

## 2. THE HUBTU IN NEO-ASSYRIAN CONTEXT: TYPOLOGIES, CONDITIONS AND FUNCTIONS(C. 1114-631 B.C.)

*El hubtu en el contexto Neosirio: tipologías,  
condiciones y funciones (c. 1114-631 a. C.)*

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### ABSTRACT

War as an organized phenomenon began with the first cities genesis and the consequent increase of supplies. These conflicts, usually seasonal and during the summer, became a way of acquiring goods and supremacy over other populations. This activity also formed new social elites who, over time, would take control over the political systems. It is in these warlike contexts that prisoners of war were made, they were a constant and essential element in the battle aftermath. In Neo-Assyria, the capture of enemy soldiers, in Assyrian *asīru*, were crucial for the war economy. Distributed by different types, depending on their social and military classes, these prisoners would give rise to ransoms and a fruitful income in the slave trade.

Keywords: *Prisioners; Neo-Assyria; War; Ransoms; Treatment.*

### RESUMEN

La guerra como fenómeno organizado comenzó con la génesis de las primeras ciudades y el consiguiente aumento de los suministros. Estos conflictos, generalmente estacionales y durante el verano, se convierten en una forma de adquirir bienes y supremacía sobre otras poblaciones. Esta actividad también formó nuevas élites sociales que, con el tiempo, tomarían el control de los sistemas políticos. Es en este contexto bélico donde se hicieron prisioneros de guerra, que fueron un elemento constante y esencial en el contexto de la batalla y sus consecuencias. En Neo-Asiria, la captura de soldados enemigos, en asirio *asīru*, eran cruciales para la economía de guerra. Distribuidos por diferentes tipos, dependiendo de su clases sociales y militares, estos prisioneros darían lugar a rescates y un ingreso fructífero en la trata de esclavos.

Palabras clave: *Prisioneros; Neo-Asiria; Guerra; Rescates; Tratamiento*

### I. INTRODUCTION

The reality of warfare prisoners has been a timeless phenomenon; we might have had them in skirmishes that, certainly took place in prehistoric times, as well as confirming their presence in later periods, from the Bronze Age to the present day. Naturally, their status,

functions and typologies differ widely regarding chronological and geographical issues. For this study, it is important to observe what «prisoners of war» were in Neo-Assyria, what were their origins, in which military contexts where they captured, what were their functions in society and how were they treated in captivity.

The prisoner's own importance in the Iron Age societies of the Ancient Middle East is evident from the references of a high number of captives throughout various textual narratives developed during the First Millennium B.C. Undoubtedly, for the Neo-Assyrian Empire, a prisoner was essential for the society development, regarding economic and social matters. However, even in the war itself, these prisoners could be of some use, especially when their skills and knowledge (of specific weapons) so allowed; furthermore, these prisoners would be used in the army. This reality is evident in some Neo-Assyrian monarchs' reigns, where captive units were integrated into the royal forces, namely, the war chariots' squadrons being of particular note.

Regarding the applied methodology, we used two types of sources: textual and iconographic and analysed them carefully. Naturally, using sources with a high propagandistic weight, implies and demands from the researcher a constant and critical look and adapt it to the current historiographic knowledge for each one of the geographies and chronologies in study. Several texts were used dispersed by numerous Neo-Assyrian monarchs: for those between c. 1115 to 745 B.C., we use the two works of A. Kirk Grayson, *RIMA I* (1991) and *RIMA II* (1996); subsequent to this chronology, for Sennacherib's reign we used the same author's work with Jamie Novotny divided into two parts, *RINAP 3/1* (2012) and *RINAP 3/2* (2014); still for this reign the work of Sidney Smith, *The First Campaign of Sennacherib, King of Assyria, B.C. 705-681* (1921); for the later reign of Esarhaddon, we used the work of Erle Leichty, *RINAP 4* (2011). In addition to these works on specific historical periods, we study others of general nature, such as: *Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament* of James B. Pritchard (1969), Simo Parpola and Kazuko Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths* (1988), the *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia* of Daniel David Luckenbill (1926), of Jean-Jacques Glassner, the *Mesopotamian Chronicles* (2004) and *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (2000) of A. Kirk Grayson. Regarding the recorded correspondence between Assyria and other entities: we used *The Nimrud Letters* of Henry Saggs (2001) and the Simo Parpola *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part 1* and from the same author with Giovanni Lanfranchi the second section of these group of correspondence (1990). The iconographic sources are dispersed throughout the reigns of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, however, for the greater part, we used the work of Paul Collins, *Assyrian Palace Sculptures* (2008) about the following kings: Assurnasirpal II, Tiglath-pileser III, Sargon II, Sennacherib and Assurbanipal.

## II. PRISONERS OF WAR IN NEO-ASSYRIA: TYPOLOGIES

In Mesopotamia, the first mention of prisoners of war comes from the Sumerian period in the most southern areas of this wide region; these were referred to as *nitakur* («male of a foreign country») and *munuskur* («female of a foreign country») (Verderame, 2018: 19). Such a term leads us to believe that the first captives acquired through conflict were, above all, of foreign origin. In the first centuries of the second millennium B.C., Hammurabi, in

Babylon, decreed that all prisoners of war should be enslaved, with the exception of those that could originate a ransom (Mendelsohn, 1946: 74). Annunziata Rositani's in-depth study regarding some Old Babylonian texts dated from Samsu-iluna's reign (c. 1742-1740 BC), demonstrate the existence of an state entity, named *bīt asīri* («the house of the prisoners of war») led by the *ugula asīri* («overseer of the prisoners of war») or by the *ugula bīt asīri* («overseer of the house of prisoners of war») that would have the function of administrate these captives and then send them throughout the kingdom according to their present needs (Rositani, 2018: 43-46). Mentions of *bīt asīri* or just *asīri* are spread throughout Mesopotamia, with references still being made in Anatolia in some «Hittite Law» texts and in Syria, more specifically in Mari and Ugarit. However, in Assyria the expression *asīri* is missing from the sources, both Old, Middle and Neo-Assyrian (Rositani, 2018: 56-59). Despite the evidence suggesting the absence of this entity, at least with the characteristics present in the Old Babylonian Period, we know that during the Old Assyrian Period, there were slave routes that linked Assyria to Babylon along the Tigris river (Koppen, 2004: 16). Yet, as we will see throughout this article, the importance of the prisoner of war in Assyria will require the existence of a complex administrative system regarding the control of prisoners of war's groups.

In Assyria, warfare was at the empire's forefront (Liverani, 2012: 634-635), something that made prisoners of war a very a constant and important element in all of Assyrian society. We can outline three major groups from which prisoners of war (*hubtu* in Assyrian) may had come, all from different social and professional backgrounds: high status prisoners (kings, princes, governors and officers) (Gerardi, 1992: 75-76), regular military prisoners (the soldiers) and regular civilians. The first group appears widely referenced throughout Assyrian narratives (as well as in other Mesopotamian written sources) about prisoners making in warlike contexts. See the following examples dated from the Tukulti-Ninurta I's and Sennacherib's reigns (note that this last example it is a Babylonian text) (Grayson, 1987: 245. A.0.78.25; Id. 2000: 80-81. BM 92502):

«[...] In the midst of that battle I captured Kaštiliašu, king of the Kassites, (and) trod with my feet upon his lordly neck as though it were a footstool. Bound I brought him as a captive into the presence of Aššur, my lord. (Thus) I became lord of Sumer and Akkad in its entirety (and) fixed the boundary of my land as the Lower Sea in the east.»

«[...] On the first year of Mušežib-Marduk: in the seventh day of the month Ab Kudur-(Nahhunte), king of Elam, was made prisoner in a revolt and died. [...] On the first day of the month of Kislev the city was captured. Mušežib-Marduk was made prisoner and brought to Assyria. [...]»

In both cases we can observe two prisoners of high social status (*Figure 1*) and both appear to be monarchs of their respective kingdoms. The first was Kaštiliašu, king of the Kassites, that is, Babylon's monarch (Jakob, 2017: 123-124; Heinz, 2012: 717) and the second example, Kudur-(Nahhunte), king of Elam. This category of prisoners would be the most desirable for the army to acquire, since the capture of these individuals allowed two very advantageous situations for the winning belligerent (Parpola; Watanabe, 1988: 22-23). First, it allowed the defeated territory to pass into the power sphere of the winning faction. However, if there was a crown prince this process would not be as linear. The other possibility is the payment of a

high ransom, a reality that would be very beneficial for Assyria finances. In both excerpts, we can see these two realities, while in the first, the king of Kassites is brought folded, in a clear sign of inferiority, to the capital and to the presence of the main deity, Aššur; in a mythological event in which the enemy leader would be «judged» by the deity. What would be the future of this king? In the respective source, there were no references to his fate, but knowing *a priori* the Babylon's future, it is likely that Kaštiliašu didn't come back to his kingdom. In fact, after his defeat against Tukulti Ninurta's army, Babylon became administered by an Assyrian governor and Tukulti-Ninurta I started calling himself «Lord of Sumer and Akkad» (Jakob, 2017: 122-124; Van de Mierop, 2016: 187). Regardless this outcome, we don't know what was the Babylonian king's fate, but taking into account that his capture allowed Assyria to control Babylon, we can assume a Kaštiliašu's execution, in order to create an important political power vacuum. On the other hand, the Elam's monarch future was quite clear at the written source: after being captured he was killed; however, the excerpt does not mention whether he was taken to an infrastructure or whether his death was done immediately after he was made a prisoner. Knowing the status and importance of that person, we may admit that, at least, his sentence and consequent death were ritualized.



FIGURE 1. *High status prisoner of war grabbed by the hair by a soldier.* [Collins, 2008: 38].

Although these are the most advantageous and desirable prisoners of war to acquire in the course of a conflict, they would also be the most difficult to catch. They would always be well protected by elite military units, a reality that leads us to believe that their capture would, in most cases, be possible only when the battle was lost, and the army was fleeing (the battlefield, where a chaotic environment could be generated, leading even the most capable soldier to adopt a reckless endeavour. Following the next narrative taken from Sennacherib's reign (c. 704-681 B.C.) (Frahm, 2017a: 615), we can see a clear example of a royal elite

unit's failure in protecting a high-status man. According to the excerpt, the Egyptian war chariot units, which were part of the royal army, were unable to protect some Egyptian princes and consequently they were captured by the Assyrians near the city of Eltekeh (Grayson and Novotny, 2014: 80. BM 118821):

«[...] In the plain of the city of Eltekeh, I fought with them and defeated them. I captured alive the Egyptian [char]ioteers and princes, together with the charioteers of the king of the land Meluhha. [...]»

There are some references regarding the capture of governors and high officials within the Neo-Assyrian texts (Grayson, 2000: 86; Id: 125-126; Id: 164; Glassner, 2004: 181). From Sennacherib's reign, we know of the presence of two «magnates», a term chosen by the translator that, certainly, referred to a pair of provincial governors, that were present on the battlefield, since the sources tell us that they were captured in the same conflict. Knowing that these governors fought on chariots and that they even had private squads, their subordinates (Ferreira, 2019: 194), it is possible to assume that it would have been other vehicles that could capture these governors in battle. This may have been a case in which the governor's chariot was caught in a disadvantageous situation and may have been neutralized by foot soldiers that surrounded him (Ferreira, 2019: 276-277). See the analysed narrative in the following example (Grayson and Novotny, 2014: 315. King, Bavian copies «Lower Panel»):

«[...] I captured alive in the midst of the battle the magnates of the King of the land Elam, including Nabû-šuma-iškun, a son of Marduk-apla-iddina (II) (Merodach-baladan), king of the land Karduniaš (Babylonia). [...]»

Other example comes from Sargon II's reign, here in the aftermath of his war against the Cimmerians it is mentioned the capture two governors and one high official. See the subsequent example (Parpola, 1987: 31. K 181. ABL 197):

«[...] The troops of the Urartian king have been utterly defeated on his expedition against the Cimmerians; eleven of his governors have been eliminated [with] their troops; his commander-in-chief and two of his governors [have been taken prisoners]. [...]»

From the same reign, we are aware of a narrative about the arrival of a delegation of ambassadors from Urartu. Based on the described context, the ambassadors' journey had as main objective the repatriation of some prisoners in charge of Nabû-duru-usur. Although the source does not openly state who these captives were, nor what were their social status; the possibility of reacquiring prisoners would always be associated with some type of payment, so it seems possible to admit that, in this specific case, we are facing a ransoms' payment related to important personnel. Regarding this case, see the following excerpt (Parpola, 1987: 12-13. K 622, 1981. ABL 306. CT 53 221):

«[...] The king's word to Nabu-duru-usur: Right now, I am sending the royal bodyguard Mannu-ki-Assur to those Urartian emissaries: he will bring them to Urzuhina in advance of these captives who are eating bread in your charge. As for you. the day you see this letter, summon these captives; they should be on the alert, standing by, and the day Mannu-ki-Assur the bodyguard writes to you: «The emissaries have arrived in Urzuhina, set the cap-

tives in motion,» assemble the captives, go to Urzuhina. and entrust them [...] to the [city over] seer of Urzuhina. [...]

Naturally, the majority of prisoners of war captured during a battle would be what we might call «regular soldiers», not only because they were the most numerous, but also because they were «less protected» during the melee. The absence of personal guards, as in the case of the already mentioned kings, princes and governors, was a major factor. These warriors would have had a more uncertain future after their capture, since it would be unlikely for them to return to their homeland. Payment of ransoms would be out of the question and the release of prisoners as an outcome of eventual treaties are completely absent from Assyrian written sources. From the «Treaty between Šamši-Adad V and Marduk-zarki-šumi, king of Babylon» (Parpola and Watanabe, 1988: 4), we can see that, although the apparent peace between Assyria and Babylon had been reached, it is clear, at the end of the narrative, that the captives obtained during the conflict were going to be kept under that very same condition. The little concern regarding these prisoners proves that they would remain as such, although, sometimes, with important functions in the Assyrian society. Safeguarding some possible cases of escapees, low status military and civilian captives should remain in the situation of prisoners/slaves for the rest of their lives. A reality reinforced by Frederick Fales who, in his work «Guerre et Paix en Assyrie», says that he did not find in any Assyrian narrative any mentions of freed slaves (Fales, 2010: 217).

It is important to mention that the Assyrian narratives do not distinguish between military and civilian prisoners, let alone their fate. However, there are several small texts in Neo-Assyrian sources that, by the numbers presented, provide us with quantitative data regarding a possible division between the imprisonment of «regular soldiers» or general civilians. Dating from the reigns of Adad-Nirari II (c. 911-891 B.C.), Assurnasirpal II (c. 883-859 B.C.), and Shalmaneser III (c. 858-824 B.C.) respectively (Yamada, 2000: 80-81; Pino Cano, 2003: 156-157; Frahm, 2017a: 615), see the following examples (Luckenbill, 1926: 119. BM 118898; Id: 168. A.0.101.1; Grayson, 1996: 17. A.0.102.2):

«[...] One thousand men of the land of [...] 4000 of them he carried away as prisoners and brought them down to the land of Assyria. [...]

«[...] 600 of their fighting men I struck down with the sword, I cut off their heads. 400 men I took alive, 3000 prisoners I brought out. [...]

«[...] I conquered the towns Taia, Hazazu, Nulia (and) Butamu which (belong) to the country Hattina. I killed 2900 of [their] battle-experienced soldiers; 14600 I brought away as prisoners of war. I received the tribute of Arame, mand of Gusi. [...]

First of all, it should be noted that these narratives could be exaggerated due to their political and propagandistic contexts in which many of these excerpts were inserted, as it would be normal for an exaggeration regarding the original data to exalt the Assyrian victory over a certain enemy. We know very little about the historiographical contexts related to the Assurnasirpal I's and Adad-Nirari II's examples, a fact that makes it difficult to determine these prisoners' origin and whether the numbers presented were relevant or not for the empire's background. But in both cases (4000 and 3400 captives) (Grayson, 1996: 187), the numbers appear to be

realistic enough to admit that they refer to a group of prisoners of war from the army defeated by the Assyrian king and not of civilian origin. Nevertheless, when we make a direct comparison of these quantifications to the Shalmaneser III's example, the disparity in terms of numbers is evident. Even admitting that this latter narrative is about a larger war against Northern Syrian cities, something that we do not know about from the other sources, we can be sure that the 14600 prisoners were actually divided between military and civilian backgrounds.

Regarding the deportations' process, an in-depth observation of the various dimensions of this procedure would imply effective space which, unfortunately, we do not have, so, we will only delineate the main lines of this *modus operandi*. In fact, it seems to us to be beyond what was intended in this article, knowing *a priori* that a large part of these populations were civil. However, when the deported groups appear to be of military origin, they will be considered and analysed in more depth. There are many cases of people transferred to other territories, like the case of the Arameans who were deported on such a large scale that they would end up creating some problems to the Assyrian power (Frahm, 2017: 7). These issues would be very common due to the quantitative dimension of the groups that were deported. According to some sources (Horne, 1917: 382; Smith, 1921: 71), up to 208000 were deported at once. A very high quantification, which may raise some logistical and social problems. Dating from Sargon II's reign, see the following example regarding the resettlement of a population (Lanfranchi and Parpola, 1990: 173. K 541. ABL 207):

«[...] As to the captives about whom the king, my lord, wrote me, I have brought them (there). I and the deputy (governor) have entered them from Tahal as far as Kar-Šamaš, and appointed (them). I have given out [provisions] for a whole month, [by the sea]h of 8 litres, and half a cup of salt and cress. Everything is fine. [...]»

Following Bustenay Oded and Frederick Fales, deportations started roughly during Assurnasirpal II's reign and continued until the end of this hegemonic land powerhouse at approximately 608 B.C. This *modus operandi* strongly marked the Assyrian iconography, being one of the activities most represented in the low reliefs. The deportations organization were carried out by a complex hierarchy of Assyrian officers, however, the most referenced position is the *mušarkisu* (Oded, 1979: 33-39) and were the displacement of large population masses, and then these groups would then be arbitrarily divided by age (blood ties would be ignored), and each age group would be placed in an exact place with specific functions (Fales, 2010: 212-215; Ponchia, 2017: 157-159). In short, the Assyrians had several reasons mobilize large groups of people (Oded, 1979: 41-74):

- As a punishment for a rebellion against Assyria;
- Weakening of rivals or centres of resistance;
- Guaranteed the loyalty of minor groups;
- Military conscription to increase the army;
- Source of skilled personnel;
- Repopulation of urban centres and strategic sites.

Regarding the first point, Bustenay Oded presents several examples of revolts against Assyrian control that ended in the consequent rebels' defeat and their deportation to other regions. Consider the case of Sennacherib and the subjugation of Babylon or Assurbanipal and

the deportation threat he made to the king of Elam (Oded, 1979: 41; Bertman, 2003: 268). In fact, the use of deportation as a punishment is very close to the second topic, because when moving all or part of a population to a different location will necessarily made them more fragile, both in political, social and military aspects. About the movement of minority groups, their deportation had the function of increasing the loyalty of these populations towards the Assyrian central power. However, conflicts with the already inhabitants of the regions where they were settled were common, thus creating problems for the Assyrian kings (Oded, 1979: 46). Concerning the use of deportations for the soldiers' recruitment and for the acquisition of specialized officials, their analysis will be made later. About the last case, there are many other examples regarding the settling of deportees in places of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, both in large cities such as Aššur, Nineveh or Dur-Sharruken and in important peripheral locations, like Abdadani (a border region between Media and Namri) who, after being destroyed by the Tiglath-Pileser III's army, was repopulated and rebuilt with deportees from other conquered regions, more exactly 65 000 individuals (Oded, 1979: 60-63).

It is natural that civilian deportations would be, regardless of the numbers, easier to put into practice. Even if less, imprisoned soldiers would have had another ability to fight back against their current condition. On the return journey of these prisoners of war, the Assyrian well organized machine would be essential in order to contain possible revolts by these prisoners. These should be transported in a safe manner, strongly escorted and well secured, a reality that, in fact, is quite well represented in some iconography from some Assyrian low reliefs.

### III. PROCESSES OF CAPTURING AND TRANSPORTING PRISONERS OF WAR

A prisoner of war implies that it was acquired from a warlike context, in the most varied types, whether in a pitched battle, in a siege, in a raid or in the passage of a marching column through hostile territory. Because their frequency and characteristics, battlefield and sieges would be the best way to acquire prisoners. In a pitched battle, the prisoners would be made throughout the melee, but especially, in the conflict's final moments, where the defeated belligerent's morale was low or already on the run. In this battle stage, because of its characteristics, the chariot units must have had special importance and these vehicles would have had the function of pursuing the fleeing military using their best features. The speed and mobility of this weapon would certainly be essential for these types of contexts. Let us imagine a fleeing infantry unit: a chariot's squadron would make a wrapping movement around these soldiers in order to corner them and not allow them to escape. So, it would be in the final stages of battles that most prisoners of war would be captured. It is also important to mention those who surrendered and, consequently, were caught by the Assyrian soldiers during the melee.

In sieges, it was only after the city's or fortress' downfall that prisoners of war were taken. For example, after the conquest of Eltekeh, Timnah and Ekron by Sennacherib's army, we see in the narrative (Pritchard, 1969: 288; Grayson and Novotny, 2014: 184) that the Neo-Assyrians made a «screening» regarding the inhabitants' fate of the city of Eltekeh: those who had a higher social position, like monarchs, governors and high officials, due to their importance in the city's defence, were found guilty and killed, then exposed around the city



(Figure 2). In a clear conditioning movement of the conquered city's population, by making these individuals an extreme example of the Assyrian «justice», Sennacherib would create fear in their minds in order to prevent future revolts against Assyrian sovereignty. Regarding the ordinary inhabitants who, according to the Assyrians, had committed some «crimes», these were taken as captives. Although the source does not make a distinction between these prisoners regarding their origin, we can admit that it would include captives of military and civilian origin. Specifically, those who were not found guilty of the «crime» of defending the city; they may have been included in some deportation process or stayed in the city.



FIGURE 2. *Execution of prisoners of war around the conquered city.* [Collins, 2008: 64].

The last two cases, raids and moving armies are omitted by the Neo-Assyrian written sources, and will be the rarest and less fruitful source of prisoners. We do not know if there was raids just with the intention to make captives or these were made in a normal process of raiding an enemy territory to acquire good and even some espionage. The absence of primary data on this method of waging war does not allow us to discourse this possibility in a more profound way, and the same applies to the moment when the Neo-Assyrian army is on the move. However, if we take into account the number of prisoners mentioned in the Neo-Assyrian sources during military campaigns, it is likely that these prisoners of war would contemplate those made in raids and moving armies.

There is little information regarding the prisoners' transportation from the place where they were captured to where they were to be held. In iconography, the captives' transport

is just represented by land on foot, which leads us to believe that in most cases this would be the transportation model, even when the terrain was difficult (Fales, 2010: 214). First of all, in the iconography we can see that they were bound with their hands tied, both in front of the body or at the rear of the body. It remains to be seen whether there would be any practical or cultural differences in doing these two different ways. Their movement would be slow in a line that should have been about one to four prisoners' side by side. It is important to mention here that this possibility is above all assumption and, certainly, the number of prisoners of war would be important for the way they were transported. In the «Balawat Gates» from Assurnasirpal II's reign, we can see in a section (BM 124685) more details regarding the process of transferring prisoners. In this relief, we can see that the captives are being transported half-naked in a row and with their hands tied behind their backs. In the composition of the prisoners, the first three walk alone while the rest follow in pairs. The scene is also completed by six female prisoners with long hair released and with their left hands in the air as a sign of supplication or submission (Curtis and Tallis, 2008: 35). This «ritual» is common in the process of transporting and receiving prisoners of war and can be seen in other iconographies, including in these very same gates (BM 124690) (Curtis and Tallis, 2008: 37).



FIGURE 3. *Prisoners doing forced labour under the soldier's supervision.* [Collins, 2008: 81].

About other possible ways of transporting captives, we can assume that, in cases where movement by river or sea would be more advantageous for the Assyrians (Jakob, 2017: 127), this would not be the case. In fact, this kind of transport would be much more beneficial because it was safer and faster and also very widespread throughout all of Mesopotamia because of its two main rivers, Euphrates and Tigris (Fales, 1993: 79-80), making the transport less dangerous for the military personnel who were escorting the captives.

#### IV. CAPTIVES' FATE IN NEO-ASSYRIAN EMPIRE

Widely represented in low relief, after being captured, the captives would arrive at the Assyrian capital and placed before the king who was on his war chariot; then, they would be exposed together with the rest of the war assets (Nadali, 2005: 185). However, it is not clear whether this «procession» would be only for prisoners of high social status, or whether it was inclusive for all military and civilians captured in the course of a particular campaign.

There are some references to possible incarceration places for the captives, but in general our knowledge regarding some specific infrastructures are quite short. Nonetheless, the prisoners would be transported to infrastructures prepared to receive them (Leichty, 2011: 156). Especially in the great cities of the empire such as Nineveh or Aššur there must have been a concentration place for groups of prisoners of war, whether of high or low social status, although, it should be noted that the place of imprisonment would be different, certainly with better conditions for the most important captives. Despite the lack of information, we can still find some data about these sites: from Assurnasirpal II's reign (c. 883-859 B.C.) (Grayson, 1991: 253; Frahm, 2017a: 615), an unknown individual had to acquire a property to build a warehouse or a prison. In this example we can observe that, in this future prison, the «men and women of the palace» could not be imprisoned there, an expression that suggests some high social status typology of prisoners. So, this mentioned prison must have been only for the lesser relevant captives. Regarding another examples, we must highlight a narrative from the *Old Testament* where Shalmaneser V claims the Egyptian king captivity in an Assyrian prison (2 Kings: 17-4; Alves, 2002: 529; Zamazalová, 2011: 315). In the Esarhaddon's reign (c. 680-669 B.C.) (Leichty, 2011: 156; Frahm, 2017a: 615) because the recent prisoners' flow, the monarch's need to increase an infrastructure that had been built by his predecessor, as the prison in question was unable to receive so many captives.

After reaching their destination, prisoners of war could have various uses and during the transport process many of these captives could have already been identified for a particular function (Ponchia, 2017: 159-162; Nadali, 2014: 102). As a matter of fact, in some specific cases they actually brought some important knowledge to Assyria, like artisans or artist (Oppenheim, 2003: 78). According to Leo Oppenheim, the group of prisoners would be extremely important to bring new knowledge to Assyria, the author gives the compared case of the Babylonians to the Assyrians that in the middle of the Second Millennium B.C., while the former was technologically stagnant, Assyria due to the flow of qualified captives was in a period of technological peak (Saggs, 1987: 22; Oppenheim, 2003: 78).

But firstly, we must analyse the most important prisoners of war like the kings, princes or governors; these men would be presented to the sovereign as can be seen in the image (*Figure 4*), where it is possible to see prisoners kneeling before the Neo-Assyrian king. These too should not be subjected to great work and would be waiting for some rescue to come and save them. However, many of these most prominent characters could be subjected to humiliation in the Assyrian capital, Nineveh, like Nergal-usezib, king of Babylon (Grayson and Novotny, 2012: 13). Others could end more suddenly and be executed as soon as they reached the place of imprisonment (Nadali, 2005: 186-187; Crouch, 2009: 43; Fales, 2010: 212). According to Tamas Dezső, these executions were made mainly by a sword and in his investigation, just once a spear was used (Dezső, 2012: 152). Specifically, about the future of those of lesser status/regular soldiers and civilians, the forced labour and some public works (*Figure 3*) would be the most common form of work (Mendelsohn, 1946: 74; Nadali, 2014: 104). As an example, see the following excerpts from Sennacherib's and Esarhaddon's reign (Smith, 1921: 73. BM 113203; Leichty, 2011: 159. IM 75889):

«[...] I gathered the sedge which (grows) in Chaldaea, and the luxuriant reeds thereof I made the fighting men of the foe who were my prisoners bear for the completion of its construction. [...]»

«[...] At that time, by means of the prisoners from the lands that I had conquered with the help of the god Aššur, my lord, I repaired (and) renovated the dilapidated parts of the ruined wall, city gates, (and) palaces, which are in Kalhu. I built (and) completed (them) (and) made (them) greater than ever before [...]».

In both cases, the use of prisoners of war in the construction of several public works is evident; both in the defensive systems of Kalhu and in the palace of this same city. This type of work would be quite beneficial for the Assyrian administration, since it was low-priced labour and allowed the Assyrian population to spend their time in other essential activities to their society, whether in specialized manufactures (although, as already mentioned, there were also cases where prisoners performed this type of functions) or in agricultural work. In fact, the application of these captives of military origins in other activities like agriculture should be avoided due to the tools necessary for the activity and their possibilities as escape weapons. Naturally, it would not be convenient to place hoes or axes in the hands of those who were trained to fight. Thus, it is natural that most of the forced labour made by prisoners was in the palaces, defensive systems, temples and other typologies of buildings (Oded, 1979: 54). As an example, Sargon II placed prisoners in the construction of his palace in Dur-Sharruken (Pedde, 2012: 861; Ponchia, 2017: 163). However, we should also mention the possible association, defended by Stefan Jakob, of prisoners of war and deportees with a social element called *šiluhlu*. A social class, commonly associated with agricultural work, co-dependent of the local administration and its employers (Jakob, 2017: 156). Besides these works for the Neo-Assyrian society, these prisoners could be a source income by being sold as slaves (Ponchia, 2017: 163), a very important source of profit for the seller's social and military administration. Regarding the slave market, underage captives were the most wanted, according to Cord Khune, in a group of Elamite workers related to a group from Syria, the under-age prisoners were

sold as slaves, all of them, with the exception of one case, were female (Khune, 1996: 7). Generally, the women could be used as singers and maids in the Assyrian royal court or in the governors' homes (Oppenheim, 2003: 78; Fales, 2010: 217).

We are also aware of the presence of prisoners of war in a religious context. According to Leo Oppenheim it would be usual for the Assyrian monarch to give as tribute to a certain temple some spoils of war, from precious objects to captives. These men and women would have had the function of serving the priests and doing some forced labour related to the Mesopotamian religious sites, as would be the case with the temples' repairs (Oppenheim, 2003: 115-117).



FIGURE 4. *Some prisoners of war arrive at the royal palace and kneel before the king of Assyria (Collins, 2008).*

A curious case comes from Sargon II's reign and narrates the inclusion of a military force of prisoners of war into the Neo-Assyrian army. Something that will happen once again in his son's reign, in Sennacherib's war against Judah, he created a large contingent of archers and shield-bearers from prisoners of war (Fales, 2010: 216; Grayson and Novotny, 2012: 3-4). Regarding the case of Sargon II, see the following excerpt (Pritchard, 1969: 284. BM 022505):

«[...] I br[ought its] king Iaubi'di as well as his family, (and) [his] warriors in fett[ers], as the prisoner (contingent) of his country, to Assyria. From these (prisoners) I set [up a troop] of 300 chariots (and) 600 moun[ted men] equipped with leather shields and lan[ces], and ad[ded them] to my royal corps. [...]

«[...] At the begi[nning] of my royal rule, I [...] the town of the Samaritans (I besieged, conquered) [...] [for the god] [...] [who let] me achieve (this) triumph. [...] I led away as prisoners [27290 inhabitants of it (and) [equipped] from among [them soldiers to man] 50 chariots of my royal corps. [...]

From a group of prisoners of war, Sargon II created a unit of 300 chariots and another of mounted soldiers assembled with shield and spear, about 600 for the latter case (Oded, 1979: 52; Çam, 2014: 19). This situation appears to be paradoxical regarding to what is normally the fate of this kind of prisoners of war. Naturally, their capacity in warfare must have been an essential factor for Sargon II to create a unit with them, even for a weapon as specific as the war chariot. Probably the answer to this problem lies in the vehicle's own characteris-

tics: these captured soldiers were integrated into Sargon II's army to make the best use of the chariots that the army had, including vehicles types outside of Northern Mesopotamia. We can also assume that these vehicles appeared together with these military personnel, through spoils of war. Thus, the knowledge that these soldiers had of the weapon in question would give them a great advantage in comparison if they were used by Assyrian soldiers, a typology that they were not used to. These certainly would have a strong knowledge of handling the vehicle and the horses, as well as its application in battle. Nevertheless, creating a unity with prisoners acquired in the middle of a war and putting weapons in their hands seems to be unwise and likely to cause revolts and hierarchical problems for the Assyrian army. This reality makes it difficult to consider including these groups in the Assyrian forces. After being captured, would these soldiers acquire the status of paid mercenaries? If we admit this possibility, then, at least as long as these were paid by the supreme power, there would be no major problems for the Assyrian military administration. Although according to Andreas Fuchs it was usual for the Assyrians to do this type of practice, a reality that would lead to a heterogeneous army (Fuchs, 2011: 387). Also, in the *Nimrud Horse List* we learn of the existence of an officer with the function of controlling prisoners of war, named *Rab šaglute*. The existence of this official reinforces the idea of using deportees in the Assyrian armies and show us that this practice was more usual that we could think firstly. However, as Tamás Dezső state, no other written sources make a reference to this military post, so his presence in other reigns must remain open (Nadali, 2005: 187; Dezső, 2006: 121-122). If for the case of Sargon II this integration in the army exists, for the Assurbanipal's reign (c. 668-631 a. C.) (Frahm, 2017a: 615), we know that a local commander wanted to integrate some deportees from Elam into some chariots' units, cavalry and messenger. But unlike Sargon II, this monarch refuses his official's proposal and states that these soldiers will die (Noble, 1990: 67).

Prisoners and deportees who were later integrated into the Assyrian forces would, on average, be non-professional or semi-professional. Their military service would be «part-time» and in a seasonal sense (they should perform other functions, such as public constructions). The seasonal nature should imply that these soldiers were deployed when necessary. Despite being mentioned, in quantitative terms they would be few compared to the rest of the army, which is not surprising, since it would be imperative that the majority were blindly loyal to the central power (Dezső, 2016: 13).

## V. THE HUBTU'S TREATMENT IN NEO-ASSYRIAN EMPIRE

As prisoners, in general, these individuals would not be treated well by the oppressive force, but subjected to torture and mutilation (Nadali, 2014: 107). Naturally, they would starve and forced into labour, as some iconography proves it. In these low reliefs (*Figure 5*), we can see the captives (apparently of Jewish origin) pulling what appears to be a rope that could have a lithic block at the end. Although this is the most realistic and plausible scenario, however, there are some interesting examples that present some concern regarding the feeding of prisoners of war. From Tiglath-pileser III's reign (c. 744-727 B.C.) (Oded, 1979: 30; Fales, 2010: 215; Frahm,

2017: 615), see the following excerpt included in the Aššur-šallimanni's correspondence with the Assyrian king (Saggs, 2001: 50. ND 2634):

«[...] On the matter on which the king my lord sent me a message, saying: Feed 6000 prisoners as your responsibility. How long (till the lives of) of 6000 prisoners come to an end? All the magnates on hearing the staunch words of the king my lord sent a message (about it). I said: There is no ration. The king my lord gave me an order. He said: You have indeed received (sufficient). He has delivered to you 40000 units of grain rations. But surely the king knows that there are not corn rations enough for 6000 (prisoners). Let him deliver 3000 (prisoners) to me (and) 3000 to Šamaš-bunaya. [...].»

Aššur-šallimanni was the governor of Arrapha and would be in charge of transporting barley by boat to the south of the empire, thus guaranteeing the subsistence of these regions. Knowing *a priori* this important role, we can better understand the letter that Tiglath-pileser sent to him, since the supplies' distribution was one of his functions as governor of Arrapha. Unfortunately, everything indicates that the governor did not have this capacity and half of the prisoners were sent to Šamaš-bunaya, who was the Assyrian governor in Babylon (Lukko, 2012: 30-31). There are, of course, many reasons for the lack of food, the most likely of which are the possibility of a bad agricultural year, a prolonged war, poor food management or reduction of the power of certain state entities. Unfortunately, there are no concrete data that can confirm some of these realities, however, on the existence of extended military conflicts, like in other Neo-Assyrian reigns, Tiglath-pileser III's government was marked by several wars against Babylon (although the narrative mentions the Assyrian governor in the city, suggesting an effective control over it by that time), Urartu and Syrian cities (Frahm, 2017b: 177). Therefore, it is natural that the Assyrian war effort had a constant weight on goods produced in the various provinces of the empire. On the other hand, the Tiglath-Pileser III's reign was also marked by a set of laws that removed much of the power from the provincial governors, drastically reducing the lands under their control (Frahm, 2017b: 177). The relationship between farmland and produced food is evident here, that is, since these governors have less land to cultivate, it is natural that they would have fewer capacity to feed their population, including some groups of prisoners. Regarding the narrative itself, if we divide the number of rations (40,000) sent by the central government to feed the 6000 prisoners of war, we find that these captives only had food for about seven days, this assuming a ration for each day. This explains the lack of food, even if on the source it is not mentioned how long these prisoners would have stay in that place. At the narrative's end, the solution was to divide the captives' group in half and send 3000 to Šamaš-bunaya. If there was no ration's division, then for 3000 prisoners there would already be food for about fourteen days and when this period ended, surely another supplies' shipment would arrive.

Another example in which it is possible to observe some care regarding prisoners of war comes from a letter of Aššur-rimanni to Nabu-bel-ahhešu (Saggs, 2001: 305). The latter were responsible for an unspecified number of captives who would be settled in an unknown area. In this specific case, we must be dealing with prisoners mostly civilian rather than military. It is also important to note the concern regarding these captives' health, something that seems to suggest that Assyria, in certain cases, would be concerned with these groups

of people. The fretfulness with ensuring the basic needs for captives, should be constant, because if they were not minimally nourished, they would not have the capacity to carry out the work imposed by the Neo-Assyrian administrators.



FIGURE 5. *Captives pulling stone blocks with the help of ropes [Collins, 2008: 83].*

## VI. CONCLUSION

The *hubtu* existence for the warlike Neo-Assyrian society was vital, and this reality is verifiable in the high number of references regarding the capture of military and civilians in the course of military conflicts. In the Neo-Assyrian Empire, the distribution of prisoners of war was stratified, based on the socio-military context of these same captives and treated according to the military political context in which they were acquired. Factors such as the degree of difficulty that Assyria had in conquering the determined territory, the objectives and needs of the administration and the army, the relations prior to the Assyrian conquest or the prisoner's own characteristics: like gender, age and skills. Although the sources are not always enlightening, it seems evident that kings taken into captivity would be the ones who would find their end more quickly, as it would be important for Neo-Assyria to remove as soon as possible the city/region's power icon (the captured monarch), in order to create a power vacuum that, under normal conditions, would allow the Neo-Assyrian king to take



control of a certain site. This would be the maximum return that a society could derive from a prisoner of war. In lower strata, we verified the presence of the aforementioned redemptions and several forced labour to which captives of a minor status would be subjected to.

After capturing prisoners, during the battle, siege, raid or small skirmish, the most sensitive process would be the transfer of these captives trained to fight, from the place of their capture to that of their captivity. Even under normal conditions, the moment of transition of an army is when it is most fragile, a reality that can be transposed to this situation and its danger expanded. Although they are certainly well manned by capable military personnel, the possibility of a revolt or an enemy attack in order to recover the now captive soldiers would be possible. However, for the latter case, admitting that the belligerent who lost the captured soldiers was the defeated army, it is unlikely that they did have the military capability to make a counter offensive to the winning army. Above all, it would be important to ensure that the column of soldiers and prisoners reached their destination as quickly as possible.

These prisoners of war, each in their own way, would be critical in the most varied sectors of this society, from the economy, politics, social development and in the war itself. After their capture, especially the civilian prisoners were often relocated in other territories within the empire, where they would later perform specific functions. As for captive soldiers, their specific characteristics related to their specialization in the use of weapons, must have forced the Assyrian administration to an extra care with this type of prisoners. Although caution had to be constant, we can admit that the inclusion of these prisoners would only be done under certain conditions, right from the start when the loyalty of these soldiers was assured. See again the case of Sargon II's inclusion of foreigners in the army as opposed to what Assurbanipal dictate after his official's request. In this specific case, the Assyrian king's refusal may have come from the group's lack of loyalty, probably stemming from the long history of conflicts that marked the relations between Assyria and Elam. In fact, the possibility of an internal revolt in the Assyrian army would be a danger present in the thinking of the Assyrian officers and tight control by the core of the Assyrian army would be essential in order to prevent possible problems, so, unlike civilian captives, they were constantly being watched and controlled by Assyrian guards. Therefore, «traditional deportations» would not be applied to these prisoners, as it would be imperative not to leave them free, even in a controlled situation. In fact, taking into account the few references (in the course of our research we only identified two examples) that the Assyrian sources present, we can conclude that the inclusion of prisoners of war in the Assyrian forces would be a somewhat rare event and above all focused on soldiers specialized in a particular weapon, such as the war chariot.

Regarding the places of incarceration of these captives, certainly, all over Assyria, structures should exist in order to accommodate prisoners of war, with different dimensions that must have been related to the political and strategic importance of the region. Probably, the empire's capital would have had more infrastructures capable of holding these prisoners than a smaller city located in a region of little importance for the interregional context of the Ancient Middle East.

About the captives' treatment that originated from conflicts, we can conclude that, although in a general perspective, living conditions would be poor, with malnutrition, mistreatment and subject to difficult and intense work. There are cases where we see, firstly,

that many of these prisoners would continue to exercise their professions in Assyria, such as artisans and artists, as well as some specialized soldiers were incorporated into the royal army itself. In addition to these processes, in some Assyrian narratives we find a relative concern for these captives, something that, in a first observation, would not be likely.

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