

**The Use of Biblical and Extra-Biblical Texts in Historiography:
An Analysis of the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis**

By

**A. K. Lama
(Box #560)**

**In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Course Requirements of
OLD TESTAMENT HISTORIOGRAPHY:
ISSUES AND METHODS
(DOT 923)
*Dr. K. L. Younger***

Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
May 9, 2003

Introduction

There are plethoras of writings on the history of Assyria and Israel, but not many are written specifically on the Syro-Ephraimitic¹ Crisis. Prior to Stuart A. Irvine's Emroy dissertation published in 1990², there are very few writings³ that are focused on this event. Perhaps, there has been a general consensus among the scholars and the scope for research was not seen promising until Irvine challenged the major elements of this consensus. The general consensus that Isaiah prophesied against both Pekah of Israel and Ahaz of Judah; Pekah for his effort to overthrow the Davidic dynasty and Ahaz for not trusting God, but inviting Assyrians for help is critically evaluated in Irvine's dissertation. Based on his re-examination of the Assyrian and biblical text connected to the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis, he paints a very different image of Ahaz and his relationship with Isaiah. Irvine's Ahaz never

¹ The term "Syro-Ephraimitic," is commonly agreed term for Syria and Israel; however, I understand H. J. Cook's claim for its anachronistic use: "It is generally assumed that the names Ephraim and Israel are interchangeable in designating the northern kingdom . . . There is no disputing [of] this fact; but the assumption that at all times after the division of the kingdom of Solomon the names of Ephraim and Israel could equally well be used to designate the northern kingdom appears to be without biblical foundation." See H. J. Cook, "Pekah," *VT* 14 (1964): 121-35 (129).

² Stuart A. Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990).

³ To my best knowledge, these few resources are: W. F. Albright, "The Assyrian March on Jerusalem, Isa. X, 28-32," *AASOR* 4(1924): 134-40; J. Begrich, "Der syrisch-ephraimistische Krieg und seine weltpolitischen Zusammenhangen," *ZDMG* 83 (1927): 213-37; Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*. SBT II/3. London: SCM, 1967; G. Rice, *The Syro-Ephraimite Crisis and the Witness of Isaiah, Chapters Seven and Eight, to the Prophet's Involvement*. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1969; Hayim Tadmor and M. Cogan, "Ahaz and Tiglath-Pileser in the Book of Kings: Historiographical Considerations," *Bib* 60 (1979): 491-508; H. Donner, *Israel unter den Volkern. Die Stellung de klassischen Propheten des 8. Jahrhunderts v. Chr zur Aussenpolitik der Konige von Israel und Juda*. VTSup 11. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964; B. Oded, "The Historical Background of the Syro-Ephraimite War Reconsidered," *CBQ* 34 (1972): 153-65.

invited the Assyrians for help. The tribute to Tiglath-pileser III and the practice of the Syrian cult happened only after Ahaz became a vassal king under Assyria. According to Irvine, Isaiah did not oppose Ahaz, but supported his effort for independence from Rezin. Irvine's analysis involves profound skepticism concerning the role of 2 Kgs 16:5-9, creative conjecture on the political dimension behind the biblical text, and the analytical use of the Assyrian texts in support of his hypothesis. In this paper, I shall re-examine both biblical and extra-biblical texts independently to see if Irvine's proposal is valid. Given the focus and the brevity of this paper, a detail analysis on Irvine's handling of the biblical and extra-biblical text may not be feasible; however, a selective analysis on some of the major points of contentions may satisfy the objective of this research.

Methodological Assumptions

Since methodological assumptions are inevitable in any research, it is appropriate to lay down at least the major assumptions that outline this analysis. In my methodology, I believe that the biblical text must be allowed to construe its own meaning according to the redemptive story line in the Bible. But how can one achieve this? Perhaps one of the ways it can be achieved is by improving one's literary competence in reading the Hebrew Bible and the ANE literatures.⁴ Amidst many extreme opinions about the place of ANE literature in the study of Hebrew Bible, I favor William Hallo's methodology who recommends both comparisons as well as contrasts of the relevant ANE texts with the text in the Hebrew Bible.⁵ But how do we decide which ANE texts are relevant? Younger's "Four

⁴ William Hallo and K. Lawson Younger Jr. ed. *The Context of Scripture Vol. III: Monumental Inscription From the Biblical World*. (Leiden: Brill, 2000): xxxvi-xlii.

⁵ This refers to William Hallo's two articles: "Biblical History in its Near Eastern Setting: The Contextual Approach," in *Scripture In Context* vol.1: 1-12 and "Compare and Contrast: The Contextual Approach to Biblical Literature," in *Scripture In Context* vol. 3:1-10.

pronged Assessment Process,” which suggests an assessment based on propinquity in four areas, namely linguistic, geographic, chronological, and cultural, cannot be ignored.⁶ Of course, consideration of propinquity alone does not guarantee the intimate connections between the literatures, yet taking heed to Younger’s advice would reduce some of the major errors of reading the text out of context. The connections between the ANE literatures and the biblical texts are complex and thus one should practice caution as much as possible before any conclusion is drawn.

Since the event in the biblical texts occurs as subservient to the theological motif, is it possible that the event was fabricated for a theological purpose? Does it mean that it cannot be trusted for its historical accuracy? The biblical writer/editor did not describe the event with great historical detail because: (1) The readers were familiar with the details of the event, or (2) The focus of the text was more theological, or (3) There was no suspicion of authenticity against such genre, or (4) All of these. The purpose of mentioning the event was to locate the theological event in the historical time and by doing so the biblical writer/ editor established its credibility of the message in the readers’ or listeners’ mind. If this is so, then, it is very unlikely that the biblical writers/editors would fabricate a historical event and jeopardize their main point. Undoubtedly, there are ambiguities on the historicity of this event in the biblical text, and so the use of the valuable Assyrian Inscriptions (See Appendix A) from the propinquity of time and space is important

Another important issue in the methodological assumption is about the place of authority of the biblical text. Consider a situation where the biblical text and the extra-

⁶ Hallo and Younger, ed. *The Context of Scripture Vol. III*:: xxxvi-xlii.

biblical text are in conflict with each other. Which text should take precedence? In my methodology I will favor the biblical texts for the fact that the Bible as a whole stands for truth and moral integrity while the extra-biblical text not necessarily. Often the extra-biblical texts are exaggeration and were used as a tool of propaganda. With these methodological assumptions, which are crucial in biblical historiography, I shall first analyze the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis in the biblical text.

Analysis of the Biblical Texts

There are several texts in the Bible that indirectly connects to the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis;⁷ however, I shall examine only three texts (2 Kings 16: 1-20, 2 Ch 28: 1-27 and Isa 7:1-17), which have direct references to this event.

(a) 2 Kings 16: 1-20

Comparing the narrative in larger context, one may notice the broader context of the story. The pattern of deuteronomistic introduction (v.1-4), conclusion (v. 19-20), and the repetition of the one main message (i.e. v.2b *and he did not do what was right in the sight of the LORD his God*), highlights the theological motif of the editor/writer. He wants the reader to know how king Ahaz did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord. He followed the ways of the kings of Israel⁸, sacrificed his son in the fire⁹, followed other nations, and offered sacrifices in every possible places. These charges are typically deuteronomistic because they are proscribed in Deut 12:2 and 18:10.¹⁰ The text does not

⁷ 2 Kgs 15:37; 16:5-9; Isa 7:1-9; 2 Chr 27:1-9; 28:1-27.

⁸ Jehoram (2 Kgs 8:18) and Ahaziah (2 Kgs 8:27) were also accused of same sins.

⁹ This is forbidden in Deut. 18:10. As mentioned in 2 Kgs 17:17, this sin among other sins provoked Yahweh to destroy Israel (2 Kgs 21:6; 23:10, and Jer 32:35).

¹⁰ Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis*, 78.

inform why king Ahaz continued to engage in all kinds of cultic worship. The answer to this question is crucial in understanding the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis. It is highly probable, along the line of ANE cultic practice, that king Ahaz was desperately seeking some kind of divine favor that would guarantee his security. As a king he was not only young, but also, was surrounded by strong nations who were a constant threat to his kingdom and his life. It is understandable why he was so readily and actively willing to turn to any pagan gods or kings.

However, Irvine in his discussion does not see this emphasis, but his concern is about the chronology of the cultic reformation. Based on the stylistic and orthographical variations he divides 2 Kgs 16:10-18 into the following sequence: (1) vv10-18 and 15-16; (2) vv 12-14; and (3) vv 17-18.¹¹ He suggests that the deuteronomistic editors missed the chronology of the cultic reform and that in fact, king Ahaz copied the Syrian religious practice before the Syro-Ephraimitic war.¹² He writes, “They [deuteronomistic editors] attached the material directly to the account of the Syro-Ephraimitic War in vv 5-9, adding at the same time ‘because of the king of Assyria’ in v 18b as an interpretive endbracket.”¹³ Irvine fails to take Isaiah’s account into consideration. Ahaz’s resistance to Syria’s political dominion would naturally constitute his refusal to Syrian cult too. The modern comparison of this may be the fate of “French Fries” and “Wine” in American restaurants after France stood against the US war on Iraq. It is more likely that the cultic reform took place after Syria’s destruction. Syria as a nation did not exist politically and therefore, Ahaz might have

¹¹ Ibid., 80.

¹² Ibid., 82.

¹³ Ibid., 81.

considered trying Syrian cult while appeasing Tiglath-pileser III with some of the Assyrian religious practices.

In v.7, after King Ahaz got frustrated with his search for divine favor, he turns to Tiglath-pileser the king of Assyria, surrendering himself and saying אָנִי וּבִנְךָ עַבְדְּךָ (I am your servant and your son).¹⁴ According to Hayim Tadmor and M. Cogan, Assyrian royal correspondence would not use the term “son.”¹⁵ Irvine suggests that the deuteronomistic editor used this term pejoratively because king Ahaz, in the line of Davidic king, was supposed to be the son of Yahweh. This is agreeable; however, in this construction Irvine goes beyond. He also suggests that the account of king Ahaz’s giving tribute described in vv 7-8 is deuteronomistic fabrication: “They [editors], however, interpreted the datum in accordance with First Kings 15: the payment of a “bribe” was a precondition for Assyrian invention.”¹⁶ In Irvine’s methodology, the biblical texts are assumed as editorially redacted, and thus to fit his propositions he rearranges its historical chronology. I suggest that 2 Kings be read synchronically as a book rather than redacted pieces of text. Perhaps, we will know why the fate of king Pekah is not described in 2 Kgs 16, but in 2 Kgs 15:29-30.¹⁷

¹⁴ I am using the literal rendering of the phrase. Scholars debate if the use of the word “your servant and your son” indicates the pre-existing suzerain-vassal status of King Ahaz. First, the grandfather of Ahaz, Azariah had subjugated to king of Assyria in 738 B.C. Second, the Syro-Ephraimitic crisis followed Tiglath-pileser’s campaign to west in 734 B. C.

¹⁵ Tadmor, H and Cogan, M. “Ahaz and Tiglath-Pileser in the Book of Kings: Historiographical Considerations,” *Bib* 60 (1979): 504.

¹⁶ Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis*, 78, 89.

¹⁷ “In the time of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came and took Ijon, Abel Beth Maacah, Janoah, Kedesh and Hazor. He took Gilead and Galilee, including all the land of Naphtali, and deported the people to Assyria. Then Hoshea, son of Elah conspired against Pekah son of Remaliah. He attacked and assassinated him, and then succeeded him as king in the twentieth year of Jotham son of Uzziah.” (NIV, 2 Kings 15:29-30).

The plot of the story remains focused on Ahaz's search for divine power apart from Yahweh and his religious sins continue even after the Syro-Ephraimitic war (v.10-18). Scholars debate on the ethnic identity of the newly found altar (Syrian, Phoenician or Assyrian)¹⁸ used for cultic reformation. According to 2 Ch 28:22-23, Ahaz imitates the Syrian religion, but according to 2 Kgs 16:18, the practice is in "deference" to the king of Assyria. Since, he was not committed to monotheistic worship of Yahweh, he might have practiced two different cults at the same time.

(b) 2 Ch 28: 1-27

In this text the story around the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis has different details and perspectives. According to Chronicler,¹⁹ the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis was a divine punishment to king Ahaz:

v. 5 וַיִּזְנֶנּוּהוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו בְּיַד מֶלֶךְ אַרָם
Therefore the LORD his God handed him over to the king of Aram
 וְגַם בְּיַד־מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל נָתַן
He was also given into the hands of the king of Israel

Unlike 2 Kings 16, here the emphasis is not on the continuity of the religious sins of king Ahaz only, but on the stubbornness of his unfaithfulness (v.22: לְמַעוֹל בַּיהוָה הוּא הַמֶּלֶךְ אָחָז: וַיִּזְנֶה, *king Ahaz became even more unfaithful to the Lord*)

Notice the Chronicler's account on the multiplicity of invasions that God brought upon Judah to humble Judeans on account of king Ahaz's wickedness (vv.19).

¹⁸ Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis*, 81-82.

¹⁹ I am using the word "Chronicler" just for the convenience. The debate on the number of authors or editors is not under consideration in this paper.

Aramean attack	Israelite attack	Edomite attack	Philistine attack
v. 5 Many people were taken as prisoners to Damascus.	<p>v.7 Killed in action: 20,000 soldiers of Judah Maaseiah, the king's son Azrikam, the incharge of the Palace. Elkanah, second to the king.</p> <p>v. 8 Taken as prisoners: 200,000 wives, sons, and daughters.</p> <p>Great plunder taken to Samaria</p>	v. 18 attacked and took prisoners	v.18 Land taken Beth-shemesh, Aijalon, Gederoth, and Soco with its villages, Timnah with its villages, and Gimzo with its villages.

The chronology of these events in the text underscores the growing insecurity of King Ahaz. It also explains why he sent a desperate plea to Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria for help (v. 16 *אָהָז שְׁלַח הַמֶּלֶךְ אָהָז*, *At that time King Ahaz sent*). The time-marker *אָהָז* points out the specific circumstances of king Ahaz while the great details on casualties inflicted upon Judean accentuate the severity of the divine punishment.

The detail description of the ministry of the prophet Oded to Israel in v. 9-13 sheds a new light on this event (not found in 2 Kgs 16). His ministry is significantly important because it explains why the leaders of Israel protested (v.12) against their own army and why the prisoners were treated well and the plunders were returned (v. 14 *וְאַתֵּר־הַבָּזָה וְאַתֵּר־הַשְּׂבִיָּה*, *So the soldiers gave up the prisoners and plunder*). Also notice, Chronicler has different interpretation of Tiglath-pileser's assistance to Ahaz (v. 20 *וְלֹא חָזְקוּ לוֹ*, *but he gave him trouble instead of help*). According to the Chronicler: (1) The Religious sins of Ahaz made him the worst king in Judean history, (2) Yahweh punished the 'faithlessness' of the king by giving him into the hands of his enemies, and (3) 'In the time of his distress,' Ahaz did not repent. Thus, he received full and just retribution."²⁰

²⁰

Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis*, 93.

(c) Isa 7:1-17

The theological motif of Isaiah in this text is lucidly different from 2 Kgs 16 and 2 Ch 28. Nevertheless, the account of Isaiah supplements valuable information in understanding some of the details on the event. Notice the break between verse 1 and 2. After stating that “The king Rezin of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel marched up to fight against Jerusalem, but they could not overpower it,” verse 2 begins afresh “Now the house of David was told, ‘Aram has allied itself with Ephraim’, so the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, . . .” This construction highlights the severity of the new situation and explains why king Ahaz and his people were now in terror. First, the break affirms the circumstances of king Ahaz emphasized in 2 Ch 28:16. Second, the failure of their first individual invasion gives a logical reason for the formation of their alliance. Third, since king Ahaz and his people had already experienced the terror of their first attack, their united attack must have appeared to them invincible. Fourth, the alliances were so sure of their victory that they had designated their puppet king Tabeel to replace Ahaz (v.6), and thus it was a serious situation for Judah. Amidst this sure and certain terrifying time in the history of Judah, God’s word comes to Isaiah that king Ahaz must stand firm in his faith (v.9) because both Damascus and Samaria would be destroyed within sixty-five years (v.7-9). But faith requires looking beyond human reason and experience. Can Ahaz, in spite of what he has experienced and what he foresees, put faith in Yahweh? He is advised to ask for a sign from the Lord, but he refuses (v.12). It is not clear why a king who was trying all kinds of religious practices to seek the divine favor, as reported in 2 Kgs 16 and 2 Ch 28 would refuse to seek a sign from Yahweh. According to Irvine, king Ahaz was “bent upon appealing to Assyria and bestowal

of a sign might force him to abandon the plan.”²¹ However, one needs to take into consideration the urgency of king Ahaz’s political situation too.

Of course, the biblical text does not answer many historical questions such as: What is the date and time of the event? How much time king Ahaz had before the war? What happened during the war? How many were deported to Kir?²² What was happening to other nations in the proximity of time and space? Answers to these questions might help in understanding this event greatly. Is it possible to get answers to these questions from extra-biblical sources? It may not be all but perhaps some.

Analysis of the Assyrian Inscriptions

Since the analysis of the Assyrian inscriptions requires specialization in the respective language and the archaeology, this paper may not include critical analysis of the Assyrian texts, but heavily depends on the recent work done by Younger²³ and Irvine. In the following paragraph, with the help of Assyrian Eponym, I will first date the event and then reflect upon few prominent Assyrian inscriptions.

(a) Assyrian Eponym:

In Assyrian system of Calendar, each year was named after different

²¹ Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis*, 5.

²² K. Lawson Younger has demonstrated skillfully the use of extra-biblical sources on Assyrian deportation. See K. Lawson Younger, Jr. “The Deportations of the Israelites.” *JBL* 117/ 2 (1998): 201-227.

²³ Younger referred the work of A. H. Layard, H. Rawlison, G. Smith, G. Tadmor, Luckenbill, Oppenheim, and Wiseman. See Hallo and Younger, ed. *The Context of Scripture Vol. II:*, 284-300.

government officials.²⁴ Out of many such lists two major lists have survived, namely Canon A and Canon B.²⁵ Incidentally, along with one of the names a solar eclipse is mentioned which has been astronomically computed to be the eclipse of June 15, 763 B. C.²⁶ This date provides the fixed point from which all other dates are derived. According to Irvine, the Canon B is more valuable as it preserved the dates from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 B. C.). The following dates from the Eponym years (See Appendix B) are noteworthy:

Nisan 734 – Nisan 733	against Philistia
Nisan 733 – Nisan 732	against the land of Damascus
Nisan 732 – Nisan 731	against the land of Damascus it is reasonable to

From the above lists, the probable time for the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis is estimated to be sometime during 732/ 731 B. C. before the third Assyrian campaign. In this paper I will not be able to discuss issues involved in calculating the calendar year in ANE context, but for our convenience and focus of this paper I will adopt the chronology worked out by J. H. Hayes and P. K. Hooker (See Appendix C).²⁷

(b) The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III

The inscriptions contain reports on some of the political conditions and movements in Syrian and Palestine during 730s but unlike biblical text, they do not give the

²⁴ Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 74.

²⁵ Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis*, 24.

²⁶ “The extant sources make possible a reconstruction of the list beginning with Adad-nirari about 911 B. C. and continuing to the middle of the seventh century B. C. In the tenth year of Ashur-dan III, the year designed by the name of Bur Sagale as eponym, a solar eclipse is mentioned.” See Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, 74.

²⁷ Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis*, 73.

details of the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis specifically. They can be divided into two broad categories: annals or summary texts. The former narrates the military activities of the king in rough chronological order, while the latter usually describes events according to geographical priorities.²⁸ There are many problems involved with the reading of these texts and the opinions vary on what should be read in between the parenthesis.

(i) Calah Annals (2.117A)

In the Ann. 21:1' - 10'; Tadmor 54-55, there is clear mention of the name of king Rezin and the big list of the tribute that king of Aram had to pay to Tiglath-pileser III. Again in Ann. 13:10 – Ann. 14:5; Tadmor 69-71, the name of “Rezin” and “the Samaritan” is described among those who paid the tribute. The description includes detail list of the items in the tribute.²⁹ Comparing with the Eponym list, probably this event may be placed with the second Assyrian campaign in Nisan 733 or 732, i. e. before the Syro-Ephraimitic crisis. I agree with Irvine, according to whom during the first “Assyrian Campaign against Philistia” in 734/733 Nisan several north Syrian rulers, including Ahaz of Judah, were subjugated, but not king Rezin, Hiram, and Pekah.³⁰ This gives some explanation why king Aram, Hiram, and Pekah wanted to resist the Assyrian empire and desired an alliance from the king of Judah,³¹ which resulted the Syro-Ephraimitic crisis.

In Ann 23:1' - 18'; Tadmor 78-81, the mention of Rezin and Damascus is associated with a vivid description of destruction around Damascus. After the army of

²⁸ Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis*, 26.

²⁹ Hallo and Younger, ed. *The Context of Scripture Vol. II*, 285.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

³¹ Hallo and Younger, ed. *The Context of Scripture Vol. II*, 284.

king Aram faces a terrible devastation, king Rezin flees like a mongoose, imprisoned in his own city “like a bird in a cage” for 45 days.³² This event may be placed chronologically after king Ahaz’s plea to Tiglath-pileser III, i.e. during the third Assyrian campaign in 732/731 BC. Then, one can see a logical progression of the event. Politically, since the alliance was a big threat against Assyrian empire, the request of King Ahaz is complied promptly. The text includes the number of people captured and the number of districts destroyed; however, contrary to the biblical text, this account does not inform explicitly the fate of king Rezin and the city of Damascus. Irvine rightly points out that “[P]recisely when we expect to read the battle and the city’s capture, the account narrates only the Assyrian actions against the outlying fields and forests.”³³ Could it be that the portion of the text, which described those events are destroyed? In this case, Assyrian texts are understood better with the help of biblical text in 2 Kgs 16 and 2 Ch 28.

(ii) The Iran Stela

In lines iii. A 1-23, the regions of Aram and the Samarian are mentioned as ones among those who were imposed tribute. The list includes specific items of tributes to be paid on annual basis. Again in lines 15’b –19’a, the text informs that king Pekah is replaced by another vassal king Hoshea; however, there is no explicit information about the death of king Pekah. Once again, the biblical texts 2 Kgs 15:27-31 is needed to complete the information on the death of king Pekah.³⁴

(iii) Summary Inscription 13 (2.117G)

³² Hallo and Younger, ed. *The Context of Scripture Vol. II*, 286.

³³ Ibid., 30.

³⁴ Ibid., 288.

In lines 17' -18', Tiglath-pileser invades Israel, but he spares Samaria and king Pekah is overthrown.³⁵ But from 2 Kings 15: 27-31, we know that king Pekah is not only overthrown, but assassinated by king Hoshea. Nevertheless, both biblical and extra-biblical texts do not give explicit details on this event.

The text from Sargon II (2.118), lines 23b-25 has some difficulties of placing the event chronology:

In my second regnal year . . . Damascus, and Sa]mari[a he caused to rebel against me] [. . .].³⁶

Again, in lines 33-36a of the Great “Summary” Inscription (2-2118E), this rebellion is mentioned.³⁷ If this rebellion is the same that took place before the Syro-Ephraimitic crisis, then the mention here may imply that Sargon II might have co-ruled with Tiglath-pileser III. This issue remains open for debate.

Conclusion

Finally, does it mean that analyses of both biblical and Assyrian texts will enable one to reconstruct the complete history of the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis? Absolutely not! First, we do not have all the data. Second, one still has to overcome the interpretive problem of these sources. That is why the history of Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis is divided into three different interpretations.³⁸ Since we can discuss these three positions in detail here I will analyze

³⁵ Hallo and Younger, ed. *The Context of Scripture Vol. II*, 292.

³⁶ Ibid., 293.

³⁷ Ibid., 296.

³⁸ According to Irvine these three positions are held respectively by J. Begrich, H. Donner, and B Oded. See Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis*, 95. See also Begrich, “Der syrisch-ephraimistische Krieg”:213-37; Donner, *Israel unter den Völkern*, 1964; Oded, “The Historical Background of the Syro-Ephraimite War Reconsidered”: 153-65.

Irvine's critique on these three positions. Irvine raises two key issues in order to evaluate these three positions. (1) What were the cause and purpose of the Syro-Ephraimitic war? (2) Did the war precede or follow Tiglath-pileser's Philistine campaign?³⁹ In response to the first question Irvine sides with J. Begrich and H. Donner's position, contending for the cause of war as anti-Assyrian coalition against B. Oded, who suggested the cause of war to be a regional struggle for the control of Transjordan. I agree with him because he takes both biblical text and Assyrian text into consideration.⁴⁰ Irvine's position on the second question is also satisfying. Irvine takes Begrich's position, which argues for the war dated in the spring of 734, sometime before Tiglath-pileser's Philistine campaign.⁴¹ Nevertheless, Irvine's position on the payment of Ahaz and the invitation to Tiglath-pileser is radical and contrary to Begrich, Donner, and Oded's position. According to him, deuteronomistic editor fabricated the account on the payment of tribute and, therefore Ahaz probably paid the tribute only after Tiglath-pileser entered the region.⁴² Furthermore, since Tiglath-pileser was already bent on western campaign, according to Irvine, he did not need any invitation for suppressing

³⁹ Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis*, 101.

⁴⁰ Irvine writes, "The Assyrian records, we have seen, document widespread revolt during the 730s, involving Syria, Israel, Tyre, Ashkelon, Samsi, probably Gaza, and perhaps the Meunites and Transjordan kingdoms. . . . Second Kings 16:5-9 reports the alliance between Rezin, Pekah, and the Edomites, and 2 Chr 28:18 might indicate the cooperation of the Philistines. If these states and groups, or at least many of them, were in league with Syria and at the same time at war with Assyria, the idea of an anti-Assyrian coalition, coordinated by Rezin, is hard to avoid. See *Ibid.*, 103.

⁴¹ Irvine writes, "Rezin had been working several years to unite the states of Phoenecia and Palestine into an anti-Assyrian block under his control. The attack on Ahaz was simply the last of many steps taken to solidify the coalition. This view of the war, along with our interpretation of the Assyrian texts, suggests that the Syro-Ephraimitic crisis occurred before Tiglath-pileser's Palestine campaign. See *Ibid.*, 107.

⁴² Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis*, 107.

a coalition against Assyrian supremacy in the region.⁴³ The idea sounds logical, but violates the explicit biblical text. This is contrary to the methodological assumption I have discussed earlier and so I do not subscribe this.

I am aware that more can be discussed on this topic to obtain more information and clarity; nevertheless, the point of this paper is to show how both biblical and extra-biblical sources have equal and important role in casting more light on the historicity of the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis. And in all these procedures the methodological assumptions are key to the results in the historiography.

⁴³

Ibid., 107.

Appendix A

[Taken from Henri Canzelles, “Syro-Ephraimitic War” *ABD* vol. 6 (1992): 282-85 (283)]

Following seven extra-biblical texts directly list the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis:

- (1) *Text A*: Rost lines 197-210 (1893: 34-37) = *LAR* 1: no. 777 = *ANET*, 283 (Left column bottom).
- (2) *Text B*: Rost lines 229-40 (1893: 38-41) = *LAR* 1: no. 779 = *ANET*, 283 (right column, lines 17-33).
- (3) *Text C*: Rost lines 211-28, and independent series (1893: 38-41); cf. Tadmor 1968: 180; Na’aman 1986:72.
- (4) *Text D*: *LAR* 1: nos. 815-18 = *ANET*, 283-84; this text is completed by the parallel in Wiseman 1951: 3 (ND 400).
- (5) *Text E*: Wiseman 1956 (ND 4301 + 4305) and Wiseman 1964 (5419), with K 2649 (cf. Kessler 1975: 57; Borger and Tadmor 1982:245; Na’aman 1986:72).
- (6) *Text F*: *LAR* 1: nos. 801-3 = *ANET*, 282.
- (7) *Text G*: Barnett and Falkner 1962: pls. 62 (Gezer) and 70-71 (Ashtartu cf. 30b) (cf. also Weippert 1975).

[Notice, *ABD* does not include the latest work. See also William Hallo and K. Lawson Younger Jr. ed. *The Context of Scripture Vol. II: Monumental Inscription From the Biblical World*. Leiden: Brill, 2000: 284-299]

1. Tiglath-pileser III (2.117)
 - A. The Calah Annals (2.117A)
 - B. The Iran Stela (2.117B)
 - C. Summary Inscription 4 (2.117C)
 - D. Summary Inscription 7 (2.117D)
 - D. Summary Inscription 8 (2.117E)
 - E. Summary Inscription 9-10 (2.117F)
 - F. Summary Inscription 13 (2.117 G)
2. Sargon II (2.118)
 - A. The Annals (2.118A)
 - B. The Borrowski Stela (2118B)
 - C. The Aššur “Charter” (2.118C)
 - D. Nimrud Prisms D & E (2.118E)
 - E. The Great “Summary” Inscription (2.118E)
 - F. The Small “Summary” Inscription (2.118F)
 - G. Pavement Inscription (2.118G)
 - H. The Cylinder Inscription 4 (2.118H)
 - I. The Nimrud Inscription (2.118 I)
 - J. The Tang-I Var Inscription (2.118J)

Appendix B

[Taken from Stuart A. Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990. p.24]

Nisan 745 – Nisan 744	On the 13 th day of Airu Tiglathpileser sat on the throne. In the month of Tashritu he marched to the territory between the rivers.
Nisan 744 – Nisan 743	against Namri
Nisan 743 – Nisan 742	in the city of Arpad. A massacre took place in the land of Uratu.
Nisan 742 – Nisan 741	against Arpad
Nisan 741 – Nisan 740	against Arpad. After three years it was conquered.
Nisan 740 – Nisan 739	against Arpad
Nisan 739 – Nisan 738	against Ulluba. The fortress was taken.
Nisan 738 – Nisan 737	Kullani was captured
Nisan 737 – Nisan 736	against Madai
Nisan 736 – Nisan 735	to the foot of Mount Nal
Nisan 735 – Nisan 734	against Uratu
Nisan 734 – Nisan 733	against Philistia
Nisan 733 – Nisan 732	against the land of Damascus
Nisan 732 – Nisan 731	against the land of Damascus
Nisan 731 – Nisan 730	against Sapia
Nisan 730 – Nisan 729	in the land
Nisan 729 – Nisan 728	The king took the hand of Bel.
Nisan 728 – Nisan 727	the king took the hand of Bel. The city of Da[mascus . . .]
Nisan 727 – Nisan 726	against the city of [Damascus] [Shalma]neser [sat] on the throne.

Appendix C

Judean kings

Azariah: 785/784-760/759
Jotham: 759/758-744/743
Ahaz: 743/742-728/727
Hezekiah: 727/726-699/698

Israelite kings

Jeroboam II: 788/787-748/747
Zechariah: 747
Shallum: 747
Menahem: 746/745-737/736
Pekahiah: 736/735-735/734
Pekah: 750-735/734 (Gilead)
734/733-731/730 (Samaria)
Hoshea: 730/729-722/721

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