

Why Did the Northern Kingdom Fall According to 2 Kings 15?

The fall of Samaria and consequently the end of the Northern Kingdom has become the object of several scholarly investigations. Most scholars have focused on the reconstruction of the events, i.e. on political and social history ¹. The biblical books describe the fall of the Northern Kingdom from different angles presenting it in accordance with the cultural views and theological beliefs of biblical authors and redactors. In particular, prophets such as Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah offer various sociological and theological reasons why the Northern Kingdom collapsed. 1–2 Kings play a special role among the biblical books dealing with the fall of the Northern Kingdom. 2 Kings 17 and 18,9-12 not only describe basic events in their characteristic annalistic style (17,3-6.23-24; 18,9-11) but also offer a theological reflection that by means of the Deuteronomistic theologies explains the reasons for the fall of the Northern Kingdom (17,7-22; 18,12). There are, however, few scholarly writings dedicated to 2 Kings 15 that would aim at understanding the dynamics latent in the society of the Northern Kingdom, which, I believe, ultimately led to its fall ².

¹ B. BECKING, *The Fall of Samaria*. An Historical and Archaeological Summary (Leiden 1992) 21-104; G. GALIL, "The Last Years of the Kingdom of Israel and the Fall of Samaria", *CBQ* 57 (1995) 52-64; J.L. HAYES – J.K. KUAN, "The Final Years of Samaria (730-720 BC)", *Bib* 72 (1991) 153-181; B.E. KELLE, "Hoshea, Sargon, and the Final Destruction of Samaria: A Response to M. Christine Tetley with a View toward Method", *JSOT* 17 (2003) 226-244; N. NA'AMAN, "The Historical Background to the Conquest of Samaria (720 BC)", *Bib* 71 (1990) 206-225; M.C. TETLEY, "The Date of Samaria's Fall as a Reason for Rejecting the Hypothesis of Two Conquests", *CBQ* 64 (2002) 59-77; K.L. YOUNGER, "The Fall of Samaria in Light of Recent Research", *CBQ* 61 (1999) 461-482.

² Besides the major commentaries the following studies treat this chapter from different angles: F. CLANCY, "Jotham and Shallum: a Redactor's Choice", *JSOT* 26 (2012) 289-302; M. COGAN – H. TADMOR, "Ahaz and Tiglath-pileser in the Book of Kings: Historiographic Considerations", *Bib* 60 (1979) 491-508; A. FAUST, "The Shephelah in the Iron Age: A New Look on the Settlement of Judah", *PEQ* 145 (2013) 203-219; M. HARAN, "The Rise

2 Kings 15 was composed after the events had taken place, and therefore it contains a post-event reflection heavily marked by the interpretative patterns of later redactors and editors. Moreover, this reflection is disguised in the literary cloak of that time. Therefore the goal of the following study is to get behind the rhetoric of 2 Kings 15 and to summarize the elements which I believe caused the downfall of the Northern Kingdom. Lastly I will contextualize these results comparing them with some examples taken from the ancient Near East.

I. *Coups d'état* in 2 Kings 15

The following paragraphs focus on a fixed formula the final redactors employed to describe *coups d'état* that ravaged the Northern Kingdom. Analyzing this formula and other dynasty changes in the Northern Kingdom we can point to the first reason indicated in 2 Kings 15 for the fall of the Northern Kingdom — its political instability.

The literary motif that permeates 2 Kings 15 is *coup d'état*: Shallum organized a conspiracy against Zechariah (15,10), Menahem organized a revolt against Shallum (15,14), then Pekah conspired against Pekahiah (15,25), and finally Hosea conspired against Pekah (15,30). It may be noticed that scribes repeated a stereotyped formula, i.e. the sequence of verbs נכב, מוֹת, and מִלֶּךְ, in order to describe the *coups d'état*. In three cases the formula is preceded by variants of the verb קָשַׁר, whereas in the case of Menahem the formula is preceded by the verbs עלה followed by בוא³. The investigation into this “fixed” formula⁴ shows that the formula,

and Decline of the Empire of Jeroboam ben Joash”, *VT* 17 (1967) 266-297; J. TINO “Nelegitimná náboženská prax biblického Izraela versus inšpirácia”, *Izraelský monoteizmus v kontexte dejín Starovekého blízkeho východu* (eds. M. KARDIS – D. SLIVKA) (Prešov 2008) 84-85.

³ For the meaning of this change and the discussion of the formula see P. DUBOVSKÝ, “Menahem’s Reign before the Assyrian Invasion (2 Kings 15:14-16)”, *Literature as Politics, Politics as Literature* (eds. D.S. VANDERHOOF – A. WINITZER) (Winona Lake, IN 2013) 29-45.

⁴ G.M. TUCKER, *Form Criticism of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia, PA 1971) 14.

even though maintaining the three verbs in *wayyiqtol*, is quite flexible and other details can be added to it (see below).

Keeping in mind the flexibility of this formula we can add two other *coups d'état* that took place in the Northern Kingdom: the conspiracy of Baasha against Nadab (1 Kgs 15,27-28) and the conspiracy of Zimri against Elah (1 Kgs 16,9-10). Besides these six *coups d'état* two other changes of dynasties should be mentioned to complete the picture of the dynastic succession in the Northern Kingdom: the ascent of Omri and the conspiracy of Jehu (2 Kings 9–10). The former describes the moments following immediately after Zimri's *coup d'état* (1 Kgs 16,15-22)⁵. The usurper Zimri, probably because he was unable to face Philistine military pressure, lost the support of the people who proclaimed king Omri commander of the army⁶. Omri besieged Tirzah, and Zimri, finding himself locked in the keep of Tirzah, burnt himself to death. After Zimri's death the kingdom was split between Tibni and Omri. The people following Omri overcame the people of Tibni and we learn that Tibni died⁷. Omri being already proclaimed king became the founder of a new dynasty. Even though Omri's ascension to the throne bears several signs of a *coup d'état*, there are several reasons to conclude that the ancient scribes did not classify it as a *coup d'état*. First, Omri was made king by the people (1 Kgs 16,16). Contrary to the fixed formula the verb in this case is in *hiphil* plural וַיִּמְלֹכוּ and it is not followed by a prepositional phrase as in other cases of the *coup d'état* וַיִּמְלֹךְ PN תַּחֲתָיו. Second, his attack on Zimri's seat Tirzah took place after Omri became king and therefore could be considered as one of the "heroic deeds" of the new king. Third, the description of the reign of his rival Tibni contains no regnal résumé⁸ to introduce and to conclude the narrative on Tibni. I see the omission of both regnal résumés as a sign that the reader should not consider the short reign of Tibni to be the start of a new

⁵ M. COGAN, *1 Kings*. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (AB 10; New York 2001) 418.

⁶ A.F. RAINEY – J. UZZIEL, *The Sacred Bridge*. Carta's Atlas of the Biblical World (Jerusalem 2006) 195-199.

⁷ Tibni's death is described as "he died", which could also mean by a natural death.

⁸ B.O. LONG, *1 Kings*. With an Introduction to Historical Literature (FOTL 9; Grand Rapids, MI 1984) 259.

dynasty⁹. Finally, it was not Omri but the people of Israel who eliminated Tibni's followers. These reasons suggest that Omri's ascension to the throne should not be understood as a *coup d'état*. For this reason, Tibni is also not listed in the following table, and his removal from the throne is not considered a dynastic change.

The last dynastic change to be evaluated is Jehu's revolt and his extermination of Ahab's dynasty (2 Kings 9–10)¹⁰. Neither in this case can we speak about the stereotyped formula of a *coup d'état*. The narrative starts with the anointing of Jehu, and therefore the extermination of Ahab's dynasty can be considered one of the "heroic deeds" of a new king as in the case of Omri. However, the narrative contains several elements that prompt an attentive reader to notice the literary motif of *coup d'état*. After an introduction describing how the officers proclaimed Jehu king, the narrator characterizes Jehu's ascension to the throne as a conspiracy (2 Kgs 9,14). After this narrative comment, the narration continues with a lengthy description of bloodshed. In 2 Kgs 10,9 Jehu himself defines his *coup d'état* as a conspiracy and assumes the responsibility for the death of the king Jehoram, using the verb נכּה. Finally in 2 Kgs 10,36 the narrator informs us that Jehu ruled over Israel for 28 years (מלך), considering him a true king. In sum, 2 Kings 9–10 contain the basic elements of a *coup d'état*: Jehu conspired against the king (verb קשר: 2 Kgs 9,14; 10,9), he struck down the kings of Israel and Judah and other members of the royal family (verb נכּה: 2 Kgs 9,24.27; 10,9.11.17.25), he killed them (instead of the verb מוּת the verb הרג¹¹ is used: 2 Kgs 10,9), and finally Jehu became the king in Samaria (the verb מלך: 2 Kgs 9,1-13; 10,36). These elements indicate that, even though we cannot speak about the formula of *coup d'état* being used by them, the final redactors classified the story as a conspiracy narrated in the style of a story (*Erzählung*)¹².

The following table relates the series of *coups d'état* to the dynasty changes:

⁹ In the case of Shallum, despite the fact that he reigned only for one month the résumés are still given (2 Kgs 15,13.15).

¹⁰ S. HASEGAWA, *Aram and Israel during the Jehuic Dynasty* (BZAW 434; Berlin – Boston, MA 2012) 12-35.

¹¹ This variant is used in 2 Chr 24,25.

¹² LONG, *I Kings*, 261.

	King	
	Jeroboam	
	Nadab	
Dynasty change I.	Baasha	<i>Coup d'état</i> (formula; 1 Kgs 15,27-28)
	Elah	
Dynasty change II.	Zimri	<i>Coup d'état</i> (formula; 1 Kgs 16,9-10)
Dynasty change III.	Omri	Not a <i>coup d'état</i> (1 Kgs 16,16-22)
	Ahab	
	Ahaziah	
	Jehoram	
Dynasty change IV.	Jehu	<i>Coup d'état</i> (narrative; 2 Kings 9-10)
	Jehoahaz	
	Jehoash	
	Jeroboam	
	Zechariah	
Dynasty change V.	Shallum	<i>Coup d'état</i> (formula; 2 Kgs 15,10)
Dynasty change VI.	Menahem	<i>Coup d'état</i> (formula; 2 Kgs 15,14)
	Pekahiah	
Dynasty change VII.	Pekah	<i>Coup d'état</i> (formula; 2 Kgs 15,25)
Dynasty change VIII.	Hoshea	<i>Coup d'état</i> (formula; 2 Kgs 15,30)

If we place Menahem's and Jehu's *coups d'état* into the same group as those defined by a stereotyped formula of conspiracy, then the conspiracies and revolts in the Northern Kingdom amount to seven. The number seven indicates totality, completeness, and fulfillment¹³. It seems that the number seven was employed in order to convey the idea of completeness, i.e., the totality of the *coups*

¹³ Cf. for example Gen 2,2; 4,24; 7,4; 41,2-54; Exod 7,25; 16,26-27; etc.

d'état that took place in the Northern Kingdom. Consequently the real number of the *coups d'état* could have been different. When the seventh *coup d'état* occurred, the instability of the Northern Kingdom reached its peak.

Moreover, an interesting accumulation of *coups d'état* can also be observed. While the first three *coups d'état* are spread over almost 200 years, the last four took place within 20 years. Thus, the instability of the Northern Kingdom culminated in a geometrical progression. A kingdom exposed to four *coups d'état* within a span of 20 years is hardly able to absorb them in such a short period of time. On the other hand, the long description of Jehu's conspiracy and bloodshed gives the reader a good idea of how much blood must have been shed in those last 20 years.

In conclusion, by means of this literary device the biblical text points to the first cause of the downfall of Samaria. The instability of the Northern Kingdom, caused by frequent conspiracies and revolts, reached its peak, and consequently it was only a question of time before the entire kingdom would also reach its end.

II. Gradual deterioration of the kingdom

The preceding analysis shows that the narrator in order to underline the impending fall of the Northern Kingdom in chapter 15 accumulated four *coups d'état* and described them by means of a stereotyped formula. This formula forms a skeleton upon which some additional comments (marked below) are hung. In order to bring out these comments, which I believe bespeak further reasons for the fall of the Northern Kingdom, I will investigate three elements that vary in the stereotyped formula in the case of the first three *coups d'état*: the place of conspiracy and the type of usurpers on the one hand and the narration time on the other.

Shallum's *coup d'état* (15,10):

ויקשר עליו שלם בן־יבש ויכהו קבל־עם וימיתוהו וימלך תחתיו

Menahem's *coup d'état* (15,14):

וישל מנחם בן־גדי מתרצה ויבא שמרון ויך את־שלים בן־יבש בשמרון וימיתוהו וימלך תחתיו

Pekah's *coup d'état* (15,25):

וַיִּקְשֶׁר עָלָיו פֶּקַח בֶּן־רַמְלִיָּהוּ שְׁלִישׁוֹ וַיַּכְהוּ בְּשִׁמְרוֹן בְּאַרְמוֹן בֵּית־מֶלֶךְ
 [הַמֶּלֶךְ] אֶת־אֲרָגָב וְאֶת־הָאֲרִיָּה וְעַמּוּ חֲמֹשִׁים אִישׁ מִבְּנֵי גִלְעָדִים וַיִּמְתְּחוּ
 וַיִּמְלֹךְ תַּחְתָּיו

The first type of additions inserted between the verb נכה and מוח concerns the location where the *coup d'état* took place. Shallum's conspiracy against Zechariah is described with the term קבלעם vocalized as קְבַלְעָם (2 Kgs 15,10) in *Codex Leningradensis*. The vocalization קְבַלְעָם suggests that the expression קבלעם is composed of two words עם and קבל. In this case קבל could be taken as an Aramaic preposition “in front of, before”. This interpretation can be found in various forms in some Greek manuscripts and is followed by most translations: “he struck him before the people”, i.e. “in public”, “publicly”¹⁴. According to this interpretation of the term קבלעם the location of the first *coup d'état* is not specified. However, it was not a secret operation but rather a public event, i.e. approved by the people, if not even with the people's participation. Conversely, the Antiochian version offers a different solution of the problem. It has the verbs in the singular and the expression קבלעם is interpreted as εἰν ἰεβλααμ “in Ieblaam” (manuscripts bore₂Ϟ). These manuscripts suggest interpreting the problematic expression as a location. Even though the geographical location Ieblaam has not been identified, understanding the term קבלעם as a geographical term should be preferred to reading it as the Aramaic preposition קבל meaning “in front of (the people)”, i.e. “publicly”¹⁵. According to this interpretation of the term קבלעם the location of the first *coup d'état* took place outside Samaria, in a place known to the reader from 2 Kgs

¹⁴ In particular in manuscript c₂. The *Codex Vaticanus* (B) has the verbs in the plural “they conspired [...] they struck him down” and the subjects should be Shallum and probably Keblaam. This interpretation becomes more evident in other Greek manuscripts, in particular, in the *Codex Alexandrinus* (A) that read Σελλουμ υἱος Ἰαβεῖς καὶ Κεβλααμ καὶ ἐπαταξάν αὐτὸν κατεναντι τοῦ λαοῦ (see also manuscripts xy^{AS}). Some manuscripts invert the order of the proper names of the people involved in the conspiracy κεβδααμ καὶ σελλημ ὁ πηρ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐπαταξεν αὐτὸν (manuscripts ghjnuz^{EZ}).

¹⁵ M. COGAN – H. TADMOR, *II Kings*. A New Translation (AB 11, Garden City, NY 1988) 170-171; T.R. HOBBS, *2 Kings* (WBC 13; Waco, TX 1985) 197; A. SANDA, *Das zweite Buch der Könige* (EHAT 9/2; Münster 1912) 171-173.

9,27 or Judg 1,27 (LXX). The location of the second revolt is clear. Menahem came to Samaria and killed Shallum in Samaria ¹⁶ (2 Kgs 15,14). The third conspiracy also took place in Samaria, in particular, in the keep of the royal palace (2 Kgs 15,25) ¹⁷.

By means of these additions the MT emphasized how the conspiracies and revolts spread around the kingdom. The first *coup d'état* took place in public, in a place undisclosed to the reader or in Ieblaam (in an unidentified location); the second in the capital; and the third was orchestrated in the safest place of the kingdom — the keep of the royal palace in Samaria. In sum, conspiracies, intrigues, and murders penetrated the whole kingdom; not even the most protected place of the kingdom — the keep of the royal palace — was safe enough to protect the king against conspirators ¹⁸.

A similar effect of increasing instability penetrating the whole kingdom can be observed by analyzing the details concerning the usurper's origin. We know the name of Shallum's father (see below), but no further information about his origin is given. Menahem came from the former royal capital Tirzah, and Pekah was Pekahiah's third man, i.e. the officer of the king's entourage. Thus, an interesting literary dynamic can be observed: from the unknown background of the first usurper, the reader is introduced to a usurper who represented the local aristocracy of Tirzah, and finally the reader discovers the traitor even among the king's entourage.

The narration time, i.e. the length of the narrative dedicated to single *coups d'état*, shows that the instability of the Northern King-

¹⁶ The MT emphasizes the location "Samaria", mentioning it twice: "he came to Samaria", "he struck Shallum, son of Jabesh, in Samaria" (2 Kgs 15,14). This emphasis on Samaria is omitted in Greek manuscripts.

¹⁷ It has been suggested to read the expression **וְאֵת־הָאֲרָנָה וְאֵת־הָאֲרָנָה** not as two personal names but as the allusion to two protective deities. In this case the intrigues penetrated not only the royal palace, but also the most protected place of the palace; see J.M. GELLER, "New translation for 2 Kings 15:25", *VT* 26 (1976) 374-377. For a short review of other possibilities see COGAN – TADMOR, *II Kings*, 173.

¹⁸ Even though the Greek manuscripts offer slightly different readings, they still preserved a similar dynamic. The *Codex Vaticanus* states that the first *coup d'état* took place in a location undisclosed to the reader, the second took place in Samaria, and the third in front of the royal palace (4 Regn 15,10.14.25). The Antiochian version also preserves similar dynamics, though more similar to that of the MT: the first *coup d'état* took place in Ieblaam, the second in Samaria, and the third in the royal palace (4 Regn 15,10.14.25).

dom tended to increase ¹⁹. Whereas the description of Shallum's conspiracy is very concise (9 words), Menahem's revolt contains more details (13 words) and lastly, the description of Pekah's conspiracy is the longest description of a conspiracy we have in this chapter (19 words). Giving more room to the description of each following insurrection, the problems of Israel can be interpreted as a growing surge of successive uprisings.

Finally, comparing the *coups d'état* of Shallum, Menahem and Pekah with that of Hoshea, we can observe some differences. The *coup d'état* of Hoshea is described in a very concise way similar to that of Shallum. However, it displays some important differences. All revolts and conspiracies are inserted between introductory and concluding regnal résumés ²⁰. These résumés set the outer limits of the event-accounts and enable us to determine the length of the narrative in terms of the number of words and types of motifs used for describing the *coups d'état*. The *coups d'état* are inserted into the reign of the king against whom the *coup d'état* was organized and not into the reign of the king who organized the *coup d'état*. The following table presents four cases from 2 Kings 15:

In the thirty-eighth year of King Azariah of Judah, Zechariah son of Jeroboam reigned over Israel in Samaria six months. He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, as his ancestors had done. He did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin.

Shallum son of Jabesh conspired against him, and struck him down in public and killed him, and reigned in place of him.

Now the rest of the deeds of Zechariah are written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel. (2 Kgs 15,8-11 *NRS*)

Shallum son of Jabesh began to reign in the thirty-ninth year of King Uzziah of Judah; he reigned one month in Samaria.

Then Menahem son of Gadi came up from Tirzah and came to Samaria; he struck down Shallum son of Jabesh in Samaria and killed him; he reigned in place of him.

¹⁹ J.L. SKA, "Our Fathers Have Told Us". Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives (SubBib 13, Roma 1990) 7-8. The notion of narrated and narration time stems from German literary criticism, cf. G. MÜLLER, *Erzählzeit und erzählte Zeit*. Morphologische Poetik. Gesammelte Aufsätze (Hrsg. E. MÜLLER) (Darmstadt 1968) 268-269.

²⁰ B.O. LONG, *2 Kings* (FOTL 10; Grand Rapids, MI 1991) 172.

Now the rest of the deeds of Shallum, including the conspiracy that he made, are written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel. (2 Kgs 15,13-15 *NRS*)

In the fiftieth year of King Azariah of Judah, Pekahiah son of Menahem began to reign over Israel in Samaria; he reigned two years. He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin.

Pekah son of Remaliah, his captain, conspired against him with fifty of the Gileadites, and attacked him in Samaria, in the citadel of the palace along with Argob and Arieah; he killed him, and reigned in place of him.

Now the rest of the deeds of Pekahiah, and all that he did, are written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel. (2 Kgs 15,23-26 *NRS*)

In the fifty-second year of King Azariah of Judah, Pekah son of Remaliah began to reign over Israel in Samaria; he reigned twenty years. He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin.

In the days of King Pekah of Israel, King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria came and captured Ijon, Abel-beth-maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali;

and he carried the people captive to Assyria.

Then Hoshea son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah son of Remaliah, attacked him, and killed him; he reigned in place of him, in the twentieth year of Jotham son of Uzziah.

Now the rest of the acts of Pekah, and all that he did, are written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel. (2 Kgs 15,27-31 *NRS*)

This scheme demonstrates that whereas only one event is inserted between the introductory and conclusive regnal résumés of the first three kings²¹, in the case of Pekah there is the accumulation of three disasters: the Assyrian invasion is followed by the deportation and finishes with a conspiracy. By the accumulation of three events in the reign of one king the biblical texts underline the growing amount of catastrophes befalling the Israelites.

²¹ Also in the case of Menahem only one event – the invasion of Pul – is inserted between the introductory and conclusive regnal résumé (2 Kgs 15,17-22).

In conclusion I pointed out another element leading to the disruption of the Northern kingdom — its gradual deterioration. There was not only one rebellion, but the entire kingdom was caught up in conspiracies and revolts. The intrigues and murders did not spare the king even in the safest place of his kingdom — the keep of the royal palace. Moreover, the corruption of the Northern Kingdom reached such a level that even the king's most trusted people turned out to be murderers. I also argued that by prolonging narration time the final redactors underlined the fact that the uprisings had a tendency to increase. Finally by noting the accumulating disastrous events in Pekah's reign, the reader can observe that while the previous kings had to cope only with one disaster, Pekah had to handle three disasters. This gradual deterioration of the kingdom was another reason that, according to my analysis of 2 Kings 15, ultimately decimated the entire kingdom.

III. Rivalry between the tribes and cities

The above analyses pointed out that the main reasons for the collapse of the Northern Kingdom were its increasing instability and the frequent *coups d'état*. In this section I study some seemingly redundant details that can illuminate the underlying tensions which could have also contributed to the dismantlement of the Northern Kingdom.

The first detail regards Shallum — שָׁלֹם בֶּן-יִבְשׁ (2 Kgs 15,10.13). J. Gray suggested taking the term Jabesh as a geographical name (Jabesh-Gilead)²². If this proposal is accepted, then the conspiracy was based in Transjordan, and Jabesh would be identical with Elijah's place. While Gray's suggestion remains only a helpful hypothesis, verse 15,25 unquestionably attributes an important role in the uprisings to Transjordanian tribes stating that Pekah de-throned Pekahiah with the help of 50 men from Gilead. T. Ishida showed that the rivalry between the Gileadites and the tribes settled west of the Jordan was an important factor in the struggles for the throne in the last decades of the Northern Kingdom²³. Thus, this seemingly redundant detail indicates that one of the reasons for the

²² J. GRAY, *I & II Kings*. A Commentary (London 1970) 621.

²³ T. ISHIDA, *The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel*. A Study on the Formation and Development of Royal-dynastic Ideology (BZAW 142; Berlin 1977).

dynastic instability was the rivalry between hill-based Ephraim-Manasseh and Transjordan-based Gilead.

A further “redundant” detail, which caused several problems to both ancient and modern interpreters, concerns the term Tirzah, which is connected twice with king Menahem in 2 Kgs 15,14.16. Tirzah was the starting point of Menahem’s revolt and the cradle of a new, even though short-lived, dynasty of Menahem. The city of Tirzah is to be identified with Tell el-Far’ah North ²⁴. The site contains a palace whose size is comparable with the largest palaces of that period in Israel (Building 148 in Stratum VIIId ²⁵). This palace was destroyed at the end of the 8th c. BC, and the destruction can be safely attributed to the Assyrians ²⁶. If this archaeological evidence is connected with the biblical account, it is possible to conclude that just before the collapse of Samaria the city of Tirzah reappeared as a new rival on the Israelite political scene. This conclusion suggests that the Northern Kingdom was ravaged by various factions that struggled for power. One of them would be the city of Tirzah. Its revival in the 8th BC indicates that Menahem would have found enough support in the local aristocracy to usurp the throne in Samaria, and his military expansion could have satisfied the aspiration of the magnates of Tirzah ²⁷.

In conclusion, these seemingly redundant details point to twofold tensions underlying the frequent *coups d’état*: the tensions between the hilled-based and Transjordanian tribes, and the tensions between the inhabitants of old and new capitals of Israel.

IV. Gradual loss of executive power

Besides the motif of *coups d’état* the biblical text mentions two Assyrian invasions that seriously undermined the sovereignty of the Northern Kingdom. The description of the Assyrian invasion

²⁴ For another possible identification see *ABD* VI, 573-574.

²⁵ A. CHAMBON – J. MALLET, *Tell el-Fâr’ah I* (Paris 1984) pl. V.

²⁶ M. AVI-YONAH (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ 1978) II, 404.

²⁷ DUBOVSKÝ, “Menahem’s Reign”, 30-38. H.M. Niemann drew a similar conclusion from the analysis of the Samaria ostraca; see H.M. NIEMANN, “A New Look at the Samaria Ostraca: The King-Clan Relationship”, *TA* 35 (2008) 249-266.

used a literary form of “invasion report”²⁸. This literary form in contrast to the fixed literary formula of *coup d'état* (see above) is not determined primarily by linguistic elements but rather by thematic features. For our purposes it is necessary not only to see what the structure of this literary form is, but above all to compare two invasion reports. The first Assyrian invasion took place during Menahem’s reign (2 Kgs 15,19-20) and the second during Pekah’s reign (2 Kgs 15,29). These concise reports, however, display differences which point to another factor contributing to the collapse of the Northern Kingdom: the gradual loss of executive power. These dynamics can be revealed by means of the analysis of biblical heroes, in particular by studying the grammatical subjects and objects of the verbs in both invasion reports.

First invasion (2 Kgs 15,19-20)

	בא פול מלך־אשור על־הארץ	Introduction
בירדו	ויחן מנחם לפול אלף כפר־כסף להיות יריו אחו להחזיק הממלכה בידו	Menahem
	ויצא מנחם את־הכסף על־ישראל על כל־גבורי החיל לתת למלך אשור חמשים שקלים כסף לאיש אחר	
	וישב מלך אשור ולא־עמד שם בארץ	Pul=TP III

Second invasion (2 Kgs 15,29)

	בימי פקח מלך־ישראל בא תגלת פלאסר מלך אשור	Introduction
		Pekah
	ויקח את־עיון ואת־אבל בית־מעכה ואת־ינוח ואת־קדש ואת־חצור ואת־הגלעד ואת־הגלילה כל ארץ נפתלי ויגלם אשורה	TP III

²⁸ LONG, 2 Kings, 171.

Both reports start with a narrative introduction containing *qatal* of the verb בּוֹא and give the name of Assyrian invaders (cf. 2 Kgs 25,1). A series of *wayyiqtol*s following the verb בּוֹא describes how the real power slid out of the hands of the Israelite kings. In the first case Menahem was the subject of two actions: he gave the money to the Assyrian king, and he exacted the money from Israelite nobility. Menahem though facing the Assyrian invasion had still enough power to negotiate the terms of the invader's retreat and even to obtain a desired confirmation of his throne. The second Assyrian invasion is described in a different manner. The protagonist (grammatical subject) of all actions is the Assyrian king; he captured the cities which he wanted, and he deported the people whom he wanted and wherever he wanted. Comparing both invasion reports we can see the differences. In the first case the country is stripped of money; in the second case it is stripped of people. In the first case the country is ravaged by the Israelite king; in the second by the Assyrian king. In the first case the Assyrian king returned to Assyria, but the Israelites stayed in the land; in the second case the Israelites were deported to Assyria²⁹. In the first invasion Menahem is still an active protagonist able to negotiate with the invaders; in the second case Pekah becomes a passive observer silently witnessing the pillage of his country. The contrast between the two invasion reports points not only to increasing Assyrian power, but also to the gradual loss of executive power of the Israelite kings. During the second invasion the Israelite king had already lost any real power and had to put up with Assyrian whims. A touch of irony can be easily recognized in these verses as well. While Menahem planned to outwit the Assyrian king, in reality this seemingly shrewd political move turned out to be the beginning of the end of the Northern Kingdom.

²⁹ It is important to notice the rhetorical device used for the description of the captured cities: *syndeton* containing seven regions followed by an *asyndeton* mentioning the "entire land of Naphtali". The seven regions mentioned here constitute more than a factual list of captured towns. It should rather be taken as a literary device indicating completeness meaning that the entire north of Israel fell into Tiglath-Pileser's hands.

V. Menahem's reign

The following analysis will focus on the structure of chapter 15. The narrative describes the reign of seven kings — two Judahite kings (Azariah and Jotham) and five Israelite kings (Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah and Pekah). The reign of these kings is described in quite a stereotyped manner: the description starts with an introductory regnal résumé and ends with a concluding regnal résumé. Chapter 15 thus contains seven literary “bricks”, each separated from the other by regnal résumés. Between the introductory and concluding regnal résumés events important for the reign of a given king (see above) are inserted. This literary technique is not a pattern written in stone, but allows for some variations. Such variations can be found in the cases of Zechariah, Menahem, and Pekah. In the case of Zechariah a formula of prophecy-fulfillment (15,12) is added after the concluding regnal résumé, in the case of Menahem the introductory résumé is prefixed with an נְסִיחָה -clause (see below), and in the case of Pekah an outline of international relations is inserted in the midst of the concluding regnal résumé (15,37).

Taking into consideration not only the stereotyped repetition of the literary “bricks” as well as the variations from these formulas we can point out that these literary “bricks” are organized in a concentric structure ³⁰.

A Judahite frame: king Azariah (15,1-7)

B Israelite frame: two Israelite kings (Zechariah and Shallum; 15,8-15)

C Center: Menahem's reign (15,16-22)

B' Israelite frame: two Israelite kings (Pekahiah and Pekah; 15,23-31)

A' Judahite frame: king Jotham (15,32-38)

The parallelisms between both sides of the concentric structure can be identified on the lexical and thematic levels. Parts A and A' deal with the Judean kings. Similar positive evaluations can also be found in the evaluation of other kings (1 Kgs 22,43-44; 2 Kgs 12,2-3; 14,3-4; 18,3-4; 22,2), but only in these two cases can we observe word-for-word repetition. The only different word, besides

³⁰ LONG, *2 Kings*, 171.

the proper names, is the verb נָשָׂא in 15,34. Moreover, both kings were touched by God's hand. The Lord struck Azariah with a skin disease and Jotham with the invasions led by Resin and Pekah. Finally, both of them were just kings, but both of them were unable to remove the high places. In sum, the similarities between parts A and A' are important enough to enable us to connect the description of Azariah's reign with that of Jotham.

Parts B and B' also display several similarities. Both describe two Israelite kings. In part B Zechariah was a legitimate successor of Jeroboam and Shallum was a usurper; in B' Pekahiah was a legitimate successor of Menahem and Pekah was a usurper. So the first king in each part is a legitimate successor of his father while the second is a usurper. Moreover, each part contains two formulas denoting a *coup d'état* (see above).

The skillfully built parallelism between parts A–A' and B–B' leads the reader to the narrative center describing Menahem's reign (part C). In order to determine the central part of chapter 15, it is necessary to focus on the addendum³¹ preceding Menahem's reign that lists the brutalities he committed (2 Kgs 15,16). Several scholars have connected this verse with Shallum's reign³². This verse starts with the particle $\text{וְ$. A similar case starting with an וְ -clause in 1 Kgs 16,21 clearly connects the וְ -clause with what follows and not with what precedes. Moreover, thematically the description regards what follows and not what precedes. Therefore it seems logical that in verse 16 the וְ -clause should be connected with the literary unit describing Menahem's reign, i.e. what follows³³. This clause prefaces the introductory regnal résumé (2 Kgs 15,17) with

³¹ The literary introductory or conclusive regnal résumés could be prefixed, infixd or suffixed with addenda. These addenda in 1 and 2 Kings are of two types: the first type adds further information about the king whose death has already been announced (1 Kgs 16,7; 2 Kgs 15,12). The second type serves as a preface to the reign of the king whose reign is going to be described (1 Kgs 16,21).

³² See for example the division in the Catholic Edition of the *Revised Standard Version of the Bible* or M.A. SWEENEY, *I & II Kings. A Commentary* (OTL; London 2007) 372-373.

³³ This verse also functions as a narrative transition between the description of Shallum's (2 Kgs 15,13-15) and Menahem's reign (2 Kgs 15,17-22), in particular by means of repetition of the verb נָבֵא in verses 15 and 16. We

a list of Menahem's violent actions. After the digression formed by means of the וְ—clause, the description of Menahem's reign follows the stereotyped pattern. The introductory and concluding regnal formulas bracket the most important event which took place during Menahem's reign — the first Assyrian invasion resulting in heavy taxation of the notables of Israel. By placing Menahem's reign in the narrative center of chapter 15 special emphasis is given to his reign and deeds. In this way two characteristics of Menahem's reign are emphasized: his brutality (וְ—clause prefacing the introductory regnal résumé) and his negotiation with the Assyrians (event-description bracketed between the introductory and concluding regnal résumés). By means of the concentric structure the ancient scribes focus the reader's attention on three causes latent in Israel that later on led to the collapse of Israel: Menahem's brutalities on the one hand and Assyrian invasions and heavy taxation on the other.

VI. Prefixed addendum: Menahem's brutality

I have argued that 15,16 should be translated: "Then Menahem (started his campaign) from Tirzah and struck Tiphseh, and all who were in it, and all its territories. Indeed he did not (just) breach (it), he struck (it) down — he ripped open all its pregnant women!"³⁴ This translation indicates that Menahem after having seized the throne attempted a campaign against the east. During this campaign he not only captured the city of Tiphseh but also ripped open its pregnant women. The biblical text does not give the reasons for Menahem's cruelties, but rather underlines the arbitrariness of Menahem's action. Menahem's violence did not stop at "regular" war cruelties (e.g. to breach a city), but he exterminated life-bearers (pregnant women) and life in its prenatal form (fetuses). This kind of violence is rarely attested in the extra-biblical source and always presents an extreme case³⁵.

can therefore conclude that from the structural point of view verse 16 is connected to the literary unit describing Menahem's reign; from the narrative point of view the verse serves as a transition from Shallum's to Menahem's reign.

³⁴ DUBOVSKÝ, "Menahem's Reign", 41.

³⁵ M. COGAN, "'Ripping open Pregnant Women' in Light of an Assyrian Analogue", *JAOS* 103 (1983) 755-757; P. DUBOVSKÝ, "Ripping Open Preg-

I suggest that the fact that Menahem's cruelty is at the center of the narrative provides another reason for the interpretation of the collapse of the Northern Kingdom. The usurper Menahem did not hesitate, during his military expansion, to use the cruellest atrocity ever committed during military campaigns. The king who was to guarantee order and justice is now promoting savage ferocity and barbarity. Naturally the brutality and cruelty of the usurpers disrupted the moral pillars upon which the Northern Kingdom rested. Seeing these atrocities in terms of retributive justice (Exod 21,22-25), we can understand Hosea's prophecy against Samaria (Hos 14,1): "Samaria will be held guilty, for she has rebelled against her God. They will fall by the sword, their little ones will be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women will be ripped open" (NAS).

VII. Hyperbolic numbers: financial and economic drain

The account of Menahem's reign is embedded between two regional résumés and states that the king had to pay the Assyrians 1,000 talents of silver in order to save his throne (2 Kgs 15,19-20). H. Tadmor's study on Menahem's payment demonstrates that such a large sum was usually paid by a usurper to Assyria so that Assyria would confirm his claim to the throne³⁶. However, it makes sense to ask: what is the symbolic meaning of this payment? In other words, why did the biblical writers mention this large sum of money and place it at the center of 2 Kings 15? One way of understanding the symbolic value of this sum of money is to convert 1,000 talents of silver into commodities which could have been acquired for this sum of money³⁷. Naturally this does not mean con-

nant Arab Women: Reliefs in Room L of Ashurbanipal's North Palace", *Or* 78 (2009) 394-419.

³⁶ H. TADMOR, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III, King of Assyria*. Critical Edition, with Introductions, Translations and Commentary (Jerusalem 1994) 276.

³⁷ This estimate is based on several studies which provide the basis for conversion rates: 1 talent = 60 minas = 3,600 shekels; 1 shekel of gold = 15 shekels of silver; 200 cors of grain = 0.166 shekels of silver; 1 daric = 0.737 shekel; see *EJ* 20, 703-708; *ABD* I, 1078; F.B. BARAHONA, "Sistema hebreo de pesos", *Aula Orientalis* 28 (2010) 25-37, P.J. KING – L.E. STAGER, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville, KY 2001) 199.

verting a sum following the rates of the stock market of that time, but converting it on the basis of the rates a reader could acquire by reading the Bible. One thousand talents of silver equals 3,600,000 shekels of silver. According to 1 Kgs 10,29 one chariot cost 600 shekels and one warhorse 500 shekels. Consequently for the reader of 1–2 Kings this would mean that Assyria could buy 50,000 chariots³⁸ or 60,000 horses. If we take into consideration the fact that Solomon in his glory had only 1,400 chariots (1 Kgs 10,26) and 12,000 horses, then 50,000 chariots or 60,000 horses possibly bought for 1,000 talents of silver would represent an army much superior to that of Solomon.

If this sum of money is translated into terms of real estate, then Menahem gave to the Assyrians a financial capital that would enable them to buy almost the entire land of Israel, its cattle, sheep, and goats³⁹. If this sum is translated into terms of human beings, then with this money the Assyrian king could acquire a good number of Israelites⁴⁰. In sum, by giving this money to the Assyrians Menahem enabled the Assyrian king to acquire almost the whole of Israel and its inhabitants.

The second number mentioned in 2 Kgs 15,19-20 regards the details describing how Menahem collected this huge amount of money: he took this money from his nobles; each person had to pay 50 shekels. Since the final sum was 3,600,000 shekels and every noble of Israel had to pay 50 shekels, it would require taxing 72,000 people. This would practically mean taxing all the nobles of Israel. In addition 50 shekels has also a theological meaning. It was the value which according to Lev 27,3 an adult had had to pay to God/temple. In consequence, Menahem made each noble pay the Assyrian king the price which an individual was to pay to God.

Even though the numbers mentioned above cannot be taken at their face-value, by mentioning this huge sum other causes leading to the collapse of the Northern Kingdom can be pointed out. Mena-

³⁸ According to 1 Chr 19,6 Assyria could obtain “only” 32,000 chariots.

³⁹ 1,000 talents of silver would be an equivalent of 7,500 Abraham’s burial places (Gen 23,13-14), 500 Shemer’s estates (1 Kgs 16,24) or 42,857 Jeremiah’s estates (Jer 32,9). For equivalents see also *ABD* VI, 1119.

⁴⁰ According to Leviticus 27 the Assyrians received the money equivalent of 30,000 virgins, 60,000 free men, 100,000 free women, 150,000 boys, 300,000 girls, or 100,000 slaves (Exod 21,32).

hem's payment and other tributes must have drained the wealth of Israel, broken the economic power of Israel, and financially ruined the Northern Kingdom⁴¹. Menahem is thus portrayed as the opposite of Solomon. The money flowed into Israel under Solomon, but under Menahem money flowed out of Israel⁴². Moreover, drawing on the wallets of 72,000 nobles must have severely undermined Menahem's popularity. Ironically by receiving this money, the Assyrians were able to form an army which then could easily attack Samaria and later on become the basis of Rab-Shakeh's boasting (2 Kgs 18,19-26).

VIII. Israel's wrong international policy

The deterioration of the Northern Kingdom is fitted into the narrative about two Judahite kings — Azariah and Jotham, which creates the narrative frame for the central part of chapter 15 (see above). By analyzing this narrative frame we can point out another cause of the downfall of the Northern Kingdom encoded in the rhetoric of 2 Kings 15 — its wrong international policy.

The narrative frame constituted by the accounts of two Judean kings is characterized above all by solidity. In contrast to five Israelite kings who reigned for a total of 32 years and 6 months, the Southern Kingdom is characterized by dynastic stability: two Judean kings reigned for a total of 68 years. No conspiracy or revolt took place during the reigns of Azariah and Jotham, whereas four *coups d'état* took place during the reign of five Israelite kings. Another element of stability can be derived from an assessment of both kings: they did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, marred in both cases only by a less-than-full approval by God, whereas all five Israelite kings did what was wrong in the eyes of the Lord⁴³. Thus, the image of serenity and of a long-lasting Davidic dynasty, even though facing its own problems, constitutes the essential fea-

⁴¹ If these conclusions are combined with 2 Kgs 17,4, then the reader learns that besides this huge payment the Israelites had to pay annual tributes to the Assyrians.

⁴² W. BRUEGGEMANN, *1 & 2 Kings* (Macon, GA 2000) 455.

⁴³ LONG, *2 Kings*, 172.

ture of this narrative frame. Consequently the problem of the Northern Kingdom is defined in terms of its relations to Judah.

In the first part of the frame the relations between Judah and Israel are not mentioned ⁴⁴. At the end of the chapter Israel allied with Aram and started attacking Judah. This split between the two kingdoms developed into a fully-fledged armed conflict described in 2 Kings 16 and Isaiah 7. Thus another latent element responsible for the collapse of the Northern Kingdom can be discerned: Pekah deliberately broke off the natural connections with Judah and formed a coalition with Israel's former enemy — Aram. This shift of international relations triggered an avalanche: in the course of less than twenty years Israel broke off and re-established contacts with Assyria, Aram, and Egypt.

The rupture between Israel and Judah incorporated into the narrative frame of chapter 15 suggests that Israel's breaking-off its kindred-based relations with Judah, which constituted a solid "frame" for Israel's international relations, went hand-in-hand with forming a series of senseless coalitions, ironically all of them concluded with their former or current enemies (Assyria, Aram, Egypt). It can therefore be concluded that the breaking-off with Judah and the shifting allegiances led to the gradual disintegration of Israelite international relations.

IX. Why did Samaria fall according to 2 Kings 15?

Let us now sum up the previous results. Without any doubt the Assyrian invasions were the main cause of the fall of the Northern Kingdom that resulted in the transformation of the independent kingdom into the Assyrian province *Sāmīrīna* that was repopulated by the nations deported from other parts of the Neo-Assyrian Empire ⁴⁵. However, according to 2 Kings 15 the Assyrian campaigns were only one among many other reasons that caused the downfall of the Northern Kingdom. The analyses presented above suggest

⁴⁴ It may be that there was some mutual co-operation between Azariah and Zechariah; see M. HARAN, "The Rise and Decline of the Empire of Jeroboam ben Joash", *VT* 17 (1967) 266-297.

⁴⁵ N. NA'AMAN – R. ZADOK, "Assyrian Deportations to the Province of Samerina in the Light of Two Cuneiform Tablets from Tel Hadid", *TA* 27 (2000) 159-188.

that there was no one primary reason why the Northern Kingdom fell but rather a series of elements whose combination ultimately led to the downfall of Israel. I will divide the reasons for the fall of the Northern Kingdom into seven categories ⁴⁶:

(1) The analysis of the fixed formula *coup d'état*, indicated that the Northern Kingdom during its last years reached the peak of its political instability and that a kingdom torn by seven (the full number of *coups d'état*) could not last too long.

(2) The analysis of additions to the fixed formula brought similar results: the unstable kingdom became unsafe. The conspiracies penetrated the whole kingdom and reached even the supposedly safest place in the kingdom – the royal keep. The rebels and conspirers penetrated all social strata: they were among commoners, among local aristocracy as well as among the king's most trusted men. The conspiracies were not just a series of mishaps but the social structure and the entire land became infected ⁴⁷. Finally, the analysis of narration time and the combination of events attributed to four northern kings showed that instability had a tendency to increase.

(3) The analysis of seemingly redundant details pointed to the tensions underlying the conspiracies and revolts. The kingdom was torn into pieces by tensions between the tribes settled on both sides of Jordan as well as by tensions between Samaria and Tirzah, the new and old capitals of Israel.

(4) The analysis of heroes in the description of Assyrian invasions brought up another dynamic that led to the fall of the Northern Kingdom: gradual loss of executive power. Whereas Menahem was still able to negotiate with Assyria, Pekah became a passive witness of Assyrian looting.

While identifying the narrative center of the passage I proposed two other causes of the collapse of the Northern Kingdom: Menahem's brutality and the drain on finances.

⁴⁶ The number seven is evidently an approximate number and one could add other causes not mentioned in this analysis or form different groups of causes. The choice of "seven" hints at the symbolic value of this number – the completeness of causes.

⁴⁷ According to Num 35,33-34, violent bloodshed, often connected with *coups d'état*, pollutes the land in such a way that no expiation can be made for it. When this infection of the land 'reaches the level that God's holiness can no longer tolerate, God forsakes his people and his land, withdrawing his protection and care', see B. HROBŇ, *Ethical Dimension of Cult in the Book of Isaiah* (BZAW 418; Berlin – New York 2010) 54.

(5) Menahem committed atrocities that no just king had ever committed. Consequently the kingdom ruled by a king who did not hesitate to rip open pregnant women was condemned according to Hos 14,1 to be punished by the same token.

(6) The analysis of the hyperbolic sum of money paid to Pul contains a good dose of irony. The payment not only drained Israel of money but also gave the Assyrians the financial means to build up an army that they used to conquer Samaria a few years later.

(7) The analysis of the narrative frame displayed the problems of Israelite international politics. After a period of peaceful relations between Israel and Judah, Israel broke off relations with Judah and concluded a series of senseless alliances with their neighbors. Naturally these new alliances did not last too long and turned out to be counterproductive.

X. Biblical rhetoric in its ANE context

The expansion of the Assyrian Empire is marked by the victorious campaigns that resulted in the annexation of entire regions to the Assyrian administrative orbit⁴⁸. Indeed, the image of Assyrian troops marching through the Levant conquering one city after the other can be easily drawn from Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions. This image, however, should be nuanced by more recent studies. B.J. Parker has suggested that it is more appropriate to use a network model for understanding the Neo-Assyrian Empire. The Empire, according to Parker, was not “a spread of land but a network of transportation and communication corridors, [...] large components of the Neo-Assyrian provincial system were physically separated from the rest of the empire by vast expanses of territory that were not subject to direct imperial control”⁴⁹. Moreover A. Fuchs analyzing Assyrian victories has shown that the Assyrian army was not as irresistible as it is portrayed in the royal inscriptions. The Assyrians had to recur to various, often non-military tools to conquer well-fortified cities⁵⁰. These two studies point out, as does the

⁴⁸ N. NA'AMAN, “Province System and Settlement Patterns in Southern Syria and Palestine in the Neo-Assyrian Period”, *Neo-Assyrian Geography* (ed. M. LIVERANI) (Roma 1995) 103-115; K. RADNER, “Provinz”, *RLA* 11, 43.

⁴⁹ B.J. PARKER, *The Mechanics of Empire*. The Northern Frontier of Assyria as a Case Study in Imperial Dynamics (Helsinki 2001) 256.

⁵⁰ A. FUCHS, “Über den Wert von Befestigungsanlagen”, *ZA* 98 (2008) 45-99.

analysis of 2 Kings 15, that the Assyrian campaigns were only one reason among many others responsible for the Assyrian victories. The fall of Samaria was not an exception. The following examples illustrate similarities between Assyrian military and non-military tools and the dynamics found in 2 Kings 15.

The reconstruction of Ashurbanipal's conquest of Elam showed that the Assyrian campaigns on their own were unable to eradicate Elamite resistance. There were several other dynamics that, combined with the military campaigns, ultimately brought victory for Assyria. Let us name some of them. First, the Assyrians willingly interfered with Elamite internal politics by fomenting its political instability and by raids organized by Assyrian officials stationed on the Elamite border. As the result of this policy there were five *coups d'état* within two decades. Second, the disagreements among the Elamite leading groups, being divided into three major factions, resulted in frequently changing allegiances, rebellions, and even executions of opponents. Finally, the instability was even more aggravated by famine. This study on the end of Elamite period II revealed three major dynamics in play: the Assyrian royal campaigns, the subversive activities of Assyrian officials left in the region after the retreat of the royal troops, and the internal instability and tensions in Elam⁵¹. Similar dynamics have been reconstructed in the case of the Assyrian conquest of Egypt. Several *coups d'état* took place in Egypt before Ashurbanipal finally incorporated Egypt into the Assyrian Empire⁵². These two examples, which could be easily multiplied, suffice to demonstrate that the Assyrians fostered tensions in a given region, using all available tools since it is always much easier to control or to conquer a kingdom that is internally divided. These dynamics, however, were not exclusive to the Assyrian period. M. Giorgieri has analyzed the forms of rule and the political struggles in the Hittite Kingdom just before it collapsed and pointed out that similar dynamics were in play in the Hittite

⁵¹ P. DUBOVSKÝ, "Dynamics of the Fall: Ashurbanipal's Conquest of Elam", *Susa and Elam. Archaeological, Philological, Historical and Geographical Perspectives. Proceedings of the International Congress Held at Ghent University, December 14-17, 2009* (eds. K.D. GRAEF – J. TAVERNIER) (Mémoires de la Délégation en Perse 58; Leiden – Boston, MA 2013) 462-463.

⁵² D.E. KAHN, "The Assyrian Invasions of Egypt (673-663 B.C.) and the Final Expulsion of the Kushites", *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 34 (2006) 251-267.

Kingdom as well. In particular he listed the struggle over sovereignty that caused some noble families to take sides with one faction or another, the elimination of opponents, a request for total loyalty and death threats in the case of defection or betrayal, concession of privileges, and finally famines and demographic crises⁵³.

Another reason for instability of a given region was heavy taxation. K. Radner has listed various types of taxes and tributes the Assyrians imposed upon their subordinates or partners⁵⁴. Heavy tributes, on the one hand, brought in capital to Assyria, and, on the other hand, they drained a given region and usually triggered rebellions and *coups d'état*. An illustrative example is the rebellion of the Arabs. The continuous increase in taxes brought the Arabs to desperation and then to rebellion against Assyria. The rebellion was considered a transgression (sin) and was violently suppressed by Esarhaddon (RINAP 4 I iv 1-31).

These examples illustrate that some dynamics decoded in the rhetoric of 2 Kings 15 were tools that the Assyrians often employed to buttress their military campaigns. In particular, the Assyrians willingly supported political factions and fomented the instability of a given region. Naturally, similar dynamics were not invented by the Assyrians, but also occurred in other periods and regions.

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The annalistic passages of the Bible, such as 2 Kings 15, have been studied mainly for the purpose of the reconstruction of political history of a given period. In this paper I have tried to demonstrate that such kind of passages convey not only a description of the events that can be more or less reliable, but also an interpretation of

⁵³ M. GIORGIERI, "Kingship in Hatti during the 13th Century: Forms of Rule and Struggles for Power before the Fall of the Empire", *Pax Hethitica. Studies on the Hittites and Their Neighbours in Honour of Itamar Singer* (eds. Y. COHEN – A. GILAN) (Wiesbaden 2010) 136-157.

⁵⁴ K. RADNER, "Abgaben an den König von Assyrien aus dem In- und Ausland", *Geschenke und Steuern, Zölle und Tribute. Antike Abgabenformen in Anspruch und Wirklichkeit* (eds. H. KLINKOTT – S. KUBISCH) (Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 29; Leiden – Boston, MA 2007) 213-230.

the events encoded in the rhetoric of redactors and final editors. 2 Kings 15 is a good example of how an apparently monotonous description of events, in particular, revolts, invasions, and rebellions, could point to some dynamics that can easily escape the reader's attention. Even though 2 Kings 15 is the result of multiple redactors and editors, its final composition points to a well conceived structure that goes beyond a mere description of political events. By examining 2 Kings 15 I have pointed out structural and rhetorical elements that could lead us to a new reconstruction of the fall of the Northern Kingdom. In particular, by analyzing various narrative and rhetorical devices I have suggested that the fall of the Northern Kingdom was due to the combination of multiple external and internal factors. This conclusion achieved from the rhetoric of the biblical texts corroborates several studies on the mechanics of the Neo-Assyrian expansion and control. These studies show that Assyrian military campaigns on their own were often insufficient to subdue hostile kingdoms and had to be supported by other military and non-military tools such as fomenting instability in the region, financial pressure, covert actions, raids, etc. Combining these two types of studies we can conclude that the fall of the Northern Kingdom was caused by multiple factors listed in section VII.

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SUMMARY

By applying various exegetical methodologies to 2 Kings 15, I have tried to identify the dynamics responsible for the fall of the Northern Kingdom, such as its instability, financial problems, tribal tensions, wrong international policy, etc. By analyzing some Assyrian documents it was shown that these dynamics were often in play during Assyrian invasions.