

## Assyria

From the late 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE, with the foundation of the Neo-Assyrian Empire by Adad-nirari II, the Assyrian Empire continually expanded out of the Assyrian homeland in northern Iraq. By the mid-9<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the Assyrians had expanded their reach into Syria, and in 853 BCE, Shalmaneser III fights a coalition of Levantine kings, including Ahab, King of Israel, and during his reign, he receives tribute from Jehu, King of Israel. From this point onward, save for the first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the Assyrians slowly advance closer and closer to the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah. During the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, various parts of the Southern Levant are conquered by the Assyrians, and during his campaign of 732 BCE, large portions of the Kingdom of Israel are captured and incorporated into the Assyrian Empire. Kingdoms in the Levant, such as the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah, become Assyrian vassals.

The Assyrian impact and influence expands from the late 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE onward. In 722 BCE, Sargon II of Assyria captures and destroys the Kingdom of Israel, exiles most of its inhabitants, and turns the kingdom into an Assyrian province. The Kingdom of Judah continues to exist, but it is under heavy Assyrian pressure. In 705 BCE, Hezekiah, King of Judah, revolts against the Assyrians, a revolt that is quelled in 701 BCE by Sennacherib. As a result of this campaign, large portions of the Kingdom of Judah, and in particular, the Shephelah, are taken from Judah, something that caused financial pressure on the kingdom as this was a rich agricultural region.

During the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the Assyrians continue to rule in the region, and during the reigns of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal, and particularly during the repeated military campaigns to Egypt, the heavy hand and influence of the Assyrians were felt strongly in the region, and in Judah in particular. During the long reign of Manasseh, King of Judah, who was a loyal vassal to Assyria, there was a period of relative prosperity in Judah.

At the time that the Assyrian Empire ruled the Levant, the Assyrians culture was the most dominant culture in the ancient Near East. The major Assyrian cities (such as Assur, Calah, and Nineveh), were the largest and richest cities in the entire region, and the influence of the Assyrian rule, and culture over the entire Near East was enormous.

During the rule of the Assyrian Empire over the Land of Israel, the influence of Assyria on the cultures of Israel and Judah are wide-ranging. This includes influences on the bureaucratic structures of these kingdoms, and perhaps the cultic reforms and political centralization in the Kingdom of Judah, from the late 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, may be influenced by the Assyrians. Some scholars have even suggested that the very concept of monotheism may have been borrowed from the Assyrians! This idea though is debated. Other aspects can be seen as well. Influences in architecture are seen, and Mesopotamian house types appear in the region, such as the *courtyard-room house*. The regular taxes and tributes that the kingdoms in the Levant had to provide to the Assyrians clearly had a significant impact. This led to developments in settlements in new regions to procure agricultural resources - such as Judahite settlement in the Judean desert, development of various agriculture produce, and in particular, the extensive development of olive oil production in Philistia and Judah, and regional centers for the Assyrian control. This can be actual palaces and forts where Assyrian contingents – official and soldiers resided, but may include the

construction of the palace at Ramat-Rachel, just to the south of Jerusalem, where excavators have suggested that it served as a Judahite center to collect taxes from within the kingdom, to be then sent to the Assyrians.