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ASSYRIAN-ISRAELITE DYNAMICS: ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES LEADING TO JEHU'S ELEVATION TO THE THRONE

The ninth century B.C. was one of the crucial times in the life of the Northern Kingdom, Israel. It was during that century that the country came out from the international isolation and became an important player in the political and military realm. Israel soon became so powerful, that in the middle of the century she was able to form a coalition of 12 kingdoms to prevent the overwhelming power of the Assyrian empire from penetrating the region of the Levant. But it was also during this time that the Yahweh-only movement became for the first time strong enough, after Israel split with Judah, to introduce the change on the throne of Israel.

However, in order to understand the dynamics of any country of the region, one must understand first Assyria, its policy and ambition. Therefore this article will present first the condition of the Assyrian empire in the ninth century B.C., then Israel's religious and political situation, and will end with presenting the dynamics between the two countries that led to the dynastic change on the Israelite throne.

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I. ASSYRIA

The political and military importance of Assyria was decreased after the early 11th century B.C. with Tiglath Pileser I (1115-1077) as a ruler. By the beginning of the ninth century Assyria was left with seven provinces[1] that comprised „a tract seventy-five miles on the side, and half of that mountain or unirrigated prairie"[2] and with big ambitions to become a great empire once again. These ambitions, however, were tempered by religious scruples concerning Babylonia to the south, and even more by the warlike mountain tribes to the east and north[3]

For these reasons the west seemed to be the best option to fulfill the imperial desires of the rulers of Assyria. At first, Assyrian military expeditions aimed at plundering the western cities. These expeditions slowly became more regular in nature and by the time of Assurnasirpal II (883-859) they assumed almost annual regularity[4]

The political situation in which Assurnasirpal II came to rule was quite advantageous for his imperial aspiration. Babylon to the south, although strong, was unwilling to engage in war; the disunited mountain tribes to the north and east did not present a serious threat to Assyria, nor the Aramean groups on the west. The western groups had successfully dominated their new region assuming the civilization of the people they subjugated. However, all these groups were not united in their enterprise and thus presented an easy target to an ambitious and, as time would show, talented leader Assurnasirpal II.

A few of the first campaigns of the new king were directed against the northern tribes. The excuse used by Assyria to attack this region was the murder of Assyria's treaty partner, Amme-baal[5] After subduing the tribal armies Assurnasirpal II settled Assyrian colonists in the area, then built a chain of fortresses there, and then to show who was the true ruler over the region, he built a palace in Tushban. He also renamed Habbu, a mountain town, to „Assurnasirpal City"[6].

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[1] Ashur, Isana, Nimit Ishtar, Kalhu, Nineveh, Kakzu, Kutmuh.

[2] A. T. O l m s t e a d, *History of Assyria*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1951, 81.

[3] William W. H a l l o, William Kelly S i m p s o n, *The Ancient Near East: A History*, Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers 1998, 121.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Amelie K u h r t, *The Ancient Near East C. 3000-330 B.C.*, ed. Fergus Millar, Routledge History of the Ancient World, London: Routledge 1995, 483.

[6] Ibid., 484.

The result of these military campaigns was probably more than anyone expected. „Many of the small but wealthy adjacent states of the south Anatolia, Upper Mesopotamia and north Syria expressed their goodwill by sending rich gifts to congratulate the royal warrior, while material supplies and manpower flowed from the north into Assyria for the remainder of Assurnasirpal's reign"[7]

In a similar manner, Assyria succeeded against its eastern neighbors. Seeing the danger of the situation, Babylonia in the south and Bit Adini on the mid-Euphrates stirred the two states between them, Suhu and Laqe, to revolt against the raising power of Assyria. Assurnasirpal II dealt cruelly with the two rebels. Rogers describes the destruction of Laqe in the following words: „The cities were utterly broken down and burned, the inhabitants butchered when they could be taken, and even the standing crops were destroyed that neither man nor beast might eat and live"[8]. Assurnasirpal also marched against Bit Adini and defeated it. However, he did not go south, leaving still-strong Babylonia alone.

In the spring of 876 B.C. Assurnasirpal II crossed the Euphrates and for the first time in many years the Assyrian army found itself in northern Syria. One of the first to pay a tribute to Assyria was Sangara, „king of the Hittite Land" as he called himself[9] He was a ruler of Carchemish, a city that was very important during that time. Located at the most important crossing of the Euphrates, Carchemish was a very wealthy place. It is not surprising then, that Sangara, in order to secure the prosperity of his state, as well as his life, decided to pay a huge tribute. As Assurnasirpal pressed west further into parts of what was earlier called the Hittite Empire, he received tribute after tribute. He did not even have to bother going south because all the Phoenician states sent him gifts[10]. It was partially because they did not look at the Assyrians as a threat but more as an opportunity to develop their businesses.

The period of 876 through 867 was a time of a relative peace for Assyria (there were only two minor expeditions). In 867 Assurnasirpal undertook his last campaign against Damdamusa and Perza Nishtun. He tried to capture Amedi but he did not succeed. Instead, he left a pile of heads opposite to the city gate, impaled other captives, and cut down plantations[11]

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Robert W. R o g e r s, *A History of Babylonia and Assyria*, vol. 2, Freeport: Books for Libraries Press 1971, 59-60.

[9] O l m s t e a d, *History of Assyria*, 94.

[10] Ibid., 95.

[11] Ibid., 96.

The reign of Assurnasirpal II woke Assyria out of its inactivity. It set an example and a trend for her following kings. He did not try to attack and subdue Babylonia but it probably was a wise decision. Attacking Babylonia in this early stage of the reappearance of Assyria on the map of political powers might have been the last act of the still small but growing Assyrian lion.

It is worth stopping now to take a closer look at the mechanics, life, and culture of the empire. It is important to note that most of the Assyrian military campaigns (at least from the period of Assurnasirpal II until the end of the Neo-Assyrian Empire) were far from being a series of random battles. As Parker suggests, „the Assyrian administration carefully weighted the potential military, political and economic benefits of expansion into new regions and chose a specific policy for each region that would maximize imperial gains. The decision to expand into new areas and the type of control imposed in those areas can therefore be understood as a cost/benefit equation"[12]. For this reason, Assyria utilized different policies towards its subjects – changing a conquered state's status either into a new province, vassal state, buffer state, or a buffer zone[13]

Some states, like Ulluba, were annexed to the already existing provinces. The highest office in an Assyrian province was governor and he was responsible only to the king. The provinces had their capitals, which were the main settlements of the regions. The provinces were well structured. They had different offices, including the already mentioned province governor, deputy governors, scribes, and village managers who were, in terms of authority, on the very bottom of the hierarchic ladder. This system secured the flow of information (orders) from the very top to the intended recipients.

Assyria also used other policies towards certain states. Sometimes it established hegemonic rule by turning a country into a vassal state (i.e. Kumme, Bit Zamani). The process was simple. Assyria tried to force a state into subordination either by use of military power or just by threatening to use it. If a country gave up peacefully, then the ruling elite was usually allowed to retain its status, power, and practice and to have relative autonomy. In the opposite case, Assyria, after a severe military campaign, would appoint a new government, which would be supportive of its establisher. In either case the

[12] Bradley J. P a r k e r, *The Mechanics of Empire: The Northern Frontier of Assyria as a Case Study in Imperial Dynamics*, Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project 2001, 252.

[13] Ibid., 249-255.

vassal state had certain responsibilities. One of the main Assyrian demands was to gather and to send to the king regular political and military reports. As history shows, the Neo-Assyrian kings knew how to use military intelligence in order to secure their success. Another vassal's obligation was to pay tribute to Assyria. The vassal state had to pay not only in material goods but also in manpower for military or labor purposes. In return, Assyria promised to protect the subject state from any outside attack and/or inner revolt. In reality, that protection solely depended upon Assyrian interests in that region at that time.

Some states were purposely left independent. The reason behind this was to establish a neutral so-called „buffer state", separating two rival powers. Such a state fulfilled its role as long as it was neutral. Its neutrality provided a degree of security for Assyria as well as its enemy.

Another kind of policy practiced by Assyria was to have buffer zones. While the function of buffer zones was similar to that of buffer states, there was a major difference. Buffer zones did not have any political structures and were viewed as „no-man's land" As such, they were only physically separating the rival states, but it still gave some degree of protection against unexpected attacks. The Garzan River Valley and the Bohtan River Valley are examples of such buffer zones.

It is worth mentioning what happened to the subdued nations. Assyria had a very well planned and organized policy of deportation. The Assyrians, after defeating a country, moved the people great distances and resettled them in new areas. „Most deported people were kept in family groups and settled together as small communities, mainly in the countryside, in order to work in the land, which increased the crucial agriculture base, and to provide manpower for the Assyrian government"[14] Deportees had equal social and juridical status as the native Assyrians, which helped them to assimilate to their new country. They were also incorporated at all levels of the Assyrian hierarchy: from a mere peasant to a royal scribe. Some of them occupied high positions in the Assyrian army.

A similar mindset was practiced in the religious policy of the empire. The Assyrians, after subduing a nation, did not impose their own religion upon the new subjects, but quite the opposite. They acknowledge the power of the foreign gods. In a matter of fact, they respected non-Assyrian gods and tried to obtain their blessings. The Old Testament recognized this fact when it recorded

[14] K u h r t, *Ancient Near East*, 533.

that Assyrians tried to restore a form of Yahwistic cult in Samaria, and to fulfill it they sent Yahweh priests back to Northern Israel[15] Assyrian imperial wisdom was revealed by their toleration of all kinds of religious and cultural expressions, which would give the people a sense of freedom, while at the same time they removed them from their own land and populated it with other peoples, thereby ensuring that that freedom would not be taken too far.

Assurnasirapal, just like other energetic kings in his times, looked for a place where he could establish his capital. For some sentimental and religious reasons he chose Kalhu. The renovation of the town showed how wealthy Assyria was during that time. Olmstead wrote:

> When he (*Assurnasirpal*) turned his attention to the site, it was a mere mass of ruin heaps. Digging down a hundred and twenty courses to the water-level, he first rebuilt the city wall. Within its limits arose a great palace, with apartments finished in cedar and cypress, juniper and ebony, pistachio and tamarisk. In the gates were „beasts of the mountains and the seas", fashioned of white limestone and alabaster. Thrones of all precious woods and covered with ivory and the metals, the spoil of the lands, were set up within. By its side stood the temple of Urta, under whose special protection were the new structures. A canal was brought from the Upper Zab, and along its course could be seen plantations of fruit[16].

Soon Kalhu and other cities in the Neo-Assyrian Empire grew too large to support their population so the king had to take care of them. However, because tax farming was not known at that time, the usual method of taxation was a threat of the governor's force against the farmers[17] Assyria needed more goods and more people. Her previous experience taught her that wars were very enriching. All the exotic materials for palace building, novel styles of architecture, strange animals and plants tended in palace gardens, manpower used for agriculture, the army, and construction works, were obtained through war or the consequence of war[18]. No wonder that the eyes of the Assyrians in the middle of the ninth century B.C. turned toward the rich Western countries, among which was Israel.

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[15] Ibid., 512-514. The Bible says, however, that it was not the initial act of the Assyrian king. The priests were sent back due to the fact that God sent lions to devour the new inhabitants of the land because they did not worship Him.

[16] O l m s t e a d, *History of Assyria*, 99.

[17] Daniel C. S n e l l, *Life in the Ancient Near East 3100-332 B.C.E.*, New Haven: Yale University Press 1997, 83.

[18] K u h r t, *Ancient Near East*, 518.

II. ISRAEL

The ninth century B.C. was a particularly opportune period for Israel politically. Weakened by constant defensive wars in the north and south, and shaken by the revolts of rival armies, the Northern Kingdom was circumstantially ready at the beginning of the century to adopt a structure of strong political central authority[19] It was Omri, the new king of Israel, who responded to this challenge. Coming to the throne in 885 B.C. he drastically changed both domestic affairs and foreign policy. He centralized power by buying a hill of Samaria and building on it what later became the state capital. The mere fact that Omri bought the land (1 Kings 16:24) and was then able to build a city there shows he had already amassed a fortune[20]

1. *Israel's Religion*

Pure expression of Yahwism or Baalism was pretty rare in the Northern Kingdom. Ninth century Israelites, to use Elijah's words, wavered between the two options. Often they did not deny the existence of either of the two deities but worshipped both. The Bible shows that the Baalism of the Omrides was not a denial of Yahweh as a divine being but a denial of Yahweh as the only God for Israel[21] Ahab, even though he was credited by the author of the Book of 1 Kings for building Baal's temple, inquired about Yahweh's will (i.e. 1 Kings 21) and gave his sons Yahwistic names (Ahaziah and Jehoram).

Zevit, discussing syncretism in Israel, made the following observation[22]. In 1 Kings 19:18 Yahweh said that He reserved in Israel seven thousand of those „whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him" Even allowing for gross exaggeration, the passage indicates that the overwhelming majority of Israelite society during the reign of Ahab had bowed to Baal.

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[19] Rainer A l b e r t z, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, The Old Testament Library, Louisville: John Knox Press 1994, 149.

[20] H. Jacob K a t z e n s t e i n, *The History of Tyre: From the Beginning of the Second Millenium [Sic] B.C.E. Until the Fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire in 539 B.C.E.*, 2nd ed., Jerusalem: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press 1997, 145.

[21] Andrew J. D e a r m a n, *Religion and Culture in Ancient Israel*, Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers 2000, 74.

[22] Ziony Z e v i t, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches*, London–New York: Continuum 2001, 649.

On the other hand, when a reader comes to 2 Kings 10:19-21 he sees that all the exclusive worshippers of Baal could fit in the House of Baal. It seems that „Yahweh-alone" and „Baal-alone" people constituted a small percentage of Israel, while the majority fell in between the two groups.

A question can be raised about the depths of the syncretism in Israel. While some assume that there was not complete fusion of the two gods (i.e. Albertz)[23], others think differently. The latter use a biblical name, Bealiah („Baal is Yahweh"), and a name found on a seal, Yehobaal („Yahweh is Baal"), to suggest that syncretism in Israel went well beyond just worshipping two different deities. According to them, people in ancient Israel sometimes equated the two gods[24] According to Day, the problem is clearly indicated in the second chapter of Hosea. The passage reads, „On that day, says Yahweh, you will call me, 'My husband' and no longer will you call me, 'My Baal' For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more" (vs. 18-19 Heb.). Day argues that „the Baals" were mentioned earlier in the chapter and clearly referred to the fertility deity, Baal[25], whom the people regarded as being responsible for the grain, wine, oil (v. 8) and also the lovers (v. 5). „From all of this it can hardly be doubted that Hosea was not simply objecting the epithet 'Lord' (ba'al) being applied to Yahweh, but was countering a tendency of the people to conflate Yahweh and Baal to such an extent that the essential identity and uniqueness of the former was compromised"[26].

Another evidence of syncretism in Israel was found in a blessing formula discovered in Kuntillet 'Ajrut and an accompanying it drawing of two standing figures. The taller figure had a human torso but a bovine face with horns, as well as bovine hooves and a tail. The shorter human-bovine figure had schematically represented female breasts and is standing to the left of and slightly behind the first figure in the traditional consort position in Egyp-

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[23] Rainer A l b e r t z, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, 2 vols., The Old Testament Library, vol. I, Louisville: John Knox Press 1994, 150.

[24] John D a y, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 2000, 72.

[25] „I will punish her for the festival days of the Baals, when she offered incense to them and decked herself with her ring and jewelry, and went after her lovers, and forgot me, says the Lord" (Hos 2:13).

[26] D a y, *YHWH and Gods*, 73. Day and Emerton think that such conclusion would explain the rise of the Son of Man imagery in Daniel 7 [J. A. E m e r t o n, *The Origin of the Son of Man Imagery*, „Journal of Theological Studies", 9(1958), 225-242].

tian art[27] There is little doubt that the figures represent divine beings, and if connected to the blessing, they represent Yahweh and His consort Asherah.

Even though the Israelite society was very syncretistic, the gods were not equally important to them. Archaeological and textual data seems to point at Yahweh as the more venerated and more revered god. Inscriptions from Kuntillet 'Ajrud suggest that it was Yahweh who was the main god. It was His name that was used to greet each other. The same conclusion comes from Mesha Stele, which is „the oldest extra-biblical evidence for the worship of Yahweh as Israel's national god"[28] King Mesha, in the stele, claims that he destroyed Nebo and took from there the vessels of Yahweh. Van der Toorn comments on this fact as follows: „Nebo, situated in North-Western Moab, was a border town and as such an object of frequent litigation. To mark its appurtenance to the Kingdom of Israel, Omri or one of his predecessors had place here *'ar'allîm* of Yahweh. The nature of these items must be guessed at. Both the etymology of the term (*'arî-'el*, 'X of god', cf. *bêt-'el*, '*baethyl*') and its connection with Yahweh suggest that they were religious objects, whose presence in a border town was a signal to the visitor that he was now entering the territory of Yahweh"[29]

The third archaeological evidence supporting the notion of Yahweh's superiority in the pantheon of gods worshipped in Israel comes from the onomastic evidence. According to Tigay, out of 738 names of individuals, „351, or nearly half, bear names with YHWH as their theophoric element. Forty-eight others bears names with the theophoric element *'el* (God/god/the deity El) or *'eli* (my god). Of the remaining names, most mention no deity at all. Only 27 seem clearly or very plausibly to refer to deities other than YHWH"[30] Concerning this fact, one has to remember that the data comes from both Judah and Israel, and from across the ninth through seventh century. However, it demonstrates how great was the contrast between the number of names with Yahwistic element in them and the number of names referring to another deity. This only confirms what was said earlier that it was Yahwistic religion that was winning people's hearts.

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[27] Peter Kyle M c C a r t e r, „Aspects of the Religion of the Isrealite Monarchy: Biblical and Epigraphic Data", in: *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, ed. Patric D. Miller, Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1987, 147.

[28] Karel van der T o o r n, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Ugarit, and Israel: Continuity and Changes in the Forms of Religious Life*, Leiden: Brill 1996, 277.

[29] Ibid., 277-278.

[30] Jeffrey H. T i g a y, „Israelite Religion: The Onomastic and Epigraphic Evidence", in: *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, 162-163.

Analysis of the biblical text points to similar conclusion. Ahab, the king accused by the author of Kings[31] of building Baal's temple, gave Yahwistic names to his sons: Ahaziah („Yahweh has grasped") and Jehoram („Yahweh is exalted"), consulted prophets of Yahweh (Micah), honored religious law, and repented being rebuked by Elijah. Even Jehu, preparing his snare claimed that „Ahab served Baal little" (2 Kgs 10:18), the comment that probably sounded truthful from the Baal cultic personnel.

2. *Policy of the Omrides*

Omri, as many other monarchs, wanted to use religion for the benefit of his kingdom and his rule. Van der Toorn believes that Omri wanted to unite his kingdom by uniting two main religious groups (worshippers of Yahweh/El who called themselves Israelites, and the worshippers of Baal who were called the derogatory name „Canaanites")[32] by treating both deities as peers or maybe even trying to merge them into one god.

Although Hayes and Miller also recognize this motivation in Omri (namely, welfare of his kingdom), they suggest different means of accomplishing it. They call attention to the following issues found in the text of 1 Kings[33]:

1) Omri probably purchased the land from a Canaanite according to Canaanite legal codes (cf. Gen 23; 33:19; 2 Sam 24:18-25). If the land were under Yahweh's control then such procedure would be impossible.

2) Omri and Ahab gave a special legal status to the city, which set it apart from the rest of Israel and which was respected by Jehu during his revolt (cf. 2 Kgs 10).

3) The city, under Ahab, was raised to the rank of a cultic place, not because of Yahweh's shrine but because of Baal's temple.

4) Omri and Ahab also had a second place to use as a capital, namely Jezreel, with the property probably having belonged earlier to Baasha.

Concluding their observations they say:

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[31] Niehr claims that since LXX has ἐν οἴκω τῶν προσοχθισμάτων, therefore its Vorlage had to have בית אלהים (Herbert N i e h r, „The Rise of YHWH in Judahite and Israel Religion: Methodological and Religio-Historical Aspects", in: *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwism to Judaism*, ed. Diana V. Edelman, Kampen: Kok Pharos 1995, 56). This, however, is far from being certain and is probably based on the reading of 3 Macc 2:18.

[32] T o o r n, 328. According to Toorn, the term „Canaanite" did not refer to ethnicity but to a religious non-Yahwistic background.

[33] John H. H a y e s, J. Maxwell M i l l e r, eds., *Israelite and Judean History*, London: SCM Press 1990, 402-403.

All these indications lead one to conclude that the Omrides were inspired, in establishing their new capital, by the example of the conditions in the southern kingdom of Judea. The parallel with Jerusalem in its special relationship to Judah is obvious. Samaria was planned from the outset as an independent city-state in which the Omrides would govern according to the Canaanite model, as city rulers, like Davidides in Jerusalem. Beyond that, the coexistance, which has no analogy, of two capitals in the territory of the northern kingdom and the absence of any cult of Yahweh in Samaria point to still another conclusion, namely that Samaria was to constitute the centre of the Canaanite part of the population and Jezreel the capital of the Israelite part. If this is correct, then the founding and enlargement of Samaria represented a well-planned step in national policy intended to provide a consistent dualistic solution of the Canaanite problem: in Samaria the kings from the house of Omri were kings over the Canaanite portion of the kingdom and in Jezreel they were kings of Israel[34].

No matter which option one chooses (Toorn's or Hayes-Miller's), it is clear that it was Omri who consolidated weakened Israel. Omri not only strengthened the inner structure of the state but also changed the foreign policy of his country. He managed to break the international isolation of Israel by marrying his granddaughter[35] Athaliah to Joram of Judah. Furthermore, he made alliances with the Phoenician and Aramaean states[36] The strong relationship between Israel and Phoenicia was confirmed with a marriage between the two royal families: Omri's son Ahab married Jezebel, a daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidonians[37]

The alliance with Phoenicia was a good move on Omri's part. Tyre had a well-developed merchandise network. Its products could be found as far as the territory of present-day Spain[38] Ethbaal, Jezebel's father and the king of Tyre and Sidon, was himself a priest of the goddess Astarte and ascended

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[34] Ibid., 403.

[35] As 2 Kgs 8:26 shows, „daughter" in 2 Kgs 8:16-18 has the meaning of „granddaughter"

[36] A l b e r t z, *Israelite Religion*, 149.

[37] The term „Sidonians" sometimes refers explicitly to the residents of Sidon, and other times to the Phoenicians. Both usages are attested in the Bible. There are at least two possibilities why Ethbaal was called „king of Sidonians" The first one is that Hiram I (Ethbaal's predecessor) and Ethbaal had enlarged their kingdom to such an extent that they could assert dominion over all of southern Phoenicia and call themselves „kings of the Sidonians", i.e. of the Phoenicians. Another possibility is that Ethbaal was a priest of Astarte in Sidon, and that his *coup d'état* made it possible to be called a king of both city-states. The title „king of Sidonians" remained in use for more than 170 years (K a t z e n s t e i n, *History of Tyre*, 131).

[38] Ibid., 136.

to the throne of Tyre (by killing the usurper Phelles[39]) when he was thirty-six years old in approximately 887 B.C. He reigned for thirty-two years and died at the age of sixty-eight[40]

Ahab, Omri's son, continued the domestic and foreign policies of his father. But it was not an easy time. Damascus grew suspicious of the ties between Tyre and Israel, which resulted in wars between Aram and the Northern Kingdom[41] Chapter 20 of 1 Kings describes two such campaigns. However, it tells the story as if the battles took place at the end of Ahab's life. Such understanding would go contrary to what we know about the state of the Israelite army during that time from the Monolith Inscription of Shalmaneser. The monolith presents Ahab as a very strong ruler; in fact it can be argued, the strongest of all allies opposing Assyria at Qarqar. The Bible, on the other hand, depicts Ahab as weak and under the dominion of Damascus (20:15, 27)[42]. Some try to solve the problem by claiming that the Bible mistakenly presents Ahab as the Israelite king during these battles. De Vries, for instance, comments on this in the following way: „As for Ben Hadad's Israelite counterpart: this is certainly not Ahab, in spite of the glosses in vv 2 and 14; and because Joram is elsewhere identified as active in warfare against Syria (2 Kgs 8:28-29), the predictions of coming disaster in 1 Kgs 20:43, realized in the actions of Hazael, make this last Omride king the most likely candidate. Such, in any case, was the understanding of the Jehuite redactor, who also viewed 22:1-38 as referring to Joram, and accordingly attached that passage directly to this"[43]

Another solution may be suggested by the text. It says that Israel was outnumbered when compared to the coalition of Aram and thirty-two kings. As Merrill suggests, it could be a coalition „forged to deal with the impending Assyrian menace"[44]. This, even though possibly true, does not explain

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[39] Josephus, *Against Apion* 1:18.

[40] K a t z e n s t e i n, *History of Tyre*, 136.

[41] Eugene H. M e r r i l l, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books 1996, 140.

[42] Wayne T. P i t a r d, *Ancient Damascus: A Historical Study of the Syrian City-State from Earliest Times until Its Fall to the Assyrians in 732 B.C.E.*, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns 1986, 114.

[43] Simon J. D e V r i e s, *1 Kings*, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 12, Waco: Word Books 1985. More support this option can be found in Edward Lipinski (*The Aramaeans:Their Ancient History, Culture, Religion*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters and Department Oosterse Studies 2000, 375).

[44] M e r r i l l, *Kingdom of Priests*, 346.

how Ahab managed to build such an army, which would contribute over half of the coalition chariots and a fifth of infantry for the coalition of twelve kings, within a few years. The solution may be that the events described in chapter 20 took place earlier in the reign of Ahab, and not at the end of his life[45]

The third option is suggested by Astour, who sees Jehu and his successors as kings involved in wars against Aram described in 1 Kgs 20 and 22. Astour says that „There are good reasons to assume that Joram continued his father policy of alliance with Aram and resistance to Assyria, and that the change on the throne of Damascus in 842 did not affect it. And if so, is it not simpler and more consistant with historical evidence to assume that the battle near Ramoth-Gilead, in which Joram was wounded, took place not against Hazael's Arameans but against Shalmaneser's Assyrians?"[46]

III. ASSYRIA, ISRAEL, AND JEHU'S COUP

Any conflict between the Israelites and Arameans was soon overshadowed by the growing power of Assyria in the east. When Shalmaneser III, who was driven by economic and commercial interests, became king of Assyria in 858 B.C., it became clear that the western countries were in danger. It is no wonder that many of these states started to form alliances against the new threat[47] In Shalmaneser's first year, he defeated the Syro-Hittite alliance at Litubu in Sam'al and one year later when the Assyrians came up once again, the kings of Sam'al, Bit-Adini, Petina, and Carchemish had to pay heavy tribute to Assyria[48].

After this easy and successful campaign, Shalmaneser III decided to move south towards central Syria. However in 853 B.C., he experienced fierce

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[45] The chronology will permit nothing earlier than ca 857 B.C.

[46] Michael C. A s t o u r, *841 B.C.: The First Assyrian Invasion of Israel*, „Journal of the American Oriental Society" 91(1971), 387.

[47] Nadav N a' a m a n, „Forced Participation in Alliances in the Course of the Assyrian Campaigns to the West", in: *Ah, Assyria...: Studies in Assyrian History and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography Presented to Hayim Tadmor*, ed. Israel Eph'al, Scripta Hierosolymitana: Publications of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1991, 81.

[48] Hayim T a d m o r, „Assyria and the West: The Ninth Century and Its Aftermath", in: *Unity and Diversity: Essays in the History, Literature, and Religion of the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. J. M. Roberts, The Johns Hopkins Near Eastern Studies, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1975, 38.

opposition from twelve kings who had created an anti-Assyrian coalition. The main members of the coalition were Hadadezer of Damascus, Urhilina of Hamath, and Ahab of Israel[49] The Assyrians clashed against the coalition at Qarqar on the Orontes River and despite Shalmaneser's claim of victory, events that followed the battle suggested otherwise[50] The king did not go further south but went west to the Mediterranean[51].

According to Assyrian royal annals, Ahab provided two thousands chariots (while the rest of the twelve-nation coalition gave nineteen hundred fifty) and ten thousand infantry[52]. Those figures indicate that Israel was a formidable military power at that time[53] For this reason, right after the battle at Qarqar, Ahab, according to the Biblical record, supported by Jehoshaphat of Judah, decided to attack Aram, renewing the old conflict. In spite of having a great army, Ahab was killed during the battle at Ramoth-Gilead by a random arrow (1 Kgs 22).

After Ahab's death, Israel was ruled for a year (two years by Israelite dating) by Ahaziah and for eleven years (twelve) by Joram. During that time Moab under the leadership of Mesha broke away from Israel and became an independent state. Joram, with the help of Judah and Edom, tried to put Moab back into line, but after an initially successful campaign he had to withdraw (2 Kgs 3).

Meanwhile, Shalmaneser III subdued Babylon and tried to do the same with the „Qarqar allies" in 849, 848, and 845 B.C. but without any success[54]. Finally, after regrouping his army of 125 000 men, he moved in 842 B.C. against Damascus to subdue the usurper Hazael. Not capturing the city but ravaging the Hauran plain, he went across to Mount Carmel.

Ashour argues that Shalmaneser's road to Mt. Carmel had to lead through Gilead and the Valley of Jezreel, that is, through Israelite territory[55]. However, it was not an unopposed march. Hosea describes the terrible devastation

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[49] L i p i n s k i, *Aramaeans*, 375.

[50] James B. P r i t c h a r d, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd with supplement, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1969, 278-279.

[51] L i p i n s k i, *Aramaeans*, 376.

[52] P r i t c h a r d, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 279.

[53] Interestingly, the biblical author decided not to mention the greatest achievement of Ahab's life. If not for the extra-biblical records, nobody would know about Qarqar and political and military greatness of Omri and his son, Ahab.

[54] William W. H a l l o, *From Qarqar to Carchemish: Assyria and Israel in the Light of New Discoveries*, „The Biblical Archaeologist" 23(1960), no. 2, 40.

[55] A s t o u r, *841 B.C.*, 384.

of Beth Arbel by Shalman as a type of destruction that awaited Israel for its sins (Hos 10:13-15). With Shalman being identified by most scholars as Shalmaneser III, and Beth Arbel being on the road from Hauran to Mt. Carmel[56], one may make an attempt to reconstruct the events. Since it was the last year of Joram's reign, it is possible that it was the Assyrians he went to fight and not the Arameans as described later by the Biblical author. He was wounded and he had to retreat to Jezreel.

At this time, Yahwistic prophetic circles with Elisha as their leader, and the Rechabites, an extremist Hebrew group that rejected agriculture and its products for being Canaanite and therefore pagan[57], decided to join forces with pro-Assyrians groups in Israel in order to remove the Omrides from the throne. For the Yahweh-only movement group it was an opportunity to repay the Omrides for their religious policy, and for the „loss of privilege and power" as Toorn puts it[58] It was also seen as an expression of divine justice that would annihilate the Omrides for all the sins of the dynasty, especially the endorsing of the cult of Baal on the national level. For pro-Assyrian groups, the revolt was one way of eliminating the main source of the Assyrian resistance in Israel, thus assuring that the country would not be devastated like Aram by the mighty forces of Assyria. Astour describes the situation as follows: „After the fall and destruction of Beth-Arbel, when the road to the core of Israel lay open to the invaders, Jehu, one of Joram's commanders, rushed to Israel and killed Joram and his ally Ahaziah, so as to prevent further Assyrian reprisals. The extermination of all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, all his great men, and his familiar friends, and his priests (2 Kgs 10:11) was not only a measure to ensure the usurper's unchallenged rule; it was also an act of appeasement of the Assyrian king by wiping out the entire anti-Assyrian party. It is quite possible that the carnage took place before the eyes of Shalmaneser when he reached Jezreel in his march to the sea"[59]

In order to show total submission, Jehu together with the Sidonians and inhabitants of Tyre paid Shalmaneser a heavy tribute[60] It is possible that

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[56] Ibid., 386-387.

[57] J. Alberto S o g g i n, *A History of Israel: From the Beginnings to the Bar Kochba Revolt*, AD 135, London: SCM Press 1985, 215. The Rechabite sect is also discussed in Frank S. Frick [*Rechabites Reconsidered*, „Journal of Biblical Literature" 90(1971), 279-287].

[58] T o o r n, *Family Religion*, 316.

[59] A s t o u r, *841 B.C.*, 388.

[60] Paul R. G i l c h r i s t, „Israel's Apostasy: Catalyst of Assyrian World Conquest", in: *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, ed. Avraham

„Jehu accepted willingly the Assyrian suzerainty, because it afforded protection for his new regime"[61]. As far as Jehu's religious policy is concern, after satisfying his religious supporters by killing off the Baal cultic personnel and destroying Baal's temple, he was apparently not too keen on belonging to Yahweh-only movement. As 2 Kgs 10:31 puts it, Jehu „did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam"

Shalmaneser III showed up again in the area in 838 B.C. to subdue Damascus but he failed and never came to that region again. He spent the following years on campaigns directed against the northwest (839-831 B.C.) and Medeans and Armenians (834-831 B.C.). In 827 B.C. Shalmaneser received a blow from inside his country. There were upheavals in Nineveh and other major Assyrian cities. Forced to go back, Shalmaneser abandoned all his foreign campaigns and went back to deal with the domestic problems. He died leaving the job of pacifying the stubborn cities to his son Shamshi-Adad V

During that time, Hazael, relieved from Assyrian pressure, overpowered the Israelites, thus gaining parts of their territory. Probably outraged with Israel's betrayal of the past coalition and willing submission to Assyria, he fought against Israel throughout the life of Jehu, and later after Jehu's death in 814/813 B.C., he marched through the length and breadth of Palestine to capture Gath (2 Kgs 12:18)[62]. After 838 B.C. Aram became the sole hegemon of the southern Syria and Palestine[63] This situation changed in 806 B.C. due to the new Assyrian campaign under Adad-nirari III, which was welcomed by the Israelites. The campaign, as the Bible says, was God's answer to Jehoahaz's plea. Interestingly, the biblical author does not name „Assyria" but uses the enigmatic „deliverer" (2 Kgs 13:4-5). After the Assyrian intervention, Israel once again experienced freedom from Syrian oppression, but not for long. Due to Israel's sin, Hazael was allowed to afflict Israel once again until the end of the ninth century B.C. (2 Kgs 13:22).

Gileadi, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House 1988, 106. It is also mentioned in: P r i t c h a r d, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 280. There is a picture depicting Jehu paying a tribute on the Shalmaneser's Black Obelisk (James B. P r i t c h a r d, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1954, 355).

[61] T a d m o r, *Assyria and West*, 40.

[62] H a l l o, *From Qarqar to Carchemish*, 42.

[63] T a d m o r, *Assyria and West*, 40.

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HISTORYCZNO-RELIGIJNY KONTEKST DOJŚCIA JEHU DO WŁADZY W KRÓLESTWIE IZRAELA

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Dziewiąty wiek przed naszą erą był jednym z kluczowych okresów Północnego Królestwa Izrael. W tym właśnie wieku kraj wyszedł z międzynarodowej izolacji i stał się ważnym graczem na międzynarodowej scenie politycznej i militarnej. Izrael z mało znaczącego państwa stał się tak silny, iż w połowie wieku był w stanie sformować koalicję dwunastu państw, wnosząc ponad połowę wszystkich wozów wojennych w celu przeciwstawienia się druzgocącej sile Asyrii. Jednak wewnętrzna polityka religijna dynastii Omriego doprowadziła do takiego stanu, że koła jahwistyczne szukały sposobności, ażeby ukrócić los zbyt przychylnej kultowi Baala rodziny królewskiej. Taka okazja pojawiła się wraz z przybyciem armii asyryjskiej na tereny Izraela.

Celem powyższego artykułu jest ukazanie niektórych mechanizmów i czynników, które doprowadziły do buntu przeciwko dynastii Omriego i wyniesieniu Jehu na tron Izraela. Ponieważ jednym z głównych czynników było zagrożenie asyryjskie, dlatego też autor niniejszego artykułu najpierw analizuje historię i motywy asyryjskiej ekspansji na zachód, a następnie nakreśla stan religijny w Królestwie Północnym w IX wieku p.n.e., by na końcu przyjrzeć się jak groźba inwazji asyryjskiej oraz wewnętrzna polityka Izraela przyczyniła się do objęcia tronu przez proasyryjskiego Jehu.

Key words: Assyria, Israel, Omri, Jehu, 9th century B.C.

Słowa kluczowe: Asyria, Izrael, Omri, Jehu, IX wiek p.n.e.