

The Israelite Covenant in Ancient Near Eastern Context

Robert D. Miller II

Israel's possession of a covenantal relationship with God is unique in the whole history of religion. "Covenant" has been considered an overriding and unifying category in theology of the Hebrew Bible, and scholarly examination of Israel's covenant with God has not abated to this day.

Fifty years ago, George Mendenhall analyzed the form of the Israelite covenant,¹ suggesting that this covenant's only parallel in the ancient Near East was Hittite suzerainty treaties of 1400-1200 B.C. Mendenhall outlined the structural parallels and elaborated the correspondence between the Hittite treaties and Exodus.² The parallels in structure included the identification of covenant-giver, historical prologue (Exod 20:2), stipulations (the Decalogue), provision for deposit and periodic public reading of the covenant / treaty, witnesses, blessings and curses, ratification ceremony (Exodus 24), and formal procedures in the event of violation of the covenant / treaty.³ Mendenhall's ideas found extensive adherence: Walter Beyerlin, Klaus Baltzer, Kenneth Kitchen, Delbert Hillers, Arvid Kapelrud, James Muilenberg, and David Noel Freedman.⁴

Yet many challenged Mendenhall in his use of the Late Bronze age suzerainty treaties as analogy. Many elements that belong in Late Bronze age treaties are missing from the Sinai covenant, namely the witnesses, the deposit in a sanctuary, and the blessings and curses.⁵ Many scholars acknowledge that some treaty parallels exist with the Sinai covenant, but the strongest parallels are with Neo-Assyrian treaties. Blood rites, for example, are common in Neo-Assyrian and even Greek examples.⁶ Several scholars showed parallels of Neo-Assyrian loyalty oaths with Deuteronomy and argued for Neo-Assyrian models for all covenant language from Genesis to Joshua.⁷

¹ Mendenhall, *Law*.

² Baltzer, *Formulary*.

³ Such lists of structural elements of treaties were found, inter alia, in Munn-Rankin, *Diplomacy* 68-110.

⁴ Beyerlin, *Origins* 54; Baltzer, *Formulary*; Huffmon, *Exodus* 101-113; Hillers, *Covenant*; Kapelrud, *Points* 87; Faley, *Kingdom* 37-53; Muilenberg, *Form* 347-365; Freedman / Miano, *People* 7.

⁵ Nicholson, *God* 58.

⁶ Weinfeld, *Heritage* 186-187.

⁷ Otto, *Ursprünge* 38-45.56-61.

Moshe Weinfeld has also shown that much of the covenant terminology of ancient Israel was ubiquitous in the ancient Near East from most ancient Sumerian times until the Greco-Roman period.⁸ Dennis McCarthy showed that the elements of treaties are the same from Eannatum of Lagash down to Esarhaddon, and so we cannot use them to date the biblical examples.⁹ The treaty form was at once too uniform over time and too varied within a given period to use as Mendenhall intends. “The diversity of treaty texts entailed that there was not a single, unambiguous form with which to draw comparisons.”¹⁰

Mendenhall responded that only a modern Westerner would expect strict formal correspondence between the Late Bronze age suzerainty treaties and a parallel in the biblical text.¹¹ There are holes in the structural correspondence, but it is noteworthy that there are any corresponding elements at all, elements that cannot be explained aside from the Late Bronze age suzerainty treaty analogy.¹²

He pointed out that in Neo-Assyrian treaties there is no nature as witness, no historical prologue or deposit or public reading, no transcendent morality, no blessings – all of which are associated with covenant rooted in the Sinai tradition.¹³ He was mistaken. While there are examples of nature as witness to treaties from the Hittites but not the Neo-Assyrians, there are examples as late as Homer and the Punic world.¹⁴ An historical prologue occurs in the Neo-Assyrian treaty of Assurbanipal and the Qedar tribe.¹⁵ Treaties were “deposited” down into Hellenistic times.¹⁶ Public reading of loyalty oaths was, in fact, practiced in Neo-Assyrian times, as well as Greek.¹⁷ The blessings, as Mendenhall asserts, are absent in 1st-millennium treaties.¹⁸ Noel Weeks’ concluded his exhaustive study of the issue in this way: “It comes down to subjective judgment.

⁸ Weinfeld, Terminology 190-199; Weinfeld, Loyalty 379-389; Weinfeld, Heritage 176-182; see, inter alia Homer, Iliad, 19.190-191.

⁹ McCarthy, Treaty 7.122.

¹⁰ Koopmans, Joshua 457.

¹¹ Mendenhall / Herion, Covenant 1.1184; Mendenhall, Theology 32.

¹² Weeks, Covenant 20-21 maintains that similarities in culture and common metaphysical notions led to similar forms in Israel and Late Bronze age Hittite society.

¹³ Mendenhall / Herion, Covenant 1181-1182; Weeks, Covenant 12.14; Barucq, Notion 61.

¹⁴ Weinfeld, Heritage 190.

¹⁵ Obv. 4'-11'; Campbell, Prologue 535.

¹⁶ Weinfeld, Heritage 190-191; e.g., the Agdistis Shrine Oath at Philadelphia in Anatolia.

¹⁷ Weinfeld, Heritage 189; e.g., Esarhaddon's loyalty oaths and the 7th-century B.C. Greek Cyrene-Thera Pact.

¹⁸ Weeks, Covenant 20.

Are the similarities sufficient to argue for some common connection?"¹⁹ And if so, which period's treaties fit best and just who is copying whom are likewise subjective judgments.

There are other possible analogies in the ancient Near East, however, for the relationship of Israel and its God, other than treaties. I will propose such a new analogy. A stele from the Neo-Assyrian world, assuredly not unique, holds many parallels to the relationship Israel articulated in its covenant.

The state of Sam'al was located very nearly in the juncture of Syria and Asia Minor at the northeast corner of the Mediterranean Sea, roughly in the "arm-pit" of Anatolia. It was on the east side of the Amanus Mountains, southwest of the Ceyhan River on one of the narrowest parts of the plain between Antioch and Marash.²⁰ The name Sam'al is a shortened form of Sam'alla.²¹ Sam'al is the Assyrian name for the state, rarely used by its own rulers – we shall return to this point shortly.²² By the local rulers it was called Y'DY, a name never found in Assyrian documents.²³ Modern Zenjirli was the capital of Y'DY.²⁴ Additionally, Sam'al was known as Bit Gabbari after its eponymous dynastic founder.

After the collapse of the Hittite Empire around 1200 B.C., Sam'al was populated by migrant Cilicians who, called themselves Hittites, although were really not. Thus, Sam'al was one of several Neo-Hittite states, with Carchemish, Arpad, and others, which emerged between the two zones of Aramaean concentration along the Khaibur River and south of the Orontes around Damascus.²⁵

Based on current ideas about the origins of the Aramaeans, I conclude that the dynastic ancestor Gabbari and his followers were semi-nomadic Aramaeans who crossed the Euphrates around 900,²⁶ conquered Neo-Hittite Sam'al, and assimilated the culture.²⁷

From this point on, Aramaean Sam'al was a weak state, requiring outside help to repulse even the feeblest of enemies, as will be seen shortly.

Sam'al's only contact with Israel was its participation in the Syro-Ephraimite War, in which Assyria intervened at Judah's request against Damascus and

¹⁹ Weeks, *Admonition* 164.177.178.

²⁰ Harper, *Visit* 184. See Parpola / Porter, *Helsinki* 2.18.

²¹ Levine, *Stelae* 18.

²² Sader, *Etats* 181; Younger, *Panammuwa* 101.

²³ Sader, *Etats* 181.

²⁴ Sader, *Etats* 181.

²⁵ Gurney, *Hittites*.

²⁶ Sader, *Etats* 307.

²⁷ Hawkins, *Neo-Hittite* 3.1.381; Landsberger, *Sam'al* 1.42.

Israel in 735. Sam'al was firmly with the Assyrian camp. Its king, Panammuwa II, himself perished in the siege of Damascus while fighting for Assyria.²⁸

It is into this historical context that the Barrakab inscription belongs. It must date between 732 and 727 to fit after the death of Panammuwa at Damascus and still during the reign of the Assyrian emperor Tiglath-pileser.²⁹

At this point, it will be useful to present the texts of the two larger Barrakab inscriptions. The vocalization of these Imperial Aramaic inscriptions can really only be approximated.³⁰

Barrakab i³¹ is carved on a 1x 62m block alongside a relief of Barrakab in Assyrian clothing, inscribed under his arm.³² The text runs:

- 1 'ānā Bir[rā]kkab
- 2 bar Panāmmuwa mēlek Šam'al
- 3 'ābed Tugultāpaleysār mārē'
- 4 rib'ay 'arqā' bišdeq 'ābī wēbišdeqī
- 5 haw θēbanī mār'ī Rākkab'ēl
- 6 wēmār'ī Tugultāpaleysār 'al
- 7 kursē' 'ābī ūbayēt 'ābī
- 8 'ēmēl min kul wērāšet bēgilgāl
- 9 mār'ī mēlek Aššūr bēmiš'at
- 10 mālkin rabrābin ba'ēlay
- 11 kēsap wēba'ēlay zēhāb wi'aḥzēt
- 12 bayēt 'ābī wēhay ṭibtēh
- 13 min bayēt ḥad mālkin rabrābin
- 14 wēhitan'abō 'aḥḥāy malkayyā'
- 15 lēkol mah ṭabat baytī
- 16 wēbay ṭab layēθā lē'abāhay
- 17 malkē Šam'al hā' bayēt Kilamuwā
- 18 lēhōm pēhā' bayēt šitwā'
- 19 lēhōm wēhā' bayēt kayēšā'
- 20 wē'ānā bēnayēt baytā' zēnah

I am Birrakkabel, son of Panammuwa, king of Sam'al, servant of Tiglath-pileser, lord of the fourths of the earth.

²⁸ Hawkins, Neo-Hittite 414.

²⁹ Donner / Röllig, *Inschriften* 2.232 §§ 216-17.

³⁰ Q.v., Tropper, *Inschriften* 174.

³¹ Donner / Röllig, *Inschriften* 2.233 § 216; ANET 501.

³² Barrakab precedes an attendant with a fly whisk, in a cliché scene of Assyrian art; Hamilton, *Past* 228. The attendant is not a scribe with a writing instrument, as per Gee, *Limhi* 57.

With the righteousness of my father and my righteousness, my lord Rakkabel and my lord Tiglath-pileser seated me on the throne of my father.

Now my dynasty was the most wretched of all, yet I ran at the wheel of my lord the king of Assyria in the midst of great kings, owners of silver, and owners of gold.

I took over my dynasty and made it better than the dynasty of any mighty king. My brothers were envious (?) of all that was good in my house. My ancestors, the kings of Sam'al, did not have a decent palace. There was the palace of Kilammuwa for them, and there was a winter palace for them, and there was a summer palace. I have built *this* palace.

Barrakab inscription ii³³ is a 45x 45cm fragment that shows part of the face and arm of a man in Assyrian garb. The surviving fragments read nearly the same, but I will read lines 8-9:

8 [wēnētan Rā]kkab'ēl hēnī qadā[m mār'ī mēlek]

9 Aššūr wēqadām ... b ...

Rakkabel [gave] me favor before [my lord the king of] Assyria and before ...

What was the purpose of these inscriptions? The Assyrian king was some 350 miles east and cannot be the intended audience.³⁴ It is not entirely clear where the more complete inscription i stood, as the 1891 excavators of Zenjirli found it lying loose amidst the rubble south of a large facade of Barrakab.³⁵ They found a stand of sorts northwest of a staircase in a building in the northwest district of Zenjirli, the measure of which exactly fit the Barrakab stele.³⁶ Standing here, the stele would have been on the left side of the main entry, facing the morning sun, exactly as an earlier stele had stood left of the entry to Palace J.³⁷ Thus the text was in plain view for anyone entering the palace to see. Written documents could only be read by a small minority of the populace, but this minority – cult officials, scribes, members of the court, other Aramaean rulers – was precisely those engaged in public activities, the only ones who mattered.³⁸

Barrakab mentioned his loyalty to and dependence upon the king of Assyria three times, once in each of the first three sections of his text, before coming to

³³ Donner / Röllig, *Inschriften* § 217.

³⁴ Nor ought we assume there were “local Assyrian officials” to impress, as per Parker, *Appeals* 218.

³⁵ von Luschan, *Ausgrabungen* 4.255.377-378.

³⁶ von Luschan, *Ausgrabungen* 4.255.

³⁷ von Luschan, *Ausgrabungen* 4.377-378.

³⁸ Russell, *Writing* 1.4; McCormick, *Sennacherib*.

the fourth section describing the construction of the palace. This reinforces that it is only through Assyria that the palace construction was possible.³⁹

It is noteworthy that while earlier Sam'al King Kilammuwa's text was in Phoenician, and King Panammuwa II's text, written by this same Barrakab, was in local Sam'alian Aramaic, the Barrakab inscriptions are in good Imperial Aramaic, the language of the Assyrian Empire.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Barrakab called himself king of Samal, not Y'DY. He was the only king of Sam'al to use this Assyrian name for his country.⁴¹ Thus, his text expresses his subjection not only in its content but also in its semantics.

The meaning is that Barrakab is firmly a client of Assyria, and proud of this fact. There is no hint of reticence. The stele presents the message that this clientship is a good thing. Barrakab's goal was for his audience to view reality this way.

The arrangement with Assyria elevated the king of Sam'al to the same rank as his neighbors.⁴² This is the meaning of running beside Tiglath-pileser's wheel "in the midst of great kings, owners of silver and gold" (lines 10-11). This was not a status that Sam'al could have attained without Assyria.⁴³ Security was only one benefit Assyrian patronage brought. In sum, as Postgate puts it "we should not see the client rulers as cowering in their citadels waiting to be irradiated with Assyrian influence, but absorbing the scene in Nineveh, fingering the tapestries and envying the silverware"⁴⁴ – or, as Mark Hamilton writes, "like Indians stopping a cricket match for tea or holding a *darbar* for Queen Victoria."⁴⁵

The Barrakab inscription borrows directly many motifs and terms from Assyrian royal propaganda. The visual depiction of Barrakab derives from

³⁹ It is therefore not true that "Attributing wealth to vassalage is difficult to explain;" Hamilton, Past 230.

⁴⁰ Zenjirli-dialect Aramaic may be "a branch of Aramaic which became increasingly independent around 1000 B.C. and which failed to follow Aramaic through to its subsequent innovations;" Dion, Language 118.

⁴¹ Sader, *Etats* 181; Younger, Panammuwa 101.

⁴² Sader, *Etats* 188.

⁴³ Cf. Shoemaker / Spanier, Patron-Client 21.

⁴⁴ Postgate, Land 260. If this was Barrakab's strategy, it is not clear whether he succeeded. Throughout the reign of Tiglath-pileser he must have, but there is no description of the final fate of Sam'al under Shalmaneser V. Whether Sam'al revolted, rejecting the propaganda of the Barrakab inscription, and was crushed, or whether it was merely annexed in an almost clerical step, cannot be established. In any event, independence did not even last Barrakab's own reign.

⁴⁵ Hamilton, Past 230.

Assyrian art.⁴⁶ The expression, “Lord of the Fourths of the Earth,” translates the Akkadian expression *šar kibrāt er-betti*.⁴⁷ It occurs in the Chicago edition (689 BC) of Sennacherib’s 691 Taylor Prism (col. 1, lines 1-19).⁴⁸ The vassal describing himself as the emperor’s “servant” is ubiquitous.⁴⁹ The “favor” (Aram. *ḥēn*) that “Rakkabel gave” Barrakab “before the king of Assyria” in inscription 2, line 8 is admittedly not the most common usage of the cognate Akkadian term *an-ni*, which usually means “a promise” or a “yes” answer from divination.⁵⁰ Yet the meaning of “favor” or “grace” occurs in a letter of Sennacherib to Esarhaddon (there bestowed by the god Nabu).⁵¹

Look again at the Barrakab Inscriptions. The “Servant,” *‘ābed*, of the “Lord of the Four Quarters of the Earth,” a servant “most wretched,” *‘ēmēl*, by grace, *ḥēn*, was “seated on a throne,” *ḥēbanī ‘al kursē’*, “in the midst of the great kings,” *bēmiš‘at mālkin rabrābin*, and responded, in turn, by being “righteous,” *šdeq*, with his lord. This is Israel’s own description of their relationship with Yahweh. The *cebed* (e.g., Isa 45:4) of the lord of the *qēšôt-hā’āreš* (Isa 40:28), in their *cāmālēnū* (Deut 26:7), by *ḥēn* grace (Exod 33:12-17), was *yôšib ‘al kissē’* (1Sam 2:8) in the midst of *mēlākīm rabbīm* (Jer 27:7), and responded with *šēdāqā* (Deut 6:24). The similarities are striking.

At first glance, however, they are scattered throughout the Hebrew Bible. That is not exactly the case. If we look at the distribution of these key terms – *cebed* of God, Lord of the Fourths of the Earth, *‘amel*, *ḥēn*, God seated me (other than about a dynastic ruler), great kings, and *šēdāqā* (other than in wisdom literature where it has a unique, different meaning),⁵² we find that aside from occurrences in Psalms impossible to date, the terms are clustered in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History, in First and Second Isaiah, in Jeremiah, and in Ezekiel. These are all writings from between 740 and 540.⁵³

⁴⁶ Hamilton, Past 228.

⁴⁷ Hamilton, Past 229 n.56; Tropper, Inschriften 134.

⁴⁸ ARAB 2.115 § 233.

⁴⁹ Waterman, Correspondence II.

⁵⁰ CAD 1.2.134-36; e.g., Harper, Letters, 3.291=K828 and Dietrich, Correspondence 64-65 § 68 r.19.

⁵¹ Waterman, Correspondence § 1452 = Harper, Letters 14.1452 = K1620b.

⁵² Ringgren, Word 45-52; Schmid, Wesen 47-50.156-166; Schmidt, Glaube 9-30; Kayatz, Studien 86-119.

⁵³ Deut 26:1-11, with its laws on centralization closely tied to Deuteronomistic theology, cannot be pre-DtrH; Römer and de Pury, Deuteronomistic 116. Judg 10:16 is “widely recognized as Deuteronomistic;” McKenzie, Trouble 288. Exod 33:12-17 may actually be earlier, from the Yahwist source; Beyerlin, Origins 98-99, 101. Deut

There is already significant evidence of literary borrowing from Assyria by Judah throughout this time. In a very thorough study, Peter Machinist has shown that Isaiah “reveals specific, often intimate awareness of what the Assyrians did in the area over a number of periods.”⁵⁴ In fact, the motifs and terminology borrowed by Isaiah show the “distinct possibility that Isaiah’s knowledge of Assyria was gained ... from official Assyrian literature, especially of the court.”⁵⁵ These motifs and terms could not have come from a later period. More recently, Mark Hamilton has given evidence that not only does Deuteronomy “reflect the political and intellectual currents of the Near East during the eight and seventh centuries BCE, [but that] some pericopes show direct literary dependence on Assyrian propaganda.”⁵⁶ Thomas Römer notes parallels of Neo-Assyrian conquest accounts and Joshua 6-12.⁵⁷ Add to this the parallels Mendenhall’s detractors found between Deuteronomistic covenant language and Neo-Assyrian treaties, which I cited earlier.⁵⁸

More weight should be given to possible connections between Assyria and Judah than between Assyria and Israel. While it is probable that litera of the Northern Kingdom, both oral and written, did find its way into Judah after the fall of Samaria, it is more difficult to postulate a mechanism for this. There was ample time between 841-836, 810-751, 740-735, and under Hoshea for Assyrian propaganda to find its way into Israelite thought patterns and literature. But in light of what we have seen about the particular biblical texts that are parallel, the probability is greater of transference to Judah, whose cordial contact with

6:20-25 may be later post-Deuteronomistic material; Davies, “KD” 415; Römer, Deuteronomy 127.

While I am still inclined to date the bulk of the composition to around 620 – “until this day” fits the time, Josiah is the climax and structural end, emphasis on cult centralization, opposition to Bethel and northern prophets make no sense post-exile – I am not inclined to assign specific verses to this or that precisely datable redaction, as do Nelson (Double Redaction) and O’Brien (Deuteronomistic History). I would follow Römer and Peckham in seeing the 7th century as the starting point for Deuteronomistic literary production, a history fully conceived in the exile; Römer, History 43.71 (his list of items that would not fit a post-exilic context is on p. 67); Peckham, Composition.

⁵⁴ Machinist, Assyria 722; evidence is found on p. 719-727 and 734-736.

⁵⁵ Machinist, Assyria 728.

⁵⁶ Hamilton, Past 232; Römer, History 71.

⁵⁷ Römer, History 84. Römer also cites titles and functions of *šōṭerīm* taken over from Assyrian administration by the Deuteronomistic Historian; Römer, History 79.

⁵⁸ Römer, History 75.

Assyria goes back at least to Ahaz's petition to Tiglath-pileser in 2Kgs 16, and Ahaz recorded by the Assyrians as paying tribute to faithfully in 734/733.⁵⁹

Assyria was in constant contact with Judah from this time. Wall Relief 5L in Room V at Dur-Sharrukin has Sargon II in Judeo-Philistine Gibbethon in 721,⁶⁰ and Sargon records receiving tribute from Judah.⁶¹ Of the many sources for the reign of Sennacherib (705-681), the Rassam Cylinder has the canonical account of his third campaign, in 701, which included his famous invasion of Judah. The issues of this invasion, its timing, and its conclusion, are very complex and need not concern us.⁶² What is important is the list of tribute in the Rassam Cylinder – longer than that in the related Taylor Prism – which includes tribute from Hezekiah of Judah in lines 55-58.⁶³

One piece of interesting information that comes from this episode in 2Kgs 18-20 and Isaiah 36-39, which have the Assyrian “Rab-Shaqeh,” *turtānu*, and “Rab-Saris” present at the siege of Jerusalem in 701. Isaiah mentions only the Rab-Shaqeh. The *turtānu* is the viceroy, and the Rab-Saris is the *rab ša reši*, chief eunuch or field marshal. *ANET*, following Oppenheim, Luckenbill, and others, will tell you that a Rab-Shaqeh was also present in a campaign against Tyre. This results from a mistaken reading of GAL.SAG as *rab šaqū*, rather than the correct reading of *rab ša reši*. The “Rab-Saris” went to Tyre, as he might be expected to. *Rab šaqū* is GAL.BI.LUL, an Assyrian official who never went on any campaigns.⁶⁴ Thus, scholars who were aware that he did not go to Tyre or anywhere else assumed the Bible had invented the presence of the Rab-Shaqeh at Jerusalem. But there is a better explanation: it is the Rab-Shaqeh who speaks in Hebrew in 2Kgs 18:28. The *Rab šaqū* had come to Jerusalem because he was a Hebrew-speaker. The presence of deportees from the Northern Kingdom in the Assyrian court and military is well known,⁶⁵ and this is another such case. This bilingualism in Assyria will be important when we come to mechanisms for transmission of Assyrian ideology to Israel later in this presentation.

Assyrian texts list Manasseh as a faithful vassal, both under Esarhaddon – who mentions on Prism A summoning the kings beyond the river, including Manasseh, to Nineveh to secure building materials for a new palace in 676 (*ARAB* 2.265-66 = *ANET* 291) – and Assurbanipal, whom Manasseh accompa-

⁵⁹ ARAB 1.801.

⁶⁰ Franklin, Room 260.

⁶¹ Nimrud Letters 17.16, line 38.

⁶² For discussion, see Grabbe, Bird.

⁶³ Doubts that Hezekiah is described here as bringing tribute or that this description is factual have been raised only rarely, as by Gallagher, Sennacherib's.

⁶⁴ Fales, Impero 301.

⁶⁵ Dalley, Legacy 62-63.

nied on the campaign to Egypt in 648 (Prism C = *ARAB* 2.340 = *ANET* 294).⁶⁶ Judah was fully within the Assyrian vassal system from the time of Ahaz until the fall of Nineveh.⁶⁷

But how did the transmission of Assyrian terms, motifs, and ideology occur? On the one hand, we should not limit the vehicles for transmission to written ones, especially in an oral culture. Israelites could have seen Assyrian reliefs and art.⁶⁸ They could have heard speeches like that of Rab-Shaqeh at Jerusalem.

“One ought not to minimize the contact with actual texts,”⁶⁹ though. The Assyrians erected stelae all over the empire for people to gaze upon.⁷⁰ The Assyrian Empire maintained an effective propaganda program by means of its inscriptions.⁷¹ The Assyrians erected stelae in both Ashdod, and Samaria, so presumably they could have in Judah also.⁷² While it is unlikely that many in Judah could read Akkadian (or any written language),⁷³ the presence of cuneiform tablets in, for example, 12th-century Shechem⁷⁴ is one of many evidences that officials in such cultural backwaters could. It is also possible that such stelae were read aloud to the populace, as Oppenheim suggested for Sargon and Esarhaddon.⁷⁵ In addition, ambassadors (Akk. *šīru*; the word is loaned to Hebrew as *šīr* in Isa 18:2), would have been exchanged between Judah (and Israel) and Assyria regularly (cf. Isa 7:37-39; 2Kgs 19-20).⁷⁶ The Judean ones would have come from precisely that urban, scribal elite that Thomas Römer identifies as the Deuteronomists.⁷⁷

The Assyrians were intentional in their propaganda and *wanted* vassal states to absorb their ideology. One of the strongest proofs of this takes us back to Sam’al. After his 671 campaign to Egypt, Esarhaddon set up three stelae, two at Til-Barsip, and one at Sam’al. They are identical except for subtle differences

⁶⁶ It is interesting that this text refers, for the first time, to Manasseh as “king” of Judah.

⁶⁷ Fales, *Impero* 15.

⁶⁸ Machinist, *Assyria* 730.

⁶⁹ Machinist, *Assyria* 730.

⁷⁰ Tadmor, *Propaganda* 330-331.

⁷¹ Ebeling, *Bruchstücke* 1.

⁷² Machinist, *Assyria* 731.

⁷³ Machinist, *Assyria* 732-733.

⁷⁴ Miller, *Chieftains* 35.

⁷⁵ Tadmor, *Propaganda* 331-332.

⁷⁶ Machinist, *Assyria* 730 n.65.

⁷⁷ Römer, *History* 46-47.

dictated by the specific audience.⁷⁸ To Assyrianized Til-Barsip, Esarhaddon is Assyrian in clothing and hair, his captives standing waist-high.⁷⁹ For Sam'al, however, still deep in its Neo-Hittite / Aramaean culture as we saw earlier, the king wears ornate garments and a Phoenician crown, and the subject people are only knee-high and kept on leashes.⁸⁰

But the biblical writers “claim for the Judean national god Yahweh the functions and the sovereignty of the Assyrian king.”⁸¹ Their subversive counter-propaganda is to “underline the fact that Judah’s suzerain is not the Assyrian king and the deities he represents, but Yahweh, the ‘only’ God.”⁸²

Summary

Much study of the Israelite covenant has focused on their similarities with ancient Near Eastern treaties. This study proposes that the biblical covenant instead bears greater resemblance to texts composed by vassals of the Neo-Assyrian empire. The best example of such texts is the Barrakab inscription from ancient Samal. It is suggested that Neo-Assyrian propaganda was used in the Barrakab inscription and was likewise adopted by ancient Israelites and altered to describe the relation of Yahweh to his people.

Zusammenfassung

Viele Studien zum israelitischen Bund beschäftigen sich mit dessen Ähnlichkeiten mit den alten Bündnissen des Nahen Ostens. Diese vorliegende Arbeit schlägt vor, dass der biblische Bund größere Ähnlichkeit mit den Texten hat, die von den Untertanen des Neo-Assyrische Reichs verfasst wurden. Das beste Beispiel solcher Texte ist die Barrakab-Inschrift aus dem alten Samal. Man kann annehmen, dass die Neo-Assyrische Propaganda in der Barrakab-Inschrift verwendet wurde und gleichfalls von den alten Israeliten angenommen und verändert wurde, um die Beziehung Jahwes zu seinem Volk zu illustrieren.

Bibliography

- ANET = Pritchard, J.B., *Ancient Near Eastern texts relating to the Old Testament*, Princeton, NJ 1955.
 Baltzer, K., *Covenant Formulary*, Oxford 1971.

⁷⁸ Porter, *Propaganda* 143.145.148.

⁷⁹ Porter, *Propaganda* 151.161.170.

⁸⁰ Porter, *Propaganda* 154.164.167.

⁸¹ Römer, *History* 105.

⁸² Römer, *History* 81.

- Barucq, A., *La Notion d'Alliance dans l'Ancien Testament et les Débuts du Judaïsme*, in: Cazelles, H. et al. (ed.), *Populus Dei, Studi in onore del Car. Ottaviani nel cinquantissimo di sacerdozio*, I, Rome 1969, 5-110.
- Beyrlin, W., *Origins and History of the Oldest Sinai Traditions*, Oxford 1965.
- Campbell, A.F., *Historical Prologue in a Seventh-century Treaty: Bib. 50* (1969) 534-535.
- Dalley, S.P., *Legacy of Mesopotamia*, Oxford 1998.
- Dietrich, M., *Babylonian Correspondence of Sargon and Sennacherib*, Helsinki 2003.
- Dion, P.-E., *Language Spoken in Ancient Samal: JNES 37* (1978) 115-118.
- Donner, H. / Röllig, W., *Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften*, Wiesbaden 1964.
- Ebeling, E., *Bruchstücke eines Politischen Propaganda-Gedichtes aus einer Assyrischen Kanzlei*, Leipzig 1938.
- Fales, M.F., *L'Impero Assiro*, Rome 2001.
- Faley, R.J., *Kingdom of Priests*, Rome 1960.
- Franklin, N., *Room V Reliefs at Dur-Sharrukin and Sargon II's Western Campaigns: TA 21* (1994) 255-275.
- Freedman, D.N. / Miano, D., *People of the New Covenant*, in: Porter, S.E. / DeRoo, J.C.R. (ed.), *Concept of the Covenant in the Second Temple Period (JSJ.S 71)*, Leiden 2003, 7-26.
- Gallagher, W.R., *Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah*, Leiden 1999.
- Grabbe, L.L. (ed.), *Like a Bird in a Cage*, Sheffield 2003.
- Gee, J., *Limhi in the Library: Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 1* (1992) 54-66.
- Gurney, O.R., *Hittites*, London 1990.
- Hahn, S.W., *Covenant in the Old and New Testaments: Currents in Biblical Research 3* (2005) 263-292.
- Hamilton, M.W., *Past as Destiny: HTR 91* (1998) 215-250.
- Harper, R.F., *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters*, Chicago 1902.
- Harper, R.F., *Visit to Zenjirli: OTSt 8* (1889) 183-184.
- Hawkins, J.D., *Neo-Hittite States in Syria and Palestine (CAH)*, Cambridge 1970.
- Hillers, D.R., *Covenant*, Baltimore 1969.
- Huffman, H.B., *Exodus, Sinai, and the Credo: CBQ 27* (1965) 101-113.
- Kapelrud, A., *Some Recent Points of View on the Time and Origin of the Decalogue: SST 18* (1965) 81-90.
- Kayatz, C., *Studien zu Proverbien 1-9 (WMANT 22)*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1966.
- Koopmans, W.T., *Joshua 24 as Poetic Narrative (JSOT.S 93)*, Sheffield 1990.
- Landsberger, B., *Sam'al, I*, Ankara 1948.
- Levine, L.D., *Two Neo-Assyrian Stelae from Iran*, Toronto 1972.
- Luschan, F. von, *Ausgrabungen in Sendschirli, IV*, Berlin 1911.
- McCarthy, D.J., *Treaty and Covenant (AnBib 21)*, Rome 1978.
- McCormick, C.M., *Sennacherib of Assyria: Architectural Rhetoric and the Claims of the King: paper read at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, Philadelphia 2005*.
- McKenzie, S.L., *Trouble with Kingship*, in: Pury, A. de / Römer, T. / Macchi, J.-D. (ed.), *Israel Constructs its History, (JSOT.S 306)*, Sheffield 2000, 286-314.
- Machinist, P.B., *Assyria and Its Image: First Isaiah: JAOS 103* (1983) 719-37.
- Mendenhall, G.E., *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, Pittsburgh 1955.

- Mendenhall, G.E., *Between Theology and Archaeology*: JSOT 7 (1978) 28-34.
- Mendenhall, G.E. / Herion, G., *Covenant*, in: ABD I, Garden City 1992, 1179-1202.
- Miller II, R.D., *Chieftains of the Highland Clans: A History of Israel in the 12th and 11th Centuries BC* (The Bible in Its World Series), Grand Rapids 2005.
- Muilenburg, J., *Form and Structure of the Covenant Formulation*: VT 9 (1959) 347-365.
- Munn-Rankin, J.M., *Diplomacy in Western Asia in the Early Second Millennium B.C.*: Iraq 18 (1956) 68-110.
- Nelson, R.D., *Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History* (JSOT.S 18), Sheffield 1981.
- Nicholson, E., *God and His People*, Oxford 1986.
- O'Brien, M., *Deuteronomistic History Hypothesis* (OBO 92), Göttingen 1989.
- Otto, E., *Ursprünge der Bundestheologie im Alten Testament und im Alten Orient*: ZABR 4 (1998) 1-84.
- Parker, S.B., *Appeals for Military Intervention*: BA 59 (1996) 213-224.
- Parpola, S. / Porter, M., *Helsinki Atlas of the Near East in the Neo-Assyrian Period*, Helsinki 2001.
- Peckham, B., *Composition of the Deuteronomistic History* (HSM 35), Atlanta 1985.
- Porter, B.N., *Assyrian Propaganda for the West*, in: Guy Bannens, G. (ed.), *Essays on Syria in the Iron Age* (ANETS.S 7), Louvain 2000, 143-176.
- Postgate, J.N., *Land of Assur and the Yoke of Assur*: World Archaeology 23 (1992) 247-263.
- Ringgren, H., *Word and Wisdom: Studies in the Hypostatization of Divine Qualities and Functions in the Ancient Near East*, Lund 1947.
- Römer, T.C., *Deuteronomy in Search of Origins*, in: Knoppers, G.N. / McConville, J.G. (ed.), *Reconsidering Israel and Judah* (SBibSt 8), Winona Lake 2000, 112-138.
- Römer, T.C., *So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, Edinburg 2005.
- Römer, T.C. / Pury, A. de, *Deuteronomistic Historiography*, in: Pury, A. de / Römer, T. / Macchi, J.-D. (ed.), *Israel Constructs its History* (JSOT.S 306), Sheffield 2000, 24-141.
- Russell, J.M., *The Writing on the Wall: Studies in the Architectural Context of Late Assyrian Palace Inscriptions* (Mesopotamian Civilizations 9), Winona Lake 1999.
- Sader, H., *Etats Araméens de Syrie depuis leurs Fondation jusqu'à leurs Transformation en Provinces Assyriennes*, Tübingen 1984.
- Schmid, H.H., *Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit* (BZAW 101), Berlin 1966.
- Schmidt, W.H., *Altorientalischer Glaube in seiner Geschichte* (NStB 6), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1990.
- Shoemaker, C.C., / Spanier, J., *Patron-Client State Relationships*, New York 1984.
- Tadmor, H., *Propaganda, Literature, and Historiography, in Assyria 1995*, in: Parpola, S. / Whiting, R.M. (ed.), Helsinki 1997, 325-338.
- Tropper, J., *Die Inschriften von Zincirli* (Abhandlungen zur Literatur Alt-Syrien-Palästinas 6), Münster 1993.
- Waterman, D.L., *Correspondence of the Assyrian Empire II* (UMS.H 18), Ann Arbor 1930.
- Weeks, N., *Admonition and Curse* (JSOT.S 407), New York 2004.
- Weeks, N., *Covenant and Treaty*: Lucas 16 (1993) 10-22.

- Weinfeld, M., *Common Heritage of Covenantal Traditions in the Ancient World*, in: Canfora, L. / Liverani, M. / Zaccagnini, C. (ed.), *I Trattati nel Mondo Antico (Saggi di Storia Antica II)*, Roma 1990.
- Weinfeld, M., *Covenant Terminology in the Ancient Near East and Its Influence on the West*: JAOS 93 (1973) 190-199.
- Weinfeld, M., *Loyalty Oath in the Ancient Near East*: UF 8 (1976) 379-414.
- Younger, K.L. Jr., *Panammuwa and Bar-Rakib*: *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 18 (1986) 91-103.

Dr. Robert D. Miller II
Mount St. Mary's Seminary
Emmitsburg, MD 21727
USA
E-Mail: Romiller@msmary.edu