

## Archeology and the Israelite-Aramaeans Wars Part 1

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[Editor's note: This study was first presented as a public lecture at the Gordon Divinity School, Brookline, Massachusetts, March 9, 1948, and inaugurated a regular series of public lectures by members of the faculty on Biblical archeology, current trends in theological thought, and kindred themes.]

Damascus, perhaps the oldest continuously occupied city in the world, had a checkered career for centuries before it emerges as the center of Aramaean power which came in deadly conflict with the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the ninth century B.C. The land of Damascus first appears in the light of actual history in the famous Execration Texts, dated between 1850-1825 B.C., which refer to 'Apum.<sup>1</sup> At this early date the Damascene was already an important political entity with names of several princes or kings of the region occurring in the Brussels texts and in the Mari documents.<sup>2</sup> The *oldest Biblical mention* of the city (Gen 14:15) fixes it as already in existence in the Patriarchal Age, when it probably was the royal residence and the capital of 'Apum. However, *the oldest historical reference* in a contemporary source does not occur until the period of the New Egyptian Kingdom in Syria, being mentioned as *Timasku*, 13th in order among the Asiatic cities conquered by the great Thutmose III (c. 1468 B.C.).<sup>3</sup> The first Biblical mention, although from a later source, goes back to the Patriarchal Age, in a historical context several centuries earlier.

The Amarna Letters (c. 1375 B.C.) introduce us to an insurrection against Egyptian rule in the land of Upe, the region of *Timasgi* (Damascus), which appears to have been governed under a district administration created or

sanctioned by the pharaoh's regime.<sup>4</sup> With the resurgence of Hittite power under Shuppiluliuma (c. 1350 B.C.) the Hittite monarch invaded the Damascene plain, conquering "Ariwana, king of the land of Apina" (Upe), as we learn from the Bhoghaz-Koï documents.<sup>5</sup> With the great invasion of northern sea peoples into Syria-Palestine, begun under Marniptah (c. 1229 B.C.) and reaching its peak under Ramesses III (c. 1191 B.C.), the Hittite Empire was destroyed, and northern and central Syria was left open to desert Bedouin by the name of Aramaeans, who settled in the region, particul...

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