

## ARAMEES

DUŠEK, J. and J. MYNÁŘOVÁ (eds.) — *Aramaean Borders. Defining Aramaean Territories in the 10<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> Centuries B.C.E.* (Culture and History of the Ancient Near East, 101). Brill Academic Publishers, Leiden-Boston, 2019. (24 cm, XVIII, 351). ISBN 978-90-04-39853-5; ISSN 1566-2055. € 165,-.

Prague has in recent years hosted a series of outstanding conferences on various subjects in Near Eastern antiquity. The volume under review is the product of one of these conferences, held under the same name at Charles University in April 2016. Like the conference on which it is based, the volume brings together research on Aramaean borders in the first three centuries of the first millennium BCE. Appropriately for a volume on borders, the research it assembles sits at the intersection of different scholarly disciplines and bodies of evidence, both philological and archaeological. The Aramaean polities of modern Syria and its environs take pride of place, but the true focus of the volume is how and where these interact with others: with the Luwian and Phoenician textual horizons, with the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and with Assyrian imperialism.

The volume includes twelve substantive chapters, a cursory introduction, and useful indices of geographical names and modern authors. The substantive chapters are divided into three parts: Aramaeans and Assyria, Aramaeans and the Northern and Central Levant, and Aramaeans and the Southern Levant. This tripartite division is geographic, but it also corresponds to the course of the Assyrian expansion that proved fatal to the political independence of the various Aramaean polities that are treated in the volume, beginning with those nearest to Assyria (and thus first to be incorporated by this expansionist state) and proceeding via the northern Levant to the south.

In the volume's introduction, co-editor Jan Dušek states that its creation grew out of a repeated grappling with the question of borders. How did the borders of the Aramaean polities of the Iron Age function, and how do they intersect with other elements of society? More theoretically (p. xvi), "what *indeed* was a border and how was it defined?" These are important questions, and to differing extents and with different emphases they pervade the contributions to the volume. With few exceptions, however, borders remain under-theorized. They are generally treated in the conventional

sense as frontiers between spheres of political authority. This still enables a wide-ranging and important discussion about where to place historical borders, even if it does not do justice to the full range of Dušek's questions. With regard to borders between different polities, the contributions to the volume share a common conclusion: the overriding historical characteristic of Aramaean borders is that they fluctuated. A lot.

One key question is, however, absent altogether: what makes a territory Aramaean? The implicit answer is linguistic. Although it is rarely stated outright, the assumption informing the volume is that Aramaeans should be equated with the Aramaic language. Excepting the contributions of Edmonds and Luukko, Aramaean territories are essentially regarded as those places for which there is roughly contemporary evidence of epigraphic Aramaic and which were governed by Aramaean polities. Aramaean polities are in turn the independent states that produced this Aramaic epigraphic evidence or are otherwise associated with an Aramaic linguistic horizon, chiefly by virtue of their names. The result is a geography that overlaps with the notion of Aram expressed in the Sfire inscriptions and the Bible: Aramaean territoriality is equated with greater Syria. There is little room here for a possible Aramaean territoriality beyond this geographic focus, or outside of the scope of the state system. There is no mention of the Bukan inscription and limited attention for the many Aramaeans of Mesopotamia, even in those cases where they appear to have enjoyed political autonomy. The scope for a broader conception of Aramaean territoriality emerges in the contributions of Edmonds and Luukko, but is otherwise unexploited. This is true despite the fact that, as Luukko notes (p. 92), "one might say that the Assyrian Empire was nothing but a large Aramaean territory with fluid borders, and Aramaic speakers in the north, south, east, and west, as well as the center."

The first substantive chapter in the volume is that of Ariel Bagg, who attempts to reconstruct the borders of Aramaean polities in the northern Levant west of the Euphrates based on Neo-Assyrian written sources. Bagg's focus is on Bīt-Agūsi, Ḥamat/Luḥuti, and Pattinu/Unqi. Perhaps unsurprisingly given his extensive experience with historical geography, Bagg's contribution offers the most sustained engagement with the theorization of borders. He notes the conceptual ambiguity of the various terms used in Assyrian sources to denote borders, criticizing their usefulness for his own project. The Assyrian sources suffer from more than terminological fuzziness. They present no detailed descriptions of the borders Bagg is trying to reconstruct. These are frustrating obstacles. Bagg offers a valuable overview of how historical geography can nevertheless yield positive results when confronted with such deficiencies in the evidence (pp. 5–7). He sagely cautions against accepting inherited identifications between ancient place names and modern geography in the absence of firm evidence. Once such identifications are made—no matter how gingerly or how poor the evidence—they are often repeated ad nauseam in subsequent scholarship. Against the background of this overview, Bagg's study makes use of distinctive landmarks and toponym clusters to exclude or render improbable some of the inherited identifications and to make novel proposals. But Bagg is aware that his own suggestions are far from certain, observing of his own ideas that (p. 12) "this likewise speculative proposal shows on the one hand that quite different

scenarios are possible, and on the other how dangerous it may be to draw conclusions from a proposed restoration of a place name when it is taken as a certain attestation." Beyond some valuable corrections and new conclusions about Aramaean geography west of the Euphrates, Bagg's most salutary intervention is his cautious approach to reconstructing Aramaean borders. He chastens us about the pitfalls of historical geography, and this chastening is necessary.

In chapter 2, Alexander Johannes Edmonds revisits the Ahlameans (*aḥlamū*). It is generally agreed that in the first millennium BCE the term *aḥlamū* was used in cuneiform sources as a broad designation for mobile pastoralist peoples or for Aramaeans specifically. Edmonds assumes that this usage is anachronistic, that there once was a coherent Ahlamean social group. He wants to know when *aḥlamū* transitioned from a term for a particular people to its broader later usage. In Edmonds' own words (p. 30), "when exactly should *ethnos* become *topos*?" To answer this question, Edmonds offers a useful survey of the diachronic development of the use of the term in cuneiform texts from the second and first millennia BCE, including an extended treatment of a relevant passage in Tiglath-Pileser III's Mila Mergi relief. But it is not clear that Ahlameans ever really function as *ethnos*. To the extent that the category surfaces in cuneiform texts from the second millennium, it always appears to refer to groups operating outside of the framework of Mesopotamia's agrarian states. The term *aḥlamū* does not need to be altogether different from the "barbarian" of Greek historiography—it could denote people without doing so in a way that would be meaningful to the people being thus denoted. Edmonds' thorough treatment of Ahlamean territoriality reinforces this point. Edmonds notes that when Ahlameans surface in cuneiform texts (p. 31) "they do not possess a land, or indeed any borders." They are instead associated with various marginal landscapes, distant, again, from Mesopotamia's agrarian states. The key takeaway from Edmonds' work is precisely the consistency of Ahlamean marginality, which points to an entire mode of territoriality that is not easily accounted for in conventional models of borders. Edmonds concludes (p. 57) that "the resilience of the term *aḥlamū* lay in its territorial ambiguities, its unboundedness, and its past usages for marginal peoples, perhaps of a marginal profession, within marginal spaces." Such marginality is already present in the earliest references to Ahlameans. If the *topos* is always there, must we bother with *ethnos* at all?

Chapter 3 investigates Assyria's western border with Bīt-Baḥiāni/Gūzāna in the late 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE based on the bilingual Aramaic-Akkadian Tell Fekheriyeh inscription. Jana Mynářová and Jan Dušek, the co-editors of the volume, offer an excellent account of the context of the Tell Fekheriyeh inscription, situating it in history and geography. They also build on their innovative coauthored edition and analysis of the text from 2016,<sup>1</sup> reprising the claim that the monument and inscription was created in distinct stages. This allows Mynářová and Dušek to interpret the inscription as (pp. 73 and 74) "a political instrument" that reflects the changing political status of and representational priorities in Bīt-

<sup>1</sup> Dušek, J. and J. Mynářová. 2016. Tell Fekheriyeh Inscription: A Process of Authority on the Edge of the Assyrian Empire. Pp. 9–39 in *The Process of Authority. The Dynamics in Transmission and Reception of Canonical Texts*, ed. J. Dušek and J. Roskovec. Berlin – New York: De Gruyter.

Baḥiāni/Gūzāna as it confronted the crests and troughs of Assyrian expansion. From the perspective of borders, we can see that the century preceding Bīt-Baḥiāni/Gūzāna's eventual absorption by the Assyrian empire was one of unstable and often fluctuating frontiers.

Dlshad Marf surveys the evidence for Aramaeans in the northern Zagros in chapter 4. There is not much material to survey, but Marf is diligent about compiling all the direct and indirect indications of an Aramaean presence. These indications consist of references to groups of Aramaeans in the area in Assyrian historiographic texts, references to individual Aramaeans in assorted Assyrian texts, and evidence of the use of the Aramaic language. By collecting these distinct strands of evidence, Marf makes a useful—albeit not always equally careful—contribution. Methodological problems complicate the use of these three evidentiary strands. The clearest indication of an Aramaean presence in the northern Zagros is the body of Assyrian texts that tell us so. Marf assumes throughout that Aramaeans in the northern Zagros must have migrated there, as is indicated by the title of his second section: “Aramaean Immigration into the Northern Zagros.” The assertion of migration is based only on the novel attestation of Aramaeans in the area in Assyrian sources. Yet Aramaeans are newly attested everywhere in the Bronze to Iron Age transition, including in the regions they are supposed to have migrated from. The people in the northern Zagros being designated as Aramaean need not have moved from anywhere. It should be considered whether it is not the people who are new arrivals, but rather the categorization imposed on them in Assyrian texts. There is also a qualitative difference between Aramaean populations in the northern Zagros and individual officials and scribes stationed there by the Assyrian authorities or simply passing through, as is the case for the individual Aramaeans that Marf identifies. Finally, it is critical to distinguish between the spread of the Aramaic language in the area and the spread of Aramaean people. There can be Aramaic without Aramaeans.

Chapter 5 is a thorough and necessary reconsideration of the evidence for Gurraeans and Itu'aeans, two groups frequently attested in Assyrian sources as auxiliary forces in the service of the empire. Mikko Luukko expertly surveys the references to these groups in order to evaluate how they fit into Assyria's imperial structure. Of the two groups, Itu'aeans are much better attested—there are about 100 extant references to them, compared to about a fourth of that number for Gurraeans. Only the Itu'aeans are explicitly referred to as Aramaean in some of our surviving sources. Notably, the identification of Itu'aeans as Aramaeans occurs in the inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III (745–727 BCE), which recount that the Itu'aeans were defeated and subdued along with other Aramaeans. In the first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, there are at least five separate Assyrian campaigns waged against Itu'aeans. It is therefore all the more remarkable that by the end of the century we find Itu'aeans bearing arms for Assyria throughout its dominions. Luukko notes that the bulk of references to Itu'aeans places them as guards in frontier regions or in the role of mobile troubleshooters, roving through the empire to pacify restive areas and deal with trouble as it arises. They are thus gendarmes of sorts, doing what Luukko describes as the dirty work of empire. But why should Itu'aeans of all people be Assyria's rapid response force? Luukko suggests (p. 104) this is related to their “high mobility,” a function of the Itu'aeans mobile pas-

toralist way of life. A salient feature of Itu'aeans participation in the Assyrian empire is their retention of autonomous leadership and distinct units within the army. Combined with their mobility, this probably allowed the Assyrian authorities to dispatch significant numbers of Itu'aeans to trouble zones without need of a ponderous levying of troops and mustering of animals and equipment. Itu'aeans had their own riding animals and weapons to hand and could set off at once, and it cost the Assyrian authorities nothing to maintain these forces in a state of preparedness. This model came with its own risks: as Luukko notes, there are multiple instances of Itu'aeans auxiliaries stealing sheep and engaging in other disruptive behaviors—even in Assur itself (SAA 13, 33). Much less can be said of the Gurraeans, who often feature as something of an afterthought in Luukko's contribution (as they do in my review). But this is a consequence of the poorer coverage of the sources. It is clear in any case that within the Assyrian army Gurraeans served as distinct auxiliary forces, akin to the Itu'aeans. This form of service is a rich avenue for future research: what was the role of autonomous auxiliaries in the Assyrian army, how did it develop, and what were its consequences for imperial governance and security? How were hostile populations compelled to cooperate with and fight for the Assyrian state, and how did this cooperation come undone? Luukko's outstanding contribution takes a great stride in helping us answer such questions.

The volume's second part takes us away from Assyria and to the western borders of the northern Levant's Aramaean polities. In chapter 6, Zsolt Simon examines the hieroglyphic Luwian evidence for Aramaean borders, both linguistic and political. This material is illustrative of the pitfalls that inhere in linguistic conceptions of Aramaeanness. If Aramaean polities are to be identified on the basis of the use of the Aramaic language, then what are we to do in much of the northern Levant, where epigraphic Hieroglyphic Luwian and Aramaic often occupy the same space in time and place? As Simon emphasizes in the context of Zincirli/Sam'al (p. 135), “instead of an Aramaic-speaking state, we have a multilingual and multiscriptal state where the Hieroglyphic Luwian writing system and the Luwian language were preserved and continuously used next to Aramaic at least until the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.” This indicates a political and linguistic landscape that is much more complex than a simple division between Luwians and Aramaeans as distinct groups with distinct languages. Linguistic frontiers are clearly not rigid, and the use of a given language for certain epigraphic purposes is not a reliable guide to demography or broader linguistic practices. Simon's contribution is not only a necessary corrective on linguistic borders. In the political sense too, Simon cautions against modern cartographic reproductions of ancient frontiers that suggests a level of knowledge and certainty that our sources cannot yield. He also warns (p. 130) that because of their constant state of flux, “no static map can provide an accurate illustration of the Aramaean borders,” which are anyway always undergoing revision as new evidence emerges. The great virtue of Simon's discussion of the Hieroglyphic Luwian evidence is thus that it unsettles our notions of linguistic and political frontiers as clear and knowable, when in truth they are at best fuzzy and only partially recoverable.

In chapter 7 Maria Giulia Amadasi Guzzo turns to evidence in Phoenician written sources for borders and exchange between Aramaean and Phoenician areas. The criterion for

defining an area as Phoenician or Aramaean is again essentially linguistic. The result is an unfortunate conflation between people and language, as when Amadasi Guzzo posits (p. 156) the establishment of Phoenician enclaves in northern Syria and Anatolia to account for the spread of Phoenician writing there. But is this really necessary? If Phoenician was a prestige language (as note 45 indicates), then Phoenician writing can be strategically deployed without any real need of Phoenician enclaves. The many bilingual and trilingual inscriptions in the northern Levant suggest that multiple languages could be reproduced in monumental inscriptions, even when it is unlikely that they all represented substantial local speech communities. Amadasi Guzzo is more careful with her treatment of borders. She notes the instability of political borders and the fact that they were readily transcended by cultural practices and various forms of exchange. Frontiers between Aramaean and Phoenician areas were porous and impermanent, complicating any attempt to recreate them. Amadasi Guzzo concludes (p. 163) that “the data at our disposal do not enable us to trace clear boundaries between Phoenicians and Aramaeans.” This negative conclusion is itself valuable, as it forces us to reconsider the notion of rigid borders and to consider instead a broad cultural and political continuum in which Aramaean and Phoenician areas merge imperceptibly.

Chapters 8 and 9 are concerned more narrowly with the historical geography of two Aramaean polities, Arpad/Bīt-Agūsi and Hamath respectively. Jan Dušek reviews the shifting frontiers of the territory controlled by Arpad/Bīt-Agūsi and its changing capitals in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE. Dušek’s survey offers an excellent overview of all the relevant data, including an account of the shift of the capital from Arnê to Arpad. His most significant contribution is the argument that the site of Sfire rather than Tell Rif’at should be identified with Arpad. Although Dušek is not the first to make this suggestion, the case he builds is the strongest and most comprehensive to date. Matthieu Richelle’s account of the fluctuating borders of Hamath before the polity’s destruction by Assyria is likewise the most comprehensive and detailed account now available. Richelle surveys the evidence for each of Hamath’s borders and evaluates how and why these fluctuated over time. Richelle also offers a judicious discussion of the various points of contention in the data and of previous scholarship on these issues, including the thorny question of the incorporation of Laqē in the Hamathite realm (cf. the discussion by Simon on pp. 139–40 concerning the position of Laqē).

Part 3 of the volume brings us firmly into the realm of biblical evidence. In chapter 10, Gaby Abousamra attempts to locate biblical Šobah. As Abousamra observes (p. 232), there are two scholarly camps: “one tries to locate it around the sources of the Litani River in the center and south of the Beqa’, and the other around the sources of the Orontes River in the north.” Based on toponymy, etymology, and strategy, Abousamra suggests that Šobah is likely to have been near the modern settlement of Zabbud by the sources of the Orontes. This is certainly plausible, though it is far from certain; Abousamra recognizes the provisional nature of his proposal on p. 242. Pending future excavations or other new evidence, the exact location of biblical Šobah will remain unknown.

Chapters 11 and 12 both deal with the border between the biblical kingdom of Israel and Aram-Damascus. André

Lemaire’s discussion in chapter 11 reviews the main sources available for the reconstruction of this frontier. These are the contemporary epigraphic material in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Akkadian, the material record from excavations in the area, and biblical historiography. Despite the deficiencies in the evidence, Lemaire proposes that seven distinct stages can be identified in the development of the border between Israel and Aram-Damascus. These stages begin with the establishment of the kingdom of Damascus ca. 970 BCE and shift repeatedly over the next two centuries before both Israel and Aram-Damascus are consumed by the Assyrian empire and their mutual frontier dissolves into a series of provincial boundaries. Lemaire’s multi-stage account of the development of the frontier between the two often warring kingdoms is compelling, though it often hews very closely to the biblical account, especially for the earliest periods. The shifting border is not exclusively of political interest. Lemaire’s suggestion that Gilead was incorporated into Israel under Jeroboam II might, for instance, go some way to accounting for the prominence of Gilead in biblical historiography and in prophetic texts relating to this period. Lemaire’s conclusion (p. 258) that the final war between Aram-Damascus and Israel in the shadow of the Assyrian onslaught “was completely political nonsense ... it was a war for nothing” rings true, though it has the advantage of hindsight. It is a cautionary tale: failure to come together in the face of a common threat will only hasten the common end.

Wolfgang Zwickel’s contribution in chapter 12 overlaps substantially with that of Lemaire. Unlike Lemaire, however, Zwickel is concerned less with reconstructing the historical development of the border between Israel and Aram-Damascus and more with compiling all available evidence and assessing its historical reliability. Of particular value is Zwickel’s extensive attempt to compare biblical historiography with the archaeological record. Zwickel lists all relevant sites mentioned in the historical sources by historical period, assembling all relevant further information along with archaeological data and coordinates when these are available. He also produces a chronology for the period 860–830 to help make sense of the confusing and inharmonious narratives of the Bible. Even if one disagrees with some of the details, seeing this abundance of data laid out in a coherent sequential framework helps make sense of the whole. Zwickel also provides an incredibly rich and useful appendix documenting excavated sites and relevant finds with further appendices on diachronic settlement patterns and no less than eight detailed maps. Compiling so much material so meticulously and methodically is an immense service. Zwickel’s views on the historical geography of the border between Israel and Aram-Damascus are persuasive, especially because they are based on command of all the material. But Zwickel recognizes that all attempts to identify the location of sites mentioned in historical texts ultimately remain a question of interpretation and correlation, and thus of choice. As Bagg points out at the very beginning of the volume, we are on shifting sands.

*Aramaean Borders* is a valuable contribution to scholarship on the Aramaean polities of Syria in the first three centuries of the first millennium BCE. It offers a great diversity of evidentiary perspectives delivered by experts from different disciplines. This wealth of scholarship sets a new benchmark for future research. Jan Dušek and Jana Mynářová are to be thanked for putting together the volume, and it is to be

hoped that Prague will continue to solidify its growing reputation as a place that fosters cutting-edge and interdisciplinary research on the ancient Near East.

Leiden University,  
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