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AHAB AND ASSYRIA (Chronologies and Kings VIII)

(This issue of continues a discussion of the Biblical and Assyrian chronologies, begun last month. If you do not have a copy of the January 1992 issue, you can obtain one from the publisher.)

Was Ahab at Qarqar?

Allis writes: "According to his Monolith Inscription, Shalmaneser III, in his sixth year (854 B. C.) made an expedition to the West and at Qarqar defeated Irhuleni of Hamath and a confederacy of 12 kings, called by him 'kings of Hatti and the seacoast.' Qarqar is described as the royal residence of Irhuleni. It was there, not far from Hamath, that the battle took place. Irhuleni was the one most directly concerned. But in describing the allied forces, Shalmaneser lists them in the following order:

He brought along to help him 1,200 chariots, 1,200 cavalrymen, 20,000 foot soldiers of Adad-'idri of Damascus; 700 chariots, 700 cavalrymen, 10,000 foot soldiers of Irhuleni from Hamath; 2,000 chariots, 10,000 foot soldiers of A-ha-ab-bu Sir-'i-la-a-a.

These three are probably mentioned first as the most important. It is rather odd that Irhuleni's troops are mentioned only second in the list, inserted between Adad-'idri's and Ahabbu's. Then follow in order the contingents of Que, Musri, Irqanata, Matinu-ba'lu of Arvad, Usanata, Adunu-ba'lu of Shian, Gindibu' of Arabia, Ba'sa of Ammon. Most of these countries were clearly in the distant north, Syria and Ammon being the nearest to Israel, and both of them Israel's bitter enemies. Among the eleven listed (he speaks of twelve kings), only five brought chariots; and most of them brought fewer troops than the first three, though some of the figures cannot be accurately determined, because of the condition of the inscription.

"In view of the make-up of this confederacy of kings, the question naturally arises whether Ahab, who had been recently at war with Ben-hadad and was soon to renew hostilities with him, would have joined a coalition of kings of countries, most of which were quite distant, and the nearest of which were bitterly hostile, to go and fight against a king with whom he had never been at war, — an expedition which involved leaving his capital city and taking a considerable army to a distance of some 300 miles and through mountainous country, and, most questionable of all, leaving Damascus, the capital of his recent enemy Ben-hadad in his rear (thus exposing himself to attack), in order to oppose a distant foe whose coming was no immediate threat to his own land or people. Shalmaneser's father, the

the West. Such an undertaking by Ahab, king of Israel, seems highly improbable to say the least.

"The name Ahab (*Ahabbu*), while uncommon, is not unique. We meet it as the name of a false prophet, who was put to death by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 29:21). The name appears to mean 'father's brother,' i.e., 'uncle.' It may possibly be shortened from Ahabbaram (my uncle is exalted) or a similar name. But it is to be noted that the name *Ahabbu* might be read equally well as *Ahappu* and be an entirely different name than Ahab, quite probably Hurrian, which would accord well with the make-up of the confederacy.

"The name of Ahabbu's country is given as Sir'ila-a-a. The reading is somewhat uncertain, since the first character might also be read as *shud* or *shut*. Even if rect, the name is a poor spelling of Israel; and it is doubly questionable because nowhere else on Assyrian tablets is Israel given this name. On the monuments it is called *mat Humri*, the land of Omri. It is perhaps not without significance that although the battle of Qarqar is mentioned in several of Shalmaneser's inscriptions, Ahabbu is mentioned on only one of them. The Assyrian kings were great braggers. Israel was quite remote from Shalmaneser's sphere of influence. If Ahab of Israel were referred to, we might perhaps expect more than this one slight mention of him.

"Adad-'idri was apparently Irhuleni's chief ally, being mentioned first. If this Syrian king was the enemy-friend of Ahab, we might expect him to be called Hadad-ezer, which is the Hebrew equivalent of the name and is given to the king of Zobah of David's time. The name Adad-'idri may stand for Bar (Hebrew, *Ben*)-Adad-'idri (Heb., *ezer*), and so be shortened at either end, to Ben-hadad or Hadad-ezer. So it may be, that the Ben-hadad of the Bible and the Adad-'idri of Shalmaneser's are the same king."

But not necessarily, says Allis. Assuming that Adad-'idri is the same as Ben-hadad does not tell us which of many Ben-hadads this was. "Ancient rulers often had the same name. We now know of three kings who bore the famous name Hammurabi. There were 5 Shamsi-Adads, 5 Shalmanesers, 5 Ashur-niraris among the Assyrian kings. Egypt has 4 Amenhoteps, 4 Amenemhets, 12 Rameses, 3 Shishaks, and 14 Ptolemies. Syria had apparently both Ben-hadads and Hadad-ezers. Israel had 2 Jeroboams; and both Judah and Israel had a Jehoash, a Jehoram, and an Ahaziah in common. It may be that Ba'sa king of Ammon who fought at Qarqar, had the same name as Baasha king of Israel. Names maybe distinctive and definitive; they may also be confusing and misleading.

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Qarqar.

"In the account which **Shalmaneser** gives of this battle, he **claims** a glorious victory. On the **Monolith** Inscription, which gives the fullest account of it, we read: 'The plain was too small to let (all) their (text: his) souls descend (into the nether world), the vast field gave out (when it came) to bury them. **With** their (text: sing.) **corpses** I apenned the **Orontes** before there was a bridge. Even during the baffle I took from them their chariots, their horses broken to the yoke.' We are accustomed to such bragging by an Assyrian king and to discount it. But this certainly does not read like a drawn battle or a **victory** for the allies; and if there is any considerable element of truth in the claim made by **Shalmaneser**, 'even during the battle I took from them their chariots, their horses broken to the yoke,' this loss would have fallen more heavily on **Ahabbu** than on any other of the confederates, since **Shalmaneser** attributes to him 2,000 chariots, as compared with Adad-'idri's 1,200 and **Irhuleni's** 700. If Ahab had suffered so severely at **Qarqar**, would he have been likely to pick a quarrel with a recent ally and to do it so soon? The fact that **Shalmaneser** had to fight against this coalition again in the 10th, 11th, and 14th years of his reign does not prove this **glorious** victory to have been a real defeat for **Shalmaneser**. Yet, despite what would appear to have been very serious losses for the coalition (all their chariots and horses), we find according to the construction of the evidence generally accepted today, Ahab in a couple of years or, according to **Thiele** in the same year, picking a quarrel or renewing an old one with his recent comrade-in-arms, **Ben-hadad**, and fighting a disastrous battle against him (1 Kings 22); and a few years later we find Ben-hadad again fighting against Israel (2 Kings 6:8-18), and even besieging **Samaria** (vss. 24ff.). Is this really probable? Clearly Ben-hadad had no love for Israel!

"The battle at **Ramoth-gilead** together with the **preparations** for it, in considerable detail (1 Kings 22), as he later describes the attack on **Dothan** (2 Kings 6:8-23) and the siege of **Samaria** which followed it. Of **Qarqar** he says not a **single** word. Why this should be the case if Ahab was **actually** at **Qarqar** is by no means clear. It was not because the Hebrew historian did not wish to mention a successful expedition of wicked king Ahab, for he has given a vivid account of Ahab's great **victory** of Ben-hadad (1 Kings 20:1-34) which led even to the capture of the king of Syria himself. And, if **Qarqar** had been a humiliating defeat for Ahab, we might expect that the **biblical** writer would have recorded it as a divine judgment on the wicked king of Israel, as he does the battle at **Ramoth-gilead**, in which Ahab perished.

"It is of course true that the record of Ahab's reign is not complete (1 Kings 23:39). His oppression of Moab is mentioned only indirectly in connection with an event in the reign of **Jehoahaz** (2 Kings 3:4f.). It is the **Mesha** inscription which gives us certain details. Yet in view of its importance the omission of any reference to a battle with **Shalmaneser** in which Ahab took a prominent part would be strange, to say the least." (Allis, pp. 414-417).

In my opinion, Allis's arguments settle the question. There is no good reason to **believe** that the **Ahabbu** or **Ahappu** of the **Shalmaneser Monolith** Inscription is the same as the Ahab of the Bible. All evidence is against it. Accordingly, the alleged synchronism between the Assyrian Eponym Canon and the Biblical chronology does not exist, and there is no reason to try and shorten the chronology found in the books of Kings and Chronicles.

We shall devote one more issue of this matter, taking up some of the other alleged **synchronisms**.