

Sargon in Samaria—Unusual Formulations in the Royal Inscriptions and Their Value for Historical Reconstruction

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How different were the claims of Assyrian royal inscriptions from actual Neo-Assyrian practice? This essay explores this question by examining two unusual claims made by Sargon II in relation to his rule of Samaria. The first claim, which appears both in the Khorsabad annals and in a Nimrud prism, should be translated “I again settled Samaria, more than (it had) previously (been settled).” Based on the historical reconstruction derived from archaeological data, I argue that this phrase refers to the movement of exiles into areas in the western part of the province of Samaria. These areas in the western part of the province, around the sites of Aphek, Hadid, and Gezer, experienced significant population increases in the Assyrian period. The second passage, in Sargon’s Great Display Inscription from Khorsabad, refers to Sargon’s treatment of non-deported Samaritans. It should be translated “I trained the remnant in their crafts.” The historical reality behind this claim is the shift in agricultural techniques and activities in Samaria as a result of the Assyrian conquest. The Assyrian domination of Samaria required the production of grain surpluses, which needed to be made available in the Aphek-Gezer region in the western part of the province of Samaria.

In each of the claims from the royal inscriptions examined in this essay, we see that the royal inscriptions credit the king with activities performed by the provincial governor. They change the description of the activity to make it “fit for royalty.”

THE VALUE OF ROYAL INSCRIPTIONS IN HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION

Assyrian royal inscriptions rarely present a full historical picture, especially in regard to social and economic changes. In Younger’s recent study of the economic impact of Assyria in the west, he notes, in piquant fashion, that reliance on these texts poses the danger of the scholar “falling victim to their propaganda,” and in Faust’s recent study, he notes differences between “the claims of Assyrian royal ideology” and Assyrian practice.¹ This practice is attested by the administrative correspondence and archaeological data.

While affirming these differences, it is clear that the scribes who wrote these inscriptions “could not lie outright.”² The key to unlocking the information they contain is recognizing that these inscriptions are “sources on the history . . . they intend to record.”³ Unlocking their

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1. K. Lawson Younger Jr., “The Assyrian Economic Impact on the Southern Levant in the Light of Recent Study,” *IEJ* 65 (2015): 179–204, here 181; Avraham Faust, “Settlement, Economy, and Demography under Assyrian Rule in the West: The Territories of the Former Kingdom of Israel as a Test Case,” *JAOS* 135 (2015): 765–89, here 779.

2. Sarah C. Melville, *The Campaigns of Sargon II, King of Assyria, 721–705 BC* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 10.

3. See the important discussion by Peter Machinist, “Assyrians on Assyria in the First Millennium BC,” in *Anfänge politischen Denkens in der Antike: Die nahöstlichen Kulturen und die Griechen*, ed. Kurt Raaflaub and *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 139.3 (2019)

contribution to economic and social history therefore requires understanding the “ideological grammar” governing their expression.⁴ The inscriptions do not invent an alternate historical reality, but pick elements from an existing historical reality and interpret them to fit into a specific ideology. Machinist cautions against exaggerating the limitations that the inscriptions’ ideology place on their value as sources.⁵ And Melville notes the importance of “paying careful attention to actual wording,” so as to discern the limits of the scribes’ equivocation.⁶

Sargon’s inscriptions describing the province of Samaria present a fascinating entrée into understanding this ideological grammar. This essay examines two passages from these inscriptions, related to the treatment of Samaria after its conquest.

The conquest of Samaria is mentioned in many of Sargon’s inscriptions, from different areas of the empire. It was part of his first campaign to the west, a campaign which helped define his monarchy. In its main battle, at Qarqar, he defeated the rebellious alliance led by Yau-bi’di of Hamath, which included Samaria,⁷ Damascus, and Calneh.

Besides the Khorsabad annals, the Khorsabad display inscription, and the Nimrud Prism, passages from which are discussed in detail below, the defeat of Samaria is mentioned in

A. The recently published sculpted slab excavated at Nineveh and photographed by Stevan Beverly.⁸ The slab apparently describes the “second” regnal year of Sargon II (presumably 720 BCE), with a detailed discussion of how Sargon suppressed the rebellion of Yau-bi’di of Hamath. Samaria is mentioned here, alongside Damascus, among the powers gathered to the side of Yau-bi’di in his rebellion.

Elisabeth Müller-Luckner (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1993), 77–104, here 78–79, to which I return in the conclusion below.

4. As Machinist notes, many of the contributions to understanding this ideological grammar have been made by scholars of the “Italian school,” and some of the original studies are contained in *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: New Horizons in Literary, Ideological, and Historical Analysis. Papers of a Symposium Held in Cetona (Siena), June 26–28, 1980*, ed. Frederick Mario Fales (Rome: Istituto per l’Oriente, Centro per le antichità e la storia dell’arte del vicino Oriente, 1981).

5. Machinist, “Assyrians on Assyria,” 79.

6. Melville, *The Campaigns of Sargon II*, 10.

7. The question of the respective activities of Shalmaneser V and Sargon II in subduing this revolt has been the subject of extensive discussion, which lies outside the scope of this article. See initially Hayim Tadmor, “The Campaigns of Sargon II of Assur: A Chronological–historical Study,” *JCS* 12 (1958): 22–40, 77–100. He argued convincingly that Shalmaneser V had conquered Samaria before 722, and that upon his death in that year, Samaria, under unknown leaders, participated in a wide-ranging rebellion against Assyrian control, led by Yau-bi’di of Hamath. (The most relevant passage dealing with this conquest can now be found in Andreas Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II aus Khorsabad* [Göttingen: Cuvillier, 1994], 89, ll. 23–24.) Tadmor’s view gained a wide consensus, as can be seen from the list of scholars holding this view in Bob Becking, *The Fall of Samaria in Historical and Archaeological Research* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 38 n. 78, to which can be added K. Lawson Younger, “The Fall of Samaria in Light of Recent Research,” *CBQ* 61 (1999): 461–82. Modifications of this view were proposed by John H. Hayes and Jeffrey K. Kuan, “The Final Years of Samaria (730–720 BC),” *Biblica* 72 (1991): 153–81, and by Sung Jin Park, “A New Historical Reconstruction of the Fall of Samaria,” *Biblica* 93 (2012): 98–106.

The idea of two conquests was challenged by Christine Tetley, “The Date of Samaria’s Fall as a Reason for Rejecting the Hypothesis of Two Conquests,” *CBQ* 64 (2002): 59–76, and defended by Brad E. Kelle, “Hoshea, Sargon, and the Final Destruction of Samaria: A Response to M. Christine Tetley with a View toward Method,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 17 (2003): 226–44.

8. Eckart Frahm, “A Sculpted Slab with an Inscription of Sargon II Mentioning the Rebellion of Yau-bi’di of Hamath,” *AoF* 40 (2013): 42–54.

B. The Assur Charter (K 1349), which contains similar language and which mentions how the “Hamathite” (obviously Yau-bi’di) gathered Arpad and Samaria to his side in his rebellion.⁹

C. The stele found at Tell Tayinat, which mentions a battle at Qarqar and apparently contained references to the defeat of Yau-bi’di, since the preserved portion of the stele clearly mentions Samaria and “the land of Hamath.”¹⁰

Many other texts of Sargon II mention the battle against the forces of Yau-bi’di,¹¹ especially the Khorsabad annals, to which we turn below.

While the inscriptions noted above relate specifically to the conquest of Samaria, our focus below will be on the treatment of Samaria’s population after its final conquest by Assyria. In analyzing this treatment, we can compare the inscriptional evidence with the archaeological evidence from the many excavated sites in the region, including the city of Samaria (Tell Sebastiya) itself. This data informs us in great detail about the region’s economic and social history in the relevant period. Comparing this data with the claims in the inscriptions can inform us about the ways in which the writers of the royal inscriptions created a narrative out of the events to accord with a set “ideological grammar” and can help in decoding some of the more subtle aspects of this grammar.¹²

The first of the two passages I examine below appears both in the Khorsabad annals and in a Nimrud prism, and the second in a Khorsabad display inscription. Each passage contains an unusual linguistic formulation, the translation of which has been discussed repeatedly. The translation of each passage must rest on firm linguistic grounds, and innovative translations unattested in the textual record must be rejected. But once a linguistically acceptable translation is achieved, the historical meaning of each passage deserves renewed consideration in light of the archaeological data regarding Samaria that has come to the fore in recent years and that completes the picture of the economic and social reality that the inscriptions present.

As will be shown below, these phrases have no precise analogues in Assyrian texts relating to other conquests and are not part of the “standard formulae” of Assyrian texts. They may therefore contain important historical information, not only about the economic and social conditions prevailing in Samaria in the period (which we can also glean from the administrative texts and the archaeological record) but about the way in which the authors of the royal inscriptions narrated these conditions.

9. Both inscriptions are severely broken, so that nothing can be concluded from the fact that the names of some kingdoms (such as Arpad, Damascus, and Calneh) are not mentioned in one or the other. See the translation and discussion of the Assur Charter in Park, “A New Historical Reconstruction of the Fall of Samaria,” 101–2.

10. Jacob Lauinger and Stephen Batiuk, “A Stele of Sargon II at Tell Tayinat,” *ZA* 105 (2015): 54–68.

11. See the Tell Acharneh stele, published by Grant Frame, “The Tell Acharneh Stele of Sargon II of Assyria,” in *Tell Acharneh 1998–2004: Rapports préliminaires sur les campagnes de fouilles et saison d’études*, ed. M. Fortin (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 49–68, which mentions the defeat of Hamath, as does the Beirut stele (see discussion in Lauinger and Batiuk, “A Stele of Sargon II,” 64), and the Cyprus (Larnaca) stele discussed by Hayim Tadmor (“Notes on the Stele of Sargon II from Cyprus,” *Eretz Israel* 25 [1996]: 286–89 [Hebrew]) and translated by D. D. Luckenbill (*Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia* [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1927], vol. 2, paragraph 183).

12. For a discussion of this ideological grammar, see Machinist, “Assyrians on Assyria,” 78–79.

“I SETTLED IT MORE THAN IT WAS PREVIOUSLY”—TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The following phrase, which is found both in a Nimrud prism and in the Khorsabad annals,¹³ appears to describe the repopulation of Samaria:

^{uru}*Sa-me-ri-na u₂-tir-ma*¹⁴ UGU *ša₃ pa-ni u-še-šib*¹⁵

This phrase, which appears (with small differences) in both inscriptions, should be translated: “I again settled Samaria, more than (it had) previously (been settled).” *Târu* has a wide range of meanings, among them to reinstate or restore a previous status.¹⁶ The verb *târu* is used elsewhere in the Neo-Assyrian inscriptions as one element in a hendiadys, with the second element also being a verb.¹⁷ Understanding this passage as a hendiadys with the verb *ušešib* produces an interesting meaning: Sargon claims to have “again” settled Samaria (in other words, he did what Samaria’s previous rulers had done) but did it “more than previously.”

Although the verbs *utēr* and *ušešib* appear frequently in the royal inscriptions, the specific phrase *utērma ēli ša pani ušešib* is not standard language in the inscriptions.¹⁸ The unique

13. The Nimrud prism was published in Cyril J. Gadd, “Inscribed Prisms of Sargon II from Nimrud,” *Iraq* 16 (1973): 174–201, here 179–80, and the Khorsabad annals in Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad*, 87–88, annals II. 11–17. The line cited is 179: 37–38 in Gadd and 88: 16 in Fuchs.

14. Stephanie Dalley suggests this is from *atāru* ‘to increase’: “Foreign Chariotry and Cavalry in the Armies of Tiglath-Pileser III and Sargon II,” *Iraq* 47 (1985): 31–48, here 36. But *atāru* most often has an explicit comparison, as in the following phrase from the inscriptions of Adad-nārāri II (RIMA 2 A.0.99.2 I. 129–30): *É šá-a-tu UGU maḥ-re-e ma-di-iš u-te-er*, “I greatly enlarged this temple beyond previous extent.” Many other examples can be found in CAD A/2 490. In the Sargon passage, the explicit comparison relates to the verb *ušešib*, “settled,” and not to the previous verb *u₂-tir-ma*. It is therefore preferable to understand *u₂-tir-ma* as *utēr*, from *târu*, rather than *utter*, from *atāru*. A pithy example of the distinction between these similar-sounding verbs appears in the following statement of Shalmaneser I, regarding the Eḫursagkurkurra temple: *ḫi-bur-ni ù ra-ṭa-ti a-na aš-ri-šu-nu ú-te-er el [ša] pa-na ú-te-er* (RIMA I A.0.77.4. II. 36–37). CAD A/2 490 takes the first verb, which lacks an explicit comparison, as *utēr* from *târu*, and the second, which has the explicit comparison, as *utter* from *atāru*, and therefore translates “I restored the *ḫiburnu* vats and the pipes and made them larger than before.”

15. Gadd, “Inscribed Prisms of Sargon II from Nimrud,” 179, read this word as *uše_{me}*, from the root *ēwú*, meaning to cause a change (CAD E 415). Dalley, “Foreign Chariotry and Cavalry,” 36, argued that in both inscriptions the text should be read *u-še-šib*, and Fuchs published both readings in the Khorsabad annals. Dalley noted the parallel to the hendiadys *utēr + ušešib* (not *utter . . . ušešib*), an example of which appears in a subsequent note. This parallel shows that *ušešib* is to be preferred, since it is more consistent with the language of other inscriptions.

16. Tadmor, “The Campaigns of Sargon II,” 34, translates “I resettled.” Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation and Commentary* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1988), 336, simply render “I restored.”

17. One example is Sennacherib’s Bellino inscription (RINAP 3/1 Sennacherib 3, l. 24), with a parallel in the Taylor prism (Sennacherib 22, col i, l. 80), describing the second campaign:

ú-ter-ma ^{uru}*É^mki-lam-za-aḫ šu-a-tu a-na bir-tu-ti aš-bat*

UGU *ša u₄-me pa-ni ú-dan-nin a-muḫ-ḫuš*

UN.MEŠ KUR.KUR *ki-šit-ti ŠU.II-ia ina lib-bi ú-še-šib*

I again made that Bit Kilamzah into a fortress.

More than previously, I strengthened its wall.

People of the lands my hands conquered I settled in its midst.

Similarly in Sennacherib’s prism known as “Cylinder D” (RINAP 3/1 Sennacherib 16, col. iv, l. 62), referring to one of the campaigns against Merodach-Baladan:

ú-ter-ma URU.MEŠ-*šu ap-pul aq-qur*

I again destroyed and burned his cities.

18. Becking, *The Fall of Samaria*, 42, argues that this is similar to a passage elsewhere in Sargon’s annals (from the Khorsabad annals, describing the cities along the Uqnu river, most recently published in Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II*, 150, ll. 294–95). However, the formulation in that case does not describe *any* repopulation of the territory but only the submission of these cities and their annexation to an Assyrian province under the rule of the governor of Gambulu. The formulation in that passage is *nagû šuātu eli ša maḥri parganiš ušarbišma*, “I caused those districts

nature of this phrase suggests that these words were chosen here due to some correspondence to historical reality.

It is important to consider the context in which this phrase appears. In the prism from Nimrud published by Gadd, which is in a better state of preservation than the Khorsabad annals, the sentence cited above appears as lines 37–38. Lines 25–30 narrate the rebellion of Samaria and Sargon’s battle against it, and lines 31–35 describe the spoils taken, including a chariot unit, and the resettlement of Samarian deportees in Assyria. Lines 35–41 describe the post-war treatment of the city of Samaria.

37–38. ^{uru}*Samerina utērma eli ša pani ušēšib*

38–39. *nišē mātāti kišitti qātīya ina libbi ušērib*

39–40. ^{LU2} *šūt rēšīya bēl piḥāti elišunu aškunma*

41. *itti nišē* ^{KUR}*Aššur* ^{KI} *amnušunūti*¹⁹

37–38 I again settled Samaria, more than (it had) previously (been settled).

38–39. I brought people of the lands my hands had conquered into it.

39–40. I set my eunuch as governor upon them.

41. I counted them among the people of the land of Assyria.

The emphasis on the repopulation that appears in the text cited above suggests that the repopulation of Samaria was directly related to Assyrian interest in this particular city, and was not simply a convenient solution to the problem of where to settle the exiles from other areas conquered by the empire.

WAS THE CITY OF SAMARIA REPOPULATED?

Extensive archaeological excavations were conducted at Sebastiya, the site of ancient Samaria, by Harvard in 1908–1910, and by a joint expedition including British and Jerusalem scholars in 1931–1935; excavations on a smaller scale have been conducted more recently. These were reviewed by Tappy, who noted that there is no evidence that the city of Samaria was expanded under the Assyrians, or that there was any massive repair of broken walls.²⁰ While it is very clear that Samaria was the seat of the Assyrian provincial governor

to repose peacefully, more than before,” with *parganiš* meaning ‘meadowlike’, i.e., ‘securely’ (CAD P 184). The emphasis in that passage is on pacification and not on repopulation, and the formulations are not parallel.

19. The normalization presented is based on the transcription in Gadd, “Inscribed Prisms,” 179 (see below), and on parallels to the Khorsabad inscriptions in Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II.*, 88, ll. 16–17. In the Khorsabad annals, the final line cited above is replaced by “I placed upon them tribute and dues (*biltu u madattu*) like those of the Assyrians.” The language of these lines is also similar to other inscriptions, especially RINAP 1, Tiglath-pileser III Text 5. Gadd transcribes:

37. (*alu*) *sa-me-ri-na ú-tir-ma eli ša pa-ni*

38. *ú-še-me ni-šē*(MEŠ) *matati ki-šit-ti qatâ*(II)–*ia*

39. *i-na lib-bi ú-še-rib* (amel) *šu-ut-rēši-ia*

40. (amel) *bēl paḥati eli-šú-nu áš-kun-ma*

41. *it-ti ni-šē* (MEŠ) (*mat*) *aš-šur*(KI) *am-nu-šú-nu-ti*

20. Ron E. Tappy, *The Archaeology of Israelite Samaria* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2001), vol. 1, 574. On that page he also discusses SAA V, 291, which mentions the provision of bricks to “[. . .] Samaria, [. . .] Arpad, and [. . .] Megiddo.” The document is very broken, but its final lines refer to the giving of bricks to magnates. It seems that these magnates, including the governors of the three cities mentioned, received bricks in one of the cities in the Assyrian heartland. They used these for building projects there, either for their own personal enrichment, or by employing corvée laborers from their provinces on royal building projects. The document thus does not refer to building projects at Samaria.

(as appears from the eponyms for the years 690 and 646 BCE),²¹ it does not appear from the archaeological data that the city grew in population in the Assyrian period.

This begs the question: What meaning can the statement in the royal inscription recording the increase in the city's population have? For the reasons noted above, it does not appear reasonable to dismiss this statement as a simple fabrication. Below, I suggest a more nuanced approach to understanding the historical and literary background to this statement. This approach indicates that Sargon's interest in repopulating Samaria was correlated to the larger geostrategic situation in the region during his reign.

GEO-STRATEGIC CONTEXT OF ASSYRIAN RULE IN THE SOUTHERN LEVANT 720–712 BCE

To understand this situation, a short historical review of the period between the beginning of Sargon's reign and 712 BCE is needed. During this period, the southern Levant, and especially Philistia, was the scene of repeated rebellions against Assyrian control, forming an almost-uninterrupted series. Each of these was followed by a campaign to the region. These include:

A. The revolt led by Hanunu of Gaza, and supported by an anti-Assyrian king of Kush, which was subdued in a great battle at Raphiah in 720 BCE. The importance of this battle can be gauged from its repeated mention in the inscriptions.²²

B. A campaign to the border of Egypt in 716.²³ The background to this campaign is unclear but the need to assert Assyrian control over the border area clearly motivated this campaign, during which Sargon engaged in some way with the *nāsiku* (often translated "sheikh") of the city of Laban in this border region.²⁴ At the same time, he received tribute

21. For the year 690, Nabû-kēnu-ušur is cited as the governor of Samaria (Alan Millard, *The Eponyms of the Assyrian Empire 910–612 BC* [Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1994], 50). At some point in the reign of Ashurbanipal, Nabû-šar-aḥḥēšu served as governor of Samaria, as appears from a clear mention in Ashurbanipal's royal inscriptions published in Rykle Berger, *Beiträge zur Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996), 75 (Prism F vii 52–53), and a slightly broken mention at 172 (Prism T vi 53). Based on the mention in K 4773, first published as ADD 927 and subsequently in SAA VII, 59, of a six-year span including the eponymate of Sagabbu (which Millard agrees was in 651) and that of Nabû-šar-aḥḥēšu, Whiting placed the eponymate of Nabû-šar-aḥḥēšu in 646 or 645 BCE (Robert Whiting, "The Post-Canonical and Extra-Canonical Eponyms," in Millard, *The Eponyms of the Assyrian Empire, 72–78*, here 75). See further discussion in Becking, *The Fall of Samaria*, 105–6.

22. For the campaign generally, see K. Lawson Younger, "The Fall of Samaria in Recent Research"; Melville, *The Campaigns of Sargon II*, 65–74. This anti-Assyrian king is identified as Shabaka by Dan'el Kahn, "The Inscription of Sargon II at Tang-i-var and the Chronology of Dynasty 25," *Orientalia* 70 (2001): 1–18, here 12, and as Piye by Michael Bányai, "Die Reihenfolge der kuschitischen Könige," *Journal of Egyptian History* 8: 115–80, here 124. Kahn and Bányai differ on the chronology of the Kushite kings in this period. The Khorsabad annals describing this campaign are to be found in Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II*. (2015): 90–94. The importance of the campaign can be seen from the fact that it was vaunted in a building inscription composed nearly thirteen years later, in 707 BCE, on which see Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II*, 179ff.

23. The narrative of this campaign appears in Andreas Fuchs, *Die Annalen des Jahres 711 v. Chr.* (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1998), 28–29, labelled IIIe, Ass. 5–11, based on the text originally numbered VA 8424. The subsequent passage refers to his fifth campaign according to the Calah count, which would place this in 716 BCE.

24. The text is fragmentary. For the location of Laban, see Israel Eph'al, *The Ancient Arabs: Nomads on the Borders of the Fertile Crescent, 9th–5th Centuries BC* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982), 104. On other activities of Sargon in the region in this year, and the attempts to sedentarize four Arab tribes mentioned in the Khorsabad annals, see Eph'al, *The Ancient Arabs*, 105–7. Melville understands the role of the *nāsiku* as overseeing trade in the desert region (*The Campaigns of Sargon II*, 93).

from an Egyptian king named Shikanni, who was “overwhelmed by terror of the *melammu* (overwhelming force) of the god Assur.”²⁵

C. A different text of Sargon II records tribute from an Egyptian king named as “Pir’u,” usually seen as a rendition of “Pharaoh.”²⁶ This text is generally understood as referring to the events of 715 BCE, in other words, one year later than the text naming Shikanni.²⁷ Even if these represent a single instance of tribute, such tribute demonstrates that Assyrian forces undertook “pacification actions” in the region, focused on the Egyptian border.²⁸

During these pacification actions, the annals from Khorsabad record an Assyrian settling of Arabian tribes in Samaria.²⁹ Eph’al showed that this action is not “literally acceptable” since it runs counter to the usual Assyrian practice of putting considerable distance between uprooted populations and their homeland. Furthermore, settling nomads in a clearly agricultural area “does not accord with the organized Assyrian deportation system.”³⁰ Eph’al proposes that they were settled in Samaria as traders “to divert to that area some of the Arabian trade in which the nomads played an important role.”³¹ At this time, probably in reaction to the tribute received and the rise of a pro-Assyrian ruler in the delta, Sargon “opened the (previously)-sealed *kāru* of Egypt,” allowing Egyptians and Assyrians to trade.³²

D. Two campaigns took place to subdue two different revolts in Ashdod. They involved three different kings, two of whom, Azuri and Yamani, were anti-Assyrian.³³

Yamani sought to build a robust anti-Assyrian coalition, and contacted other kings in Philistia, as well as Judah and even the Transjordanian kings of Moab and Edom, in what appears to be a full-scale revolt against Assyria in the region.³⁴ The kings mentioned presented gifts

25. Fuchs, *Die Annalen des Jahres 711 v. Chr.*, 28–29, Ass. 8–11. On Shilkanni’s identity, see Kahn, “The Inscription of Sargon II,” 9 n. 41, and Fuchs, *Die Annalen des Jahres 711 v. Chr.*, 131.

26. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II.*, 110, Ann. I. 123.

27. The dating here follows Fuchs, *Die Annalen des Jahres 711 v. Chr.*, 83 (chart), 124–31 (discussion).

28. Dan’el Kahn, cited in Bányai, “Die Reihenfolge der kuschitischen Könige,” 134, suggests that these two narratives record a single event, and only appear to be different events due to changes in dating by Sargon’s scribes.

29. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II.*, 110, annals II. 120–23, where the “city of Samaria” is mentioned as the destination at which they were settled, and in the same publication, p. 34, Cylinder, I. 20, where the “land of the House of Omri” is cited as the destination. The dating of this campaign is discussed in Hayim Tadmor, “The Campaigns of Sargon II of Assur,” 78.

30. Eph’al, *Ancient Arabs*, 106. In support of the implausibility of settling nomadic Arabs in an agricultural area, we can cite administrative texts from northern Syria (SAA I, 177, 178, and 179) which speak of the Arabs as “coming and going” (i.e., not sedentarized). Evidence from the administrative texts shows that attempts to sedentarize such tribes in Syria were not successful and there is no reason to assume that the attempts in Samaria were any more so.

31. Eph’al, *Ancient Arabs*, 106. The text of the Khorsabad annals here clearly aims to express Sargon’s dominion over the Arabs. Describing how Sargon placed them in Samaria accomplishes this goal. This passage does not seem to focus specifically on his successes in settling Samaria.

32. Gadd, “Inscribed Prisms of Sargon II from Nimrud,” II. 42–46. Until the RINAP volume on Sargon becomes available, this text is only accessible in Gadd, p. 180. The dating to 716 or 715 is based on two factors. One is the mention there that Sargon “caused the *šalummatu* (radiance) of Assur to overcome the Arabians and Egyptians,” which accords with what we know of the events of 716/5. The second is the mention in I. 37 there of the resettlement of Samaria. Since in the Khorsabad annals the resettlement of Samaria is connected to the settling of Arabs in the city, it seems that the re-opening of this previously sealed harbor took place after the subjugation of these Arabs.

33. The relevant passages appear in Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II.*, 219–21, Prunkinschrift, lines 90–109, and Fuchs discusses the episode at 124–31. In “The Historical Background to the Destruction of Judahite Gath in 712 BCE” in *Tell It in Gath: Studies in the History and Archaeology of Israel. Essays in Honor of A. M. Maeir on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Jeff Chadwick, Louise Hitchcock, Itzhaq Shai, and Joel Uziel (Ugarit: Ugarit-Verlag, 2018), 1–9, I propose a possible chronology for these campaigns and revolts, which may have extended over several years. A more compressed chronology is proposed in Ariel Bagg, *Die Assyrer und das Westland* (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 241.

34. Fuchs, *Die Annalen des Jahres 711 v. Chr.*, 44–46, II. 15–33.

to an Egyptian king, named as “Phara’oh,” who was apparently Shabaka, an anti-Assyrian leader in Egypt.³⁵ These gifts indicated a transfer of loyalty, or, from the Assyrian perspective, a revolt. The seriousness of the revolt can be judged from the scale of the swift Assyrian response, generally dated to 712.³⁶ Ashdod and other cities, including Ashdod-yam and Gath, were conquered, an Assyrian province was organized in the area, and the inscriptions record that deportees were brought to the region.³⁷

This historical review shows the importance to Assyria of controlling Philistia and curbing the influence of anti-Assyrian forces in Egypt over the southern Levant during this period. Troops were sent repeatedly to subdue revolts, and a steady stream of *kallû*-messengers must have kept the Assyrian center informed of the activities of the rebels, so that appropriate counter-measures could be taken.³⁸ For these troops and messengers to pass swiftly and securely, it was critical that the road that passed to the west of the Samarian hill-country and east of the coast, and that formed the main international highway leading to Philistia and the border of Egypt, be available and equipped with the relevant amenities. The route followed by this road was not always defined, but in certain areas, such as the Aphek pass, there was only one reasonable area for north-south travel, and the road certainly passed through this specific point.³⁹

For the messengers to pass efficiently, stations known as *bīt mardīte* would have had to be established along this road. These stations provided lodging, food, and, most importantly, a change of horses for the messengers.⁴⁰ These messengers played a critical role in relaying information about revolts and intelligence about the plans of Assyrian enemies to the central administration.⁴¹ Therefore, those who staffed such stations had to be clearly loyal to the

35. Fuchs, *Die Annalen des Jahres 711 v. Chr.*, 46, l. 32. Note that the verb “sent” is in the plural: *iššûma* (written *iš-šu-û-ma*), and its subject is the kings of Philistia, Judah, Edom, and Moab.

36. Fuchs, *Die Annalen des Jahres 711 v. Chr.*, 126, argues for 711, as does Bagg, *Die Assyrer und das Westland*, 241. The difference is not material to our discussion.

37. See Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II.*, 132ff. [Annals, ll. 241–55, my translation]: “Azuri, king of Ashdod, plotted not to deliver tribute . . . and sent . . . to the kings of his neighborhood . . . of Assyria. Because of the crimes he committed against the people of his land, I changed his rule. I appointed Ahimti, his beloved brother, to the kingship. The people of Hatti, speakers of lies, hated his kingship. They elevated above them Yadani, who had no right to the throne, and, like them, did not know how to fear sovereignty. In my rage, with my personal chariot and horsemen—who do not leave my side whether in hostile or in friendly territory—I quickly marched to Ashdod, his royal city. I surrounded and conquered Ashdod, Gath, and Ash[dod-yam]. I counted as spoil the gods who dwell in their midst, with the people of his land, gold, silver, and the property of his palace. I settled there people from the lands I had conquered. I placed upon them my official as district governor. I counted them as people of Assyria. They bore my yoke.”

38. These messengers were a key element in the efficient functioning of the military and administrative aspects of the empire. See discussion in Florence Malbran-Labat, *L’armée et l’organisation militaire de l’Assyrie d’après les lettres des Sargonides trouvées à Ninive* (Geneva: Droz, 1982), 21–25.

39. West of Aphek, the river and adjoining swamps created an impassable obstruction. About 1 km. to the east of Aphek, however, were the western slopes of the Samarian hills. These forced all the possible routes to converge in the narrow Aphek pass. The importance of Aphek is also reflected in Esarhaddon’s inscription, where he describes how he organized and supplied his army at Aphek before marching them southwards towards Philistia and Egypt (Esarhaddon inscription 34 in RINAP, l. 16’). The import of the mention in this inscription that Aphek was “in the region of Samaria” will be discussed below. For a full discussion of the importance of this specific region to the Assyrian administration, see Avraham Faust and Shawn Zelig Aster, “Administrative Texts, Royal Inscriptions and Neo-Assyrian Administration in the Southern Levant: The View from the Aphek-Gezer Region,” *Orientalia* 84 (2015): 292–308.

40. See SAA XVI 148, which discusses how critical it was to have a change of riding animals at such stations, and the consequences of the non-availability of such animals to the messengers’ efficient work. For discussion of these, see David A. Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1991), 44.

41. On the importance of the messengers in the intelligence network of the empire, see SAA XV, 148. See also discussion in Shawn Zelig Aster, “An Assyrian *Bit Mardite* near Tel Hadid?” *JNES* 74 (2015): 281–88.

empire. The administrators of these stations were appointed by the central administration of the empire (as appears from SAA I, 171, ll. 17'–19'). Additional persons, consisting of families, were settled at these posts. These additional staff presumably filled the menial functions needed to take care of the animals and food stocks at these sites.

Although the administrators of these stations were appointed by the central government, provision of the necessary food stocks was the responsibility of the provincial governors. SAA I, 172, from Syria, records squabbles among provincial governors, one of whom claims that he takes care of three such stations, while the other governors are only responsible for two stations each. As appears clearly from this letter, the food and fodder needed to provide for these stations were obtained by the province governor extracting (as taxes) these commodities from inhabitants of his district.

Similar amenities were required for troops passing along these roads, although the quantities of food and fodder required for troops were substantially larger. SAA I, 181 shows the responsibility of the provincial governor to supply such quantities and the opposition of a provincial governor to these demands. The specific needs of troop-supply are discussed in further detail later in this paper.

Since the main road leading to Philistia passed just to the west of the Samarian hills, and since the area through which the road passed was part of the province of Samaria in the Assyrian period,⁴² it is clear that the governor of Samaria was responsible for maintaining the *bīt mardīte* stations along the road. Furthermore, the placing of families loyal to the Assyrian empire at such stations was the responsibility of the provincial governor, as appears from SAA I, 177, l. 9.⁴³ While this was his responsibility, he could not obtain such families on his own, but needed the cooperation of the central imperial administration for this, as appears from the line noted above:

30 *bētāni lušabbiša ina libbi laškunu*

Let me get together 30 families and place them there!

In sum, we note here, based on the administrative correspondence, how critical it was to populate the area surrounding the main road near Samaria with loyal citizens, in order to ensure the rapid transit of Assyrian troops and messengers along it. Such actions were important during the period of 720–712, but it is clear that no Assyrian administrator could rely on the successful pacification of the region as a result of the campaigns that took place during these years, and it was necessary to continue to maintain the road and its amenities after these years. Furthermore, we noted that the populating of this area was the responsibility of the provincial governor of Samaria, who would need to obtain loyal settlers from the central Assyrian administration. We next examine the archaeological evidence for populating this region.

INCREASES IN POPULATION IN SAMARIA IN THE ASSYRIAN PERIOD?

Extensive archaeological excavations in this region show that in the Late Iron Age many farmsteads were established in the specific region around Aphek and to its south, close to the main international road.⁴⁴ Faust noted that this is the only area in the territory of the

42. Esarhaddon inscription 34 in RINAP 4, l. 16', which mentions Aphek, a location whose importance is discussed above.

43. Note the first person verb forms.

44. See, for example, Israel Finkelstein, "Rural Settlement in the Foothills and the Yarkon Basin in the Israelite-Hellenistic Periods" (MA thesis, Tel-Aviv University, 1978) [Hebrew]; "Israelite and Hellenistic Farms in the

former kingdom of Israel where we see an increase in settlement in the seventh century BCE (compared with the eighth century).⁴⁵ Furthermore, we know that some of the population settled in this region, at or near Tel Hadid, were ethnic Mesopotamians. This is attested in the two cuneiform tablets published by Na'aman and Zadok, the first dated to 698 BCE and the second to 664 BCE. The first documents a land sale in which someone named Marduk-bēla-ušur bought a field from four men whose names are not preserved. The witnesses have Akkadian names. The second tablet is a pledge document, in which two of the witnesses have Akkadian names.⁴⁶

But besides their names, the fact that these documents were written in cumbersome cuneiform attests to the fact that those involved in writing them depended on an administration functioning in cuneiform to uphold these documents if the loans or sales they recorded were challenged. This strongly indicates that these individuals were ethnic Mesopotamians, who arrived in the region as deportees or as administrative personnel sent by the imperial administration.⁴⁷ The supposition that these were deportees is supported by an administrative letter from Sargon to the governor of Que (SAA 1,1 Il. 66–70), showing that following this campaign, deportees from southern Mesopotamia were sent to the periphery of the empire. Na'aman and Zadok therefore argue that Sargon must have transferred the deportees to Tel Hadid after his defeat of Babylonia and before his death on the battlefield in 705 BCE, i.e., in the years 708–706 BCE.⁴⁸

This demographic development stands in sharp and marked contrast to the situation in the city of Samaria itself. As noted above, the archaeological evidence from the excavations at the site casts doubt on the claim of Sargon to have settled the city “more than (it had) previously (been settled).” The archaeological evidence strongly suggests that no significant population was added to the city, and that any demographic growth in this province was restricted to its southwestern corner (the Aphek area) along the main international road.

THE HISTORICAL VALUE OF THE CLAIM OF INCREASED POPULATION

In interpreting the inscription's claim that Sargon settled the city of Samaria more than it was previously, we face an interesting paradox. On the one hand, the population did not increase in the city itself. And on the other, the population clearly did increase in the formerly marginal area in the southwestern corner of the province, along the main international road. Unless we discard the inscriptions as historically valueless—a position that is problematic for the reasons discussed above—the only historical basis for the claim in the royal inscription is to be found in the increased population in the western part of the province.

But why would the scribes of the royal inscriptions, who surely distinguished between the signs for “city of Samaria” and “land of Samaria,” transfer the historical reality of increased

Foothills and the Yarkon Basin,” *Eretz-Israel* 15 (1981): 331–48 [Hebrew]; Avraham Faust, “Farmsteads in Western Samaria's Foothills: A Reexamination,” in *I Will Speak the Riddles of Ancient Times* (*Abiah chidot minei-kedem – Ps. 78:2b*): *Archaeological and Historical Studies in Honor of Amihai Mazar on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Aren M. Maeir and Pierre de Miroschedji (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 477–504.

45. Faust, “Settlement, Economy, and Demography,” 776, 780.

46. For a full discussion of these documents and their historical import, see Nadav Na'aman and Ran Zadok, “Assyrian Deportations to the Province of Samerina in the Light of Two Cuneiform Tablets from Tel Hadid,” *Tel Aviv* 27 (2000): 159–88.

47. On the function of Tel Hadid in the Assyrian administration, see Aster, “An Assyrian *bīt mardīte* near Tel Hadid?”

48. Na'aman and Zadok, “Assyrian Deportations from the Province of Samerina,” 178.

population from the Aphek area in the southwest of the province to the chief city of the province?

To answer this question, it is relevant to examine the process by which the population in the southwestern part of the province increased. The initial impetus for the increased population clearly stemmed from deportees, deported by the central administration. (In later stages, additional population was probably attracted to the region by the opportunity to provide goods and services to this developing region.)

Deportees sent by the central administration for settling along roads were transferred to the provincial governors, as appears from SAA I, 171, above. The complex process of transferring deportees is described in SAA I, 128, in which an official of the city of Dur-Sharruken records receiving deportees sent to him from Guzana. He states that he traveled to meet them at a location between the two cities, ensured that each of the deportees on the list he was given was present, and sent a *qurbu*-official back to Guzana to retrieve missing deportees. This demonstrates that deportees were not “sent off” from one location to another to arrive on their own, but that they were “handed off” from the responsibility of one governing official to another. This process of handing off responsibilities for deportees and ensuring that each deportee was accounted for is also recorded in SAA V, 48, ll. 10–16.⁴⁹ These documents show that written records were kept about each group of deportees to ensure that they reached the official for whom they were intended.

Deportees destined for a *bīt mardīte* or other locations along the main road in western Samaria would have become the responsibility of the provincial governor, who was resident in the city of Samaria. Scribes in the Assyrian administrative hierarchy who followed up on reports arriving from the provincial governors through whose territory the deportees passed would have known that the deportees were destined for the governor resident in the city of Samaria. As the documents noted above show, they would have followed the reports, so as to ensure that these deportees reached their intended destination. From their point of view, the intended destination of these deportees was the governor resident in the city of Samaria.

There is no reason to believe that the administrators who followed the “paper trail” of the deportees would occupy themselves with the specific locations in which the deportees were settled. From their point of view, the provincial governor received these deportees, and was responsible for deploying them to fulfil his obligations, which included maintaining *bīt mardīte* stations. And if the provincial governor fulfilled his responsibilities properly, and did not complain about burdens, the administrators in Assyria would not concern themselves further with how he deployed these deportees.

The royal inscriptions, which are the product of scribes employed by the central administration, therefore base themselves here on the records kept by the administrative scribes in the Assyrian capitals, rather than on what occurred in the provinces. The administrative scribes knew that deportees were being sent to the provincial governor resident in Samaria. Based on this knowledge, the scribes in the Assyrian capitals who composed the royal inscriptions wrote that their king had “settled the city of Samaria more than it was previously.” It is entirely possible that these scribes knew full well that the deportees were not being settled in the city of Samaria (and that their numbers did not exceed the previous population of the city), but it is more probable that even if they knew, these scribes did not concern themselves with the demographic geography of Samaria. They used information at their disposal in such a way as to claim an achievement for Sargon II. The populating of a former capital city of a vassal state was considered such an achievement, while the creation of an efficient road

49. Note that the text does not speak only about animals but also about people, as is clear from l. 13.

system was not considered as such. This is evidenced by the absence, anywhere in the royal inscriptions, of boasts about the creation of this network, which surely ranks as one of the great administrative feats of Assyria.

The inscriptional boast of repopulating Samaria shows that the royal inscriptions try to “transfer achievements” between the different branches of Assyrian government: achievements largely executed by provincial administrators, such as the creation of an efficient road network, are de-emphasized, whereas achievements considered worthy of a king, such as the building of cities, are emphasized. The royal inscriptions do not invent facts; they merely transfer the credit for actions performed by the provincial branches of the Assyrian government to the king.⁵⁰ In so doing, they ignore geographic details internal to the province, as well as demographic numbers, because such details do not help accomplish the rhetorical goal of the inscriptions, which is to highlight the king’s accomplishments.

“I CAUSED THEM TO SEIZE THEIR CRAFTS”—TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

This discussion provides important background in understanding a different passage from Sargon’s Great Display inscription. This passage, too, relates to the repopulation of Samaria, and states:

^{uru}*Samerina alme akšud*
 27290 *nišē āšib libbi ašlula*
 50 ^{giš}*narkabāti ina libbišunu akšurma*
u sittuti inūšunu ušāḫiz
^{lu₂}*šut-rēšīa elišunu aškunma*
bilat šarri māhrē emidsunūti
 I surrounded and conquered the city of Samaria.
 I took as booty 27,290 dwellers in its midst.
 I organized into a cohort 50 chariots which were in its midst.
 I trained the remnant in their crafts.
 I set a servant of mine over them.
 I established (that they would pay) the tribute of the former king.⁵¹

The phrase *u sittuti inūšunu ušāḫiz*, here translated “I trained the remnant in their crafts,” has been the cause of considerable scholarly discussion. The phrase describes how the Assyrians treated those not deported from Samaria. Although the first line cited specifically mentions the conquest of the city of Samaria, the large number in the second line suggests that the remainder of the passage describes the fate of the residents of the kingdom of Israel as a whole, and not only of the city’s residents.

Cogan comments on this phrase:

The residents of Samaria who remained in the land were instructed in the proper behavior expected of Assyrian citizens. This included “to revere god and king,” i.e., rendering homage to the imperial god Ashur and the reigning king as his earthly representative. Experts were sent to Samaria to oversee the instruction of the surviving Israelites and the exiles that were brought to the newly founded province of Samerina.⁵²

50. This tendency of the inscriptions is noted in Melville, *The Campaigns of Sargon II*, 10.

51. Text from Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II.*, 197, ll. 24–25, my translation and phrase division.

52. Mordechai Cogan, *The Raging Torrent* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2008), 84.

Cogan implies that the Assyrian central administration sought to inculcate Assyrian ideology among those remaining in Samaria by teaching them to render homage to Ashur and his representative, the king. A similar view is expressed by Becking, who understands this phrase to mean “to live in fear of the Assyrian Gods (*sic*) and king.”⁵³

But an Assyrian intent to “culturally Assyrianize” the population does not appear in this text. The phrase *palāḥ ilī u šarri*, “to fear the gods and king,” which might represent the process Becking describes, does not appear here. The only statement that those remaining in Samaria were made “into Assyrians” appears in a line from the Khorsabad annals discussed above: *biltu madattu kī ša Aššuri emidsunūti*, “I established upon them tribute and gifts like those of Assyria,” which parallels the line cited above in the Nimrud prism: *itti nišē KUR Aššur^{KI} amnušunūti*, “I counted them among the people of Assyria.”⁵⁴ In that passage, the “Assyrianizing” of the inhabitants of Samaria has no cultural or educational component, but purely a financial one. As inhabitants of a province, they were liable to the same taxation as Assyrians.

Moreover, understanding the phrase *inūšunu ušāḥiz* as implying a measure of enforced acculturation has no strong linguistic basis in parallels from other Assyrian royal inscriptions.⁵⁵ Only four attestations of the word *inu*, all in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, are recorded in CAD I/J 152. The most significant parallel usage, for our purposes, appears in Sargon’s summary inscription on a bull, related to the building of Dur-Šarrukin. The meaning of this noun (which I translated “crafts” above) is key to our discussion:

mārē Aššur mudūte inī kalama
ana šūḥuz šibitte
palāḥ ilī u šarri
aklī u šāpirī uma’iršunūti

I appointed natives of Assyria, knowers of the crafts, all of them
 to train in correct behavior,
 fear of gods and king,
 as overseers and supervisors.⁵⁶

In this passage, the special characteristic of the Assyrian natives that qualifies them to act as supervisors and overseers is their knowledge of crafts, i.e., their technical training. This is the simple meaning of the term *inu*.⁵⁷ The bull inscription recounts how Assyrian natives were trained in economically productive occupations, and were to instruct the conquered peoples in these, so that the conquered peoples could also be economically productive and contribute to the economic projects of the empire. This particular text relates to the employment of deportees and corvée workers from the provinces in the building of Sargon’s new capital. It is clear from other documents that the primary purpose of sending these deportees

53. Becking, *The Fall of Samaria*, 26 n. 22.

54. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II.*, 88 l. 17. This is part of the passage from the Khorsabad annals which parallels part of the Nimrud prism. The two lines cited are preceded by the same formulations (cited above from the Nimrud prism); only the final line of the text, that cited here, differs. See also Cogan, *The Raging Torrent*, text 20.

55. This was noted by Dalley, “Foreign Chariotry and Cavalry,” 35.

56. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II.*, 72, lines 95–97, transcription from CAD I/J 152 (my translation).

57. Note CAD I/J 152, “The meaning is based, apart from context, on the parallel expression *mudūt šipri kalama*, which is understood in the sense of practical knowledge, as opposed to technical and specialized knowledge.”

to the new capital was to work on its construction.⁵⁸ One specific administrative text describing the building of this capital shows that carpenters and potters were collected and brought to the building site to instruct deportees in carpentry and pottery-making.⁵⁹ This shows the practice of teaching trades to deportees at Dur-Šarrukin, a practice that is also attested in the bull inscription cited above, and supports the interpretation of *inu* in the bull inscription as “crafts.”

The two remaining attestations of *inu* also support this meaning of “crafts.” Sargon’s titular, in the cylinder inscription from Khorsabad, describes him as:

šarru pīt ḥasīsi, le’ē inī kalama
the king, wise and skilled in all crafts.⁶⁰

The continuation of this line compares Sargon to the *apkallū*, who are known for transmitting divine wisdom to kings,⁶¹ and describes how he grew in *nemēqu* (wisdom) and *tašīmtu* (practical intelligence). This is followed by a long description of his abilities in achieving increased food production in Assyria. This strongly implies that Sargon is being praised here for his practical intelligence, that the meaning of *inu* here is useful technical knowledge, and that agricultural techniques which increase food production are included under the rubric of *inu*.

The idea that *inu* indicates technical knowledge and ability is also supported by an inscription of Assurbanipal, in which the following line appears: *lē’aku ša gimir ummāni kališunu inūšunu rabū*, “I am an expert in the best technical lore of every craft.”⁶² In the previous line, Assurbanipal declares: *uštanašbar kīma kiškattē arāte kabābāte*, “I . . . heavy and light shields, as if I were an armorer.”⁶³ The passage therefore describes the technical skill and knowledge of the king.

Given that *inu* clearly refers to technical skills or crafts, rather than to religious or political practices, Dalley suggested translating the passage from the Great Display Inscription as “I allowed the remainder to pursue their own skill.”⁶⁴ But the meaning “to allow” is nowhere else attested for the verb *šūḥuzu*, whose range includes teaching, instilling a specific behavior, or causing a person to hold another person or object.⁶⁵ The verb consistently refers to

58. K. Lawson Younger, “The Deportations of the Israelites,” *JBL* 117 (1998): 201–27, here 221–22, and “Give Us Our Daily Bread: Everyday Life for the Israelite Deportees,” in *Life and Culture in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Richard E. Averbeck, Mark William Chavalas, and David B. Weisberg (Bethesda: CDL Press, 2003), 276–77.

59. SAA XV, 280, previously published as ABL 1065, discussed by Younger, “The Deportations of the Israelites.”

60. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II.*, 37 l. 38.

61. At p. 292, Fuchs understands the reference to the *apkallū* as a reference to Adapa, based on the parallels cited there. The *apkallū*, among whom was Adapa, were antediluvian mythic figures who transmitted divine wisdom to human scholars and thereby ensured the correct implementation of divine plans by kings. See the brief discussion by Jonas Chaim Greenfield, s.v. *Apkallu*, in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 2nd ed., ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 72–74, and the more extensive discussion of Alan M. Lenzi, *Secrecy and the Gods: Secret Knowledge in Ancient Mesopotamia and Biblical Israel* (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2008), 67–122.

62. The line is part of K2624, published in the old edition of Maximilian Streck, *Assurbanipal und die letzten assyrischen Könige* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1916), 2:256 l. 25, and commented on by Rykle Borger, *Beiträge zum Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals*, 187.

63. The line is presented based on CAD K 454 and §4. The meaning of *uštanašbar* remains uncertain, but “fashion” is suggested by the context. The word *kiškattē*, here translated “armorer” based on the context, elsewhere means ‘smith’, ‘engineer’, or more generally ‘craftsman’.

64. Dalley, “Foreign Chariotry and Cavalry,” 35, followed in CAD A/II 182.

65. CAD A/II 180–82.

imposing a behavior or object on another, and not to allowing an individual the freedom to choose a behavior or object.

Therefore, it does not appear that the expression *inūšunu ušāḥiz* refers to anything other than causing the non-deported Samaritans to engage in certain crafts or occupations. This fits well with the context of the inscription, which discusses the economic disposition of Samaria: the previous line describes how some Assyrians were incorporated into Sargon's chariotry and the subsequent lines describe the collection of tribute from the region.

This, of course, begs the question of what sort of training or inducement the Assyrians might have offered the Samaritans to engage in certain crafts. The agrarian majority of the Samaritan population certainly knew the agricultural practices most suited to the region far better than the Assyrians did. It would be absurd to interpret this line as referring to Assyrians training the Samaritans in the agriculture that the Samaritans had previously practiced.

CHANGES IN ECONOMIC ACTIVITY IN SAMARIA IN THE ASSYRIAN PERIOD

The line might refer, however, to changes in economic activity in the region of Samaria in the Assyrian period. Prior to the Assyrian period, the kingdom of Israel had a well-developed economy in which the rural sector produced and traded wine and olive oil, among other products.⁶⁶ As Faust noted, these economic sectors were devastated by the Assyrian conquest.⁶⁷

The evidence cited above suggests that the economic center of the province of Samaria shifted to the Aphek-Gezer region, i.e., the region surrounding the main coastal road, in the western part of the province. It appears that the statement *u sittuti inūšunu ušāḥiz*, "I trained the remnant in their crafts," is related to this shift in economic activity. It reflects a reality in which Assyrian activity in the region forced the remaining population to gravitate towards providing services to Assyrians using the main road. The line would then be intended to vaunt the Assyrian "accomplishment" of forcing the remaining population to engage in economic activity that benefited Assyrian interests.

But we may be able to provide more precise data about the nature of these services, again based on the corpus of Assyrian administrative documents. In his study of the logistics of the Assyrian army, Deszo notes that the largest burden on provincial governors was the provisioning of troops, both local troops raised to participate in campaigns and royal troops who were garrisoned in the territory of the provincial governor.⁶⁸ These garrisons (Akk. *birtu*) were locations where troops were stationed either in preparation for campaigns or to assist the governor in deterring the local population from bearing arms against him.⁶⁹ Below, I examine some of the documentary evidence that illustrates the quantities of grain that governors were required to provide to troops, and the conditions under which this supply was to be provided.

As appears from SAA V, 289, the governors would take the grain tax raised from the local population and use it to provision the garrisons.⁷⁰ As indicated by this tablet, the governors

66. For examples of such production in the rural sector, see Shimon Dar's discussion of Hurvat Jama'in, a town to the west of the city of Samaria, "Hurvat Jama'in: A First Temple Period Village in Western Samaria," in *Shomeron Studies*, ed. S. Dar and Ze'ev Safrai (Tel Aviv: Kibbutz Ha Meuhad, 1986), 13–73 [Hebrew]; and S. Riklin's discussion of the rural site at Beit Arye, to the east of Tel Hadid, in "Bet Arye," *'Atiqot* 32 (1997): 7–20 [Hebrew].

67. Faust, "Settlement, Economy, and Demography."

68. Tamas Deszo, *The Assyrian Army* (Budapest: Eotvos, 2012), vol. 2, 70–72.

69. Deszo, *The Assyrian Army*, 72.

70. See the discussion of the extraction of the grain-tax (*nusāḥē*) in John N. Postgate, *Taxation and Conscription in the Assyrian Empire* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1974), 194–99. The tax was collected by officials of the governor's staff, but the authority to collect the tax derived from the central government, and the central government

were responsible for providing rations to any soldier in the garrisons who had a “bread ration” entered on his “tablet.”⁷¹ The military hierarchy controlled by the central government was responsible for determining who was eligible for rations, but the governors were responsible for providing these.

One particular type of agricultural produce was of paramount importance in allowing the governor to fulfil his responsibility for provisioning the garrisons:

Raising barley rations for troops during campaign preparations had obviously the greatest importance from a military point of view, as it was impossible to plan and execute a campaign without the necessary provisions for the troops. It was for this reason that the foremost concern of governors, magnates and other officials was the collection of the necessary supplies, and the process was closely monitored by the king himself.⁷²

Deszo bases his assessment of the importance of grain on the many clear statements in the administrative documents indicating that this was the primary (and often the sole) provision issued to troops. One example of this is an administrative document from Syria, SAA I, 181, which records the fulfilment of a royal order to disburse bread (NINDA.MEŠ). To fulfil the order, the soldiers took grain from the stocks kept by the governor, Bel-liqbi. This is also seen in SAA I, 182, which records quantities of harvested grain and discusses what quantities ought to be issued to the chariot troops. We find no evidence that other types of foodstuffs were issued to troops as rations.

One might reasonably expect that on campaigns beyond the borders of Assyrian provinces, rations would not need to be issued to troops since they could forage and pillage to obtain food. But as Deszo notes, the well-organized Assyrian army would not have relied solely on this method of feeding troops during campaigns due to the strong likelihood that the towns under attack would hear of the advancing Assyrian army and burn all grain in the fields and in undefended towns.⁷³

Furthermore, in campaigns conducted in the spring, before the standing grain ripened, only a limited amount of the previous harvest’s grain would be stocked in the attacked towns, and the troops would have difficulty locating and seizing sufficient grain. (The average ration of a soldier was 2 *qa*, i.e., 2 liters, of grain per diem.) It is clear that the Assyrian army commanders went to great lengths to ensure that sufficient grain stocks would be available in proximity to the areas to be attacked, and that the governors were responsible for providing these grain stocks.⁷⁴ The grain stocks would be assembled in areas under control of the governors (i.e., the provinces) and troops would be provisioned before moving beyond the

appears to have regarded the tax as belonging to it (see in this regard the claims in SAA I, 220). By using the tax to provide for the army’s needs, the governors fulfilled their obligation of transferring this tax to the “account” of the central government.

71. Further evidence of the governor’s obligation to provide food for the garrison appears in SAA XIX, 60, discussed by Deszo, *The Assyrian Army*, 73.

72. Deszo, *The Assyrian Army*, 73. We should note that the English word “grain” would be more accurate than “barley” in this quote. The Akkadian texts on which Deszo bases himself do not distinguish between different types of grain. Barley was certainly the cheapest grain in many areas, and was probably used in most rations.

Besides grain for humans, both fodder and grain for equids were also required. (Melville, *The Campaigns of Sargon II*, 41, discusses the quantities needed.) I focus my discussion on grain (to the exclusion of fodder) because the former has a greater impact on human agricultural activity, relatively less manpower being required to harvest fodder than to produce grain.

73. Deszo, *The Assyrian Army*, 88.

74. Deszo, *The Assyrian Army*, 82.

provinces, into the areas to be attacked. In this way, they would be fed in the province, and would carry with them some provisions for their campaign beyond the province.⁷⁵

One specific administrative text, SAA V, 250, gives us quantitative information about the large stocks of grain needed for a campaign. The letter is a report to the king by governors and other magnates who arrived in Kar-Aššur (a city controlled by Assyria east of Ashur), as a sort of advance party before the beginning of an Assyrian campaign in the region. The king demands data on the stored grain that the Assyrian army had at its disposal in the city, and the magnates report on over 700 homers of grain available as a *daily* ration for troops. This equals 70,000 liters (or *qa*), on a daily basis, and is an enormous quantity of grain. Both Fales and Deszo have addressed the quantitative aspect of the stocks of grain that governors were expected to prepare before Assyrian campaigns, and have reached the conclusion that large stocks of grain were indeed needed in many areas.⁷⁶

It seems reasonable, therefore, to posit that during the reign of Sargon, at least until 712 BCE, the governor of Samaria, which was the last western Assyrian province before Philistia, was responsible for providing large stocks of grain to the Assyrian troops who participated in the campaigns detailed above.

The adversaries the Assyrians faced in the post-720 campaigns in Philistia and on the Egyptian border may have been less formidable than those the Assyrians confronted in the northeastern part of the empire in the campaign described in SAA V, 250. Accordingly, the number of troops participating in the campaigns that passed through Samaria may have been far fewer, and the quantity of grain needed would have been smaller in proportion. But even if the quantity of grain needed was only a fifth of that described in SAA V, 250, the governor would still have been expected to supply over 14,000 liters of grain daily, equaling over 400,000 liters of grain for a single month. A rough calculation suggests that this quantity represents the produce of 120 hectares (1200 dunam) of cultivated fields.⁷⁷ This is not a terribly large territory, equaling only 1.2 square km. But to put these extra 1200 dunam under grain production, a certain shift in agricultural techniques and the disposition of manpower would have been needed.

To illustrate this shift, we note that a plot of 10–15 dunam was needed to sustain the average family.⁷⁸ Thus, to produce the grain stocks estimated above, workers would need to produce the equivalent of 120 family plots, over and above what was needed to feed themselves and their families. Producing this surplus would require a transition from family plots to larger estates, as well as techniques that produce larger yields, such as fertilizing, more intense ploughing, or planting sprouted grains.⁷⁹ Furthermore, the disposition of man-

75. Melville, *The Campaigns of Sargon II*, 41.

76. Deszo, *The Assyrian Army*, 75; and Frederick Mario Fales, "Grain Reserves, Daily Rations, and the Size of the Assyrian Army: A Quantitative Study," *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 4 (1990): 23–34. Note that the reference to SAA V, 251 at p. 24 is a typographical error and should indicate SAA V, 250. The calculations here include only grain for humans, and including grain for equids increases the totals very substantially and strengthens my argument.

77. This is based on 1 liter of barley weighing approximately 600 g and 1 dunam yielding 200 kg of grain annually in a pre-industrial society. This estimate of the yield of a dunam is based on the estimates of Yehuda Feliks, *Agriculture in Palestine in the Period of the Bible and Talmud: Basic Farming Methods and Implements* (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1990), 146 [Hebrew]. He calculates a yield of between 91 and 183 kg per dunam in lean years and between 183 and 367 kg in better years, and discusses the possibility of reaching 816 kg (!) using advanced methods of cultivation. Safrai takes 150 kg as average annual yield (Ze'ev Safrai, *The Economy of Roman Palestine* [London: Routledge, 1994]), 110).

78. Safrai, *The Economy of Roman Palestine*, 110.

79. On these techniques, see Feliks, *Agriculture in Palestine*, 146–50.

power might require change, from that typical of a family plot to a system in which large numbers of workers were drafted at harvest time.⁸⁰ The ideal region in which to grow these grains would have been the alluvial soil in the valley of Ayyalon, south of Aphek and close to Gezer, which had the added advantage of being close to the main road. For the changes noted above to happen quickly, they would have had to be directed “from the top down,” by some authority with coercive power (viz., Assyrian provincial officials), rather than allowing a more gradual “from the bottom up” transition, initiated by the local population.

To summarize the foregoing: Important changes took place in the economy of Samaria after the Assyrian conquest. The only economic sector that saw growth was located along the main international route in the southwestern part of the province and related to providing goods and services to the Assyrian administrators and troops travelling along it. It is extremely probable that many of the goods required consisted of larger quantities of grain, and that some of the non-deported population, at least in the years 720–712 BCE, were required by the Assyrians to grow the grain they required. This increased grain production required the use of new techniques, new dispositions of manpower, and bringing new areas into production. For these changes to happen quickly, officials would have had to direct them.

It is important to note that during these years, large-scale deportations from Babylonia to Samaria had not yet taken place,⁸¹ so that as far as we know, the entire burden for providing services to the Assyrians fell on the remaining non-deported population.

THE HISTORICAL VALUE OF THE CLAIM “I CAUSED THEM TO SEIZE THEIR CRAFTS”

The changes detailed above were shepherded by the provincial governors of Samaria. They were responsible for extracting resources from the local population, for ensuring the establishment of *bit mardite* stations along the main international route, for provisioning these, and for providing the requisite grain supplies to troops before campaigns.

To fulfil these responsibilities, governors necessarily cajoled, induced, or forced some of the local non-deported population in Samaria to engage in economic activities that allowed them to fulfil these responsibilities. These included moving closer to the main international route and increasing grain production so that the necessary stocks would be available. This reality corresponds to the claim in the royal inscriptions “I caused the remainder to seize (or undertake) their crafts,” which represents changes in the economic activity of the remaining population. But there is one important difference between the claim and the reality.

These shifts in economic activity would have been supervised, overseen, or observed by the provincial governors. There is no evidence that the central Assyrian administration would have occupied itself with these sorts of local matters, beyond requiring the governors to fulfil their responsibilities with regard to the international road, the *bit mardite*, and the provisioning of troops. This stands in marked contrast to the claim in Sargon’s inscriptions to have caused the remaining non-deported population to engage in certain crafts. It appears here that, as in the passage discussed above (“I settled it more than it was previously”), activities

80. Large-scale grain production in the Land of Israel under royal auspices involved corvée laborers for harvest, as seen in the Mešad Ḥashavyahu text (available in F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance* [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2005], 357–77) and in the significantly earlier El Amarna letter 365. Non-deported inhabitants of Samaria could have been recruited for such work in the context of their *ilku*-obligations.

81. On these deportations taking place after Sargon’s campaigns in Babylonia, i.e., after 710, see Na’aman and Zadok, “Assyrian Deportations to the Province of Samerina.”

undertaken by the provincial governors in managing the province are in the royal inscriptions claimed to redound to the credit of the king.

CONCLUSION: THE USE OF ROYAL INSCRIPTIONS IN HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION

The Assyrian royal inscriptions are valuable as sources for historical reconstruction. We recognize that

Their value as sources must always be gauged in light of their distortions and incompleteness—limitations conditioned especially by their ideological concerns.⁸²

But these ideological concerns did not lead the authors of the inscriptions to fabricate historical data. Scholars who disregard data from the royal inscriptions because of their ideological concerns misconstrue history.

The analysis of two passages from Sargon's inscriptions related to Samaria shows how the authors of these inscriptions recounted events from the point of view of the central Assyrian administration. They ignored the role that governors played in implementing Assyrian policy and narrated actions undertaken by the governors as though they were authored by the king.

In regard to the claim to have resettled the city of Samaria, they narrate a functional Assyrian policy of sending deportees to settle along the main road in Samaria as though the deportees were sent to settle the city of Samaria itself. They thus present an activity that was important for logistical Assyrian purposes as though it involved something analogous to the establishment of a city, which was considered a "regal" accomplishment of which the annals boast in several places. Similarly, in regard to the claim to have "caused the remainder to seize their crafts," the technical or logistical character of the Assyrian accomplishment is ignored, and so too is the contribution of the local governor.

In both passages, we see how the Assyrian scribes attempt to reframe the narrative. They extract events that can be interpreted as royal accomplishments from the record of Assyrian activities, ignore the role of the governors and other officials, and narrate these events as accomplishments fit for the king's majesty to have achieved. This highlights the role of the royal inscriptions in buttressing the accomplishments of the king, not only in relation to his enemies, but specifically in relation to the magnates and officials of the Assyrian empire. The ideology reflected in the inscriptions assigns a specific role to Assyrians as destined to control other peoples.⁸³ But the inscriptions are not only designed to place "Assyria" at the top of a hierarchical pyramid. They are perhaps in the first instance designed to place the king at the pinnacle of the top tier of this hierarchical pyramid, a tier occupied by the Assyrian magnates. (They specifically illustrate the difference between that pinnacle and the top tier!) As the passages analyzed here show, they are designed to depict the king as ascendant and more accomplished than any of his officials, to magnify his position and accomplishments while ignoring theirs.

82. Machinist, "Assyrians on Assyria in the First Millennium BC," 79.

83. Machinist, "Assyrians on Assyria in the First Millennium BC," 82–84.

