortly after the Assyrian empire reached its zenith, during the first half of the reign of Ashurbanipal (668–627), its rapid decline began. Ashurbanipal's hard-fought wars with Babylon (651–648) and Elam (647–646) required a strong and sustained effort in the eastern part of the empire and decreased the power to govern in the western regions. The effects were soon felt: in the Nile delta, a rebellion against Assyria broke out shortly after Ashurbanipal's accession but the Assyrian authorities responded with comparative moderation. One of the rebel leaders, Necho prince of Memphis and Sais, was seized and brought before Ashurbanipal, who made a new agreement with him and then returned him to his own country. His son, Psammetichus I (who acceded to the throne in 664), continued the policy of liberating Egypt until, after a number of years, it was completely free of the Assyrian yoke.¹² The settled countries on the edge of the desert, from the middle Euphrates to southern Transjordan, suffered from the pressure of invading nomadic tribes. These People of the East had to be repelled chiefly by the forces of the vassal frontier states and by the Assyrian garrisons stationed there and in the provinces. But all these burdensome defense efforts were not effective for long and the desert inhabitants so increased their incursions that in c. 645, the first possible moment when the Assyrian army could take a break from its demanding Eastern activities, it had to launch a specific campaign against the nomads.¹³

The weakening of Assyrian control and administrative organization in the west of the empire at that period is illustrated by an Assyrian deed of sale from Gezer in 651. This document, written in the presence of the “governor of the city” (*lūha-za-nu*) is dated: “Month Sivan, day 17th, eponymy (*limmu*) which is after Aššur-dūra-ušur, governor of Barḥalza.”¹⁴ The dating of the year according to the eponym of the past year (*limmu ša arki PN*) is found on Assyrian documents at times of extraordinary upheavals, which is why the new eponym for the year beginning on Nisan 1st was either not determined or not published at the appropriate time.¹⁵ While the above document suggests that the eponym for the year 651 was still not known in Gezer two and a half months after the year began, another document, from Nineveh, written on Nisan 4th of that year,¹⁶ indicates that in the capital there was no delay in determining the eponym for the same year. It would seem, therefore, that the failure to write the date in the Gezer document must be attributed to serious breakdowns in communica-

tion and control in Palestine and perhaps in other parts of the western region of the Assyrian empire.

The Rassam Cylinder of Ashurbanipal (ix, 115–128) tells of the capture of ^{uru}U-šú-ú (Palaetyrus, the mainland Tyre) and the punishment of the inhabitants of Acco who had rebelled against Assyria and ceased to pay tribute. According to this source, the punitive expedition against these cities took place at the end of the Assyrian campaign against the nomad leagues in the Syrian desert about 645. These cities almost certainly rebelled against Assyria when the chances of failure and punishment seemed slight (in other words, during the major wars of Ashurbanipal in the east between 651 and 646), rather than when Assyria and its armies could more easily turn their attention westward.

The account in II Chron. 33:11 ff. that Manasseh of Judah was captured by the Assyrian army commanders and taken to Babylon—doubtless on suspicion of rebellion—and that *after* his return from Babylon he strengthened his kingdom and removed the foreign gods from Jerusalem matches our information about developments in the western part of the empire during Ashurbanipal's wars in the east. It can accordingly be assumed that this account is founded upon the political situation of that period and can be considered a reliable source of information about the period of Manasseh.¹⁷

In sum, all the above-mentioned data clearly reflect the decline in Assyrian rule in the west at the beginning of the second half of the seventh century B.C.E. Nothing whatever testifies to Assyrian rule after c. 645, which seems to have declined rapidly thenceforward and to have ended within a few years.¹⁸

B. THE POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

The political entities in Palestine and its vicinity fall into three categories, according to their political and administrative relationship with Assyria: provinces, vassal states, and nomadic tribes.

I. THE PROVINCES:

The building-up and growth of the Assyrian empire was linked to the abolition of the political independence of many of the countries it conquered, including [Aram-] Damascus and Israel, and their annexation to Assyrian administrative realms. So effective were their administrative and organizational methods of creating provinces, in fact, that we hear almost nothing about provincial uprisings. In these countries, new administrative districts were established, governed by Assyrians generally selected from among the king's courtiers and officers (the Assyrian name for such a district is *pīhātu* = province; the technical term for the establishment of a province is *ana eššūti šabātu* = "to reorganize").

The civil status and obligations to imperial authority of the inhabitants of the provinces—both the indigenous population and the recently-arrived exiles—paralleled those of the inhabitants of Assyria.¹⁹ The provinces were generally contiguous with Assyria proper and only rarely was there an isolated one.

The title of the governor of a province was ^{lú}*bēl piḫāti* (= biblical *phh*) or ^{lú}*saknu* (biblical *sgn*; cf. Jer. 51:23, 28, 57; Ezek. 23:6, 12, 23). The two titles are confused in Assyrian documents and refer to the same individuals;²⁰ at the present stage of research into Assyrian administrative structure we are unable to establish a clear functional difference between them.²¹ Other administrative titles found in Assyrian documents from the province of Samirina are ^{lú}*rab ālāni*, an official in charge of a group of settlements (governor of a district),²² and ^{lú}*ḫazannu*, a mayor, governor of a city.²³

The establishment of Assyrian provinces consisted of uprooting large sections of the population from their native land and reintegrating them within the framework of the empire. The organizational apparatus for mass deportations was especially developed and perfected in the time of Tiglath-pileser III and his successors, who ensured a two-way movement of deportees to avoid threatening the economic potential of areas emptied of inhabitants. These were the conditions under which many inhabitants of Galilee and Transjordan were deported during the reign of Tiglath-pileser, as well as people of the central mountain region in Sargon's time (see Chap. VIII). Deportees from the eastern regions of the empire replaced them (II Kings 17:24; cf. Sargon, Nimrud Prism, Fragment D, col. iv, 38–39; Khorsabad Annals, II, 2, line 16). The transfer of deportees to the western provinces of the Assyrian empire continued until the time of Esarhaddon and Osnappar (= Ashurbanipal; Ezra 4:2, 9–10).²⁴ Many of the deportees had been members of the upper-class in their homeland and others had been soldiers and craftsmen. These latter were integrated into the manpower pool of the empire and became the majority of the inhabitants of the Assyrian royal cities.²⁵ But the enormous numbers of deportees mentioned in the Assyrian inscriptions make it likely that many peasants were also included. The exile of a vital layer of the Israelite population and its replacement by aliens undoubtedly fomented profound ethnic and cultural change in the Assyrian provinces in Palestine, as it had in other zones of the empire. Concerning the policy adopted toward the deportees, the inscriptions of Sargon state: "People of the four regions of the world, of foreign and divergent speech, dwellers of mountain and lowland . . . all that I carried off at Aššur, my lord's, command by the might of my scepter—I unified them (lit.: made them of one mouth), and settled them therein (in Dūr Šarrukīn = Khorsabad, the new capital built by Sargon). I commissioned natives of Assyria, masters of practical knowledge (*inû*), as overseers and officials to teach them correct behavior (*šibittu*) (and) to

serve the gods and the king.”²⁶ This quotation and II Kings 17 both indicate that the deportees underwent Assyrian indoctrination in their new places of settlement and, with the encouragement of the imperial authorities, also adopted local customs. Thus there in fact developed within the Assyrian provinces a general culture characterized by a common language (*koinē*), at first Assyrian and later Aramaic, and other common living patterns. This also happened in Palestine where through the ages a new nation—the Cuthians—had consolidated. Their ancestors had brought alien worship to Palestine (cf. II Kings 17:24 ff.) and they were singled out from the Jews during the period of Restoration; but so many Israelite religious and cultural practices had been inculcated that they considered themselves worshippers of the Lord, entitled to participate in the building of His Temple. If this was so in the period of Ezra and Nehemiah, Israelite consciousness seems to have been acquired by the people of Samirina under Assyrian rule and not subsequently.

Since the publication of Forrer’s fundamental research in 1920, the accepted thesis has been that three Assyrian provinces were established in Israelite territory in Transjordan (Hauran, Gilead, and Karnaim), and three in western Palestine (Megiddo, Dor, and Samirina) and that most of them were founded in the time of Tiglath-pileser, with the exception of Samirina, which was founded in the time of Sargon.²⁷ But when the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser discovered in recent decades are applied to conjectured readings of inscriptions published previously, Forrer’s historical interpretation and the geo-administrative picture changes: the reconstruction of fragments of Tiglath-pileser’s Display Inscriptions indicates that those passages dealing with the northern Transjordanian territories annexed to the Assyrian provinces refer to the land of ^{kur}Bit ^mḪaza’ili, i.e., Aram-Damascus, eventually conquered in 732 and at that time extending to the city of ^{uru}Ga-al-’a-da = (Ramoṯ?-) Gilead; not a word in these inscriptions mentions the establishment of Assyrian provinces in the territory of the kingdom of Israel itself.²⁸ Moreover, since the name ^{uru}Ka-aš-pu-na appears in an inscription of Tiglath-pileser (ND 400, line 8) to designate a city on the Phoenician coast, on the border of the region annexed to the territory of the province of Ši[mirra], the reading [^{uru}Ra]-aš-pu-na proposed by Forrer in a parallel fragment is invalidated, as well as the identification of *Rishpon-Arsuf-Apollonia, and this being the case, cancels the necessity of extending the territory of the Assyrian provinces to the Yarkon in the time of Tiglath-pileser.²⁹ Apart from what is written in the Sargon inscriptions about conquering Samaria and annexing it to the Assyrian provincial system, there is nothing explicit about the process of organizing Assyrian governance in the area of the Northern Kingdom. Certainly the process of absorption into the Assyrian administrative system ended when the Northern Kingdom was finally subjugated and its independence lost during

Sargon's reign. Without clear information, however, the organization of the Assyrian provinces in Palestine and Transjordan can be described only statically, with no attempt made to reconstruct circumstances and dates of inception, and generally even no possibility of determining their boundaries.

There is a common assumption that the Assyrians, like other conquerors of Palestine, adopted, in general terms, the territorial-administrative structure of the country whose rule they took over. Parallels can accordingly be brought from the territorial-administrative organization in the proximate periods of the Monarchy in Israel on the one hand and the Hellenistic age on the other, and applied to the Assyrian period. This assumption, however, cannot be supported by the information in the relatively few documents surviving from the Assyrian period; it is doubtful whether it can be systematically utilized.³⁰ As a matter of fact, the only certain sources for learning about the territorial structure of the Assyrian provinces in Palestine and Transjordan are the explicit titles of officials, such as the governor of Karnaim (^{lú}bēl pīḫat ^{uru}Qar-ni-na, ADD 924:4). On the other hand, the city lists on the clay tablets (as distinguished from tribute lists) cited in Forrer's study,³¹ should be treated with caution, since their contextual nature is far from clear and it is possible that they are not lists of provincial centers at all. Given these methodological limitations, the following picture emerges: as already mentioned, we know of the existence of the province of Karnaim (^{uru}Qar-ni-na/ni; for this spelling cf. ADD 942:4; III R 53, I obv. col. ii, 12). This region was captured by Jeroboam II king of Israel (cf. Amos 6:13) but returned to (Aram-)Damascus around the time of Jeroboam's death (748) and captured from (Aram-)Damascus by Tiglath-pileser.³² When the name Gilead appears in inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser it designates a city (^{uru}Ga-al-'a-da) at the edge of the territory of the kingdom of (Aram-)Damascus;³³ only by comparing biblical quotations (cf. II Sam. 2:9; I Kings 4:19, etc.) with the administrative-territorial unit of ἰαλααδιρίς in Hellenistic times can it be assumed that in the Assyrian period this city was the capital of a province of the same name. As for Hauran, there is no evidence whatever from Assyrian sources for the existence of a province in Transjordan of this name: the toponym Hauran in inscriptions of Shalmaneser III is spelled ^{kur}Ha-ú-ra-ni,³⁴ whereas the name of the Assyrian province is always written ^{uru}ya-u- × u = -ri-na,³⁵ and the shift of the suffix -an(i/u) to -ina is difficult to accept. Moreover, Assyrian census documents clearly indicate the proximity of the province of Haurina to the province of Harran, and it must therefore be located in the Balikh region.³⁶ The titles of province governors (who were eponyms of the years 690, 679, 646), as well as tribute lists, testify to the existence of the provinces of Megiddo and Samirina in western Palestine.³⁷ The references to the city of Dor (^{uru}Du-'ru) in the Assyrian sources might, on the other hand, have been either to a special province

of this name along the coast or to nothing more than an Assyrian administrative center.³⁸

To sum up: we have clear information about the existence of only two Assyrian provinces in western Palestine (Megiddo and Samirina) and two in Transjordan (Karnaim and Gilead). But because the Assyrian documents that we possess are few and accidental, it is impossible today to be sure either of the existence or the extent of other Assyrian provinces in Palestine.

2. THE VASSAL STATES:

Aside from the kingdoms of Israel and (Aram-)Damascus, which were re-organized into Assyrian provinces, all the political entities in Palestine and its immediate vicinity existed, but as vassal states,³⁹ subject to Assyrian sovereignty as long as its rule lasted in the area. These included Judah and the four kingdoms of Philistia (Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron) in Palestine; Edom, Moab, and Ammon in Transjordan; and in southern Phoenicia the kingdom of Tyre and for a number of decades the kingdom of Sidon as well. In these kingdoms Assyrian rule did not seriously discommode the local ethnic composition, and the previous governing and administrative systems continued to exist.

The survival of the vassal states, which meant that they were preferred over the countries that became provinces, depended on their complying with political and economic obligations, many of whose details are known from the Bible and from Assyrian sources. Essential conditions for this arrangement were that the policies of the vassal states be coordinated with those of Assyria and tribute paid. The vassal kings had to swear an oath of fealty to the king of Assyria⁴⁰ and receive his approval for their accession to the throne.⁴¹ They were forbidden contact with Assyria's enemies; for Palestine and its immediate surroundings this meant primarily dissociation from Egypt. When a major campaign took place in the region, the vassal kings had to supply the Assyrian army with services and even military forces;⁴² they also participated in building and development projects launched in their neighborhood by the Assyrian authorities.⁴³ Tribute called *biltu* or *maddattu/mandattu* (cf. *bēlō* and *mindāh* in Ezra 4:13) had to be paid annually at a fixed rate, and special taxes were levied on particular occasions (these were called *katrū* = "gift," *tāmartu* or *nāmurtu* = "interview present"). The vassal kingdoms in Palestine paid tribute in silver and gold, in local produce like textiles, clothes, and fish, or in imported goods, especially Egyptian (such as horses and rolls of papyrus for the Aramaic scribes of the king of Assyria), which were routed through Palestine.⁴⁴

There are indications that some or all of the vassal states were supervised by Assyrian commissioners: in a treaty between Esarhaddon and Baal king of Tyre, Baal was forbidden to open and read letters sent him by Esarhaddon except in

the presence of the deputy (^{lú}qēpu) appointed over him by the king of Assyria. Similarly, along with the designation of the eponym of the year 650 B.C.E. ^mBēl-šadūa ^{lú}šakin ^{uru}Kar-^{ma}Aššar-âḫâ-iddina,⁴⁵ we have a date formula of the same year, ^{linnu} ^mBēl-šadūa ^{lú}šakin ^{kur}Šur-ri.⁴⁶ This means that the Assyrian governor (^{lú}šaknu) of Kar-Esarhaddon, founded near Sidon after its conquest by Esarhaddon, had also a political and administrative position in the nearby kingdom of Tyre. The inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser also refer to the appointment of a deputy (^{lú}qēpu) over Samsi queen of the Arabs after he had subjugated her anew in 733.⁴⁷ If Assyrian commissioners existed side by side with the local kings in the vassal states, this might explain the presence of an Assyrian governor (^{lú}šaknu) in Ashdod, who was the eponym of the year 669, along with the fact that the inscriptions of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal from 671 and 667 refer to a king in Ashdod called Aḫimilki.⁴⁸ Representatives of various ranks, appointed by the Assyrian king and assisted by garrisons at their disposal, supervised not only the narrow foreign policy of these vassal states but also economic and other matters important to the Assyrian authorities like tax-collecting, and felling the trees of Lebanon and selling them to Philistia or Egypt.⁴⁹ On the other hand, there is no evidence for the previously accepted view that Assyrian cult and other religious customs were forced on the vassal states.⁵⁰

What we know about the vassal states in Palestine reflects the effect of their geopolitical situation, as a constant factor, on the nature of their relations with Assyria: Because the kingdoms of Philistia were situated at the extremity of the Fertile Crescent and close to Egypt, the impulse often arose among them—more frequently than among other political entities in Palestine and its neighborhood—to throw off the Assyrian yoke with the idea of receiving support from Egypt. The conduct of the Assyrian kings toward these states reveals a superficial contradiction: since Philistia was the linchpin between the Assyrian empire and Egypt and logistically vital to the success of any campaign in northern Sinai, the Assyrian kings were especially sensitive to the need for stabilizing their control in the area and were therefore determined to localize and quickly subdue any attempted rebellion. At the same time, however, these same geographical factors made Philistia of great economic importance, linked as she was to Egypt on the one hand and the Arabian trade on the other. These links had been forged and nurtured over generations by individuals and groups, particularly from among those with economic and political influence in Philistia. If the Assyrian authorities reacted sharply to rebellions in Philistia—for example, by establishing a province there, by mass deportation, or by any punitive action seriously damaging the local ethnic and social fabric—these irreplaceable trade relations would have been severed, causing considerable harm to the economy of the empire. Thus we find that the kings of Assyria excepted Philistia from the usual

treatment of rebel states, contenting themselves with the removal of the disloyal king, and replacing him with another, even from the local royal dynasty, without substantially disturbing the population.⁵¹

The same principle held good for the kingdoms of Edom, Moab, and Ammon. The main potential danger to them, after the liquidation of the kingdoms of Israel and (Aram-)Damascus, came from the "Arabs," those nomads of the Syro-Arabian Desert whose pressure on the settled countries along the frontiers of the Fertile Crescent was continually increasing. The constant threat of the nomads on the Transjordanian kingdoms demanded the maintenance of permanent garrisons on their eastern frontiers and involved Assyrian military assistance. Assyria was itself interested in driving back the nomads from the settled area on the western extremity of the territory under its dominion and in insuring regular traffic on the main highway traversing the length of Transjordan, which provided an imperial communications artery and a vital channel for Arabian commerce to the west of the Fertile Crescent and to the Mediterranean Sea. On the other hand, the limited manpower at the disposal of the Assyrian authorities—as opposed to the many undertakings devolving upon them throughout the empire and along its borders—compelled them to seek ways of implementing their policy in Transjordan with only a minimum investment of means. These common interests seem to be the reason why certain units of Assyrian garrisons may have been stationed at key positions in Transjordan to reinforce the local troops and link the frontier states in the area with Assyria.⁵² It should be pointed out that we know of no campaign to subdue any rebellion in Transjordan throughout the period of Assyrian rule there.

3. NOMADS:⁵³

The nomadic tribes in the Syro-Arabian Desert and in northern Sinai—known from the Bible and from Assyrian sources as Arabs, ^{lú/kur}*Arbaya*, *Aribi*, etc.—must be considered an independent element in the political and administrative scheme of the Assyrian empire. There were pasture-lands and water sources along the frontier of the settled zones, which these nomads needed, especially at times of drought. They also profited from supplying services such as water, food, and protection, and possibly also from entrepreneurship, to the caravans carrying spices and other luxury items through their territories, from southern Arabia to the lands of the Fertile Crescent. The imposition of Assyrian sovereignty over the entire western area of the Fertile Crescent—including all its frontier regions and the outlets of all the trade routes of northern Arabia—caused a certain dependence of the nomads on Assyria from the time of Tiglath-pileser III on. According to the inscriptions of the Assyrian kings, the formal relationship between them and the nomad leaders was similar to that of a master and his

vassal, in terms of payment of tribute in fixed sums and at fixed times and of the oath of fealty to the king of Assyria. Among the nomadic groups close to the Palestine border who surrendered to the Assyrians were the Mc'unites and the people of Massa', Tema, Sheba, Ephah, Badanu, Hatte, Adbeel, and Kedar. The efficacy of Assyrian rule over the Arabs should nevertheless not be exaggerated, in view of their nomadic way of life and of the inability the Assyrian army, like the armies of other empires, to carry out long and extensive operations in the desert.

The discrepancy between the size of the Assyrian army and its extensive tasks of securing and exercising authority over its widespread empire, as well as the desire of the Assyrian kings for increased supervision of Arabian commerce and thus increased profits, led them to integrate certain nomadic groups into the administrative and economic structure in the west of their empire. In the time of Tiglath-pileser and Sargon, some nomadic groups were permitted to graze their flocks along the frontier of the settled land and even within it (especially in the provinces) and their leaders were granted official status; these nomads were used to perform supervisory tasks on the borders in the areas of the Anti-Lebanon and southern Palestine and to secure the normal movement of traffic in the vicinity of the desert along the main routes which were the life-lines of the empire. In the time of Sargon, certain groups from the nomad tribes of northern Arabia were even brought and settled in Samaria and apparently also in the vicinity of Wadi el-'Arish. This can be explained by Sargon's putative use of their connections with their brethren involved in the international gold and spice trade passing through north Arabia, thus deflecting some of this trade from its regular routes along the Transjordanian border to the interior of the country, so that Assyrian control could be strengthened and Assyrian profits increased.

The Arabs acquired a new dimension of importance during the Assyrian military campaigns against Egypt. The transfer of massive armies through northern Sinai without splitting them up—in order to deploy them in concentrated numbers at full strength as soon as they had crossed the desert—involved transporting large quantities of water with the advancing troops. The Assyrian army, like other large armies in ancient times, lacked the means to transport water in the desert, and had to rely on the Arabs, who were uniquely able to supply the fleet of camels necessary for such transport. They thereby became decisive to the success of the Assyrian expeditions against Egypt, and undoubtedly derived therefrom a special status with the Assyrian authorities in the time of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal.⁵⁴