

THE LOST TRIBES FOUND IN ASSYRIAN ARCHIVES - W.E. Filmer

THE BIBLE tells us that in the days of Pekah, Tiglath-pileser, King of Assyria, invaded the northern tribes of Israel who dwelt in Galilee and Gilead, and carried them away captive to Assyria (2 Kings 15:29). In 1 Chronicles 5:26, we are told that "he carried them away, even the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, and brought them unto Halah, and Habor, and Hara, and to the river of Gozan". Gozan is believed to be the Assyrian town Guzana on the river Habur. The Arab name for the mound covering its ruins is Tell Halaf, suggesting that a town of similar name once existed in the neighborhood as the original of Halah. Habor may be either the river Habur, or a town of the same name; Hara is probably Haran (cf Isa 37:12).

Eleven years later, a second deportation of Israelites took place when Shalmaneser "the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of Medes' (2 Kings 17:5,6). Thus, in addition to the places in Assyria to which the first captives were taken, others were also taken to Media.

Now Israel had long been known to the Assyrian as Beth-Khumri, meaning "the people of Ommri". Omri in Hebrew began with the letter ayin or gayin. This letter used to be pronounced as a guttural H or GH; for example, Gomorrah in Hebrew begins with the same three consonants as Omri. So Omri used to be pronounced Ghomri, which became Khumri in Assyrian. For example, on the Black Obelisk, now in the British Museum, an earlier king of Assyria, more than a century before the captivity, recorded that he received tribute from Jehu, and above the panel depicting the event, the inscription read, "The tribute of Jehu, son of Khumri, followed by details of what he brought.

So also Tiglath-pileser, in his Annals, tells how he took the first Israelite captive at the time when he captured Damascus and conquered Syria: 'The towns of Gilead and Abel-beth-maacah on the frontier of Beth-Khumri, and the widespread district of Hazael to its whole extent, I turned into the territory of Assyria.' Syria is here named after Hazael, a former king of that land, just as Israel is called Beth-Khumri, after the king who founded Samaria.

The Assyrian Eponym Canon places the capture of Damascus, and therefore by implication the first captivity of Israelites in 732 B.C. The Bible tells that Shalmaneser next began to besiege Samaria, but it is known that he died in December 722 B.C., so King Sargon II, his successor, rightly claimed in his Annals to have captured the city in the beginning of his reign, that is, 'in the first quarter of 721 B.C. On a nine-sided prism (K.1681), to be seen in the British Museum, he calls the 'the land of the house of Omri (Khumri). After this the name Khumri is never again

mentioned in Assyrian records. However, close to the place in northern Media where some of the Israelites were placed in captivity, a people called at first Gamir, later Gimira or Gimirra received their first mention in the Assyrian archives.

This name Gamir may well have been derived from Ghumri by the reversal of the final syllable -ri to -ir, a type of spelling error that sometimes occurs in other cuneiform documents (e.g. king Rusas of Urartu is sometimes spelled Ursa). Historians are agreed, however, that Gimira is the Assyrian equivalent of the Greek Kimmerio (called Cimmerians in English), who are known to have been active in Asia Minor during the seventh century B.C. The first Assyrian documents to mention the Gimira indicate, however, that some of them were actually living in northern Iran, near Lake Urmia, as early as 707 B.C., only fourteen years after the fall of Samaria. But these documents lend no support to the theory given in history books that the Cimmerians originated in south Russia, north of the Black Sea, whence they migrated through the Caucasus into Media and Asia Minor.

THE APPEARANCE OF THE GIMIRA

The earliest documents to mention the Gimira are a series of cuneiform tablets in which Assyrian spies, keeping watch on their northern frontier, reported on the movement of Urartian troops, and said that the Urartians were defeated by the Gimira south of Lake Urmia. These tablets, about twenty in number, are part of a collection of some 23,000 recovered about a century ago from the library of Ashurbanipal in the ruins of Nineveh. They were published in English in *The Royal Correspondence of the Assyrian Empire* (1930), by L. Waterman, among 1,471 miscellaneous letters, but owing to the relevant texts being mixed up in complete disorder among so many others, no historian has hitherto published a reconstruction of the events to which they refer.

Concerning them the *Cambridge Ancient History* (Vol III, p. 53) says, 'The collection of letters preserved in Ashurbanipal's library serves to inform us of events in the years 707-706 which are of great interest. From a report of the Assyrian officer Ashur-risua, we learn that Argistis (king of Urartu) was engaged in 708 in collecting a considerable army, which it was supposed he intended to use against Assyria. The next spring, however, saw him otherwise engaged. The people called Gimirrai by the Assyrians, Kimmerioi by the Greeks were beginning to move into Asia Minor, and to meet their attack Argistis marched northward. All that we know is that Argistis suffered a great defeat in battle, apparently delivered in territory acknowledged to belong to the Cimmerians.'

In fact, there is nothing in any of these letters to suggest that the Gimirra were moving through the Caucasus into Asia Minor, or that Argistis marched northward to meet their attack. This notion derives from a misleading statement made by the Greek historian Herodotus who said that when the Cimmerians were driven out of south Russia by the Scythians, they migrated round the eastern end of the Black Sea to enter Asia Minor. The archaeological evidence clearly shows that no Scythians appeared in south Russia until after 600 B.C., whereas the Cimmerians are known from various historical sources to have been in Asia Minor throughout the seventh century, and from these Assyrian spy reports to have been in the region Lake Urmia before 700. There is no reason to believe that they had been displaced from Russia at

this time, whether by a Scythian or 'Proto-Scythian' people, for Russian archaeologists have produced no evidence to suggest that the lands north of the Black Sea had been invaded from the east by any fresh people between the arrival of the 'Srubna Culture' in the thirteenth century B.C., and the Scythians in the sixth century.

THE ASSYRIAN SPY REPORTS

The location of the battle that took place in 707, when the Urartians were defeated by Gimira, may be established by piecing together the reports of the Assyrian spies. These were received in Nineveh by Sennacherib, then crown prince, and passed on to his father, king Sargon, who was absent from the capital at the time. Evidently the spies had been sent to keep a watch on Urartian activities in the summer of 708, but they reported (in letters H.123 and 148) no troop movements until the autumn, when Sennacherib wrote to his father saying that 'On the eleventh day of the month Elul a letter came to me from Ashur-risua, saying, "The king of Urartu together with his forces, entered the city of Uesi." 'He added that the Mannai, south of Lake Urmia, had also come to him with a similar report, as well as others from the hill country bordering on Urartu (H.198).

Now Uesi, originally a Urartian fortress, had been captured by Sargon in 714 on his way home from a campaign that had taken him as far north as Lake Van. On that occasion, after taking Uesi, he had made a diversion to bring into subjection Urzana, the chieftain of Musasir, who had failed to pay him tribute. The ruins of Musasir have been identified by the German archaeologist Lehmann-Haupt, so its position, which is important, is well known. Lehmann Haupt also showed that Uesi is to be identified with modern Basch-Kalah on the west bank of the upper Zab river, and that in ancient times a road ran through the mountains from Lake Van via Uesi to Musasir. His book, however, was apparently published too late to be available to the authors of the Cambridge Ancient History, who identify Uesi with Bitlis, far away to the northwest.

Early in the following spring, the Urartian forces began to muster in Uesi, for Ashur-risua reported that the Urartian king had left the capital Turushpa at the beginning of Nisan, and that Kakkadanu, his commander-in-chief, had arrived in Uesi (H.492). In a further letter he says that 'five of the governors of the land of Urartu have entered the city of Uesi', and among their names Kakkadanu is again mentioned. He says that they came from the capital and entered Uesi, and now that they have brought up their forces their army is strong (H.444).

In his next report Ashur-risua says that 3,000 troops had crossed 'the Black River' (Upper Zab?) and had set out for the city of Musasir with their pack animals. The king himself was moving into Uesi (H.380). When this news reached the Assyrian palace, an enquiry was evidently sent to Musasir for further details, for we have the reply (H.409) from Urzana, the local chieftain, saying that the Urartian troops, after offering sacrifices in the temple, had passed through. The king, he said, was still in Uesi where he had met more of his leaders, all of whom were expected to come and offer sacrifices in Musasir. Sennacherib immediately forwarded this information to his father, adding the startling fresh news that the governor of Uesi had been slain, and that the troops of Urartu were in full flight. His letter (H.1079) ends, 'When we have investigated, we shall send you our further report.'

In his next letter (H.197), Sennacharib quotes three reports from his spies, two of whom said that 'when the king of Urartu went into the land of Gamir (Cimmerians), his army was utterly defeated, while the third, from Ashur-risua, added that Kakkadanu, the commander-in-chief, had been captured. Another letter (H.646) from an unknown writer lists nine of his generals, including the governor of Uesi, who had been killed, and says that the king himself had fled to the mountains.

These documents confirm that Uesi lay on the road from Turushpa to Musasir. They also reveal that in the autumn of 708 B.C., the Urartians had reoccupied this fortress, and then in the spring of 707 advanced through Musasir toward the south of Lake Urmia, apparently with the object of recapturing the Mannai territory which the Assyrians had conquered seven years earlier. It was there they were defeated by the Gimira. This location is confirmed by a further report to the palace overseer which says that in their counterattack 'the Gomera went forth out of the midst of the Mannai into the land of Urartu' (H.12). This last tablet would alone be sufficient to prove that the 'Gamera', when first heard of, were located in Mannai territory, immediately adjacent to Media, where the Israelites had been placed in captivity only fourteen years earlier.

Now in 719 B.C., only two years after the Israelite exile, Sargon says in his Annals that he invaded this district and deported many of the Mannai to the west. This would have left a partial vacuum into which the homeless Israelites would naturally tend to drift. There is good reason, therefore, to expect that some Israelites would be found in this area. The slight change in the name from Khumri to Gamir or Gamera in the spy reports is easily explained in view of the excitement caused by the unexpected defeat of the Urartian army.

THE CIMMERIANS IN ASIA MINOR

When the house of Israel was taken into exile in 732 and 721 B.C., the Bible tells us that they were deported to two different places, one around Gozan and the river Habur in northern Assyria, the other among the Medes in northern Iran. From the Apocrypha (2 Esdras 13: 40-45) we learn that some of the ten tribes escaped through the gorge of the Euphrates, which would bring them into Asia Minor.

Although at first the Assyrians called the Israelites Khumri, this soon became Gamir after the captivity, and later Gimira, equivalent to the Greek Kimerioi, or the English name Cimmerian. According to Greek historians, the Cimmerians made their first appearance in Asia Minor when they overthrew Midas, king of Phrygia. This was dated by Julius Africanus and Eusebius in the first quarter of the seventh century B.C. Archaeologists, excavating the ruins of Gordium, the Phrygian capital, have confirmed that the city was destroyed by fire about 700 B.C. or soon after. These dates agree well with the view that the Cimmerians were actually Israelites who had been taken into exile in 732 NS 721 B.C., and then escaped through the gorge of the Euphrates.

We have also the evidence of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria 681-669 B.C., who recorded a battle with the Cimmerians in the second year of his reign. 'Teushpa, the

Gimira', he says, a barbarian whose home was afar off, I cut down with the sword in the land of Hubushna, together with all his troops'. Hubushna, was the region in central Asia Minor north and west of the Euphrates gorge. After listing other people who dwelt in the mountains, he ends his account saying, 'On the rest of them who were not guilty of rebellion and insubordination, I imposed the heavy yoke of my sovereignty.' This suggests that the Gimira had been guilty of rebellion, which implies that they had previously been subject to Assyria, and not intrusive invaders, as modern history books make out.

A large prism of Ashurbanipal who succeeded Esarhaddon records that subsequently, about the middle of the seventh century, the Cimmerians had made raids on the kingdom of Lydia in western Asia Minor.

THE GIMIRA IN MEDIA

Now the Assyrian spy reports from the reign of Sargon showed that some Gimira, or Cimmerians, were living among the Mannai south of Lake Urmia in northern Media as early 707 B.C. A further letter found in the archives of Nineveh confirms that they were still there in the reign of Esarhaddon some twenty years after they had defeated the Urartian invaders. This is a letter (H.1237) addressed to Esarhaddon by an officer evidently in command of troops sent to collect tribute from the Mannai. He appears to be advising caution on account of threats from the Gimira, and says, 'Although the king sent an order to his troops saying, "Enter into the midst of the Mannai", all the troops should not enter. Let the cavalry and the Dakku invade the Gimira who have spoken saying, "The Mannai pertain to you, we have not interfered". Certainly this is a lie. They are the offspring of outcasts; they recognize neither the oath of a god nor any human agreement'.

The remark about 'the offspring of outcasts; may be just a piece of invective, but it could have been based on the knowledge that the Gimira were, in fact, exiles from their native land. The letter goes on to advise the king that his chariots and baggage wagons should remain on the frontier pass, from whence cavalry raids should be sent to plunder both the Mannai and the Gimira.

PRAYERS TO THE SUN-GOD

The Gimira are also mentioned in another series of tablets recovered from the ruins of Nineveh. These are the prayers of Esarhaddon to the sun-god Shamash, in which he wrote to the priests asking for divine guidance about the operation of his troops sent to collect tribute in the territory of the Medes and Mannai. To these he received answers in the form of liver omens, a practice mentioned in Ezekiel 21:21. At least half a dozen of these texts mention hostile bands of Gimira both among the Mannai and in Media that made the collection of tribute very hazardous at that time. One such text mentions them in association with the Medes threatening Bit-Hamban as far south as the modern city of Kermanshad. If the Gimira were Israelites placed in cities of the Medes, this is just what we might expect.

Now the fact that the Gimira made their appearance in such widely separated places as central Asia Minor and Media within fifty years of the Israelites arriving in these

very places, can only be accounted for on the hypothesis that they were Israelites. The mountain barriers of the Caucasus, as well as along the southeastern coast of the Black Sea, and the political barrier formed by the powerful kingdom of Urartu, exclude the possibility that the Gimira were a people who had migrated from south Russia, as history books say.

THE FIRST SCYTHIANS

Now in addition to the Gimira being reported among the Medes and the Mannai, another name Iskuzza also occurs in this connection in the Assyrian archives. For example, Esarhaddon, in his Annals, claimed victory over them: I scattered the Mannaeans, intractable barbarians, and I smote with the sword the armies of Ishpaki, the Iskuzza; alliance with them did not save him.' They are again mentioned in association with the Mannai in a prayer text asking, 'Will the Iskuza warriors who live in a district of the Mannai, and have moved to the frontier of the Mannai, succeed in their plan? Will they march out from the pass of Hubushkia, and reach the town of Harrania and Anisuskia, and take great booty and heavy spoil from the borders of Assyria? Hubushkia was the chief city of the hill country called Nairi, lying between Assyria and Urartu.

These two texts clearly place the Iskuza among the Mannai in the north. But at the same time two further prayer texts mention them in the south threatening Assyrian expeditions sent to collect tribute in Media. One asks whether someone whose name is illegible, 'his son, or the Iskuza warriors, or anyone else who is with him, will attack the nobles and governors of Bitkari and Saparda who are going into a district of the Medes and are returning? In the other text, the king enquires, 'Will the governors, nobles, warriors, horses and troops of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, which are in Bitkari, and which have invaded the land of the Medes to collect the tribute of horses, be attacked by the hand of Iskuza warriors?'

It is evident from these texts that during Esarhaddon's reign, hostile bands not only of Gimira, but also of Iskuza, were operating among the Mannai and the Medes. From the Bible we know that Israelites had been placed in the same region less than half a century earlier. It seems unlikely that three distinctly different people, the Gimira, the Iskuza and the Israelites would all arrive in the same small area within such a short space of time. It seems more likely that these are different names for the same people, for just as Gimira could be derived from Khumri, so Iskuza could have been derived from Isaaca or house of Isaac, as the Israelites may have called themselves (cf Amos 7:16).

This derivation finds support in the fact that Iskuza was the Assyrian name for the people whom the Greeks called Scythians, and Herodotus (VII,64) informs us that the Persians called all Scythian tribes Sacae. The initial I in the name Isaac, though retained by the Assyrians, was dropped by the Persians, probably because in Hebrew the accent fell on the last syllable. Since the Persians called the Israelites in Media Sacae, the name Sacae or Scythian was retained for them in later literature, but those in Asia Minor retained the Assyrian name Gimira or Greek Cimmerian.

THE TREASURE OF ZIWIYE

Tangible evidence for the presence of Scythians in Media during the seventh century B.C. came to light in 1947 when a royal treasure was unearthed by the inhabitants of the village of Ziwiye, some seventy miles south of Lake Urmia. In his book *Iran, R. Ghirshman* writes, "The collection falls into four very distinct groups: the first is undoubtedly Assyrian in inspiration and execution; the second is typically Scythian; the third Assyro-Scythian in inspiration, but was probably executed by Assyrian artists; and finally the fourth group consists of products of local workshops, probably Median' (Pelican edn. P. 106 f.).

Ghirshman goes on to express his opinion that 'part at least of the treasure may have been the gifts made by the king (Eaahaddon) on the occasion of the marriage of an Assyrian prince's to the Scythian king Partatua. The treasure had been packed into a bath-tub and buried, presumably at the time, towards the end of the seventh century B.C. when the Medes joined the Babylonians in overthrowing the Assyrian empire, and drove the Scythian out of Media. The bath-tub was almost identical with one now shown in the British Museum which dates from the time of Ashurbanipal (669-627 B.C.). The treasure of Ziwiye would thus be the most ancient of all Scythian remains, being almost half a century earlier than anything found in Rome.

PERSIAN TRI-LINGUAL INSCRIPTIONS

Final proof that Gimira, Iskuza, or Sacae were only different names for the same people is provided by several Persian tri-lingual inscriptions dating from the reign of Darius the Great, some two centuries after the Israelite exile.

The first is the famous rock inscription of Behistun on the road from Hamadan (Ecbatana) to Babylon which provided Sir Henry Rawlinson, a century ago, with the key to the translation of Assyrian cuneiform writing. The text in three languages, Persian, Susian and Babylonian, includes a list of the peoples over whom Darius ruled, and among these were the Sakka or Sacae in central Asia. In both the Persian and Susian version these are called Sakka, but in the Babylonian version the same people are called Gimiri, translated Cimmerians. This seems to have been a puzzle to the experts, for King and Thompson who published the text, added a footnote saying that the word 'Gimiri' is clear upon the rock.

A second tri-lingual inscription, on a thin sheet of gold, was published in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1926) by Sidney Smith of the British Museum. In it Darius proclaims that his kingdom extended 'from Scythia which is beyond Sogdiana to Kush (Ethiopia), and from India to Sardis.' In the Persian and Elamite versions the original for Scythia is Sakka, but in the Babylonian it is once again Gimira.

Finally, an inscription in the tomb of Darius again lists the nations over whom he ruled, but here three different groups of 'Scythians' are mentioned. Each time they are called Sakka in the Persian and Elamite texts, but all three times they are called Gimira in the Babylonian translation. The simplest, and in fact the only way to explain this is that the Persians knew that all the people they called Sakka were known as Gimira in Babylonia and Assyria. But since the Assyrians included the Cimmerians in Asia Minor among the Gimira, they must all originally have been the same people. That they were, in fact, Israelites is evident from the fact that all made

their first appearance immediately after the Israelite exile, and in exactly those places where the Israelite exile, and in exactly those places where the Israelites vanished. Furthermore, both names can be derived from names for Israel.