

A Political History of the Arameans: From Their Origins to the End of Their Polities



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The Arameans were a large group of linguistically related entities that played a significant role in the history and culture of the ancient Near East. While their greatest legacy was, undoubtedly, the Aramaic language that became a *lingua franca*, they contributed in many other ways to Iron Age civilization.

Politically, the Arameans were characterized by wide-ranging diversity. The geographical areas where they resided dictated some of this diversity.

The other peoples with whom the Arameans interacted also impacted them causing variations in their culture. The fact that they adapted to different geographical and cultural environments makes the study of their history, both intriguing and challenging.

In the forthcoming monograph produced during my tenure at the Albright Institute, I explore this amazing people and their choices in political structures. While past histories have concentrated on the political status of the Aramean states, which is essential in understanding their history, I have attempted a more detailed study of all of the Aramean socially constructed entities. This includes a more sophisticated, anthropologically nuanced approach to tribal structures that builds on analogies from the earlier Amorite tribes in addition to a more robust study of the very vocabulary utilized to describe these tribal structures. In particular, this approach takes advantage of recently discovered texts which yield a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity and flexibility in political structures that the Aramean groups used, and how these entities functioned. In this volume, I draw on recent scholarly discussions concerning immigration theory because such an approach eliminates the one-size-fits-all monolithic explanations that have often been used in past studies.

What makes the study of the Arameans even more interesting, and demanding, is all the new archaeological and textual data that have come to light in the last decade. One quick example must suffice: the archaeological work done on the Middle Assyrian Euphrates fort systems and the new Middle Assyrian texts necessitate a new historical synthesis. And this is what my work attempts to do. But all these data bring new issues and problems to the development of such a synthesis. Therefore, it is important to identify what the interpretive options are and how best to negotiate the data in order to deal with these new issues and problems.

Throughout their history, the Arameans furnish a wide range of political entities to study. And one of the best ways to engage this study is to employ a regional approach. Consequently, I have investigated the various Aramean polities by dividing the study into four regions: the Jezirah where Assyrian power and influence were a particular challenge; Anatolian north Syria where in the Iron I and II periods one encounters the Luvian-Aramean cultural symbiosis; the Levant (central and southern Syria) —which is still obscure in many ways; and southern Mesopotamia where the indigenous Babylonians, the Chaldean groups and the geography combined to create a very different environment for the Aramean entities. In most of these regions, the Aramean polities manifest a range of adaptations: some opted to remain simply individual clan or tribal groups, others chose to configure tribal confederations, and still others set up tribal states.

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