THE BOUNDARIES OF ARAM-DAMASCUS IN THE 9TH–8TH CENTURIES BCE*

GERSHON GALIL

Haifa

This article reexamines the boundaries of Aram-Damascus in the second half of the 9th century and in the 8th century BCE in light of the new inscriptions published in the last decade, mainly Hazael’s booty inscriptions from Samos and Eretria,¹ the fragments of the Aramaic royal inscription from Tel Dan,² and the new edition of the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III.³

I. The Boundaries of Aram-Damascus in the time of Hazael and Bar Hadad, his son

In 841 and again in 838 (and in 837?) Damascus was defeated by the Assyrians, the army of Shalmaneser III occupying all the districts of the land of Damascus up to Mount Hauran.⁴ The defeats of Aram on the battlefield did not lead to its surrender. Assyria failed

* This article is based on a paper presented at the 44th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale in Venice in July 1997.


³ H. Tadmor, The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III King of Assyria (Jerusalem, 1994).

to conquer Damascus, and Hazael did not become an Assyrian vassal. The Assyrian threat, however, was not lifted from Damascus, and it took Aram several years to recover from the blows it had endured. Biblical sources state clearly that Hazael subdued his southern neighbors, including the two Israelite kingdoms and Gath of the Philistines. The Aramean campaigns probably took place during the first five years of the reign of Shamshi-Adad V, taking advantage of the death of Shalmaneser III and the revolt in Assyria. Hazael annexed to Aram all the land of Israel from the Bashan up to the river Arnon (2 Kgs 10,32–33). It was probably a very cruel and sadistic conquest which even after three generations was not forgotten (Amos 1,3; 2 Kgs 8,12). Most of the oracles against the nations in the book of Amos, chapter 1, probably refer to the period of Hazael. The empire of Hazael may have included not only Israel, Judah, and Gath of the Philistines but also Tyre, the other four Philistine kingdoms, and the kingdoms of Transjordan. It is possible that the fall of Calneh and Hamath mentioned in Amos 6,2, also refers to the conquests of Hazael.

Hazael’s booty inscriptions from Samos and Eretria indicate that Unqi/Pattina was within the empire of Hazael. Moreover, it is reasonable to suppose that the river which Hazael crossed was the Euphrates (“in the year that our lord crossed the river”). I may therefore suggest that central and northern Syria were under the hegemony of Damascus, already during the reign of Hazael (as indicated also, in my opinion, from Amos 6,2).

---

5 For the date of Hazael’s campaigns see G. Galil, The Chronology of the Kings of Israel and Judah (Leiden, 1996), pp. 48–51.

6 We should read: “to deliver them up to Aram” instead of “to deliver them up to Edom”—Amos 1,6, etc. For earlier studies of Amos’s Oracles against the nations see J. Barton, Amos’s Oracles against the Nations: A Study of Amos 1.3–2.5 (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 25–31; M.E. Polley, Amos and the Davidic Empire: A Socio-Historical Approach (New York and Oxford, 1989), pp. 76–77.

7 The commentators conclude that the references in Amos 6,2 are to the campaigns of Tiglath-pileser III, attributing this verse to a later redactor of the book of Amos. Cf. J.H. Hayes, Amos (Nashville, 1988), pp. 183–84, with earlier literature. For another approach to this problem see S.M. Paul, Amos (Minneapolis, 1991), pp. 201–204.

8 There is no reason to accept the identification of ‘MQ in the Eretria and Samos inscriptions with the Beqa’ of Lebanon. For this proposal see N. Na’aman, “Hazael of ‘Amqi and Hadadezer of Beth-rehob”, UF 27 (1993), pp. 384ff., pp. 393–94; Na’aman misunderstood the inscriptions and his interpretation must be rejected.