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# Hoshea ben Elah, the Last King of Israel: Narrative and History in 2 Kings 17:1–6

## 1 Introduction

In the controversial discussion about the circumstances that led to the downfall of Samaria, there is still an important significance ascribed to the compact account of the events in 2Kgs 17:1–6.<sup>1</sup> The reason for this is not so much that the biblical narrative is considered to be of particularly historical value as a source, but rather the fact that the cuneiform sources provide contradictory reports as to which Assyrian ruler conquered Samaria. While the Babylonian Chronicle attributes the conquest to Shalmaneser V<sup>2</sup>, his successor, Sargon II, claims for himself in contemporary inscriptions to have destroyed the city, deported its inhabitants, and incorporated the remaining Samarian state into the Assyrian provincial system.<sup>3</sup> This finding has been interpreted as either evidence for two separate military seizures of Samaria<sup>4</sup> or as an indication for a joint venture of both Assyrian kings.<sup>5</sup> In order to support their interpretation, both models

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1 The actual debate is briefly summarized in Christian Frevel, *Geschichte Israels* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016), 234–45. The most thorough treatment of the problem is still offered by Bob Becking, *The Fall of Samaria: An Historical and Archaeological Study* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), cf. also Nadav Na'aman, “The Historical Background to the Conquest of Samaria (720 BC),” *Bib* 71 (1990): 206–25, and Stefan Timm, “Die Eroberung Samarias aus assyrisch-babylonischer Sicht,” in id., “*Gott kommt von Teman ...*”: *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte Israels und Syrien-Palästinas*, ed. Claudia Bender and Michael Pietsch (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2004): 103–20.

2 The text of the Babylonian Chronicle dates from the 22<sup>nd</sup> year of the reign of the Persian king Darius II (i. e. 500 BC), but can be traced back to even older traditions. The Chronicle mentions that in the reign of Shalmaneser V, he “broke” (*hepû*) the city of Samaria: Albert Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Locus Valley NY: Augustin, 1975), 73.

3 Cf. the prism inscription of Sargon II from Kalḫu/Nimrud, column IV, lines 25–41 (cf. Manfred Weippert, *Historisches Textbuch zum Alten Testament* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010], 301–302) and the somewhat contemporary annals of the king from Dūr-Šarrukēn/Ḫorsābād, lines 10–17, which text is, however, greatly damaged and often complemented by the parallel report from the Prism Inscription (cf. the critical discussion in Becking, *Fall*, 39–44).

4 Cf. Hayim Tadmor, “The Campaigns of Sargon II,” *JCS* 12 (1958): 22–40, 77–100, whose suggestion many have followed; cf. the literature listed in Becking, *Fall*, 38 note 78.

5 Cf. Herbert Donner, *Israel unter den Völkern: Die Stellung der klassischen Propheten des 8. Jahrhunderts v. Chr. zur Außenpolitik der Könige von Israel und Juda* (Leiden: Brill, 1964), 65–66. Other supporters of this interpretation are mentioned in Becking, *Fall*, 33 note 56.

invoke particular passages from the biblical account in 2Kgs 17:1–6 that correspond to the respective cuneiform writings. But in doing so, the literary structure and narrative pragmatic of each text are not seriously taken into consideration. Such an analysis should, however, precede any historical interpretation. Therefore, this chapter will first discuss the narrative composition of the *res gestae* of the last king of Israel, Hoshea ben Elah, in 2Kgs 17:1–6. In the second part, based on the literary analysis of the episode what one can derive for a historical reconstruction of “the last days of the kings of Israel” will be considered.

## 2 2Kgs 17:1–6 as Narrative

The passage restarts the narrative plot in the Book of Kings by the syntactical construction *x-qāṭal* and the temporal modification “in the 12<sup>th</sup> year of Ahaz, the king of Judah,” reaching back chronologically beyond the report of the death and burial of Ahaz in 2Kgs 16:19–20. The declaration of the nine-year reign of the last king of Israel in Samaria (cf. v. 1b) is taken up again by means of the stipulation “in the 9<sup>th</sup> year of Hoshea” (v. 6), which closes the literary sequence.<sup>6</sup> The syntactical structure of the section reveals a three-part composition, which is marked by the use of the element *x-qāṭal*: the actual narrative following the introductory regnal formula in vv. 1–2 starts with v. 3a as indicated by the syntactical construction *x-qāṭal* along with the introduction of the king of Assyria, Shalmaneser V. This is continued with a chain of narrative forms until v. 5 and ends with a note about the three-year siege of the city of Samaria by the Assyrians.<sup>7</sup> The use of a temporal adverb at the beginning of v. 6a (cf. *x-qāṭal*) marks yet another break and emphasizes the comment about the capture of the city and the deportation of its inhabitants as the final point of the sequence in contrast to what precedes it. This provides a clear structure of the text (Fig. 1), which goes from vv. 1–2, across vv. 3–5, ending in v. 6.

This observation dissuades the widespread assumption that vv. 3–4 and vv. 5–6 contain parallel accounts of the same event, which were taken from different archival collections.<sup>8</sup> This assumption is also contradicted by the fact that

<sup>6</sup> However, the title “the king of Assyria” occurs again in vv. 24–33, linking this passage back to the narrative in vv. 3–6 and supposing the identity of the Assyrian king mentioned in both texts.

<sup>7</sup> The chain of events is interrupted by a relative clause in v. 4a\* giving some background information on the revolt of Hoshea, namely the request for help from the Egyptian pharaoh and the holding back of the regular tribute to the Assyrian overlord.

<sup>8</sup> This assumption goes back as far as Hugo Winckler, *Alttestamentliche Untersuchungen* (Leipzig: Eduard Pfeiffer, 1892), 15–25, who supposed that the twofold mention of a military cam-

- vv. 1–2a Dates of the reign of Hoshea ben Elah and negative royal judgment  
(*x-qāṭal + wayyiqtol*)
- v. 2b Limitation of the royal judgment (textual background)
- vv. 3–4a<sub>1</sub> Vassal status of Hoshea (v. 3) and the uncovering of the insurrection  
against the Assyrian sovereignty (*x-qāṭal + wayyiqtol*)
- v. 4a<sub>2</sub> Request for aid from Egypt and discontinuance of tribute  
(textual background)
- vv. 4b–5 Capture of Hoshea and three-year siege of Samaria (*wayyiqtol*)
- v. 6 Conquest of Samaria “in the ninth year of Hoshea” and the  
deportation of Israel to Assyria (*x-qāṭal + wayyiqtol*)

**Fig. 1:** The syntactic structure of 2Kgs 17:1–6. Prepared by the author.

in a synchronic reading the notice on the vassal status of Hoshea in v. 3 establishes the factual prerequisite for the Assyrian campaign described in vv. 4–6, and that without vv. 3–4, some of the syntactical references in vv. 5–6 were misleading.<sup>9</sup> Finally, the question remains: which type of archival material should

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campaign by Shalmaneser V against Samaria in v. 3a and v. 5a is due to the literary-critical technique of *Wiederaufnahme* indicating the use of two independent literary sources by the narrator. The first of which (represented in vv. 3b–4\*) was originally connected to the historical account in 2Kgs 15:29, whereas the second (vv. 3a.4\*.5–6) was related to 2Kgs 15:30. However, the starting point for Winckler’s thesis was the observation that the biblical account neither fits with the report on the vassal status of Hoshea in the royal inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III nor with the claim of Sargon II to have conquered the city of Samaria and deported its inhabitants. Regarding the narrative plot of the biblical account in 2Kgs 17:3–6 it is evident that the mentioning of the Assyrian king in v. 3a and in v. 5a is related to two different events as can easily be learned from their respective context. Therefore it is not necessary to regard them as a literary doublet or a case of redactional *Wiederaufnahme*. The narrative sequence from v. 4b to vv. 5–6 may seem a little awkward to modern interpreters, but it is not to be explained by means of source criticism.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Timm, “Eroberung,” 103–104 with note 3. – Christoph Levin has clearly recognized the difficulties of a source-critical explanation of the literary structure of the passage and has argued in favor of a redaction-critical analysis based on a comparison with the parallel account in 2Kgs 18:9–11 (cf. his chapter in the present volume). He presupposes that 2Kgs 18:9–12 belong to a later editing in the account of the reign of Hezekiah, king of Judah. Its presentation of the

be considered as a source for the accounts? The Samaritan royal court can hardly be considered.<sup>10</sup>

## 2.1 The Introductory Regnal Formula (vv. 1–2)

If we return to the beginning of the passage, it has already been said that the synchronistic dating of the beginning of Hoshea's regency in the 12<sup>th</sup> year of the Judean king Ahaz reaches back narratively to a point before the final verses of the previous chapter. In 2Kgs 15:29–30 the narrator has informed the reader more precisely that Hoshea came to power through a military coup (*qæšær*) against the ruling king Pekah after Tiglath-pileser III had annexed the (Upper) Galilee and the region of Gilead.<sup>11</sup> Hence, in the narrative plot of the Book of

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events has been taken over from the report in 2Kgs 17:3–6 with only a little editorial reworking and the insertion of v. 12. Therefore only those textual elements from 2Kgs 17:3–6 which are also present in 2Kgs 18:9–11 can be assumed to be the original report of the events. This is to be confirmed by demonstrating that all the secondary elements in the narrative of 2Kgs 17:3–6 (cf. vv. 3b–5a\*) share a common polemical bias discrediting the last king of Israel (cf. the textual variant in the Antiochene reading of v. 2b). Regarding the secondary origin of 2Kgs 18:9–12 Levin seems to be right. The passage interprets Samaria's demise as due to the peoples' (and their kings', respectively) breaking of the covenant with Yhwh by not obeying the Mosaic torah. By this means it contrasts Hezekiah's rebellion against Sennacherib, "the King of Assyria" (cf. 2Kgs 18:7b), with the revolt of Hoshea, for Hezekiah did follow the torah of Yhwh (cf. v. 6). It was his intention to explain why the rebellion of Hoshea led to the total loss of political sovereignty and the deportation of "all Israel" while Hezekiah, even after his revolt failed, had only to pay some heavy tribute to the Assyrians, but remained king in Jerusalem (cf. 2Kgs 18:13–16). The editor was neither interested in the reign of Hoshea itself nor in his personal fate. He used only the information from 2Kgs 17:3–6 which supports his own argument (e. g. the events mentioned in v. 3 would have weakened the antagonism between Hoshea and Hezekiah). If this proves to be correct, it is not possible to reconstruct any older textual layer in 2Kgs 17:3–6 by means of a comparison with the account in 2Kgs 18:9–11. The narrative plot in 2Kgs 17:3–6, however, shows no clear indication of a redactional reworking (cf. also the chapter by Dan'el Kahn in the present volume).

**10** 2Kgs 17:3–4\* has often been assigned to a Northern tradition originating from the royal annals of the court in Samaria, but this assumption is not very probable (cf. Timm, "Eroberung," 104 note 3).

**11** The events belong to the so-called Syro-Ephraimite War (cf. 2Kgs 16:5–9) dating to the years 733/32–732/31 BC according to the Eponym Chronicle for the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (cf. Weipert, *Textbuch*, 285–87). The narrator claims these territories for Israel, but at least Gilead seems to have been under Aramaean control at this time (cf. the chapter by Norma Franklin in the present volume). – Hoshea's rebellion is termed in the view of the reigning king Pekah as a military coup (*qæšær*, cf. 2Kgs 17:4a!), without any religious disqualification.

Kings, the note in v. 1 reminds the reader of Hoshea's violent seizing of power. The dating of this event in 2Kgs 15:30b, however, is in the 20<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Jotham, the father of Ahaz, who reigned only 16 years according to 2Kgs 15:33. However, according to 2Kgs 16:1, Ahaz was crowned king in Jerusalem in the 17<sup>th</sup> year of Pekah, king of Israel. Since Pekah ruled 20 years, according to 2Kgs 15:27, Hoshea would have ascended the throne in the fourth year of Ahaz.<sup>12</sup>

The various chronological and text-critical problems apparent in the divergent statements do not need to be discussed here in detail.<sup>13</sup> Only a brief comment on the synchronism in 2Kgs 17:1 shall be given. The calculation that leads to the 12<sup>th</sup> year of Ahaz finds its point of origin, it seems, neither with the date of the beginning of the reign of Ahaz nor with the chronology of the reign of Pekah. Instead, it is to be found in the synchronism between Hezekiah, king of Judah, and Hoshea in 2Kgs 18:1. If this is right, it has to be assumed that the beginning of Hoshea's reign has been postdated and that his third regnal year overlapped with the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> year of Ahaz.<sup>14</sup> The synchronistic dating of the capture of Samaria in 2Kgs 18:9–11, on the other hand, presupposes the synchronism in 18:1.<sup>15</sup> However, it is quite obvious that the system of synchron-

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**12** The textual and historical difficulties regarding the synchronistic datings in the Book of Kings are discussed in further detail in the chapters by Christian Frevel and Kristin Weingart in the present volume.

**13** In the transmission of the Greek text different attempts have been made to harmonize the chronological problems present in the Masoretic text. However, no coherent chronological system has been reached in the history of textual transmission. Therefore it seems difficult to draw any firm conclusions from the textual variants with regard to different chronological systems within the sources used by the editor of the Book of Kings as did Joachim Begrich, *Die Chronologie der Könige von Israel und Juda und die Quellen des Rahmens der Königsbücher* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1929), 102–15.

**14** This proposal would imply that the beginning of the calendrial year has been already transferred to spring-time in Samaria, while in Judah it still remained autumn – or at least the one responsible for the synchronism understood it in this way. Otherwise a short period of co-regency between both Judean kings not attested elsewhere has to be assumed; cf. the discussion in Erasmus Gaß, *Im Strudel der assyrischen Krise (2. Könige 18–19): Ein Beispiel biblischer Geschichtsdeutung* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener 2016), 7.

**15** Or is the synchronism in 2Kgs 18:1 made up by the editor responsible for the insertion of vv. 9–12 into the narrative contrasting the reigns of Hezekiah and Hoshea? In the narrative flow of the Book of Kings the reference to the nameless “King of Assyria” against whom Hezekiah rebelled (cf. 2Kgs 18:7b) points back to Shalmaneser V, who led Israel into exile (cf. 2Kgs 17:3–6, 24–28). This could explain the chronological contradiction between the regnal dates in v. 1 and the account of Sennacherib's campaign against Judah dated in the 14<sup>th</sup> year of Hezekiah according to 2Kgs 18:13–16.

istic dating in the Book of Kings is primarily a product of historiographic reasoning and cannot simply be taken as face value for historical queries.

Following the regnal dates of the king a historiographic evaluation of Hoshea's rule is given (v. 2): "He has committed evil in the eyes of Yhwh" (v. 2a). This is in accord with the same negative judgment all the kings of Israel receive (with the single exception of Jehu, cf. 2Kgs 10:30), albeit with one noteworthy qualification: "but not like the kings of Israel that came before him" (v. 2b). The reproach taken up against the last king of Israel differs from the usual theological pattern without offering a clearer reason in the text itself.<sup>16</sup> In this respect, the formulation differs from its closest parallel in 2Kgs 3:2–3. There, the negative judgment against Jehoram, king of Israel, the son of Ahab, is qualified because he supposedly acted against the cult of Ba'al, which his parents promoted.<sup>17</sup> He allowed, however, the "Sin of Jeroboam," the establishment of two golden calves as idols to be worshiped in Dan and Bethel (cf. 2Kgs 12:28–32), to continue, which led to a negative overall judgment of his reign. A similar argument was the basis of Jehu's evaluation in 2Kgs 10:28–31: Yhwh acknowledges that Jehu did "what is right in my eyes," in that he extinguished the cult of Ba'al and executed judgment against the Omride dynasty. But because

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**16** In the Antiochene text of the Septuagint there is no restriction to the negative evaluation of the king. On the contrary, it is explicitly said that he has done evil in the eyes of Yhwh *more than any other king of Israel before him* (παρὰ πάντας τοὺς γενομένους ἔμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ [= *mikkol 'ašcer hāyū l'pānāw*, cf. 1Kgs 14:9; 16:25, 30, 33]). The downfall of Samaria, it is reasoned, was due to the outstanding evil committed by its last king. This textual variant seems to correct the difficult Masoretic reading by referring to a more common phraseology to which textual priority cannot be ascribed. However, it has been argued that the phrase occurs in the Masoretic text one last time with regard to Ahab, who is stigmatized as the sinful king *par excellence* (cf. 1Kgs 16:30, 33). In the Antiochene text, on the other hand, it is also present in 1Kgs 22:54 (with regard to Ahaziah, Ahab's son and successor to the throne) and 2Kgs 17:2 indicating a use of the phrase not yet biased by the dogmatic stigmatization of king Ahab; cf. Julio C. Treballe, "La caída de Samariá, crítica textual, literaria e história de 2Re 17,3–6," *Salmanticensis* 28 (1981): 137–52, and the chapter by Timo Tekoniemi in the present volume. However, with regard to 1Kgs 22:54 the reading present in the rest of the Greek manuscripts (κατὰ πάντα τὰ γεγόμενα ἔμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ) might have been reworked in the Antiochene textform to fit the more common expression. Therefore it does not seem reasonable to assume a dogmatic correction in the Masoretic text of 1Kgs 22:54 nor is the enigmatic reading in 2Kgs 17:2 due to a similar interest.

**17** In 2Kgs 3:2b it is mentioned that Jehoram turned aside the pillar of Ba'al which his father had erected. This account contradicts 2Kgs 10:26–27, ascribing the destruction of the pillar of Ba'al in Samaria to Jehu. However, there is no other mention of Ahab erecting a pillar for Ba'al in the Book of Kings. The account may want to explain, why there is almost no polemic against the cult of Ba'al within the Elisha narratives (with exception of 2Kgs 3:13–14; 9:22 – both referring to the religious acts of Ahab and his wife Jezebel!) and why the prophet himself is partly acting on behalf of the Omride king (cf. 2Kgs 6–7).

he held fast to the “Sin of Jeroboam,” the length of his dynasty is limited to four generations (vv. 29–30). This finding could point to the fact that the qualification of the negative judgment of the king in 2Kgs 17:2 purports that the worship of Yhwh in the form of the two golden calves at Dan and at Bethel were no longer continued in the time of Hoshea.<sup>18</sup> This is at least evident in the narrative plot of the Book of Kings for the Upper-Galilean city of Dan, which is located in the area that had been annexed by Tiglath-pileser III according to 2Kgs 15:29. Whether or not one can reckon with a loss of cultic image in Bethel due to the heavy tribute paid to the Assyrians is less certain regarding the many textual problems in Hos 10:5–6.

## 2.2 The Downfall of Samaria (vv. 3–6)

### 2.2.1 The Prologue (v. 3)

The course of events begins in v. 3 introduced by the syntactical construction *x-qāṭal*. By means of the precedence of the prepositional construction *‘ālāw*, Hoshea’s fate is emphasized and the focus on the king himself is continued beyond the introductory remarks: “Against him Shalmaneser, the king of Assyria, came up” (v. 3a). Mentioning Shalmaneser V by name marks, on the one hand, a chronological transition over and against the previous section in 2Kgs 15:17–16:20, where an Assyrian king, in the person of Tiglath-pileser III, enters the narrative stage of events for the first time in the Book of Kings.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, it es-

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18 Cf. Alexander Rofé, *The Prophetic Stories: The Narratives about the Prophets in the Hebrew Bible, their Literary Types and History* (Jerusalem: Magness Press, 1988), 98 with note 50: “According to the Rabbis, Hoshea son of Elah removed the *praesidia* (garrison troops) who had prevented the Israelites from making pilgrimages to Jerusalem (bGit 88a, bTa’an 28a, bBBat 121b).”

19 Tiglath-pileser III is introduced in 2Kgs 15:19–20 with the Assyrian name Pūl(u), by which he was known in Persian and Hellenistic times. The episode belongs to the reign of Menahem, king of Israel, who is mentioned among the tributaries of Tiglath-pileser III in a list dating to the year 738 BC (cf. Weippert, *Textbuch*, 288–90). The name Tiglath-pileser (III) first occurs in the biblical narrative in 2Kgs 15:29 during the reign of Pekah, king of Israel. He annexed Northern Galilee and the Transjordanian territories from Israel and led the people into exile. The second mentioning of the Assyrian king by name is related to the same event: the anti-Assyrian coalition defeated by the king in the years 733/32–732/31 BC (cf. 2Kgs 16:7–9). Hence, the narrative composition in 2Kgs 15–16 can be read as if Pul and Tiglath-pileser (III) were two different Assyrian kings (as is supposed in 1Chr 5:26!), who are opposed to different Israelite (and Judean) kings. In this case the reign of Tiglath-pileser III would have been narrowed down to the events related to the so-called Syro-Ephraimite War. Hoshea, the last king of Israel, is then linked to a new Assyrian king, Shalmaneser V.

establishes to whom the title “the King of Assyria” refers, as a function of literary coherence, throughout the story (cf. vv. 4, 5, and 6). The narrator does not give a reason for the sudden appearance of the Assyrian king; there is also no exact temporal reference of the event within the reign of Hoshea. The idea of a vassal relationship between Hoshea and Tiglath-pileser III, the predecessor of Shalmaneser V on the Assyrian throne, is often referred to in order to understand the statement in v. 3a.<sup>20</sup> The Book of Kings, however, is not predisposed to report anything regarding such a relationship. Indeed, the mention of the Galilean and Transjordan territories of Israel annexed by Tiglath-pileser III in 2Kgs 15:29 could be interpreted as punishment for Pekah participating in an anti-Assyrian coalition in the view of 2Kgs 16:7–9, but it is only in 2Kgs 17:3b that Hoshea’s status as an Assyrian vassal is reported for the first time.

This corresponds with the observation that v. 3 is not mentioning any attempt by Hoshea to throw off the Assyrian yoke, as is the case in v. 4a. In addition, the sudden appearance of Shalmaneser V and the resulting obligation of the king of Israel to pay tribute has a close parallel in connection with the first mention of an Assyrian ruler in the Book of Kings in the time of Menahem of Israel in 2Kgs 15:19–20. He, just like Hoshea, was able to affect an Assyrian withdrawal through the payment of a hefty tribute. The expansionistic politics of the Assyrian kings apparently did not need any further rationale. In the narrative framework of 2Kgs 17:3–6, the comment on Hoshea’s vassal status sets the stage for the events evolving. It has an expository function for what follows.

### 2.2.2 Israel’s Way into Exile (vv. 4–6)

The introductory function of v. 3 is also highlighted by the temporal phrase *kēšānāh bēšānāh* (“from year to year, annually”) in v. 4a separating the following events from what has preceded. A closer dating, however, is just as unclear as in the exposition. In other words, when exactly did Hoshea stop paying the annual tribute and began conspirative negotiations with Egypt is unknown to the narrator, or at least considered meaningless for his narrative presentation. The only fact important is the situation at hand that the last king of Israel – for unknown

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<sup>20</sup> Either the vassal status of Hoshea, mentioned in v. 3b, is paralleled to the notion of him paying tribute to Tiglath-pileser III in the royal inscriptions of the Assyrian king (cf. Weippert, *Textbuch*, 296), or – more commonly – it is assumed that the Israelite king participated in an anti-Assyrian revolt of some Syro-Palestinian vassal states subdued by Shalmaneser V shortly after his accession to the throne; cf. Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 198–99.



reasons – decided to revoke his loyalty to the king of Assyria, thereby setting the disastrous events in motion, which led to the decline of Samaria and the exile of Israel.

Whether there is something more to the difficult form of the name of the Egyptian king, *sô'*, in v. 4a, perhaps a shortened form of the name Osorkon (IV) or a misunderstood pharaonic title,<sup>21</sup> plays secondary role for the understanding of the narrative. For the South Palestinian petty states, Egypt is the closest ally, without whose military support an uprising against the supremacy of Assyria would be pointless.<sup>22</sup>

Although Hoshea's violation of loyalty precedes chronologically the second emergence of the Assyrian king, the narrator only mentions it in a circumstantial clause (textual background, cf. Fig. 1). The progress of the plot line (textual foreground) is dominated by the king of Assyria, who uncovered Hoshea's rebellion.<sup>23</sup> He is the main character (Fig. 2) in the narrative (cf. vv. 3a, 4a<sub>1</sub>, b, 5–6).

- v. 3a     Shalmaneser (V), *king of Assyria*
- v. 3b     Hoshea (becoming a vassal of Assyria)
- v. 4a<sub>1</sub>    *King of Assyria*
- v. 4a<sub>2</sub>    Hoshea (violation of loyalty to the Assyrian king)
- v. 4b     *King of Assyria*
- v. 5       *King of Assyria*
- v. 6       *King of Assyria*

Fig. 2: Acting characters in 2Kgs 17:3–6. Prepared by the author.

The exposure of the conspiracy resulted in Hoshea's arrest, the details of which remain vague. Neither battle nor siege are mentioned in v. 4b. Instead,

<sup>21</sup> Cf. the discussion of the various suggestions in Bernd U. Schipper, "Wer war 'Sô', König von Ägypten?" *BN* 92 (1998): 71–84.

<sup>22</sup> Even Yamani of Ashdod sought Egyptian support for his anti-Assyrian activities (cf. Morkot in this volume, p. 131). Therefore the narrated world of the text can demand a certain degree of historical plausibility, but it is based on a more general pattern in Syro-Palestinian political affairs, whose only individual detail, the name of the pharaoh, remains obscure. Cf. the chapter of Robert Morkot in this volume.

<sup>23</sup> If Hoshea's rebellion is called a coup d'état (*qæšær*), the negative qualification of the term is reasonable from the perspective of the Assyrian overlord. However, a religious disqualification of the last king of Israel is not necessarily implied (see above, note 11).

the personal consequences of the king are pointed out. He is captured by the Assyrians (‘šr) and thrown into prison (‘sr + *bêt kælæ*).<sup>24</sup> The root ‘sr (“to bind, to tie”) appears again later with the Judean kings Jehoahaz and Zedekiah, both of whom are led into captivity to Egypt and Babylon respectively (cf. 2Kgs 23:33; 25:7). If this was the case for Hoshea, as well, then his fate would symbolically point to that of Israel (cf. v. 6), but this is not explicitly said. The narrator is rather silent concerning the future wellbeing of the last king of Israel – he is captured and arrested, but still alive. In contrast to Necho II and Nebuchadnezzar II (cf. 2Kgs 23:34; 24:17), Shalmaneser V did not install a new king in Samaria. This implies that Hoshea is the last king of Israel known by the narrator, it does not imply, however, that his reign necessarily ended with his capture.<sup>25</sup>

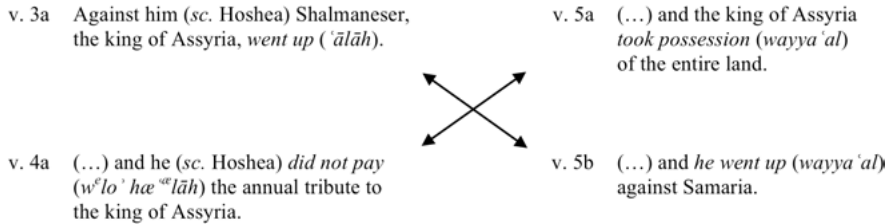
With the comment concerning the capture of Hoshea, the narrative comes to a relative end, as nothing else is said about the fate of the king, also the antagonism between Hoshea and the Assyrian king, which has dominated the narrative plot so far, comes to an end (cf. Fig. 2). But the question remains what the consequences might be for the people of Israel. Hence, the silence concerning a successor to the Samarian throne points forward to the portrayal of the siege and capture of the city in vv. 5–6.<sup>26</sup> The consecutive tempora in v. 5 drive the plot forward. After Hoshea’s capture, the king of Assyria, still identifiable as Shalmaneser V according to the rhetorical outline of the text, claimed the remaining state of Samaria (v. 5a) and then moved against the capital city itself, which he besieged for three years (v. 5b). The verb *‘ālāh* (Fig. 3), which functions as a keyword in vv. 3–5 (cf. vv. 3a, 4a, and 5a.b), evokes the threatening presence of the Assyrian king, which resulted in Hoshea’s surrender earlier (cf. v. 3a), with-

**24** Due to the course of events and according to the spatial references in the narrative plot the capture of Hoshea must have taken place outside the Samarian territory (cf. v. 5a). This has led to the assumption that the king had been summoned to Shalmaneser V and afterwards arrested (cf. Jehoahaz in 2Kgs 23:33). The meaning of the root ‘šr in the G-stem “to hold back” does not exclude this interpretation. The sequence of actions described by ‘šr and ‘sr (+ *bêt kælæ*’, cf. Judg 16:21, 25) is in accordance with the narrative plot: first Shalmaneser V arrested Hoshea before he sent him to jail.

**25** This can be seen e.g. in the short account on Jehoiachin’s release in 2Kgs 25:27–30 dating the event according to the regnal years of the imprisoned king (cf. v. 27). A similar chronological system is used in the Book of Ezekiel; cf. Ernst Kutsch, *Die chronologischen Daten des Ezechielbuches* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag / Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985).

**26** Hence, the literary analysis of the narrative plot in 2Kgs 17:3–6 confirms our earlier assumption that vv. 3–4 are neither taken from an independent textual source nor have they been added to the passage by a later editor (see above, notes 8–9).

out conflating both events into one.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, it points toward Hoshea's refusal to pay tribute in v. 4a: because he withheld his annual payment to the Assyrian king, the Great King marched to Samaria, which is named as the explicit target of the Assyrian advance here for the first time.<sup>28</sup>



**Fig. 3:** The verb '*ālāh* as keyword in 2Kgs 17:3–5. Prepared by the author.

The consecutive chain of events in the middle section, which establishes a coherent structure through the repetition of the root '*lh*, arrives at its conclusion with the comment about the three-year siege of Samaria in v. 5b without reaching the end of the story. The actual beginning of the siege is not shared by the narrator, it is only possible to extrapolate it retrospectively by means of the temporal adverbial phrase “in the 9<sup>th</sup> year of Hoshea” at the beginning of v. 6 as it was done by a later editor in 2Kgs 18:9–12 synchronizing 2Kgs 17:5–6 with the reign of the Judean king Hezekiah. The much-discussed issue of whether it is plausible that Samaria was able to resist the siege of the Assyrian troops for three years does not seem to concern the narrator. He reckons that Hoshea, even while imprisoned, remains the legitimate king of Israel until its political

<sup>27</sup> The mention of the Assyrian king campaigning against Samaria in v. 5a is not a literary doublet to the events mentioned in v. 3a, because in the first instance, Shalmaneser V subdued Hoshea and made him a vassal paying an annual tribute, while in the second, Samaria has been besieged and finally captured and the people sent to exile. There is also no reason to assume a later origin for the expression *b'kāl hā'āræš* in v. 5a due to its absence in the parallel version of 2Kgs 18:9 as proposed by Immanuel Benzinger, *Die Bücher der Könige* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Mohr Siebeck, 1899), 173. The editor of 2Kgs 18:9–12 seems, instead, to have compiled both phrases from 2Kgs 17:3a and 5a into one. Due to his historiographic interest contrasting Hoshea with Hezekiah, he had to eliminate the first episode of his source text which mentions the last king of Israel paying tribute to the Assyrian overlord in order to rescue Samaria from becoming an Assyrian province as did Hezekiah in 2Kgs 18:13–16 (see above note 9).

<sup>28</sup> The root '*ālāh* occurs twice, in v. 5 and in vv. 3–4. Is this a mere coincidence? However, the distribution of the root throughout the narrative shows a distinctive literary pattern (a–b–b'–a') according to which the conquest of the land (v. 5a) corresponds to the withholding of the annual tribute by Hoshea (v. 4a, cf. also the play on words with the roots *šwb* and *yšb* in vv. 3b and 6b).

sovereignty ended. The point at which this happened has already been mentioned in the regnal summary in v. 1b.

The reference to the 9<sup>th</sup> year of Hoshea at the beginning of v. 6 signals, on the one hand, the end of the siege of Samaria, and marks, on the other, a narrative break. It thus reveals the capture of the city and the deportation of its inhabitants as the pragmatic climax of the episode and connects the narrative arc back to the dates of Hoshea's reign in the introductory formula. The capture of the city, expressed with the verb *lākad* ("to catch, to capture"), does not necessarily imply its destruction but, instead, draws a parallel to the fate of its king.<sup>29</sup> The conquest of Samaria and the exile of its people are attributed to the same king that is identified at the beginning of the section as Shalmaneser V (cf. 2Kgs 18:9–11). He resettled the deportees in central Assyria and in the Northeastern border areas (v. 6b).<sup>30</sup> The expression *wayyošəb 'otām* in v. 6b phonetically assonates the notice of Hoshea paying tribute to the Assyrian king in v. 3b (*wayyā-šəb lô minhāh*). Instead of paying tribute, Israel itself is now brought to Assyria. The second confrontation with the Assyrians ended badly for Israel with the loss

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**29** The root *lākad* with a personal object has the meaning "to catch," either humans (especially prisoners of war) or animals; with cities or territories as object it means "to take possession of, to conquer" (cf. Akkadian *kašādu*). It always implies violence and a loss of freedom, but not necessarily physical destruction; cf. Heinrich Groß, "לָכַד *lākad*," *ThWAT* 4 (1984): 573–76. Hence, on a literary level, the conquest of the city corresponds to the fate of its last king. In a historical perspective, however, the literary depiction of the events coincides with the archaeological record in *Sebaštye* (Samaria), where no signs of a massive destruction of the city in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC have been found; cf. Ron E. Tappy, *The Archaeology of Israelite Samaria*, vol. 2: *The Eighth Century BCE* (Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 2001), 558–75.

**30** The reference to the cities of the Medes may indicate that the deportations mentioned in v. 6b did not happen before the reign of Sargon II, who in 716 BC subdued the Eastern border region of the Assyrian empire and incorporated it into the Assyrian provincial system (cf. the chapter by Karen Radner in the present volume). However, the massive deportations carried out by the Assyrian kings over a long period led to an ongoing exchange of people from all parts of the Assyrian empire. Thus the deportation of the Samaritans (as well as the resettlement of foreign people into the territory of Samaria, cf. 2Kgs 17:24) is not to be imagined as a single event, but has taken place over a period of time. It may well have started under the reign of Shalmaneser V and continued far into the time of Sargon II; cf. Bustenay Oded, *Mass Deportations and Deportees in the Neo Assyrian Empire* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1979) and the chapter of Karen Radner in this volume. In 2Kgs 17:6 the continuing process of deportations has been reorganized in a single narrative plot and ascribed to "the King of Assyria". Whether the narrator had any particular knowledge about the settlement places of the deportees from Samaria (or their heirs) remains uncertain. There are references in the cuneiform sources to peoples possibly related to the deportees from Samaria in the regions mentioned in the biblical account until the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC (cf. Becking, *Fall*, 61–93, and the chapter by Karen Radner in the present volume).

of political sovereignty and deportation of its people into a foreign country. The people finally share the same fate as their last king.

### 3 Who Conquered Samaria?

As mentioned at the beginning, the cuneiform sources contain contrasting information concerning the events leading up to the downfall of Samaria. Aside from the widely discussed alternatives of whether the capture of the city can be attributed to Shalmaneser V or Sargon II, there are further questions that arise when the biblical narrative in 2Kgs 17:3–6 is taken into consideration. If Shalmaneser V was responsible for the conquest of Samaria, at which point during his five-year reign did this take place? Was the capture of the city preceded by a three-year siege? Was the city handed over (by Hoshea) or was it taken by force? Was Samaria already made into an Assyrian province and the people deported under Shalmaneser V or did it all happen under Sargon II? Did Sargon II already overthrow Samaria in his accession year or not before his second *palû*? The list goes on, and the manifold problems cannot be discussed here in detail.<sup>31</sup> The following observations will merely give a brief sketch of what contribution the presentation of the events in 2Kgs 17:1–6, being aware of the narrative pragmatic of the passage, is able to bring to bear on the discussion concerning the historical circumstances of the conquest of Samaria as well as which (narrow) limits are hidden in such an endeavor. It is, however, not my primary interest to establish the historical validity of the biblical account, but to point to the various historical propositions, upon which its interpretations generally depend.

#### 3.1 The Chronology

The first set of problems to address is about the chronology of events. Aside from the contradictory information contained in the synchronistic framework of the Book of Kings, which later have been reworked in the process of textual transmission,<sup>32</sup> we do not have any closer knowledge about the regnal dates of the

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. the discussion in the chapters by Eckart Frahm, Norma Franklin, Karen Radner and Ron Tappy in the present volume.

<sup>32</sup> E.g., in the divergent textforms of the Septuagint the reigning years of the earlier kings Menahem, Pekahia, and Pekah have been (with variations) enlarged to fit the given synchronisms – a practice still in use in modern scholarship.

last king of Israel. Therefore it is nearly impossible to achieve a reliable set of data that can bear the weight of historical scrutiny. This is evident for the contradictory dates regarding the beginning of Hoshea's reign (cf. 2Kgs 15:30 with 17:1) and concerns just as much the synchronism between the downfall of Samaria and the reign of Hezekiah (cf. 2Kgs 18:1 with 18:9, 11), which stands in contradiction to the date of the third military campaign of Sennacherib, which took place in the year 701 BC, in the 14<sup>th</sup> year of Hezekiah (cf. 2Kgs 18:13).<sup>33</sup> However, the nine-year reign of Hoshea is often seen as historically reliable information, which has been used to firmly establish the date of the downfall of Samaria.<sup>34</sup> But when did it start? To more closely determine the date of Hoshea's accession to the throne, it is necessary to take a closer look at the royal inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III.<sup>35</sup>

In his various summary inscriptions the Assyrian king mentions his submission of Israel, the installation of Hoshea as a vassal king, and the collection of tributary payments.<sup>36</sup> Because the summary inscriptions do not follow a chronological order, the date of these events can only be determined by a comparison with the Eponym Chronicle, which mentions for Tiglath-pileser III a military campaign against Damascus in the year 733/32 and 732/31 BC respectively, which most likely are related to the anti-Assyrian alliance also mentioned in 2Kgs 16:5–9.<sup>37</sup> It is often assumed that Samaria was already subdued during the first campaign of Tiglath-pileser III in the year 733/32 BC.<sup>38</sup> It is not clear, however, whether Hoshea's revolt, according to 2Kgs 15:30, occurred during

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**33** Becking, *Fall*, 53–54, tried to harmonize both dates by ascribing the date in 2Kgs 18:13 to a military campaign of Sargon II to Palestine in the year 715 BC and assuming it was later erroneously connected with Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem.

**34** Assuming the nine-year reign of Hoshea is certain, either the date of Hoshea's accession year or the date of the fall of Samaria vary in the scholarly debate; cf. Timm, "Eroberung," 115 note 49. On the other hand, some scholars have supposed a longer reign for the last king of Israel based on the cuneiform sources; cf. Rudolf Kittel, *Die Bücher der Könige* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1900), 273–74 and Albrecht Šanda, *Die Bücher der Könige*, vol. 2: *Das zweite Buch der Könige* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1912), 211–12.

**35** Cf. the latest edition of the texts by Hayim Tadmor and Shigeo Yamada, *The Royal Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III. (744–727 BC) and Shalmaneser V. (726–722 BC), Kings of Assyria* (Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011).

**36** Cf. Weippert, *Textbuch*, 295, and Tadmor and Yamada, *Inscriptions*, 105–106, 112, 131–32.

**37** Cf. Weippert, *Textbuch*, 288. Tiglath-pileser III had already campaigned in Palestine in the year 734/33 BC in order to subdue a rebellion of the Philistine coastal cities and to secure the border to Egypt.

**38** Or did Israel lose parts of its territory already during Tiglath-pileser's campaign against Gaza in the year 734/33 BC? According to the archaeological record it seems that the coastal strip was no longer under Israelite control in the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC.

this conflict or followed shortly thereafter.<sup>39</sup> Tiglath-pileser III mentions that Hoshea paid his tribute in the South-Babylonian city of Sarrabānu.<sup>40</sup> Since the Assyrian king, according to the Eponym Chronicle, was engaged in a military campaign in this region in the year 731/30 BC, it would be obvious to connect the payment of tribute with these events.<sup>41</sup> If this tribute was Hoshea's first payment to the Assyrian suzerain, as is usually presumed, it would follow that the first year of Hoshea's reign was in the year 732/31 BC (or 731/30 BC respectively).<sup>42</sup>

This dating can be connected to the notice of the Babylonian Chronicle, which attributes the conquest of Samaria to Shalmaneser V (cf. 2Kgs 17:3–6), who reigned between 727 and 722 BC. An even more exact dating of the event, however, cannot be garnered from the text of the Babylonian Chronicle. The assumption that Shalmaneser V took possession of Samaria only at the end of his reign finds its basis on a misunderstanding of the compositional structure of the Chronicle.<sup>43</sup> Presupposing Hoshea's accession to the throne in Samaria in the

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**39** The wording of the Summary Inscription no. 13, lines 17–18, indicates that Pekah was murdered only after Tiglath-pileser III had annexed the Galilean and Transjordan territories of Israel (cf. Tadmor and Yamada, *Inscriptions*, 112) – perhaps to prevent any attempt to further support the former ally Rezin, king of Damascus, who withstood the Assyrian attack in 733/32 BC.

**40** Summary Inscription no. 9, lines r. 10–11 (cf. Weippert, *Textbuch*, 295, and Tadmor and Yamada, *Inscriptions*, 132).

**41** Cf. Rykle Borger and Hayim Tadmor, “Zwei Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft aufgrund der Inschriften Tiglatpilesers III.,” *ZAW* 94 (1982): 244–51, 244–49. The Babylonian Chronicle, however, mentions that Tiglath-pileser III did not defeat Nabû-mukin-zeri until the year 729/28 BC, when he became king of Babylon himself (cf. column I, lines 19–23). Therefore Hoshea could have paid his tribute to the Assyrian king in Sarrabānu at this later date as well; cf. Gaß, *Strudel*, 3–4. However, a date of Hoshea's coup years after Tiglath-pileser III had reorganized the political landscape of Syro-Palestine seems less probable.

**42** The list of Western tributaries in the Summary Inscription of Tiglath-pileser III no. 7, r. 7–13 (cf. Weippert, *Textbuch*, 289–90), probably composed in the year 729/28 BC, fails to mention Samaria and Damascus, indicating that it may represent the political situation of the year 733/32 BC, when both rebelled against the Assyrian dominion; cf. Hayim Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III. King of Assyria: Critical Edition, with Introductions, Translations and Commentary* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1994), 268. The fragmentary character of the inscription, however, does allow different interpretations.

**43** Cf. Becking, *Fall*, 24. – The Eponym Chronicle for Shalmaneser V is heavily damaged. In his 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> year the king undertook military campaigns, but the names of his targets are not preserved. In his first regnal year (726/25 BC) he stayed in Assyria; cf. Alan R. Millard, *The Eponyms of the Assyrian Empire 910–612 BC* (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1994), 59. The entry for his last year is too damaged to draw further conclusions. However, there are other hints to military activities carried out by Shalmaneser V in Southern Syria and Babylonia respectively, but their dating remains uncertain; cf. Timm, “Eroberung,” 110–11. What can be

year 732/31 BC along with the information concerning his nine-year reign, a relative precise point in time for the conquest of Samaria by Shalmaneser V becomes apparent, which is compatible with the dates in the Babylonian Chronicle.<sup>44</sup> If instead, Sargon II has a right to his claim that he conquered Samaria in his accession year (i.e., 722/21 BC), then Hoshea could not have come into power before the year 730/29 BC, or else the reign of the last king of Israel must be calculated independent from the biblical chronology.

## 3.2 The Course of Events

What is the situation concerning the information the sources provide on the sequence of events? In the Babylonian Chronicle, it is only mentioned that Shalmaneser V “broke” Samaria (*ḥepû*). However, the Akkadian verb *ḥepû* is used in other passages of the Babylonian Chronicle as an expression indicating the conquest of cities and regions. For this reason, one can translate it “to conquer” or “to capture” without necessarily implying a violent destruction.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, Sargon II presents the conquest of Samaria in a much more detailed manner: he fought against its people and conquered (*kašādu*) the city, deported its inhabitants, resettled deportees from other conquered areas, installed a provincial governor, and established tributes and taxes from the people. All of this sup-

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said for sure is that Shalmaneser V did not capture Samaria earlier than his second regnal year (725/24 BC).

**44** It is likely that Hoshea (together with other Western vassal states) took advantage of the political turmoil in the Assyrian homeland following Shalmaneser’s V accession to the throne which forced the king to stay at home in his first regnal year (see above note 43). Did the king first subdue the revolt in Southern Babylonia, mentioned in an Aramaean letter from the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC (cf. KAI, no. 233, line 15), before he turned to the West?

**45** Cf. Weippert, *Textbuch*, 296–97. However, Timm, “Eroberung,” 107–108, concluded from a comparison of the account concerning the capture of the cities of Ḥarratum and Ḥirimma by Sennacherib in the Babylonian Chronicle (cf. column II, lines 24–25) with the parallel account in the Annals of the king (cf. column I, lines 54–63), that “*ḥepû* bedeutet im übertragenen Gebrauch der babylonischen Chronik grausamste Bestrafung der Gegner, Ablieferung schweren Tributs und administrative Neuordnung des eroberten Gebietes”; cf. also Becking, *Fall*, 24–25. But a closer analysis of the passage reveals that both cities have been treated by Sennacherib in quite different ways: regarding Ḥarratum, it is only said that the city had to pay heavy tribute. In the case of Ḥirimma, a violent destruction of the city, mutilation of the dead bodies of the enemies, and an administrative reorganization of its territory is mentioned. Both events have been summarized in the Babylonian Chronicle, with the term *ḥepû* used here in a more general sense of “to break (someone’s resistance), to subdue”; cf. Na’aman, “Background,” 211.



posedly occurred in the year of the king's accession to the throne according to the Annals of Sargon II from Dūr-Šarrukēn/Ḫorsābād.<sup>46</sup>

The annals are dated, however, from later in the reign of the king.<sup>47</sup> The earlier inscriptions of Sargon II are not (yet) aware of these events and only mention Samaria in the context of the revolt of Ilu-bi'di of Hamath, which Sargon II suppressed in the second year of his reign (i. e., 720/19 BC).<sup>48</sup> The literary form of the portrayal in the annals follows already existing patterns and is linked to events that occurred over a period of time during the reign of Sargon II.<sup>49</sup> This could indicate that the author(s) of the royal annals freely constructed the campaign of Sargon II against Samaria in the accession year of the king, drawing on older material and imitating the typical style of Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions. This may have been done to conceal the fact that Sargon II was not capable of any military undertakings due to the political turmoil in the wake of his claiming the throne.<sup>50</sup> Assuming this is correct, it would support the assertion of the Babylonian Chronicle that the conquest of Samaria occurred at the hand of Shalmaneser V.

The biblical tradition mentions a three-year siege, or more aptly stated, a blockade of Samaria, about which the Assyrian sources remain silent.<sup>51</sup> It also

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**46** Cf. the Annals of Sargon II, lines 10–17. The fragmentary text of the annals is mostly restored according to the parallel account in the Prism Inscription of Sargon II from Kalḫu/Nimrud, column IV, lines 25–41; cf. Andreas Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad* (Göttingen: Cuvullier, 1994, 87–88). The latter, however, does not allow a precise dating of the events. A shorter version of the story is preserved in the Summary Inscription of Sargon II from Dūr-Šarrukēn/Ḫorsābād, lines 23–25; cf. Weippert, *Textbuch*, 302.

**47** The annals of Sargon II from Dūr-Šarrukēn/Ḫorsābād were not composed before his 15<sup>th</sup> *palū* (cf. Timm, “Eroberung,” 115), the Prism-Inschrift from Kalḫu/Nimrud dates from around the same time or shortly thereafter (see above note 3).

**48** Cf. the Assur Charter of Sargon II, lines 16–28, probably written shortly after the events, and the recently discovered Tell Tayinat Stele of Sargon II; cf. Jacob Lauinger and Stephen Batiuk, “A Stele of Sargon II. at Tell Tayinat”, *ZA* 105 (2015): 54–68, and the chapter by Eckart Frahm in the present volume.

**49** Here a remarkable parallel to the biblical narrative in 2Kgs 17:3–6 can be noted, where a similar literary technique is to be observed; cf. already the remarks by John Gray, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1977; third edition), 60–62.

**50** Cf. the chapter by Eckart Frahm in the present volume. – The account in the annals that the military campaign against Samaria had already occurred in the accession year of Sargon II raises some logistical problems as well, because there are only a few weeks left between his accession to the throne on the 12<sup>th</sup> of Ṭebēt (cf. Babylonian Chronicle, column I, line 31) and the beginning of his first regnal year on the 1<sup>st</sup> of Nisān. Additionally the turmoil following the death of Shalmaneser V probably made it necessary for the king to stay at home.

**51** The fragmentary text of the Eponym Chronicle for Shalmaneser V does not completely rule out a three-year siege of Samaria as mentioned in 2Kgs 17:5–6, but this would leave very little

appears unlikely that the city managed to muster the strength to resist the siege for a considerable time even after the capture of Hoshea.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, one must reckon that the events as reported in 2Kgs 17:3–6 are ordered in a single continuous narrative plot even though historically they most likely occurred over a much longer period of time. This can be seen from the following observations: first the regions, in which the Israelites, according to 2Kgs 17:6b, are supposed to have been resettled, could only have been firmly incorporated in part into the Assyrian provincial system under Sargon II,<sup>53</sup> and second, considering the literary structure of the chapter, the resettlement of foreign deportees in the territory of Samaria (cf. 2Kgs 17:24) is ascribed to the same king of Assyria, who had conquered Israel and sent the people into exile and who the cuneiform sources identify as Sargon II.<sup>54</sup> Therefore the motif of the three-year siege of the city of Samaria is to be understood primarily as a narrative figure to develop the plot establishing a coherent literary thread. This, however, would be historically correct in that the procedure of transforming conquered regions into an Assyrian province, along with an expansive resettlement of the inhabitants, would require more time than would have been possible at the hand of Shalmaneser V alone, as the inscriptions of Sargon II confirm. A (short-lived) blockade of Samaria by

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time for the other military campaigns the king had undertaken during his reign (see above note 44). However, the account from Menander mentioned by Josephus (cf. Ant. IX,13,2) in which Shalmaneser V besieged Tyros for five years is not to be connected to the fall of Samaria, but most probably belongs to another time; cf. Ariel M. Bagg, *Die Assyrer und das Westland: Studien zur historischen Geographie und Herrschaftspraxis in der Levante im 1. Jt. v.u.Z.* (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 228–29. – In the Summary Inscription of Sargon II from Dūr-Šarrukēn/Ḫorsābād the king claims that he laid siege (*lemû*) against Samaria and conquered (*kašādu*) the city (cf. line 23), but this is the only passage in the royal inscriptions of Sargon II which mentions a siege of Samaria. Thus a three-year blockade would be in contrast to the reports of the event in the king's annals and in his Prism-Inscription from Kalḫu/Nimrud dating from around the same time. The contrary argument by M. Christine Tetley, "The Date of Samaria's Fall as a Reason for Rejecting the Hypothesis of Two Conquests," *CBQ* 64 (2002): 59–77, is not convincing.

**52** Therefore J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Louisville KT: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006; second edition), 386–87, assumed that after Hoshea has been captured he was followed by another king on the throne in Samaria, whose name is not known to us anymore, but there is no evidence in the sources to foster their argument; cf. Gaß, *Strudel*, 14 note 52.

**53** See above note 30.

**54** Cf. the reference to some Arabic tribes Sargon II has resettled in Samaria in his Cylinder-Inscription from Dūr-Šarrukēn/Ḫorsābād. The episode is dated in the annals of the king to his 7<sup>th</sup> *palû* (715 BC), cf. Weippert, *Textbuch*, 305–306. Of course, this does not rule out the possibility that other deportees had been resettled in Samaria at an earlier time starting with the reign of Shalmaneser V.

Shalmaneser V might have happened, a three-year siege of the city, however, is historically less plausible.<sup>55</sup> Hence, the “king-less” resistance of Samaria seems to be a literary construct that does not need any historical explanation.

The same is true regarding the notice that Hoshea first became an Assyrian vassal under Shalmaneser V, at a time of his reign not precisely determined (cf. 2Kgs 17:3). According to the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, Hoshea was from the beginning of his reign under Assyrian domination. For this reason, the events mentioned in v. 3 are often connected to a revolt of some vassal states in Southern Syria, which used the turmoil occurring in Assyria after the accession of Shalmaneser V as an occasion to throw off the Assyrian yoke.<sup>56</sup> The assumption that a group of Syro-Palestinian petty states took advantage of the political unrest in Assyria in order to build an anti-Assyrian coalition possesses a certain amount of plausibility.<sup>57</sup> This, however, serves more likely as the background for the rebellion, which led to the downfall of Samaria (cf. 2Kgs 17:4–6). The idea that Shalmaneser V mounted a second campaign against Samaria in such a short reign is less likely. Moreover, it remains unclear what reason there might have been for Hoshea (and his allies) to stage such a revolt later in the reign of the Assyrian king. If one takes into account that the narrator of the Book of Kings is silent about the vassal status of Hoshea under Tiglath-pileser III (cf. 2Kgs 15:30), and that 2Kgs 17:3 represents the narrative exposition for the report on the downfall of Samaria, then it seems to be futile to search for any historical cause for the first advance of Shalmaneser V against Hoshea.<sup>58</sup>

Hoshea’s insurgency against the Assyrian rule might be connected with a broader revolt of some Syro-Palestinian vassal states along with Egyptian support, about which little more is known, aside from the comment in 2Kgs

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55 Cf. Hermann Michael Niemann, “Royal Samaria – Capital or Residence? or: The Foundation of the City of Samaria by Sargon II,” in id., *History of Ancient Israel, Archaeology, and Bible: Collected Essays*, ed. Meik Gerhards (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2015): 295–315, 305–307.

56 Cf. the discussion in Na’aman, “Background,” 213–16, and Becking, *Fall*, 50–51.

57 However, this is not to be argued due to the reference from Menander in Josephus (see above note 51), but due to the fact that Shalmaneser V, according to the Eponym Chronicle, stayed at home in his first regnal year; cf. Jean-Jacques Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, trans. Benjamin R. Foster (Atlanta GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 174. It can be reasoned that the struggle with his political adversaries in Assyria (and Babylonia) encouraged the Western vassal states to throw off the Assyrian yoke, but no further information has been preserved on the course of events in Assyria after Shalmaneser V acceded to the throne.

58 Cf. Gershon Galil, “The Last Years of the Kingdom of Israel and the Fall of Samaria,” *CBQ* 57 (1995): 52–56, 62–63.

17:4a.<sup>59</sup> The identity of the Egyptian pharaoh, whose name (or title?) is *Sô* in the biblical account, is unresolved.<sup>60</sup> In addition, it remains questionable whether the narrator had any closer knowledge about the political situation in that time, or whether his narrative is mandatory to a common historical pattern. The historical plausibility of an alliance with Egypt certainly cannot be denied. Such an endeavor, however, would have not likely been met with much success considering the unstable political conditions along with competing claims to power in Egypt at that time.<sup>61</sup>

## 4 In Conclusion

No matter how one wants to judge the details, each historical query of the events leading to the downfall of Samaria must take into consideration that the narrative in 2Kgs 17:3–6 pursues primarily an historiographic interest, which subsequently incorporates the individual narrative elements into the story. This makes an historical analysis palpably difficult, even when dispensing with the task of verifying its historical value. In this case, it leads to the result that the basic information concerning the dates in the narrative can be correlated with the cuneiform reports. The narrative does possess a general historical plausibility, but it does not allow a closer historical reconstruction of the course of events, which underlies many historicizing interpretations. Neither is the biblical account in 2Kgs 17:3–6 able to say what exactly happened in “the last days of the kings of Israel,” nor should an historical reconstruction of the events be made the ultimate measure of the interpretation of the text. The ‘biblical’ answer to the question “Who conquered Samaria?” is just as unambiguous as it is ambiguous: “the King of Assyria”.

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59 Cf. Herbert Donner, *Geschichte Israels und seiner Nachbarn in Grundzügen*, vol. 2: *Von der Königszeit bis zu Alexander dem Großen: Mit einem Ausblick auf die Geschichte des Judentums bis Bar Kochba* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995; second edition), 345. Na’aman, “Background,” 217–19, connects the account with an anti-Assyrian revolt following the accession of Sargon II to the throne subdued by the king in the year 720/19 BC. Thus he argues in favor of Sargon II as the Assyrian king, who conquered Samaria, but his proposal raises more questions than it can answer.

60 Cf. the discussion in Na’aman, “Background,” 216–17, and Schipper, “Sô’.”

61 Cf. Donner, *Königszeit*, 344–45.