

CONFLICTS BETWEEN ASSYRIAN VASSALS ¹

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The Assyrians inherited not only the wealth of the kingdoms included in their empire, but also their protracted territorial conflicts, which have only temporarily suppressed by the artificial “Pax Assyriaca”. This article will review a few examples of conflicts between Assyrian vassals, and will examine the Assyrian attitude towards these conflicts. All the examples which will be discussed took place in the west during the 9th and the 8th centuries B.C. I will review only conflicts between Assyrian vassal kingdoms; conflict between Assyrian officials (*bēl pihāti* or *bēl āli*)², or between vassal kings and Assyrian officials³, will not be mentioned.

It is not incidental that the article is not based on the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions, but on casual findings, i.e., boundary stelae, letters, or non-Assyrian sources (Aramaic inscriptions or the Bible). We may suppose that the scribes of the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions intentionally ignored these conflicts, and thus there may have been more examples than these which will be mentioned below.

¹) This article is based on a paper presented at the 39th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale (“Assyrien im Wandel der Zeiten”) in Heidelberg in July 1992.

²) For territorial and economic conflicts between Assyrian officials see: G.B. Lanfranchi and S. Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II. Part II, Letters from Northern and Northeastern Provinces* (SAA 5), Helsinki 1990, p. 175, no. 243; and probably also p. 151, no. 210 and p. 186, no. 260.

³) For conflicts between vassal kings and Assyrian officials see: Lanfranchi and Parpola, *ibid.*, p. 40, no. 46; pp. 112f., no. 149; see also D.D. Luckenbill, ARAB II, pp. 204f, 213, 216f.; R. Börger, *Die Inschriften Assarhaddons, Königs von Assyrien*, Graz 1956, p. 46, for the attack of Nabû-zer-kitti-lišir against Ningaliddina, the governor of Ur, in the days of Esarhaddon.

1. *A conflict between the kings of Tabal*

I would like to open the discussion with a conflict between the kings of Tabal, dated to the last years of Sargon. A well known letter (ND 2759) written by the king of Assyria to Aššur-šarru-ušur, the governor of Que, describes a military conflict between three vassals of Assyria: the kings of Atuna and Ištunda, on one hand, and Urpala'a, king of Tuhana, on the other hand⁴.

I will first quote the relevant paragraph (translated by S. Parpola in SAA I, 1, ll. 43-56)⁵: "As to what you wrote: 'Urpala'a [may slip away] from the King, my lord, on account of the fact that the Atunnaeans and the Ištuandaeans came and took the cities of Bīt-Paruta away from him' — now that the Phrygian has made peace with us ..., what can all the kings of Tabal do henceforth? You will press them from this side and the Phrygian from that side, so that (in no time) you will 'snap your belt' on them. Thanks to my gods Aššur, Šamaš, Bel and Nabû, this land has now been trodden under your feet! Move about as you please, do whatever you have to do, cut the long and lengthen the short until I come and give you [...] work!'"

The situation described in this paragraph is complicated. It is clear that the king of Atuna, probably Kurti, with his allies, the Ištuandaeans, invaded the territory of Urpala'a, king of Tuhana, one of the important kings of Tabal, and probably the most loyal vassal of Assyria in Anatolia since the days of Tiglath-pileser III⁶. We may suppose that the aggressors seized from Urpala'a the cities which before 713 were in the hands of Ambaris, king of Bīt-Burūtaš and Hilakku. The date of the invasion was probably 709 B.C.⁷

The geographical picture is not clear at all. We may suspect that the kingdoms of Tabal were located in the following order (from north to south): Atuna —from the Halys river and Bohça, in the north, to the Phrygian border, in the west, including the area of Aksaray, which is identified with Šinuhtu⁸; Ištunda —probably to the south of Atuna; and Tuhana —from Bor and Niğde to Ivriz and the Cilician gates. Bīt-Burūtaš

⁴) This letter was first published by H.W.F. Saggs, *The Nimrud Letters, 1952 - Part IV: The Urartian Frontier*, Iraq 20 (1958), pp. 182-187; for a detailed discussion on this letter see J.N. Postgate, *Assyrian Texts and Fragments*, Iraq 35 (1973), pp. 21-36.

⁵) S. Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II. Part I, Letters from Assyria and the West* (SAA 1), Helsinki 1987, p. 6.

⁶) Urpala'a is first mentioned in the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III; see P. Rost, *Die Keilschrifttexte Tiglat-Pileasers III*, Leipzig 1893, p. 26; L.D. Levine, *Two Neo-Assyrian Stelae from Iran*, Toronto 1972, p. 16.

⁷) Postgate, *op. cit.* (above, fn. 4), pp. 32-34. For a different opinion see G.B. Lanfranchi, *Sargon's Letter to Aššur-šarru-ušur: An Interpretation*, SAAB 2/1 (1988), pp. 59-64.

⁸) Cf. J.D. Hawkins, *Some Historical Problems of Hieroglyphic Luwian Inscriptions*, AnSt 29 (1979), pp.

was located to the east of Atuna, in the area of Kayseri, Kululu and Sultanhan⁹.

After the oppression of the rebellion of Ambaris in 713 B.C.¹⁰, Sargon reorganized his kingdom, dividing it probably into three main districts: 1. Bīt-Burūtaš, in the north (administered by Assyrian officials and by Sargon's daughter, Ahat-abiša)¹¹; 2. Hilakku, in the south (in the hands of Kilar?)¹²; 3. a territory between Bīt-Burūtaš and Hilakku, which was annexed to the kingdom of Tuhana. This territory (or at least a part of it), was probably conquered by Kurti in 709 B.C. We may suppose that the Atunaeon-Ištuandaeon coalition controlled now a large area between Phrygia in the west, and Que, in the east; and between Bīt-Burūtaš in the north-east, and Tuhana in the south.

The reaction of the king of Assyria and his instructions to the governor of Que are surprising. One could have expected for an Assyrian campaign against the aggressors, that violated the "Assyrian peace", or at least for clear orders to attack them. Yet in fact Sargon left the initiative in the hands of Aššur-šarru-ušur. The summary of the king's instructions is given at the end of the paragraph: "move about as you please"; one day, possibly, the king of Assyria will come and will act against the aggressors, but the date of this delayed action is not mentioned¹³.

It is important to point out that this was not the first time that Kurti acted against Assyrian interests in Anatolia employing an independent foreign policy: in 713 he joined the anti-Assyrian coalition of Ambaris¹⁴, although only five years earlier, in 718, he had received from Sargon the territory of the kingdom of Kiakki of Šinuhtu¹⁵. After

162-167 (see especially the editorial note on p. 167, by O.R. Gurney); J.D. Hawkins - J.N. Postgate, *Tribute from Tabal*, SAAB 2/1 (1988), p. 39.

⁹ For the location of Bīt-Burūtaš see J.D. Hawkins, *A Hieroglyphic Hittite Inscription from Porsuk*, AnSt 19 (1969), pp. 107-108; Hawkins and Postgate, *ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁰ For the rebellion of Ambaris see A.G. Lie, *The Inscriptions of Sargon II, King of Assyria*, Paris 1929, pp. 32ff.; H. Tadmor, *The Campaign of Sargon II of Assur*, JCS 12 (1958), p. 95.

¹¹ Postgate, *op. cit.* (above, fn. 4), p. 31.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹³ This vague response is reminiscent of the El-Amarna letters, in which the local rulers frequently seek Egyptian intervention, and even at times an Egyptian campaign against the aggressors in Canaan is hinted at, or mentioned explicitly in the letters of the king of Egypt. The Egyptians, however, probably did not mean to fulfil this threat and in fact it is not clear at all if they campaigned against Canaan in the El-Amarna period. It is well known that the kings of Egypt, at that time, did not interfere in the conflicts between their vassals; they usually ignored them, and at times even encouraged them. For the El-Amarna letters see J.A. Knudtzon *et al.*, *Die El-Amarna-Tafeln*, I-II, Leipzig 1915; A.F. Rainey, *El Amarna Tablets 359-379. Supplement to J.A. Knudtzon, Die El-Amarna-Tafeln*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1978²; W.L. Moran, *Les Lettres d'El-Amarna*, Paris 1987 (see especially letters no. 141, 144, 269, 286-288, 290, 292, 367).

¹⁴ See Luckenbill, ARAB II, p. 111.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27; Lie, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11. Šinuhtu was the name of the capital city; the name of the kingdom was probably Tusha. See Levine, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37, 17.

the defeat of Ambaris, Kurti changed sides, his re-submission was accepted, and he probably was not punished¹⁶.

It is not clear how the conflict between Kurti and Urpala'a was resolved. Yet, it is well known that Sargon did not act in Anatolia before his last and fatal year, and the events of this year are vague, as well as the circumstances of his death¹⁷.

2. *Moving the boundary of Gurgum*

The Pazarcik inscription, which was recently published by V. Donbaz¹⁸, is a very important example of Assyrian intervention in a territorial conflict in favour of its loyal vassal, in this case, Kummuh, the most obedient vassal of Assyria in the West, and one of the few kingdoms which did not join the anti-Assyrian coalition of Arpad, Gurgum and the others (at that time both Kummuh and Gurgum were Assyrian vassal kingdoms). The reason for the Assyrian interference is clear: it was their interest to reward loyal dependents, and to discourage opponent elements.

The settlement imposed by Adad-nirari did not conclude this conflict, but only suppressed it temporarily, as can be deduced from the reverse of the Pazarcik stela; Shalmaneser IV, son of Adad-nirari, had to interfere once again in favour of Kummuh against Gurgum in 773 B.C., and to reconfirm the first settlement. This fact probably points to the conclusion that the territorial demands of Gurgum continued during all this period, and probably also after 773.

In the days of Tiglath-pileser III the boundary of Gurgum was moved again, at that time in favour of Sam'al: "... and his lord Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, [added to] his territory towns from the territory of Gurgum" (The Panamuwa Inscription, ll. 14-15). The date of this episode was probably ca. 743-740 B.C.¹⁹.

¹⁶) Luckenbill, ARAB II, p. 111.

¹⁷) For the death of Sargon see H. Tadmor - B. Landsberger - S. Parpola, *The Sin of Sargon and Sennacherib's Last Will*, SAAB 3/1 (1989), pp. 28-29.

¹⁸) V. Donbaz, *Two Neo-Assyrian Stelae in the Antakya and Kahramanmaras Museums*, ARRIM 8 (1990), pp. 5-24.

¹⁹) For this inscription see B. Landsberger, *Sam'al. Studien zur Entdeckung der Ruinenstätte Karatepe*, Ankara 1948, pp. 69-72; H. Donner - W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften*, Wiesbaden 1962, p. 40, no. 215; J.C.L. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions*, II, Oxford 1975, pp. 80-81.

3. *The territorial conflict between Hamath and Arpad*

The Antakya inscription describes the interference of the Assyrian King in a territorial conflict between Ataršumki, king of Arpad, and Zakkur, king of Hamath²⁰. At that time, both kings were vassals of Adad-nirari III. It is quite surprising that the settlement was established in favour of the previously hostile king of Arpad, and even more so, that it took place after the defeat of Arpad in the battle of Paqirahubuna²¹. The king of Arpad received not only the town of Nahlasi, with all its fields, but also a part of the Orontes valley: "They divided (*i-zu-zu*) the Orontes River between them" (The Antakya Inscription, ll. 6-8). In this inscription, same as in the Šunašura treaty and in the "Synchronic History", the annexation is not presented as the "enlargement" of Arpad, but as an equitable division between the two kingdoms²².

The reason for preferring Arpad is clear: it had broken up the lines of the Syro-Hittite coalition, and opened before Adad-nirari III the way to the south, to Damascus. Bar-Hadad III, king of Aram—the most important kingdom in Syria in the last decade of the 9th century B.C.—was now left to defend himself, and was not able to stop the Assyrian army.

4. *Joash, king of Israel, versus Bar-Hadad III, king of Aram*

At the same time, Joash, king of Israel, took advantage of the weakness of Aram, which had been defeated by Adad-nirari, and reconquered the disputed areas between Israel and Aram in Transjordan: "And Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz recaptured the cities which Ben-Hadad, the son of Hazael, had taken in war from Jehoahaz his father. Three times Joash defeated him and recovered the cities of Israel" (2 Kings 13, 25; and see also 2 Kings 13, 14-19)²³.

In this instance the Assyrians probably ignored the Israelite aggression, and accepted the changes in the boundary between the two vassal kingdoms, because Israel

²⁰) Donbaz, *op. cit.*, pp. 7ff..

²¹) For the campaigns of Adad-nirari III to the west see A.R. Millard - H. Tadmor, *Adad-nirari III in Syria*, Iraq 35 (1973), pp. 57-64; H. Tadmor, *The Historical Inscriptions of Adad-nirari III*, Iraq 35 (1973), pp. 141-150; N.T. Pitard, *Ancient Damascus*, Winona Lake 1987, pp. 160-167; N. Na'aman, *Forced Participation in Alliances in the Course of the Assyrian Campaigns to the West*, in *Scripta Hierosolimitana* 33 (1991), pp. 84-89.

²²) Cf. M. Liverani, *Prestige and Interest. International Relations in the Near East ca. 1600-1100 B.C.*, Padova 1990, pp. 80-81.

²³) For the campaigns of Joash see Pitard, *op. cit.*, pp. 167-169; Na'aman, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-89, with earlier literature.

was regarded as an ally of Assyria, while Aram was still the most powerful and dangerous kingdom in Syria, and it was an Assyrian interest to weaken it and to lessen its territory²⁴.

We have mentioned above three different reactions of Adad-nirari III towards conflicts between his vassals: in the first case it was in favour of the weak and the loyal vassal (Kummuh), which was rewarded for its pro-Assyrian policy; in the second case, Adad-nirari interfered in favour of Arpad, the head of the anti-Assyrian coalition, and against Hamath, which did not join the same coalition. In the third episode, the military confrontation between Israel and Aram was ignored, and the aggressor was preferred.

5. *The Assyrian intervention in the Syro-Ephraimite war*

The order of the campaigns of Tiglath-pileser III to the west in 734-732 is not yet clear, and there are different reconstructions of the sequence of the events at that time²⁵. My point of departure is the *coup d'état* of Peqah in Samaria, which probably took place in 736 B.C. A year later, in 735, Rezin, king of Aram, and Peqah, king of Israel, joined forces and conquered from Judah the plain of Madaba and the "Land of Ben Tobeel" in Transjordan²⁶. In 734, Tiglath-pileser III campaigned against the coast land as far as Gaza. The reasons for this act were mainly commercial; it was neither directed against Aram, nor against Israel. In this year Judah first submitted to Assyria, the same as the Philistine kingdoms and the kingdoms of Transjordan (K. 3751)²⁷. After the Assyrian retreat from the area, Rezin and Peqah continued their independent foreign policy (as yet without Assyrian intervention). They attacked Judah, and intended to put Ben-Tobeel on the throne in Jerusalem. The Philistine kings, who also were vassals of Assyria, took advantage of the situation, invaded the northern lowlands of Judah, and conquered a few cities (2 Chronicles 28, 16). The main reason for the Assyrian campaign against Damascus and Samaria in 733-732 was the increasing of the power of Aram and Israel. One would be naive to suppose that the Assyrians were motivated by the desperate call of Ahaz, king of Judah, or by his bribe (2 Kings 16, 7-8).

²⁴) For the Assyrian tendency to strike at the great and powerful kingdoms in order to weaken them, see B. Oded, *War, Peace and Empire. Justification for War in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, Wiesbaden 1992, p. 68.

²⁵) For the Syro-Ephraimite war see B. Oded, *The Historical Background of the Syro-Ephraimite War Reconsidered*, CBQ 34 (1972), pp. 153-165; B. Otzen, *Israel under the Assyrians*, Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute 9 (1977/8), pp. 100ff.; E. Lipiński, *Aram et Israël du X^e au VIII^e siècle av. N.È.*, Acta Antiqua 27 (1979), pp. 97-101; H. Tadmor - M. Cogan, *Ahaz and Tiglath-pileser in the Book of Kings. Historiographic Considerations*, Biblica 60 (1979), pp. 491-508; Na'aman, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-94.

²⁶) Oded, *ibid.*, pp. 164-165.

²⁷) For K. 3751, see Rost, *cit.*, p. 70ff.

Aram was conquered and turned into Assyrian provinces, the same as the Gilead and the Galilee; yet Assyria probably did not interfere in the territorial conflict between Judah and Philistia, and the aggressors, once again, were not punished.

6. *The territorial conflict between the Israelite Kingdoms and Moab*

We have already mentioned that the Plain of Madaba in Transjordan was a disputed area between Israel and Judah. Yet this same area was also a matter of debate between the Israelites and the Moabites over the course of hundreds of years from the 12th century till the 8th century B.C. It is clear from the Bible and from the Meš'a Inscription that thousands of Israelites and Moabites were killed during this protracted conflict. In 733-732 Tiglath-pileser III seized the plain of Madaba and exiled its Israelite inhabitants (2 Kings 15, 29; 1 Chronicles 5, 6). He did not return this area to Ahaz, king of Judah, neither to Hoshea, the last king of Israel (both vassals of Assyria), nor was it annexed to the new province "Gilead"; instead, it was given to the king of Moab. This fact is clear from letter ND 2773, and also from the prophecies of Isaiah (Ch. 15-16), Jeremiah (Ch. 48), and Ezekiel (25, 8-11)²⁸. The transfer of this area from Israel to Moab, and not, for example, its annexation to the new province "Gilead", probably reflects the Assyrian intention not to settle this conflict.

7. *Hezekiah versus Ekron — 713-712 B.C.*

In an article which was published recently²⁹, I showed that the "Azekah Inscription", the two parts of which were first joined by N. Na'aman in 1974 (BM 82-3-23, 131 and K. 6205)³⁰, describes the Assyrian campaign against Ashdod and Judah in 712 B.C., and not Sennacherib's campaign to the west in 701 B.C. This conclusion is based on the following four reasons:

1. The location of Azekah "between my la[nd] and Judah" (line 5': *ina bi-ri²⁷ [áš]-ri-ia u KUR.Ia-u-di*)³¹, may reflect only a period between 712 and 701, because a) Ashdod was turned into an Assyrian province only after 712 (Annals of Sargon, ll. 261-262; Prunkinschrift, l. 109); b) according to Sennacherib's Annals, Ashdod was a vassal kingdom in 701 (The Chicago Prism, col. II, l. 52; col. III, l. 32); c) there is no

²⁸) For ND 2773, see H. W. F. Saggs, *The Nimrud Letters, 1952 - Part II*, Iraq 17 (1955), pp. 131-132. In ND 2773, the territory of Aianur the Tabeelite (including the city Gader) is situated near the boundary of Moab.

²⁹) G. Galil, *Judah and Assyria in the Sargonic Period*, Zion 57 (1992), pp. 111-133 (in Hebrew).

³⁰) N. Na'aman, *Sennacherib's 'Letter to God' on his Campaign to Judah*, BASOR 214 (1974), pp. 25-39.

³¹) For this reading see R. Borger, *Babylonisch-assyrische Lesestücke²*, Roma 1979, pp. 134-135.

evidence for an Assyrian action against Philistia between 712 and 701. It is therefore evident that there is no possibility to suppose that the “Azekah Inscription” describes Sennacherib’s campaign to the west in 701.

2. It is now clear that the name of the king of Judah in the “Azekah Inscription” is Hezekiah: I reconstructed the name of the king in this inscription in line 11’ as follows: $^{\text{r}}\text{Ha}^{\text{r}}\text{zaq}^{\text{r}}\text{-[i]-a-a-u}^{\text{32}}$, (and in l. 4’: $^{\text{r}}\text{[Ha-zaq]-ia-a-u}$). My new proposed spelling of the name Hezekiah is, of course, different from the usual form of the name in Sennacherib’s inscriptions.

3. The rendering of Aššur’s name by AN.ŠAR started only in the days of Sargon. The inscription could not be from the time of Sennacherib, for in his historical texts only the usual spelling *Aš-šur* appears³³.

4. Stylistically and lexically the “Azekah Inscription” is very close to the “Letter to the God Aššur”, which describes Sargon’s campaign to Urartu in 714 (in my opinion this letter was composed only two years before the “Azekah Inscription”)³⁴.

We will now reconsider the relations between Judah, Assyria and Philistia in 713-712 B.C. In 713 the usurper, Iamani, seized the throne in Ashdod, and convinced his neighbours, the kings of Judah, Moab, Edom and Philistia (probably Gaza and Ashkelon), to send “evil words” to the king of Egypt (probably Osorkon IV), asking him to take an active part in the conspiracy³⁵. At that time, Hezekiah reconquered the Judaite cities taken away from Ahaz, his father, by the Philistines in 734; he also captured Ekron and brought troops into the city (“The Azekah Inscription”, ll. 11’, 17’). In 712 Sargon’s *turtānu* led a punitive expedition against Ashdod and Judah. The Assyrian army conquered Ashdod and its cities, Gath (T. Šafit) and Ashdod-yam; and later invaded Judah and conquered Azekah. Afterwards, Sargon’s army took over Ekron and its cities, organizing the kingdom of Ashdod and probably of Ekron as an Assyrian province. In his last years Sargon restored Ashdod and Ekron to their former state of vassal kingdoms, appointing Mitinti as king of Ashdod, and Padi as king of Ekron³⁶.

This time the Assyrians punished the aggressor, but it was only a limited action, and it is not clear in which way the Assyrian settled the territorial conflict between Judah and Ekron. The limited action was employed probably because Judah was one of the most loyal vassal kingdoms in the west during the previous 20 years (734-714).

To sum up: Practically, the Assyrians had no fixed policy towards conflicts between

³²) My new proposal was confirmed by Prof. R. Borger in his letter of 31 March 1992.

³³) Tadmor, *cit.*, p. 82.

³⁴) Na’aman, *cit.*, p. 29; Galil, *cit.*, p. 119.

³⁵) For the “Iamani affair”, see H. Winckler, *Die Keilschrifttexte Sargons*, Leipzig 1889, p. 188; Luckenbill, *cit.*, p. 185; Tadmor, *cit.*, pp. 83ff.; Na’aman, *ibid.*, pp. 32ff.; Galil, *ibid.*, pp. 131ff.

³⁶) Galil, *ibid.*, p. 133.

their vassals; they rather employed a flexible policy, dealing with each conflict on its own. The reaction was always motivated by the Assyrian interests, depending on circumstances; it was motivated by contradicting interests: on the one hand, aggressive acts violated the "Assyrian order and peace", with consequent economic damage, but, on the other hand, protracted hostility between vassals might prevent anti-Assyrian coalitions (*divide et impera*). The Assyrians used every possible manipulation, and the aim always justified the means: sometimes they supported the royal vassals, and sometimes they supported the aggressor. In other instances they ignored the conflict, or delayed their reaction. We may suppose that the Assyrian flexible policy was well known to their vassals, who tried from time to time to employ an independent policy, hoping that the king of Assyria would accept it *post factum*.