Sargon, II Biography

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Biography

The Assyrian king Sargon II (reigned 722-705 BC) was one of the chief architects of the late Assyrian Empire and the founder of its greatest line of kings.

Sargon II, upon his accession, took the name Sharrukin (Sargon is the biblical form), after the illustrious founder of the Akkadian dynasty, who had died 1,600 years before. This name and the fact that his predecessor, Shalmaneser V, reigned very briefly suggest that Sargon may have been a usurper. His first task was to restore order and overcome opposition at home; he then turned to the problems facing his army on the frontiers of the empire. He captured Samaria, the Israelite capital, and deported its inhabitants; next he defeated the rebel Syrian vassels at Qarqar. In the northeast, the turbulent Iranian tribes had been stirred into revolt by Assyria's old enemy, the Kingdom of Urartu. Punitive campaigns between 719 and 717 B.C. restored order, but trouble broke out again, and in 715 Sargon, in a demonstration of strength, marched round Lake Urmia to Van, Urartu's capital. Van held out, however, creating a stalemate on Assyria's northern frontier.

In 717 Sargon was faced with a revolt in the west encouraged by King Midas of Phrygia. Sargon's army overran northern Syria and the Taurus region, and by 710 all Syria and Palestine had submitted to Assyrian rule with the exception of Judah; Egypt was friendly. Only the Babylonians enjoyed virtual independence under their Chaldean leader, Merodach-Baladan; but when Sargon marched south in 708, Merodach-Baladan fled to Elam, and Sargon was crowned king of Babylon. The king of Bahrein sent gifts, and so did seven kings of Cyprus. Like his ancient namesake, Sargon could claim sway from the Upper Sea (the Mediterranean) to the Lower Sea (the Persian Gulf).

Sargon lived in Calah (modern Nimrud), the military capital, which he fortified and embellished. He also created a new residence city, Sargonsburg, 15 miles northeast of Nineveh, near modern Khorsabad. The city, which was inaugurated in 706, took 10 years to build. It was laid out in a rectangle, and its walls were pierced by eight gates. The great palace and temple, which stood on a 50-foot-high citadel platform, contained spacious halls decorated with stone reliefs. Colossal figures of man-headed bulls stood at the doorways. Early in 705 Sargon was called to the northwest, where he fell in battle against the nomadic Cimmerians and was killed.