



Sennacherib at the Gates of Jerusalem

Story, History and Historiography

Edited by
Isaac Kalimi and Seth Richardson

Sennacherib at the Gates of Jerusalem

Culture and History of the Ancient Near East

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Dedicated to
the blessed memory of our dear friend and colleague,
Professor David Weisberg z"l,
who constantly strove for justice,
loved kindness, and
walked humbly with God and every human being.

CONTENTS

The Contributors	ix
1. Sennacherib at the Gates of Jerusalem—Story, History and Historiography: An Introduction	1
<i>Isaac Kalimi and Seth Richardson</i>	

PART ONE

I WILL DEFEND THIS CITY TO SAVE IT

2. Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah: The Chronicler's View Compared with His 'Biblical' Sources	11
<i>Isaac Kalimi</i>	
3. Cross-examining the Assyrian Witnesses to Sennacherib's Third Campaign: Assessing the Limits of Historical Reconstruction	51
<i>Mordechai Cogan</i>	
4. Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah: The Archaeological Perspective with an Emphasis on Lachish and Jerusalem	75
<i>David Ussishkin</i>	
5. Beyond the Broken Reed: Kushite Intervention and the Limits of <i>l'histoire événementielle</i>	105
<i>Jeremy Pope</i>	

PART TWO

THE WEAPON OF AŠŠUR

6. Family Matters: Psychohistorical Reflections on Sennacherib and His Times	163
<i>Eckart Frahm</i>	

7. The Road to Judah: 701 B.C.E. in the Context of Sennacherib's
Political-Military Strategy 223
Frederick Mario Fales

8. Sennacherib's Invasion of the Levant through the Eyes of
Assyrian Intelligence Services 249
Peter Dubovský

PART THREE

AFTER LIFE

9. Memories of Sennacherib in Aramaic Tradition 295
Tawny L. Holm

10. Sennacherib's Campaign and its Reception in the Time of the
Second Temple 325
Gerbern S. Oegema

11. Sennacherib in Midrashic and Related Literature:
Inscribing History in Midrash 347
Rivka Ulmer

12. The Devil in Person, the Devil in Disguise: Looking for
King Sennacherib in Early Christian Literature 389
Joseph Verheyden

13. The First "World Event": Sennacherib at Jerusalem 433
Seth Richardson

Indices

- Index of Topics 507
Index of Key Terms 534
Index of Sources and Compositions 536
Index of Modern Authors 546

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SENNACHERIB AT THE GATES OF JERUSALEM—STORY, HISTORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY: AN INTRODUCTION

Isaac Kalimi and Seth Richardson

The Assyrian siege of Jerusalem in 701 B.C.E. was a “world event,” both historically and historiographically. The encounter drew together the actions of disparate groups whose fate was bound together by Assyria’s empire: Babylonia, Anatolia, Syria, Egypt and Nubia were all affected by it. Just as importantly, the event formed the kernel for later literary traditions both east and west: in the Hebrew Bible, in Aramaic folklore, and in Greek and Roman sources about the East; in medieval Syriac tales, in Arabic antiquarianism; and even in the cultural politics of nineteenth century C.E. Europe and America.¹ Thus the historical event formed the basis for ongoing and divergent interpretation in multiple cultural forms from antiquity to modernity. This rich material is fertile ground for historical scholarship: the event is not only important for biblicalists and Assyriologists, but also for studies in ancient literature, diplomacy, folk tradition, imperialism, cult practice, epidemiology, military intelligence and communication, class and politics, and the role of language in society. What is more, since the “siege” of Jerusalem also ironically has the distinction of being historically amplified from a non-event (no actual fighting, as such, occurred at Jerusalem), it excites philosophical and theological questions about the importance of “the event” as a historical category.

The third campaign of Sennacherib to the west—in general, with specific reference to Judah and Jerusalem—has been well researched in historical and literary terms. However, it has not yet been much investigated

¹ Among others, see S. Holloway, “God Save our Gracious King: Sennacherib, the Toast of Victorian England,” *Proceedings of the Eastern Great Lakes Midwest Regions of the Society of Biblical Literature* 26 (2006): 23–33, and “Nineveh Sails for the New World: Assyria Envisioned by Nineteenth-Century America,” in *Nineveh: Papers of the XLIX^e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale London, 7–11 July 2003*, vol. 1, ed. D. Collon and A. R. George (London, 2005), 1: 243–56; J. M. Russell, *The Final Sack of Nineveh: The Discovery, Documentation, and Destruction of King Sennacherib’s Throne Room* (New Haven, 1988); M. T. Larsen, *The Conquest of Assyria: Excavations in an Antique Land, 1840–1860* (London, 1996); and F. N. Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture, Imagining Mesopotamia in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, 2003).

from the point of view of historiography or reception history; the appearance of the subject in so many varied literatures is a phenomenon worthy of study. This volume intends to fill these gaps without covering every possible aspect of “Sennacherib studies.”² The essays herein offer some novel historical approaches, such as psychohistory, mytho-history, and the integration of text, image, and archaeology, and build a bridge between the historical traditions of the ancient and late-antique worlds.

The work also attends throughout to how deeply historiographic issues pervade our interpretations of historical events. When, indeed, does “historiography” begin to be relevant to the interrogation of sources we usually think of as “historical?” One might say not even the earliest record is free of the webs of bias and beliefs that direct the composition of accounts. Yet mere awareness of this fact may provide little more than the modest comfort of theoretical acumen. This book attempts to go beyond by particularizing how a study of original methods can contribute to our understanding of both events and reception.³

The volume comprises three major sections. The first section (“I Will Defend this City to Save It”) mainly concentrates on early sources—biblical, Assyrian and Egyptian texts and archaeological finds in the Land of Israel—concerning the events of 701 B.C.E. The second section (“The Weapon of Aššur”) focuses on the broader Assyrian political and military history forming the background of the campaign. The third section mainly traces the “after life” (*Nachleben*) of Sennacherib’s campaign as it was interpreted and transformed in the wide range of postbiblical literature, including Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, Aramaic and rabbinic literature, New Testament and the early Christian sources.

The first section opens with Isaac Kalimi’s discussion “Sennacherib’s Campaign to Judah: The Chronicler’s View Compared with His ‘Biblical’ Sources.” The third campaign of Sennacherib king of Assyria to the west-

² Since there is already a tremendous amount of scholarly literature regarding the stories of the campaign in 2 Kgs. 18:13–19:37 (and its relationship to the parallel text in Isa. 36–37), we did not find it necessary to cover this ground again. For some bibliography and discussion on these texts, see I. Kalimi, “Sennacherib’s Campaign to Judah: The Chronicler’s View Compared with His ‘Biblical’ Sources,” this volume, 11–50.

³ As just one example, we may observe that the earliest sources for our study, the Assyrian and biblical accounts, both preferred the selection to the alteration of facts, a basic fidelity to historical consecution (in contrast to later tales), and the interpolation only of unverifiable narrative elements, i.e., the “awesome splendor” of Sennacherib, or the Angel of the Lord.

ern territories of the Empire is very well documented. Nonetheless, scholars have usually concentrated on the early biblical writings and Assyrian sources. Although the Chronicler's story of the campaign contains some valuable historical data, it is almost totally neglected. Kalimi points out the place of Sennacherib's campaign in the Chronicler's account of Hezekiah as a whole; scrutinizes the story of Assyrian invasion as it is presented by the Chronicler in comparison to the earlier "biblical" (and to certain extent also extra-biblical) sources; and highlights the Chronicler's particular historiographical methods, his essential ideological-theological purposes, and his ultimate accomplishments.

Mordechai Cogan next addresses the issue of the sources in his "Cross-examining the Assyrian Witnesses to Sennacherib's Third Campaign: Assessing the Limits of Historical Reconstruction." Cogan states that despite the abundance of sources available for the reconstruction of the Assyrian campaign to Judah in 701 B.C.E.—more than for most events concerning ancient Israel—and after countless scholarly proposals regarding the course of events, a lack of satisfaction with the current state of the question is still evident, given the continuous stream of publications with "new insights" on the subject. Cogan is of the opinion that a review of the cuneiform sources, utilizing genre and literary analysis, points to the agreements and disagreements of these witnesses with the biblical material. From this basis, the limits of our knowledge can be drawn, at which point the entry into speculative modern historiography should become clear.

The study of David Ussishkin follows next, "Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah: The Archaeological Perspective with an Emphasis on Lachish and Jerusalem." He discusses especially the archaeological excavations in Lachish, the different challenges presented by the ground at Jerusalem, and the question of the Assyrian camp. He associates the last subject with the general appearance of Jerusalem at that time and its water sources. Ussishkin concludes that a comparison of the sieges of Lachish and Jerusalem emphasizes the role of intimidation in the latter case.

The section concludes with an analysis by Jeremy Pope, "Beyond the Broken Reed: Kushite Intervention and the Limits of *l'histoire événementielle*." Pope situates the dispatch of Egyptian aid to Judah within a sequence of events—coalition, rebellion, extradition, and battle—involving the 25th Dynasty. On first blush, the biblical and Assyrian sources feature the Kushite pharaohs of Egypt within a brief and episodic narrative. Yet the view from northeast Africa provides something more of a mystery: the otherwise highly detailed royal records of the 25th Dynasty scarcely

mention the events and personages of Judah, the Levant, or Assyria, save in the most oblique and formulaic language. Various motives have been attributed to the Kushites, ranging from aggressive expansionism and rash instigation to political disloyalty and even to sibling rivalry. For such theories to be grounded in evidence, they must be situated within a broader sweep of historical time, within the frames *Annales* historians have termed *l'histoire conjoncturelle* and *la longue durée*. A consideration of these larger temporal rhythms suggests that the Kushite reticence be understood as deliberate and informed of world events, and not the product of isolation or inaction.

The volume's second section ("The Weapon of Aššur") shifts to the Assyrian side of the campaign. It opens with the study of Eckart Frahm, "Family Matters: Psychohistorical Reflections on Sennacherib and His Times." The psychohistorical approach is, for obvious reasons, not without significant risks; clearly, the sources do not allow going beyond a certain point. Yet it would be naive to ascribe the unfolding of history to abstract economic, social, political, and ideological factors. Especially in autocratic regimes, individual rulers had an enormous amount of power to shape the events of their times, and there can be little doubt that their actions, like those of any human being, were influenced by their emotions, passions, and fears. On these grounds, Frahm studies the psychological background of the political and military endeavors of Sennacherib, including his campaign to Judah in 701 and his attack on Babylon in 689. The discussion focuses on Sennacherib's upbringing, presumably as a member of a cadet branch of the royal house, in the city of Kalḫu; the much debated identity of Sennacherib's mother and its relationship (if any) to the Judean policy; Sennacherib's "political socialization" during his time as crown prince; and the traumatic death of his father, Sargon II, who was killed on the battlefield in Anatolia in 705 B.C.E. and whose body could not be recovered. The result of this approach is an appreciation of the unique nature of Sennacherib's rule.

Mario Fales' "The Road to Judah: 701 B.C.E. in the Context of Sennacherib's Political-Military Strategy" considers the Jerusalem encounter in the light of *realpolitik*. From the point of view of Assyrian strategy, Fales argues, the seemingly incomplete success of Sennacherib (or, for that matter, of Hezekiah) in Judah reflects not so much a problem of the sources, but our own misunderstanding of the limited and "conservative" goals of the Assyrian empire. Building on comparisons to other Assyrian policies and campaigns, the author points out that containment and bor-

der maintenance, the preservation of order, and the depletion of enemy blood and treasure were, demonstratively, goals more dear to the empire than any hope to achieve the more florid claims of royal rhetoric. "Mission accomplished," Fales concludes; "for the moment, at least."

Peter Dubovský's contribution focuses on "Sennacherib's Invasion of the Levant through the Eyes of Assyrian Intelligence Services." He points out that Sennacherib inherited an intelligence network founded by Tiglath-pileser III whose mission was the successful control of enemy regions, vassal states, and provinces. Correct and timely information about the enemy forces, their international contacts, and territory was indispensable for organizing military campaigns. Dubovský investigates the historical and theoretical problems of information-gathering, including Sennacherib's invasion of Judah, exploring what the Assyrians knew and how they knew it, including the incorporation into its sophisticated intellectual system of divination as a method of gaining knowledge about enemies. Just as importantly, Dubovský stresses how deeply and personally engaged Sennacherib was with the intelligence system. Since Sennacherib served as the empire's director of intelligence under Sargon II, it must be emphasized that his rule was the first time an Assyrian king came to the throne with a stronger background as a spymaster than as a military man.

The volume's third section traces the "after-life" (*Nachleben*) of Sennacherib's campaign as it was interpreted and transformed in the wide range of postbiblical literature. It begins with Tawny L. Holm's essay, "Memories of Sennacherib in Aramaic Tradition," which focuses on Sennacherib as he was remembered in Aramaic literature from the first millennium B.C.E. into the first millennium C.E. Sennacherib is one of a few Assyrian rulers (alongside his son Esarhaddon and his grandsons, Assurbanipal and Shamash-shum-ukin) that feature in Aramaic stories as far apart as Egypt and Armenia. But the characterization of Sennacherib and other Assyrians in this literature is varied. Aramean refugees in Egypt brought from the east their story of Sennacherib as the benevolent patron of the wise courtier Aḥiqar, while it was Esarhaddon who was not remembered in such a positive light. In contrast, for Syriac Christians, Sennacherib was the paradigmatic pagan king, murdered in a family feud by an assassin who took refuge near the mountain of the Ark, and whose progeny converted to Christianity and lived on in the region for centuries.

Gerbern S. Oegema's paper is a reception history of the fifth to first centuries B.C.E., entitled "Sennacherib's Campaign and its Reception in the Time of the Second Temple." Oegema discusses in particular *Aḥiqar*

col. 1:1–10; *Tobit* 1:15–22; *Demetrius the Chronographer*, Fragment 6; 2 *Baruch* 63:1–11; 4 *Ezra* 7:40; *Testament of Adam* 4:6; 3 *Maccabees* 6:1–15; as well as passages in the Pseudepigrapha, such as the *Ascension of Isaiah* 3:2; *Joseph and Aseneth* 8:9 and the *Hellenistic Synagogue Prayers* 6:10. These interpretations, actualizations and allusions seem to take two or perhaps three directions. On the one hand there is a clear and early interest in the relevance of Sennacherib's campaign for historiography and the characterization of the Assyrians (in *Aḥiqar*, *Tobit*, and *Demetrius*). On the other hand, the event was also understood from the point of view of apocalyptic and theological thinking for the interpretation of contemporary political events (2 *Baruch*, 4 *Ezra*, *Testament of Adam*, and 3 *Maccabees*). This latter strain of interpretation arose in the late Hellenistic and Roman periods, whereas the first was of Persian and early Hellenistic origins. In other words, the historiographic approach to the texts clearly precedes the apocalyptic one, although both relied on the same material. Finally, Oegema also identifies a third understanding, one in which Hezekiah's prayer was seen as one of many other prayers of intercession (4 *Ezra*, *Ascension of Isaiah*, and *Hellenistic Synagogue Prayers*). He concludes with a brief review of the presence or absence of allusions to Sennacherib in the Qumran Scrolls, Philo, and Josephus.

Rivka Ulmer explores subsequent developments in her "Sennacherib in Midrashic and Related Literature: Inscribing History in Midrash," investigating traces of the campaign in rabbinic literature. To what extent, she asks, had the textual memory of Sennacherib been influenced by cultural transformations? Midrash and related texts depicted the attack of Sennacherib against Judah in great detail, she points out, showing massive armies deployed against Hezekiah. Sennacherib was said to have utilized astrologers and observed Jerusalem from a distance, which delayed his attack; his army was then annihilated on the eve of Passover when Hezekiah recited Hallel psalms. Other worship practices represented that angels were involved in the battles, and that they revealed the heavenly liturgy to the Assyrians themselves. Hezekiah was presented as a Messiah, whereas Sennacherib and his armies represented Gog and Magog in an End-of-Days scenario. These rabbinic passages are related to apocalypticism. In other stories, however, Sennacherib and his sons survived: Sennacherib worshipped a plank of Noah's Ark before his sons killed him and released the Jewish captives in Babylonia and themselves converted to Judaism.

In his study, "The Devil in Person, the Devil in Disguise: Looking for King Sennacherib in Early Christian Literature," Joseph Verheyden first dis-

cusses the origin and history of the hypothesis that the biblical accounts of Sennacherib's siege (and not capture) of Jerusalem are at the background of the references to the fall of Jerusalem in Luke 21. The second part of his study investigates how the figure of Sennacherib was discussed in Patristic interpretational tradition, both among earlier Christian authors and then in a later and more robust Antiochene tradition.

Seth Richardson's retrospective closes the volume with an essay entitled "The First 'World Event': Sennacherib at Jerusalem." Richardson analyzes the function of Sennacherib's campaign as a literary vehicle for a developing imperial culture and new political ideals at the expense of older traditions about kingship. The historicity of the siege and Sennacherib's "survival" in widely divergent stories are not unrelated, since the stories were formed and propagated in all the regions which first experienced imperial rule in Sennacherib's time. Beyond this, Richardson identifies new topics emerging in this "archipelago" of stories and explains them as shared responses to imperialization and diaspora in the millennium to come: the social authorization of "autonomous elites"; narrative devices of miracles and magic; and ubiquitous themes of flight and hiding. He follows with a consideration of why the broad inaccuracy and flexibility of the stories enabled a therapeutic "cultural forgetting"; and closes with a consideration of the importance of the reception of the episode as a distinct historical event.

It is our hope that this collection of fresh studies will broaden our knowledge and deepen our understanding of the events of 701 B.C.E. in the land of Israel, in Assyria and in the ancient Near East as a whole. The collection provides the reader with a sense of how and why stories of Sennacherib and the campaign were retold and rewritten in various cultures, language, places and ages; in this sense, this book stands in the longer line of that tradition itself. We hope these essays will invite students and scholars to conduct further studies on the issues discussed, and demonstrate that there remain mysteries yet to explore in even the most well-worked subjects: there remains so much more to know even of pasts we think we have already mastered.

PART ONE

I WILL DEFEND THIS CITY TO SAVE IT

SENNACHERIB'S CAMPAIGN TO JUDAH: THE CHRONICLER'S VIEW COMPARED WITH HIS 'BIBLICAL' SOURCES¹

Isaac Kalimi

I. SENNACHERIB'S CAMPAIGN TO JUDAH: SOURCES AND RESEARCH STANDS

Compared to many other events in the history of the ancient Near East, the third campaign of Sennacherib (Sîn-aḥḥē-erība; 705–681 B.C.E.), the second king of the Neo-Assyrian Sargonid Dynasty, to Ḥatti—the Western territories of the empire—in the fourth year of his reign (701 B.C.E.),² is very well documented. It is definitely the best documented event of the history of Israel in the First Temple period. The event is recounted in various Assyrian sources: it was detailed in the Annals of Sennacherib (Rassam Cylinder, Taylor Prism of the British Museum, as well as Sennacherib Prism of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago—the most detailed among all the Assyrian campaigns to the West), which were composed shortly after the campaign,³ in the Bull inscriptions, and later condensed in his summary-inscriptions.⁴ It was illustrated in the Assyrian reliefs, and testified to by abundance of archaeological excavations and discoveries, such as hundreds bullae of *lmlk* (למלך) jar handles in the cities of Judah from the reign of Hezekiah, which were used as food storage for the coming wartime.⁵ The campaign and its results are

¹ This article was written during my time as a Fellow of the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Science and the Arts (Brussels, 2013).

² The campaign to the Western territories took place when Sennacherib was around 44 years old; see E. Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften* (Wien, 1997), 8.

³ The Rassam Cylinder is the earliest document: it is dated "Month of Iyyar (eponymy of) Mitunu, governor of Isana," that is, spring 700 B.C.E.; see M. Cogan, *The Raging Torrent: Historical Inscriptions from Assyria and Babylonia Relating to Ancient Israel* (Jerusalem, 2008), 111–12. Taylor Prism is composed in the eponymy of Bel-emuranni, 691 B.C.E.; the Oriental Institute Prism is dated in the eponymy of Gahilu, 689 B.C.E.; see D. D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia* (Chicago, 1927), vol. 2, 115. See also J. B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (= ANET; 3rd ed. with Supplement; Princeton, 1969), 287–88; Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 53–55.

⁴ See D. D. Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib*, Oriental Institute Publications 2 (Chicago, 1924); idem., *Ancient Records*, vol. 2, 118–21, see also 136–37.

⁵ On this issue see, for instance, D. Ussishkin, "Lmlk Seal Impressions Once Again: A Second Rejoinder to Oded Lipschits," *Antiquo Oriente* 10 (2012): 13–23, with references to the earlier bibliography.

well documented in the early and late biblical historical-writings (2 Kings 18:13–19:37; 20:6; 2 Chronicles 32:1–23) and in the prophetic literature (e.g., Isaiah 1:7–9; 22:9–11a; 29:1–8; 31:4–9; 36–37; 38:5b–6; Micah 1:8–16). It is reflected also in extra-biblical written sources, such as classical and Hellenistic historiographies (Herodotus, *Historia* 2.141; Josephus Flavius, *Antiquitates Judaicae* 10.1–23, where he also cites Herodotus and Berossus's *History of Chaldaea*).⁶ The story regarding the Assyrian king and his campaign to Judah was spread out and expanded in a range of directions in different times and places, in varied languages, cultural settings and religious denominations. It was rewritten in Greek sources, Aramaic tales, intertestamental, rabbinic as well as Christian literatures.⁷ Nonetheless, despite the wealth of different documentations, archaeological material, many traditional references, and numerous studies on the topic, there is still space for additional researches to handle relatively neglected texts, clarify some complicated and still unsolved problems, and deepen our knowledge and vision.

Commonly, scholars and students of Sennacherib focus on the detailed account of the campaign in the cuneiform inscriptions and the reliefs describing the siege and conquest of Lachish,⁸ meticulous early biblical historical writings (2 Kings 18:13–19:37 // Isaiah 36–37) as well as of the eighth century Isaiah's and other prophetic compositions⁹ and the

⁶ Herodotus tells the story on the Egyptian background and viewpoint. On Herodotus's story of Sennacherib, see L. L. Grabbe, "Of Mice and Dead Men: Herodotus 2.141 and Sennacherib's Campaign in 701 B.C.E.," in L. L. Grabbe, ed., *'Like a Bird in a Cage': The Invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BCE*, JSOT Suppl. Series 363 (Sheffield, 2003), 119–40.

⁷ See, for example, the story and proverbs of Aḥiqar col. I:1–10; Tob. 1:15–22; 2:10; 11:18; 14:10; Demetrius the Chronographer fragment 6; 2 Bar. 63:1–11; 4 Ezra 7:40; Testament of Adam 4:6; 3 Macc. 6:1–15; Ascension of Isaiah 3:2; Joseph and Aseneth 8:9; and see the studies of T. L. Holm, G. S. Oegema, R. Ulmer, and J. Verheyden in the third part of this volume.

⁸ See, for example, Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib*; Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*; R. D. Barnett, "The Siege of Lachish," *Israel Exploration Journal* 8 (1958): 161–64; L. T. Geraty, "Archaeology and the Bible at Hezekiah's Lachish," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 25 (1987): 27–37.

⁹ There are numerous studies—commentaries, articles and monographs—regarding the biblical accounts of Sennacherib's campaign in 2 Kgs. 18–19 // Isa. 38–39. See, for example, T. R. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, WBC 13 (Waco, TX, 1985), 241–84; M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 11 (Garden City, NY, 1988), 223–51; V. Fritz, *1&2 Kings: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN, 2003), 361–79; H. Wildberger, *Jesaja* 28–39, *Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament* 10/3 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1982), 1378–1438; O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 13–39: A Commentary*, 2nd ed. (London, 1980), 365–96; R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1–39 The New Century Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1980), 277–93; H. Orlinsky, "The Kings-Isaiah Recensions of the Hezekiah Story," *JQR* 30 (1939/40): 33–49; B. S. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, *Studies in*

archaeological finds in the Land of Israel (particularly the excavations in Jerusalem, Lachish [stratum III which was destroyed by the Assyrians in 701 B.C.E.], and Timna).¹⁰ Of course, the Chronicler's account of Sennacherib's invasion (2 Chronicles 32:1–23) is discussed by the commentators, and from time to time a number of scholars have referred to particular points from it. However, in spite of a few separate studies that were dedicated to it,¹¹ generally speaking the Chronicler's account is neglected. This direction of the research stems, first and foremost, from the fact that a vast majority of scholars were—and still are—interested in historical descriptions of the event. Given the frequent approach of scholars that does not credit Chronicles with reliable historical credibility as is usually done for cuneiform and earlier biblical and archaeological sources, the Chronicler's story is simply considered not valuable to the reconstruction of the historical events.¹² After all, the Chronicler's account was composed over three centuries (most likely in the first quarter of the fourth century B.C.E.),¹³ after the historical event took place, and it is primarily based

Biblical Theology 3 (London, 1967); R. E. Clements, *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem: A Study of the Interpretation of Prophecy in the Old Testament*, JSOT Suppl. 13 (Sheffield, 1980), 24–39; A. Rofé, *The Prophetic Stories* (Jerusalem, 1982), 78–83 (in Hebrew); F. J. Gonçalves, *L'expédition de Sennachérib en Palestine dans la littérature hébraïque ancienne*, Études bibliques, Nouvelle série 7 (Paris, 1986); W. R. Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah: New Studies*, Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East 18 (Leiden, 1999); N. Na'aman, "New Light on Hezekiah's Second Prophetic Story (2 Kgs. 19:9b–35)," *Ancient Israel and Its Neighbors: Interaction and Counteraction—Collected Essays* (Winoona Lake, IN, 2005), vol. 1, 179–92; P. S. Evans, *The Invasion of Sennacherib in the Book of Kings: A Source-critical and Rhetorical Study of 2 Kgs. 18–19*, VTSuppl. 125 (Leiden, 2009); R. A. Young, *Hezekiah in History and Tradition*, VTSuppl. 155 (Leiden, 2012), 123–50. For a survey of two centuries of Sennacherib study, until a decade ago, see Grabbe, 'Like a Bird in a Cage', 20–34.

¹⁰ For a brief survey of archaeology and Sennacherib, see Grabbe, 'Like a Bird in a Cage', 3–20. See also D. Ussishkin, "The Destruction of Lachish by Sennacherib and the Dating of the Royal Judean Storage Jars," *Tel Aviv* 4 (1977), 28–60; idem, "The Water System of Jerusalem during Hezekiah's Reign," *Cathedra* 70 (1994), 3–28 esp. 5 (in Hebrew), and his chapter in this volume. For the different possible reconstructions of the campaign, see L. L. Honor, *Sennacherib's Invasion of Palestine* (Ph.D. Diss., Columbia University, 1926; reprinted, New York: AMS Press, 1966), xiii–xiv, 35–77.

¹¹ For example, in 1967 Brevard S. Childs dedicated a tiny chapter to Chronicles (*Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 104–11, including the translation of 2 Chron. 32:1–23); about two decades later, in 1986, Gonçalves discussed the Chronicler's account in his *L'expédition de Sennachérib en Palestine*, 488–527. In the framework of his study on Hezekiah, Young touched also 2 Chron. 32, particularly verses 3–8 and 27–30; see his *Hezekiah in History and Tradition*, 249–53.

¹² See for instance Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah*, 16.

¹³ For the date of Chronicles, see I. Kalimi, "The Date of the Book of Chronicles: Biblical Text, Elephantine Papyrus and El-Ibrahimiya's Aramaic Grave Inscription," *An Ancient*

on the early “biblical” account(s),¹⁴ that is, on the “second hand” sources (see below §IV).¹⁵ Moreover, the poor treatment of the Chronicler’s account is also an outcome of a lack of knowledge and understanding of his book as a whole.¹⁶ Nonetheless, it is interesting and quite important in its own right to examine how the historian from the Second Temple period, the Chronicler, historiographically reshaped, theologically formed and reflected this significant event in the history of Judah. Furthermore, although the Chronicler’s account of Sennacherib’s campaign was composed over three hundred years after the occasion, still there are some additional valuable historical data in Chronicles (though indeed probably based on “biblical” prophetic and other sources, see below §II, no. 4) which generally have been overlooked.¹⁷

The aim of this study is to point out the place of Sennacherib’s campaign in the Chronicler’s account of Hezekiah as a whole; to scrutinize the story of the Assyrian assault as it is presented in Chronicles in comparison with earlier “biblical” (and to a certain extent also extra-biblical) sources. Besides, the purpose is also to highlight the Chronicler’s particular historiographical methods, his essential ideological-theological purposes, and his ultimate accomplishments. As the reader might admit, my approaches, methods and results in this study are completely different from earlier scholars who investigated the Chronicler’s account.

II. HEZEKIAH’S REIGN AND SENNACHERIB’S CAMPAIGN IN CHRONICLES

The account of Hezekiah’s reign in the book of Kings is comprised of ninety-one verses within roughly three chapters (2 Kings 18:1–8, 13–37; 19–20). Of these verses, the author/editor of Kings dedicates over two-thirds (sixty-two verses) to describe Sennacherib’s campaign to Judah

Israelite Historian: Studies in the Chronicler, His Time, Place, and Writing, SSN 46 (Assen, 2005), 41–65.

¹⁴ Contra A. G. Auld, *Kings without Privilege: David and Moses in the Story of the Bible’s Kings* (Edinburgh, 1994); see in detail, I. Kalimi, “Kings with Privilege: The Core Source(s) of the Parallel Texts between the Deuteronomistic and Chronistic Histories,” *Revue biblique* 119 (2012): 498–517.

¹⁵ The “first hand” sources were the original archival reports from the time of or shortly close to the event.

¹⁶ See I. Kalimi, *The Retelling of Chronicles in Jewish Tradition and Literature: A Historical Journey* (Winona Lake, IN, 2009), and *Das Chronikbuch und seine Chronik: Zur Entstehung und Rezeption eines biblischen Buches*, Fuldaer Studien 17 (Freiburg, 2013).

¹⁷ See I. Kalimi, “Placing the Chronicler in His Own Historical Context: A Closer Examination,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 68 (2009): 179–92.

(2 Kings 18:13–37; 19:1–37). Thus, the heart of Kings' account of Hezekiah's reign is Sennacherib's campaign to Judah. In other words, this historian presents the campaign as the most important event in the time of Hezekiah, as we can confirm from other biblical and extra-biblical sources. In the book of Chronicles, the account of Hezekiah's reign is presented differently. A close reading of this account reveals the following eight points:

1. The account of Hezekiah's reign in Chronicles occupies the third largest place in the book. The Chronicler devotes to him eighty-four verses within four chapters (2 Chronicles 29–32). In addition, there are twelve verses in 1 Chronicles 4:32–43 regarding the Simeonites who acted in the time of Hezekiah. Thus the Chronicler devotes altogether ninety-six verses to Hezekiah, more space than in Kings and much more space in his book than to any other pious king (for instance, to Josiah's reign: two chapters, with sixty verses [2 Chronicles 34–35]). In fact, only the core kings of the united Israelite kingdom, David and Solomon, were highlighted more than Hezekiah in the Chronicistic writing.¹⁸ Obviously, the dedication of such length to Hezekiah reflects his importance among all the kings of Judah and Israel, from the Chronicler's perspective. Furthermore, the great fame and wealth that the Chronicler attributes to Hezekiah in 2 Chronicles 32:27–30 (an "addition") brings to mind the glory of David and Solomon.¹⁹ Also, the chronological location of Hezekiah, bookended between two of Judah's wicked kings—Ahaz on the one side and Manasseh on the other (2 Chronicles 28 and 33)²⁰—naturally highlights his righteousness (though the Chronicler follows here his *Vorlage* in 2 Kings 16 and 21).

2. The first three chapters of the four on Hezekiah in Chronicles deal with the king's renewal of the Temple service, cult reform, and the celebration of Passover (2 Chronicles 29–31; an "addition"), while only one verse is devoted to the religious activities of Hezekiah in Kings (2 Kings 18:4). The last ten verses of the fourth chapter (2 Chronicles 32:24–33) deal with Hezekiah's illness, some of his other acts, and some concluding words on his reign. Thus only twenty-three verses are devoted to Sennacherib's campaign to Judah and the conflict with Hezekiah (2 Chronicles

¹⁸ David's reign was described within nineteen chapters (roughly, 1 Chron. 11–29), and Solomon's reign within about nine chapters (roughly, 2 Chron. 1–9).

¹⁹ See 1 Chron. 14:17; 22:14; 29:2–5a, 28 ("additions")—David; 2 Chron. 8:18 (// 1 Kgs. 9:28); 9:13–21 (// 1:14–17), 23–25, 27–28 (// 1 Kgs. 10:14–22, 23–29)—Solomon. Compare also 2 Chron. 32:30b, *ויצילח יחזקיהו בכל מעשהו*, with 1 Sam. 18:14, *ויצילח דוד לכל דרכיו משביל*, ויהיה עמו. See also below, §VIII (b), 3.

²⁰ Though, according to the Chronicler, Manasseh repented towards the end of his reign (2 Chron. 33:12–16).

32:1–23). About *one-fourth* of the entire space dedicated to Hezekiah's reign in Chronicles is devoted to the Assyrian crisis, while almost *three-fourths* of the account in Kings focuses attention on this subject. Hence, in his writing the Chronicler gives a central place to Hezekiah and his religious behavior and cult activities. These issues are more important for the Chronicler than the historical story regarding the military campaign of Sennacherib to Judah.

3. Although there are new elements in the Chronicle's account of Sennacherib (see below, nos. 5–6), it mainly depends on the earlier "biblical" text of 2 Kings 18–19 (// Isaiah 36–37).²¹ However, this is not simply a repetitive copy or summary of the earlier text; rather, the Chronicler substantially condenses it:²² against sixty-two verses to Sennacherib's account in Kings, there are only twenty-three verses in Chronicles. In other words, in Chronicles the story is approximately one-third of the one in Kings.

4. More than three-fourth of the texts in Chronicles dedicated to Hezekiah (namely, 1 Chronicles 4:32–43; 2 Chronicles 29:3–31:21; 32:22–23, 25–30) have no parallel in Kings or in any other source. This fact automatically raises the question of whether the Chronicler had or did not have extra source(s) from which he obtained the information, and if he had such a source(s), what was its literary genre and historical credibility.²³

5. In spite of having the longer account of Sennacherib's campaign, 2 Kings (along with Isaiah) does not detail Hezekiah's preparation for the war. Even 2 Kings 20:20b, which tells about the king's water supply project, does not relate it to the Assyrian conflict. In contrast, 2 Chronicles 32:2–6a describes the realistic logistical preparations of the king for Sennacherib's assault: the construction of the water system in Jerusalem, reconstruction of the breaches in the wall, raising of towers, collecting weapons, building

²¹ That the Chronicler depends on the text of Kings, rather than on an independent "shared text," as Auld assumes (*Kings without Privilege*), it is evident also from the harmonization of several issues that appear in 2 Kgs. 18–19; see the examples listed below, in the text. Similarly, in 2 Chron. 34:24, the Chronicler creates harmony between the contradictory verses in 2 Kgs. 22:10 and 16; see in detail I. Kalimi, *The Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History in Chronicles* (Winona Lake, IN, 2005; repr. 2012), 156. See also above, note 14.

²² For example: (1) In 2 Chron. 32:13, the Chronicler accounts the main content of 2 Kgs. 18:33–34 (// Isa. 36:18b–19), while deleting the details listed there. (2) In 2 Chron. 32:13 the Chronicler writes "his servants" instead of listing the three names mentioned in 2 Kgs. 18:17 (the parallel text in Isa. 36:2 mentions one name only—Rabshakeh, who speaks later); see in detail, Kalimi, *Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History*, 88–89.

²³ In fact, these questions apply to all the "additions" (*Sondergut*) in the book of Chronicles, and the opinions of scholars are widely divided on these issues.

another wall (ה[ה]אחרת) outside it²⁴ (in order to protect the new quarter in the north-west of the city²⁵—*mishneh*, “doubling,” Zephaniah 1:10–11), and so forth.²⁶ Most likely, the main lines of the description in Chronicles basically depend on Isaiah 22:9–11a, where the prophet responds to the events of 705–704 B.C.E. The relation between these texts is revealed first and foremost from their contents, but also from the use of the same verb קבץ (ויקבצו עם רב and ותקבצו את מי הבריכה). However, there are some differences between the two accounts; as Isaiah has it:²⁷

You have seen also the breaches of the city of David that they are many; and you gathered together the waters of the lower pool. And you have counted the houses of Jerusalem, and the houses that you have broken down to fortify the wall. You made also a pond between the two walls for the water of the lower pool.

Regarding the Shiloah/Siloam tunnel project (2 Chronicles 32:30 // 2 Kings 20:20) and the inscription that commemorates its completion, scholars are divided about the time before 701 B.C.E. or after it.²⁸ It seems that 2 Chronicles 32:30 is just a detail of the water system's construction

²⁴ The letter ה of the word אחרת[ה] falls because of haplography from the end of the previous word, החמה.

²⁵ Cf. M. Liverani, *Israel's History and the History of Israel* (London, 2005), 152–55. The archaeological excavation by Reich and Shukron confirms the existence of the second wall of Jerusalem dated to the end of the eighth century B.C.E.; see R. Reich and E. Shukron, “The Urban Development of Jerusalem in the Late Eighth Century B.C.E.,” in A. G. Vaughn and A. E. Killebrew, ed., *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period*, SBL-SymS 18 (Atlanta, 1997), 209–18.

²⁶ In addition to these preparations were the food storages for wartime in different cities of Judah, as testified by the *lmk* jar-handles that date to the reign of Hezekiah (see above, §1).

²⁷ For example, according to the Chronicler, Hezekiah acted to prevent access to water for the Assyrians, while, according to Isaiah, the activity intended to supply water to Jerusalem. Furthermore, according to Chronicles, “to plug the waters of the springs which were outside the city” (32:3), while Isaiah stresses that they “gathered together the waters of the lower pool” (22:9).

²⁸ For the text of the inscriptions, see, e.g., Pritchard, *ANET*, 321. Most likely it is a citation from an archival source, such as “the book of Chronicles/Annals of the Kings of Judah,” one of the major sources that was used by the author(s)/editor(s) of the biblical book of Kings; see G. Levi della Vida, “The Shiloah Inscription Reconsidered,” in M. Black and G. Fohrer, ed., *In Memoriam Paul Kahle*, BZAW 103 (Berlin, 1968), 162–66. A vast majority of the scholars are of the opinion that the tunnel had been excavated before the campaign of Sennacherib to Judah. For this and other opinions regarding the date of the tunnel, see the detailed discussion by A. Grossberg, “When was Carved Hezekiah's Tunnel and Place of ‘between the Walls’ and the Crater,” *Judah and Samaria Studies* 9 (2000): 63–74 (in Hebrew).

in Jerusalem that was described earlier in 32:3–4,²⁹ and that the Siloam tunnel project was completed before the campaign of 701 B.C.E.

6. The speech of Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 32:6b–8) also comes from the hand of the Chronicler, probably based on the content of 2 Kings 18:30 and 32b (// Isaiah 36:15, 18a). Here the Chronicler uses expressions which appear elsewhere in the earlier biblical texts³⁰ and create word-plays (puns).³¹ The speech presents the Chronicler's own religious views and literary proclivities, and was composed by him and ascribed to Hezekiah—a phenomenon which is well known in biblical as well as in Greek, Hellenistic and Roman historiography.³² Here Hezekiah puts his complete trust in God, an idea which is also familiar from other places in Chronicles (for example, 2 Chronicles 14:10; 17:2, 12–19; 20:17).

7. In contrast to Isaiah, the Chronicler does not negate the preparations of Hezekiah (Isaiah 22:11b). For him, the preparation for the struggle (32:2–6a), and Hezekiah's expression of trust in God (32: 6b–8) are two sides of one and the same coin; they complete each other rather than contrast.³³ That is to say, one must, first and foremost, do all in one's power to address dangers and enemies, but at the same time also trust God and

²⁹ See, for example, David Kimchi's commentary on 2 Chron. 32:30; E. L. Curtis and A. A. Madsen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Chronicles* (Edinburgh, 1910), 486–87; J. M. Myers, *II Chronicles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 13 (Garden City, NY, 1965), 187; S. Japhet, *I & II Chronicles: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY, 1993), 982–83.

³⁰ For the whole expression חזקו ואמצו אל תיראו ואל תחתו in 2 Chron. 32:7, see for example Josh. 10:25 (in chiasmic order); 1 Chron. 22:13 (“additions”); and compare Jer. 1:8 (אל תירא מפניהם) and 17 (אל תחת מפניהם); Josh. 1:9. For the expression חזקו ואמצו, cf. Deut. 3:28; 31:6, 7, 23; Josh. 1:6, 7, 18; Ps. 27:14; 31:28. For אל תיראו ואל תחתו, cf. Deut. 1:21; 31:8; Josh. 8:1; 1 Sam. 17:11; Isa. 51:7; Jer. 30:10; 23:4; 46:27; Ezek. 2:6; 3:9; and see also 2 Chron. 20:15, 17.

³¹ The verb חזק in verses 5 and 7 (altogether three times) create a word-play with the name חזקיהו. The words יהוה אלהינו עמנו יהוה in verse 8 create a pun with the name עמנאל (cf. Isa. 7:14b). On this feature in the Chronistic writing in general and on the issue under review in particular, see I. Kalimi, “Utilization of Pun / Paronomasia in the Chronistic Writing,” *Ancient Israelite Historian*, 67–81 esp. 78 no. 4, and see also below note 101.

³² For references, see Kalimi, “Placing the Chronicler in His Own Historical Context,” 182–84, 186, 192.

³³ For a different opinion see, for example, H. G. M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1982), 380. According to him, verses 2–6 “seems to stand in contrast to the insistence on complete trust on God's power to deliver expressed both in Hezekiah's address immediately following (vv. 7–8) and in the miraculous manner of the deliverance later on . . . It was suggested there that this could *only* (italics mine) be solved on the basis of the Chronicler's conviction that part of the blessing which faithful kings enjoyed was their success in building operations. The same explanation will apply here. . . .”

pray for his help.³⁴ Indeed, while the military forces of Hezekiah stood on the wall to defend Jerusalem from the Assyrian invasion (2 Chronicles 32:10, 18), the ultimate defeat of Sennacherib was accomplished by the angel of the Lord (32:21), and the Chronicler stresses: “Thus *the Lord saved* Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all others” (32:22; an “addition”). In fact, the speech of Hezekiah is a post-eventum reflection of the story: the Chronicler knew that the mighty and well-equipped Assyrian army was demolished by the angel of the Lord in front of the gates of Jerusalem rather than by the small military forces of Hezekiah. At the same time, he knew that the preparations of Hezekiah had prevented an immediate Assyrian breach of the walls of Jerusalem.

Furthermore, the Chronicler considers building of Jerusalem and other cities in Judah as good deeds of righteous kings (e.g., 2 Chronicles 11:5–12, 23—Rehoboam;³⁵ 14:5–7—Asa; 17:12–14—Jehoshaphat). Hezekiah, who built various projects in Jerusalem in the urgent situation of the Assyrian crisis, is included among those kings. In other words, Hezekiah’s building activities in Jerusalem—though preparations for war—perhaps should be considered as part of his positive deeds rather than as any mistrust in God.

8. All in all, the Chronicler intensively uses the accounts of Kings and Isaiah, while reshaping them and suggesting a series of significant modifications on essential key-points (see below). His account is drastically shorter in length and differs in content than the ones in Kings (/Isaiah). Thus, as a whole, the Chronicler presents a fresh account of Sennacherib’s campaign which maintains distinct historical, theological and didactical goals. It was addressed to a different audience in different times and historical settings, that is, to the Chronicler’s own contemporary audience in the Persian province of Yehud Medinta. In the same breath, this account raised new challenges to general readers, as well as to modern exegetes, theologians and historians.

³⁴ A similar approach is reflected also from the Chronicler’s description of Abiam, Asa and Jehoshaphat, kings of Judah, who trusted God but meanwhile also prepared well for war (2 Chron. 13:3, 14–16; 14:7–10; 17:1–2 and 20:3–13, 17–18). Compare also with what is told about Jacob who prayed to and trusted in God regarding overcoming his brother Esau’s animosity, but who at the same time also prepared himself for a possibly struggle with Esau, and sent “diplomatic” messengers and gifts to appease him (Gen. 32:1–24).

³⁵ Liverani (*Israel’s History and the History of Israel*, 154) attributes these cities not to Rehoboam as in Chronicles, but to Hezekiah. However, he fails to provide any evidence for his argument.

III. THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF SENNACHERIB'S CAMPAIGN

Neither Assyrian documents nor the biblical texts of Kings and Isaiah provide the historical circumstances that led Hezekiah (and other regional kings) to rebel against the Assyrians. These sources neither hint at the defeat of the Assyrian army in central Anatolia by Gurdî of Tabal (705 B.C.E.), nor at the death of Sennacherib's father, Sargon II, on the battlefield (and disappearance of his corpse), which inflamed the rebel-fire in diverse corners of the Assyrian empire. This historical setting of the rebels against Assyria is explicitly deduced by modern historians from various cuneiform sources, rather than suggested by any single source making an account of the third campaign of Sennacherib. Although the author/editor of Kings explicitly points out that Hezekiah "rebelled against the king of Assyria and served him not" (2 Kings 18:7b), he does not provide the historical circumstances that led Hezekiah to make such a crucial decision, that is, to stop paying annual tribute to Assyria and make an independent—mostly anti-Assyrian—foreign policy. Hezekiah also attacked some Philistines poleis, which most likely were loyal to Assyria: "He struck the Philistines, as far as Gaza and its territory, from watchtower to fortified city" (2 Kings 18:8). 1 Chronicles 4:39–41 tells of some military actions and settlements of the Simeronites, in the time of Hezekiah, in Gerar (MT: Gedor), which was in proximity to Gaza. Indeed, the Assyrian annals inform us that, on the one hand, Hezekiah cooperated with the anti-Assyrian king of Ashkelon, Šidqa, and, on the other hand, he captured the Assyrian loyal vassal, Padi king of Ekron, and jailed him in Jerusalem.³⁶ These aggressive actions of Hezekiah, after the sudden tragic death of Sargon II, resulted in Sennacherib's campaign to subdue the rebellions.

Both sources, the text of Kings as well as the Assyrian annals, recount that at some point in the course of his campaign, Sennacherib invaded the kingdom of Judah, besieged its fortified cities (including the second-most important Judean city, Lachish), and demolished numerous towns and villages. At that point, Hezekiah admitted his horrible political and military miscalculations, submitted to Sennacherib without condition, and paid him a heavy tribute, which probably included payments for all the previous years he had failed to send tribute to Nineveh (ca. half a decade, 705–701 B.C.E.), as well as a penalty for his "evil acts" against Assyria:

³⁶ See Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib*, p. 30, col. III ll. 60–61; p. 32, ll. 18–19.

And in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah,³⁷ Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah, and conquered (lit. took) them. And Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria to Lachish, saying, I have offended; withdraw from me; that which you put on me will I bear. And the king of Assyria imposed on Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. And Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king's house. At that time did Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the Temple of the Lord, and from the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria. (2 Kings 18:13–16)

The Chronicler replaces the precise date of Sennacherib's invasion to Judah ("in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah," 2 Kings 18:13a), with an inexact and approximate one: אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים וְהָאֵלֶּה "After these things, and these deeds of integrity . . ." (2 Chronicles 32:1a). This phrase is similar to the well-known phrase (particularly from narrative and historical segments of the Hebrew Bible),³⁸ וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, which generally means "sometime afterward."³⁹ It is a technical phrase which relates stories or determines the relative position of a story within a chain of stories. In employing it, the Chronicler creates literary and chronological proximity between Hezekiah's positive cultic activities that he detailed in the previous chapters (2 Chronicles 29–31) and the evil thoughts of Sennacherib to conquer Judah (2 Chronicles 32:1b). By doing so, the Chronicler elucidates the result of the campaign: the success of Hezekiah on the one hand, and the failure of Sennacherib on the other. In other words, he presents the Assyrian campaign against the king of Judah as one that was doomed to fail from the very beginning. Moreover, the Chronicler delivers a clear message here: when a king makes good in the sight of the Lord, no enemy—not even the mighty Assyrian king—can triumph over him.

The Chronicler not only declines to provide any historical background for Hezekiah's rebellion against Sennacherib (like the authors/editors

³⁷ "The fourteenth year of King Hezekiah" refers to the events described in 2 Kgs. 20, which probably took place in 714/713 B.C.E. Of the two biblical dates (the synchronism in 2 Kgs. 18:9–10 [see also the one in verses 1–2] and the date under review in 18:14), only the former fits with the fixed extra-biblical dates that appear in the cuneiform sources, that is, the capture of Samaria (721/20 B.C.E.) and the third campaign of Sennacherib (701 B.C.E.); see in detail Wildberger, *Jesaja* 28–29, 1380; H. Tadmor and M. Cogan, "Hezekiah's Fourteenth Year: The King's Illness and the Babylonian Embassy," *Eretz-Israel* 16, H. M. Orlinsky Volume (Jerusalem, 1982): 198–201 (in Hebrew).

³⁸ Among its many appearances, see for example, Gen. 15:1; 22:1a, 20a; 39:7; 48:1.

³⁹ Compare the translation in the *Jewish Study Bible* on Gen. 22:1: "Some time afterward."

of Kings and Isaiah),⁴⁰ he does not even hint at the fact of Hezekiah's revolt itself. There is no clue in Chronicles that the Assyrian campaign to Judah was a reaction to Hezekiah's rebellious behavior against Assyria, his anti-Assyrian activities in Philistia, or his conspiracy with Egypt, some Philistines and Phoenician coastal kingdoms. Instead, the Chronicler suggests a psycho-historical setting for the event: all of a sudden, capriciously, Sennacherib wishes to capture the cities of Judah and journeys there to do it: "Sennacherib king of Assyria came, and entered into Judah, and encamped against the fortified cities, and *thought to make a breach therein for himself*" (בא סנחריב מלך אשור ויבא ביהודה ויחן על הערים) (2 Chronicles 32:1b).⁴¹ Accordingly, the reader obtains the impression that Sennacherib's campaign was a sudden aggressive assault on the kingdom of Judah in order only to conquer and plunder its fortified cities. The measures that Hezekiah took as acts of defense took place only *after* Sennacherib began his campaign against Jerusalem, rather than as preparations for a revolt: "And when Hezekiah saw that *Sennacherib had come, and that he intended to fight against Jerusalem . . .*" (32:2–6, see above, §II, 4).

The Chronicler also does not share the view of his source(s) that "Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah, and took them" (2 Kings 18:13b // Isaiah 36:1). Rather, he represents that Sennacherib "*thought to make a breach therein for himself*," but actually did not succeed! Furthermore, the earlier texts reflect that Lachish was one of those "fortified cities" (2 Kings 18:13b) captured by the Assyrians. Sennacherib returned his headquarters to Lachish, where he accepted Hezekiah's delegation (2 Kings 18:14), and "from Lachish" (מן לביש / מלביש) he "sent Tartan and Rabsaris and Rabshakeh to King Hezekiah with a great army against Jerusalem . . ." (2 Kings 18:17 // Isaiah 36:2). In Chronicles, however, there is no clue that Lachish ever was captured by Sennacherib. The Chronicler excludes the text of 2 Kings 18:14 from his account; and 2 Chronicles 32:9 (// 2 Kings 18:17 and Isaiah 36:2) relates that Sennacherib sent a delegation to Jerusalem while he was besieging (though not capturing) Lachish: "After this (זה), Sennacherib king of Assyria sent his servants to Jerusalem, for *he himself [laid siege] against Lachish*

⁴⁰ In fact, as one who heavily depends on the biblical sources, the Chronicler was unable to provide such a historical background.

⁴¹ For further discussion on 2 Chron. 32:1, see Kalimi, *Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History*, 22–26, esp. 25.

(והוא על לביש)⁴² and all his strength was with him, to Hezekiah king of Judah and to all of Judah who were at Jerusalem....” The words “after this” (אחר זה)⁴³ in verse 9 are related to verse 1, which tells that Sennacherib “encamped against the fortified cities and *thought to make a breach therein* for himself” (see above), after the interruption of verse 2–8 that recounts Hezekiah’s preparations.

IV. SENNACHERIB’S CAMPAIGN AND THE DELIVERY OF JERUSALEM

(a) *The Book of Kings*

The book of Kings presents two views regarding the same campaign of Sennacherib to Judah and delivery of Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:13–19:37).⁴⁴ Although these views are enormously different in their textual extent, content, literary style and genre, still they stand independently, side by side, not referring each to other:

The first view appears in 2 Kings 18:13–16, which is, in the scholarly literature commonly marked as story “A.” It is a short unit, which on the one hand provides “dry” factual information about Sennacherib’s campaign to Judah, its date and achievements, Hezekiah’s surrender to the Assyrian king and his heavy tribute paid to him from the Temple and palace treasuries. On the other hand, it contains neither Deuteronomistic phraseology, theological ideas and judgmental evaluations, nor any literary–propagandistic element. Thus seemingly it is an authentic official annalistic record, most likely from the Temple archive regarding the

⁴² The phrase והוא על לביש should be considered as an ellipsis (מקרא קצר), and it means: והוא [צר] על לביש. On this phenomenon in the Hebrew Bible, see Kalimi, *Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History*, 68–74, with examples and references to additional secondary literature.

⁴³ Cf. to the similar idiom: אחר בן in Lev. 14:36; Deut. 21:13; 1 Sam. 10:5.

⁴⁴ However, there are some scholars who assume that 2 Kgs. 18:13–19:37 contains two stories of two campaigns of Sennacherib to Judah. See also, for example, W. F. Albright, “New Light from Egypt on the Chronology and History of Israel and Judah,” *BASOR* 130 (1953): 8–11. John Bright stated: “... serious consideration should be given to the possibility that II Kings has telescoped the accounts of two campaigns, one in 701 (ch. 18:13–16), the other later (chs. 18:17 to 19:37);” J. Bright, *A History of Israel*, 2nd ed. (London, 1974), 307. See also W. H. Shea, “Sennacherib’s Second Palestinian Campaign,” *JBL* 104 (1985): 401–18, and “Jerusalem under Siege: Did Sennacherib Attacked Twice?” *Biblical Archaeological Review* 25/6 (1999): 36–44, 64. See also H. Horn, “Did Sennacherib Campaign Once or Twice Against Hezekiah,” *Andrews University Seminar Studies* 4 (1966): 1–28; M. Cogan, “Sennacherib’s Siege of Jerusalem: Once or Twice?” *BAR* 27/1 (2001): 40–45, 69.

Assyrian crisis.⁴⁵ It was composed very close to the events or soon after 701 B.C.E.⁴⁶ Certain details of this record are overlapping to the annals of Sennacherib, and the amount of the gold paid to the king of Assyria is identical in both documents.⁴⁷

Moreover, this unit presents a negative portrait of Hezekiah: he himself admitted that the rebellion was a fatal mistake; he acted as a terrified and powerless ruler, stripped the precious material from the Temple's doors, emptied the treasuries of the kingdom and passed the contents on to the Assyrian king. As such, it stands in contrast to the positive evaluation of Hezekiah by the Deuteronomistic historian (2 Kings 18:3–8). Nonetheless, despite all this, the Deuteronomistic historian included story “A” within his composition, without inserting any alterations.⁴⁸

The second view appears in 2 Kings 18:17–19:37, marked as story “B.”⁴⁹ It is a long unit, telling a lively and dramatic prophetic story that was theologically formed. It starts with the mission of the Assyrian high officials,

⁴⁵ Some scholars assumed that 2 Kgs. 18:13–16 is an excerpt from an official “Chronicles of the Kings of Judah;” see, for example, J. A. Montgomery and H. S. Gehman, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings* (Edinburgh, 1951), 482–83; J. Gray, *I & II Kings—A Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, 1970), 672; Na’aman, “New Light,” 188. However, it is hard to accept that an official royal document presented the failure of Hezekiah so obviously without attempting to cover up for him. On the other hand, it is reasonable to assume that the Temple archive contended such critical points.

⁴⁶ The date “The fourteenth year of King Hezekiah” in 2 Kgs. 18:13a originally related to the Babylonian embassy in Jerusalem, and its current place as a late editorial insertion; see the discussion and reference, above note 37. Most likely, originally was written something like “at his/that time. . .” It is also possible that *וּבְאַרְבַּע עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה* is a textual corruption of *וּבְאַרְבַּע וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה*, as suggested by Montgomery and Gehman, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 483.

⁴⁷ Compare 2 Kgs. 18:14 and Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib*, 34 (Oriental Institute Prism, col. III, l. 41); Pritchard, *ANET*, 288. Interestingly, according to the annals of Sennacherib, Hezekiah sent his tribute to Nineveh by his messengers (col. III, ll. 47–49), rather than giving it to him when he was in Judah. Does the hastened departure of Sennacherib support this?

⁴⁸ The Deuteronomistic historian brought the archival source alongside the following one (“B”) and related to them (see below), but he did not change the content of the source, even when it stood in contrast to his perspective on the figure or theme. For this feature in the book of Kings, see also 1 Kgs. 17:30, Kalimi, *Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History*, 140; *contra* Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 73, who sees “A” as an edited archival source. Moreover, this record is not necessarily a (late) insertion (“ein Einschub”) as defined by B. Stade “Miscellen: 16. Anmerkungen zu Kö. 15–21,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 6 (1886): 122–89, esp. 172. Rather it is, most likely, from the hand of the same author/editor of Kings. For the same reason, I reject the assumption of I. W. Provan (*Hezekiah and the Books of Kings*, BZAW 172 [Berlin, 1988], 122) who considers 2 Kgs. 18:14–17 as “a secondary insertion into the book” from the hand of a late Deuteronomistic historian who wished to minimize the positive image of Hezekiah in Kings.

⁴⁹ Obviously, 2 Kgs. 18:13 (// Isa. 36:1) uses as opening verse for the previous view (“A”), as well as for this view (“B”).

who were sent by Sennacherib to demand Hezekiah's ultimate surrender, and culminates with the sudden, miraculous swift smiting of the Assyrian troops in front of Jerusalem's gates and the assassination of Sennacherib. The current form of the text under review could not have been composed before 681 B.C.E., the year that Sennacherib was murdered by his sons.⁵⁰ Moreover, since the mention of "Tirhaka, king of Ethiopia" as one who confronted Sennacherib in Altaqu/Eltekeh in 701 B.C.E.⁵¹ is anachronistic (2 Kings 19:9a // Isaiah 37:9a), the composition of "B" must be dated sometime after his accession.⁵² The author(s) of story "B" had some direct knowledge of the Assyrian administrators, as revealed from the usage of the titles of Assyrian high officials, "Tartan," "Rabsaris" and "Rabshakeh," as well as the title "the great king the king of Assyria," and the fact that Aramaic used the diplomatic language of the Assyrian empire.⁵³ The author(s) of story "B" had a good knowledge of the many places captured by the Assyrians (2 Kings 18:33–34; 19:12–13). The scenario of Rabshakeh stand in front of Jerusalem's wall and demanding the surrender of its warriors, against the will of the king (2 Kings 18:17–36 // Isaiah 36:9–21), has a parallel in an Assyrian letter from the end of the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (731 B.C.E.), in which Assyrian officials negotiated with the people of Babylon prior to the siege of the city.⁵⁴ Moreover, "the factual notation on Sennacherib's assassination and the identity of his murderers and their place

⁵⁰ See in detail, below §VIII, b3.

⁵¹ The confrontation in Altaqu is described in the Rassam Cylinder (Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 541:43–45), see J. Vidal, "Some Remarks on the Battle of Altaqu," in *The Perfumes of the Seven Tamarisks: Studies in Honor of Wilfred G. E. Watson*, AOAT 394 (Münster, 2012), 75–83.

⁵² Rofé (*Prophetic Stories*, 81) dates it to ca. 650 B.C.E.

⁵³ For further discussion on "Imperial Aramaic," see below, §VIII, a. The conclusion of Giovanni Garbini (*History and Ideology in Ancient Israel* [New York, 1988], 46) "that the whole episode presupposes a linguistic situation in which Aramaic had become an international language . . . seems somewhat anachronistic in 701 BC, when the Jerusalem court must have been more familiar with Phoenician than with Aramaic;" and therefore "the siege of Jerusalem has only the siege as a historical core and has been put down in writing . . . at least a century after the facts narrated" (italics mine), is completely incorrect. Aramaic became an international diplomatic and trade language (*lingua franca*) in the Assyrian empire at the end of the eighth century B.C.E. (and perhaps even since the time of Adad-nirari III, 811–783 B.C.E.); see A. Demsky, *Literacy in Ancient Israel*, Biblical Encyclopedia Library 28 (Jerusalem, 2012), 127–129, 198 (in Hebrew). Thus it is not surprising that an Assyrian high official, Rabshakeh, and the Judean officials and King Hezekiah (2 Kgs. 19:14 // Isa. 37:14) spoke and read Aramaic.

⁵⁴ See H. W. F. Saggs, "The Nimrud Letters, 1952—Part I," *Iraq* 17 (1955), 21–50, esp. 23–26; cf. S. Herrmann, *A History of Israel in Old Testament Times* (Philadelphia, 1981), 259, 262.

of refuge (in v. 37) could only have been derived from the Babylonian chronicles.”⁵⁵

In the current biblical text format, story “B” appears as one continuous unit. However, it does not present a coherent story, and most likely comprises two distinct versions of one and the same event: 2 Kings 18:17–19:9a, 36–37 (“B¹”) and 19:9b–35 (“B²”).⁵⁶ That is to say, at some point during the history of the transformation of the story, a biblical editor combined the two versions (which were composed in different times and with different perspectives), under one continuous format, regardless of some contradictions between them and the duplications that resulted in such a combination.⁵⁷ The shifting point between the two versions of story “B” is 2 Kings 19:9b: “*And again* he sent messengers to Hezekiah” (וישב וישלח) מלאכים אל חזקיהו; in the parallel text, Isaiah 37:9b: . . . וישמע וישלח “*And when he heard it, he sent . . .*”). Indeed, 2 Kings 19:36–37 that concludes story “B” could actually be considered as an epilogue for each of the versions.

(b) *The Books of Isaiah and Chronicles*

Most likely, Isaiah 36–37 depends on the account in the book of Kings.⁵⁸ The editor(s) of the book of Isaiah was logically interested in the

⁵⁵ See Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 244.

⁵⁶ This division is accepted in principle, sometimes with minor changes, on the opinion of the vast majority of the biblical scholars; see for example, Stade, “Miscellen: 16. Anmerkungen zu Kö. 15–21,” 173–183; Honor, *Sennacherib's Invasion of Palestine*, 45–48; Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 73–76.

⁵⁷ For duplications, see for example: twice the Sennacherib delegation had been sent to Hezekiah and demanded his surrender (2 Kgs. 18:17; 19:9b); twice Hezekiah prayed to God in the Temple (2 Kgs. 19:1, 14–15); and twice God replied via prophet Isaiah (2 Kgs. 19:6–7, 20–34). The list of the captured places is mentioned twice (partially overlap and partially different names) in 2 Kgs. 18:33–34 and in 19:12–13. There are also some contradictions between the two versions, such as: in 2 Kgs. 18:22, 25 Rabshakeh claims that Hezekiah sinned and therefore the Lord sent the king of Assyria to punish him. In contrast, in 2 Kgs. 18:32b–35; 19:10–12, Rabshakeh claims that, like the gods of other people, the Lord is also powerless to save Jerusalem from Sennacherib's hands. In 2 Kgs. 19:7 Isaiah promises that Sennacherib will hear a rumor and go back to his land; while in 2 Kgs. 18:33–34, he prophesies that the Lord will protect Jerusalem, that means, Sennacherib will campaign from Lachish to Jerusalem. Cf. Stade, “Miscellen: 16. Anmerkungen zu Kö. 15–21,” 173–83; Rofé, *Prophetic Stories*, 78–79. Indeed, the phenomenon of a few versions of a single story is well-known in biblical literature, for example: the three stories about the matriarch who was captivated by a foreign ruler (Gen. 12:10–20; 20; 26:6–11); the two stories regarding the captive of David by Saul (1 Sam. 24; 26); the two stories about Zedekiah's delegations to Jeremiah (Jer. 21:1–6; 37:3–10); see Rofé, *ibid*.

⁵⁸ See, for example, Gray, *I & II Kings*, 658–59; Kaiser, *Isaiah 13–39*, 365; and see the detailed discussion by Wildberger, *Jesaja 28–39*, 1370–74, and *Isaiah: A Continental*

prophetic story, i.e., story “B,” where the involvement of prophet Isaiah is obvious. He ignored the archival record of 2 Kings 18:14–16, i.e., story “A,” in which Isaiah is not mentioned at all. Moreover, this editor found much more interest in the theological issues mentioned in story “B” than in the “dry” historical details listed in story “A.”⁵⁹ Although this editing used 2 Kings 18:13 as its opening words (Isaiah 36:1), it demonstrates that story “B” can basically stand alone without reference to story “A.” Nonetheless, it does not mean that story “B” must be alone, without story “A.”

As one who presents the Assyrian campaign to the kingdom of Judah as a failure from the very start (see above), and portrays Hezekiah in a very positive way (see below), the Chronicler does not and could not present Hezekiah in the negative way related by the annalistic record (story “A”). Thus, for his own reasons, the Chronicler also ignores the archival record altogether and bases his account of Sennacherib merely on the prophetic story (“B”). In Kings and Isaiah, “B” (2 Kings 18:17–19:9a, 36–37 // Isaiah 36:2–37:9a, 37–38) and “B²” (2 Kings 19:9b–35 // Isaiah 37:9b–36) stand independently, each by the other, despite some differences and duplications between them (see above). The Chronicler, however, correlates these versions and harmonizes some contradictions; for example:

(1) In 2 Chronicles 32:21, the Chronicler changes the text of 2 Kings 19:36–37 (// Isaiah 37:37–38), which relates the withdrawal of Sennacherib from Judah and his murder in Assyria in order to harmonize it with Isaiah’s prophecy of the same events in 2 Kings 19:7 (// Isaiah 37:7).⁶⁰

(2) According to 2 Kings 18:33–35 (// Isaiah 36:18b–20) Rabshakeh says: *ההצל הצילו אלהי הגוים איש את ארצו מיד מלך אשור... כי הצילו את שמרון מידי... מי בכל אלהי הארצות אשר הצילו את ארצם מידי כי יציל יהוה את ירושלם מידי*. However, in 2 Kings 19:12–13 (// Isaiah 37:12–13), Rabshakeh states the same point as follows: *ההצילו אתם אלהי הגוים אשר... שחתו אבותי את גוזן... איזו (איה) מלך חמת... הלא תדעו מה עשיתי אני ואבותי לכל עמי הארצות היכול יכלו אלהי גוי הארצות להציל את ארצם מידי מי בכל אלהי הגוים האלה*

Commentary, trans. T. H. Trapp (Minneapolis, MN, 1991–2002), vol. 3, 559; G. H. Jones, *1 & 2 Kgs.* (Grand Rapids, 1984), 557–58. Gray (*ibid.*, p. 658) correctly stresses that the suggestion that Kings and Isaiah “cannot be drawn independently from a common source, but the one depends on the other.”

⁵⁹ For this issue see also below, § VIII.

⁶⁰ See Kalimi, *Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History*, 161.

אשר החרימו אבותי... כי לא יוכל כל אלוהי כל גוי וממלכה להציל עמו מידי
 ומיד אבותי אף כי אלהיכם לא יצילו אתכם מידי (2 Chronicles 32:13–15).⁶¹

Thus, through the varied emendations that the Chronicler makes in his “biblical” sources, he creates a new account. He significantly differs from the earlier biblical accounts in Kings (and Isaiah), and the result stands in contrast to the historical outcomes of Sennacherib’s campaign as reflected from the earlier biblical texts (as well as from the Assyrian sources and archaeological finds).⁶²

V. THE CHRONICLER’S INACCURATE DESCRIPTION OF THE CAMPAIGN

What caused the Chronicler to illustrate—historically speaking—such an inaccurate picture of Sennacherib’s campaign to Judah, a picture that fundamentally differs from and stands in contrast to his *Vorlage’s* accounts, as well as those of several other prophetic descriptions (e.g., Isaiah 1:7–9; 29:1–8; 31:4–9; Micah 1:8–16)? Which theological and pedagogical message did he attempt to deliver to his audience by such a representation? Prior to suggesting replies to these questions, two essential issues should be introduced here, namely: the portrait of Hezekiah; and the concept of “war” and “peace” in the Chronistic historiography.

(a) *The Portrait of Hezekiah in Chronicles*

Indeed, the chronological location of Hezekiah, between the wicked kings Ahaz and Manasseh (2 Chronicles 28 and 33 // 2 Kings 16 and 21), obviously highlights his righteousness. But the particular importance that the Chronicler bestows on Hezekiah is also revealed from the large space that he devotes to him (see above, §II, 1). Moreover, the Chronicler considers Hezekiah one of the most pious kings of Judah. Hezekiah behaved correctly before the Lord, performed good deeds, and accomplished major cult reforms in the Jerusalem Temple (2 Chronicles 29–31). At the end, he was remembered for his “good deeds” (חסדיו, 2 Chronicles 32:32), rather than for his “all powerfulness” (כל גבורתו, 2 Kings 20:20). The Chronicler presents Hezekiah’s religious activities as the antithesis to those of his

⁶¹ Compare Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 108–109, and there additional examples.

⁶² For the details, see Kalimi, *Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History*, 25, with additional secondary literature.

father and predecessor, King Ahaz. Whatever negative deed Ahaz conducted, Hezekiah performed a positive one to counter it:

1. The Chronicler repeats the antithesis between Ahaz and Hezekiah that appears in his *Vorlage*: Ahaz did not do “that which was right in the sight of the Lord, like David his father” (2 Chronicles 28:1b // 2 Kings 16:2b). Besides, he adds: “and (Ahaz) made also molten images for the Baalim” (2 Chronicles 28:2b; cf. 31:1 // 2 Kings 18:4). In contrast, Hezekiah did “that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father had done” (2 Chronicles 29:2 // 2 Kings 18:3).
2. Ahaz “cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and *closed the doors of the house of the Lord*” (2 Chronicles 28:24; an “addition” to 2 Kings 16:17–18; see also 2 Chronicles 29:7). In contrast, Hezekiah “*opened the doors of the house of the Lord*, and repaired them” (2 Chronicles 29:3, an “addition;” see also 29:7).
3. Under Hezekiah’s authority, the Levites began to sanctify the house of the Lord and cleansed “the altar of the burnt offering, with all its vessels, and the table of the bread of display, with all its utensils. And all the vessels that *King Ahaz in his reign cast away* in his transgression,” they prepared and sanctified them (2 Chronicles 29:18–19; an “addition”).
4. Ahaz made “altars in every corner of Jerusalem, and in every city of Judah he made high places to burn incense to foreign gods” (2 Chronicles 28:24–25, an “addition”). In Hezekiah’s time, however, all Israel “went out to the cities of Judah, and broke the images in pieces, and cut down the Asherim, and broke down the high places and the altars throughout all Judah and Benjamin, in Ephraim also and Manasseh, until they had completely destroyed them all” (2 Chronicles 30:1, an “addition;” see also 30:14, and cf. 2 Kings 23:6 regarding Josiah’s cult reform).⁶³
5. Ahaz was in conflict with the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and even asked Assyria’s help (2 Chronicles 28:16–21 // 2 Kings 16:5–16; Isaiah 7:1–17). Hezekiah, concerned for the Israelite remnants in the north, invited them to take part in the Passover celebration in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 30:6–11, an “addition”).

⁶³ See also 2 Chron. 32:12 (// 2 Kgs. 18:22): “Has not this same Hezekiah taken away his high places and his altars, and commanded Judah and Jerusalem, saying, you shall worship before one altar, and burn incense upon it?”

6. Ahaz “burned incense in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, and burned his children [in Kings: “child”] in the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the people of Israel. And he sacrificed and burned incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree” (2 Chronicles 28:3–4 // 2 Kings 16:3–4). In contrast, Hezekiah celebrated the Pesach fest (2 Chronicles 30), and on the whole, he “did that which was good and right and true before the Lord his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the Torah, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered” (2 Chronicles 31:20–21, an “addition”).⁶⁴
7. Ahaz collaborated with Tiglath-pileser III, king of Assyria, paid him tribute and became his vassal (2 Chronicles 28:20–21, cf. 2 Kings 16:7–9; 732 B.C.E.).⁶⁵ In contrast, the Chronicler presents Hezekiah as a courageous king who prepared his capital and military forces for the coming war with Sennacherib (32:2–6a), prayed to God (32:20), encouraged his people and inspired hope among them (32:6b–8). Even more, he completely trusted the Lord who would definitely demolish the Assyrian enemy: “Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid nor dismayed because of the king of Assyria, nor because of all the crowd that is with him (כל ההמון אשר עמו);⁶⁶ for there are more with us than with him; *With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles*” (32:7–8a, an “addition”).⁶⁷ The Chronicler’s figure of Hezekiah is absolutely different from the one which emerges from both stories—“A” as well as “B”—in Kings, where Hezekiah was

⁶⁴ The author(s)/editor(s) of Kings describes in detail regarding the foreign altar and cult that Ahaz entered into Jerusalem Temple (2 Kgs. 16:10–16). The Chronicler shortly refers to this issue (2 Chron. 28:22–23). Interestingly, neither Kings nor Chronicles refers specifically to the cleanness of this foreign cult by Hezekiah. 2 Kgs. 18:4 refers specifically to the bronze serpent of Nehushtan. However, the Chronicler omitted this issue altogether and thus avoided to stem Moses’s honor.

⁶⁵ For the discrepancy between Kings and Chronicles at this point, see the discussion by L. R. Siddall, “Tiglath-pileser III’s Aid to Ahaz: A New Look at the Problems of the Biblical Accounts in the Light of the Assyrian Sources,” *ANES* 46 (2009): 93–106.

⁶⁶ Notice, the Chronicler names the Assyrian military forces ההמון, “the crowd” (2 Chron. 32:7), instead of חיל כבד “a great army,” a term that is used in 2 Kgs. 18:17 (// Isa. 36:2), which is omitted in Chronicles. This term used by the Chronicler also labels the forces of Jeroboam king of Israel (13:8) and Zerah the Cushite (14:10) who fought with Judah. By using the term “the crowd,” perhaps the Chronicler stresses his abhorrence towards the enemy’s army.

⁶⁷ Note that the Chronicler formed his words here in chiasmic order: “there are more *with us* than *with him*; *With him* is an arm of flesh; but *with us* is the Lord our God. . . .”

presented as a fearful and helpless king, desperately sending word to Sennacherib, saying: "I have offended; withdraw from me; that which you put on me will I bear" (2 Kings 18:14a). When he heard the speech of Rabshakeh, he panicked: "he tore his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth..." and sent his officials and the elders of the priests, also covered with sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah, saying: "This day is a day of trouble and of reviling, and blasphemy; for the children have come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring them forth," asking Isaiah to pray to the Lord (2 Kings 19:1-4 // Isaiah 37:1-4).

8. Ahaz was attacked by the Philistines who "had invaded the cities of the Shephelah, and the Negev of Judah, and had taken Beth-Shemesh, and Ayalon, and Gederoth, and Soco with its villages, and Timnah with its villages, Gimzo also and its villages; and they lived there" (2 Chronicles 28:18-19, an "addition" to 2 Kings 16). Hezekiah, however, "struck the Philistines, as far as Gaza and its territory, from watchtower to fortified city" (2 Kings 18:8); and in his days, sons of Simeon captured Philistines territories by Gaza (1 Chronicles 4:39-41, an "addition;" see above, §III).

Furthermore, 2 Kings 20:12-19 (// Isaiah 39:1-8) recounts a prophetic story regarding the visit of the Babylonian messengers in Jerusalem. This story also reflects the image of Hezekiah negatively, as one proud of his wealth, unnecessarily bragging about it in front of the Babylonians. Isaiah sharply rebukes him, and prophesies a punishment that will come on his descendants in the future. The reaction of Hezekiah ("Good is the word of the Lord which you have spoken... Is it not good, if peace and truth are in my days?") depicts him in an even more negative way, as one who is careless about his descendants, the Davidic dynasty and its treasures.⁶⁸ The Chronicler omits this detailed story. Instead, he concludes briefly and somewhat enigmatically: "But Hezekiah did not render back according to the benefit done to him; for his heart was proud; therefore wrath came upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem." Nevertheless, the Chronicler stresses that Hezekiah "humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem," thus the wrath of the Lord did not come

⁶⁸ The story of the sending of the messengers of B/Merodach-Baladan (=Marduk-apla-iddina), king of Babylon, to Hezekiah is located literarily, not chronologically, and is a late addition in Kings. For the tendency of the story and its historicity, see Tadmor and Cogan, "Hezekiah's Fourteenth Year," 199-200.

upon them in Hezekiah's time (2 Chronicles 32:25–26).⁶⁹ Furthermore, he presents the visit of the Babylonian embassy to Jerusalem as one which came to explore the wonders of the land, and as a testing of the Lord in order to know Hezekiah's heart (2 Chronicles 32:31; cf. Deuteronomy 8:2; 13:4; Judges 3:4).⁷⁰ These presentations are more softened and balanced than those in Kings and Isaiah, and show Hezekiah, despite all, in a positive light.⁷¹

(b) *The Concept of War and Peace in Chronicles*

One of the fundamental concepts in the Chronistic historiosophy (which is, indeed, theological in its nature) is a consideration of war and times of conflict as divine punishment for certain transgression(s), with peaceful times as a divine reward for appropriate religious behavior. Two examples follow:

(1) The invasion of Pharaoh Shishak of Egypt to the kingdom of Judah is considered as a punishment to King Rehobeam, who practiced evil in the sight of the Lord (2 Chronicles 12:1 [an "addition"], 14 // 1 Kings 14:21).

(2) In the time of King Asa of Judah, "there was no peace to him who went out nor to him who came in, but great troubles were upon all the inhabitants of the countries. And they were broken in pieces, nation against nation, and city against city, for God troubled them with all kinds of adversity" (2 Chronicles 15:5–6, an "addition"). However, when Asa removed the foreign gods and altars from Judah, to "seek the Lord God of their fathers, and to keep the Torah and the commandment," then "the kingdom was quiet under him . . . for the land had rest, and he had no war in those years; because the Lord had given him rest" (2 Chronicles 14:1–6). Later on, the Chronicler stresses this point once again, when Asa and the people of Judah "sought Him with their whole desire; and He was found by them; and the Lord gave them rest around" (2 Chronicles

⁶⁹ Hezekiah became proud but was not punished, in contrast, Josiah clearly sinned and was punished—by Pharaoh Necho; thus in Chronicles Hezekiah exceeds Josiah as the most pious king of Judah.

⁷⁰ Note, God is allowed to test human beings (see also, for example, Gen. 22:1; Job 1–2:10), but human beings are not allowed to test God (see Deut. 6:16, cf. Num. 14:22).

⁷¹ The enthusiasm of the Chronicler for Hezekiah had a great impact on the following generations. For example, at the beginning of the second century B.C.E., Joshua Ben Sira (/ Jesus Sirach) eagerly describes Hezekiah (48:17–22). Later on, some rabbis considered Hezekiah as one who was supposed to be the messiah, see Babylonian Talmud, *Berachot* 28b; *Sanhedrin* 94a, 99a.

15:15, an “addition”). But when Asa failed to rely on God, and relied on the Aramean power instead, then Hanani the seer announced: “In this you have done foolishly; therefore from this time onward you shall have wars” (2 Chronicles 16:9, an “addition”).⁷²

(c) *Confident and Righteous Hezekiah versus Capricious and Wicked Sennacherib*

According to the Chronicler, if Sennacherib waged a war against Hezekiah, it meant that the latter had transgressed, and the military campaign should be considered as a punishment for his evil religious and social deeds. But because the Chronicler reshaped Hezekiah as a completely righteous king and as one who put his trust explicitly in the Lord, consequently the Chronicler concluded as follows:

1. The Chronicler judged the very Assyrian campaign to be *a priori* a disastrous collapse: Sennacherib “thought to win” the fortified cities of Judah for himself, but completely failed and returned to his own land “with shame of face” (2 Chronicles 32:21; see below, §IX, 1).
2. Due to his proper religious behavior and acts, Hezekiah should never have been understood to have submitted to the king of Assyria, nor, of course, to have transferred any tribute to him; thus he omits 2 Kings 18:14.
3. Hezekiah who “in the *first year* of his reign, in the *first month*, opened the doors of the house of the Lord, and repaired them” (2 Chronicles 29:3, an “addition”),⁷³ would not have given to the king of Assyria “all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord.” He definitely would not “cut off the gold from the doors of the Temple of the Lord, and from the pillars which . . . had overlaid” and give them to Sennacherib. Thus he omits 2 Kings 18:15–16 as well. Moreover, stripping the gold from the doors of the Temple and giving it to a bitter enemy definitely could not come under the definition of Hezekiah as one who “did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to *all* that David his father had done” (2 Chronicles 29:2 // 2 Kings 18:3), especially since David had assembled a tremendous amount of gold and silver for the future

⁷² See also 2 Chron. 28:1–2; 16–20; 29:6–8.

⁷³ On these dates in Chronicles and some typological examples from the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, see M. Cogan, “The Chronicler’s Use of Chronology as Illuminated by Neo-Assyrian Royal Inscriptions,” in *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism*, ed. J. H. Tigay (Philadelphia, 1985), 197–209; Kalimi, *Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History*, 412.

- Temple-building, rather than take anything from the sanctuary of his time (1 Chronicles 28:14–18; 29:2–8, “additions”).
4. In 2 Chronicles 32:10 and thereafter, the Chronicler does not cite the text of 2 Kings 18:20–21, 24b (// Isaiah 36:5–6, 9b) regarding the dependence and trust of Hezekiah upon Egypt. He also omits any hint of what is mentioned in the earlier biblical texts regarding “Tirhaka, king of Ethiopia,” as if he came to fight with Sennacherib (2 Kings 19:9a // Isaiah 37:9a). By omitting these texts, the Chronicler highlights Hezekiah’s trust in the Lord alone rather than in any foreign force(s), exactly as demanded by prophet Isaiah,⁷⁴ who strongly opposed any political and military relationship with Egypt (Isaiah 18:1–6; 30:1–7; 31:1–3).⁷⁵ Thus the Chronicler portrayed Hezekiah as one who did not trust in man “and makes flesh his arm,” but rather as one “who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord” only (Jeremiah 17:5–7).⁷⁶ Therefore, the Lord miraculously delivered Hezekiah from the brutal hands of Sennacherib (2 Chronicles 32:21–22).⁷⁷ The latter totally failed and could not do any damage to Judah and Jerusalem.
 5. The Chronicler mentions the Assyrians’ misinterpretation of Hezekiah’s cult reform: in their pagan view, Hezekiah acted sinfully when he concentrated the Lord’s cult in one place, Jerusalem,⁷⁸ while destroying all other high places and altars (2 Chronicles 32:11–12 // 2 Kings 18:22 // Isaiah 36:7). Simply, they either did not know or could not comprehend that Israel’s God disliked having numerous altars and high places, but rather preferred a single central place. By destroying the latter, Hezekiah acted precisely according to the law in the Torah (Deuteronomy 12), and therefore his expectation for the Lord’s help was justified, and not vice-versa as the Assyrians thought!
 6. Because of Hezekiah’s righteousness, the Assyrian’s claim: “Am I now come up without the Lord against this place to destroy it? The Lord said to me, Go up against this land, and destroy it” (2 Kings 18:25 // Isaiah 36:10), sounds ridiculous, and therefore the Chronicler omits it as well.

⁷⁴ However, the Chronicler considers positively Hezekiah’s preparations for the war with Sennacherib (2 Chron. 32:2–6a), see above, §II no. 5.

⁷⁵ The historical background of these prophecies in Isaiah is Hezekiah’s preparations to rebel against Sennacherib.

⁷⁶ Cf. Ps. 84:13, “O Lord of hosts, happy is the man who trusts in you.”

⁷⁷ See also Ps. 46:5–8, which perhaps refers to Sennacherib’s campaign to Judah.

⁷⁸ In order to stress clearly this point, the Chronicler replaces *הַמִּזְבֵּחַ הַזֶּה* “this altar” (2 Kgs. 18:22 // Isa. 36:7), with *מִזְבֵּחַ אֶחָד* “one altar.”

7. The Assyrians compare their imperial mighty army with the relatively tiny military forces of Hezekiah and mock it: "I beg you, make a wager with my lord the king of Assyria, and I will deliver to you two thousand horses, if you are able on your part to set riders upon them" (2 Kings 18:23 // Isaiah 36:8). However, in the same breath, the pagan king does not and could not understand that despite his preparations for the war, Hezekiah put his trust completely in God rather than in his military forces, and as such, "there are more with us than with him; With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles" (2 Chronicles 32:2–8a esp. 8a, an "addition"). Thus, the Chronicler omits 2 Kings 18:23 (// Isaiah 36:8).
8. The Chronicler does not consider Sennacherib's campaign as an act of "punishment" to Hezekiah for something bad that he had done—quite the opposite. He balances the Assyrian campaign and the correct religious behavior of Hezekiah. On the one hand, he presents Sennacherib as one who did not fulfill his goals, failing to capture or destroy anything in Judah, with nobody injured, killed or exiled from the kingdom. King Hezekiah and his capital city were gloriously delivered from the Assyrian heavy military offensive, and Sennacherib's mighty army was demolished (2 Chronicles 32:21a, 22). He returned to Nineveh shamefacedly and there was murdered. On the other hand, Sennacherib's campaign turned out to be a source of divine reward to the king of Judah (2 Chronicles 32:22–23, an "addition").⁷⁹

VI. THE CONFLICT BETWEEN HEZEKIAH AND SENNACHERIB AS A HOLY WAR

The speech attributed to the Assyrian high official, Rabshakeh, states the inability of the God of Israel to save Hezekiah and his people from the hand of the Assyrian king, and compares him with gods of other peoples that could not save their people from the hands of the current and earlier Assyrian kings (2 Kings 18:30, 32b–35 // Isaiah 36:14–15, 18–20).⁸⁰ These statements and comparisons, which were considered by Hezekiah to "taunt the living God" (2 Kings 19:4 // Isaiah 37:4), were utilized by the Chronicler, with some alterations (2 Chronicles 32:13–15), to become the

⁷⁹ On this issue, see in detail Kalimi, *Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History*, 24–26, with references to different opinions; see also below in this study.

⁸⁰ Cf. this issue with Ps. 3:3; 42:11; 79:10; 115:2.

heart of Rabshakeh's speech in his book. In fact, he repeats that context three more times:

- (1) "And now do not let Hezekiah deceive you, nor persuade you on this manner, nor should you believe him; for no god of any nation or kingdom was able to save his people from my hand, and from the hand of my fathers; How much less shall your God save you from my hand? And his officials spoke yet more against the Lord God, and against his servant Hezekiah" (32:15–16).
- (2) "And he also wrote letters casting disrespect on the Lord God of Israel, and speaking against him, saying: Just as the gods of the peoples of other lands have not saved their people from my hand, so shall the God of Hezekiah not save his people from my hand" (32:17).
- (3) "And they spoke against the God of Jerusalem, as if it were against the gods of the peoples of the earth, which are the work of the hands of man" (32:19).

Most likely, the Chronicler attempts to show the ignorance of the Assyrian officials and their unfamiliarity with the nature of the powerful Israelite God, and therefore their insulting comparison of him to the powerless foreign gods. He stresses the Assyrians' under-estimation of God's *ability* (יכולת) to save Hezekiah and his people. Accordingly, instead of the presentation in 2 Kings 18:33b–34 (// Isaiah 36:18b–19)—

"Have they *saved* Samaria from my hand? Who among all the gods of the lands have *saved* their country from my hand, that the Lord should *save* Jerusalem from my hand?" (מלך) "ההצל הצילו אלהי הגוים איש את ארצו מיד מלך) אשר הצילו את ארצם מידי כי הצילו את שמרון מידי? מי בכל אלהי הארצות אשר הצילו את ארצם מידי כי יציל יהוה את ירושלם מידי

—he writes in 2 Chronicles 32:13b–14:

"Were the gods of the nations of those lands *able* in any way to save their lands from my hand? Who was there among all the gods of those nations, which my fathers completely destroyed, that *could* save his people from my hand, that *your God should be able* to save you from my hand?" (יכלו) "היכול יכלו אלהי גוי הארצות להציל את ארצם מידי? מי בכל אלהי הגוים האלה אשר החרימו אבותי אשר יכול להציל את עמו מידי כי יוכל אלהיכם להציל אתכם מידי

In Chronicles, the ability of God to redeem Jerusalem, Hezekiah and his people is more emphasized than it is in Kings and Isaiah, as if to say: look what the Assyrians said—and what the God of Israel was able to do! The Chronicler considers the Assyrian attack on Hezekiah as a direct attack on God; as he puts it: "And his (Sennacherib's) officials spoke yet more *against the Lord God, and against his servant Hezekiah*" (32:16, an "addition"). Thus, Hezekiah's war against Sennacherib is presented as a holy war—

God's war against a pagan king. Presumably, according to this line of thought, the Chronicler changes the *Vorlage* in 2 Kings 19:35 (// Isaiah 37:36), which tells that the angel of the Lord "struck in the camp of the Assyrians" (וּיָדָ/וֹיכָה בַּמַּחֲנֵה אַשּׁוּר), and writes that the Lord sent an angel, who "struck in the camp of *the king of Assyria*" (וּיָדָ בַּמַּחֲנֵה מֶלֶךְ אַשּׁוּר; 2 Chronicles 32:21). Thus he draws the attention from "the camp" to the "king" of Assyria—Sennacherib.

According to the Chronicler, a person who is loyal to God and his commandments will be saved from pagan enemies. The latter become God's own enemies, and he fights and defeats them to save his faithful servants.⁸¹ This view is not unique to the Chronicler, and it appears already in writings preceding his time. For example, in the book of Numbers the idiom "*avenge the sons of Israel of the Midianites*" (31:2; P), appears as equivalent to the phrase: "*the Lord's vengeance in Midian*" (31:3). In the same book, Moses presents the enemies of Israel in Canaan as the enemies of God himself: "And Moses said to them . . . if *you will go armed before the Lord to war*, and will go all of you armed over Jordan before the Lord, until *He has driven out His enemies from before Him*" (32:20–21). Moreover, the words: "and the land shall be subdued *before the Lord*" (32:22) are comparable to "and the land shall be subdued *before you* (= Israelites; 32:29)."⁸²

VII. "THE GREAT KING": SENNACHERIB *VERSUS* GOD

The epithet of Sennacherib, "the great king, the king of Assyria" (הַמֶּלֶךְ הַגָּדוֹל מֶלֶךְ אַשּׁוּר) appears twice in the earlier account, both times in the "first" speech of Rabshakeh ("B"; 2 Kings 18:19, 28 // Isaiah 36:4, 13). This epithet is identical to the epithet that frequently appears in the royal inscriptions of Sennacherib: *šarru rabu . . . šar māt Aššur*.⁸³ Interestingly, in both cases Rabshakeh refers only to "Hezekiah," without mentioning his title "king of Judah" or even simply "king." This imbalance of referring to "the great king the king of Assyria" on the one hand, and just to "Heze-

⁸¹ Cf. R. Mosis, *Untersuchungen zur Theologie des chronistischen Geschichtswerkes*, FTS 92 (Freiburg, 1973), 191.

⁸² See also Ps. 83:2–6, 13. This notion regarding Hezekiah and Sennacherib is also expressed by the Talmudic rabbis; see Kalimi, *Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History*, 29 n. 38, with references there.

⁸³ See Ch. Cohen, "Neo-Assyrian Elements in the First Speech of the Biblical Rab-Šāqê," *IOS* 9 (1979): 32–48; cf. Kalimi, *Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History*, 387 n. 21.

kiah” on the other, is definitely a political connotation: disrespectful to the king of Judah while giving great respect to the king of Assyria.

The Chronicler is prevented from using this epithet in both cases. In the first case (2 Chronicles 32:10, // 2 Kings 18:19 // Isaiah 36:4), he replaces “the great king” simply with the name “Sennacherib,”⁸⁴ while in the second case (2 Kings 18:28 // Isaiah 36:13) he omits the expression altogether. Perhaps the Chronicler had some theological motivation in these changes: he considered the epithet “*the great king*” one to be used only for the God of Israel, as expressed by the Psalmist: “For the Lord is a *Great God* and a *Great King* above all gods” (כי אל גדול יהוה ומלך גדול על כל אלהים; Psalms 95:3) and “For the Lord Most High is wonder a *Great King over the whole earth*; (עליון גורא מלך גדול על כל הארץ; Psalms 47:3).⁸⁵ Indeed, elsewhere the Chronicler himself states: “And the house which I build is great; for *great is our God above all gods*” (כי הבית אשר אני בונה גדול כי גדול אלהינו מכל אלהים; 2 Chronicles 2:4, an “addition”).⁸⁶ Thus, contra Raymond B. Dillard, these changes are much more “than paraphrase.”⁸⁷

VIII. THE ASSYRIAN ARMY AT THE GATES OF JERUSALEM

(a) *Did Sennacherib Put Jerusalem Under Siege?*

The Assyrian royal inscription reads: “As for Hezekiah . . . like a caged bird I shut up in Jerusalem his royal city. I barricaded him with outposts, and exit from the gate of his city I made taboo for him.”⁸⁸ Thus according to the Assyrian sources, Jerusalem came under some sort of blockade, though not a complete siege with appropriate equipment and massive military activities.⁸⁹ Indeed, the description of the blockade of Jerusalem

⁸⁴ The Greek translation of Chronicles has here only the title: ο βασιλευς Ασσυρίων, that is, “the king of Assyrians.”

⁸⁵ See also Deut. 7:21; 10:17; Jer. 32:18; Ps. 77:14; Neh. 1:5; 9:32; Dan. 9:4.

⁸⁶ Compare 2 Chron. 2:4a with Ps. 135:5 and 48:2. Notice that the same phrase in 2:4a is again repeated in 2:8b and creates *inclusio*.

⁸⁷ See R. B. Dillard, *2 Chronicles* (Waco, TX, 1987), 254. Although Dillard raises the possibility “to see some theological motivation in this change” (i.e., in 2 Chron. 32:10; I.K.), he does not, however, suggest what that “theological motivation” might be.

⁸⁸ The citation is according to the Oriental Institute Prism; for the translation, cf. Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib*, 33, col. III, lines 27–30 (// Taylor Cylinder, ll. 49–52); Pritchard, *ANET*, 288a.

⁸⁹ See the discussion by H. Tadmor, “Sennacherib’s Campaign to Judah: Historical and Historiographical Considerations,” *With my many chariots I have gone up the heights of mountains: Historical and Literary Studies on Ancient Mesopotamia and Israel*, ed. M. Cogan (Jerusalem, 2011), 653–75, esp. 668: “Sennacherib appears not to have besieged

in the annals of Sennacherib is different than that of other Judean cities captured by the Assyrians, and the impressive Assyrian reliefs in the central hall of Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh describe the siege (and conquest) of Lachish rather than that of the royal city of Hezekiah.

In Kings (// Isaiah), a prophecy of Isaiah is cited saying that the king of Assyria “shall not come to this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast up a mound against it” (2 Kings 19:32 // Isaiah 37:33). Although a mass of military forces were located in the Assyrian camp by Jerusalem (see below in this section, no. b2), there is no description of a comprehensive siege of Jerusalem in the earlier biblical sources.

In Chronicles, however, the author changes the phrase ascribed to the Assyrian messenger, Rabshakeh: “What is the basis of your trust/confidence?” (מה הבטחון הזה אשר בטחת; 2 Kings 18:19 // Isaiah 37:4), and writes: “on what are you relying that you sit under siege in Jerusalem?” (על מה אתם בטחים וישיבים במצור בירושלם; 2 Chronicles 32:10b). The phrase בא במצור means to be besieged (cf., e.g., 2 Kings 24:10; 25:2 // Jeremiah 52:5; Deuteronomy 20:19; 28:55).⁹⁰ Further, the Chronicler emphasizes the severe consequences of undergoing siege: “Is not Hezekiah misleading you, so as to allow you to die of hunger and thirst?” (32:11). It seems that he prepared his audience for such a view already at the very beginning of his account, where he says that the king of Assyria came into Judah “and encamped against the fortified cities” (ויחן על הערים הבצורות; 2 Chronicles 32:1b // 2 Kings 18:13b // Isaiah 36:1b). Being that Jerusalem was the most important and capital city of Judah, and was fortified, so the Chronicler concluded that the Assyrians besieged it as well. Moreover, the Chronicler seemingly considered the phrase “the men who sit on the wall” (האנשים היושבים על החומה) to mean men who protected the city from Assyrian siege, and the purpose of the Assyrian, who talked to the defenders with a loud voice in Judah's language (יהודית / Hebrew) rather than Aramaic, was “to frighten them, and to trouble them, so that they might take the city” (2 Chronicles 32:18). In other words, he expounded his *Vortlage* “then Rabshakeh stood and cried with a loud voice in the language

Jerusalem with his entire huge army. Still, the blockade of the city and the terror that fell upon Hezekiah show that it was no inconsequential force that was dispatched to make a show of force before the walls of the city.”

⁹⁰ Some scholars translate here: “sit in the fortress of Jerusalem,” see for example, Myers, *II Chronicles*, 186; Williamson, *I and 2 Chronicles*, 383. However, if thus, one expects to be written here: יושבים במבצר (cf., e.g., Jer. 1:18). R. W. Klein (*2 Chronicles: A Commentary*. [Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN, 2012], 456–57) translates: “in distress”; but if so, it should be written יושבים בצער.

of Judah” (יהודית) גדול בקול ויקרא בקול גדול יהודית) (2 Kings 18:27–28a // Isaiah 36:12–13a)⁹¹ as part of the Assyrian terror in order to capture the city:

And they shouted with a loud voice in the language of Judah to the people of Jerusalem who were on the wall, to frighten them, and to trouble them, so that they might take the city” (ויקראו בקול גדול יהודית על עם ירושלם אשר) (על החומה ליראם ולבהלם למען ילכדו את העיר; 2 Chronicles 32:18).

Also, most likely the Chronicler interpreted that the phrase “eat feces and drink urine,” which was used by Rabshakeh (2 Kings 18:27 // Isaiah 36:12), as indicating the great difficulties that fighters and inhabitant of Jerusalem would soon encounter in a siege, and concluded that the event really happened.

Indeed, the Chronicler does not speak about massive Assyrian forces around Jerusalem: he omits the words “with a great army” (חיל כבד; 2 Kings 18:17 // Isaiah 36:2) in his description of the Assyrian delegation that Sennacherib sent to Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 32:9). He also omits the number “185,000” as the total killed in the Assyrian camp (cf. 2 Chronicles 32:21 with 2 Kings 19:35 // Isaiah 37:36). However, he does mention the mass of elite military forces, “all the mighty warriors, and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of Assyria” (32:21), who encamped by the gates of Jerusalem, and assumed that they were there to besiege Jerusalem. In any case, it seems that by adding to the story as if Jerusalem had been under an actual siege, the Chronicler intended to glorify the heroic standing of the city and the greatness of its divine delivery, and to increase the failure of the Assyrians to capture Jerusalem.⁹²

(b) *The Epilogue of the Campaign: Kings (// Isaiah) versus Chronicles*

In the books of Kings and Isaiah, Sennacherib’s campaign ends as follows:

And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and eighty five thousand; and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. So Sennacherib, king of Assyria, departed and went and returned, and resided at Nineveh. And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god that Adramelech and Sharezer smote him with the sword,

⁹¹ It is reasonable that Rabshakeh also knew Hebrew to enable him to speak directly to the Judeans without mediator or translation.

⁹² See Kalimi, *Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History*, 387–89.

and they fled to the land of Ararat. His son Esarhaddon reigned in his place. (2 Kings 19:35–37 // Isaiah 37:36–38)

The parallel text in 2 Chronicles 32:21 is much shorter and emended as follows:

And the Lord sent an angel who annihilated all the mighty warriors and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land, and when he had come into the house of his god, they that came forth of his own bowels slew him there with the sword.

Following are some observations how the later historian—the Chronicler—reshaped a few specific points in his “biblical” source(s).

(1) *Who and How Many Were Demolished in the Assyrian Camp?*

Like in many other cases in different times and places, the Assyrians erected a military camp near Jerusalem, most likely on the north side of the city.⁹³ The mass of forces in camp by Jerusalem emerges from two biblical texts. First, 2 Kings 18:17 (// Isaiah 36:2) recounts: “And the king of Assyria sent Tartan . . . *with a great army* against Jerusalem” (ישלח מלך) (אשור את תרתן . . . בחיל כבד ירושלם). Second, 2 Kings 19:35 (// Isaiah 37:36) reports on the 185,000 men who were demolished in the Assyrian camp. Nonetheless, the texts in Kings and Isaiah do not detail what exactly were the military ranks of the men destroyed in the Assyrian camp: were they elite of the Assyrian army, high-ranking officers or the mixture of ordinary soldiers and low- as well as high-ranking commanders which usually make up regular military forces? In all probability, the story refers to all kinds of military men (i.e., different warriors, officers and service-givers), all of whom perished. The enormous number of Assyrian military forces that died is, in any case, exaggerated—a phenomenon that is well known from biblical as well as ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman sources.⁹⁴

⁹³ For the location of the Assyrian camp, see the detailed discussion of Ussishkin, “The Water System of Jerusalem during Hezekiah’s Reign,” 5–9.

⁹⁴ See, for example, Exod. 12:37–38; 2 Sam. 24:9; 2 Chron. 13:2, 17; 14:7–8; and studies such as by P. J. Barton, “The Validity of the Numbers in Chronicles,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136 (1979): 109–28, 206–20; A. R. Millard, “Large Numbers in the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions,” in M. Cogan and I. Eph’al, ed., *Ah, Assyria . . . : Studies in Assyrian History and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography Presented to Hayim Tadmor*, Scripta Hierosolymitana 33 (Jerusalem, 1991), 213–22; Kalimi, “Placing the Chronicler in His Own Historical Context,” 181–82. Remarkably, in medieval times, Rashi in his commentary on 2 Kgs. 19:35 harmonizes between the versions of Kings and Chronicles and writes: “185,000—all captains of troops.” Thus the number was much exaggerated and the wonder represented was even greater.

The purpose is clear: to glorify the divine miracle on the one hand, and make greater the embarrassing defeat of the Assyrian army on the other. In fact, the same tendency appears also in the annals of Sennacherib (e.g., the Chicago and Taylor Prisms, col. III, l. 17), which claims that the king deported 200,150 people from Judah—the largest number of deportees ever mentioned in the Assyrian royal inscriptions for a single kingdom or nation.⁹⁵

The Chronicler does not enumerate the dead men in the Assyrian camp. Rather, he only states that they were the elite of the Assyrian forces: **ויכחד כל גבור חיל ונגיד ושר במחנה מלך אשור** “cut off *all the mighty warriors and the leaders and captains* in the camp of the king of Assyria” (2 Chronicles 32:21b). Is the Chronicler intending to glorify, even more than his sources, the greatness of the miracle and the Assyrian collapse, saying that the dead men were not simply ordinary soldiers, but the best of it? In any case, the death of **כל גבור חיל ... ושר** in the Assyrian camp (32:21b) stands in contrast to the **שריו וגבריו** (in chiasmic order) of Hezekiah who helped him prepare Jerusalem for the coming war and stayed alive (32:3).⁹⁶

The Chronicler states that an angel of Lord “annihilated” (**ויכחד**) the Assyrian army’s elite: “all the mighty warriors and the leaders and captains.” This meaning of the verb **ויכחד** appears in several places in the Hebrew Bible (i.e., Exodus 23:23; 1 Kings 13:34 **פני מעל פני ולהכחיד ולהשמיד מגוי / ולא יזכר** [האדמה]; Zechariah 11:8–9; Psalms 83:5 **אמרו לבו ונכחידם מגוי / ולא יזכר** [שם ישראל עוד ויך]). Seemingly, the Chronicler uses this verb, instead of **ויך** in the parallel text of Kings and **ויכה** in Isaiah, because he meant to present a much stronger, decisive and complete divine act. That is to say, the angel did not simply smite or strike the Assyrian forces, as it is expressed in Kings/Isaiah, but rather he totally annihilated them.⁹⁷ The annihilation of the Assyrian top military forces was considered by the Chronicler more effective, causing more damage in the long term than killing everybody in the camp.

⁹⁵ Indeed, Sennacherib mentions that in his first campaign he took 208,000 deportees, but it was from several nations: Babylonians, Elamites, Arabs, Arameans and Kedarites; see Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, vol. 2, 133. A. Ungnad (“Die Zahl der von Sanherib deportierten Judäer,” *ZAW* 59 [1942/43]: 199–202, esp. 202), suggested to read here 2,150 instead of 200,150.

⁹⁶ For **גבורים** as a military division, cf. for example, 2 Sam. 10:7; 16:6, 9; 20:7; 23:8; 1 Kgs. 1:8, 10; Jer. 26:21; 1 Chron. 28:1; 29:24.

⁹⁷ There is no need to consider **ויכחד** as the Chronicler’s misreading of **ויכה**, as suggested by Klein, 2 *Chronicles: A Commentary*, 457.

(2) *Who Struck the Assyrian Camp?*

According to the Chronicler, the downfall of the Assyrian military forces at the gates of Jerusalem was not the initiative of an “angel of the Lord,” which readers mistakenly could expound from the earlier texts. Rather it was the Lord’s own initiative to send an angel to cut off all the mighty warriors in the Assyrian camp. The direct and active involvement of God in the delivery of his loyal servant, city and people is stressed twice: once the author alters the text: “*the angel of the Lord went out, and struck in the camp of the Assyrians . . .*” (2 Kings 19:35 // Isaiah 37:36) and then writes: “*And the Lord sent an angel, who struck all the mighty warriors . . . in the camp of the king of Assyria*” (2 Chronicles 32:21b). As if it was not enough, he summarizes this issue once again as follows: “*Thus the Lord [and not the angel!] saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all others, and guided them on every side*” (32:22, see below, §IX). Seemingly, the Chronicler emphasized here what was uttered by the prophet so-called Second Isaiah (ca. 570–530 B.C.E.), “*In all their (= Israelites’) affliction . . . not a messenger⁹⁸ or an angel but his (i.e., God’s) face (/presence/countenance) saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them . . .*” (Isaiah 63:9).

Interestingly, the phenomenon under review appears also in 1 Chronicles 21:15; the Chronicler there changed 2 Samuel 24:16 that states, “*And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it,*” and instead attributes the act of the angel directly to God: “*And God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it.*”

Usually the Chronicler identifies anonymous and unknown figures that appear in his sources with well-known ones. In fact, this phenomenon also appears in other Second Temple literature (and later on in rabbinic sources).⁹⁹ However, in order to highlight God’s direct involvement, here the Chronicler does not identify the anonymous angel of his *Vorlage* with any known heavenly figure.¹⁰⁰ The Chronicler is, therefore, even

⁹⁸ Read: לַאֲ, as in Ketib (and not לוֹ as in Qere). Also, read: צִיר (“messenger”) as in LXX (cf. Isa. 18:2; 57:9), in place of צָר (enemy) in MT; see for example, K. Marti, *Das Buch Jesaja—Erklärt* (Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament 10; Tübingen, 1900), 393.

⁹⁹ See Kalimi, *Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History*, 74–77, and *Retelling of Chronicles*, 165–66.

¹⁰⁰ Targum Chronicles, however, identifies “an angel” in 1 Chron. 21:15 with “*the angel of the pestilence*” (in some manuscripts: “death”), and “an angel” in 2 Chron. 32:21 who smote the Assyrians, with *the angel Gabriel*. Some manuscripts of the Targum identify him with angel Michael or Michael and Gabriel; see J. S. McIvor, *The Targum of Chronicles: Trans-*

more theocentric than Samuel-Kings. He stresses the active place of God himself in the history of Israel, as well as the foreign nations, a tendency that reveals from many earlier biblical texts (e.g., Exodus 3:7–8; 12:51; 14:24; 20:2; Deuteronomy 9:3; Joshua 3:10; Isaiah 10:15).

Thus, in the time of King David, “*God sent an angel*” to destroy Jerusalem, but at the last moment the king stopped him from doing so. Then, in the time of King Hezekiah, “*the Lord sent an angel*” to rescue Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib by destroying the Assyrian army. Finally, however, in the time of the last King Zedekiah, *the Lord* delivered the city to the hands of Nebuchadnezzar II, king of Babylonia, because of the wickedness of its people (2 Chronicles 36:11–21).

(3) *The Shamefaced Return of Sennacherib, and His Assassination*

The sudden and capricious campaign of Sennacherib ended with the collapse of the Assyrian army. Yet he himself was not destroyed with the others at the hand of the Lord’s angel, in order to suffer disgrace and humiliation: he “returned with shame of face (וישב בבשת פנים)¹⁰¹ to his own land” (2 Chronicles 32:21 instead: “and Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and lived in Nineveh;” 2 Kings 19:36 // Isaiah 37:37). By adding the judgmental phrase, “with shame of face,” the Chronicler juxtaposes the post-campaign status of Sennacherib and that of Hezekiah, who was “exalted in the eyes of the nations” and received gifts (2 Chronicles 32:23). This antithesis seems to be in the spirit of the Psalmist:

Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your loving kindness. Let me not be ashamed, O Lord; for I have called on you; let the wicked be ashamed, and let them be silent in Sheol. Let the lying lips be put to silence; which speak insolent words, arrogantly and contemptuously against the righteous. Oh how great is your goodness, which you have laid up for those who fear you; which you have done for those who trust in you . . . Blessed be the Lord; for he has marvelously shown me his loving kindness in a besieged city (Psalms 31:17–22).¹⁰²

lated with Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes, The Aramaic Bible 19 (Collegeville, MN, 1994), 115–16, 227. Moreover, the Targumist assumes that the annihilation of the Assyrian army was “during the first night of the Passover.” Thus, Hezekiah who celebrated Passover, was also redeemed at Passover. Moreover, “the view that many important events in the history of the patriarchs and that of Israel took place during the night of Passover is very old . . .”; see L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1942), vol. 5, 221 n. 76.

¹⁰¹ Notice the pun וישב בבשת פנים and compare רגע רגע יבשו רגעי יבשו רגעי in Ps. 6:11; see in detail, I. Kalimi, “Inverse Letters Order of Words in Biblical Literature: Linguistic, Textual and Literary Phenomena,” forthcoming.

¹⁰² Cf. Ps. 83:17–18 regarding the fate of all God’s enemies: “Fill their faces with shame . . . Let them be put to shame and dismayed for ever; and let them be put to shame, and perish . . .”

As mentioned above, 2 Kings 19:35–36 (// Isaiah 37:36–37) recounts the annihilation of the Assyrian army and Sennacherib's return to his royal-city, Nineveh. Immediately after, the author reports the assassination of Sennacherib by his sons: "As he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch (probably "Nimrud" = Ninurta),¹⁰³ his god that Adramelech (= Urda-Mullissu / Arda-mulišši) and Sharezer¹⁰⁴ smote him with the sword, and they fled to the land of Ararat (= Urartu). His son Esarhaddon reigned in his place" (2 Kings 19:37 // Isaiah 37:38).¹⁰⁵ Although the author does not link these events explicitly, by bringing them in close proximity he nevertheless creates an impression that Sennacherib was murdered upon his return from his unsuccessful campaign to Judah. This impression is greatly strengthened by Isaiah's prophecy: "Behold, I shall put a spirit in him, and he shall hear a rumor and shall return to his own land; and I will strike him down by the sword in his own land" (2 Kings 19:7 // Isaiah 37:7). The message that the author of Kings attempted to insert covertly ("between the lines") into the minds of his potential readers was conveyed by the Chronicler overtly. He clearly relates Sennacherib's embarrassed return from Judah to his assassination in Nineveh, and presents the two events as a single unit: "So he returned with shame of face to his own land, and when he had come into the house of his god, they that came forth of his own flesh (lit., "bowels," ומיציאוי/ מעיו)¹⁰⁶ slew him there with the sword" (2 Chronicles 32:21b). The Chronicler seems to have desired by

¹⁰³ The Assyrians did have a deity named "Nisroch." Therefore, probably, "the house of Nisroch," refers to the temple of Nimrud = Ninurta, god of the hunter (Gen. 10:8–9). The biblical text does not mention the name of the city where Sennacherib was murdered. However, most likely it was in the temple of Ninurta in Kalah; see W. von Soden, "Gibt es Hinweise auf die Ermordung Sanheribs im Ninurta-Tempel (wohl) in Kalah in Texten aus Assyrien?" *N.A.B.U.* 22 (1990): 16–17; C. Uehlinger, "Nisroch," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. K. van der Toorn, B. Becking and P. W. van der Horst, 2nd ed. (Leiden, 1999), 630–32.

¹⁰⁴ The *Qere* here and Isa. 37:38 have also the word: בניו "his sons." Because the name "Sharezer" is unknown from any other biblical or extrabiblical text, and because its meaning is "god save the king," it is considered as a-historical figure and assumed that the name was added to the biblical text as an "ironic dimension" to the story of the murder of Sennacherib; see O. Tammuz, "Punishing a dead villain: The Biblical Accounts on the Murder of Sennacherib," *Bibliche Notizen* 157 (2013): 101–105.

¹⁰⁵ Since Esarhaddon does not clearly mention in his inscriptions the murder of his father, telling in Prism A only about his appointment as a king by Sennacherib and his victory over his brother, some scholars have suspected that Esarhaddon himself was behind the murder of Sennacherib; see von Soden, "Gibt es Hinweise auf die Ermordung Sanheribs im Ninurta-Tempel," 16.

¹⁰⁶ Compare the idiom ומיציאוי/ מעיו with that in Gen. 15:4 and 2 Sam. 7:13. In the latter place, the Chronicler changed the idiom vice-versa: he replaced יהיה מבניך יצא ממעיך with יהיה מבניך (1 Chron. 17:11). Probably the Chronicler considered the idiom not a respectful one. Thus for King David he used יהיה מבניך, whereas for Sennacherib he used ומיציאוי/ מעיו.

this explicit linkage not to leave any doubt about the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that Sennacherib would retreat from the gates of Jerusalem and be assassinated in his own land (2 Kings 19:7 // Isaiah 37:7).¹⁰⁷ He creates an obvious literary and thematic proximity in order to show the immediate punishment of the wicked Sennacherib.¹⁰⁸

Moreover, the Chronicler creates another contrast between the post-campaign destiny of Sennacherib and Hezekiah. Sennacherib was not safe even among his own sons within his own god's temple, and his life was shortened by sudden assassination. In contrast, Hezekiah, despite his illness, lived fifteen more years, and

had great riches and honor; and he made for himself treasuries for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all kinds of precious utensils; And storehouses for the produce of grain, and wine, and oil; and stalls for all kinds of beasts, and folds for sheep. And he provided cities for himself, and possessions of flocks and herds in abundance; for God had given him much wealth" (2 Chronicles 32:27–29, an "addition").

Yet the Assyrian and Babylonian documents show that there is no connection whatsoever between Sennacherib's campaign to Judah (701 B.C.E.) and his assassination by his sons twenty years later (681 B.C.E.).¹⁰⁹ Moreover, the one who died just a few years after the campaign was in fact Hezekiah (most likely in 699/698 B.C.E.), and not Sennacherib!¹¹⁰ Presumably, the story about the illness of Hezekiah, his healing and the additional years that he gained, actually took place in 714/713 B.C.E., several years before Sennacherib's assault of 701 B.C.E., as reflected in 2 Kings 20:6 (// Isaiah 38:5b–6): "I will save you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria;

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Kalimi, *Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History*, 32–33. Similarly, Sennacherib's assassination by his sons is explained in an inscription dated to the beginning of the reign of King Nabonidus of Babylon as a punishment meted out by Marduk for having destroyed the city of Babylon (689 B.C.E.); see S. Langdon, *Die neubabylonischen Königsinschriften* (Leipzig, 1912), 270–72, col. I, ll. 1–41.

¹⁰⁸ The matter was represented in the same way by later ages; for instance, by Josephus, *Jewish Antiquity* 10.21–22; see in detail, Kalimi, *Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History*, 33 n. 47.

¹⁰⁹ For a detailed discussion of the circumstance of the Sennacherib assassination, see S. Parpola, "The Murderer of Sennacherib," in *Death in Mesopotamia*, ed. B. Alster, Mesopotamia 8 (Copenhagen, 1980), 171–82; S. Zawadzki, "Oriental and Greek Tradition about the Death of Sennacherib," *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* IV (1990): 69–72.

¹¹⁰ According to 2 Kgs. 18:2, Hezekiah reigned altogether 29 years. The synchronism in 2 Kgs. 18:9–10 informs us that at the time of the capture of Samaria (721/20 B.C.E.) Hezekiah reigned already seven years. Thus, he died in ca. 699/698 B.C.E. Cf. Rofé, *Prophetic Stories*, 81 n. 43 and *Angels in the Bible: Israelite Belief in Angels as Evidenced by Biblical Tradition*, 2nd corrected ed. (Jerusalem, 2012), 166 (in Hebrew), with references to other opinions.

and *I will defend this city . . .*" (cf. 2 Kings 19:34 // Isaiah 37:35).¹¹¹ Indeed, the reports about the assassination of Sennacherib as well as the extended life of Hezekiah are included within prophetic stories, which usually are not marked by their historical accuracy, but rather by the fulfillment of divine words (and the activities of the prophets).¹¹²

The Chronicler omits the names of Sennacherib's murdering sons ("Adrammelech and Sharezer"); the name of the god ("Nisroch") in whose temple the murder took place; the name of the land ("Ararat") to which the sons fled; and the name of his successor (Esarhaddon). Similarly, in 2 Chronicles 32:9, the Chronicler also omits the titles of the Assyrian delegation to Hezekiah, "Tartan and Rabsaris and Rabshakeh" (2 Kings 18:17 // Isaiah 36:2), and writes simply עבדיו ("his officials"). In all these cases, he did not find any necessity to furnish his reader with such information that had nothing to add to the core theme of his book: the history of Judah. Indeed, these kinds of omissions are one of the characteristic features of the Chronistic composition.¹¹³ Strikingly, this form of abbreviated information appears also in the Babylonian Chronicles that reports: "In the 20th of Tebet, Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, was murdered by his son."¹¹⁴ The name of the son (in the singular!) and the place to which he escaped are not mentioned.

IX. CONSEQUENCES OF SENNACHERIB'S CAMPAIGN TO JUDAH

Both the author(s)/editor(s) of Kings as well as Isaiah admit the tremendous damage that the Assyrian campaign caused to the kingdom of Judah: Sennacherib "came up against *all the fortified cities of Judah, and took them*" (2 Kings 18:13 // Isaiah 36:1). This fact is basically confirmed and described in some detail in the annals of Sennacherib:

As for Hezekiah, the Jew, who did not submit to my yoke, 46 of his strong, walled cities, as well as the small cities in their neighborhood, which were without number . . . I besieged and took (those cities). 200,150 people, great

¹¹¹ The phrase is neither a gloss, nor secondary, nor said mistakenly as assumed by some scholars; rather it is an integral part of the text, while 2 Kgs. 19:34 (// Isa. 37:35) is secondary. See in detail Tadmor and Cogan, "Hezekiah's Fourteenth Year," 198–201, with references to different views.

¹¹² For general discussion, cf. Rofé, *Prophetic Stories*, 55–59.

¹¹³ See, for example, Kalimi, *Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History*, 85–92 esp. 87, 90.

¹¹⁴ See A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicle*, TCS 5 (Locust Valley, NY, 1975), 81, col. III ll. 34–35.

and small, male and female, horses, mules, asses, camels, cattle and sheep, without number, I brought away from them and counted as spoil. Himself, like a caged bird I shut up in Jerusalem his royal city. . . .¹¹⁵

Moreover, Sennacherib cut large amounts of territory from Judah and passed them to the faithful Philistines kingdoms: Gaza, Ashdod, and Ekron.¹¹⁶ Indeed, the horrible situation in post-campaign Judah was well-expressed by prophet Isaiah:

Your kingdom is desolate, your cities are burned with fire; as for your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as if overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, like a besieged city. If the Lord of hosts had not left us a very small remnant, we should have been like Sodom, and we should have been like Gomorrah (Isaiah 1:7–9).

No wonder, therefore, that Hezekiah passed away shortly after the disastrous Assyrian invasion to Judah.

In contrast to the authors/editors of Kings and Isaiah (and the Assyrian annals), the Chronicler completely ignores all the disastrous results of Sennacherib's campaign. According to him, Jerusalem and the entire kingdom of Judah were saved from the bloody hands of Sennacherib without any harm. Sennacherib thought to capture the cities of Judah, but in fact he could not and did not do anything to them. Twice the Chronicler points out the miraculous and divine delivery of Hezekiah and Jerusalem (32:21–23), and stresses the prosperity and the great reputation of the king and city that followed the campaign by adding:

Thus the Lord saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all others, and guided them on every side (וינהלם מסביב).¹¹⁷ And many brought gifts (מנחה) to the Lord to Jerusalem, and presents (מגדנות)¹¹⁸ to Hezekiah king of Judah; so that he was magnified in the sight of all nations from that time onward" (32:22–23 see also 27–29, both "addition").

¹¹⁵ See Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib*, 32–33, col. III, ll. 18–28; Pritchard, *ANET*, p. 288; see also above n. 88.

¹¹⁶ See in detail A. Alt, "Die Territorialgeschichtliche Bedeutung von Sanheribs Eingriff in Palästina," *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel* (München, 1953), vol. 2, 242–49.

¹¹⁷ For the word וינהלם cf., for example, 2 Chron. 28:15; Exod. 15:13; Ps. 23:2 מנחות על מי מנחות and Ps. 31:4 ותנהלני תנחני. However, one cannot deny the possibility that the word is a corruption of וינח להם, cf. Septuagint and Vulgate translations of the verse, and see, for example, Deut. 12:10; 2 Sam. 7:1; 2 Chron. 14:5–6; 15:15; 20:30 (all "additions").

¹¹⁸ The word *Migdanot* is parallel to the word מנחה in this verse; see also 2 Chron. 21:3; Ezra 1:6; Gen. 24:53.

Furthermore, at that time Hezekiah became sick, but he prayed and the Lord gave him more years of life (32:24–26).

Adding a short conclusion summarizing the major political and international outcome of an Israelite battle with an enemy to the end of a text/story that may have been taken from Samuel–Kings was a typical historiographical feature of the Chronic writing. For example, in 1 Chronicles 10:13–14 the Chronicler summarizes the most important inner-Israelite political result of the battle between Saul and the Philistines on Mount Gilboa (10:1–12 // 1 Samuel 31:1–13); in 1 Chronicles 14:17, he adds the international reputation of David as the result of his victories over the Philistines (1 Chronicles 14:8–16 // 2 Samuel 5:17–25). And the Chronicler added similar conclusions at the conclusion of the successful battle of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, with the Transjordanian kingdoms (2 Chronicles 20:29–30, an “addition”), and after the successful struggle of King Uzziah with Philistines, Arabs, and the Me’unites (2 Chronicles 26:6–8 esp. 8, an “addition”).

X. CONCLUSION

While the earlier biblical sources present the conflict between Judah and Assyria as the central issue in the history of the kingdom under Hezekiah and devote a large space to it, the Chronicler marginalizes the issue, relatively speaking, and basically uses it as an opportunity to enhance Hezekiah’s reputation and emphasize his religious righteousness and complete trust in God.

The Chronicler emphasizes the essential place of Jerusalem in the whole story by referring to it at the very beginning and the end: he opens his description with the defensive preparations that Hezekiah took to prepare the city for the Assyrian assault (32:2–8, an “addition”), and concludes with divine deliverance of it from Sennacherib’s army.

In Kings and Isaiah, there is no clear indication of this, and the prophet Isaiah states that Sennacherib will not even bring the city under siege (2 Kings 19:32 // Isaiah 37:33). The Chronicler, however, speaks about an Assyrian siege of Jerusalem in order to glorify the brave standing of the city, the divine delivery of it, and to add to the fall of the Assyrian army. In this way, the Chronicler highlights the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy on Jerusalem: “I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake, and for my servant David’s sake” (2 Kings 19:34 // Isaiah 37:35).

In the book of Kings there are two explanations, standing side by side, to answer the question of how—in spite of it all—Hezekiah and Jerusalem

were saved from Assyrian hands in 701 B.C.E.: according to the story “A” (the archival source), Hezekiah and Jerusalem were saved due to the heavy tribute that he paid to Sennacherib (2 Kings 18:13–16). The prophetic story (“B”) suggests, however, that Hezekiah and Jerusalem were delivered thanks to divine interference: God’s angel smote the Assyrian army, 185,000 men in one night (2 Kings 19:35), causing Sennacherib to withdraw from Jerusalem’s gates. Isaiah 36–37 omits the archival document of 2 Kings 18:14–16, and concentrates on the prophetic story, telling how Hezekiah and Jerusalem were delivered from Assyrian aggression miraculously by divine interference (Isaiah 37:36).¹¹⁹ The Chronicler chose the prophetic story over the archival one while stressing once again the wonderful delivery of Hezekiah and Jerusalem.

What emerges from Chronicles is that Hezekiah should not and did not pay any tribute to the Assyrians, and because of his good deeds, appropriate religious behavior, and absolute trust in God, Jerusalem and Judah were not harmed at all and an angel was sent by the Lord to smite the Assyrian army. Moreover, Hezekiah even gained from the entire event, politically and materially. Thus on the one hand, the Chronicler replaces the incomplete success of Sennacherib as it is described in Kings and Isaiah, with a complete disastrous collapse of the campaign and the shortening of the life of the king himself. On the other hand, he describes God and Hezekiah as if they had completely triumphed over the Assyrian king. Hezekiah passed the Assyrian crisis not only without any harm, but with his reputation was enormously enhanced, his life lengthened, and receiving many gifts from surrounding kingdoms.

¹¹⁹ See also the discussion above. The timing of the miracles (“and it came to pass that night,” 2 Kgs. 19:35a), is not mentioned in Isaiah. Perhaps the editor of this book trusted that the reader would conclude that the miracle took place at night from the rest of the account: “. . . and when they arose early in the morning, behold. . . .” Interestingly, the Chronicler omits both timing indications that appear in his *Vorlage*; compare 2 Chron. 32:21 with the parallel places in Kings and Isaiah.

CROSS-EXAMINING THE ASSYRIAN WITNESSES TO SENNACHERIB'S
THIRD CAMPAIGN: ASSESSING THE LIMITS OF HISTORICAL
RECONSTRUCTION

Mordechai Cogan

I. INTRODUCTION

One hundred and sixty years ago, scholars as well as the general public were first alerted to the cuneiform record of Sennacherib's campaign to Judah. In the summer of 1851, the indefatigable Colonel Henry Rawlinson reported in the English literary magazine *Athenaeum* that he had succeeded in reading the name of Hezekiah king of Judah on one of the bull colossi discovered by Austin Layard at Nineveh,¹ and with this announcement, he opened a debate that still attracts new discussants in seemingly unending succession. This is surely due to the fact that the Assyrian account of "the celebrated war against Hezekiah"²—Sennacherib's third military campaign—added a perspective that complemented the biblical account of this same event.³ And though countless studies over the decades have clarified many of the linguistic, structural and ideological features of the cuneiform and biblical texts, a consensus concerning the course of events in 701 B.C.E., the year of Sennacherib's campaign, has yet to be achieved.⁴ Still, the challenge of integrating the sources into a coherent historical picture is one that most have been unable to forgo.⁵

¹ *The Athenaeum* No. 1243 (August 23, 1851): 902–3.

² So H. F. Talbot, "Assyrian Texts Translated," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 19 (1862): 135–98. Talbot's translation of the Taylor Prism was the first coherent rendition of Sennacherib's eight campaigns; the Rassam Cylinder, the earliest record of the third campaign, was discovered and published two decades later.

³ Austen Henry Layard, who had discovered the bulls, noted the discrepancies, but thought that there was no difficulty in correlating the two reports; see his remarks in A. H. Layard, *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon* (London, 1853), 142–45. He used a translation provided him by Edward Hincks that was good for its day, but Talbot's (above, note 2) certainly reflects the advances made during the next decade.

⁴ Leo Honor's astute observation, that "the differences which different writers have reached are not due to differences in the sources employed by them, but to different constructions put on them," still holds true; see L. L. Honor, *Sennacherib's Invasion of Palestine. A Critical Source Study* (New York, 1926), xiv.

⁵ The intellectual exercise by Diana V. Edelman to reconstruct Sennacherib's campaign solely on the basis of the biblical text and archaeological finds, as if the cuneiform evidence

The present volume, of which this essay is a part, attests to this continuing endeavor.

My contribution to the discussion is limited to a new cross-examination of the Assyrian witnesses to the events in the West in 701 B.C.E. In using the term cross-examination, I adopt Collingwood's view of the historian as resembling a "Detective-Inspector," and to history writing as "scientific history [that] contains no ready-made statements at all... the scientific historian does not treat statements as statements but as evidence: not as true or false accounts of the facts of which they profess to be accounts, but as other facts which, if he knows the right questions to ask them, may throw light on these facts."⁶ As regards the Assyrian witnesses—the royal inscriptions in general and those of Sennacherib in particular—it is now over a generation that the focus of scholarly interest has shifted from asking direct historical questions to investigating the ideological issues of the Assyrian monarchy as expressed in the texts.⁷ Numerous studies have disclosed the literary code of the Assyrian imperial ideology embedded in them and called attention to the rhetorical structure imposed on the events reported.⁸ It has been shown that careful analysis of the "compositional variants" in the royal inscriptions holds the key to "the political and ideological tendencies" current during a particular reign. It is this understanding that circumscribes the use that can be made of the inscriptional evidence in historical reconstructions.⁹ As to Sennacherib, Eckart Frahm has provided us with a fresh, thoroughgoing study of all the extant texts of

were non-existent, concluded that "the main outlines of the history of the period" would not change much. How overrated this judgment is can be seen in her own admission that without the annalistic inscription we would lack knowledge of "the specific nature of the interregional conflict between Judah and Philistia and the Assyrian resolution of the conflict"; see D. V. Edelman, "What if we had no Accounts of Sennacherib's third campaign or the Palace Reliefs depicting his Capture of Lachish," *Biblical Interpretation* 8 (2000): 88–103.

⁶ R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford, 1946), 266–268, 275.

⁷ In retrospect, the conference in 1980 at Cetona, which yielded the volume: *Assyrian Royal Inscription: New Horizons*, F. M. Fales (ed.), (Rome, 1981), served as the "formal" opening of this new stage of investigation.

⁸ H. Tadmor surveyed the major contributions to this study in "Propaganda, Literature, Historiography: Cracking the Code of the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions," in *Assyria 1995*, ed. S. Parpola and R. Whiting (Helsinki, 1997), 325–338; reprinted in "*With my many chariots I have gone up the heights of mountains*": *Historical and Literary Studies in Ancient Mesopotamia and Israel*, ed. M. Cogan (Jerusalem, 2011), 3–24.

⁹ So M. Liverani, "Critique of Variants and the Titulary of Sennacherib," in *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: New Horizons*, 225–57, esp. 230; cf. idem, "Memorandum on the Approach to Historiographic Texts," *Or* 42 (1973): 178–94.

his reign—new ones hitherto unpublished, as well as up-to-date editions and/or readings of texts published decades ago.¹⁰ And while the third campaign has been investigated with these new tools,¹¹ the present re-examination has elicited a number of insights regarding the Assyrian texts unobserved earlier. Thus, for example, it will be seen that the story told is not the whole story, as there appear to be many gaps in the narrative; nor does the narrative sequence reflect the chronological sequence of the campaign. In addition, reading the third campaign report alongside other texts in the Sennacherib corpus clarifies the king's treatment of Hezekiah. These and other conclusions will make the re-thinking of a number of historical reconstructions unavoidable.

II. THE RASSAM CYLINDER¹²

The starting point of the present cross-examination of the Assyrian witnesses is the annal inscription on the Rassam Cylinder, dated to the spring of 700 B.C.E. and the first to report Sennacherib's third campaign.¹³ Frahm pointed to the large number of copies of this cylinder known to us—it was surely “mass produced”¹⁴—likely a sign of the text's significance at

¹⁰ E. Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, AfO Beiheft 26 (Vienna, 1997). The Rassam Cylinder is now re-edited in the comprehensive collection and edition of Sennacherib's texts by A.K. Grayson and J. Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704–681 BC)*, Part I, RINAP 3/1 (Winona Lake, IN, 2012), 55–69, Text No. 4.

¹¹ See, in particular, W. R. Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah*, SHCANE 18 (Leiden, 1999); W. Mayer, “Sennacherib's Campaign of 701 B.C.E.: The Assyrian View,” in L. L. Grabbe (ed.), *'Like a Bird in a Cage,' The Invasion of Sennacherib in 701 B.C.E.*, JSOT-Sup 363 (Sheffield, 2003), 168–200; K. L. Younger, “Assyrian Involvement in the Southern Levant at the End of the Eighth Century B.C.E.,” in *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period*, ed. A. G. Vaughn and A. E. Killebrew (Atlanta, 2003), 235–63.

¹² Text edition: Frahm, *Sanherib-Inschriften*, 53–55, lines 32–58; earlier, Luckenbill, *Sennacherib*, 29–34, col. II:37–III:49; 60, lines 56–58. The translation here corrects a few lapses in the one I presented in *COS 2*, 302–3 and M. Cogan, *The Raging Torrent* (Jerusalem, 2008), 112–15.

¹³ This cylinder received its name by dint of its discovery by Nimroud Rassam as reported by his uncle Hormuzd Rassam, *Asshur and the Land of Nimrod* (Cincinnati, 1897), 222; cf. J. Reade, “Foundation Records from the South-West Palace, Nineveh,” *ARRIM 4* (1986): 33–34. The date in the cylinder's colophon is: “The month of Iyyar. The eponym of Mitunu, governor of the city of Isana,” which was at most about a half-year after the completion of the campaign, assuming that the Assyrian army returned home before the onset of winter. For the date of Mitunu, see A. Millard, *The Eponyms of the Assyrian Empire*, SAAS II (Helsinki, 1994), 101.

¹⁴ Frahm notes 74 (!) copies of the text that he thinks “originated possibly within a few days”; see *Sanherib-Inschriften*, 50.

the time of its publication. Yet despite its importance for understanding the recensional development of the annals during the reign of Sennacherib, a proper, full edition of the Rassam Cylinder was unavailable until Frahm corrected this shortcoming.¹⁵ In practice, the latest recension of the Sennacherib annals composed in 691–689 B.C.E., represented by the Taylor Prism (and later the Chicago Prism),¹⁶ is the one most often quoted in modern studies,¹⁷ very likely because of its discovery at the birth of Assyriology in the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁸ By the end of the eighth century B.C.E., it was common practice among the royal scribes to appropriate reports from the early recensions and place them ahead of the newer material in the later recensions. Thus, though the late recension in the Taylor Prism exhibits no major substantive deviations from the report of the Third Campaign given in the Rassam Cylinder (see below), still the Rassam Cylinder should be considered the key witness in accordance with the still-valid methodological principle articulated by Albert T. E. Olmstead almost a century ago concerning the use of the earliest available report of a campaign: “Now it would seem that all Assyriologists should have long ago recognized that *any one of these editions is of value only when it is the most nearly contemporaneous of all those preserved*” (emphasis in

¹⁵ Ibid., 47–61, with full bibliography of earlier partial treatments on 47. To be sure, D. D. Luckenbill (*The Annals of Sennacherib* [OIP 2; Chicago, 1924]) noted the variants of the later texts as compared to the Rassam Cylinder, but he relegated these to footnotes, causing them to be overlooked by many. The Assur fragments of the Rassam Cylinder mentioned by Frahm (*Sanherib-Inschriften*, 50) are now published by him, see E. Frahm, *Historische und historisch-literarische Texte*, Keilschrifttexte aus Assur literarischen Inhalts 3, WVDOG 121 (Wiesbaden, 2009), 79–80 (VAT 11955 and 15468). One may speculate, as does Frahm, that in Assur, these “Ninevite” texts—so designated because of their dedications of buildings at Nineveh—may have been part of an “official” state archive; cf. Frahm, *Historische und historisch-literarische Texte*, 9.

¹⁶ For the record, it should be noted that Luckenbill himself revised his translation of 1924 within a few years; see D. D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia* (Chicago, 1927), vol. 2, §§ 239–240. For example: col. III, line 13: *ša aranšunu la ibšū* “for whom there was no punishment” (1924); “who were without sin (blame)” (1927); col. III, line 21: *ina šukbus aramme*, “by levelling with battering-rams (?)” (1924); “by escalade” (1927); col. III, line 35: *nadān mātišun*, “the giving up of their land” (1924); *nadān šattišun*, “as their yearly payment” (1927).

¹⁷ Once this edition was made available, it seems inappropriate to continue using as the base text for discussion the late Chicago Prism given in Luckenbill’s *The Annals of Sennacherib* as is sometimes still done. See, e.g., E. A. Knauf, “Sennacherib at the Berezina,” in *Like a Bird in a Cage*, Grabbe (ed.), 141–49 esp. 141 n. 2.

¹⁸ The Taylor Prism was published in the first major edition of cuneiform texts by H. C. Rawlinson and E. Norris, *The cuneiform inscriptions of Western Asia I: A selection from the historical inscriptions of Chaldaea, Assyria, and Babylonia* (London, 1861), Plates 37–42, though it was discovered three decades earlier.

original).¹⁹ Still, the application of this rule of thumb does not obviate subjecting this first, “nearly contemporaneous” report to literary-ideological analysis in preparation for its use in historical reconstruction.

In recent discussions, the Third Campaign report has been analyzed in a number of ways. For example, Hayim Tadmor observed:

Schematically, the story is divided into two parts: the first is the surrender of the enemy without a fight, and the second, the surrender of the enemy following a battle. Each part consists of subunits, each of which is a whole story in itself, which is also schematic. The story has a total of six units, of which five stand by themselves and the sixth is an addendum that ends it.²⁰

William Gallagher detected:

The First Phase of the Campaign: Phoenicia; Eight Western Kings Bring Gifts to Sennacherib; The Second Phase of the Campaign: Philistia; The Third Phase of the Campaign: Judah.²¹

K. Lawson Younger’s analysis of the campaign narrative identified two phases that “clarified who was loyal and disloyal among the kings of the west”; within these phases, chiasitic structuring of elements create the literary effect of moving from easy to hard victories.²² Younger was careful to point out that “some events are presented out of order.”²³

In the following translation and discussion, I distinguish five sections: §§1–5, of varying length; with repeated phrases (in bold)—key to the text’s literary and ideological features—serving as section markers. At the head of each section, I present a thematic summary. The discussion, i.e., the cross-examination of this witness, is restricted to the testimony of the Assyrian text, irrespective of the testimony of other witnesses (e.g., the biblical texts, archaeological remains). My aim is to retrieve the “bare facts” of the case from this one witness.

(A) *Text*

§1—The flight of an insubordinate vassal; the submission of his country; new order established:

¹⁹ A. T. E. Olmstead, *Assyrian Historiography* (Columbia, MO, 1916), 8.

²⁰ See H. Tadmor, “Sennacherib’s Campaign to Judah: Historiographical and Historical Considerations,” in *With my many chariots . . .*, Cogan (ed.) 653–75.

²¹ Thus Gallagher, *Sennacherib’s Campaign to Judah*, 91–142.

²² On this point, Younger, “Assyrian Involvement,” 249, acknowledges Tadmor’s similar assessment.

²³ Younger, “Assyrian Involvement,” 249.

32–35: In my third campaign, I marched against Hatti. **The awesome splendor of my lordship overwhelmed** Luli, king of Sidon, and he fled overseas far-off. **The terrifying nature of the weapon of (the god) Ashur my lord overwhelmed** his strong cities, Greater Sidon, Little Sidon, Bit-zitti, Šariptu, Mahaliba, Ushu, Achzib, Acco, walled cities (provided) with food and water for his garrisons, and they bowed in submission at my feet. I installed Tuba'lu on the royal throne over them and **imposed upon him tribute and dues for my lordship (payable) annually without interruption.**

§2—A list of submissive vassal kings and their gifts:

36–38: The kings of Amurru, all of them—Minuhimmu of Samsimuruna, Tuba'lu of Sidon, Abdili'ti of Arvad, Urumilki of Byblos, Mitinti of Ashdod, Puduilu of Beth-Ammon, Chemosh-nadbi of Moab, Ayarammu of Edom—**brought me sumptuous presents as their abundant audience-gift, fourfold, and kissed my feet.**

§3—The punishment of an unsubmitive vassal; the conquest of his kingdom; order restored:

39–41: As for Šidqa, king of Ashkelon, who had not submitted to my yoke—his family gods, he himself, his wife, his sons, his daughters, his brothers, and (all the rest of) his descendants, I deported and brought him to Assyria. I set Sharruludari, son of Rukibtu, their former king, over the people of Ashkelon and **imposed upon him payment of tribute (and) presents to my lordship; he (now) bears my yoke.** In the course of my campaign, I surrounded and conquered Beth-dagon, Joppa, Bene-berak, Azor, cities belonging to Šidqa, who did not submit quickly, and I carried off their spoil.

§4—Battles with a rebellious vassal and its allies, their defeat and punishment; the reestablishment of the old order:

42–48: The officials, the nobles, and the people of Ekron who had thrown Padi, **their king, (who was) under oath and obligation to Assyria,** into iron fetters and handed him over in a hostile manner to Hezekiah, the Judean, took fright because of the offense they had committed. The kings of Egypt, (and) the bowmen, chariot corps and cavalry of the king of Nubia assembled a countless force and came to their (i.e., the Ekronites) aid. In the plain of Eltekeh, they drew up their ranks against me and sharpened their weapons. Trusting in the god Ashur, my lord, I fought with them and inflicted a defeat upon them. The Egyptian charioteers and princes, together with the charioteers of the Nubians, I personally took alive in the midst of the battle. I besieged and conquered Eltekeh and Timnah and carried off their spoil. I advanced to Ekron and slew its officials and nobles who had stirred up rebellion and hung their bodies on watchtowers all about the city. The citizens who committed sinful acts, I counted as spoil, and I ordered the release of the rest of them, who had not sinned. I freed Padi, their king, from Jerusalem and set him on the throne as king over them and **imposed tribute for my lordship over him.**

§5—The conquest and defeat of the most obstinate rebel; his submission and immense payment:

49–54: As for Hezekiah, the Judean, I besieged 46 of his fortified walled cities and surrounding smaller towns, which were without number. Using packed-down ramps and applying battering rams, infantry attacks by mines, breeches, and siege machines (or perhaps: storm ladders), I conquered (them). I took out 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, cattle, and sheep, without number, and counted them as spoil. He himself, I locked up within Jerusalem, his royal city, like a bird in a cage. I surrounded him with armed posts, and made it unthinkable (literally, “taboo”) for him to exit by the city gate. His cities which I had despoiled, I cut off from his land and gave them to Mitinti, king of Ashdod, Padi, king of Ekron and Šilli-bel, king of Gaza, and thus diminished his land. **I imposed dues and gifts for my lordship upon him, in addition to the former tribute, his yearly payment.**²⁴

55–58: He, Hezekiah, was **overwhelmed by the awesome splendor of my lordship**, and he sent me after my departure to Nineveh, my royal city, his elite troops (and) his best soldiers, which he had brought in as reinforcements to strengthen Jerusalem, his royal city, with 30 talents of gold, 800 talents of silver, choice antimony, large blocks of carnelian, beds (inlaid) with ivory, armchairs (inlaid) with ivory, elephant hides, ivory, ebony-wood, boxwood, multicolored garments, garments of linen, wool (dyed) red-purple and blue-purple, vessels of copper, iron, bronze, tin and iron, chariots, siege shields, lances, armor, daggers for the belt, bows and arrows, countless trappings and implements of war, together with his daughters, his palace women, his male and female singers. He (also) dispatched his messenger to **deliver the tribute and to do obeisance.**

(B) *Discussion*

The main focus of all five sections in the narrative is the contrasting behavior of Assyria’s western vassals, the kings and city officials in Phoenicia, Philistia, Judah and Transjordan, upon the appearance of Sennacherib

²⁴ There is a syntactical error at this point in the cuneiform text. The text speaks of an increase of tax payments imposed “upon him” [so three of the five Rassam manuscripts; the other two read “them”], in addition to “their” yearly dues. Most recent translators smooth the text and read “upon them,” taking the Philistine kingdoms the subject throughout (so, e.g., Gallagher, *Sennacherib’s Campaign*, 129). But the subject of the present paragraph is Hezekiah, his submission and the penalties imposed on him. This included the cutting off a large portion of Judah’s territory that was handed over to neighboring kingdoms in Philistia and the taxes imposed on him. In each section of the text, the tax and tribute arrangements of the new or reinstated kings are noted. If this is not the correct reading, then the Rassam Cylinder said nothing about the terms of Hezekiah’s continued rule, indeed an anomaly.

in their territories. The description moves from the coward and the submissive to the resisters and the most obstinate. All are brought into renewed subservience by the all-powerful Assyrian king, expressed by the imposition—and in some cases, the immediate delivery—of tribute, dues, and gifts, as protocol required (see the phrases emphasized in **bold** in the text above).

§1—The flight of an insubordinate vassal; the submission of his country; new order established: The report begins abruptly with the flight of Luli, king of Sidon, without a word of explanation for this departure or of his fate in an unnamed place of refuge. Obviously he had somehow crossed Sennacherib and feared retribution, but we are not told exactly how; nor is there any indication that his actions were coordinated with the other rebellious kingdoms mentioned below (e.g., in §4, note is made that the rebels in Ekron had allied with Hezekiah).²⁵ As to Luli's whereabouts overseas, it is conceivable this was unknown at the time of the composition of the Rassam Cylinder. Certainly, from the Assyrian point of view, his flight was seen as cowardly—he had abandoned his troops and his country to extricate himself from punishment.²⁶ Still, Sennacherib had failed to punish this unrepentant rebel personally; this shortcoming would be righted in treatments of this episode in later recensions.

Two later texts, the annal recension of 697 B.C.E. and the summary inscription of 694, amplified Rassam's laconic testimony on this point. They reported that Luli had died overseas. This appeared first in the 697 recension of the annals (Cylinder C): "He fled overseas far-off and died (lit. "disappeared forever")."²⁷ A few years later, the summary inscription on Bull colossus No. 2,²⁸ from 694 B.C.E., presented a fully reworked morality tale:

²⁵ Three decades earlier, Tyre joined Damascus in opposing Tiglath-pileser III, see H. Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, King of Assyria* (Jerusalem, 1994), 186, rev. lines 5–7.

²⁶ See F. M. Fales, "The Enemy in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: 'The Moral Judgment,'" in *Mesopotamien und seine Nachbarn*, ed. H.-J. Nissen and J. Renger, CRRAI 25 (Berlin, 1982), vol. 2, 409–24.

²⁷ See Frahm, *Sanherib-Inschriften*, 66, T 10.

²⁸ See Luckenbill, *Sennacherib*, 77, lines 17–19. The text of Bull 4 reads: "He fled from Tyre to Cyrus in the midst of the sea" (*ibid.*, 69, lines 18–19).

Now Luli, king of Sidon, was afraid of doing battle with me, and he fled to Cyprus, which is in the midst of the sea, and took refuge. In that year, because of the terrifying appearance of the weapon of Ashur, my lord, he disappeared forever.²⁹

It is of note that this summary inscription rendition had no influence on the annal tradition, which continued to copy the updated Cylinder C down through the latest recension of the annals.³⁰

But what of the submission—the “overwhelming” of Sidon? Did the army and people of Sidon oppose the Assyrian army or did they simply lay down their arms when Sennacherib arrived? The expression “the terrifying nature of the weapon of (the god) Ashur my lord overwhelmed his strong cities” occurs often in descriptions of victory over Assyria’s enemies, yet it hides more than it reveals because of its figurative nature.³¹ In the present case, being overcome by divine splendor and power has elicited a range of modern elucidations, for instance, “Tyre’s territory on the Phoenician coast was subdued. It is probably after this loss that Luli fled to Cyprus”;³² or, “It appears, indeed, that Sidon and her daughters delivered themselves up to Sennacherib, for we do not hear of any punishment inflicted on them by the Assyrian king.”³³ Note should be taken, however, that the testimony of the Rassam Cylinder does not refer either to Tyre or to Cyprus.

For sure, Luli ruled from the city of Tyre, at the same time bearing the traditional title “King of Sidon(ions),” but nowhere is there any mention of Sennacherib’s engagement with Tyre itself. A quarter-century prior to the

²⁹ The motif of the god Ashur acting in foreign countries to punish his enemies appears a half-century later in the annals of Ashurbanipal, with reference to the recalcitrant Gyges, king of Lydia. See R. Borger, *Beiträge zum Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals* (Wiesbaden, 1996), 31, 32, 219, Prism A, II: 111–125.

³⁰ See Luckenbill, *Sennacherib*, 29, lines 39–40.

³¹ For a study of this phrase and its employment over the centuries, see E. Cassin, *La splendeur divine* (Paris, 1968), 65–82. A recent example of rationalizing the divine is that of Dubovsky who takes this expression as connoting “the fear that Assyrians instilled into their enemies during military campaigns, referring in particular to the violent means employed by the Assyrian military” (*Hezekiah and the Assyrian Spies*, BibOr 49 [Rome, 2006], 230).

³² G. W. Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine from the Palaeolithic Period to Alexander’s Conquest*, JSOTSup 146 (Sheffield, 1993), 708.

³³ H. J. Katzenstein, *History of Tyre*, 2nd ed. (Beer Sheva, 1997), 247. Cf. Gallagher, *Sennacherib’s Campaign*, 104: “When Assyria invaded Phoenicia, the coastal cities rebelled against Luli, king of Sidon and Tyre, and surrendered to Sennacherib.”

third campaign, Shalmaneser V had waged war against Tyre,³⁴ and though he seems to have had only limited success, a working relation between Tyre and Assyria was achieved during the reign of Sargon. This must have ended on the death of Sargon (705 B.C.E.) as it did in most areas of the empire. Whatever it was that triggered Luli's flight, we should not conclude that Sennacherib's passage through southern Phoenicia was a romp, for his treatment of its residents suggests that he faced some resistance. The Rassam Cylinder provides a clue to this in its report of the deportation of Tyrians. In the building account at the end of the Rassam Cylinder (lines 61–92), we learn of captives who labored on his palace at Nineveh:

The people of Chaldea (Babylon), Arameans, (and people) from Mannea, Que, Cilicia, Philistia and Tyre, who had not submitted to my yoke, I exiled them and had them carry the basket and make bricks [line 69].³⁵

A similar list of work battalions composed of deportees had appeared in the annal texts of the years 702 and 701, the two years preceding the Rassam Cylinder, and to which the author of Rassam added the words: "Philistia and Tyre,"³⁶ thus bringing the list up to date so as to reflect the results of the Third Campaign. Confirming this evidence is the report in the later Bull Colossus Inscription no. 2, relating to the preparations for the attack on the Chaldeans of Bit Yakin who had fled to the area of the Persian Gulf:

I settled Hittites (i.e., north Syrians), captives of my bow, in Nineveh and they skillfully built mighty ships, the craft of their land. Tyrian, Sidonian (and) Cypriote (?) sailors, whom I myself captured, launched them in the Tigris; I gave them orders (and) they sailed them downstream to Opis.³⁷

The campaign of 701 B.C.E. is the most likely occasion for the transfer of these Phoenician shipwrights and sailors to Assyria. Thus it seems clear that in 701, persons from the kingdom of Tyre—both from Sidon and coastal Tyre—who had rebelled and resisted, were rounded up and packed off to Assyria's capital to work on state projects. The specification "Tyre" cannot refer the island of Tyre as it was not captured and so

³⁴ The evidence for this is the quotation brought by Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities*, ix.283–287) from Menander, derived from the Tyrian annals.

³⁵ Frahm, *Sanherib-Inschriften*, 55, line 69.

³⁶ For the annal text of 702, with only the "first campaign" reported, see Luckenbill, *Sennacherib*, 95, line 71); for the "Bellino" annal text of 701, reporting two campaigns, see *ibid.*, 99, note 1. No further additions were made to this list in later editions of the annals.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 73, lines 57–62; cf. Frahm, *Sanherib-Inschriften*, 117.

was not part of the political arrangements imposed on the coastal area; it refers to the territories opposite Tyre handed over to the city of Sidon and its newly appointed king Tuba'lu. What would have been Luli's fate had he stayed and fought, we cannot know; he chose to flee rather than fight.³⁸

Section §1 closes with the appointment of Tuba'lu as king in Sidon, noting his vassal status (to be repeated in §2). His kingdom stretched along the coast from Sidon to Acco, isolating Tyre, which had not been taken.³⁹

§2—A list of submissive vassal kings and their gifts: The list enumerates eight kings who chose to declare their loyalty rather than engage the Assyrian army. Each of these kingdoms had its own fluctuating history as a tributary of Assyria prior to Sennacherib's elevation to the throne, and the appearance of the kings before Sennacherib was likely meant to dispel any suspicion of rebellion on their part.⁴⁰ The list follows a geographical order from north to south and then southeast—from the lesser Phoenician kingdoms, all north of Sidon, to Moab and Edom in the southern Transjordan. Its summary nature is indicated by the inclusion of Tuba'lu, king of Sidon, whose appointment was reported in the preceding paragraph (§1), where it was told that tax and tribute were imposed upon him. The list was placed here in the narrative in this order to serve as contrast to the behavior of the terror-stuck Luli who fled overseas; all of the submissive kings greeted Sennacherib with “fourfold” audience-gifts, apparently reparations for the gifts they had not tendered during the four years (705–701 B.C.E.) between Sennacherib's accession and the third campaign. There is no way of knowing whether they had been in the camp of the rebels during these years or whether they had considered such a stance and settled on continued vassalage.⁴¹ Their tardy payments, if that is what they were, could be ascribed to the war on Assyria's southern front, which had freed the West for the time being of direct Assyrian control.

³⁸ The suggestion to take the depiction on a slab from Sennacherib's palace as the departure of Luli from Tyre (so R. D. Barnett, “Ezekiel and Tyre,” *Erlsr* 9 [1969]: 6–7) is disputed and best left out of the discussion; cf. Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign*, 128; C. Uehlinger, “Clio in a World of Pictures—Another Look at the Lachish Reliefs from Sennacherib's Southwest Palace at Nineveh,” in *Like a Bird in a Cage*, Grabbe (ed.), 301.

³⁹ For a discussion and reconstruction of the history of the dual-kingdom of Tyre and Sidon under Luli and Tuba'lu, see Katzenstein, *History of Tyre*, 220–58.

⁴⁰ These histories are difficult to reconstruct because of the discontinuous and sporadic reference to the kingdoms in the Assyrian sources.

⁴¹ This seems to have been the dilemma that Hezekiah faced when he was prevailed upon to join the rebellion of Ashdod against Sargon II in 712; see the Nineveh annal prism, viia, 13–16; viib 1–48 in Cogan, *Raging Torrent*, 103–04.

There is no indication in the Rassam Cylinder as to the site where these kings presented themselves. This omission persists down to the latest annal recensions (the Taylor and Chicago prisms). This means that this summary paragraph §2 might be understood as follows: as the Assyrian army moved ahead on its march, Sennacherib held court, as it were, at various stages on the way, where he received the greetings and gifts of the submissive monarch(s) in each region. Contrarily, in one version of the summary inscriptions, composed ca. 694 B.C.E. and engraved on a few of the bull colossi that stood at the entrances to the rooms of Sennacherib's palace,⁴² it is noted that the submissive kings came to "the environs of Ushu" (i.e., the coastal area facing the island of Tyre)⁴³ to deliver their gifts to Sennacherib. The source for this specification is not known nor can it be traced, but it was not included in the other summary inscriptions composed during that same year, nor was it accepted into the later recensions of the annals. Unlike another specification, that of Luli's death, which was introduced into the post-Rassam recensions of the annals (see above §1), it would seem that there was some question among the scribes about the collective submission at Ushu. Was the Ushu specification merely a deduction by the author of the summary inscription, when, in fact, the kings had submitted to Sennacherib individually when the Assyrian king approached their territories? We simply do not know. Those who would reconstruct a ceremony at Ushu do so on questionable evidence.⁴⁴

§3—The punishment of an unsubmitive vassal; the conquest of his kingdom; order restored: Unlike Luli and the eight kings, Šidqa, king of Ashkelon, chose to fight rather than submit. But his forces were no match for the Assyrian army and the enclave of four cities north of Ashkelon that were under his sway fell to Sennacherib. Whether this defeat broke Šidqa's resistance and he surrendered or whether there was some resistance in Ashkelon after this defeat is not reported. The description focuses on the punishment meted out to Šidqa, who was exiled, together with the entire royal family. Šarru-lu-dari, son of Rukibtu, a former king,⁴⁵ was enthroned as an Assyrian vassal.

⁴² Bull Inscription no. 1 [Luckenbill], no. 4 [Frahm], apparently composed ca. 694 B.C.E.

⁴³ For the identification of Ushu, see Katzenstein, *History of Tyre*, 14–15.

⁴⁴ Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign*, speaks of "Sennacherib's summons to these kings to appear before him at Ushu" (109); cf. also Ahlström, *History*, 708.

⁴⁵ Rukibtu had assumed the throne in Ashkelon in 734 B.C.E., after Tiglath-pileser III subdued Philistia. See Tadmor, *Tiglath-pileser III*, 82, line 10'. We have no information as to how and when his reign ended, but Šidqa clearly led the anti-Assyrian faction in Ashkelon.

The ordering of the elements in the present unit, focusing first on the fate of Šidqa and then the defeat of his army, reflects the polemical style of the inscription. Failure to recognize that the Rassam Cylinder does not convey a strict chronological progression of the campaign—that is, the movement of the Assyrian army from point A to B, from B to C and so forth—has led to some curious suggestions as to the course of events. Thus, for example, Yohanan Aharoni, in the first edition of *The Land of the Bible* (London, 1967), closely followed the sequence of the Assyrian text and told of the king of Ashkelon submitting “as soon as the Assyrian army appeared in Palestine,”⁴⁶ viz., immediately after the presentation of gifts by the kings of Amurru (§2). However, in the postmortem revision and enlargement of Aharoni’s work by Anson F. Rainey (1979), this reconstruction was set aside. Rainey cogently explained as follows:

The Sennacherib annal is more a summary than a chronological account. For example, it is obvious that Sennacherib could not have exiled Šidqa, king of Ashkelon, before he arrived in Philistia. But the account of Šidqa’s stubbornness is introduced very early, just after the submission of the other rulers from Amurru. The point being made is that these others hastened to pay their tribute and thus avoided disaster while Šidqa did not.⁴⁷

That the author of the Rassam Cylinder chose to specify the four towns under Šidqa’s control—Beth-dagon, Joppa, Bene-berak, Azor—is not an unusual feature in the third campaign report. He referred to eight cities in the Kingdom of Tyre by name (§1) and also to the two towns, Eltekeh and Timnah, associated with Ekron (§4). Yet this does not come close to the manner of reporting in the earliest recension of Sennacherib’s annals that summarizes only one (i.e., the first) campaign; that report includes several lists of over a hundred (!) toponyms itemizing the cities taken during the Chaldean campaign.⁴⁸ Such detailing was rejected in the second recension of the annals (Bellino Cylinder),⁴⁹ and in all subsequent recensions, as restricted reporting became the convention. This is evidently true when

Had he ousted Sharru-lu-dari to take control of the city? Tadmor speculated that he was Rukibti’s younger brother (H. Tadmor, “Philistia under Assyrian Rule,” *BA* 29 [1966]: 96).

⁴⁶ Y. Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible. A Historical Geography*, (London, 1967), 337.

⁴⁷ Y. Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible. A Historical Geography*, 2nd edition, revised and enlarged by A. F. Rainey (Philadelphia, 1979), 388; see also A. F. Rainey and R. S. Notley, *The Sacred Bridge* (Jerusalem, 2008), 241.

⁴⁸ See Luckenbill, *Sennacherib*, 52–54, lines 36–50. On these lists, see I. Eph’al, *The Ancient Arabs* (Jerusalem, 1982), 40, n. 106.

⁴⁹ Cf. Luckenbill, *Sennacherib*, 56, line 11.

we consider the report in the Rassam Cylinder on the victories in Judah (see further in §5).

§4—Battles with a rebellious vassal and its allies, their defeat and punishment; the reestablishment of the old order: The kingdom of Ekron is presented as a further example of a rebellious city that refused to surrender without a fight. The anti-Assyrian elements in the city had removed their king, Padi, a loyal vassal of Assyria, and given him over to Hezekiah, who was holding him in custody in Jerusalem. They allied themselves with the Nubian king of Egypt, who sent a considerable force to support the rebel cause. The Assyrian army routed the combined Nubian and Egyptian corps at Eltekeh, and then proceeded to take Eltekeh and Timnah, as well as Ekron itself. The harsh punishment of the Ekronite rebels—their impalement around the city—was a warning to all: see and be horrified! Padi was freed from Jerusalem and returned to his post as an Assyrian vassal.

The Assyrian victory over the Egyptians at Eltekeh has been subject to much doubt, and a number of scenarios reordering the events and tempering the reported success have been put forward. For some, it is the very straightforwardness and stereotypical language of the report that suggest “that the ‘victory’ was rather exaggerated.”⁵⁰ Because there was no follow-up, such as the pursuit of the defeated to the border of Egypt or some other action, “[p]erhaps calling the battle a stalemate would be more accurate.”⁵¹ More extreme is the conclusion that “there can be no doubt that it [the battle at Eltekeh] was an unexpected and serious reverse for Assyria (sic!) arms.”⁵² Then there is the suggestion of a subsequent regrouping of the Egyptian forces for a second attack on the Assyrians,⁵³ an event based on the merging of the Assyrian annal statement with the biblical references to the Egyptians in 2 Kings 18:21 and 19:9. All the Egyptian actions are assumed to have taken place under the leadership—or at least the

⁵⁰ H. Tadmor, “Philistia under Assyrian Rule,” 97.

⁵¹ Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign*, 121.

⁵² So D. B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton, 1992), 353.

⁵³ Thus K. A. Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (1100–650 BC)* (Warminster, 1973), 385; *ibid.*, “Egypt, the Levant and Assyria in 701 BC,” *Fontes atque pontes. Fs. H. Brunner*, *ÄAT* 5 (1983): 243–53. Rainey (*Sacred Bridge*, 244) considers this to be a “new Cushite expeditionary force,” but does not explain how it was related to those Egyptians defeated at Eltekeh. M. Liverani also speaks of “the imminent return of an Egyptian army” as a factor in Jerusalem’s “rescue” (*Israel's History and the History of Israel*, [London, 2003], 148).

participation—of Taharqa, the brother of Shabaka (/ Shabatka), the reigning Nubian king,⁵⁴ another biblically based (cf. 2 Kings 19:9) “fact.”

None of these readings is derived solely from the report of the Rasm Cylinder. Still there are a few particulars from Assyrian documents that are unassailable. It is clear that Shabaka had adopted a new policy towards Assyria after Sargon’s death. In winter 707/706 B.C.E., he extradited Yamani of Ashdod to Assyria, choosing to avoid confrontation with the empire that sat on Egypt’s border in southern Philistia; but by 701, his troops were fighting Sennacherib.⁵⁵ The size of the Egyptian force that faced Sennacherib is unknown; however large it may have been, it is likely that, considering the distance to be transversed between the Delta and Philistia, that a force—or at least an advanced division—was stationed in Philistia in anticipation of the Assyrian campaign. As to whom victory should be credited—Sennacherib or Taharqa—it is possible that the Assyrian claim to have defeated the Egyptians is less than the whole truth. Similar claims of routing the enemy have been shown to be exaggerated, e.g., Shalmaneser III’s defeat of the western allies at Qarqar in 853; Sargon II’s victory at Der in 720.⁵⁶ Yet even if the battle at Eltekeh ended in a stalemate, this did not prevent Sennacherib from accomplishing his campaign goals in Philistia and Judah, which did not include further pursuit of the Egyptian army.

Were this issue not enough, questions of military logic have entered the discussion, for example, the choice of Eltekeh as the site of the battle, followed by the seizure of Eltekeh and Timnah. Were they “two unimportant towns”⁵⁷ or “two fortified cities under Ekronite control”⁵⁸ that had to be taken before the siege of Ekron could be undertaken? Since the identification of Eltekeh is not conclusive, its size and importance remain a matter of conjecture (it is well to recall that the same holds true of such towns as Beth-dagon or Azor referred to in connection with Šidqa’s capitulation

⁵⁴ The difficulties raised a generation ago concerning Taharqa’s young age in 701 have been answered in newer studies. See the recent evaluation of the chronological problems of the Egyptian monarchy and the date of Shabatka’s appearance in the Delta by D. Kahn, “The Inscriptions of Sargon II at Tang-I Var and the Chronology of Dynasty 25,” *Or* 70 (2001): 1–18, esp. 8–9.

⁵⁵ Cf. the discussion by J. K. Hoffmeier, “Egypt’s Role in the Events of 701 B.C.,” in *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology*, Vaughn and Killebrew (eds.), 219–34.

⁵⁶ Cf. A. K. Grayson, “Problematic Battles in Mesopotamian History,” in *Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger on His Seventy-Fifth Birthday April 21, 1965*, AS 16 (Chicago, 1965), 337–42 esp. 340–42.

⁵⁷ Gallagher, *Sennacherib’s Campaign*, 121.

⁵⁸ H. Tadmor, “Sennacherib’s Campaign to Judah,” 73.

§3, which are similarly unidentified).⁵⁹ We must admit that we do not know why the Assyrian author chose to mention Eltekeh and Timnah, or for that matter, any of the other towns in his account. Thus if he had wanted to boast of an outstanding victory, he could have referred to the conquest of the Judean fortress of Lachish, as did the artist who prepared the reliefs for Sennacherib's palace;⁶⁰ but he did not specify any town in Judah at all.

Moving ahead, the reinstatement of the imprisoned Padi to his throne in Ekron is a classic case of disputed testimony in the Rassam cylinder. The report of his release from Jerusalem comes before the description of the Assyrian attack on Judah. Are we to take this to mean "the threats of Sennacherib forced him [i.e., Hezekiah] to release the hapless vassal?"⁶¹ Or did the release come after Hezekiah's capitulation?⁶² A firm decision on this issue cannot be made because of the literary nature of the text. In cuneiform narratives—and in biblical narratives as well—authors often bring a subject to a close by relating its final episode that is chronologically beyond the horizon of the context, thus rounding off and concluding the story. The case of Padi's release is an example of such prolepsis.⁶³ The Ekron interlude is brought to its successful conclusion—the restoration of the old order—without regard to the actual chronological sequence of all its events.

§5—The conquest and defeat of the most obstinate rebel; his submission and immense payment: The final section of the third campaign report is devoted to the subjugation of "Hezekiah, the Judean." From the amount of space given over to describing the battles waged in Judah—in particular, the military operations used to bring about its surrender—as well as the punishment inflicted on Hezekiah, it is evident that the annal author took Hezekiah to be "Sennacherib's public enemy number one"⁶⁴ in the

⁵⁹ The identification with Tell esh-Shalaf, originally proposed by Mazar, holds wide acceptance; see B. Mazar, "The Cities of the Territory of Dan," in *The Early Biblical Period. Historical Essays*, ed. B. Mazar (Jerusalem, 1986), 104–12, esp. 110–12 (revised version of his essay appearing in *IEJ* 10 [1960]: 65–77). See, e.g., Rainey and Notley, *The Sacred Bridge*, 242.

⁶⁰ See the detailed analysis of C. Uehlinger, "Clio in a World of Pictures," 221–305.

⁶¹ Rainey, *Sacred Bridge*, 241c; cf. similarly, Ahlström, *History*, 710.

⁶² This seems to be the view of the majority of writers; e.g., J. Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia, 1981), 286; J. M. Miller and J. H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY, 2006), 419.

⁶³ Gallagher (*Sennacherib's Campaign*, 123) calls this technique "topical arrangement."

⁶⁴ So Younger, "Assyrian Involvement," 253.

West. It is, therefore, somewhat surprising that, other than his keeping Padi of Ekron in detention, not a word is said about Hezekiah's crimes against Assyria. While this act against a loyal vassal of Assyria was an act of rebellion against Assyria, it could hardly have been the sole reason for the attack on Judah.⁶⁵ This silence seems to have been felt quite soon, and in the very next recension of the annals in 699 B.C.E., Hezekiah is described as the one "who did not submit to my yoke,"⁶⁶ a phrase that was adopted in all subsequent annal recensions.⁶⁷ Another expansion, this one in one of versions of the summary inscription for the bull colossi, emphasizes Hezekiah's strength, which at the same time enhanced Sennacherib's victory over him: "I devastated the wide district of Judah, and I brought the strong and powerful Hezekiah into submission at my feet."⁶⁸

The large number of Judean cities captured—"46 of his fortified walled cities and surrounding smaller towns, which were without number"—is impressive, though none of them are named, as was the case with the towns under Šidqa's control (§3). It is more than likely that Rassam's editor relied on a list of conquered cities prepared by army scribes for this number. As to the verbal description of various methods employed by the Assyrian army in capturing these cities, the wall reliefs depicting the attack on the city of Lachish in Room XXXVI of Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh serve as an illuminating complement.⁶⁹

The extremely large number of captives deported from Judah (200,150) is one of those numbers that appear from time to time in Assyrian royal inscriptions that is best described as "an example of propagandistic inflation," devoid of any basis in reality.⁷⁰ Whatever their actual number may have been—and the suggestions are many⁷¹—the Judean deportees would

⁶⁵ B. Becking thinks so, because "Assyrian kings had the obligation to defend their vassals against foreign powers" and "Sennacherib obviously wanted to liberate his former vassal." See B. Becking, "Chronology: A Skeleton without Flesh? Sennacherib's Campaign as a Case-Study," in *'Like a Bird in a Cage,'* Grabbe (ed.), 46–72 (= *ibid.*, *From David to Gedaliah, The Book of Kings as Story and History*, OBO 228 [Fribourg-Göttingen, 2007], 123–46, esp. 141, 144).

⁶⁶ Frahm, *Sanherib-Inschriften*, 62 [T 6].

⁶⁷ Luckenbill, *Sennacherib*, 32, line 19 [Chicago prism].

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 77, lines 20–22. Read: *šēpšu mitru*; cf. *CAD M/1*, 140a.

⁶⁹ Cf. C. Uehlinger, "Clio in a World of Pictures;" earlier D. Ussishkin, *The Conquest of Lachish by Sennacherib* (Tel Aviv, 1982), 76–93.

⁷⁰ This is the conclusion of M. De Odorico, *The Use of Numbers and Quantification in the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, SAAS III (Helsinki, 1995), 114–15.

⁷¹ Mayer's suggestion that the number reflects "the way Assyrians counted live booty . . . animal and human, without differentiating between them" is contradicted by his own statement in the same paragraph where he mentions that in reference to Babylon, the

have been treated like those from “Philistia and Tyre” who were subject to work on state projects (see above §1). In this regard, note should be taken of the two-line closing passage that follows the third campaign report in the Rassam Cylinder, which presents a summary of the foreign soldiers conscripted into the Assyrian army during all three campaigns. These lines read: “From the captives of all the lands I had taken, I recruited 10,000 archers, 10,000 shield-bearers and added them to my royal corps. I divided the rest of the vast enemy booty like sheep among all my camp, and my provincial governors and the residents of my large cult centers” (lines 59–60).⁷² That the round numbers given here are approximations does not invalidate the supposition that Judean fighters, taken prisoner at cities like Lachish in the Shephelah of Judah, were among these new conscripts; they had been registered separately from their 200,000+ countrymen reported earlier.⁷³

The reported distribution of captured Judean territory among Assyria’s vassals in Philistia—Mitinti, king of Ashdod, Padi, king of Ekron and Šilli-bel, king of Gaza—served as punishment for Judah’s rebellion, as well as reward to these vassals for their loyalty. The inscription of bull colossus no. 4 summarized this move as follows: “I gave it (Hezekiah’s land) to the kings of Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron and Gaza.”⁷⁴ The addition of the kingdom of Ashkelon to the other three listed earlier in Rassam may indicate later arrangements concerning the parceling of the Judean Shephelah. Note should be taken that while Mitinti of Ashdod appears in the summary list of the submissive kings in §2, Šilli-bel of Gaza is absent there, yet he benefited from the land division here described. In truth, we lack evidence that might clarify Gaza’s stance vis-à-vis the rebellion in the West. The last king of Gaza known from Assyrian sources is Hanunu, who was unseated and deported by Sargon in 720;⁷⁵ after that date, there is a gap of close to twenty years during which Gaza goes unmentioned. Sometime

number of small cattle is given, separate from the human exiles (Mayer, “Sennacherib’s Campaign,” 182). Cf. Frahm, *Sanherib-Inschriften*, 51, Rassam cylinder, line 14.

⁷² This passage appears in later texts until 695 B.C.E., with the number of recruited captives growing in number as dictated by the additional campaigns that had been fought; see Frahm, *Sanherib-Inschriften*, 105. De Ódorico errs in speaking of loot collected rather than persons (*The Use of Numbers and Quantification*, 89).

⁷³ R. D. Barnett (“The Siege of Lachish,” *IEJ* 8 [1958]: 161–64) sought to identify members of what he called “the Lachish regiment” on a relief from the palace of Sennacherib; cf. Uehlinger, “Clio in a World of Pictures,” 279–82.

⁷⁴ Luckenbill, *Sennacherib*, 70, line 30.

⁷⁵ A. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad* (Göttingen, 1994), 90, line 56.

during this period Šilli-bel ascended the throne. One thing seems certain: the location of Gaza at the end of the coast road that crossed the northern Sinai peninsula would have made it vulnerable to Egyptian pressure. It would have served as the natural first encampment in Philistia for Egypt's army on its way to fight Sennacherib.⁷⁶

Now, finally, to the main culprit. What was it that brought Hezekiah to his knees—the defeat that his army suffered in the battles in the Shephelah or the blockade of Jerusalem? Perhaps it was the combination of both. The tactics adopted by Sennacherib concerning Jerusalem do not seem to have been unusual, as similar descriptions are known from reports of other battles, though difficulties remain in interpreting the move.⁷⁷ For example, Tiglath-pileser III is said to have inflicted a resounding defeat on the troops of Rezin of Damascus and then “cooped him up like a bird in a cage” in his capital.⁷⁸ Ashurbanipal used armed posts to cut off vital supplies from Tyre.⁷⁹ In the case of Damascus, the city was taken and Rezin eventually captured and executed, but details are scarce.⁸⁰ As for Ba'al, king of Tyre, he surrendered to Ashurbanipal, but he was not apprehended; rather, in an act of “compassion,” he kept his throne and resumed his former vassal status.⁸¹ Thus a number of alternatives can be considered concerning Sennacherib's treatment of Jerusalem and Hezekiah.

Perhaps the most striking feature of §5 is the lengthy, detailed list of tribute that Hezekiah is reported to have sent to Sennacherib after his return to Nineveh.⁸² Post-Rassam editions of the annals shortened the list somewhat, but it remains the longest one in the third campaign report.⁸³

⁷⁶ Cf. H. Tadmor, “Philistia under Assyrian Rule,” *BA* 29 (1966): 96, n. 40. Extracuneiform evidence seems to suggest that pressure was put on Gaza to join the rebellion, cf. 2 Kgs. 18:8, but this is beyond the limits set for the present discussion.

⁷⁷ The control by armed posts of the roads to the city in el-Amarna letters employ the hunting term *ḥuḥāru* (glossed by *kilūbu*), “snare, trap,” that is not represented in the NA similes; cf. *CAD* H, 225.

⁷⁸ See H. Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, King of Assyria* (Jerusalem, 1994), 78, Annal 23, lines 1'–11'.

⁷⁹ See R. Borger, *Beiträge zum Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals. Die Prismenklassen A, B, C = K, D, E, F, G, H, J und T sowie andere Inschriften* (Wiesbaden, 1996), 28, B II 44–52.

⁸⁰ This is known from 2 Kgs. 16:9, the only evidence for Rezin's demise. See the comment of Tadmor, *Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III*, 79.

⁸¹ Borger, *Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals*, 28, B II 59–65.

⁸² The tribute followed Sennacherib's return to Nineveh and was not carried off by the army as spoils. Accompanying the treasures were Hezekiah's elite troops, the *urbi*. This meaning follows H. Tadmor, “The *urbi* of Hezekiah,” in “*With my many chariots . . .*,” ed. Tadmor, 337–46; also Cogan and Tadmor, *2 Kings*, 247, note 2.

⁸³ See Luckenbill, *Sennacherib*, 34, lines 41–49.

In Tadmor's view this list served as "literary compensation" for Sennacherib's not having captured Hezekiah, not taking Jerusalem, and not turning Judah into an Assyrian province as expected according to the "canonical model" as to how a successful campaign should have ended.⁸⁴ For many of these same reasons, Millard feels that "the narrative of Sennacherib's campaign against Hezekiah seems to be less straightforward than it may appear when read in isolation."⁸⁵ Gallagher, too, adopts this understanding and speaks of an "incomplete victory." He feels that the facts on the ground presented a dilemma for the scribes. Hezekiah should have personally presented himself before Sennacherib and the army should have taken the booty as it departed Judah to return home. This was not a "typical victory" and so the scribes made up the difference by detailing the pain and damage inflicted on Judah and including one of the longest booty lists in Sennacherib's inscriptions.⁸⁶

Undoubtedly, the conclusion of the Judean episode of the third campaign did not conform to the customary pattern of reporting Assyrian victories. Yet this was not the first time that Sennacherib's scribes faced the problem of recounting a non-routine outcome of a campaign. In the first edition of the annals that they themselves had composed just two years earlier, which dealt exclusively with the battles in the south against Merodach-baladan, they depicted Sennacherib as overwhelming Merodach-baladan, even though the Chaldean rebel had personally escaped punishment. Sennacherib entered Babylon and despoiled his treasures, the royal household and staff. The booty list given there approaches in detail and extent the one reported of Hezekiah.⁸⁷ And in that first campaign report, even the animals carried off were itemized: "7,200 horses and mules, 11,073 asses, 5,230 camels, 80,050 cattle, 800,110 sheep."⁸⁸ Obviously, had they wanted, the scribes could have detailed the number of animals taken from Judah and not simply used the general term "without number."

As to whether the description of the outcome in Judah should be decoded as an "incomplete victory," such an explication assumes that the

⁸⁴ H. Tadmor, "Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah," 670.

⁸⁵ A. R. Millard, "Sennacherib's Attack on Hezekiah," *Tyndale Bulletin* 36 (1985): 72.

⁸⁶ Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign*, 132–33.

⁸⁷ Luckenbill, *Sennacherib*, 52, lines 31–33. Note that this list was abbreviated somewhat in later editions, cf. *op. cit.*, 56, lines 8–9 (Bellino Cylinder); 24, lines 27–35 (Chicago Prism).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 55, line 60.

ancient reality conflicted with Assyrian ideological rhetoric as we presently perceive it. This, however, may not necessarily be so. Consider, for example, the dismemberment of Judah. Why had the conquered territory of Judah not been incorporated as an Assyrian province rather than distributed among the vassals in Philistia? There is no reason to think that had he so desired, Sennacherib could not have followed the time-honored practice of provincialization. But he chose a manner of imperial governance that was at odds with the one followed by his predecessors.

This leads directly to the ever-engaging question of Jerusalem's survival. My assessment of Sennacherib's imperial policy, based on a critical reading of the texts from the entirety of his reign, shows that, unlike his father, he was not "an expansionist"; he did not found new provinces in the West.⁸⁹ If this is correct, then leaving a weakened and diminished Judah with the chastened Hezekiah as its king was the first expression of a policy followed by Sennacherib throughout his reign. The submission of Hezekiah had been complete. He lost the economically and strategically important Shephelah of Judah; his court was exiled; he paid an exceedingly large tribute; and "his elite troops (and) his best soldiers"⁹⁰ left for Nineveh where they were likely inducted into the Assyrian army.⁹¹ It does not seem to have been in Assyria's interest to pursue further military action against Jerusalem, so the city could be left, even as the capital city of Judah, which had been reduced to a rump kingdom, stripped of its power to instigate future rebellion.

⁸⁹ Cf. the remarks of H. Tadmor, "World Dominion: The Expanding Horizon of the Assyrian Empire," in *Landscapes: Territories, Frontiers and Horizons in the Ancient Near East. Papers presented to the XLIV Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Venezia, 11 July 1997*, ed. L. Milano et al. (Padova 1999), 61–62. This may also explain the change in status of the province of Ashdod established by Sargon to renewed vassalage just a decade later that is evidenced in the Rassam Cylinder. For the suggestion that Mitinti retained his throne at the same time that an Assyrian governor administered affairs in Ashdod, see Tadmor, "Philistia under Assyrian Rule," 95–96.

⁹⁰ The erroneous translation of Luckenbill (*Sennacherib*, 33, lines 39–40): "the Urbi (Arabs) and his mercenary(?) troops" is still quoted by E. A. Knauf, "Sennacherib at the Berezina," in *'Like a Bird in a Cage,'* Grabbe (ed.), 145, despite the clarification of the term by I. Eph'al, *The Ancient Arabs*, 7, ns. 23, 113; H. Tadmor, "The urbi of Hezekiah," 337–46; also Cogan and Tadmor, *2 Kings*, 247, note 2; cf. Frahm, *Sanherib-Inschriften*, 104–105.

⁹¹ Oded collected the evidence for the conscription of deportees into the Assyrian army, see B. Oded, *Mass Deportations and Deportees in the Neo-Assyrian Army* (Wiesbaden, 1979), 48–54.

III. CONCLUSIONS

The preceding cross-examination of the Assyrian witnesses to Sennacherib's campaign to the West in 701 B.C.E. set out to delineate the "bare facts" concerning the events by distinguishing them from the literary-ideological framework in which they are encased. It has shown that the Rassam Cylinder, besides being the earliest Assyrian witness to the campaign, presents the fullest account, which was copied into later editions of the king's annals with three minor alterations: the insertion of a note telling of Luli's death on Cyprus (see above, p. 58); the additional designation of Hezekiah as being unsubmitive (see above, p. 67); the shortening of the list of tribute delivered by Hezekiah (see above, p. 69). Three further points may be expressed:

(1) The text of the Rassam Cylinder does not tell the whole story of the third campaign. The text's author employed established ideological rhetoric and literary patterns common to the Assyrian royal inscriptions, which he adapted to reflect the temper of his sovereign. At the same time, he was hemmed in by practical concerns. On the practical level, the space available on the writing surface of the cylinder determined the overall extent of the report, while the ideological matrix determined the manner of presentation. Because of these considerations, many gaps were left in the Cylinder's testimony. For example, we may sense that during the years preceding the campaign, a wide anti-Assyrian alliance had organized itself; Judah's Hezekiah was a leading player among the rebellious kingdoms that were supported by Nubian Egypt. Yet none of this is stated. Rassam's author limited his remarks concerning foreign intervention to Ekron and its negotiation for Egyptian help and only in conjunction with Padi's imprisonment is there an allusion to Hezekiah's "sin" against Sennacherib.

(2) Because the testimony of the Rassam Cylinder is organized in highly fashioned literary units and its tale proceeds from the victories easily attained to those that required the employment of massive force, the precise order of march and engagement of Sennacherib's army is irretrievable. Moreover, we cannot know whether the army fought as a single corps or was at times divided into separate military units. All arrows on modern maps showing the route of the third campaign are, therefore, provisional.

(3) Despite its propagandistic nature, the Rassam report still appears to have considerable credibility in its details, especially the instances that did not easily fit the ideal picture of the victorious Assyrian king; thus, e.g.,

the escape of Luli (§1); the division of captured Judean territory among the Philistine kingdoms (§5); and the receipt of Judah's tribute after the king's departure for Nineveh (§5).⁹²

The Assyrian testimony by itself is insufficient to suggest a construction of Sennacherib's campaign. Similar cross-examinations of all the other witnesses need to be undertaken, after which the collected testimonies can be pitted against one other and the unavoidable judgment made that some are more trustworthy than others. Only then can the historian, like Collingwood's Detective-Inspector, begin to re-imagine the course of events of 701.

APPENDIX: A SECOND ASSYRIAN CAMPAIGN TO THE WEST?

That Sennacherib undertook a second campaign to the West sometime during the last decade of his rule is a suggestion that has been bandied about almost from the start of the study of the third campaign.⁹³ Despite the fact that there is not a shred of evidence whatsoever in cuneiform sources for such a campaign, this chimera raises its head every so often among biblicalists and historians alike. Thus, for example, in the revised edition of the *Cambridge Ancient History*, A. K. Grayson proffers:

It seems obvious that the two sources [Sennacherib's annals and the biblical account] are describing essentially different events, and that we must reckon with at least one further Palestinian campaign after 701. This second campaign probably took place late in the reign (688–681), a period for which no Assyrian annalistic narratives are preserved . . . Whatever happened, Sennacherib withdrew in confusion and disgrace.⁹⁴

⁹² Ben Zvi's observation in this regard is most apt: "There seems to be a grammar of writing that does not allow unrestrained creativity with some matters." See E. Ben Zvi, "Malleability and Its Limits: Sennacherib's Campaign Against Judah as a Case-Study," in *'Like a Bird in a Cage'*, ed. Grabbe, 73–105.

⁹³ G. Rawlinson (*The Five Great Monarchies of the Ancient Eastern World: The Second Monarchy: Assyria*, [London, 1864], vol. 2, 430–46), seems to have been the first to suggest two invasions of Judah by Sennacherib (with just two to three years separating them, due to his adopting the biblical data for Hezekiah's reign that ended in 698 B.C.E.).

⁹⁴ A. K. Grayson, "Assyria: Sennacherib and Esarhaddon (704–669 B.C.)," *Cambridge Ancient History* (2nd edition; Cambridge, 1991), vol. III, Part 2, III. Grayson also notes that "the years 699–7, allowing one of these for the fifth campaign, cannot be entirely ruled out;" *loc. cit.*, note 28.

As indicated, the proffered second campaign is meant to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable reports of the third campaign and the biblical traditions of Sennacherib's attack on Judah. The first engagement ended with an Assyrian victory (= "third campaign" and 2 Kings 18:13–16); during the second one, Sennacherib suffered a disastrous defeat (2 Kings 18:17–19:35).⁹⁵

But such a scenario—the decimation of the Assyrian army towards the end of Sennacherib's reign—would require a full rewriting of the regional history during the first half of the seventh century as it is presently understood, that is, against the well-known facts of the era. As I have pointed out elsewhere,⁹⁶ Esarhaddon, Sennacherib's son and heir, found a subdued and quiescent empire when he took rule, despite the internal upheaval in Assyria that accompanied his accession. Had his father withdrawn "in confusion and disgrace," Esarhaddon would have had to reassert Assyria's hegemony over the West early on. Yet on his march to "the city Arza, which is on the border of the Wadi of Egypt" in northern Sinai, in 679/78 B.C.E., Esarhaddon encountered no resistance.⁹⁷ In addition, tribute lists from his reign include the names of the western vassals, all of whom had been brought into line by Sennacherib.⁹⁸ This can only mean that Sennacherib's campaign of 701 was so successful that there were no further rebellions in the region until Sidon's attempt to break-away in 677/76.⁹⁹ Besides, what western monarch would have thought to engage Sennacherib after learning about the ravage of Babylon in 689 under Sennacherib's direction? In sum, all indications lead to the conclusion that there was only one campaign to the West during Sennacherib's reign, the third campaign in 701 B.C.E., after which Assyria returned to be the area's undisputed hegemon for next quarter-century.

⁹⁵ Besides Grayson, only a few scholars endorse the two-campaign theory; see, e.g., W. H. Shea, "Sennacherib's Second Palestinian Campaign," *JBL* 104 (1985): 410–18; *ibid.*, "Jerusalem under Siege," *BAR* 26/6 (1999): 36–44, 64.

⁹⁶ M. Cogan, "Sennacherib's Siege of Jerusalem. Once or Twice?" *BAR* 27 (2001): 40–45, 69.

⁹⁷ Cogan, *Raging Torrent*, 132, 135.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁹⁹ This date derives from the Babylonian Chronicles; see *ibid.*, 135.

SENNACHERIB'S CAMPAIGN TO JUDAH: THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE WITH AN EMPHASIS ON LACHISH AND JERUSALEM

David Ussishkin

INTRODUCTION

In 705 B.C.E. Sennacherib ascended the throne of Assyria. The king was soon faced with a revolt organized by Hezekiah king of Judah. An alliance against Assyria was formed between Judah, Egypt and the Philistine cities in the Coastal Plain, possibly with Babylonian support. Sennacherib met the challenge. In 701 B.C.E. he marched to Phoenicia, Philistia and Judah, and succeeded in reestablishing Assyrian supremacy in those regions.

Based on the detailed information in the Hebrew Bible and the Assyrian records it seems that the main course of the campaign can be reconstructed in different ways.¹ The following reconstruction seems to me the most plausible. Sennacherib and his powerful army marched on foot from Nineveh, the capital of Assyria to the Phoenician cities situated along the Mediterranean coast. He received there the tribute of various vassal rulers and continued his advance southwards to Philistia. Sennacherib then defeated in open battle a large Egyptian expeditionary force, and reestablished Assyrian rule in Philistia.

At this point Sennacherib turned against Hezekiah and Judah. Upon arriving in Judah, Sennacherib's attention was focused primarily on the city of Lachish rather than on the capital Jerusalem. Lachish was the most formidable fortress city in Judah, and its conquest and destruction were the paramount task facing Sennacherib when he came to crush the military powers of Hezekiah. In fact, the conquest of Lachish was apparently of singular importance and considered by Sennacherib as a great Assyrian military achievement.

The biblical texts inform us that Sennacherib encamped at Lachish and established his headquarters there during his campaign in Judah (2 Kings 18:14, 17; Isaiah 36:2; 2 Chronicles 32:9). He conquered and destroyed various Judahite cities, and from Lachish he sent a large task force to challenge Hezekiah in Jerusalem. Eventually, as related in both

¹ See M. Cogan's article in this volume, 51–74.

the Hebrew Bible and the Assyrian annals, Jerusalem was spared, and Hezekiah came to terms with Sennacherib. Hezekiah continued to rule Judah—now weakened and reduced in size—as an Assyrian vassal, and paid a heavy tribute to the Assyrian king.

Lachish and Jerusalem were the most important cities which were militarily challenged by Sennacherib during his campaign to Judah. The events that transpired in these cities are documented in the historical chronicles, and their material remains have systematically been studied by archaeologists. In the case of both cities, an analysis of the archaeological data helps in interpreting the written sources and in understanding better the events of 701 B.C.E. For both Lachish and Jerusalem we shall briefly review the topography of the city, the settlement of the time, the Judahite government center and the fortifications as well as the pattern of the Assyrian military challenge—all helping to elucidate the nature of the events in each city and the Assyrian strategic intentions.

LACHISH ON THE EVE OF SENNACHERIB'S CAMPAIGN

Tel Lachish (Tell ed-Duweir), the site of the biblical city, is one of the largest and most prominent ancient mounds in southern Israel. The mound is nearly rectangular, its flat summit covering about 18 acres (Fig. 1). The slopes of the mound are very steep due to the massive fortifications of the ancient city constructed here. Extensive excavations were carried out at Lachish by three expeditions. The first excavations were conducted on a large scale between 1932 and 1938 by a British expedition directed by James Starkey.² In 1966 and 1968 Yohanan Aharoni, at that time on the staff of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, conducted a small excavation, limited in scope and scale, in the 'Solar Shrine' of the Persian period (Fig. 1, location 12).³ Finally, systematic, long-term and large-scale excavations were directed by me on behalf of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University between 1972 and 1993.⁴

² See O. Tufnell et al., *Lachish II: The Fosse Temple* (London, 1940); O. Tufnell, *Lachish III: The Iron Age* (London, 1953); and O. Tufnell et al., *Lachish IV: The Bronze Age* (London, 1958).

³ See Y. Aharoni, *Investigations at Lachish; The Sanctuary and the Residency (Lachish V)*, Publications of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University 4 (Tel Aviv, 1975).

⁴ See D. Ussishkin, ed., *The Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish (1973–1994)*, Monographs of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University 22, vols. 1–5. (Tel Aviv, 2004).

During the earlier part of the ninth century B.C.E., one of the kings of Judah constructed here a formidable fortress city, turning Lachish into the most important city in Judah after Jerusalem. With the absence of inscriptions, it is not known which king built the city and at what date. The fortress city continued to serve as the main royal fortress of the kings of Judah until its destruction by Sennacherib in 701 B.C.E. In archaeological terminology this fortress city is divided into two successive strata, labeled Level IV and Level III.

The nearly rectangular fortress city was protected by two city-walls—an outer revetment surrounding the site at mid-slope (Fig. 1, location 3), and the main city-wall extending along the upper periphery of the site (Fig. 1, location 4). The massive outer revetment was uncovered in its entirety by the British expedition. Only its lower part, built of stones, was preserved. It probably served mainly to support a rampart or glacis which reached the bottom of the main city-wall. This massive wall was built of mud-brick on stone foundations. Being more than 6m (20ft) thick, its top provided sufficient, spacious room for the defenders to stand and fight.

A roadway led from the southwest corner of the site to the ancient city-gate. The gate is the largest, strongest and most massive city-gate known today in the Land of Israel. The city-gate complex included in fact two gates: an outer gatehouse (Fig. 1, location 1), connected to the outer revetment, and an inner gatehouse (Fig. 1, location 2), connected to the main city-wall, and an open, spacious courtyard extending between the two gates.

From the inner gate, a roadway led the way to the huge palace-fort complex which crowned the center of the summit (Fig. 1, location 5). The palace-fort served as the residence of the royal Judahite governor and as the base for the garrison.

The palace-fort is undoubtedly the largest and most massive edifice known today from ancient Judah. Very little is known about the building proper, as only its foundations below floor level have been preserved. The structure of the foundations resembles a big box rising above the surrounding surface. Some parts of the exterior walls of the foundation structure were exposed in the excavations. These walls are about 3m (9ft) thick. The spaces between the foundation walls were filled with earth and the exterior walls were supported by an earth rampart. The floor of the building extended at the top of the foundations. It is clear that a magnificent, monumental edifice rose at the time above these foundations. A large courtyard and two annexed buildings were attached to the palace-fort.

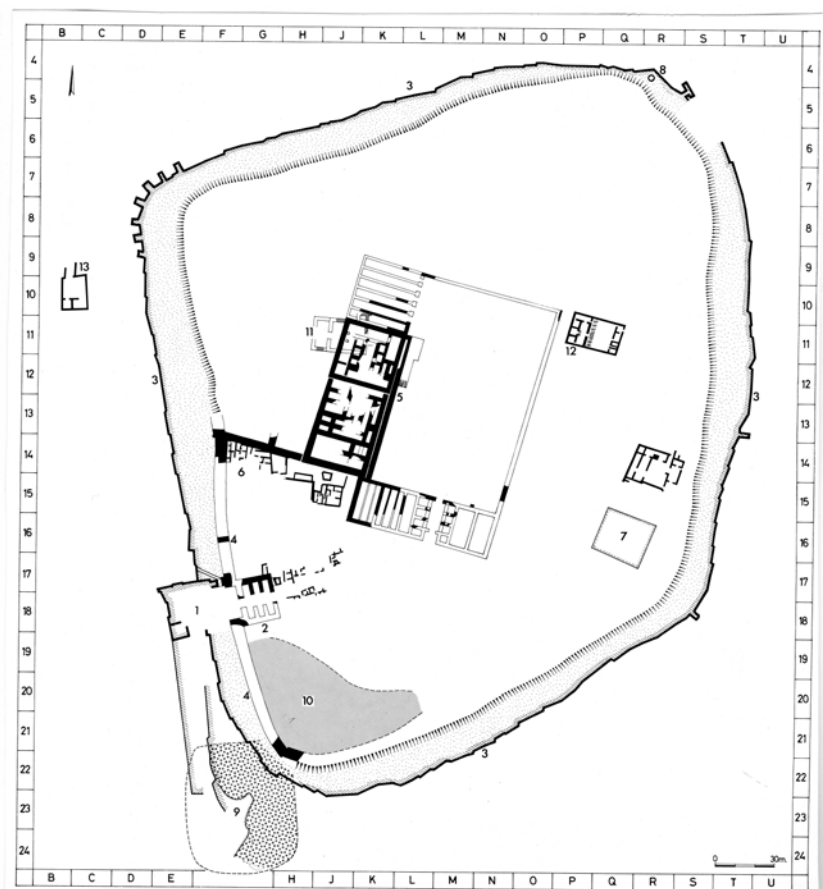


Fig. 1. Tel Lachish: (1) Outer city-gate; (2) Inner city-gate; (3) Outer revetment; (4) Main city-wall; (5) Judean palace-fort complex; (6) Area S—the main excavation trench; (7) The Great Shaft; (8) The well; (9) Assyrian siege-ramp; (10) The counter-ramp; (11) Acropolis Temple; (12) Solar Shrine; (13) Fosse Temple.

It seems that one of the buildings was a stable, and that a unit of chariots was stationed here.

A deep well, which formed the main water source of the settlement, was located near the city-wall in the northeast corner of the site (Fig. 1, location 8). Apparently, it provided sufficient quantities of water during times of peace and siege alike. The upper part of the well was lined by stone blocks and the lower part was hewn in the rock. The well is 44m (132ft) deep and still contained water when the British archaeologists uncovered it.

The city of Level III was completely destroyed by fire in 701 B.C.E. when Lachish was conquered by the Assyrian army. It seems reasonable to assume that following the successful attack on the city, Assyrian soldiers holding burning torches in their hands walked systematically from house to house and set everything on fire. The remains of the destruction have been encountered wherever the excavations reached the public buildings and domestic houses of Level III. The domestic houses were largely built of mud-brick, and the fire was so intense that the sun-dried mud-bricks were baked and colored, and in some cases it can be observed how the walls of the houses collapsed. The floors of the houses were found covered with a layer of ashes, smashed pottery vessels and various household utensils—all buried under the collapse.

THE ASSYRIAN ATTACK ON LACHISH

When Sennacherib arrived at the head of his army at Lachish, he did not have to deliberate at length on where to direct the main thrust of his onslaught on the fortified city. The obvious answer was dictated by the topography of the site and the surrounding terrain. The city was enveloped by deep valleys on nearly all sides, and only at the southwest corner did a topographical saddle connect the mound with the neighboring hillock. The fortifications at this corner were specially strengthened, but nevertheless the southwest corner and the nearby city-gate were the most vulnerable and the most logical points to assault. Hence it is quite natural that the southwest corner bore the brunt of the Assyrian attack (Fig. 1: location 9).

Upon arrival at Lachish, the Assyrian army must have pitched its camp, as was the common practice in Assyrian campaigns. It must have been a large camp, providing facilities for the expeditionary force and accommodating the king's retinue and headquarters (cf. 2 Chronicles 32:9). Assyrian military camps are often portrayed schematically in Assyrian reliefs; they were generally round or elliptical in plan and surrounded by a fence or a wall. In some portrayals a central track is shown extending across the camp, and in others it is divided into four parts by two bisecting tracks. The camp constructed at Lachish is portrayed in a similar fashion in the "Lachish reliefs" to be discussed below.

It seems that the site of the Assyrian camp can be fixed with much certainty. Strategic considerations suggest (a) that the Assyrian camp should have been located not far from the place where the main attack on the

city-walls was to be launched; (b) that it should have been near the city but beyond the range of fire from the city-walls; (c) that it should not have been topographically lower than, or tactically dominated by, the city-walls; and (d) that the site of the camp should have been relatively flat and spacious, sufficiently large to accommodate the expeditionary force and the king's headquarters. The above criteria fit the hillock to the southwest of the mound, where the Israeli village Moshav Lachish is now located. Since this hillock is connected to the mound by the saddle described above, the approach to the city was fairly easy, and the camp was located opposite the place where the main attack was to take place. This hillock is relatively high and its summit broad and flat, rising nearly as high as the city-walls in the southwest corner. Unfortunately, the reconstruction of the Assyrian camp at this place cannot be archaeologically substantiated. Any remains of such a camp, if still preserved, are now obscured by the houses and farms of Moshav Lachish.

The excavations in the southwest corner were started in 1932, when Starkey cleared the face of the outer revetment around the entire mound. Large amounts of stones were uncovered at this spot, and the digging extended down the slope as more stones were removed. As the excavations developed, the saddle area at the foot of the southwest corner and the roadway leading up to the city-gate were cleared of many thousand tons of fallen masonry. Starkey believed that these stones collapsed from above, from the strong fortifications of the southwest corner destroyed during the Assyrian attack. We resumed the excavation of the southwest corner in 1983. It soon became apparent that the stones encountered by Starkey were irregularly heaped against the slope of the mound rather than fallen from above, and hence it became clear that they form the remains of the Assyrian siege-ramp. The excavations at our trench enabled us to reconstruct the Assyrian attack to a large degree.⁵ Although partly removed by Starkey, the siege-ramp laid at the bottom of the slope could still be studied and reconstructed (Fig. 1, location 9). At its bottom, the sloping siege-ramp must have been about 70m (210ft) wide, and about 50m (150ft) long. The core of the siege-ramp was made entirely of heaped large stones which must have been collected in the fields around.

⁵ See D. Ussishkin, "The Assyrian Attack on Lachish: The Archaeological Evidence from the Southwest Corner of the Site," *Tel Aviv* 17 (1990): 53–86; *ibid.*, "Area R and the Assyrian Siege," in *Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish*, ed. Ussishkin, vol. 2, 695–767; and I. Eph'al, "The Assyrian Siege Ramp at Lachish: Military and Lexical Aspects," *Tel Aviv* 11 (1984): 60–70; *ibid.*, *The City Besieged: Siege and its Manifestations in the Ancient Near East* (Leiden, 2009).

We estimated that the stones invested in the construction of the ramp weighed 13,000 to 19,000 tons.

The stones of the upper layer of the siege-ramp were found stuck together by hard mortar. This layer was the mantle of the ramp, added on top of the loose boulders in order to create a compact surface which enabled the attacking soldiers and their siege-machines to move on solid ground. The top of the siege-ramp at the foot of the city-wall was crowned by a horizontal platform; it was made of red soil and was sufficiently wide, thus providing even ground for the Assyrian siege-machines to stand upon. To end the discussion of the siege-ramp, it has to be emphasized that the siege-ramp of Lachish is, first, the earliest siege-ramp so far uncovered in archaeological excavations, and second, the only Assyrian siege-ramp which is known today.

Above the siege-ramp were uncovered the fortifications of the southwest corner which were especially massive and strong at this vulnerable point. The outer revetment formed here a kind of tower; it was built of mud-brick on stone foundations and stood about 6m (18ft) high, preserved nearly to its original height. The tower was topped by a kind of "balcony," protected by a mud-brick parapet, on which the defenders could stand and fight. The main city-wall extended behind and above this tower. It was preserved at this point nearly to its original height—almost 5m (15ft).

Once the defenders of the city saw that the Assyrians were constructing a siege-ramp in preparation for storming the city-walls, they started to lay down a counter-ramp inside the main city-wall (Fig. 1, location 10). They dumped here large amounts of mound debris taken from earlier city-levels which they brought from the northeast part of the mound, and constructed a large ramp, higher than the main city-wall, which provided them with a second, new inner line of defense.

As a result of the construction of the counter-ramp, the southwest corner became the highest part of the mound. The counter-ramp undoubtedly was a very impressive rampart, its apex rising about 3m (10ft) above the top of the main city-wall. Some makeshift fence or wall, perhaps made of wood, must have crowned the rampart, but its remains were not preserved. Our soundings in the core of the counter-ramp revealed accumulation of mound debris containing much earlier pottery, as well as limestone chips, which was dumped in diagonal layers. Significantly, once the Assyrians reached the walls and overcame the defense, they extended the siege-ramp over the ruined city-wall—we called it the "second stage" of the siege-ramp—to enable the attack on the newly-formed, higher defense line on the counter-ramp.



Fig. 2. The Lachish reliefs: A siege machine attacking the city-gate.

Turning to weapons and ammunition used in the battle, I shall first mention the siege-machine, the formidable weapon used by the Assyrians to destroy the defense line on the walls. No fewer than seven siege-machines arrayed for battle on top of the siege-ramp and near the city-gate are portrayed in the Lachish reliefs (Fig. 2). The siege-machine moved on four wheels, partly protected by its body, which was made in six or more separate sections for easy dismantling and reassembling. The ram, made of a wooden beam reinforced with a sharp metal point, was probably suspended from one or more ropes, like a pendulum, and several crouching soldiers must have moved it backwards and forwards. As shown in the relief, the Judahite defenders standing on the wall were throwing flaming torches on the siege-machines. As a counter-measure, Assyrian soldiers

standing on the roof of the siege-machines were pouring water from long ladles on the façade of the machines to prevent them from catching fire. The relief emphasizes the fact that the fighting between the two sides took place at close quarters, something very difficult for us to imagine at the present time when long-range guns and missiles form the main weapons.

Two more unique finds are apparently associated with the attempts of the defenders to destroy the siege-machines. The first one includes twelve perforated stones which were discovered at the foot of both city-walls. These are large perforated stone blocks, with a flat top, straight sides, and an irregular bottom. Each of them is nearly 60cm (2ft) in diameter and weighs about 100 to 200kg. Remains of burnt, relatively thin ropes were found in the holes of two stones.

As indicated by the remains of the ropes, it seems that the perforated stones were tied to ropes and lowered by the defenders from the city-wall. I assume that these stones were lowered from some makeshift installation, such as a thick wooden beam projecting from the line of the wall. The defenders probably used the stones in an attempt to damage the siege-machines and prevent the rams from hitting the wall; they must have dropped the stones on the siege-machines and swung them to and fro like a pendulum.

The second find is a fragment of an iron chain containing four long, narrow links, which was uncovered in the burnt mud-brick debris in front of the outer revetment. The defenders probably used the iron chain in order to unbalance the siege-machines. We assume that they lowered the chain below the point of thrust of the ram in order to catch its shaft when it reached the wall, and then raised the chain.

Some of the ammunition used in the battle was also found. The Lachish reliefs display Assyrian slingers shooting at the walls as well as Judahite defenders shooting sling stones at the attackers, and many sling stones were indeed found in the excavations. These are well-shaped balls of flint or limestone, resembling tennis balls, and weighing about 250 grams or more.

The Lachish reliefs display Assyrian archers supporting the attack on the walls, and indeed close to one thousand arrowheads were discovered in the excavation of the southwest corner.⁶ The arrowheads are not

⁶ See Y. Gottlieb, "The Arrowheads and Selected Aspects of the Siege Battle," in *Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish*, ed. Ussishkin, vol. 4, 1907–69.

uniform in size or shape, and different types are represented. Almost all of them were made of iron, and a few were cast of bronze or carved of bone. In some cases ashes, the remains of the wooden shafts of the arrows, could still be discerned when exposed in the excavation. Most of the arrowheads were uncovered in the burnt mud-brick debris in front of the city-walls. Apparently these arrows were shot by Assyrian archers at the Judahite warriors standing on the “balconies” on top of the walls. The discovery of so many arrowheads in such a small area indicates how concentrated the Assyrian firepower was. Many arrowheads were found bent—an indication that they were shot at the walls with powerful bows from close range.

Unfortunately, the archaeological data are insufficient to answer three basic questions: what was the size of the city’s population at the time of the siege; what was the size of the Assyrian force; and how long did the siege last? Regarding the number of inhabitants and defenders, we can only make a rough estimate. The accepted method for estimating the size of the population in an ancient settlement is by multiplying the settled area by a density coefficient. Adopting the coefficient of 100 people per acre used by Broshi and Finkelstein in their study of the Iron II period⁷ it follows that fewer than 2000 people lived at Lachish at that time. However, this method is meant to estimate the population in a regular settlement, while Lachish was mainly a military, fortified center. Moreover, it is possible that the number of people in Lachish changed on the eve of the siege, either because people from the surrounding region took refuge here, or due to changes being made in the deployment of the Judahite army.

As to the size of the Assyrian army encamped at Lachish, or the size of the force which took part in the attack on the city, no data are available. As to the question of how long the siege of the city lasted, it apparently was a brief siege, as the entire Assyrian campaign lasted for only part of one year. During that period of time, the Assyrian army marched from Assyria to Judah, subjugated Phoenicia and Philistia, fought the Egyptian expeditionary force, conquered part of Judah, and returned home. It seems that most of the time needed for the attack on Lachish was spent in laying the siege-ramp, while the attack on the city-walls was relatively brief. Eph’al tried to calculate the time needed for laying the siege-ramp,

⁷ M. Broshi and I. Finkelstein, “The Population of Palestine in Iron Age II,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 287 (1992): 48.

and suggested that it took twenty-three days.⁸ However, all the basic data needed for the calculations, such as the quantity of stones dumped in the siege-ramp, the distance from where they were taken, the number of porters employed in carrying them, and the delays caused by opposition of the defenders, can only be surmised.

THE LACHISH RELIEFS

A few years after the campaign in the Levant and the subjugation of Judah, Sennacherib constructed his royal palace in Nineveh, known today as the Southwest Palace.⁹ This extravagant edifice, its construction, size, magnificence and beauty are recorded in detail in Sennacherib's inscriptions; he proudly called it the "Palace Without Rival." The palace was largely excavated in 1850 C.E. by Sir Austen Henry Layard on behalf of the British Museum in London. He prepared a plan of the building and uncovered a large number of reliefs cut on alabaster slabs which adorned the walls.

The stone slabs depicting in relief the conquest of Lachish were erected in a special room located at the back of a central ceremonial suite in the palace. It seems that the whole room—and perhaps also the entire suite—was intended to commemorate the conquest of Judah and the victory at Lachish. According to our reconstruction, the "Lachish room" (labeled by Layard "Room XXXVI") was 11.5m (35ft) wide and 5m (15ft) long. Its walls were probably entirely covered by the Lachish reliefs. The stone reliefs on the left side of the room were left by Layard on the site and were thus lost, while the rest of the series, comprising twelve slabs, were transferred by him to the British Museum in London and are currently exhibited there. The length of the preserved series is about 19m (57ft). It seems that the missing part of the series was about 8m (24ft) long. Accordingly, the original series depicting the conquest of Lachish must have been about 27m (81ft) long. This is the longest and most detailed series of Assyrian reliefs depicting the storming and conquest of a single fortress city.

⁸ Eph'al, "Assyrian Siege Ramp": 63–64.

⁹ On Sennacherib's palace and the Lachish reliefs see D. Ussishkin, "The 'Lachish Reliefs' and the City of Lachish," *Israel Exploration Journal* 30 (1980): 174–95; *ibid.*, *The Conquest of Lachish by Sennacherib*. Publications of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University 6 (Tel Aviv, 1982); R. D. Barnett, et al., *Sculptures from the Southwest Palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh* (London, 1998).



Fig. 3. The Lachish reliefs: Judean family deported from the conquered city.

The missing relief slabs were not documented, and the only hint as to their content is Layard's remark that "the reserve consisted of large bodies of horsemen and charioteers."¹⁰ Further along, in consecutive order from left to right, are shown the attacking infantry, the storming of the city, the transfer of booty, punishment of captives, families going into exile, Sennacherib sitting on his throne, the royal tent and chariot, and finally the Assyrian military camp. Significantly, the main scene portraying the storming of the city was placed exactly in the center of the rear wall of the room, opposite the monumental entrance. Given good lighting conditions, anyone who passed through the entrance could see the storming of Lachish facing him as he entered the room.

The city-gate is shown in the center of the scene portraying the assault on the city, being attacked by a siege-machine (Fig. 2). Refugees are shown carrying their belongings and leaving the city through the gate. On both sides of the besieged city are depicted the city-walls. Judahite warriors stand on the walls and on the "balcony" on the roof of the gatehouse and shoot at the attacking Assyrians. The siege-ramp is shown to the right of the gatehouse. As mentioned above, seven siege-machines, supported by

¹⁰ H. R. Layard, *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon* (London, 1853), 149.



Fig. 4. The Lachish reliefs: Sennacherib sitting on his throne facing Lachish.

archers and slingers, are attacking the walls—five on top of the siege-ramp, and two attacking the city-gate, possibly placed on an additional siege-ramp built against the gatehouse. The royal Assyrian relief series usually portray one, and in a few cases two siege-machines attacking the walls of a besieged city. The relief portraying the siege of Lachish is unique in showing no fewer than seven siege-machines taking active part in the battle.

Further to the right are shown Assyrian soldiers carrying booty and captives—probably Hezekiah's officials, being severely punished—and the inhabitants of Lachish leaving the destroyed city. The deported Lachishites take their belongings with them, a tragic picture of entire families forced out of their homes (Fig. 3). The family shown here consists of two women, followed by two girls and a man leading a cart harnessed to two oxen. The cart is laden with household goods and tied-up bundles on which two small children, a boy and a girl, are sitting. The ribs of the oxen are emphasized, possibly to point out that they suffer from malnutrition.

The deportees are distinguishable by their appearance and dress, which were probably typical to the people of Judah at that period. The women wear a long, simple garment. A long shawl covers their head, shoulders

and back, reaching to the bottom of the dress. The men have a short beard and their heads are wound with scarves whose fringed ends hang down. Their garment has a fringed tassel hanging between the legs. Both men and women are barefoot.

The procession of the Assyrian soldiers carrying booty, and that of the deported inhabitants, face the Assyrian king sitting on his throne (Fig. 4). The cuneiform inscription, carved in the background of the relief, identifies the assaulted city as Lachish. The beautiful throne is richly ornamented and is specifically mentioned in the inscription; it was almost certainly brought from Assyria to Lachish for the use of Sennacherib. The throne has very high legs, enabling the sitting monarch to look down from above at the people standing in front of him. The feet of the king rest on a high footstool. Both the throne and the stool were decorated with beautifully carved ivories. Facing the king stands a high official, possibly the commander of the army (*Tartan/turtanu*). He is followed by commanders of lesser rank, and two eunuchs holding fans stand behind the throne. Further to the right are shown the royal tent, identified as Sennacherib's tent by a short cuneiform inscription, the ceremonial chariot of Sennacherib, dismounted cavalymen, the king's battle chariot and finally the Assyrian fortified camp, depicted in the schematic Assyrian style as described above.

Lachish provides us with a unique opportunity of comparing an Assyrian stone relief depicting in detail an ancient city with the site of the same city whose topography and fortifications are well known to us. Although many enemy cities are shown in the reliefs found in various Assyrian royal palaces, only a handful of them can be identified by name, and even fewer can be associated with places of known location and nature. In the case of Lachish, however, not only are we well acquainted with the topographical setting, but we have identified the city level that was destroyed by the Assyrians and uncovered the remains of the attack on that city.

It seems to me, in following the initial study of Richard Barnett,¹¹ that the Lachish relief series portrays the city from one particular spot. In the relief, the various features of the city are depicted according to the usual rigid and schematic conventions of the Assyrian artists, but they are shown in a certain perspective, roughly maintaining the proportions and relationships of the various elements as they would appear to an onlooker

¹¹ See R. D. Barnett, "The Siege of Lachish," *Israel Exploration Journal* 8 (1958): 161–64.

standing at one specific point.¹² In my view the particular vantage point from which Lachish is shown in the relief is located southwest of the mound, just in front of the presumed site of the Assyrian camp, between it and the city, and facing the main point of attack. I believe that this is the very spot where Sennacherib, the supreme commander, sat on his beautiful throne, conducted the battle, and later reviewed the booty bearers and the deportees (Fig. 4). Consequently, I believe that the Lachish reliefs present the besieged city as seen through the eyes of Sennacherib himself at his command post.

JERUSALEM ON THE EVE OF SENNACHERIB'S CAMPAIGN

The available data enable us to draw a clear picture of the size and character of Jerusalem in the later part of the eighth century B.C.E. (Fig. 5). It seems clear that by that time Jerusalem extended over the Southeast Hill, that is the City of David, as well as over the Southwest Hill, where the *Mishneh* quarter was built, thus becoming the largest city in Judah. Jerusalem now covered an area of about 110 acres, and it is estimated that several thousand people lived there. The city was heavily fortified, and segments of its massive stone-built, free-standing walls and revetments have been uncovered along the eastern slope of the City of David by Kathleen Kenyon, Yigal Shiloh, and Ronny Reich and Eli Shukron, as well as further to the north in the area of the Ophel by Eilat Mazar.¹³ In the Southwest Hill segments of the fortifications were uncovered in the Jewish Quarter by Nachman Avigad, possibly also in Hagai Street by Amos

¹² For different views, see R. Jacoby, "The Representation and Identification of Cities on Assyrian Reliefs," *Israel Exploration Journal* 41 (1991): 112–31; and C. Uehlinger, "Clio in a World of Pictures—Another Look at the Lachish Reliefs from Sennacherib's Southwest Palace at Nineveh," pp. 221–305 in *Shut Up like a Bird in a Cage: The Invasion of Sennacherib in 701 B.C.E.*, ed. L. L. Grabbe, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 363 (Sheffield, 2003).

¹³ M. L. Steiner, *Excavations by Kathleen M. Kenyon in Jerusalem 1961–1967. Volume 3: The Settlement in the Bronze and Iron Ages*. Copenhagen International Series 9 (London, 2001), 89–92; Y. Shiloh, *Excavations at the City of David I: 1978–1982; Interim Report of the First Five Seasons*, Qedem 19 (Jerusalem, 1984), 8–10, 28, and figs. 30, 33; R. Reich, *Excavating the City of David; Where Jerusalem's History Began*, (Jerusalem, 2011); R. Reich and E. Shukron, "Jerusalem, City of David," *Hadashot Arkheologiot: Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 112 (2000): 82*–83*; *ibid.*, "The Date of City–Wall 501 in Jerusalem," *Tel Aviv* 35 (2008): 114–22; E. Mazar and B. Mazar, *Excavations in the South of the Temple Mount; The Ophel of Biblical Jerusalem*, Qedem 29 (Jerusalem, 1989), 1–48; E. Mazar, *Discovering the Solomonic Wall in Jerusalem; A Remarkable Archaeological Adventure*, (Jerusalem, 2011).

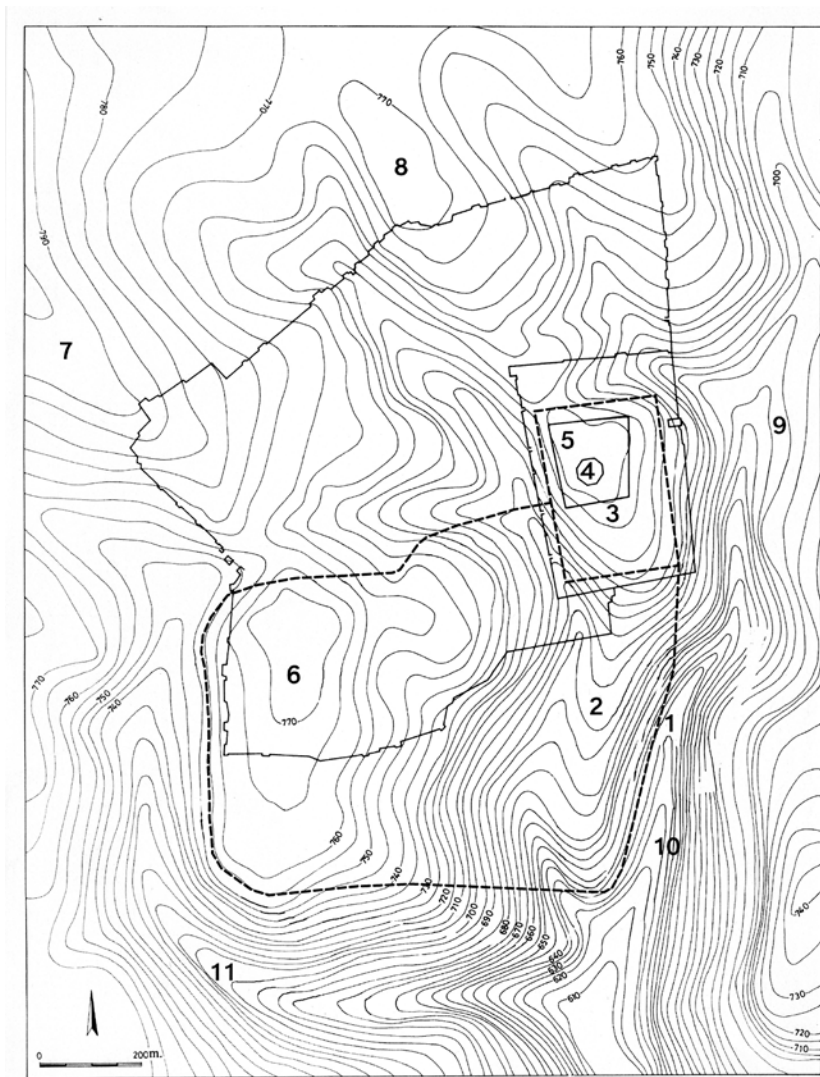


Fig. 5. Jerusalem on the eve of Sennacherib's campaign—a schematic reconstruction: (1) Spring Gihon; (2) Southeast Hill or City of David; (3) Temple Mount; (4) Dome of the Rock where the temple stood; (5) Assumed place of the royal palace; (6) Southwest Hill; (7) Northwest Hill; (8) Northeast Hill—the site of the Camp of the Assyrians; (9) Mount of Olives; (10) Kidron Valley; (11) Hinnom Valley.

Kloner and in the Ottoman citadel near Jaffa Gate by Hillel Geva and Amit Re'em.¹⁴ The Temple Mount formed an integral part of the metropolis and served as the royal acropolis or compound of the kings of Judah. It can be safely assumed that the Temple Mount was surrounded by a wall which was incorporated in the city's fortifications. The acropolis was situated at the edge of the city, and therefore part of its surrounding wall formed a segment of the city-wall, while another part separated the Temple Mount from the City of David and from the *Mishneh* quarter on the Southwest Hill.

The famous Gihon Spring, located on the eastern slope of the City of David (Fig. 5, location 1), which issued large amounts of water all the year round, was the main source of water for ancient Jerusalem since the fourth millennium B.C.E. Various installations, pools, channels and approach tunnels were constructed in the area of the spring.¹⁵ They date to different periods, both earlier and later, including the reign of Hezekiah (see 2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chronicles 32:30). Significantly, since the first half of the second millennium the spring was protected by massive fortifications. As the city grew in size during the eighth century B.C.E. additional arrangements for providing water to the growing population must have been made. It seems that new water systems were constructed in the northern parts of the city. The "conduit of the Upper Pool" (2 Kings 18:17; Isaiah 36:2), where the negotiations with the Assyrian ministers took place (see below), almost certainly was one of those water systems. The rock-cut channel known as the "Hasmonean channel," which led water to the Temple Mount, probably also dates to this period.¹⁶

¹⁴ N. Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem*, (Nashville, TN, 1983), 46–60; N. Avigad and H. Geva, "Iron Age Strata 9–7," pp. 44–82 in *Jewish Quarter Excavations in the Old City of Jerusalem. Vol. I: Architecture and Stratigraphy: Areas A, W and X-2; Final Report*, ed. H. Geva (Jerusalem, 2000); *ibid.*, "Area W—Stratigraphy and Architecture," pp. 131–97 in *ibid.*; A. Kloner, "Rehov Hagay," *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 3 (1984): 57–59; H. Geva, "The Western Boundary of Jerusalem at the End of the Monarchy," *Israel Exploration Journal* 29 (1979): 84–91; *ibid.*, "Excavations in the Citadel of Jerusalem, 1979–1980; Preliminary report," *Israel Exploration Journal* 33 (1983): 56–58; and A. Re'em, "First Temple Period Fortifications and Herod's Palace in the Kishle Compound," *Qadmoniot* 43 (no. 140; 2010): 96–101 (in Hebrew).

¹⁵ See P. J. King and L. E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, (Louisville, KY, 2001), 213–23; Reich, *Excavating the City of David*.

¹⁶ D. Ussishkin, "The Water Systems of Jerusalem during Hezekiah's Reign," pp. 289–307 in *Meilsteinen; Festgabe für Herbert Donner zum 16. Februar 1995*, ed. M. Weippert and S. Timm. *Ägypten und Altes Testament* 30 (Wiesbaden, 1995), 294.

The Temple Mount was surrounded on three sides by a steep slope, but on the northwest side it was connected by a topographical saddle to the hill running farther to the northwest, known as the Northeast Hill (Fig. 5, location 8). This saddle constituted the topographical weak point in the defense of the Temple Mount. Charles Wilson and Charles Warren surveyed the exposed rock surface in this area in 1864, and concluded that a deep ditch was cut at this point into the rock.¹⁷ In following, Magnus Ottosson and Dag Oredsson suggested that a moat was cut in the rock across the saddle in the First Temple period.¹⁸

According to the biblical text, the royal acropolis on the Temple Mount contained two major buildings—the royal palace and the temple. At the time of its construction the royal palace was almost certainly the main edifice of the compound, being much larger in size than the temple. In later periods, however, the temple gained in importance, while the royal palace was nearly forgotten. Assuming that the temple stood on the summit of the hill, exactly at the spot where the Dome of the Rock is presently situated (Fig. 5, location 4), all scholars reconstruct the royal palace to the south of the temple, where the ground is lower.¹⁹ This reconstruction is based on several indications in the biblical text that one had to ascend from the palace to the temple (e.g., 2 Kings 22:3–4; Jeremiah 26:10, 36:10–12), and—more importantly—on the references to the royal palace in the descriptions of the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s city-wall in Nehemiah 3:25–29; 12:37. The descriptions of Nehemiah’s wall and its relationship to the palace, however, can be interpreted in different ways.²⁰

In my view, however, it is reasonable to assume that the palace stood on the lower ground to the north of the temple, an area spacious enough

¹⁷ C. Wilson and C. Warren, *The Recovery of Jerusalem; A Narrative of Exploration and Discovery in the City and the Holy Land* (London, 1871), 13.

¹⁸ M. Ottosson, “Topography and City Planning with Special Reference to Jerusalem,” *Tidsskrift for Teologi og Kirke* 4 (1989): 263–70; D. Oredsson, *Moats in Ancient Palestine*. Old Testament Series 48 (Stockholm, 2000), 92–95.

¹⁹ E.g., K. Galling, *Biblisches Reallexikon* (Tübingen, 1937), 411; J. Simons, *Jerusalem in the Old Testament; Researches and Theories*, (Leiden, 1952), 436; G. J. Wightman, *The Walls of Jerusalem; From the Canaanites to the Mamluks*. Mediterranean Archaeology Supplement 4 (Sydney, 1993), 30–31, fig. 7.

²⁰ See also D. Ussishkin, “On Nehemiah’s City Wall and the Size of Jerusalem during the Persian Period: An Archaeologist’s View,” in *New Perspectives on Ezra–Nehemiah; History and Historiography, Text, Literature, and Interpretation*, ed. I. Kalimi (Winona Lake, IN, 2012), 118–120.

to accommodate such a large complex (Fig. 5, location 5). If located to the north of the temple, the royal palace of Jerusalem would have been ideally situated: the royal acropolis of Jerusalem was at the northeastern edge of the city and the palace at the northern end of the acropolis, adjacent to the edge of the fortified city. This way the palace would have been more secure and isolated, while if located to the south of the temple everybody approaching the temple from the direction of the City of David would have had to pass near it.

JERUSALEM: THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE ASSYRIAN SIEGE

The government of Hezekiah made thorough preparations to meet the Assyrian threat to Jerusalem. We are informed that buildings were demolished in the city in order to provide building stones for strengthening the fortifications (Isaiah 22:10; 2 Chronicles 32:5). The water sources situated outside the city-wall were blocked in order to prevent their possible use by the Assyrian invaders (Isaiah 22:9–11; 2 Chronicles 32:2–4). The many *lmlk*-stamped storage jar handles uncovered in Jerusalem apparently indicate that a considerable number of *lmlk* storage jars containing provisions, probably oil and wine, were stored in the city as part of the preparations for the siege.²¹

The famous Siloam Tunnel has briefly to be discussed here.²² This channel was cut in the rock beneath the City of David, carrying the water of the Gihon Spring to the southern end of the settlement. Today it leads the water to the Siloam Pool which dates to the Byzantine period, ca. to the fifth century C.E., but it is not clear where exactly the original pool built at the end of the tunnel was situated. The famous Siloam Inscription—the largest ancient Hebrew monumental inscription known to date—was carved inside the tunnel, in a hidden, dark spot. It is unclear why the builders chose this particular spot where the inscription would be totally hidden from view. The inscription discusses the construction of the tunnel but—surprisingly—does not mention the name of the king of Judah responsible for it.

²¹ On the *lmlk* stamped storage jars, see discussion below.

²² See, e.g., Simons, *Jerusalem in the Old Testament*, 178–88; Ussishkin, “Water Systems of Jerusalem,” 294–303; Reich, *Excavating the City of David*.

Ever since the discovery of the Siloam Tunnel and its inscription in the nineteenth century C.E., both have been attributed by many scholars to Hezekiah, and associated with the preparations to meet the Assyrian attack on Jerusalem.²³ This theory has been based on the references in the Old Testament which described the preparations to meet the Assyrian attack (see above). The Siloam Tunnel could indeed have been constructed during the long reign of Hezekiah (see 2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chronicles 32:30), but definitely not as part of the preparations for the siege which aimed at blocking the water sources situated outside the perimeter of the settlement: the Gihon Spring was apparently incorporated at that time in the fortifications of the city,²⁴ while the pool at the end of the tunnel could have well been located outside the line of the wall.²⁵

JERUSALEM: THE ASSYRIAN CHALLENGE

After the storming and destruction of Lachish, Sennacherib remained encamped near the ruined fortress city (2 Kings 18:17 // Isaiah 36:2; 2 Chronicles 32:9). From there, he sent a strong task force to Jerusalem—“a great army” as described in 2 Kings 18:17 (// Isaiah 36:2). It was headed by three top officials—the Tartan, Rab-saris and Rab-shakeh (the commander of the army, the chief eunuch, and the chief officer)—who conducted the negotiations with Hezekiah and came to terms with him. Hezekiah—under heavy pressure—agreed to pay a large tribute and became a vassal of the Assyrian king. The story of these events and the salvation of Jerusalem have been told in detail in both the Assyrian inscriptions and the Hebrew Bible (2 Kings 18–19 // Isaiah 36–37; 2 Chronicles 32).

It seems clear that it was a large army that challenged Hezekiah in his capital. Sennacherib boasted that “He himself I shut up like a caged bird within Jerusalem, his royal city. I put watch-posts strictly around it and turned back to his disaster any who went out of its city-gate.”²⁶ Significantly, the archaeological data agree with the written sources that the

²³ See, e.g., Simons, *Jerusalem in the Old Testament*, 186; G. E. Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia, 1962), 172; H. Shanks, *Jerusalem: An Archaeological Biography* (New York, 1995), 83–85; I. Kalimi, “Placing the Chronicler in his own Historical Context: A Closer Examination,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 68 (2009): 179–92, esp. 1987.

²⁴ See King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 213 and ill. 98, 102.

²⁵ See Ussishkin “Water Systems of Jerusalem,” 294–303.

²⁶ D. W. Thomas, ed., *Documents from Old Testament Times* (London, 1958), 67 (trans. D. J. Wiseman).

Assyrian army did not lay a siege to Jerusalem, and that the city was not attacked, conquered or destroyed.²⁷

Finally, the location of the Assyrian camp should be discussed in brief. In *The Jewish War* describing the events of the Roman siege of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., Flavius Josephus twice refers to a place in Jerusalem called the Camp of the Assyrians. First, we are informed (5.303) that after capturing the first city-wall (now known as the 'Third Wall') and the 'New Town' (i.e., Bezetha) defended by it, Titus shifted his camp to the site called the Camp of the Assyrians. We are further informed (5.504–507) that the siege-wall which Titus built around the city after conquering the 'New Town' passed by the Camp of the Assyrians. From the detailed description of the siege-wall in this passage, it can be inferred that the "camp" was located on the Northeast Hill, to the northwest of the Temple Mount, in the general area where the Rockefeller Museum presently stands (Fig. 5, location 8). We can safely assume that this place marks the very place where the Assyrian task force sent by Sennacherib to Jerusalem in 701 B.C.E. pitched its camp.²⁸ As mentioned above, a schematic view of such a camp is portrayed in the Lachish reliefs. Apparently, the appearance of the Assyrian army at the gates of Jerusalem left a strong impact on the population of the city, and hence the site of the camp retained its name for nearly eight hundred years.

From the Assyrian point of view, the Northeast Hill was the optimal place for pitching the camp. It faced the Temple Mount and the royal palace; it was situated on high ground, beyond the range of fire of the archers standing on the city-wall; and the site was sufficiently spacious to accommodate the camp for the large army and its logistics. The presence of the Assyrian army at this place directly threatened the center of the Judahite government—the royal compound, and in particular the royal palace located, as assumed above, on its northern side.

Probably, it was in or near this topographical saddle and the assumed rock-cut moat, in the place known as the "conduit of the Upper Pool on the causeway leading to the Fuller's Field" (2 Kings 18:17 // Isaiah 36:2), that the Rab-shakeh and the other Assyrian emissaries stood within earshot of those standing on the city-wall (and possibly also on the roof of the royal palace), and negotiated with the ministers of the King of Judah.

²⁷ See also A. van der Kooij, "Das assyrische Heer vor den Mauern Jerusalems im Jahr 701 v. Chr.," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palaestina-Vereins* 102 (1986): 93–109.

²⁸ D. Ussishkin, "The Camp of the Assyrians' in Jerusalem," *Israel Exploration Journal* 29 (1979): 137–42; *ibid.*, "Water Systems of Jerusalem," 290–92.

We are not informed where the Judahite officials stood during the negotiations; possibly they remained standing on top of the city-wall, or they may have met the Assyrian officials outside the wall near the topographical saddle.

THE POTTERY OF LACHISH III AND THE *LMLK* STORAGE JARS

An impressive assemblage of domestic pottery vessels was retrieved in the houses of Level III at Lachish.²⁹ Many vessels could be restored from the fragments dispersed on the floors of the houses and sealed by the destruction debris. Sometimes the vessels still retained their shape though broken by the debris falling on them, thus making the restoration work much easier. The large pottery assemblage was in use for a short period of time immediately before the destruction of the city in 701 B.C.E. The well-dated assemblage, known as the Lachish III pottery assemblage therefore serves as a reliable typological indicator for dating other contemporary sites in Judah which contained similar pottery, in particular sites destroyed as well in 701 B.C.E.³⁰

One group of pottery vessels—the royal Judahite or *lmlk* storage jars—is of special importance with regard to the Assyrian invasion.³¹ These are large storage jars, uniform in shape and size, which were apparently manufactured in a single production center located somewhere in the region of the Shephelah (Fig. 6a). The handles of many storage jars were stamped. The stamps included a four-winged or a two-winged emblem—apparently royal Judahite emblems—and an inscription in ancient Hebrew characters (Fig. 6b). They read “*lmlk*” (that is, “belonging to the king”) followed by the name of one of four towns in Judah—Hebron, Sochoh, Ziph, or *mmšt*. These towns must have been associated with the manufacture or distribution of the storage-jars, or with the produce stored in them, probably oil or wine. Some of the storage jars were also stamped with a ‘private’ stamp bearing the name of the potter or that of an official (Fig. 6c).

²⁹ See Tufnell *Lachish III*, 257–330; O. Zimhoni, “The Pottery of Levels III and II,” in *Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish*, ed. Ussishkin, vol. 4, 1789–1899.

³⁰ See M. Aharoni and Y. Aharoni, “The Stratification of Judahite Sites in the 8th and 7th Centuries B.C.E.,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 224 (1976): 73–90.

³¹ See summaries in A. G. Vaughn, *Theology, History, and Archaeology in the Chronicler’s Account of Hezekiah*. (Atlanta, 1999); G. Barkay and A. G. Vaughn, “The Royal and Official Seal Impressions from Lachish,” in *Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish*, ed. Ussishkin, vol. 4, 2148–73; D. Ussishkin, “The Royal Judean Storage Jars and Seal Impressions from the Renewed Excavations,” in *ibid.*, 2133–47.



Fig. 6a



Fig. 6b



Fig. 6c

Fig. 6. Royal Judean or *mlk* storage jars: (a) Restored storage jars; (b) *mlk hbrn* seal impression; (c) A private seal impression “Meshulam son of Ahimelekh.”

The *lmlk* storage jars are known from various sites in Judah, but mainly from Lachish and Jerusalem, where hundreds of stamped handles have been recovered. At Lachish, complete storage jars impressed with both four-winged and two-winged stamps have been found in the clear stratigraphical context of Level III. We have to conclude that royal storage jars of all types were being used at one and the same time during the reign of Hezekiah, shortly before the Assyrian campaign.³² This conclusion accords well with the suggestion of Nadav Na'aman³³ that the phenomenon of the *lmlk*-stamped storage jars was directly associated with Hezekiah's preparations to meet the imminent Assyrian threat and to lay in supplies for the anticipated siege of the Judahite cities.

JUDAH: THE IMPACT OF SENNACHERIB'S CAMPAIGN

The kingdom of Judah suffered severely from the Assyrian campaign. Sennacherib relates in his annals that "forty-six . . . strong walled towns and innumerable smaller villages in their neighborhood I besieged and conquered. . . . I made to come out from them 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, innumerable horses, mules, donkeys, camels, large and small cattle, and counted them as the spoils of war."³⁴ Two brief Assyrian monumental inscriptions mention that Sennacherib "laid waste the wide district of Judah."³⁵ This is corroborated by the Hebrew Bible informing us that Sennacherib came up "against all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them" (2 Kings 18:13 // Isaiah 36:1). Only Lachish, Jerusalem and Libnah (possibly Tel Burna, located northwest of Lachish) are mentioned by name in the descriptions of the campaign, and a few more towns are referred to by the prophet Micah, all located in the foothills of the western

³² For a different opinion see recently O. Lipschits, O. Sergi, and I. Koch, "Royal Judaite Jar Handles: Reconsidering the Chronology of the *lmlk* Stamp Impressions," *Tel Aviv* 37 (2010): 3–32; and *ibid.*, "Judahite Stamped and Incised Jar Handles: A Tool for Studying the History of Late Monarchic Judah," *Tel Aviv* 38 (2011): 5–41; cf. D. Ussishkin, "The Dating of the *lmlk* Storage Jars and its Implications: Rejoinder to Lipschits, Sergi and Koch," *Tel Aviv* 38 (2011): 220–40.

³³ N. Na'aman, "Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah and the Date of the *LMLK* Stamps," *Vetus Testamentum* 29 (1979): 61–86.

³⁴ Thomas, *Documents*, 67.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

districts of Judah. Finally, large parts of the Shephelah were apparently handed over by Sennacherib to the hegemony of the Philistine rulers: “[Hezekiah’s] towns which I had despoiled I cut off from his land, giving them to Mitinti, king of Ashdod, Padi, king of Ekron, and Sillibel, king of Gaza, and so reduced his land.”³⁶ The vanquished and abandoned city of Lachish was probably one of those “towns.”

Turning to the archaeological evidence, it appears that the Shephelah of Judah and the northern Negev are the regions which were mostly hit in Sennacherib’s campaign. The intensive archaeological survey carried out in the Shephelah by Yehuda Dagan indicated a drastic reduction in the number of settlements from the eighth to the seventh centuries B.C.E.³⁷ Dagan surveyed 289 sites covering about 1,040 acres which were settled in the Iron II A–B period (ninth–eighth centuries B.C.E.), but only eighty-five sites covering about 345 acres settled in the Iron II C period (seventh–sixth centuries B.C.E.)—this being a clear indication of the drastic changes in the settlement pattern caused by the Assyrian invasion.

The excavations carried out at the sites of several large settlements indicate that these settlements were completely destroyed at the end of the eighth century and then abandoned (or nearly abandoned) for a time. In all these settlements, the destruction is dated by the presence of Lachish Level III type pottery, including *mlk* stamped storage jars handles. In the Shephelah proper, I shall mention Lachish, Tell Beit Mirsim,³⁸ Beth Shemesh, recently excavated afresh by Shlomo Bunimovitz and Zvi Lederman,³⁹ Tel ‘Eton, possibly ancient Makedah, currently being excavated by Abraham Faust,⁴⁰ and Tel Burna, recently being excavated

³⁶ Ibid., 67.

³⁷ Y. Dagan, “Results of the Survey: Settlement Patterns in the Lachish Region,” in *Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish*, ed. Ussishkin, vol. 5, 2680–82.

³⁸ W. F. Albright, *The Excavation of Tell Beit Mirsim*. Vol. III: *The Iron Age*. Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research 21–22 (New Haven, CT, 1943); for the date of the final destruction see O. Zimhoni, “The Iron Age Pottery of Tel ‘Eton and its Relation to the Lachish, Tell Beit Mirsim and Arad Assemblages,” *Tel Aviv* 12 (1985): 82–84.

³⁹ See e.g., S. Bunimovitz and Z. Lederman, “Close Yet Apart: Diverse Cultural Dynamics at Iron Age Beth–Shemesh and Lachish,” in *The Fire Signals of Lachish; Studies in the Archaeology and History of Israel in the Late Bronze Age, Iron Age, and Persian Period in Honor of David Ussishkin*, ed. I. Finkelstein and N. Na‘aman (Winona Lake, IN, 2011), 48.

⁴⁰ See A. Faust, “Tel ‘Eton Excavations (2006–2009); A Preliminary report,” *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 143 (2011): 198–224; H. Katz and A. Faust, “The Assyrian Destruction Layer at Tel ‘Eton,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 62 (2012): 22–53.

by Itzhaq Shai and Joe Uziel.⁴¹ On the borders of Philistia, Tel Batash (identified with Timna, mentioned in the Assyrian record of the campaign), was also destroyed by Sennacherib.⁴² In the northern and eastern Negev, Tel Halif,⁴³ Tel Beer-sheba,⁴⁴ Tel 'Ira⁴⁵ and the fortress of Arad,⁴⁶ were all apparently destroyed in 701 B.C.E.

The situation is less clear in the region of the Judean hills and the eastern fringes of the country. In these regions, the impact of the Assyrian campaign was less destructive. The main settlements which were settled in the eighth century were settled as well in the seventh century B.C.E. and the archaeological data is insufficient to establish whether these settlements suffered at the hand of the Assyrians. I shall mention Jerusalem, Ramat Raḥel,⁴⁷ Tell en-Naṣbeh (identified with Mizpah),⁴⁸ and Gibeon.⁴⁹ Evidence for destruction in 701 B.C.E. was possibly detected in Tell Rumeidah, identified with Hebron,⁵⁰ and Jericho in the Jordan Valley.⁵¹

⁴¹ See I. Shai, et al., "The Fortifications at Tel Burna: Date, Function and Meaning," *Israel Exploration Journal* 62 (2012): 141–57.

⁴² See A. Mazar and N. Panitz–Cohen, *Tinnah (Tel Batash) II: The Finds from the First Millennium B.C.E.* Qedem 42 (Jerusalem, 2001), 279–81.

⁴³ See J. D. Seger, "Halif, Tel," in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. E. Stern, vol. 2. (Jerusalem, 1993), 558.

⁴⁴ See Y. Aharoni, *Beer–Sheba I; Excavations at Tel Beer–Sheba; 1969–1971 Seasons*. Publications of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University 2 (Tel Aviv, 1973), 5–7, 107.

⁴⁵ See L. Singer–Avitz, "'Busayra Painted Ware' at Tel Beersheba," *Tel Aviv* 31 (2004): 84–86.

⁴⁶ See Z. Herzog, "The Fortress Mound at Tel Arad: An Interim Report," *Tel Aviv* 29 (2002): 14, 98.

⁴⁷ See O. Lipschits, et al., "Paradise and Oblivion: Unraveling the Riddles of Ramat Raḥel," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 74 (2011): 2–49.

⁴⁸ See C. C. McCown, *Tell en–Naṣbeh; Excavated under the Direction of the Late William Frederic Badè. I: Archaeological and Historical Results* (Berkeley, 1947); J. R. Zorn, *Tell en–Naṣbeh: A Re-evaluation of the Architecture and Stratigraphy of the Early Bronze Age, Iron Age, and Later Periods* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, 1993).

⁴⁹ See J. B. Pritchard, *Hebrew Inscriptions and Stamps from Gibeon* (Philadelphia, 1959).

⁵⁰ See I. Eisenberg and A. Nagorski, "Tel Ḥevron (Er–Rumeidi)," *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 114 (2002): 91*–92*.

⁵¹ See E. Sellin and C. Watzinger, *Jericho: Die Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen*. Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichung der Deutschen Orient–Gesellschaft 22. (1913; new edition Osnabrück, 1973), 72–82, 136–59; H. Weippert and M. Weippert, "Jericho in der Eisenzeit," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina–Vereins* 92 (1976): 105–147; K. M. Kenyon, *Excavations at Jericho. III: The Architecture and Stratigraphy of the Tell* (London, 1981), 111–13, 171–73, 219.

The Lachish reliefs provide the only indication about the tragic fate of the population of the conquered and abandoned settlements—defined in the Assyrian records as “the spoils of war.” Some men, probably Hezekiah’s officials, were executed, but most of them were allowed to leave with their families and belongings. Some Judahite deportees may have even reached Nineveh: as mentioned above, a few years after the 701 B.C.E. campaign, Sennacherib constructed his new royal palace in Nineveh. A series of reliefs found by Layard in the palace depicts some aspects of its construction. In two scenes we see captives moving in rows, whether hauling stones or dragging a sculpture. The captives of each row are distinctly dressed, indicating that they represent different ethnic groups wearing the attire of their country of origin. The slaves of one row are very similar in appearance to the men of Lachish as depicted in the Lachish reliefs. They differ from the men of Lachish only by wearing leggings and boots, whereas just after their surrender the latter were seen barefoot. Most likely these are the men of Judah who were deported to Nineveh and were forced to hard labor in the construction of the royal palace.⁵²

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summarizing the evidence from Lachish and Jerusalem, it appears that both cities were heavily fortified and formed pivotal strongholds of a rebellious Judah. In each of them, Sennacherib settled his business in a different fashion, and it can be assumed that he acted according to a pre-conceived plan. The analysis and interpretation of the archaeological data help us to reconstruct the overall intentions and plans of the Assyrian monarch.

The events at Lachish and Jerusalem can be explained in the following way. It seems that Sennacherib, given the choice, did not intend to conquer Jerusalem by force. It seems that he intended to bring the rebellion to an end, to crush Hezekiah’s military force, to reduce the kingdom of Judah to poverty, and to turn Hezekiah into a loyal Assyrian vassal. It was

⁵² See Ussishkin, *Conquest of Lachish*, 127–30; *Sculptures from the Southwest Palace*, No. 147a.

preferable to come to terms with the king of Judah and turn him into an Assyrian vassal than to conquer and destroy Jerusalem and annex Judah to Assyria as a province.

Acting according to this general scheme upon entering Judah, Sennacherib turned first to Lachish, rather than to the capital, Jerusalem. Lachish was the main military stronghold of Hezekiah, the leader of the rebellion. Sennacherib was determined to conquer and destroy Lachish before turning to deal with Hezekiah in his capital. By doing so, he intended to achieve two aims: first, to cripple Hezekiah's ability to fight; and second, to demonstrate just how terrible and mighty was the military power of Assyria. Both these aims were fully achieved. Sennacherib encamped at Lachish and—sitting on his ivory throne as shown in the relief—personally directed the attack. Lachish was conquered and utterly destroyed by fire. As portrayed in the relief, the Judahite officials were severely punished. The entire population was driven out, and the city was abandoned.

The conquest of Lachish was a remarkable military achievement of the young Assyrian monarch. The fortifications of the city were massive and strong, and a huge siege ramp had to be laid before the assault on the walls could start. A strong Judean garrison was stationed there, and it apparently included also a unit of chariots. It appears that the conquest of Lachish was considered in Assyrian eyes as an unusually important and difficult military achievement, so that when a few years later Sennacherib built a new royal palace at Nineveh, he dedicated there a special room—centrally placed—for immortalizing the conquest of Lachish. To judge by the way the relief series was exhibited, Sennacherib considered the conquest of Lachish to be his most important military achievement in the period prior to the construction of the palace.

The conquest and destruction of Lachish—followed by the conquest and destruction of many other settlements in the Shephelah—must have been a terrible military and moral blow inflicted on Hezekiah. This was a vivid example of the determination and ability of Sennacherib and the Assyrian army. The implications for the continuation of the military struggle were clearly understood in Jerusalem and Sennacherib must have been aware of it. Sennacherib himself remained in Lachish and sent a mighty task force to Jerusalem. The appearance of the task force oppo-

site the walls and the royal palace at a convenient point for attacking the city, and the harsh and aggressive speech of the Assyrian emissaries, were sufficient to convince Hezekiah that he should come to terms with Sennacherib, and to bring the insurrection to an end. The Assyrian task force finally left Jerusalem, and only the name of the hill, "The Camp of the Assyrians," remained.

BEYOND THE BROKEN REED: KUSHITE INTERVENTION AND THE
LIMITS OF *L'HISTOIRE ÉVÉNEMENTIELLE*

Jeremy Pope

Too often, the apparent sudden arrival of Assyrian troops . . . [and] intense warfare between Egypt, Kush (the two sometimes allied, sometimes opposed), and Assyria has not been given a proper perspective.

—Anthony J. Spalinger¹

Le temps court est la plus capricieuse, la plus trompeuse des durées.

—Fernand Braudel²

INTRODUCTION

The summons of Egypt's 25th Dynasty to Judah's defense is most easily situated within a sequence of proximate events involving heads of state as the principal actors: coalition, rebellion, extradition, and battle. To a large extent, this context is dictated by the Deuteronomistic History and the Neo-Assyrian royal records, which feature the Kushite pharaohs as metonyms for Egypt within an episodic narrative. Yet the view from northeast Africa is strangely incongruous: the otherwise detailed royal and private inscriptions of the 25th Dynasty scarcely mention the events and personages of the Levant and Assyria, save in the most oblique and formulaic language. As a result, the objectives of the Kushite kings and their strategy of engagement in the Near East remain obscure, prompting much casual speculation among historians. Various motives have been attributed to the pharaohs of the 25th Dynasty, ranging from aggressive expansionism, rash instigation, and commercial interest, to border defense, geopolitical naïveté, sibling one-upmanship, and even caprice.

The essay that follows is part historical proposal, part historiographical argument. It will be proposed that Kushite foreign policy was motivated primarily by commercial interest in prestige goods that were obtained as

¹ Anthony J. Spalinger, "The Foreign Policy of Egypt Preceding the Assyrian Conquest," *CdE* 53 (1978): 22.

² Fernand Braudel, "Histoire et Sciences sociales: La longue durée," *Annales: Histoire, Science Sociales* 13, no. 4 (1958): 728.

tribute from Levantine client states—particularly “Asiatic copper” (*hm.t Št.t*), and cedar (š), whose import served to bolster the 25th Dynasty’s standing in the fragmented political landscape of Egypt. Likewise in the service of dynastic legitimacy, military force was deployed by the Kushite kings in the Sinai and the Levant for the purposes of border defense and peripheral raiding—but not in pursuit of territorial acquisition and administrative overrule. It will be further proposed that this policy originated as an extension of the 25th Dynasty’s strategies of rule in northeast Africa and was most likely reinforced by their evolving awareness of the Assyrian threat abroad.

However, this historical proposal is advanced here merely as the least vulnerable of the available hypotheses, because the larger argument of this essay is an historiographical one: that the historian in search of the reasons for Kushite intervention in Judah must look beyond the brief rivalry with Assyria, as the evidence available from the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E. permits neither certainty nor even much confidence on the question of Kushite foreign policy. Section I catalogs and analyzes the Near Eastern and Kushite/Egyptian textual records in order to demonstrate their incongruence and limitations, while Section II outlines the seven principal explanations of Kushite strategy which scholars have attempted to derive from those records. For such theories of foreign policy to be grounded in a more ample body of evidence, the temporal purview of the historian must extend beyond *l’histoire événementielle*. The Assyrian siege of Jerusalem and its proximate events are nested within larger time frames corresponding to what the *Annaliste* historians famously termed *l’histoire conjoncturelle* and *la longue durée*, and several recent publications in the field of Nubiology have provided valuable insights into the factors which have shaped political behavior in the Middle Nile region over those temporal spans. A synthesis of these recent Nubiological contributions is then offered in Section III in an attempt to situate in broader temporal perspective the Kushites’ outlook and objectives in 701 B.C.E.

I. “LES DOCUMENTS ET LA CHAÎNE DES FAITS”

The propensity of textual evidence to construct the past as a sequence of events was once celebrated by an earlier generation of historians. In his classic *Introduction à l’histoire*, Louis Halphen could state confidently that “[i]l suffit alors de se laisser en quelque sorte porter par les documents, lus l’un après l’autre tels qu’ils s’offrent à nous, pour voir la chaîne des faits

se reconstituer presque automatiquement.”³ The Assyro-Kushite rivalry of the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E. would at first seem to present an exemplary case for Halphen’s prescription, and the temptation to infer motive and policy from event reportage remains strong. With an optimism reminiscent of Halphen’s, Henry Aubin would now propose that, “[a]llowing events to speak for themselves, we can see the reasons behind the 25th Dynasty’s incursion into Khor [Syria-Palestine].”⁴

I.1. *The Near Eastern Record*

In the surviving documents from the ancient Near East, the episodes directly involving both Assyria and Egypt during the period of Kushite rule are reported by four main textual corpora: the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions of that same era, including correspondence and consultation of oracles; the Hebrew account of Second Kings, likely composed within the century that followed;⁵ the Esarhaddon Chronicle (*ABC 14*) attributed to the Neo-Babylonian period;⁶ and the so-called “Babylonian Chronicle” (*ABC 1*) written no later than the early Achaemenid era.⁷

³ Louis Halphen, *Introduction à l'histoire* (Paris, 1946), 28.

⁴ Henry T. Aubin, *The Rescue of Jerusalem: The Alliance of Hebrews and Africans in 701 BC* (New York, 2002), 75 (emphasis added). For Aubin’s definition of the term *Khor*, see *ibid.*, 16; for the use of this toponym as inclusive of Palestine during the 25th Dynasty, see discussion in: Spalinger, “Foreign Policy of Egypt,” 43; Kenneth A. Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (1100–650 B.C.)* (Warminster, 1986), 558 §471.

⁵ While the composition and date of the books of Kings and the Deuteronomistic History as a whole have been controversial, nearly all parties to the debate would date the various hypothetical editorial layers somewhere between the reign of Josiah (ca. 640–610 B.C.E.) and the middle of the following century. For a recent and helpful overview of the various positions as to the history of the composition of the Deuteronomistic History, see: Thomas Römer, *The So-called Deuteronomistic History* (London, 2007), esp. 13–106. For the later dates assigned to the parallel accounts in Isaiah and 2 Chronicles, see: H. G. M. Williamson, “Hezekiah and the Temple,” in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran*, ed. M. V. Fox (Winona Lake, IN, 1996), 47–52; Joel P. Weinberg, “The Book of Chronicles: Its Author and Audience,” *Eretz-Israel* 24 (1993): 216–20; Hayim Tadmor, “Period of the First Temple, the Babylonian Exile and the Restoration,” in *A History of the Jewish People*, ed. A. Malamat and H. H. Ben-Sasson (Cambridge, MA, 1976), 91–182, esp. 159; Andrew G. Vaughn, *Theology, History, and Archaeology in the Chronicler’s Account* (Atlanta, 1999), 15–16.

⁶ British Museum 25091 in Albert Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Locust Valley, N.Y., 1975), 125–28 and pl. XX. For the proposed date of the surviving tablet, see Jean-Jacques Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles* (Atlanta, 2004), 206.

⁷ British Museum 92502 in Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, 69–87 and pls. XII–XIII.

Despite numerous chronological, toponymic, and prosopographical disputes, a condensed review of the accepted “chaîne des faits” exposes a stark contrast between the documentary record of the Near East and that of northeast Africa: events which are described at length by the former are scarcely mentioned at all by the latter. In the Near Eastern record, the narrative of escalating conflict begins during the latter half of the eighth century B.C.E., when Tiglath-Pileser III campaigned in Philistia as far as the “Brook of Egypt,” sending Ḥanunu of Gaza into Egyptian exile, and imposing in Sidon a moratorium upon lumber exports to Egypt.⁸ At Tiglath-Pileser’s death, Hoshea of Samaria rebelled, appealing in vain to the enigmatic “So, king of Egypt,” before being imprisoned by the new Assyrian claimant to the throne, Shalmaneser V.⁹ The Assyrian reprisal intensified under Sargon II, who carried his punitive campaigns to “the City of the Brook of Egypt,” defeating there an Egyptian army, receiving the tribute and especially the horses of one “Shilkanni” of Egypt, capturing the resurgent Ḥanunu at Gaza, and placing a “sheikh of Laban” in charge of the new imperial border.¹⁰ “Of the country of Egypt,” Sargon reflected, “I opened the sealed (treasury?); the people of Assyria and of Egypt I mingled together and let them bid for [the contents].”¹¹ Of Kush, Sargon wrote that it was “an inapproachable region . . . whose fathers never—from remote days until now—had sent messengers to inquire after the health of my

⁸ For the flight of Ḥanunu, see British Museum (squeezes) I16a–b + 122 + 124a–b + 125a–b (the Summary Inscription of Tiglath-Pileser III), Summary 4, ll. 8’–15’, in: Henry Creswicke Rawlinson, *Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*, Vol. 3 (London, 1861–1884), pl. 10 (No. 2); Hayim Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III, King of Assyria* (Jerusalem, 1994), 138–141 and pls. XLIX–LI. For Tiglath-Pileser’s campaign to the “Brook of Egypt,” see: Nimrud 400, l. 18, in D. J. Wiseman, “Two Historical Inscriptions from Nimrud,” *Iraq* 13, no. 1 (1951): 23 and pl. XI. For the export moratorium imposed upon Sidon, see: Nimrud 2715, ll. 26–27, in Henry W. F. Saggs, “The Nimrud Letters, 1952: Part II,” *Iraq* 17, no. 2 (1955): 128 and pl. XXX. The inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III have recently been re-published in Hayim Tadmor and Shigeo Yamada, *The Royal Inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727 BC) and Shalmaneser V (726–722 BC)*, RINAP 1 (Winona Lake, IN, 2011).

⁹ 2 Kgs. 17:3–4.

¹⁰ For Ḥanunu’s capture, see: Sargon II’s Great Display Inscription at Khorsabad, Room X, l. 25, in: Andreas Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad* (Göttingen, 1994), 197 and 344. For Sargon’s campaign to the “Brook of Egypt,” the submission of Shilkanni, and the installation of the “sheikh of Laban,” see: Fragmentary prism Assur 16587 (=Vorderasiatisches Museum Berlin 8424), col. B, ll. 5–11, in Ernst F. Weidner, “Šilkan(he)ni, König von Mušri, ein Zeitgenosse Sargons II., nach einem neuen Bruchstück der Prisma-Inschrift des assyrischen Königs,” *AfO* 14 (1941): 43.

¹¹ Nimrud Prism, Fragment D, Col. IV, ll. 46–48, in C. J. Gadd, “Inscribed Prisms of Sargon II from Nimrud,” *Iraq* 16, no. 2 (1954): 180 and pls. XLIII and XLVI.

royal forefathers.”¹² The first unequivocal Assyrian reference to a Kushite rival occurred when Iamani of Ashdod fled to Egypt to escape Sargon’s reach but was then extradited by *Sá-pa-ta-ku-u’* (Shebitqo).¹³ At century’s close, Assyrian dynastic succession was once again met with Levantine rebellion and the dispatch to Judah of one “Tirhakah, king of Kush.”¹⁴ The culminating events of that process in 701 B.C.E.—Sennacherib’s battles against Egypto-Kushite forces at Eltekeh and the sieges of Lachish and Jerusalem—have given to history its most enduring metaphor for the 25th Dynasty: the *rab šaqê’s* “broken reed.”¹⁵

For the next two decades, the Assyrian record guards silence about its erstwhile Kushite opponents until the accession of Esarhaddon.¹⁶ The events of his early reign parallel those of Tiglath-Pileser III’s—a campaign to the “Brook of Egypt” and mandatory audit by an Assyrian deputy of all correspondence arriving at the Phoenician port of Tyre: “If the royal deputy is absent, wait for him and then open it.”¹⁷ A subsequent defeat

¹² Sargon II’s Great Display Inscription at Khorsabad, Room X, l. 109, in: Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II.*, 221 and 348.

¹³ Tang-i Var Inscription (*in situ*), ll. 19–21, in: Grant Frame, “The Inscription of Sargon II at Tang-i Var,” *Orientalia* 68 (1999): 31–57 and Tables I–XVIII; ‘Alī Akbar Sarfarāz, “Sangnibištah-i mihi-i Ūrāmānāt,” *Majallah-i Barrasihā-i Tārikhī* 3, no. 5 (1968–69): 13–20 and 14 pls. I thank Hossein Badamchi of the University of Tehran for guiding me through the original publication in Farsi.

¹⁴ 2 Kgs. 19:9. For the argument that “Tirhakah” (Taharqo) was acting only as a general at the time—and not as king—see discussion below in §1.2 and n. 48.

¹⁵ For Sennacherib’s account, see esp.: 87–7–19, 1, in Eckart Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, AfO 26 (Vienna, 1997), 47–61; British Museum ME 91032 (“Taylor Prism”) in Rawlinson, *Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*, vol. 1, pls. 37–42; Chicago Oriental Institute Museum A2793 in Daniel David Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib* (Chicago, 1924). For Hebrew accounts, see not only 2 Kgs. 18:13–19:37, but also Isa. 36–37, and 2 Chron. 32. Outside of the Near East proper, Herodotus offers what would seem to be a rather garbled account of conflict between Sennacherib and Egypt; see: Herodotus II.141 [Godley, *LCL*].

¹⁶ For an alternative theory holding that 2 Kings records campaigns by Sennacherib in both 701 and 688 B.C.E., see John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia, 1959), 285–87; William H. Shea, “Sennacherib’s Second Palestinian Campaign,” *JBL* 104 (1985): 401–18; cf. Siegfried H. Horn, “Did Sennacherib Campaign Once or Twice Against Hezekiah?” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 4 (1966): 1–28. For refutation, see: Kitchen, *Third Intermediate Period*, 157–161 §§127–129, 383–386 §346 nn. 823–824, 552–554 §§465–467, and 584–585 §528; Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton, NJ, 1992), 351–54 nn. 163 and 165.

¹⁷ For copious references to the “Brook of Egypt” in Esarhaddon’s inscriptions, see now Erle Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680–669 BC)*, RINAP 4 (Winona Lake, IN, 2011), 17–18 §1 iii.39, 29 §2 i.57, 37 §3 ii.10’, 77 §31 14’, 90 §36 6’, 135 §60 3’, 155 §77 16, 158 §78 15, 161 §79 15, and 175 §93 7. For the audit of correspondence at Tyre, see British Museum K 3500 + K 4444 + K 10235 (+) Sm 964, Reverse III, ll. 1’–14’, in: Riekle Berger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons Königs von Assyrien* (Graz, 1956), Taf. 3; and

upon Egyptian soil is recorded only in Babylonian Chronicle 1 (*ABC 1*),¹⁸ but within three years it was quickly reversed by Esarhaddon's sack of Memphis.¹⁹ The Assyrian king recalled:

As for Taharqo the king of Egypt and Kush, the accursed of their great divinity, from the city of Išḫupri to Memphis . . . I inflicted serious defeats on him daily, without ceasing. Moreover, (as for) him, by means of arrows, I inflicted him five times with wounds from which there is no recovery; I carried off to Assyria his wife, his court ladies, Ušanuḫuru, his crown prince, and the rest of his sons (and) his daughters, his goods, his possessions, his horses, his oxen, (and) his sheep and goats, without number. I tore out the roots of Kush from Egypt. I did not leave a single person there to praise (me).²⁰

That the “roots of Kush” took hold in Egypt once again after Esarhaddon's withdrawal is clearly suggested by his anxious consultation of oracles on Egyptian affairs and the king's further campaign against Egypt that was aborted only by his own death *en route* in 669 B.C.E.²¹ When the campaign resumed under Assurbanipal, he complained that the petty dynasts

Simo Parpola and Kazuko Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths* (Helsinki, 1988), 24–25.

¹⁸ See Chronicle 1.iv.16 (British Museum 92502) in Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, 84 and pls. XII–XIII. For Fecht's attempt to reconcile the Babylonian Chronicle's singular report with the contrasting account for that year recorded in the Esarhaddon Chronicle, see Gerhard Fecht, “Zu den Namen ägyptischer Fürsten und Städte in den Annalen des Assurbanipal und der Chronik des Asarhaddon,” *MDAIK* 16 (1958): 116–19; and critique of the same in Anthony J. Spalinger, “Esarhaddon and Egypt: An Analysis of the First Invasion of Egypt,” *Orientalia* 43 (1974): 300–301.

¹⁹ For multiple references to the event in Esarhaddon's own inscriptions, see Leichty, *Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon*, 54 §8 ii'.21', 88 § 34 rev. 12, 94 §39 6', 185 §98 rev. 39 and 41, 192 §103 7, 304 §1019 12. For memory of the event in later chronicles, see Chronicle 1.iv.23–28 (British Museum 92502) in Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, 85–86 and pls. XII–XIII; Esarhaddon Chronicle (British Museum 25091), ll. 25–26, in *ibid.*, 127 and pl. XX.

²⁰ Vorderasiatisches Museum Berlin 2708 (Zinçirli stela), rev. ll. 43b–50a, in: Felix von Luschan, *Ausgrabungen in Senchirli*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1893), 11–43 and Taf. I–V, esp. 40–41 and Taf. II and V; Leichty, *Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon*, 185–86 §98.

²¹ For Esarhaddon's consultation of oracles, see: Ivan Starr, Jusso Aro, and Simo Parpola, eds., *Queries to the Sun-god: Divination and Politics in Sargonid Assyria* (Helsinki, 1990), 97 §82 (British Museum Kuyunjik Collection 11481), 98–100 §84 (British Museum Sm 2485 + 83–1–18,555), 102–104 §88 (British Museum Kuyunjik Collection 11467 + 83–1–18,897 = British Museum Ki 1904–10–9,122); Simo Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal*, vol. 1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1970), 83 §117 (British Museum Kuyunjik Collection 2701a); *ibid.*, vol. 2 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1983), 100–101; British Museum Kuyunjik Collection 154 in Leroy Waterman, *Royal Correspondence of the Assyrian Empire*, vol. 1 (Ann Arbor, MI, 1930), 186–89 §276. For Esarhaddon's death *en route* to Egypt, see the “Babylonian Chronicle” 1.iv.30–31 (British Museum 92502) in Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, 86 and pls. XII–XIII; the Esarhaddon Chronicle (British Museum 25091), ll. 28–29, in *ibid.*, 127 and pl. XX.

of Lower Egypt had sent the following appeal to Taharqo: “Let there be peace between us and let us come to a mutual understanding; we will divide the country between us, so no foreigner shall be ruler among us!”²² The plan was quickly thwarted by Assurbanipal, who drove Taharqo back to Kush, where “the night of death overtook him.”²³ A brief reclamation of Egypt by the Kushite Tanutamani precipitated Assurbanipal’s devastating sack of Thebes and the expulsion of the Kushite dynasts from the Egyptian throne.²⁴ This event brought to a decisive end the decades-long struggle between Assyria and Kushite-controlled Egypt—a process which had witnessed at least eight separate military campaigns, no fewer than three of them culminating on Egyptian soil, as well as two Philistine royal exiles to Egypt, and a pair of appeals for Egyptian assistance by the kings of Samaria and Judah.

Yet not a single one of these events or their foreign agents are explicitly mentioned in the entire corpus of surviving Kushite royal inscriptions—whether in Egypt or in Kush, during the reigns of the 25th Dynasty or those of its descendants.

I.2. *The Kushite and Egyptian Record*

The Kushite royal inscriptions’ apparent silence on the above “chaîne des faits” would be less remarkable if the available corpus were small or were generally uninformative about military engagements or other historical events and personages. However, this is decidedly not the case: the era of Kushite rule in Egypt yields several royal inscriptions, and these include some of the most detailed accounts of domestic affairs ever to be composed in the ancient Egyptian language. Alan Gardiner, the doyen of Egyptian philology, confessed:

For those whose life is devoted to the study of Egyptian texts it is somewhat humiliating to find that some of the most interesting hieroglyphic inscriptions

²² British Museum 91026 (Rassam Cylinder) / British Museum 91086 (Prism A), col. I, ll. 123–126, in: Rawlinson, *Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*, vol. 5, pls. 1–10; Hans-Ulrich Onasch, *Die assyrischen Eroberungen Ägyptens*, vol. 1 (Wiesbaden, 1994), 120–121.

²³ British Museum 91026 (Rassam Cylinder) / British Museum 91086 (Prism A), col. II, ll. 20–21, in: Rawlinson, *Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*, vol. 5, pls. 1–10; Onasch, *Die assyrischen Eroberungen Ägyptens*, vol. 1, 122–23.

²⁴ British Museum 91026 (Rassam Cylinder) / British Museum 91086 (Prism A), col. II, ll. 22–48, in: Rawlinson, *Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*, vol. 5, pls. 1–10; Onasch, *Die assyrischen Eroberungen Ägyptens*, vol. 1, 122–23. By contrast, Herodotus’ account of the same period foregrounds Saïte-Kushite rivalry rather than Assyrian aggression: see Herodotus II.152 [Godley, *LCL*].

are not really Egyptian at all, but emanate from the Nubian kings of alien descent who ruled Egypt, either wholly or in part, during the latter half of the eighth and the first half of the seventh centuries before the Christian era. Perhaps it was the foreign blood of an energetic and warlike race that caused them, despite a deep devotion to Pharaonic tradition, to commemorate upon their triumphal stelas a wealth of picturesque details and manifestations of personal temperament entirely absent from the vainglorious annals of earlier times.²⁵

The starkest contrast is therefore not that between the Kushite corpus and its Near Eastern contemporaries but instead the contrast between the often detailed Kushite descriptions of domestic affairs and the consistently laconic Kushite references to foreign affairs.

No text better exemplifies this contrast than the Great Triumphal Stela of the Kushite king Pi(ankh)y *ca.* 727 B.C.E.²⁶ It records the king's intervention in an Egyptian civil war, a series of events which seems to have inaugurated Kushite claims to the Two Lands, and its description of that process is so generous with information that Lichtheim has hailed the text as the "foremost historical inscription of . . . [Egypt's] Late Period."²⁷ The stela mentions more than seventy-five toponyms in Egypt, names more than two dozen historical personages living there, recounts at least a dozen separate battles, and describes multiple reports delivered to and issuing from the royal court. Even the king's generals are credited by name—in a manner quite atypical for the Egyptian royal canon.²⁸ No less exceptional are the actions and quotations that were included in the text to illustrate personal character and motivation—most famously, the Kushite king's eschewal of the captured women and his indignation at the mistreatment of horses (*ll.* 63–66). As a result, the Great Triumphal

²⁵ Alan H. Gardiner, "Piankhi's Instructions to His Army," *JEA* 21, no. 2 (1935): 219.

²⁶ Cairo JE 48862 in Nicolas-Christophe Grimal, *La stèle triomphale de Pi(ankh)y au Musée du Caire* (Cairo, 1981). For argumentation regarding the absolute date of the stela, see *ibid.*, 216–19. Depuydt has nevertheless proposed a minimal chronology that would place the redaction of the stela *ca.* 708 B.C.E.; see Leo Depuydt, "The Date of Piye's Egyptian Campaign and the Chronology of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty," *JEA* 79 (1993): 269–74. Debate over the appropriate reading of this king's name is still ongoing; for discussion and further bibliography, see Karl-Heinz Priese, "Nichtägyptische Namen und Wörter in den ägyptischen Inschriften der Könige von Kusch I," *MIO* 14 (1968): 167–84; Günter Vittmann, "Zur Lesung des Königsnamens *P-ʿnhj*," *Orientalia* 43 (1974): 12–16; Claude Rilly, "Une nouvelle interprétation du nom royal Piankhy," *BIFAO* 101 (2001): 351–68.

²⁷ Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 3 (Berkeley, CA, 1980), 66.

²⁸ See Cairo JE 48862, *ll.* 8–9, in Grimal, *La stèle triomphale de Pi(ankh)y*, pls. I and V. For commentary, see also Timothy Kendall, *Gebel Barkal Epigraphic Survey: 1986: Preliminary Report of First Season's Activity* (Boston, MA, 1986), 23 n. 35.

Stela of Pi(ankh)y stands well above the royal inscriptions of the preceding Dynasties 21–24 during the Third Intermediate Period, and the stela compares favorably even to the grandest of New Kingdom royal inscriptions commissioned by Egypt's most celebrated conquerors. Gardiner reflected that “[t]he third Tuthmosis and the second Ramesses have afforded us accounts of their exploits far less jejune than those of most of their compatriots, . . . [b]ut who among us will prefer their narrations to that of the Ethiopian conqueror Piankhi?”²⁹ Within such an informative text, commissioned by a monarch who now lay claim to both Upper and Lower Egypt, one might reasonably expect some commentary upon the rising Assyrian threat to the east, which had already reached the “Brook of Egypt,” curtailed Egypt's lumber imports, and driven onto her soil a prominent Philistine fugitive.³⁰

The Great Triumphal Stela does not meet this expectation. Interest in Near Eastern affairs—as voiced centuries prior by “the third Tuthmosis and the second Ramesses”—finds no echo in Pi(ankh)y's inscription. In place of foreign policy and international reportage, the text gives only bombast. As Pi(ankh)y arrived at the harbor of Hermopolis in Middle Egypt, the inscription reports that “the splendor of His Majesty reached the Asiatics (*Sty.w*), every heart trembling at him.”³¹ The account closes with the suppression of conflict in Lower Egypt, after which ships were sent to the Kushite king “laden with silver, gold, copper, clothing, everything of Northland, every product of Khor [Syria-Palestine], and all the aromatic woods of God's Land.”³² Of Asia nothing else is mentioned in the Great Triumphal Stela nor during the remainder of Pi(ankh)y's tenure. The chasm which separates the king's domestic and foreign reportage is all the more frustrating if one accepts the arguments of many scholars that relief scenes in a Kushite monument may depict Assyrian soldiers subdued by Pi(ankh)y; the enemy is shown there wearing conical, knobbed helmets of the kind most popular under Tiglath-Pileser III and Sargon II (Figs. 1 and 2).³³ None of Pi(ankh)y's inscriptions describes such a conflict with

²⁹ Gardiner, “Piankhi's Instructions to His Army,” 219.

³⁰ See references to Tiglath-Pileser III's actions in n. 8 *supra*.

³¹ Cairo JE 48862, l. 30, in Grimal, *La stèle triomphale de Pi('ankh)y*, pls. I and V.

³² Cairo JE 48862, l. 154, in Grimal, *La stèle triomphale de Pi('ankh)y*, pls. IVb and XII. For Khor as Syria-Palestine, see n. 4 *supra*.

³³ Though no longer preserved, these reliefs from the Great Temple of Amun at Gebel Barkal (B 500) were copied in two nineteenth-century MSS now in the Bodleian Library and Dorset History Centre, respectively: Wilkinson MSS xi. 56 and Bankes MSS xv A. 28. See Anthony J. Spalinger, “Notes on the Military in Egypt during the XXVth Dynasty,” *JSSEA*



Fig. 1. John Gardner Wilkinson's drawing from the Great Temple of Amun at Gebel Barkal. © Bodleian Library, University of Oxford 2014, MS Wilkinson dep. e. 66, p. 56.



Fig. 2. William John Bankes's drawing from the Great Temple of Amun at Gebel Barkal. William Bankes Egyptian Drawings MS xv A 28. Photograph courtesy of Dr Daniele Salvoldi, the Dorset History Centre, and the UK National Trust.

Assyrians or explains how exactly “the splendor of His Majesty reached the Asiatics” and caused their trepidation.

Regarding Pi(ankh)y’s successor, Spalinger asserts that “Shabako . . . was the first Kushite Pharaoh to stress his dominance over the Asiatic peoples.”³⁴ Not only is the accolade a dubious one in light of the foregoing discussion, but it corresponds to no greater specificity in Kushite royal references to the Near East. An unprovenanced scarab claims that Shabaqo

has slain those who rebelled against him, in the South and the North, and in every hill-country. The sand-dwellers (*hry.w-š’y*) who rebelled against him are fallen down through fear of him. They come of themselves as prisoners. Each one has seized his fellow among them.³⁵

As Redford acknowledges, “[i]t is debatable whether the ‘sandy ones,’ the *hryw-š^c* on the Shabaka scarab, can be construed as a reference to the Sinai nomads, although this would be plausible.”³⁶ Even if the epithet does refer to an Asiatic population, it cannot be assumed to record an historical event or process any more than a formulaic boast or royal ambition. The same must be said of the ubiquitous “Kushite oath” which appears in Abnormal Hieratic contracts during Shabaqo’s reign: “As Amun lives and as Pharaoh lives, may he be healthy, and may Amun grant him victory!”³⁷

(1981): 47–49 (figs. 3–4). For an alternative interpretation that would place this relief later during the 25th Dynasty, see Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel*, 356–57 n. 185.

³⁴ Spalinger, “Foreign Policy of Egypt,” 28.

³⁵ Toronto Royal Ontario Museum 910.28.1, ll. 5–9, in Gaston Maspero, “Sur un scarabée de Sabacon,” *ASAE* 7 (1906): 142. See also: Jean Yoyotte, “Plaidoyer pour l’authenticité du scarabée historique de Shabako,” *Biblica* 37 (1956): 457–76; Jean Yoyotte, “Sur le scarabée historique de Shabako. Note additionnelle,” *Biblica* 39 (1958): 206–10.

³⁶ Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel*, 350.

³⁷ The mention of “victory” does appear to have been added to the formula during Shabaqo’s reign, as it is not present in earlier contract oaths even as late as the reign of Pi(ankh)y; see, e.g., P. Leiden F 1942/5.15 ll. 5–6, in Sven P. Vleeming, “The Sale of a Slave in the Time of Pharaoh Py,” *OMRO* 61 (1980): 10–11 and 14–15 n. 48. On this formula, see Koenraad Donker van Heel, “Abnormal Hieratic and Early Demotic Texts Collected by the Theban Choachytes in the Reign of Amasis: Papyri from the Louvre Eisenlohr Lot,” (Ph.D. diss., Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden, 1996), 80 §VI and nn. 15–17; Bernadette Menu, “Un document juridique ‘kouchite’ le P. Vienne D 12002,” in *Recherches sur l’histoire juridique, économique et social de l’ancienne Égypte*, vol. 2, ed. B. Menu (Versailles, 1998), 331–43, esp. 331. For examples, see P. Louvre E 3228e (Shabaqo year 10), l. 7, in Michel Malinine, *Choix de textes juridiques en hiératique “anormal” et en démotique*, vol. 2 (Cairo, 1983), 14–15 and pl. V, and *ibid.*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1953), 36–37; P. Louvre E 3228b (Shabaqo year 13), col. I, l. 6, in *ibid.*, vol. 2, 1 and pl. I, and *ibid.*, vol. 1, 4–5; and P. Louvre E 3228d (Taharqo year 3), ll. 7–8, in *ibid.*, vol. 2, 18, and pl. VI, and *ibid.*, vol. 1, 44–45. Though Redford juxtaposes this formula with the Assyrian records of the Battle of Eltekeh, he concedes that this newly-minted Abnormal Hieratic oath is “of uncertain application” to any historical event during Shabaqo’s reign: Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel*, 353 n. 164.

No victorious campaign, achieved or contemplated, is ever specified, and yet it can hardly be doubted that Shabaqo was aware of, if not directly engaged in, contemporaneous developments in the Near East. His nomina are attested not only on jar-seal impressions from Megiddo³⁸ but also at Nineveh itself: Layard discovered there a clay sealing that bore an Assyrian signet impression—"probably a royal signet"—together with the stamp of Shabaqo's nomen.³⁹ Some form of exchange, diplomatic or otherwise, between the Assyrian and Kushite royal courts appears likely during the reign of Shabaqo, but it left no explicit record in the royal inscriptions of Egypt and Kush.

The enigma deepens with the installation of Shabaqo's successor, Shebitqo. Though Sargon II mentioned him by name in the inscription at Tang-i Var,⁴⁰ Shebitqo seems never to have reciprocated. Instead, Kushite monuments constructed during the late eighth century B.C.E. give only militaristic images and epithets: upon the façade of his Karnak chapel for Osiris *hq3-d.t*, Shebitqo receives a sword from Amun,⁴¹ while the doorjambes of his chapel by the Sacred Lake describe the king as "he whose renown is great in all lands, . . . whose strength is great, who smites the Nine Bows, . . . [and] who is satisfied with victory."⁴² Unlike his predecessors

³⁸ See Megiddo reg. no. P 3585 as found in Stratum III in Robert S. Lamon and Geoffrey Morgan Shipton, *Megiddo I, Seasons 1925–34, Strata I–V*, OIP 42 (Chicago, 1939), 172 §77 and pls. 41 no. 11 and 115 no. 4. The reading is not entirely certain, however, as the *k3*-arms are unusually angular, and the presence of an apparent *š* is not clearly integrated with the rest of the damaged impression. Many other objects of probable Levantine provenance bear Kushite nomina, but most are not from excavated contexts like that at Megiddo.

³⁹ There were, in fact, two clay sealings found at Nineveh which bore this same imprint, though published description of the second (British Museum 84527) would suggest that it was more fragmentary. See British Museum 84884 and British Museum 84527 in: Austen Henry Layard, *Discoveries Among the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon* (New York: Harper, 1853), 132–34; Harry Reginald Holland Hall, *Catalogue of Egyptian scarabs, etc., in the British Museum*, vol. 1 (London, 1913), 290 §§2775–76; but cf. Raphael Giveon, *The Impact of Egypt on Canaan: Iconographical and Related Studies* (Göttingen, 1978), 123. More ambiguous are the similar caryatids found at Nimrud and the Kushite royal cemetery of el-Kurru; see ND 1644 in Max Mallowan, *Nimrud and its Remains*, vol. 2 (London, 1966), 211 fig. 147; unregistered object found in tomb Ku. 15, in Dows Dunham, *El Kurru*, vol. 1 of *The Royal Cemeteries of Kush* (Cambridge, MA, 1950), 55 and pls. LXII A–E.

⁴⁰ For Sargon II's inscription at Tang-i Var, see n. 13 *supra*.

⁴¹ An excellent photograph of the scene may be found in Donald B. Redford, "Sais and the Kushite Invasions of the Eighth Century B.C.," *JARCE* 22 (1985): 14 fig. 3.

⁴² No longer *in situ*; see now Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung Berlin 1480, as copied most clearly in Karl Richard Lepsius, *Denkmäler aus Ägypten und Äthiopien*, vol. 5 (Berlin, 1849–59), pl. IIIa–b. The first of the epithets listed here is given as the king's Two-Ladies name upon the chapel's left doorjamb, where the two epithets that follow combine to form his Golden Horus name; the final epithet represents an alternative Golden Horus name inscribed upon the right doorjamb.

and successors of the 25th Dynasty, Shebitqo appears to have left no inscriptions of any appreciable length and historical content. As a result, the Kushite royal corpus is at its most oblique precisely at the century's turn, just when Near Eastern documents attest direct Kushite military intervention in Levantine affairs—and the imbalance is little relieved by Egypt's corpus of private inscriptions.

Faced with such a lacunose record during Shebitqo's reign, scholars have read with heightened interest all retrospective passages within the Kushite royal inscriptions of later decades. Two in particular have been widely judged as references to the events of 701 B.C.E.: in Kawa stelae IV and V, both dated to the sixth regnal year of Taharqo, the king recalls his summons as a young man from Ta-Seti (Nubia) to Thebes by "His Majesty."⁴³ Kawa IV clearly states that the reigning king in question was "His Majesty, King Shebitqo," and Kawa V specifies that Taharqo was only twenty years old at the time of the event.⁴⁴ The vocabulary of the inscriptions would further suggest a military context: Taharqo adds that he was among the *ḥwn.w nfr.w* and the *mšꜥ*—terms meaning in their broadest possible sense "good youths" and "crowd," respectively, but more often used to refer to "recruits" and the "army."⁴⁵ In Kawa V, Taharqo is "elevated" (*ts*) by the king—a word with similar military overtones and cognates⁴⁶—and his stated age corresponds to that attested elsewhere for Kushite conscripts.⁴⁷ Combining

⁴³ Kawa IV (Khartoum 2678= Merowe Museum 52), *l.* 8, in Miles Francis Laming Macadam, *The Temples of Kawa*, Vol. 1, pls. 7–8; Kawa V (Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek Æ.I.N. 1712), *l.* 13, in *ibid.*, pls. 9–10. For a parallel to this passage of Kawa V, see also the Tanis stela (Cairo JE 37488), *l.* 5, in Jean Leclant and Jean Yoyotte, "Nouveaux documents relatifs à l'an VI de Taharqa," *Kêmi* 10 (1949): pls. II–III.

⁴⁴ Kawa IV (Khartoum 2678= Merowe Museum 52), *l.* 8, in Macadam, *Temples of Kawa*, vol. 1, pls. 7–8; Kawa V (Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek Æ.I.N. 1712), *l.* 17, in Macadam, *Temples of Kawa*, vol. 1, pls. 9–10; see also the Tanis stela (Cairo JE 37488), *l.* 14, in Leclant and Yoyotte, "Nouveaux documents relatifs à l'an VI de Taharqa," pls. II–III.

⁴⁵ Kawa IV (Khartoum 2678 = Merowe Museum 52), *ll.* 8 and 10, in Macadam, *Temples of Kawa*, vol. 1, pls. 7–8. For *ḥwn-nfr*, see *WĀS* III: 52–53; for *mšꜥ*, see *WĀS* II: 155.

⁴⁶ Kawa V (Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek Æ.I.N. 1712), *l.* 13, in Macadam, *Temples of Kawa*, vol. 1, pls. 9–10; see also the Tanis stela (Cairo JE 37488), *l.* 5, in Leclant and Yoyotte, "Nouveaux documents relatifs à l'an VI de Taharqa," pls. II–III. For *ts*, see *WĀS* V: 405 and 402–403.

⁴⁷ The Kushite soldier Pekertor was also aged twenty years during his visit to Egypt as recorded upon his unprovenanced stela: see Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts Moscow I.I.b.37, *l.* 4, in: Svetlana Hodjash and Oleg Dmitrievich Berlev, *The Egyptian Reliefs and Stelae in the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow* (Leningrad: Aurora cop., 1982), 164–170 §109; Anthony Leahy, "Kushite Monuments at Abydos," in *The Unbroken Reed: Studies in the Culture and Heritage of Ancient Egypt in Honour of A. F. Shore*, ed. C. Eyre et al. (London, 1994), 184 pl. XXVlb and 191 n. 21. For further discussion see Steffen Wenig, "Pabatma—Pekereslo—Pekar-Tror: Ein Beitrag zur Frühgeschichte der Kuschten," in *Studia in honorem Fritz Hintze*, ed. D. Apelt et al. (Berlin, 1990), 333–52.

these details, many scholars have concluded that Taharqo's summons to Egypt was, in fact, his call to duty in Egypt's defense of Judah—a service for which the Hebrew account in Second Kings would later commemorate him by name as “Tirhakah, king of Kush.”⁴⁸ The inference is a reasonable one and favored by the present writer—but not without reservations. If Kawa stelae IV and V do record the Kushites' most memorable intervention in Levantine affairs, it is certainly noteworthy that neither text bothered to claim so. As Redford has cautioned, “[t]he summoning of the princes is never stated to have been in connection with any preparation for war Shebitku is simply forming his court at Memphis after the death of his predecessor, Shabaka.”⁴⁹ Though Taharqo is brought north with the *mšc* in Kawa IV, later in the same text the *mšc* also escorts a construction crew on its trip to Kawa—hardly a call to arms.⁵⁰ What the retrospective passages of Kawa IV and V reveal most clearly is historians' eagerness for an explicit Kushite account of their campaign(s) in 701 B.C.E.—despite the Kushite record's apparent refusal to provide one.

During the early seventh century B.C.E., a lull in Assyria's western campaigns corresponds to a marked increase in both the volume of Kushite royal inscriptions and their references to the Near East.⁵¹ All are tantalizingly vague, but they do grow more informative as the reign advances. The first quarter of Taharqo's tenure witnessed donations of lapis lazuli, *rdnw*, “true *in3q*,” turquoise, and *wnw*-seeds.⁵² While Spalinger has deemed some of the items to “imply . . . connections abroad,” Redford cautions that the list contains “nothing that could be construed either as tribute or as pieces commemorative of foreign wars.”⁵³ However, Redford posits a change during Taharqo's sixth regnal year, after which the king “began to take the initiative in his dealings with the states of Palestine.”⁵⁴ Kawa stela IV and Taharqo's stela from Dahshur (near Memphis) present the pharaoh

⁴⁸ 2 Kgs. 19:9. For the argument that Kawa IV and V record Taharqo's summons to Judah, see, e.g.: Kitchen, *Third Intermediate Period*, 157–58 §127 and 557 §469; L. Török, *The Kingdom of Kush: Handbook of the Napatan and Meroitic Civilization* (Leiden, 1997), 169–70; Tormod Eide et al., eds., *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum*, vol. 1 (Bergen, 1994), 144; Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 334–35 n. 54.

⁴⁹ Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel*, 353 n. 163.

⁵⁰ Kawa IV (Khartoum 2678 = Merowe Museum 52), l. 21, in Macadam, *Temples of Kawa*, vol. 1, pls. 7–8.

⁵¹ Cf. n. 16 *supra*.

⁵² Kawa III (Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek Æ.I.N. 1707), cols. 3, 6, and 9, in Macadam, *Temples of Kawa*, vol. 1, pls. 5–6.

⁵³ Spalinger, “Foreign Policy of Egypt,” 27; Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel*, 353.

⁵⁴ Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel*, 354.

as military hero, while the donation in Kawa III of a bronze statuette of the king smiting foreign countries has been interpreted by Kahn as an “allu[sion] to some hostile activity abroad,” or more tentatively by Picchi as “forse la ripresa di un’iconografica tradizionale, o forse il ricordo di una vittoria personale all’estero.”⁵⁵ In this second quarter of Taharqo’s reign, the Temple of Amun-Re at Kawa in Upper Nubia was endowed not only with trees, copper, *rdnw*, and *ʿwnw*, but also specifically with juniper (*mr*), “Asiatic copper” (*hm.t St.t*), and cedar (š)—even “true cedar of Lebanon” (š *m3c n Hnty-š*).⁵⁶ One of the highest officials in Thebes at the time, Montuemhat, would later claim in an autobiographical inscription that he, too, had used “true cedar from the best of the Lebanese hillsides” (š *m3c n tp hty.w*) to construct a sacred barque and had fashioned temple doors from “genuine Aleppo pinewood banded in Asiatic copper” (š *m3c qd.t nbd m hm.t St.t*).⁵⁷ More remarkably, Kawa’s Temple of Amun-Re was now staffed with viticulturists drawn from the “Mentyu-nomads of Asia” (*Mnty.w St.t*).⁵⁸ In the forecourt of the same temple, a pair of smiting scenes on the east wall was accompanied by the caption:

He has slaughtered the Libyans (*Tmh.w*). He has restrained the Asiatics (*dʿir n=f Sty.w*). He has [crushed?] the hill-countries that revolted. He causes them to make the walk of dogs. The sand-[dweller]s ([*hry*].*w-š*) come—one knows not their place—fearing the king’s ferocity.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Kawa IV (Khartoum 2678 = Merowe Museum 52), *ll. 2–7*, in Macadam, *Temples of Kawa*, vol. 1, pls. 7–8; Dahshur Road Stela (*in situ?*), *ll. 5–7*, in Ahmed Mahmoud Moussa, “A Stela of Taharqa from the Desert Road at Dahshur,” *MDAIK* 37 (1981): 331–37 and Taf. 47; Hartwig Altenmüller and Ahmed Mahmoud Moussa, “Die Inschriften der Taharkastele von der Dahschurstrasse,” *SAK* 9 (1981): 57–84; Kawa III (Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek Æ.I.N. 1707), col. 15, in Macadam, *Temples of Kawa*, vol. 1, pls. 5–6; Dan’el Kahn, “Taharqa, King of Kush, and the Assyrians,” *JSSEA* 31 (2004): 110; Daniela Picchi, *Il conflitto tra Etiopi ed Assiri nell’Egitto della XXV dinastia* (Imola, 1997), 43; see also Spalinger, “Foreign Policy of Egypt,” 26.

⁵⁶ Kawa III (Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek Æ.I.N. 1707), col. 21, in Macadam, *Temples of Kawa*, vol. 1, pls. 5–6; Kawa VI (Khartoum 2679 = Merowe Museum 53), *ll. 10, 12–14, 18–19*, in *ibid.*, vol. 1, pls. 11–12; Kawa VII (Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek Æ.I.N. 1713), *ll. 3–4*, in *ibid.*, vol. 1, pls. 13–14.

⁵⁷ For cedar from the best of the Lebanese hillsides, see the north wall of Montuemhat’s so-called “crypt inscription” at Karnak’s Mut Temple, second column from viewer’s right, in: Jean Leclant, *Montouemhat: Quatrième prophète d’Amon, prince de la ville* (Cairo, 1961), 197, 205, and pl. LXVIII. For his use of Asiatic copper and Aleppo pinewood, see south wall of the same, ninth col. from viewer’s right, in *ibid.*, 213, 218, and pl. LXIX; Robert K. Ritner, *The Libyan Anarchy: Inscriptions from Egypt’s Third Intermediate Period* (Atlanta, 2009), 561 and 563; Janet Johnson, *Chicago Demotic Dictionary* (Chicago, 2001–), Q (04.1), 96.

⁵⁸ Kawa VI (Khartoum 2679 = Merowe Museum 53), *ll. 20–21*, in Macadam, *Temples of Kawa*, vol. 1, pls. 11–12.

⁵⁹ Macadam, *Temples of Kawa*, vol. 2, 64 and pl. XIa–b.

Thus, two decades after 701 B.C.E., the pendulum has swung to the other extreme: the Kushite royal corpus gives multiple references to the Near East, just when Near Eastern documents fall nearly silent about Kushite involvement in the region.

The increasing specificity of Kushite references to Asia across the first half of Taharqo's reign has also given rise to more confident inference. Redford concludes that "a judicious use of the Kawa Inventories has made it virtually certain that the first decade of the reign, i.e., 690/89 to 680 B.C.E., witnessed military activity across Egypt's borders . . . [including] a campaign somewhere along the Levantine coast in year 10."⁶⁰ Leclant and Yoyotte have likewise deduced that the Kawa donation lists "attesterait des relations économiques avec l'Asie . . . [et] leur activité militaire dans les confins palestiniens."⁶¹ Nevertheless, the actual toponyms and ethnonyms mentioned at Kawa—*Mnty.w*, *St.t*, and *hry.w-š*^c—are no more specific than those evoked by Pi(ankh)y and Shabaqo decades prior. As Redford has admitted, even *Mnty.w* was an archaic term that "could as well apply to Philistines, Judeans, or even Assyrians!"⁶² Moreover, their relocation to Kawa need not have been the product of a military campaign orchestrated by the Kushite monarchy; just as likely is the possibility that they were purchased from Lower Egypt *à la* the "men of the north" (*rmt.w* ^c*mh.ti*) often sold in Abnormal Hieratic documents,⁶³ that they were captured in minor raids, or, as Yurco has proposed, that they were "drawn from exiles or voluntary immigrants such as periodically crossed the northeastern frontier seeking refuge from political turmoil or sustenance in time of economic hardship."⁶⁴ If Taharqo instead obtained these men during an eastward expansion of his realm, it is again remarkable that he did not see fit to record it. Indeed, on the one occasion that Taharqo explicitly defined the

⁶⁰ Donald B. Redford, "Taharqa in Western Asia and Libya," *Eretz Israel* 24 (1994): 188.

⁶¹ Leclant and Yoyotte, "Notes d'histoire et de civilisation éthiopiennes," 28–29.

⁶² Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel*, 350.

⁶³ See especially the comments of Jan Quaegebeur, "A propos de l'identification de la 'Kadytis' d'Hérodote avec la ville de Gaza," in *Immigration and Emigration within the Ancient Near East*, ed. K. van Lerberghe, A. Schoors, and E. Lipinski (Leuven, 1995), 245–70, esp. 259–64. For examples, see P. Leiden F 1942/5.15, ll. 4, 11, 13, 16, 19, in Vleeming, "The Sale of a Slave," 11 and 14 n. 45; P. Vatican 2038C (old 10574), ll. 4, 13, 17, 19, and 25, in Francis Llewellyn Griffith, "An Early Contract Papyrus in the Vatican," *PSBA* 32 (1910): 5–10 and pl. I; also in Michel Malinine, "Une vente d'esclave à l'époque de Psammétique Ier (papyrus de Vatican 10574, en hiératique anormal)," *RdE* 5 (1946): 119–31 esp. 121–22. On the date of the latter, see Bernadette Menu, "Cessions de services et engagements pour dette sous les rois kouchites et saïtes," *RdE* 36 (1985): 75.

⁶⁴ Frank J. Yurco, "Sennacherib's Third Campaign and the Coregency of Shabaka and Shebitku," *Serapis* 6 (1980): 240 n. 146.

boundaries of his authority, it was in celestial rather than terrestrial terms; in Kawa V, the king states: “My father Amun commanded for me that every flatland and every hill-country should be placed under my sandals, south to *Rthw-Qbt* (Darkness?), north to the Pool of Horus, east to the rising of the sun, and west to the place in which it sets.”⁶⁵ Despite an influx of Levantine products and even laborers, the Kawa corpus gives only the vaguest account of their origins and procurement.

The reign of Taharqo is not bereft of Asiatic toponym lists. Taharqo’s statue base from the Mut Precinct of Karnak lists: upon its front side Babylon (*Sngr*) and Naharin; upon its left side the Shasu-nomads, Hatti, Arzawa, and Assyria (*’I-s-sw-r*); and upon its back side Tunip, and Kadesh.⁶⁶ De Rougé reasoned that “[i]l n’est pas dans l’habitude des Égyptiens de consigner sur leurs monuments des victoires imaginaires; ils se contentent de taire leurs défaites. On a donc ici la preuve certaine des victoires de Tahraka contre les Assyriens.”⁶⁷ It was, however, the practice of pharaohs to copy the toponym lists of their predecessors, and Taharqo’s list bears a marked equivalence to that of Horemheb upon Karnak’s Tenth Pylon.⁶⁸ *Contra* de Rougé, it must be emphasized that a toponym list was

⁶⁵ Kawa V (Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek A.I.N. 1712), ll. 15–16, in Macadam, *Temples of Kawa*, vol. 1, pls. 9–10; see also the Tanis stela (Cairo JE 37488), l. 10, in Jean Leclant and Jean Yoyotte, “Nouveaux documents relatifs à l’an VI de Taharqa,” *Kémi* 10 (1949): pls. II–III. For the indeterminate “Pool of Horus,” see Henri Gauthier, *Dictionnaire des noms géographiques contenus dans les textes hiéroglyphiques*, vol. 5 (Paris, 1928), 171. The ambiguity of the southern boundary nevertheless provides a useful comparison by which to judge the nature of the northern boundary. See *Rthw-Qbt* or *Rthw-Q3btyw* in: l. 4 of Thutmose I’s Tombo Stela in Lepsius, *Denkmäler aus Ägypten und Äthiopien*, vol. 3, 5a; Cairo CG 34163, l. 6, in Pierre Lacau, *Stèles du nouvel empire*, vol. 1, (Cairo, 1909), 204; but esp. P. Carlsberg I, col. I, l. 22, and col. II, ll. 19–26, in Alexandra von Lieven, *Grundriss des Laufes der Sterne: Das sogenannte Nutbuch* (Copenhagen, 2007), vol. 1: 59, 141, and vol. 2: Taf. 8–9. For earlier translations of and commentary upon the latter, see Otto Neugebauer and Richard Anthony Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts*, vol. 1 (London, 1960), 45, 52–53, and pl. 37 (col. II, l. 21), and pl. 36 (col. I, l. 22); Edoardo Detoma, “L’astronomia degli Egizi,” in *Scienze moderne & antiche sapienze: Le radici del sapere scientifico nel Vicino Oriente Antico* (Milan, 2003), 116–17.

⁶⁶ See Cairo CG 770 (=JE 2096) as copied in Ludwig Borchardt, *Statuen und Statuetten von Königen und Privatleuten*, vol. 3 (Berlin, 1930), 81–82 §770, and further discussion in Jan Jozef Simons, *Handbook for the Study of Egyptian Topographical Lists Relating to Western Asia* (Leiden, 1937), 103 and 187. For *Sngr* as Babylon, see discussion in: Hans Wolfgang Helck, *Die Beziehungen Ägyptens zu Vorderasien im 3. und 2. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Wiesbaden, 1962), 286; R. Zadok, “The Origin of the Name Shinar,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* 74/2 (1984): 240–44.

⁶⁷ Emmanuel de Rougé, “Étude sur quelques monuments du règne de Tahraka,” *Mélanges d’archéologie égyptienne et assyrienne* 1 (1872): 11–23, esp. 13.

⁶⁸ Simons, *Egyptian Topographical Lists*, 52, 103, 135, 187. *Contra* Dallibor, Assyria was not a new addition in Taharqo’s list: Klaus Dallibor, *Taharqo: Pharao aus Kusch: Ein Beitrag*

not tantamount to a record of victorious campaigns. Completed soon after his Temple of Amun-Re at Kawa, Taharqo's Temple of Amun-Re, Bull of Ta-Seti, at Sanam depicts upon its Second Pylon a row of bound captives labeled as the "northern hill-countries, southern hill-countries, Phoenicians (*Fnh.w*), all lands, the Shasu, Southland and Northland, bowmen of the deserts, Libyans (*Thn.w*), and everything that the Euphrates encloses (*šnw nb phr wr*)."⁶⁹ The list appears to have been shaped more by a desire for symmetry and comprehensiveness than by ambitions of event reportage. Nowhere in Taharqo's surviving inscriptions is there a narrative itinerary of military campaigns to rival those of his Kushite predecessor Pi(ankh)y, the Assyrians Tiglath-Pileser III, Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Assurbanipal, or Taharqo's Kushite successors Tanutamani, Irike-Amanote, and Nastasen.⁷⁰

From Taharqo's substantial corpus of inscriptions dating to the first half of his reign, the most likely candidate for such a distinction is his so-called "Long Inscription" from Sanam, but nothing within its detailed narrative suggests an Asiatic milieu.⁷¹ The absence of any surviving reference in the text to Kush's Near Eastern contemporaries is remarkable for at least two reasons. Firstly, the inscription was clearly quite extensive in its original form, spanning 180 columns of text across the walls of a temple forecourt.⁷² Secondly, the contents of this lengthy text were evidently historical in

zur *Geschichte und Kultur der 25. Dynastie* (Berlin, 2005), 189; cf. Simons, *Egyptian Topographical Lists*, 135 (List XII, no. 9).

⁶⁹ Francis Llewellyn Griffith, "Oxford Excavations in Nubia VIII–XVII. Napata, Sanam Temple, Treasury and Town," *AAA* 9 (1922): 67–124 and pls. IV–LXII esp. 105 and Pl. XLI.1. However, for the possibility that the Shasu might refer here to a population neighboring the Middle Nile, see Macadam, *Temples of Kawa*, vol. 2, 86.

⁷⁰ Stela Cheikh Labib 94 CL 1013 contains the fragmentary narrative description of a military engagement which Redford has attributed to Taharqo and associated with action against a "Libyan enclave." However, Revez's more recent study has now assigned to the stela a date earlier in the Third Intermediate Period. Revez appears to have been unaware of Redford's article, for he states: "À ma connaissance, cette stèle n'a fait jusqu'à présent l'objet d'aucune publication." As a result, no actual debate over the dating criteria of the stela has yet appeared in print. See Redford, "Taharqa in Western Asia and Libya," 188–91; cf. Jean Revez, "Une stèle inédite de la troisième période intermédiaire à Karnak: une guerre civile en Thébaïde?" *Cahiers de Karnak* 11 (2003): 535–65 and pls. I–IV.

⁷¹ Griffith, "Napata, Sanam Temple, Treasury and Town," 101–104 and pls. XXXVIII–XL.

⁷² If the text has attracted little scholarly attention, this is primarily due to its poor state of preservation: the inscription exists today only in photographs and hand-copies made during the early twentieth century, and these show that the walls had been stripped down since antiquity to their lowest two courses of quite friable sandstone masonry. Griffith translated less than a quarter of the 180 inscribed columns which his wife Nora had copied by hand, resulting in an edition of only three pages with a few sentences of historical commentary and no philological annotation. For other dismissals of the text's interest, see Pawel Wolf,

nature:⁷³ a forthcoming *editio princeps* has identified within the inscription references to one or more nautical expeditions, possible military and political conflicts, several titled officials of the realm, a plethora of toponyms and ethnonyms, and the most important cultic centers across the full length of the Double Kingdom of Kush-and-Egypt.⁷⁴ Yet Taharqo's inscription at Sanam appears to have focused exclusively upon northeast African affairs—much like the Great Triumphal Stela commissioned by his predecessor, Pi(ankh)y, and the inscriptions of all of Taharqo's successors upon the Kushite throne.⁷⁵

Particularly striking in Taharqo's royal corpus is the absence of any Kushite reference to Esarhaddon's defeat in Egypt, as recorded in Babylonian Chronicle 1 (*ABC 1*).⁷⁶ The event marks an apparent re-ignition of direct, armed conflict between Kush and Assyria, but it is not registered in the royal and private corpora of Egypt or Kush. Such a dearth of Kush-

"Die archäologischen Quellen der Taharqozeit im nubischen Niltal," (Ph.D. diss., Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 1990), 140 n. 108; Spalinger, "Foreign Policy of Egypt," 24.

⁷³ For designation of the text as "historical," see discussion in: Török, *Kingdom of Kush*, 372; László Török, *The Image of the Ordered World in Ancient Nubian Art: The Construction of the Kushite Mind (800 BC–300 AD)* (Leiden, 2002), 367.

⁷⁴ Jeremy Pope, *The Double Kingdom under Taharqo: Studies in the History of Kush and Egypt, c. 690–664 BC*, (Leiden, forthcoming), 59–145. I thank Jaromir Malek, Elizabeth Fleming, Alison Hobby, and Cat Warsi of Oxford's Griffith Institute Archive for providing access to the photographs and site cards. See also Jaromir Malek and Diana N. E. Magee, "Meroitic and Nubian Material in the Archives of the Griffith Institute," *Meroitic Newsletter* 25 (1994): 29. Only one of the scattered fragments of the inscription was removed for conservation (frag. 4, now Oxford Ashmolean Museum 1922.158), and those that remained *in situ* were subsequently denuded and then covered by wind-blown sand. Thanks are due to Helen Whitehouse for her assistance in consulting the Ashmolean's records, and to the current excavator of Sanam, Irene Vincentelli of the Joint Sudanese-Italian Expedition in the Napatan region, for giving me her assessment of the inscription's current condition and her assistance in attempting to trace the whereabouts of loose fragments.

⁷⁵ Cairo JE 48864 in Grimal, *La stèle triomphale de Pi('ankh)y*. Pi(ankh)y's status as possible sire of Taharqo may initially be deduced through both men's connection to Shepenwepet II. She is described as sister of Taharqo upon Cairo JE 36327, l. 3, in Ricardo A. Caminos, "The Nitocris Adoption Stela," *JEA* 50 (1964): 71–101 and pls. VIII–X esp. pl. VIII; but cf. n. 134 *infra*. Likewise, upon the ram-headed vessel held by her black granite sphinx, Berlin Ägyptisches Museum 7972, her cartouche flanks that of Pi(ankh)y with the following inscriptions: *dw3.t-ntr šp-n-wp.t s3.t nsw P-ḥy*. See photograph in Fritz Hintze and Ursula Hintze, *Civilizations of the Old Sudan* (Leipzig, 1968), fig. 64. The same relationship is also suggested by the appearances of Pi(ankh)y's and Taharqo's nomina together in separate cartouches upon a scarab in the Ward Collection: see William M. Flinders Petrie, *A History of Egypt*, vol. 3 (London, 1905), 291 fig. 119. For the inscriptions of Taharqo's Kushite successors, see Cara Sargent, "The Napatan Royal Inscriptions: Egyptian in Nubia," (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2004); Carsten Peust, *Das Napatanische: Ein ägyptischer Dialekt aus dem Nubien des späten ersten vorchristlichen Jahrtausends: Texte, Glossar, Grammatik* (Göttingen, 1999).

⁷⁶ See n. 18 *supra*.

ite testimony has granted a wider field of play for historical conjecture, which has often stretched individual pieces of evidence beyond their carrying capacity. A case in point may be observed in the mountain passes of Lower Nubia, where three nearly identical graffiti were carved upon a single day; each read as follows:

Regnal year 19, month 3 of Inundation, day 1: The cattle-road which Taharqo traveled at the entrance of the western mountain of the land of the Majesty of Horus: Exalted-of-Epiphanyes; Two-Ladies: Exalted-of-Epiphanyes; Golden-Horus: Protector-of-the-Two-Lands; King-of-Upper-and-Lower-Egypt: Re-is-the-Protector-of Nefertem; Son-of-Re: Taharqo, beloved of Amun-Re, Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands, given all life, stability, and dominion like Re forever.⁷⁷

Dallibor has recently attributed exceptional importance to the graffiti, proposing that “[m]öglicherweise sind die drei nubischen Inschriften *der einzige ägyptische Beleg für die kriegerischen Auseinandersetzungen mit den Assyrern*.”⁷⁸ In this judgment, he echoes the opinion of Weigall nearly a century ago; upon his discovery of one of the graffiti, Weigall proposed that “it was written to commemorate Taharqa’s march to the Sudan in B.C. 669–668 [sic] when Esarhaddon entered Egypt from the north . . . a moment of order in the headlong flight of an utterly defeated Pharaoh.”⁷⁹ Subsequent commentators have generally followed suit, directly associating the Lower Nubian graffiti with Taharqo’s wars against Assyria; Hintze even proposed that the graffiti mark the route by which Taharqo had “in seinem 19. Jahr Theben zurückerobert.”⁸⁰ Yet there are considerable problems with Weigall’s thesis and its elaboration by Hintze. Firstly, it has proven necessary to modify the timing of Taharqo’s maneuver as Weigall envisioned it, for the date provided in the graffiti does not match the chronology of the Assyrian wars as now understood: in the third month of

⁷⁷ For a new edition of the graffiti with philological and historical commentary, see Pope, *The Double Kingdom under Taharqo*, 181–91. For previous translations, see Arthur Weigall, “Upper Egyptian Notes,” *ASAE* 9 (1908): 105–12; *id.*, *A Report on the Antiquities of Lower Nubia* (Oxford, 1907), 68 and pl. XXII no. 4; Gunther Roeder, *Les temples immergés de la Nubie: Debod bis Bab Kalabsche*, vol. 1 (Cairo, 1911), 211–12, 215–16, and Taf. 93a, 94, and 127a–b; Fritz Hintze, “Eine neue Inschrift von 19. Jahr König Taharqas,” *MIO* 7 (1960): 330–33.

⁷⁸ Dallibor, *Taharqo*, 81 [emphasis added].

⁷⁹ Weigall, “Upper Egyptian Notes,” 106.

⁸⁰ Hintze, “Eine neue Inschrift,” 332–33. See also: Kitchen, *Third Intermediate Period*, 392 n. 871; Török, *Kingdom of Kush*, 141 n. 123; Dallibor, *Taharqo*, 81. But cf. Roeder, *Debod bis Bab Kalabsche*, 211–12, 215–16.

Inundation during Taharqo's nineteenth regnal year, the Assyrian armies had yet to take Memphis, much less Thebes, so the graffiti could only record Taharqo's preparation for war—not his retreat, and certainly not an attempted reconquest of Thebes.⁸¹ Thus, Kitchen and Dallibor have concluded that the text “may mark the route north by which he had *earlier* brought his Nubian levy to Egypt,” in anticipation of “der Abwehr einer *drohenden* assyrischen Invasion.”⁸² Still more troubling, however, is the fact that the graffiti contain no references at all to warfare: there is no mention of troops, no rhetoric of “restraining the Asiatics,” not even a militaristic royal epithet. Beyond their dateline and royal nomina, the graffiti deliver only one simple message—a label for the path which they marked: “the cattle-road which Taharqo traveled at the entrance of the western mountain of the land of the Majesty of Horus.” Weigall's colorful interpretation seems to have persisted largely because these graffiti would answer the historian's desire for a Kushite commentary upon the Assyrian wars.⁸³

A similar confusion has accompanied a group of statues excavated at Nineveh. Spalinger states that “a fragment of a statue of Taharqa found in the ruins at Nineveh may shed some light upon Taharqa's interest in Asia,” explaining that “[t]he object appears to describe the goddess Anukis, usually associated with Elephantine, as being connected with a foreign locality”—i.e., an Asian toponym which Spalinger leaves unspecified.⁸⁴ A favored Kushite goddess granted cultic association with an Asian toponym might, indeed, suggest some form of religious imperialism or even a Kushite-Egyptian garrison or merchant community abroad. Yet some of the details appear to have been muddled in Spalinger's description: none of the three fragments of life-sized Taharqo statues found at Nineveh

⁸¹ The third month of Inundation in Taharqo's 19th regnal year would correspond to the spring of 672 B.C.E., with that same regnal year ending on 6 February 671. Esarhaddon's armies did not capture Memphis until the 22nd day of the month of Du'uzu, which would correspond to the *summer* of 671 B.C.E. See dates given in Mark Depauw, *A Chronological Survey of Precisely Dated Demotic and Abnormal Hieratic Sources* (Cologne, 2007), 2; Kahn, “Taharqa, King of Kush, and the Assyrians,” 112.

⁸² Kitchen, *Third Intermediate Period*, 392 n. 871 [emphasis added]; Dallibor, *Taharqo*, 81 [emphasis added].

⁸³ For another piece of Lower Nubian evidence quite dubiously connected in the secondary literature with the wars between Assyria and Kush, see Pope, *The Double Kingdom under Taharqo*, §§IV.2–IV.4.; Jeremy Pope, “Montuemhat's Semna Stela: The Double Life of an Artifact” (paper presented at the 62nd Annual Meeting of the American Research Center in Egypt, Chicago, 3 April 2011).

⁸⁴ Spalinger, “Foreign Policy of Egypt,” 28.

makes any mention of Anukis;⁸⁵ she is instead attested at Nineveh upon a quite separate object—a bronze statuette—which contains no allusion to a foreign toponym.⁸⁶ Taharqo's statue fragments at Nineveh do associate the god *Onuris* with a foreign toponym, which Simpson initially took for a Near Eastern locale based upon his examination of casts:

One possible reading is *dgrw*, and this suggests a place in Syria or Palestine If the cult place turns out to have been situated in Syria or Palestine, the statues may well have been set up there and seized in an early part of the conflict . . . by Assurbanipal around 663 B.C.⁸⁷

Presumably, the unnamed “place in Syria or Palestine” which Simpson would equate with *dgrw* would be either the *dgʒr* or the *dgʒr-ir* mentioned as an Asiatic toponym within Papyrus Anastasi I.⁸⁸ However, Simpson admitted that, “because of the uncertainty in its reading on the basis of the casts, . . . [i]t would be necessary to see photographs of the inscription itself.”⁸⁹ By contrast, Vikentiev's analysis of the casts concluded that the toponym was not *dgrw*, but was instead variously written as either *tʒ-r-b-r* or *tʒ-ir-b-r*.⁹⁰ The only known parallels for that sequence of phonemes are to be found among a plethora of African toponyms upon a statue base of Amenhotep III and within an inscription of the fourth century B.C.E. Kushite king Nastasen.⁹¹ Though Vikentiev believed that the placement

⁸⁵ Now in the Mossul Museum; see Naji al Asil, “Editorial Notes and Archaeological Events: the Assyrian Palace at Nebi Unis,” *Sumer* 10 (1954): 111 and issue frontispiece. For a clear explanation of the finds, see Steven W. Holloway, *Aššur is king! Aššur is king! Religion in the Exercise of Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Leiden, 2002), 142 n. 208.

⁸⁶ Iraq Museum 59032 as photographed in frontispiece of *Sumer* 11, no. 2 (1955) and mentioned in: Letter from I. E. S. Edwards to Naji al Asil dated 1 March 1955 in *Sumer* 11 (1955): 129; Letter from Naji al Asil to I. E. S. Edwards dated 3 April 1955 in *Sumer* 11 (1955): 130; Letter from W. K. Simpson to Naji al Asil dated 9 July 1955 in *Sumer* 11 (1955): 131–32; Letter from Naji al Asil to W. K. Simpson dated 31 January 1956 in *Sumer* 11 (1955): 133.

⁸⁷ William Kelly Simpson, “The Pharaoh Taharqa,” *Sumer* 10 (1954): 194 and figs. 4–5.

⁸⁸ P. British Museum 10247, col. 21, l. 8, in Alan H. Gardiner, *Egyptian hieratic texts, transcribed* (Leipzig, 1911), 23, 33.

⁸⁹ Simpson, “The Pharaoh Taharqa,” 194.

⁹⁰ See Vikentiev's letter dated 15 December 1954 as appended by editor al Asil to: Simpson, “Pharaoh Taharqa,” 194. See also: Vladimir Vikentiev, “Quelques considerations à propos des statues de Taharqa trouvées dans les ruines du palais d'Esarhaddon,” *Sumer* 11 (1955): 111–16. As Vikentiev recognized, the toponym is clearly accompanied by the “déterminatif du pays étranger” (*ibid.*, 112).

⁹¹ For the statue base of Amenhotep III, see Louvre A 18, front of base, bound captive on viewer's far left, in Alexandre Varille, “Fragments d'un colosse d'Aménophis III donnant une liste de pays africains (Louvre A 18 et A 19),” *BIFAO* 35 (1935): 164 and pl. III. For Nastasen's stela, see Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung 2268, l. 50, as photographed and collated in: Heinrich Schäfer, *Die äthiopische Königsinschrift des berliner Museums. Regierungsbericht des Königs Nastasen des Gegners des Kambyyses* (Leipzig, 1901),

of Taharqo's statues in Esarhaddon's palace indicated diplomatic relations between the two kings,⁹² Simpson proposed rather more logically that their position should be attributed to their function as trophies of war.⁹³ The Anukis statuette, for its part, may be one of the "goddesses of Taharqo" which Esarhaddon claimed to have looted from Memphis.⁹⁴ It would therefore seem that neither the Anukis statuette excavated at Nineveh nor the statues of Taharqo found with it give any indication of "Taharqa's interest in Asia."

For all that Esarhaddon's sack of Memphis may have taken from the royal house of Kush, it wrought for historians of Kush a rare gift: arguably the clearest reference to a Near Eastern event in the entire corpus of Kushite royal inscriptions. Inscribed upon dismantled blocks from the south wall of the north peristyle court (Sixth Pylon) at Karnak is Taharqo's fragmentary appeal:

O Amun, that which I did in the land of Nehesy [Nubia], allow . . . Allow that I might make for you your tribute from the land of Khor [Syria-Palestine] which is turned away from you. O Amun . . . [m]y wives. Allow that my children might live. Turn death away from them for me.⁹⁵

Spalinger identified in these three columns of text allusion to "a debacle which occurred abroad, in which only the Assyrians can be the enemy."⁹⁶ As Kahn would later recognize, the concern which the inscription expresses for the safety of Taharqo's wives and children is much more likely to correspond to the period after their capture by Esarhaddon than before that event, as previously assumed by Vernus and Spalinger.⁹⁷ In this brief

19, 127, and Taf. IV; Peust, *Das Napatanische*, 41. The proposed readings for Amenhotep's list and Nastasen's stela are simply *r-b-3-r* and *r-b-3-r*, respectively, rather than "land of *r-b-r*" as given on the Nineveh fragments.

⁹² Vikentiev, "Quelques considerations à propos des statues de Taharqa," 112.

⁹³ Simpson, "The Pharaoh Taharqa," 194.

⁹⁴ Vorderasiatisches Museum Berlin 31 (Nahr el-Kelb cast), l. 11, in Leichty, *Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon*, 192 §103.

⁹⁵ See Chicago House Epigraphic Survey photograph 8581, as well as hand-copy published in: Pascal Vernus, "Inscriptions de la troisième période intermédiaire (I): Les inscriptions de la cour péristyle nord du VI^e pylône dans le temple de Karnak," *BIFAO* 75 (1975): 11 fig. 11 J2, fifth to seventh cols. from the left. I thank Christina Di Cerbo for providing me with access to the unpublished photograph.

⁹⁶ Spalinger, "Foreign Policy of Egypt," 43.

⁹⁷ Kahn, "Taharqa, King of Kush, and the Assyrians," 116–17. For Spalinger's previous interpretation, see Spalinger, "Foreign Policy of Egypt," 31. For Esarhaddon's account of the capture of Taharqo's family members, see esp.: Vorderasiatisches Museum Berlin 2708 (Zinçirli stela), rev. ll. 43b–50a, in: von Luschan, *Ausgrabungen in Sendchirli*, vol. 1, 40–41, Taf. II, and V; Leichty, *Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon*, 185–86 §98.

passage, we may in fact safely perceive a pair of related events: the cessation of Khor's tribute to Egypt and the capture of Taharqo's family at Memphis. From the Kushite record's "chaîne des faits," these two links would seem to be the only ones corresponding directly to episodes described in the textual corpora of the Near East.⁹⁸ As Spalinger has lamented: "Among all of the dated inscriptions of Taharqa, none recount any Asiatic wars of this Pharaoh, [and] . . . there are very few allusions to Taharqa's eastern neighbors."⁹⁹ The allusions inscribed upon the Karnak blocks are also the final references to Asiatic affairs in the Kushite royal inscriptions. Located beyond Kush's subsequent sphere of influence, the Near East seems never again to have figured in the narratives commissioned by Kushite kings.

The Egyptian record is only slightly more forthcoming about the events that ravaged the country's most sacred cities in the mid-seventh century B.C.E. Montuemhat, who outlived the brief Assyrian interregnum, claimed credit for "repulsing the raging of the hill-countries."¹⁰⁰ A century later, the author of Papyrus Rylands IX would acknowledge those catastrophic years as simply "that evil time" (*p3 h3 bin*), but as Vittmann has deduced, "[d]er Ausdruck . . . bezieht sich offenbar . . . auf die 'schlimme Zeit' der Assyrerherrschaft."¹⁰¹ Even in the Graeco-Roman period, literary memory of the Assyrian invasion as recalled in the Inaros Cycle (formerly known as the "Pedubast Cycle") was focused upon the petty Lower Egyptian kings and their rebellions against Esarhaddon and/or Assurbanipal—not upon the confrontation of Assyria and Kush, and certainly not upon Kushite royal strategy. Schneider has recently proposed that the Assyrian invaders

⁹⁸ Viewed in conjunction with the royal inscriptions from Kawa, these two events mentioned in Taharqo's Karnak inscription would also clearly imply an event which is not explicitly recorded in the Near Eastern corpus: the resumption of substantial tribute rendered to Egypt from Khor at some point between Tiglath-Pileser III's initial embargo and Esarhaddon's sack of Memphis. As Picchi notes of the Karnak inscription: "La scarsità di notizie forniteci sui periodi dai testi cuneiformi e l'arrivo improvviso del truppe assire ai confini dell'Egitto nel 679 a.C. sarebbero inspiegabili, se non si confrontassero con [questa] iscrizione di Taharqa." Picchi, *Il conflitto tra Etiopi ed Assiri*, 42.

⁹⁹ Spalinger, "Foreign Policy of Egypt," 23 and 26.

¹⁰⁰ See Cairo CG 42241 (=JE 37176), sixth col. from viewer's left below lunette, in Leclant, *Montouemhat*, 83–84 and pl. XXII.

¹⁰¹ See P. Rylands 9, col. VI, l. 16, and col. VII, l. 3, in: Günter Vittmann, *Der demotische Papyrus Rylands 9*, vol. 1 (Wiesbaden, 1998), 26, 29, and 132–35; *ibid.*, vol. 2, 409–10. Papyrus Rylands 9 must perforce derive from no earlier than the late sixth century B.C., as it mentions the ninth regnal year of Darius I (ca. 513 B.C.E.): see col. 1, ll. 1–2, in Vittmann, *Rylands 9*, vol. 1, 1 and 116–17. For another reference to *p3 h3 bin*, see P. Brooklyn 47.218.3, col. 4, l. 2, in Richard Anthony Parker, *A Saite Oracle Papyrus from Thebes in the Brooklyn Museum* (Providence, 1962), 51–52 and pl. 19. In this context, Parker has judged *h3 (bin)* as simply "bad season, famine" (cf. Coptic Ⲓⲉⲃⲱⲛ).

may appear “in disguise” as the bellicose herdsmen of *The Contest for the Benefice of Amun*.¹⁰² A more explicit but even briefer reference to the events is provided by *The Contest for the Breastplate of Inaros*, in which one Pemu of Heliopolis (near Memphis) repulses *wr iš[wl] ʒslštny* (“the grandee of Assur, Esarhaddon”) on behalf of Pedubast; the chronology appears to have been collapsed, as Pemu seems unlikely to have been in power at the time—and he may even be an apocryphal figure.¹⁰³ The lambdacized name of Esarhaddon surfaces in three additional manuscripts, but all remain unpublished.¹⁰⁴ The name of his father, Sennacherib, is featured in that same corpus only as a patronymic and was rendered according to a folk etymology: *Wsh-rn=f*, “His Name is Long.”¹⁰⁵ Throughout the Demotic corpus, the ethnonym *išwr.w* is used to refer to both Syrians and Assyrians, echoing some of the ambiguity of the earlier *Sty.w*, *Mnty.w*, and *hry.w-š*.¹⁰⁶ At no point does a text written in the Egyptian language openly pit Kushite royals against Assyrian invaders.¹⁰⁷ One *Piʒ* (Piye/Piankhy?) does appear in *Nanefersokar and the Babylonians*, but the enemy given there is “the grandee of Babylon” (*pʒ wr Bbl*), his subjects are called “the Assyrians” or “the Syrians” (*nʒ išr.w*), and they are conscripted from among the “satraps” (*hštrpn*) and bear Persian names.¹⁰⁸ The one extant text from

¹⁰² Thomas Schneider, “The Assyrian Conquest in Disguise: Rewriting Egyptian History in the ‘Struggle for the Benefice of Amun,’” (paper presented at the 60th Annual Meeting of the American Research Center in Egypt, Dallas, 24 April 2009). As Schneider’s proposal remains unpublished, any evaluation of it would be premature at present. For *The Contest for the Benefice of Amun*, see W. Spiegelberg, *Der Sagenkreis des Königs Petubastis nach dem Strassburger demotischen Papyrus sowie den Wiener und Pariser Bruchstücken* (Leipzig, 1910); Friedhelm Hoffmann and Joachim F. Quack, *Anthologie der demotischen Literatur* (Berlin, 2007), 88–107.

¹⁰³ Friedhelm Hoffmann, *Der Kampf um den Panzer des Inaros: Studien zum P. Krall und seiner Stellung innerhalb des Inaros-Petubastis-Zyklus* (Vienna, 1996), 165 and Taf. 5; for the proposed identification with Esarhaddon, see Edda Bresciani, *Der Kampf um den Panzer des Inaros (Papyrus Krall)* (Vienna, 1964), 115, and further discussion in: Joachim Friedhelm Quack, *Einführung in die altägyptische Literaturgeschichte*, vol. 3 (Münster, 2005), 42–61; Kim Ryholt, “The Assyrian Invasion of Egypt in Egyptian Literary Tradition: A survey of the narrative source material,” in *Assyria and Beyond: Studies Presented to Mogens Trolle Larsen*, ed. J. G. Dercksen (Leiden, 2004), 483–510, esp. 495.

¹⁰⁴ See P. Carlsberg 80 (Inaros Epic), P. Carlsberg 68+123 (also Inaros Epic), and P. Berlin P 14682 (unidentified story), in Ryholt, “Assyrian Invasion of Egypt,” 485.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 485.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 490; cf. nn. 31, 35–36, 58–59, and 62 *supra*.

¹⁰⁷ For a rather cryptic tale involving four Kushite rulers and indeterminate “men of the east,” see P. Carlsberg 400 (*The Story of Nakhthorshen*) in *ibid.*, 504–505.

¹⁰⁸ See P. Carlsberg 303 + P. Berlin P 13640 in Karl-Theodor Zauzich, “Einleitung,” in *The Carlsberg Papyri*, vol. 1, ed. P. J. Frandsen (Copenhagen, 1991), 1–11 esp. 6, and Ryholt, “Assyrian Invasion of Egypt,” 502–504.

Late Period Egypt which juxtaposes “Esarhaddon” (ʿS<R>HDN) and “Taharqo, king of the Kushites” (THRQ MLK KŠY) is an Aramaic dipinto inscription found within a cave, but it survives only in tantalizing fragments of broken narrative.¹⁰⁹

The Kushite and Egyptian record’s considerable obliquity on international affairs of the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E. may be variously explained as an accident of survival, systematic destruction, or authorial elision, but the resulting “chaîne des faits” provides only limited scope for discussion of Kushite foreign policy. The historian who truly “se laisse porter par les documents” gains little traction in pursuit of the reasons behind the 25th Dynasty’s intervention in 701 B.C.E.¹¹⁰ Caution might therefore seem to advise against any inference on that question. However, such interpretive abstinence imposes far too positivistic a stricture upon the work of the historian.¹¹¹ In fact, the poverty of evidence has allowed a proliferation of theories to explain Kushite inaction, extradition, coalition, and intervention against the Assyrian threat.

II. SEVEN EXPLANATIONS OF KUSHITE FOREIGN POLICY

Without an explicit statement of Kushite intention or strategy in the primary source record, discussion of the subject in the secondary literature has rarely taken the form of sustained debate. More often, one or a pair of reasons for Kushite behavior has been briefly asserted as self-evident within the context of narrative *histoires événementielles*. The range of available interpretations may be parsed into at least seven categories, two of which will be supported here as preferable to the other five: it will be proposed that the Kushite kings prioritized the maintenance of long-distance

¹⁰⁹ For the Sheikh Fadl inscription, see Noël Giron, “Note sur une tombe découverte près de Cheikh-fadl par M. Flinders Petrie et contenant des inscriptions araméennes,” *Ancient Egypt* 8 (1923): 38–43; Andre Lemaire, “Les inscriptions araméennes de Cheikh-Fadl (Égypte),” in *Studia Aramaica: New Sources and Approaches*, ed. Markham J. Geller et al. (Oxford, 1995), 77–132; Bezalel Porten and Ada Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt*, vol. 4 (Jerusalem, 1999), 286–99, foldouts 5–8; Quack, *Einführung in die altägyptische Literaturgeschichte*, vol. 3, 44; and further discussion with bibliography in: Ryholt, “Assyrian Invasion of Egypt,” 496–97; Günter Vittmann, *Ägypten und die Fremden im ersten vorchristlichen Jahrtausend* (Mainz am Rhein, 2003), 104–105.

¹¹⁰ See n. 3 *supra*.

¹¹¹ David Hackett Fischer, *Historians’ Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York, 1970), 4–8; Bernard Bailyn and Edward Connery Latham, *On the Teaching and Writing of History* (Hanover, N. H., 1994), 73.

trade and border defense as a buttress to their own domestic legitimacy—and conversely that they did not pursue territorial acquisition in the Near East, foment Levantine rebellion, ignore the military prowess of Assyria, or act out of sibling rivalry or caprice. However, from an historiographical perspective, it will be argued that the evidence reviewed above ultimately provides insufficient grounds upon which to evaluate the seven theories outlined immediately below, and thus an alternative method must be sought further below in Section III.

Common to all published explanations of Kushite foreign policy is an emphasis upon the 25th Dynasty's desire for Levantine and especially Phoenician bulk goods and luxuries. That commercial demand was one component of Kushite interest in the Near East is an impression strongly reinforced by the recurrence of Asiatic woods and ores within the Kawa inventories, as well as by Taharqo's lament to Amun regarding "your tribute from the land of Khor [Syria-Palestine] which is turned away from you."¹¹² Yet Redford has questioned the importance of trade relative to other Kushite motivations:

We cannot be sure that trade was uppermost in the Sudanese Pharaohs' minds. Certainly Gaza and Ashkelon must now have become the beneficiaries of an incipient commerce passing from south Arabia via the Negeb and the 'Arabah. But many of the aromatics and tropical products traversing this route were available to the 25th Dynasty in their homeland far to the south of the Nile.¹¹³

Indeed, if understood in strictly formalist terms, the Kushite dynasts' lust for Levantine exports would not easily justify the expenditure of resources and manpower, or the peril to domestic security, which the resulting competition with Assyria entailed. The problem with commercial interest as an explanation for Kushite foreign policy is not that it rings false, but that it is entirely too vague, for it raises more questions than it would answer: How was material acquisition weighed against competing objectives? Was it the primary force driving Kushite involvement in the affairs of Asia or only an auxiliary one? And by what specific strategies was it actually pursued? Kahn concludes: "[A] commercial Kushite activity in the Levant

¹¹² See references in nn. 52, 56–57, and 95 *supra*.

¹¹³ Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel*, 351.

cannot be ruled out entirely . . . [but i]t seems to me that we should prefer to understand the Kushite activity in the Levant as a military one."¹¹⁴

Many scholars have shared Kahn's judgment, attributing to the Kushite kings a consistently expansionist agenda. The theory is voiced most categorically by Kitchen, who writes of the 25th Dynasty's "nakedly imperialistic pretensions," manifested in the east by an "aggressive policy in Western Asia."¹¹⁵ The same assumption is implied by Morkot's assessment of the conflict with Sennacherib in 701 B.C.E.: "[I]f the Kushite army had been successful, they may have been able to make a bid for supremacy in Western Asia."¹¹⁶ Redford would concur, asserting flatly of Shabaqo and Shebitqo that "[b]oth Pharaohs undoubtedly had aspirations to extend their hegemony over Asia and acted upon them."¹¹⁷ Viewed from this angle, the Kushite intervention in Judah would aim to impose an enduring vassalage upon the region, if not eventually to annex it as a colonial territory. Such an explanation is particularly favored by three features of the surviving Kushite record. Firstly, the earliest narrative account of the royal house of Kush—the Great Triumphal Stela of Pi(ankh)y—depicts it in the process of an armed expansion.¹¹⁸ Secondly, the most abundant and explicit references to the Near East within the Kushite royal inscriptions derive from the reign of Taharqo—a king whose adulthood seems to begin and end with military contests against Assyria.¹¹⁹ As Kahn observes, "Taharqa was during the whole of his lifetime hostile towards the Assyrians."¹²⁰ Thirdly, the iconography and phraseology adopted by the Kushite dynasts were frequently patterned after those of the New Kingdom—as exemplified by Taharqo's apparent reproduction of Horemheb's Asiatic toponym list.¹²¹ The choice of model, Redford argues, was conditioned not by an indiscriminate traditionalism but by deliberate and focused emulation: "The fact that [Taharqo] makes use of this genre—he is the first to do so since Sheshonq I 250 years earlier—shows that for precedents Taharqa was looking back to the period of empire."¹²² The military prowess of Assyria ensured that any such ambitions on the part of the 25th Dynasty would

¹¹⁴ Kahn, "Taharqa, King of Kush, and the Assyrians," 118 n. 12.

¹¹⁵ Kitchen, *Third Intermediate Period*, 557 §470 and 385 §346.

¹¹⁶ Robert Morkot, *The Black Pharaohs: Egypt's Nubian Rulers* (London, 2000), 217.

¹¹⁷ Redford, "Sais and the Kushite Invasions," 15.

¹¹⁸ See n. 26 *supra*.

¹¹⁹ See nn. 23 and 48 *supra*.

¹²⁰ Kahn, "Taharqa, King of Kush, and the Assyrians," 118 n. 12.

¹²¹ See nn. 66 and 68 *supra*.

¹²² Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel*, 355.

not be fully realized, and so, *faute de mieux*, Kushite propaganda is taken as evidence of Kushite intention.

Closely related to the image of an expansionist Kushite state is the assumption that the kings of the 25th Dynasty actively fomented rebellion throughout the Levant. Popularized by Breasted's *A History of Egypt* in 1905, this explanation was preserved with little modification in both Nubian and Near Eastern Studies by the seminal works of Adams and Kuhrt, respectively.¹²³ With the publication in 2010 of Wilkinson's *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt*, the theory is now circulated anew to a broad audience:

Faced with such an intimidating opponent, Shabaqo at first settled for a policy of cautious diplomacy. . . . [Later, w]hen the Assyrian ruler Sennacherib began a systematic consolidation of his western territories, Egypt decided that the covert encouragement of local insurgencies would serve its interests better, and began to stir discontent among the fractious rulers of the Near Eastern city-states. The policy backfired disastrously. . . . [Sennacherib] forced Taharqo to flee back to Egypt with the remnants of his defeated and dejected army.¹²⁴

For the epoch that followed, Spalinger asserts that "it was Egypt, or rather the Kushite ruler of that land, who first initiated hostile activities," and "[i]t is evident that Taharqa had realized that the peripheral Assyrian territories in the Levant were ripe for intervention."¹²⁵ Redford as well has wondered "whether the '22 kings of Khatte' whom Esarhaddon counted as wholly subservient to himself had originally constituted a loose coalition, organized under Tyre at the instigation of Taharqa."¹²⁶ The 25th Dynasty's postulated orchestration of Levantine revolts against Assyria might therefore be construed as Kushite imperialism *in ovo*, a preliminary step toward inclusion of those territories within an expanding realm. Thus, Motyer has called the Kushite royal house "the evil genius."¹²⁷ Conversely, hindsight would deem such a strategy not only ill-fated but ill-conceived; as Picchi has argued: "Fu quindi il faraone kushite a provocare la reazione di Esarhaddon, che decise allora di conquistare l'Egitto."¹²⁸ What appeared to Motyer as keen machination is instead depicted by Kitchen as a case

¹²³ William Yewdale Adams, *Nubia: Corridor to Africa* (Princeton, 1977), 263–264; Amélie Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, vol. 2 (London, 1995), 499.

¹²⁴ Toby Wilkinson, *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt* (New York, 2010), 407.

¹²⁵ Spalinger, "Esarhaddon and Egypt," 301–302.

¹²⁶ Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel*, 356.

¹²⁷ John Alexander Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: an introduction and commentary* (Leicester, 1993), 170.

¹²⁸ Picchi, *Il conflitto tra Etiopi ed Assiri*, 44.

of “incompetent interference in Palestinian affairs . . . disastrous for Egypt and Palestine alike.”¹²⁹

Kitchen’s characterization of events speaks to a rather different view of Kushite foreign policy as driven not by informed strategy but by geopolitical naïveté. The most vocal exponent of this hypothesis has been T. G. H. James, who would depict the 25th Dynasty as an utterly guileless interloper, first upon the Egyptian, and then upon the Near Eastern, stage:

In political matters the Nubians behaved with extraordinary naivety, failing wholly, it would seem, to grasp the reality of the exercise of power within Egypt. The title of King of Upper and Lower Egypt, which represented so potently the overall dominion of the pharaoh throughout Egypt, was accepted as a supreme dignity, but its political implications were ignored. The unity of the north with the south in the understanding of the Egyptian monarchy since the First Dynasty meant the physical control of the whole of Egypt; it was not simply titular. This fact seems never to have been appreciated by the Nubians, and their acceptance from time to time of the submission and formal loyalty of the Delta rulers reveals how little they were able to justify, in the terms of long-established practice, their assumption of the supreme pharaonic designation.¹³⁰

When these parvenus inherited the responsibility for Egypt’s eastern trade, James argued, they entered a realm quite beyond their comprehension: “Their adventures in foreign affairs, almost invariably disastrous, were it seems, not prompted by any consistent policy, but by misguided interest in the machinations of Palestinian and Syrian states, compounded with a misjudgment of the competence of their armies in opposition to the well-organized might of Assyria.”¹³¹ The Near Eastern documentary record might be taken to support this view, based in particular upon two famous Assyrian judgments of Kush. In the earliest, Sargon II’s account of the Iamani affair, the Assyrian speaks of Shebitqo as “the king of Meluhḫa, who [lives] in [a distant country], in an inapproachable region, the road [to which is . . .], whose fathers never—from remote days until now—had sent messengers to inquire after the health of my royal forefathers.”¹³² More influential still is the rab-šaḳê’s assessment of the 25th Dynasty as

¹²⁹ Kenneth A. Kitchen, “Egypt,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Bible Places*, ed. J. J. Bimson (Grand Rapids, MI, 1995), 117.

¹³⁰ Thomas Garnet Henry James, “Egypt: the Twenty-fifth and Twenty-sixth Dynasties,” in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 3, fasc. 2, ed. J. Boardman et al. (Cambridge, 1991), 703.

¹³¹ James, “Twenty-fifth and Twenty-sixth Dynasties,” 703.

¹³² See n. 12 *supra*.

rendered in Second Kings: “Behold, you trust upon the staff of this broken reed, even upon Egypt, which pierces a man’s hand and wounds him if he leans upon it! Such is Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to all who depend upon him.”¹³³ In the Near Eastern record, it is thus Assyrian propaganda which stands, *faute de mieux*, as evidence of Kushite foreign policy.

James’ attribution of Kushite provincialism has given rise to the theory that the kings of the 25th Dynasty were motivated, not by imperial design, but by sibling one-upmanship. Of the dynasty’s genesis in Egypt, James wrote: “It is possible only to surmise at [Shabaqo’s] reasons for moving north, but among them may well have been the desire to match the brilliant campaign of P[iankh]y.”¹³⁴ The evidentiary foundation for such a rivalry remains obscure—unless it be vaguely inspired by the *damnatio memoriae* executed against Pi(ankh)y’s name in Kush, or perhaps the allegations of Kushite fratricide in the Latin glosses to Jerome’s epitome of the *Chronicle* of Eusebius.¹³⁵ More apropos, however, are this hypothesis’ implications for international policy: while James mentioned the intransigence of Lower Egypt as one possible concern in Shabaqo’s mind, he would not countenance a similar Kushite awareness of the Assyrian juggernaut to the east, which had already reached the “Brook of Egypt” more than once in Shabaqo’s lifetime.¹³⁶ If an informed domestic policy is deemed unlikely, an informed foreign policy is *a fortiori* excluded.

The image of a callow and provincial 25th Dynasty is communicated in much subtler form within arguments for a capricious Kushite foreign policy.¹³⁷ Yet proponents of this interpretation stand upon a firmer

¹³³ 2 Kgs. 18:21.

¹³⁴ James, “Twenty-fifth and Twenty-sixth Dynasties,” 689. It has been widely assumed that Pi(ankh)y and Shabaqo were brothers, but this remains uncertain. Explicit statements of parentage exist in the Kushite record only for the royal women, and thus the filiation of Kushite kings is dependent upon their relation to those women, as communicated by the notoriously ambiguous kinship term *sn(.t)*. See, e.g., Jean Revez, “The Metaphorical Use of the Kinship Term *sn* ‘Brother’,” *JARCE* 40 (2003): 123–31.

¹³⁵ For the erasure of Pi(ankh)y’s nomina from monuments even in Kush, see Jean Yoyotte, “Le martelage des noms royaux éthiopiens par Psammétique II,” *RdE* 8 (1951): 220. For allegations of Kushite fratricide, see Leo Depuydt, “Glosses to Jerome’s Eusebios as a Source for Pharaonic History,” *CdE* 76 (2001): 30–47.

¹³⁶ See nn. 8 and 10 *supra*.

¹³⁷ See, esp. James, “Twenty-fifth and Twenty-sixth Dynasties,” 703, and to a lesser extent: Kahn, “Taharqa, King of Kush, and the Assyrians,” 19; Richard Lobban, “Foreign Relations of the XXVth Dynasty: the Struggle for Legitimacy and the Burden of Power,” in *Recent Research in Kushite History and Archaeology: Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference for Meroitic Studies*, ed. D. Welsby (London, 1999), 331–46, esp. 335; Yurco, “Sennacherib’s Third Campaign,” 228.

empirical base, for the Near Eastern record of Kushite action would seem to present more than one *volte-face*. Though Iamani's flight to Egypt indicates some expectation of asylum, Shebitqo extradited him, in what Bright has deemed a "craven" betrayal;¹³⁸ then, only a decade hence, Shebitqo was evidently willing to send his own troops abroad for intervention against Assyria.¹³⁹ The absence of Kushite testimony to any of these events has altogether deprived historians of direct evidence for motive. As a result, there remains a strong temptation to view the 25th Dynasty as wildly inconsistent in the global arena.

Finally, the actions of the Kushite dynasts have been explained as strategies of border defense. Aubin attributes most of Kushite foreign and domestic policy to this overriding goal across the full tenure of the 25th Dynasty. Of the Kushite expansion recorded in the Great Triumphant Stela, Aubin writes: "I believe Piye's sweep into Lower Egypt was motivated to a significant extent by a desire to demonstrate to Assyria that an invasion of the country would be met with force."¹⁴⁰ Despite the markedly different emphases of the Assyrian and Kushite records, Aubin would juxtapose the two as an integrated narrative of action and reaction; as Assyria advanced to the "Brook of Egypt," Kush responded by consolidating its hold over the Egyptian Delta. Thus, Aubin proposes that, in the years that followed Pi(ankh)y's demise, "Shabako's likely motive was to unify Egypt and strengthen it so as to better defend against invasion."¹⁴¹ A similar conclusion has been reached by Török: "The Assyrian advance as well as the continuation of Tefnakht's ambitious policy by his successor Bakenranef/Bocchoris at Sais made it an imperative necessity, to transfer the capital and royal residence of the double kingdom of Kush and Egypt from Napata [Fourth Cataract] to Memphis."¹⁴² Extending this theory into the seventh century B.C.E., Yurco maintained—*contra* Spalinger—that Kushite action abroad was reactive and principally oriented toward domestic security:

Concerning Esarhaddon and Taharqa, it is the Assyrian who made the first hostile moves by cutting off trade between Egypt and the Philistine and

¹³⁸ Bright, *History of Israel* (Philadelphia, 1959), 265. Bright assumes the Kushite pharaoh in question to have been "Piankhi." Cf. n. 13 *supra*.

¹³⁹ See nn. 14–15 *supra*.

¹⁴⁰ Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 71–72.

¹⁴¹ Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 68.

¹⁴² Török, *The Kingdom of Kush*, 166–67. See also: Lobban, "Foreign Relations of the XXVth Dynasty," 332 and 334; Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel*, 357; but for Redford's views cf. also nn. 117 and 122 *supra*.

Phoenician cities, in his actions of 679 B.C. . . . Taharqa's reaction in 673 B.C. was strictly defensive. The Babylonian Chronicle . . . agrees in portraying Esarhaddon, not Egypt, as the aggressor.¹⁴³

The Kushite prioritization of defense over imperial aggrandizement is credited by Aubin vaguely to "an interpretation of *ma'at* distinctive to their culture" and to "Nubian prototypes' of which almost nothing is known."¹⁴⁴ Though based upon the same documents and its "chaîne des faits," Aubin's, Török's, and Yurco's interpretations are quite radically opposed to those advocated by Kitchen, Spalinger, and James: neither imperial aggressor and instigator nor naïve and capricious tyro, the 25th Dynasty is instead reconstructed as the model of defensive consistency.

Whichever interpretation ultimately proves justified, the diversity of opinion among historians clearly demonstrates that the events do not "speak for themselves."¹⁴⁵ In fact, of the seven explanations outlined above, only one is directly contradicted by the events reported in the Near Eastern and Kushite documents: Aubin has persuasively demonstrated that the anti-Assyrian coalitions mentioned in the surviving record are unanimously described as Levantine appeals sent to Egypt; even the Neo-Assyrian royal corpus—no apologist for the Kushite royal house—never charges the 25th Dynasty with initiating the correspondence.¹⁴⁶ Consequently, the explanation of Kushite foreign policy circulated to popular audiences is the one most undermined by the documentary evidence.¹⁴⁷ However, with the exception of this hypothesis and the vague commercial interest mentioned at the outset, the remaining motivations imputed to the Kushite dynasts can neither be conclusively proven nor disproved by "les documents et la chaîne des faits."

The available explanations of Kushite foreign policy share more than a deficiency of evidence; as compensation for that deficiency, all are supplied by some form of implicit historical analogy. For instance, scholars who would see the 25th Dynasty as an expansionist state thereby liken its ambitions either to those of the Egyptian New Kingdom and its "precedents of empire" or to the ambitions of Assyria—with Assyria and Kushite-ruled Egypt purportedly both engaged in "a bid for supremacy in Western

¹⁴³ Yurco, "Sennacherib's Third Campaign," 239 n. 142.

¹⁴⁴ Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 101 and 61.

¹⁴⁵ See n. 4 *supra*.

¹⁴⁶ Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 226–33.

¹⁴⁷ See nn. 123–24 *supra*.

Asia” between “the imperial Assyria and the would-be imperial Egypt.”¹⁴⁸ Those who would cast the Kushite monarchy as the instigator of Levantine revolts, on the other hand, have as a possible parallel the example of Babylonia’s Marduk-apla-iddina and his envoy to Hezekiah.¹⁴⁹ Likewise, all accounts which have depicted the 25th Dynasty as naïve, capricious, or driven more by sibling one-upmanship than by informed understanding of global politics would reconstruct the nation’s foreign policy in terms markedly different from those used to describe the strategies of its Near Eastern contemporaries; Kush is thereby relegated to the margins of international politics, in much the same way that core-periphery models of the ancient world would situate Kush beyond the pale of the “Central (West Asian-Mediterranean) political-military network (PMN).”¹⁵⁰ A quite similar theoretical framework marks those explanations which would conversely situate Kush as a global *core* whose monarchs behaved as rational economic actors engaged in cost-benefit analysis of Levantine bulk goods and luxuries.¹⁵¹ Finally, the argument that the 25th Dynasty prioritized domestic security has been advanced on the grounds of an analogy with unspecified “Nubian prototypes” as presumably manifested in other historical epochs.¹⁵² Argument by analogy has thus enabled a rather meager body of evidence to generate a proliferation of theories explaining Kush’s involvement in the Near East.

James Bryce once quipped that “the chief practical use of history is to deliver us from plausible historical analogies.”¹⁵³ Bryce would likely be

¹⁴⁸ See nn. 116 and 122 *supra*; Motyer, *Prophecy of Isaiah*, 170.

¹⁴⁹ For Marduk-apla-iddina’s role, see 2 Kgs. 20: 12–17; William Hamilton Barnes, *Studies in the Chronology of the Divided Monarchy of Israel* (Atlanta, 1991), 115–18 nn. 127–28; Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Garden City, N.Y., 1988), 260–62; John H. Hayes and Stuart A. Irvine, *Isaiah the Eighth-Century Prophet: his times and his preaching* (Nashville, 1987), 385–86; Carl D. Evans, “Judah’s Foreign Policy from Hezekiah to Josiah,” in *Scripture in Context: Essays on the Comparative Method*, ed. C. D. Evans (Pittsburgh, 1980), 163–64; Ronald E. Clements, *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem: A Study of the Interpretation of Prophecy in the Old Testament* (Sheffield, 1980), 66–67; John A. Brinkman, “Sennacherib’s Babylonian Problem: An Interpretation,” *JCS* 25 (1973): 89–95 esp. 91; *ibid.*, “Merodach-baladan II,” in *Studies presented to A. Leo Oppenheim*, ed. R. D. Biggs and J. A. Brinkman (Chicago, 1964), 6–53, esp. 31–33. For an attempt to liken the roles of Marduk-apla-iddina and the 25th Dynasty, see esp. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 20.

¹⁵⁰ Christopher Chase-Dunn et al., “Rise and fall: East-West Synchronicity and Indic Exceptionalism Reexamined,” *Social Science History* 24/4 (2000): 727–54, esp. 729 and 748.

¹⁵¹ See n. 113 *supra* and n. 193 *infra*.

¹⁵² Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 61.

¹⁵³ James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*, vol. 1 (London, 1910), 8.

disappointed by the prospects for analysis of Kushite foreign policy, as “plausible historical analogies” have proven unavoidable in the current state of the evidence. None of the analogies may be endorsed without serious qualification. Attempts to conflate Kushite-ruled Egypt of the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E. with New Kingdom Egyptian imperialism 500 years prior take insufficient account of the geographic, social, and cultural contrasts between Kush and Egypt and any consequent differences in the reservoir of “precedents” invoked by each country’s rulers. The assumption that Kush’s principal motivations were akin to Assyria’s expansionist designs also smacks of the *Taharqo Triumphans* lore once promoted by Megasthenes and Strabo;¹⁵⁴ that Taharqo was more militarily successful than often acknowledged is a point that may be cogently argued, but victorious campaigns do not an imperialist make.¹⁵⁵ Likewise, any proposed analogy between the Kushite dynasts and Marduk-apla-iddina ignores a fundamental geographic distinction between the two: Assyrian armies sent to crush rebellion in the Levant would have thereby marched away from Babylonia and toward Egypt’s borders; instigation of Levantine revolts thus held very different consequences for the 25th Dynasty than it did for Babylonia. Similarly, interpretations that would situate Kush as a peripheral and dependent territory are quite dubious for the 1st millennium B.C.E.,¹⁵⁶ and those that would conversely posit Kush as an exploitative core within a World Systems model are equally vulnerable to critiques of anachronism.¹⁵⁷ Even the attempt to analogize the 25th

¹⁵⁴ For Strabo’s account, see Strabo I.3.21 and XV.1.6 [Jones, *LCL*]. For critique, see Godefroy Goossens, “Taharqā le conquérant,” *CdE* 44 (1947): 239–44.

¹⁵⁵ For a “revisionist approach to the foreign policy of Taharqā . . . [designed to] restore some of the gleam to a very tarnished image,” see esp.: Spalinger, “Foreign Policy of Egypt,” 22; Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 148–63.

¹⁵⁶ For critique, see esp.: Lewis Peake, “The invisible superpower. Review of the geopolitical status of Kushite (Twenty-fifth Dynasty) Egypt at the height of its power and a historiographic analysis of the regime’s legacy,” in *Between the Cataracts: Proceedings of the 11th Conference of Nubian Studies, Warsaw University, 27 August–2 September 2006*, Vol. 2, fasc. 2, ed. W. Godlewski and A. Łątarz (Warsaw, 2010), 465–76; László Török, “A Periphery on the Periphery of the Ancient World? Ancient Nubia in Six New Books on the Middle Nile Region,” *Symbolae Osloenses* 73 (1998): 201–17. I thank Sophia Farrulla for her observations on this issue.

¹⁵⁷ See n. 113 *supra*. Cf. esp.: Gil Stein, *Rethinking World Systems. Diasporas, Colonies, and Interactions in Uruk Mesopotamia* (Tucson, 1999). For additional discussion and extensive bibliography, see Stuart Tyson Smith, *Wretched Kush: Ethnic Identities and Boundaries in Egypt’s Nubian Empire* (London, 2003), 58–61; Charles R. Cobb, “Archaeological Approaches to the Political Economy of Nonstratified Societies,” *Archaeological Method and Theory* 5 (1993): 43–100; Philip L. Kohl, “The Use and Abuse of World Systems Theory: The Case of the Pristine West Asian State,” *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory* 11 (1987):

Dynasty with “Nubian prototypes” runs the risk of mistaking continuity for stasis. As Török has cautioned about Nubian Studies in general: “It *may* be true that there existed direct lines of evolution between data divided from each other by centuries, but this assumption cannot be proved by the validity of the paradigm of evolution itself, but only by sufficient data along the imaginary line.”¹⁵⁸ For the foreign policy of the 25th Dynasty, the evidence itself is often imaginary (see Section I.2 above) and could hardly bridge even the most continuous evolutionary lines from preceding and succeeding eras.

Yet this sobering assessment admits one significant prospect: of the various alternative theories outlined above, that which would compare the 25th Dynasty’s foreign policy to traditions of governance in Nubia remains virtually unexplored as a research strategy. This seeming paradox is a familiar one to Nubiologists; as Morkot has observed, “the Viceregal period and the early Meroitic period—the ‘Napatan’ or Egyptian 25th Dynasty—have still (with a very few exceptions) not been effectively integrated into Nubian studies.”¹⁵⁹ The chasm which often separates the 25th Dynasty from Nubiology is a function of both sources and methods. The 25th Dynasty’s political ascendancy over neighboring Egypt, the archaizing Egyptian iconography and Egyptian language employed for the dynasty’s inscriptions and art, and the Egyptian setting of so many of their recorded feats have confined study of the period not only within the disciplinary boundaries of Egyptology but also within the limited perspective of *l’histoire événementielle*.¹⁶⁰ As a result, discussion of the 25th Dynasty and its *Kuschitenherrschaft* has become quite alienated from the preceding non- and semi-literate epochs of the Middle Nile’s past, the mostly untranslated record of the Meroitic era that followed it, and the archaeologists and linguists who now study the broad patterns of Nubian history.¹⁶¹

1–35; Tim Murray, “Evaluating Evolutionary Archaeology,” *World Archaeology* 34/1 (2002): 47–59; Stephen K. Sanderson, “World-Systems Analysis after Thirty Years: Should it Rest in Peace?” *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 46/3 (2005): 179–213. I thank Dan Pasciuti for his consultation; any errors of interpretation are entirely my own.

¹⁵⁸ László Török, “The Historical Background: Meroe, North and South,” in *Nubian Culture Past and Present: Main Papers Presented at the Sixth International Conference for Nubian Studies in Uppsala, 11–16 August 1986*, ed. T. Hägg (Stockholm, 1987), 149.

¹⁵⁹ Robert Morkot, “Economic and Cultural Exchange between Kush and Egypt,” (Ph.D. diss., London University, 1993), 16.

¹⁶⁰ See esp. Jean Leclant, “Kuschitenherrschaft,” in *LÄ* 3: 893–901.

¹⁶¹ For the Meroitic corpus and its study, see now: Jean Leclant, ed., *Repertoire d’epigraphie méroïtique*, 3 vols. (Paris, 2000); Claude Rilly, *La langue du royaume de Méroé: Un panorama de la plus ancienne culture écrite d’Afrique subsaharienne* (Paris, 2007); *id.*,

Though 25th Dynasty political history and Nubiological archaeology are still frequently treated as antithetical and irreconcilable camps,¹⁶² a synthesis of the two, grounded in the current literature of each, would doubtless prove mutually informative.

In his recent analysis of international politics of the eighth century B.C.E., Aubin's suggestion that the 25th Dynasty may have been related to "Nubian prototypes" cites a text by Trigger that is now over thirty years old. Reflecting in 1976 upon the extraordinary longevity of the ancient Kushite state, Trigger resigned himself to the following conclusion: "The spectacular success of this Kushite kingdom may reflect a knowledge of statecraft derived from Kerma or other yet unknown Nubian prototypes even more so than from the years of Egyptian occupation."¹⁶³ Fortunately, recent archaeological literature has offered several new data points with which to reconstruct an evolutionary line across the history of the Middle Nile. As a result, the Nubian background of *Kuschitenherrschaft* is no longer the undertheorized subject that it was just a few decades ago. The evidence reviewed below combines to validate Török's and Aubin's emphasis upon border defense and commercial interest as the dominant motivations for Kushite involvement in the Near East. These patterns are discernible only within a broader temporal perspective that looks beyond the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E.

III. A LONG VIEW OF *KUSCHITENHERRSCHAFT*

In the broader study of history, the most sustained attempt to transcend the limitations of *l'histoire événementielle* was that of the prolific *Annales* school in the early- to mid-twentieth century, and its most widely-cited representative text is arguably Fernand Braudel's two-volume opus, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II* (1949, transl. 1972). Braudel was particularly concerned with dissecting "the

La méroïtique et sa famille linguistique (Leuven, 2010); Claude Rilly and Alex de Voogt, *The Meroitic Language and Writing System* (Cambridge, 2012).

¹⁶² For discussion, see William Yewdale Adams, "Three Perspectives on the Past: The Historian, the Art Historian, and the Prehistorian: Comments on Session II," in *Nubian Culture Past and Present*, ed. T. Hägg, 285–91; Török, "A Periphery on the Periphery of the Ancient World?" 201–17; R. Morkot and S. Quirke, "Inventing the 25th Dynasty: Turin stela 1467 and the Construction of History," in *Begegnungen: antike Kulturen im Niltal: Festgabe für Erika Endesfelder, Karl-Heinz Priese, Walter Friedrich Reineke und Steffen Wenig*, ed. C.-B. Arnst et al. (Leipzig, 2001), 349–63 esp. 349–50.

¹⁶³ B. G. Trigger, *Nubia Under the Pharaohs* (London, 1976), 150.

complex arena of warfare,”¹⁶⁴ and the challenges he met in pursuit of that inquiry resonate with those facing the historian of Kushite intervention in Western Asia:

Since in fact we have only incomplete accounts of the period . . . material plentiful enough it is true, but insufficient for our purpose—the only possible course, in order to bring this brief moment . . . out of the shadows, was to make full use of evidence, images, and landscapes dating from other periods, earlier and later and even from the present day. The resulting picture is one in which all the evidence combines across time and space, to give us a history in slow motion from which permanent values can be detected.¹⁶⁵

Braudel’s methodological response to this challenge is eminently more suitable to the case at hand than the exclusive reliance upon “les documents et la chaîne des faits” as proposed by Halphen and examined above in Section I.2. Driven to the realization that “war, as we know, is not an arena governed purely by individual responsibilities,” Braudel explained that “*l’histoire événementielle*, that is, the history of events, [comprises] surface disturbances, crests of foam that the tides of history carry on their strong backs Resounding events are often only momentary outbursts, surface manifestations of these larger movements and explicable only in terms of them.”¹⁶⁶ To that end, the entire 578 pages of Volume 1 were devoted to mapping the Mediterranean as a “physical and human unit”—the most enduring feature of the region’s history and thus a consistent influence upon its demography and social, economic, political, and military practices.

For ancient Kush, the analogous physical and human unit would be the *Nilo-Sahel*. Though use of this term has been mostly confined to the discipline of linguistics,¹⁶⁷ *Nilo-Sahel* captures the topographic complexity of the region far better than the restrictive Egyptological designation of Kush as the *Middle Nile*. Kush was rather located at the junction of two perpendicular axes—one Nilotic and the other Sahelian—both of which

¹⁶⁴ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, vol. 1 (New York, 1972), 21.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 16–17.

¹⁶⁷ *E.g.*, the references to “Nilo-Sahelian” languages in Th. C. Schadeberg and M. L. Bender, ed., *Nilo-Saharan: Proceedings of the First Nilo-Saharan Linguistics Colloquium, Leiden, September 8–10, 1980* (Cinnaminson, 1981), esp. 253–63; Robin Thelwall, “Linguistic Aspects of Greater Nubian History” in *The Archaeological and Linguistic Reconstruction of African History*, ed. C. Ehret and M. Posnansky (Los Angeles, CA, 1982), 39–44; and the *Nilo-Sahelian Newsletter* of the Dept. of Anthropology at Southern Illinois University – Carbondale.

played significant roles in its development and both of which differentiated the environment of Kush from that of Egypt. Though the same Nile waters that reached Egypt also flowed through Kush, the Nubian Nile was more incised, with a narrower and more intermittent alluvial floodplain.¹⁶⁸ The portion of the Nile best known to the ancient Kushites would have provided a smaller total of irrigable acreage than was available in Egypt, resulting in lower potential for riverine settlement. O'Connor has estimated the Bronze Age population of Nubia at 460,000, compared to an Egyptian population between 2.5–4.5 million for that same era.¹⁶⁹ Equally significant is the course of the Nubian Nile—markedly sinuous in Upper Nubia and impeded by numerous cataracts on its passage northward to Egypt (Fig. 3). Consequently, settlements at three of the most productive agricultural basins in Nubia—Shendi, Napata, and Kerma—would have communicated more quickly overland by the Meheila and Bayuda Roads than was possible by river.¹⁷⁰ Thus, the vertical, Nilotic axis which connected Kush and Egypt also accounted for many of their contrasts over *la longue durée*.

The horizontal, Sahelian axis passing through Kush distinguished it even more radically from Egypt to the north. The relative lack of scholarly attention to Kush's Sahelian context is due in part to disciplinary boundaries, but also to recent desiccation: the environment of Upper Nubia in modern times is better described as Saharan than as Sahelian. During antiquity, however, isohyets reached farther north, placing the Butana Steppe on the margins of savannah and situating the Dongola-Napata Reach (Third-Fourth Cataracts) at the Sahelian margin (see Fig. 3).¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Adams, *Nubia*, 13–43.

¹⁶⁹ D. O'Connor, "Early States along the Nubian Nile," in *Egypt and Africa: Nubia from Prehistory to Islam*, ed. W. Vivian Davies (London, 1991), 145–65, esp. 147 and 160 nn. 58–60; *id.*, "The New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period, 1552–664 BC," in *Ancient Egypt: A Social History*, ed. B. G. Trigger et al. (Cambridge, 1983), 183–278, esp. 190; Karl W. Butzer, *Early Hydraulic Civilization in Egypt: A Study in Cultural Ecology* (Chicago, 1976), 85 fig. 13; B. G. Trigger, *History and Settlement in Lower Nubia* (New Haven, 1965), 17; cf. Karola Zibeliuss-Chen, *Die ägyptische Expansion nach Nubien* (Wiesbaden, 1988), 37–40.

¹⁷⁰ For discussion of the agricultural potential of the Shendi, Napata, and Kerma basins, see respectively: Khidir Abdelkarim Ahmed, *Meroitic Settlement in the Central Sudan: An Analysis of Sites in the Nile Valley and the Western Butana* (Cambridge, 1984), 100; Adams, *Nubia*, 301; B. J. Kemp, "Imperialism and empire in New Kingdom Egypt (c. 1575–1087 BC)," in *Imperialism in the Ancient World*, eds. Peter D. A. Garnsey et al. (Cambridge, 1978), 21. For Kushite royal use of the Bayuda Road, see Berlin Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung 2268, ll. 8–12, as photographed and collated in: Schäfer, *Die aethiopische Königsinschrift*, Taf. IV; Peust, *Das Napatanische*, 34–35.

¹⁷¹ Khidir Abdelkarim Ahmed, "Economy and Environment in the Empire of Kush," in *Studien zum antiken Sudan. Akten der 7. Internationalen Tagung für meroitische Forschungen*

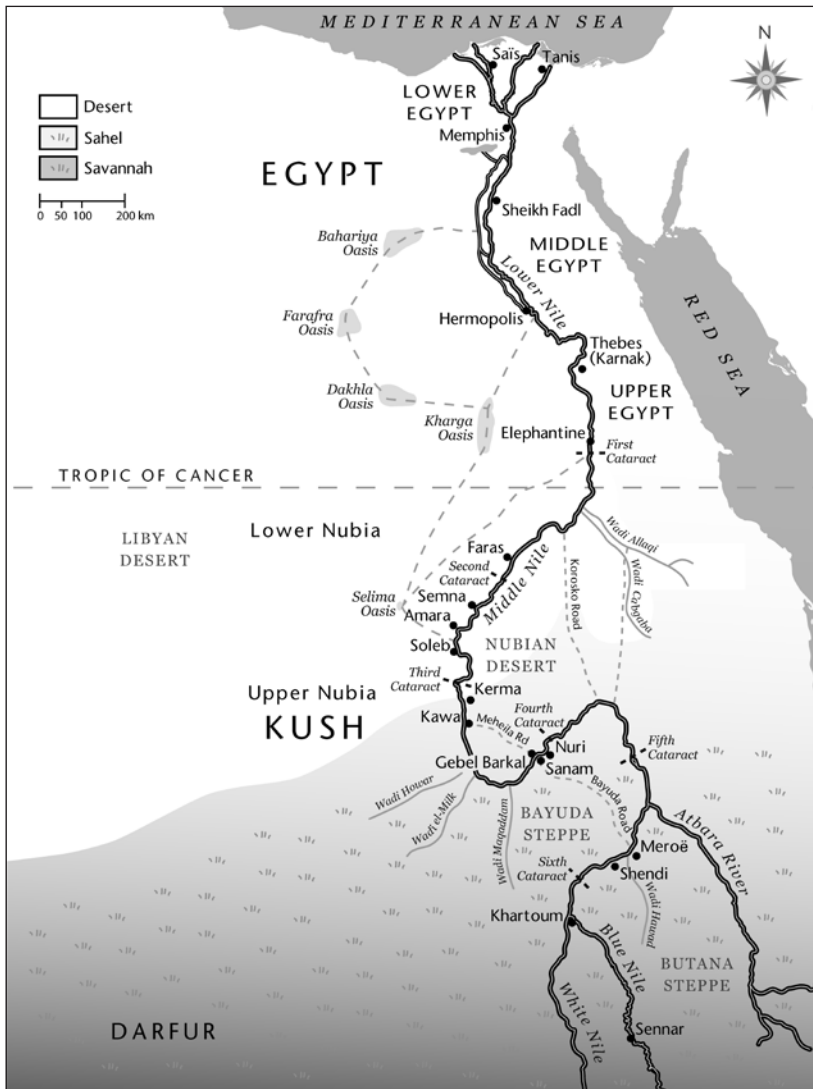


Fig. 3. Northeast Africa during the first millennium B.C.E. Courtesy of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Cartography Laboratory.

Indeed, if this were not the case, then the numerous man-made catchment reservoirs excavated within the Butana during the Meroitic era would not have been functional, and the presence of *Celtis integrifolia* seeds at Meroë would be equally difficult to explain.¹⁷² Over the course of the region's history, this Sahelian environment has compensated in many respects for the relatively meager agricultural potential of the Nubian Nile. The Sahel provided valuable access not only to flora and fauna of the ranging savannah, but also to a rain-fed steppe consisting of acacia scrub, grassland, and a vast network of seasonal wadis suitable for transhumance and extensive dry-farming.¹⁷³ While such conditions typically yield less crop per hectare of land and lower corresponding population densities than would an intensive regime based on irrigation, an extensive dry-farming regime can actually provide greater total yields due to the larger quantity of cultivable land.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, the broad steppe allows pastoralist groups considerably more mobility than would the narrow riverbanks. It is a landscape quite distinct from that of Egypt.

It was precisely within this Sahelian environment—not in Egypt—that the 25th Dynasty first established its political regime. Whatever the precise geographic origins of the family or families which constituted

vom 14. bis 19. September 1992 in Gosen/bei Berlin, ed. Steffen Wenig (Wiesbaden, 1999), 291–311, esp. 294–95; John Gowlett, “Human Adaptation and Long-term Climatic Change in Northeast Africa,” in *The Ecology of Survival: Case Studies from Northeast Africa*, ed. D. H. Johnson and D. Anderson (London, 1988), 27–45; R. A. Mawson and M. A. J. Williams, “A Wetter Climate in the Eastern Sudan 2,000 Years Ago?” *Nature* 308 (1984): 49–51.

¹⁷² Marion Hinkel, “Wasserbauten im alten Sudan,” *Das Altertum* 36 (1990): 29–36 esp. 32, and “Hafire im antiken Sudan,” *ZÄS* 118 (1991): 32–48; Ahmed Mohammed Ali Hakem, “Meroitic Settlement of the Butana (Central Sudan),” in *Man, Settlement and Urbanism*, ed. P. J. Ucko, R. Tringham, and G. W. Dimbleby (London, 1972), 639–46; Peter Lewis Shinnie, “Meroe in the Sudan,” in *Archaeological Researches in Retrospect*, ed. G. R. Willey (Cambridge, MA, 1974), 256.

¹⁷³ David N. Edwards, “Meroe in the Savannah—Meroe as a Sudanic Kingdom?” in Wenig, *Studien zum antiken Sudan*, 312–22; *The Archaeology of the Meroitic State: New Perspectives on its Social and Political Organisation* (Cambridge, 1996); and “Meroe and the Sudanic Kingdoms,” *JAH* 39 (1998): 175–93. As Edwards observes, Sudan is located immediately to the south of the Tropic of Cancer and is thus “entirely within the tropics”—hence Connah’s characterization of Nubian polities as “the earliest known cities and states of tropical Africa”: D. N. Edwards, “Ancient Egypt in the Sudanese Middle Nile: A Case of Mistaken Identity?” in *Ancient Egypt in Africa*, ed. D. O’Connor and A. Reid (London, 2003), 140; G. Connah, “Birth on the Nile: the Nubian achievement,” in G. Connah, ed., *African Civilizations: An Archaeological Perspective*, 2nd ed., (Cambridge, 2001), 18.

¹⁷⁴ John Reader, *Africa: A Biography of the Continent* (New York, 1997), 249–55; Harvey Weiss, “Excavations at Tell Leilan and the Origins of North Mesopotamian Cities in the Third Millennium BC,” *Paléorient* 9/2 (1983): 40.

the dynasty,¹⁷⁵ the intersection of Nile and Sahel in the Dongola-Napata Reach was clearly a region under their authority well before the dynasty's expansion into Egypt: at that intersection was constructed the most extensive complex of the dynasty's Kushite temples;¹⁷⁶ there, too, were erected the Sandstone Stela and Great Triumphal Stela of Pi(ankh)y;¹⁷⁷ there lay the dynastic cemeteries of el-Kurru and Nuri;¹⁷⁸ and there as well was *T3-q3.t*—a site later described as the “garden” from which the dynasty's progenitor had “sprouted.”¹⁷⁹ Moreover, an abundance of archaeological evidence attests to the dynasty's early and continuous interaction with the Butana Steppe even farther south:¹⁸⁰ the steppe was either included within the domain claimed by the Kushite kings, or, as argued elsewhere, it was instead one of the first peripheral regions with which the fledgling

¹⁷⁵ For George Andrew Reisner's now-discredited view that the dynasty was of Libyan origin, see his “The Royal Family of Ethiopia,” *BMFA* 19 (1921): 26–28, and “Note on the Harvard-Boston Excavations at El-Kurruw and Barkal in 1918–1919,” *JEA* 6, no. 1 (1920): 63–64. For arguments that the dynasty originated in the Shendi Reach, see J. Garstang and A. H. Sayce, “Second Interim Report on the Excavations at Meroë in Ethiopia,” *AAA* 4 (1912): 45–71, esp. 57; Muhammad Ibrahim Bakr, *Tarikh al-Sudan al-qadim* (Cairo: al-Matba'ah al-Fanniyah al-Hadithah, 1971), 100; Ahmed Mohammed Ali Hakem, “The City of Meroe and the Myth of Napata,” *Adab: The Journal of the Faculty of Arts, University of Khartoum* 2/3 (1975): 119–34; Karl-Heinz Priese, “The Kingdom of Kush: The Napatan Period,” in *Africa in Antiquity: The Arts of Ancient Nubia and the Sudan*, vol. 1, ed. Sylvia Hochfield and Elizabeth Riefstahl (New York, 1978), 77–78; Rebecca Bradley, “Varia from the City of Meroe,” in *Meroitic Studies*, Meroitica 6, ed. N. B. Millet and A. L. Kelley (Berlin, 1982), 163–70, and “Meroitic Chronology,” in *Meroitische Forschungen 1980*, Meroitica 7, ed. F. Hintze (Berlin, 1984), 195–211; Maurizio Damiano, “L'Éta tarda,” in *Oltre L'Egitto: Nubia: L'avventura dell'archeologia dalle rive del Nile ai deserti del Sudan*, ed. S. Curto (Milano, 1985), 47–52; D. O'Connor, *Ancient Nubia: Egypt's Rival in Africa* (Philadelphia, 1993), 67–69; Karola Zibelius-Chen, “Entstehung und Endes eines Großreiches: Die 25. Dynastie in Ägypten,” in Wenig, *Studien zum antiken Sudan*, 705. For the implicit suggestion that the dynasty originated in the Dongola-Napata Reach, see László Török, *Meroe City: An Ancient African Capital: John Garstang's Excavations in the Sudan*, vol. 1 (London, 1997), 18; Morkot, *Black Pharaohs*, 153–54.

¹⁷⁶ Dows Dunham, *The Barkal Temples* (Boston, 1970), 10–12, 41–61, 77–81, and plans I and III–V; Kendall, *Gebel Barkal Epigraphic Survey*, and “The Monument of Taharqa on Gebel Barkal,” in *Neueste Feldforschungen im Sudan und in Eritrea: Akten des Symposiums vom 13. bis 14. Oktober 1999 in Berlin*, ed. Steffen Wenig (Wiesbaden, 2004), 1–46.

¹⁷⁷ Khartoum 1851 in G. A. Reisner, “Inscribed Monuments from Gebel Barkal. Part I,” *ZÄS* 66 (1931): Taf. V; Cairo JE 48862 and 47086–47089 in Grimal, *La stèle triomphale de Pi(ankh)y*, pls. I–IV.

¹⁷⁸ Dunham, *El Kurru; id., Nuri*, Vol. 2 of *The Royal Cemeteries of Kush* (Boston, 1955).

¹⁷⁹ Berlin Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung 2268, ll. 8–12, in Schäfer, *Die äthiopische Königsinschrift*, Taf. IV; Peust, *Das Napatanische*, 34–35 §3.3. Cf. J. C. Darnell, “Whom did Nestasen Overhear at Isderes?” *Enchoria* 24 (1998): 154, 156; Sargent, “Napatan Royal Inscriptions,” 390–93.

¹⁸⁰ See esp. D. Dunham, *The West and South Cemeteries at Meroë*, (Boston, 1963).

royal house maintained extensive diplomatic relations.¹⁸¹ In the former case, the ancestors of the 25th Dynasty would have forged their domestic policy in a region peopled by shifting cultivators and mobile pastoralists; in the latter case, relations with those shifting cultivators and mobile pastoralists would have constituted one of the royal family's first experiences in foreign policy.

The effects of such an environment upon political economy may be observed in the historical records of Sahelian societies, revealing several emphases shared with the inscriptions of the 25th Dynasty. Viewed in isolation, each of these parallels between different periods is at best suggestive; viewed in combination, however, they acquire a cumulative force which may be logically attributed to the influence of a shared environment. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries A.D., the north-east African Sahel was dominated by the Funj sultanate on the banks of the Nile at Sennar and the neighboring Keira sultanate in Darfur.¹⁸² Of both, Edwards observes:

Under conditions of relatively abundant—if often quite poor quality—land and low population levels, conditions were in general not favourable for land to acquire increased value and the control of land did not form a primary power base. The major determinant of production remained the availability of labour rather than land, and political power associated with it was derived from the control of people rather than territory. In this respect, the open environment of the Middle Nile, like other regions of the savannah, contrasts quite fundamentally with the enclosed Egyptian Lower Nile.¹⁸³

As a result, taxation of agricultural surplus was concentrated around small riverine areas but proved more difficult to achieve in the broader steppe, where “control of people” was significantly complicated by their mobility.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ For the argument that relations with the Butana Steppe constituted one of the royal family's first experiences in foreign policy, see Pope, *Double Kingdom under Taharqa*, 31–33.

¹⁸² Rex Seán O'Fahey and Jay Spaulding, *Kingdoms of the Sudan* (London, 1974); Rex Seán O'Fahey, *State and Society in Darfur* (London, 1980); Jay Spaulding, “Farmers, herds-men and the state in rainland Sennar,” *JAH* 20 (1979): 329–47, and *The Heroic Age in Sennar* (East Lansing, MI, 1985).

¹⁸³ Edwards, “Meroe and the Sudanic Kingdoms,” 178.

¹⁸⁴ Jack Goody, *Technology, Tradition and the State in Africa* (London, 1971), 30–33, and *Production and Reproduction* (Cambridge, 1976), 108; Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, “Research in an African Mode of production,” in *Relations of Production*, ed. D. Seddon (London, 1980), 265–66; Gil Stein, “Segmentary States and Organizational Variation in Early Complex Societies: A Rural Perspective,” in *Archaeological Views from the Countryside: Village Communities in Early Complex Societies*, ed. G. Schwartz and S. E. Falconer (Washington, D.C., 1994), 68.

However, “on balance,” Edwards notes, “pastoral communities, encumbered by families and baggage were extremely vulnerable to punitive raids when they were within range of the military power of the state.”¹⁸⁵ The implications for state-sponsored warfare in the Sahel are explained by Fuller: “Most of the time force may be used for raiding, a source for acquiring wealth in such things as cattle and slaves, rather than for territorial acquisition.”¹⁸⁶

The emphasis upon raiding over territorial acquisition in turn prioritized the horse as the military weapon *par excellence* among such medieval and early-modern Sahelian states as Wadai, Kanem-Bornu, Songhai, and especially Darfur, which obtained its steeds from the neighboring Dongola Reach.¹⁸⁷ The 25th Dynasty embodied these broader patterns of Sahelian history in microcosm: in the surviving corpus of royal inscriptions, the military and especially equestrian power of the state was deployed beyond the borders of Kush and Egypt only for unspecified durations upon unmarked landscapes and against ill-defined enemies (“Asiatics” and “Libyans”) who were then conscripted as public labor; no text recounts the detailed itinerary of a sustained Kushite campaign into the Near East.¹⁸⁸

The 25th Dynasty’s expressed interest in the Near East also resonates with the treatment of peripheral regions by the Funj and Keira sultanates. In the latter, state revenue was sought outside of the “zone of raiding” and the small riverine “zones of taxation” primarily through trade governed by “client-patron relations in the exaction of forms of taxes or tribute reciprocated by gifts.”¹⁸⁹ In this regard, it is certainly noteworthy that the 25th Dynasty’s most explicit reference to the Near East emphasized Taharqo’s loss of “tribute from the land of Khor [Syria-Palestine]”¹⁹⁰—not the rebellion of Levantine subjects nor even the aggression of the Assyrians. The Kushite pursuit of trade in a violently contested region might at first seem rather foolhardy, given that the products obtained from the Levant were consistently specified as non-utilitarian luxury goods (especially copper and cedar). However, a comparison with other Sahelian states would

¹⁸⁵ Edwards, *Archaeology of the Meroitic State*, 18.

¹⁸⁶ Dorian Q. Fuller, “Pharaonic or Sudanic? Models for Meroitic Society and Change,” in *Ancient Egypt in Africa*, ed. O’Connor and Reid, 174.

¹⁸⁷ Edwards, “Meroe and the Sudanic Kingdoms,” 178; Edwards, *Archaeology of the Meroitic State*, 17; Goody, *Technology, Tradition and the State in Africa*; O’Fahey, *State and Society in Darfur*, 93–95.

¹⁸⁸ See nn. 31–35 and 59 *supra*.

¹⁸⁹ Edwards, “Meroe and the Sudanic Kingdoms,” 181.

¹⁹⁰ See n. 95 *supra*.

suggest that long-distance exchange can only be considered peripheral in a geographic sense—not an economic or political one—because its maintenance was often inextricably linked to state formation. In fact, MacDonald would locate the very Neolithic origins of Sahelian (including Kerman) social complexity in the circulation of prestige objects as “primitive currencies” and in large-scale accumulations of cattle as “bank on the hoof”—rather than in sedentarism and agriculture.¹⁹¹

Across Sahelian history, much of the inherent value of prestige goods and livestock lay in the fact that they could be redistributed by the royal center to local elites and then reciprocated as “wealth-in-people”—whether through *ad hoc* mobilization of soldiery, agricultural workforce, or labor for public construction.¹⁹² Fuller has therefore cautioned that the kind of wealth obtained and the ends which it served speak forcefully against the interpretation of Sahelian trade in a “simplistic and capitalist vein, in which the economic benefits of trade were implicitly self-evident”; on the contrary, the “form of maintaining relationships of power through exchange can be considered through the broader anthropology of gift-giving and substantivist views of the economy as inherently embedded within social systems in pre-modern times.”¹⁹³ As Edwards observes, “the loss of control of external trade by central monarchs could precipitate the loss of outlying provinces.”¹⁹⁴ For the 25th Dynasty as for other Sahelian states, the logic of this prioritization is explicable as a strategic response to environmental conditions: because taxable agriculture in the Sahel was more elusive than on the Egyptian Lower Nile, revenue acquired from

¹⁹¹ Kevin C. MacDonald, “Before the Empire of Ghana: Pastoralism and the Origins of Cultural Complexity in the Sahel,” in *Transformations in Africa: Essays on Africa's Later Past*, ed. G. Connah (London, 1998), 71–103. For dietary evidence of the mobility of Kermans and/or their cattle, see A. H. Thompson et al., “Stable Isotopes and Diet at Ancient Kerma, Upper Nubia (Sudan),” *Journal of Archaeological Science* 35 (2008): 376–87.

¹⁹² For discussion of “wealth-in-people,” see Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison, WI, 1977); Jane I. Guyer and Samuel M. Eno Belinga, “Wealth in People as Wealth in Knowledge: Accumulation and Composition in Equatorial Africa,” *JAH* 36 (1995): 91–120; Susan Keech McIntosh, “Pathways to Complexity: An African perspective,” in *Beyond Chiefdoms: Pathways to Complexity in Africa*, ed. S. K. McIntosh (Cambridge, 1999), 1–30.

¹⁹³ Fuller, “Pharaonic or Sudanic?,” 174; see also similar remarks by Török, “A Periphery on the Periphery of the Ancient World?,” 209. For the dubious interpretation of the Kushite economy in terms of profit-oriented commerce, see Michael Rostovtzeff, *Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft im römischen Kaiserreich* (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1930), 31–37 and 302–304; and more subtly, William Y. Adams, “Ecology and Economy in the Empire of Kush,” *ZÄS* 108 (1981): 1–11.

¹⁹⁴ Edwards, *Archaeology of the Meroitic State*, 15, 18 and 29.

zones of raiding and zones of clientage assumed an even greater relative importance to state survival.

Among the imports consistently prized in the Nilo-Saharan prestige economy, one in particular deserves mention for its exceptional and enduring local value: copper. Copper obtained from clients and vassals abroad appears to have been no less prestigious than the gold so readily available between the Third and Fifth Cataracts or obtainable from rather short-range campaigns into the Wadis Allaqi and Cabgaba of the Nubian Desert:

[W]as there a preference for copper, even over gold? The historic role of copper in sub-Saharan Africa as a powerful and highly valued material is widespread and well documented. Interestingly, its high value in the Middle Nile is also explicitly noted in Herodotus' (III.23) account of the "Aethiopi-ans" . . . This potential importance of copper and bronze in the Middle Nile region has attracted little attention, not least because of what may prove to be an Egyptocentric focus on the gold resources of Kush; a focus and interest which may well not have been directly reflected in indigenous value systems.¹⁹⁵

Attempts to source the array of copper and bronze artifacts found in Meroitic burials remain inconclusive, but Török and Edwards have both argued for considerable import rather than widespread local manufacture.¹⁹⁶ If this deduction proves justified, it would help to explain the metal's apparent prestige in the region during the Meroitic period, as well as the emphasis upon "Asiatic copper" in the inscriptions of the 25th Dynasty.¹⁹⁷ Similarly, among the Fur of the early modern era, imported copper and tin rings were counted among the principal sources of wealth and media of exchange.¹⁹⁸ That such economic patterns should be recurrent across the millennia of Nilo-Saharan history can hardly be surprising, for the centripetal force of the redistributive prestige economy may be

¹⁹⁵ D. N. Edwards, "Ancient Egypt in the Sudanese Middle Nile?", 146–47. Herodotus' assertion was that "among these Ethiopians, there is nothing so scarce and so precious as bronze"; see Herodotus III.23 [Godley, *LCL*].

¹⁹⁶ Edwards, *Archaeology of the Meroitic State*, 31; László Török, "Kush and the External World," in *Studia Meroitica, 1984*, Meroitica 10, ed. S. Donadoni (Berlin, 1989), 49–215 (esp. 143) and 365–79.

¹⁹⁷ See nn. 56–57 *supra*.

¹⁹⁸ Edwards, *Archaeology of the Meroitic State*, 18; Yusuf Fadl Hasan, "The Fur Sultanate and the Long-Distance Caravan Trade, 1650–1850," in *The Central Bilad al Sudan*, ed. Yusuf Fadl Hasan and Paul Doornos (Khartoum, 1979), 201–215, esp. 204; Terence Walz, *Trade between Egypt and the Bilad es Sudan 1700–1820* (Cairo, 1979), 50–51.

seen to counteract the centrifugal effects of pastoral mobility and shifting cultivation in the steppe.

Such are the broadest patterns in Nilo-Saharan political economy; nevertheless, their applicability to Kushite foreign policy in 701 B.C.E. might be opposed by the claim that the 25th Dynasty was rather an outlier in the evolutionary line of Nilo-Saharan history. After all, New Kingdom imperialism had implanted on Nubian soil a suite of Egyptian institutions, accompanied by an unprecedented degree of Egyptian literacy and religious influence—also reflected centuries later in the inscriptions, art, and architecture of the 25th Dynasty. The Kushite rulers of the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E. might therefore be considered as Egyptian in culture and outlook, ideologically divorced from the circumstances and traditions of their Nilo-Saharan homeland.¹⁹⁹ Even more exceptional was the territorial extent of the 25th Dynasty state: at no other point in history did a Nilo-Saharan political regime include the Egyptian Lower Nile within its realm or send into Western Asia state-sponsored military campaigns of the kind documented for the 25th Dynasty in the Near Eastern record. Surely the Kushite intervention in Judah cannot be classed as a mere border raid, altogether devoid of grand strategy. The very fact that Kushite rulers had expanded their authority into Middle and Lower Egypt during the eighth century B.C.E. might be taken as evidence that they had adopted the imperialist designs of their New Kingdom Egyptian predecessors and Neo-Assyrian contemporaries, and their subsequent claim to those enclosed river-basins might conceivably require an administrative transformation of *Kuschitenherrschaft*. Indeed, James' attribution of geopolitical naïveté to the Kushite dynasts would imply that past experience had proven inadequate to their present challenges.²⁰⁰ Should the 25th Dynasty not then be regarded as an aberration in the sequence of Nilo-Saharan regimes, for which the broader patterns of the region's history do not apply?

To this chain of assumptions, recent Nubiological research offers three possible correctives, each resonant once again with the emphases of the *Annales* school: geography, ideology, and social history.²⁰¹ The proposition that New Kingdom colonialism would have divorced Kushite elites from

¹⁹⁹ As argued by Karl Jansen-Winkel, "Die Fremdherrschaft in Ägypten im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.," *Orientalia* 69 (2000): 13–16 and 19–20.

²⁰⁰ See nn. 130–31 *supra*.

²⁰¹ For wider application of all three *Annales* emphases to antiquity, see esp. John L. Bintliff, ed., *The Annales School and Archaeology* (London, 1991).

the circumstances and traditions of the Nilo-Sahel is one that mistakes colonialism for a geographically uniform phenomenon: thus, according to Adams, the Nubian territories between the First and Fourth Cataracts would have been equally integrated into the Egyptian viceregal administration—possibly headquartered at Napata, the empire’s southern boundary.²⁰² Morkot has raised a number of objections to this theory. Firstly, Egyptian construction above the Third Cataract appears to have been limited to isolated temples at Kawa and Gebel Barkal, without the more extensive network of temple-towns found in Lower Nubia. Secondly, neither Kawa nor Gebel Barkal appears to have had the viceregal administrative functions discernible for towns farther north:

The evidence surviving (excavated and published) indicates that Soleb and Amara were successively the seats of the idnw from the late Eighteenth Dynasty to the Twentieth Dynasty, and in consequence should be regarded as the most important. It is significant that such documentary sources as the tomb of Huy refer to Napata only as the limit of Viceregal authority, and to officials of Soleb and Faras as the leading towns of the regions. It should also be noted that no specifically Napatan officials are recorded in any known surviving New Kingdom source.²⁰³

Thirdly, the titularies of officials claiming authority above the Third Cataract include one wholly unattested elsewhere—the “Overseer of the Southern Foreign Lands”—a status held not only by viceroys but also by “the Chief of Bowmen of Kush (the head of the militia in Nubia), and others who are almost certainly Kushite princes”—*e.g.*, the famous (Pa-)Heqa-em-sasen and Khay.²⁰⁴

From these conspicuous differences between the territories north and south of the Third Cataract, Morkot concludes that the experience of Egyptian colonialism was, in fact, not uniform between the First and Fourth Cataracts; rather, “the 3rd–4th Cataract region was left in the direct control of indigenous rulers who received military support for their regimes along with economic and other benefits.”²⁰⁵ There, in the

²⁰² Adams, *Nubia: Corridor to Africa*, 243.

²⁰³ Robert Morkot, “Nubia in the New Kingdom: the limits of Egyptian control,” in *Egypt and Africa: Nubia from Prehistory to Islam*, ed. W. Vivian Davies (London, 1991), 295; see also his “Egypt and Nubia,” in *Empires: Perspectives from Archaeology and History*, ed. S. E. Alcock et al. (Cambridge, 2001), 238.

²⁰⁴ See Morkot’s “Egypt and Nubia,” 238 [emphasis added]; *Black Pharaohs*, 84; “Economic and Cultural Exchange between Kush and Egypt,” 37–75; and “Nubia in the New Kingdom,” 299.

²⁰⁵ Morkot, “Egypt and Nubia,” 238.

Dongola-Napata Reach, the Egyptian system of temple-town economies was not imposed, locally prevailing economies persisted, and elites were instead co-opted through “education at the Egyptian court, gift, and military support, and . . . allow[ed] a degree of autonomy.”²⁰⁶ As current consensus would trace the origins of the 25th Dynasty to precisely this Upper Nubian region—the Dongola-Napata Reach, if not even farther south—their ancestors’ political strategies were forged in a Nilo-Sahelian environment beyond Egypt’s territorial control. Even if Morkot’s theory is to be rejected, the alternatives would still place a significant hiatus between the Egyptian colonial experience in Nubia and the rise of the 25th Dynasty. The history lost to view within this gap seems to have been later invoked by the 25th Dynasty itself: Török’s analysis of the 25th Dynasty coronation circuit as practiced in Kush has identified within it a “mythologised ‘commemoration’ of the original unification of the independent polities that had emerged with the fall of Egyptian domination in the eleventh century B.C.”²⁰⁷ The immediate ancestors of the 25th Dynasty would therefore have faced the challenges of Nilo-Sahelian governance for centuries without the interference of Egyptian overrule—sufficient time to revive or simply retain “a knowledge of statecraft derived from . . . Nubian prototypes.”²⁰⁸

The further assumption that the 25th Dynasty’s expansion into Egypt would naturally have been followed by similar ambitions toward Western Asia is perhaps the most suspect of all, for it completely elides the unique status of Egypt within Kushite ideology. The dynasts’ studious imitation of Old and Middle Kingdom pharaonic nomina, grammar, and artistic canon, their marked devotion to the cults of Thebes and Memphis, and their ostentatious puritanism vis-à-vis unacculturated Libyans were manifestly designed to claim Egypt and its tradition as part of the Kushite royal patrimony—a degree of ownership which the Kushites never attempted to claim over Western Asia.²⁰⁹ Moreover, Kushite propaganda in Egypt

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 239.

²⁰⁷ Török, *Kingdom of Kush*, 231–32. For the argument that this unification was mythologized gradually across the course of the 25th Dynasty and Napatan era, see Pope, *Double Kingdom under Taharqo*, 35–58.

²⁰⁸ See nn. 144 and 163 *supra*.

²⁰⁹ For discussion of the nomina of the Kushite kings, see Eide, *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum*, vol. 1, 42–44 §3, 47–52 §5, 121 §12, 125–27 §15, 129–30 §18, 190–91 §27. For discussion of Kushite attitudes toward Libyans, see Robert K. Ritner, “Libyan vs. Nubian as the Ideal Egyptian,” in *Egypt and Beyond: Essays Presented to Leonard H. Lesko*, ed. S. E. Thompson and P. D. Manuelian (Providence, 2008), 305–14.

reveals a deeper sincerity than its later Persian, Macedonian, and Roman echoes; of all Egypt's foreign rulers, only the Kushites were buried in such a close approximation of the Egyptian style in their own homeland, and only the Kushites maintained a coherent suite of elements from Egyptian pharaonic culture for over a thousand years after their withdrawal from Egyptian soil.

On these grounds, Jansen-Winkeln has even gone so far as to argue that *Kuschitenherrschaft* in Egypt was not *Fremdherrschaft* at all, since the fundamentals of religion and language were so little changed.²¹⁰ The Kushite affinity for Egyptian cultural forms was likely a product of elite emulation under New Kingdom colonialism, and, as Kendall has argued at length for Gebel Barkal, the very symbols that were used by New Kingdom Egypt to integrate Kush into its realm were then re-deployed during the 25th Dynasty to integrate Egypt into a Kushite realm.²¹¹ The frequency with which Egyptian practices were adapted, abandoned, and later resuscitated across the millennia of Nubian history has led Williams to the conclusion that "the essential structure and symbolism of Egyptian culture must therefore already have had meaning to the Kushites before it was adapted in Kush."²¹² Williams would provocatively attribute this Kushite understanding of Egyptian culture to a "shared religious tradition" of Neolithic mint with distinctive attitudes toward divinity, nature, successive incarnation, and funerary practice that had developed partly "in contrast to Western Asia."²¹³ Regardless of whether this hypothesis is to be accepted, the essential fact remains that Kushite claims to Egypt were of a different order than Kushite interests in Western Asia; the one did not lead necessarily to the other in mechanical progression.

The final assumption, that Kushite expansion into Egypt led to a naïve dynasty's belated education in Near Eastern affairs, is more difficult to assess. No source records a Kushite royal visit to Western Asia prior to Taharqo's intervention in 701 B.C.E., and Sargon II denied receipt of any

²¹⁰ Jansen-Winkeln, "Die Fremdherrschaften in Ägypten," 13–16 and 19–20.

²¹¹ Timothy Kendall, "Kings of the Sacred Mountain: Napata and the Kushite Twenty-fifth Dynasty of Egypt," in *Sudan: Ancient Kingdoms of the Nile*, ed. D. Wildung (New York, 1998), 161–71, and "Napatan Temples: A Case Study from Gebel Barkal: The Mythological Origin of Egyptian Kingship and the Formation of the Napatan State," (paper presented at the 10th International Conference for Nubian Studies, University of Rome, Italy, September 2002).

²¹² Bruce Williams, "Kushite Origins and the Cultures of Northeastern Africa," in Wenig, *Studien zum antiken Sudan*, 372–92, esp. 383–84.

²¹³ Bruce Williams, "A Prospectus for Exploring the Historical Essence of Ancient Nubia," in Davies, *Egypt and Africa*, 74–91, esp. 74 and 87 n. 3.

correspondence from Kush prior to the extradition of Iamani.²¹⁴ Yet some consideration must be given in this regard to the possible reconnaissance of non-royal Kushites—particularly merchants and mercenaries. As G. M. Trevelyan famously opined, “without social history, economic history is barren and political history unintelligible.”²¹⁵ The peoples of the Nilo-Sahel and surrounding regions had served as rank-and-file mercenaries on Egyptian campaigns into the Sinai since at least the third millennium B.C.E.,²¹⁶ and a thousand years later Rib-Hadda of Byblos’ requests that pharaoh send to him “men from Egypt and Meluḥḥa” and “100 men from Kaši” “according to the practice of your ancestors” may indicate that Kushite mercenaries had now taken up residence in the Levant.²¹⁷

From the first millennium B.C.E., Fort Shalmaneser has yielded a group of ivory figurines depicting men clad in Egyptian-style kilts, accompanied by goats, gazelle, oryx, and bulls, and carrying on their shoulders baboons, monkeys, and leopard skins; Mallowan described their physiognomic features as “prognathous with high cheek-bones, pendulous ears, flattened nose[s] and protruding lips” and concluded that they were “Nubian.”²¹⁸ The free modeling in the round and the realistic carving of monkeys suggested to Mallowan a date “c.800 B.C.”²¹⁹ More concrete evidence of a Kushite presence in the region may be found in the Nimrud Wine Lists from the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III, in which six liters of wine are given to a group of people identified by the gentilic *kūsaya*—one of whom was responsible for supplying horses to the Assyrian army.²²⁰ In fact, the Nineveh Horse

²¹⁴ See nn. 12–14 *supra*.

²¹⁵ George Macaulay Trevelyan, *English Social History: A Survey of Six Centuries from Chaucer to Queen Victoria* (London, 1942), vii.

²¹⁶ Cairo JE 6304 and 34570 (=CG1435), cols. 16–17, as photographed in *Des dieux, des tombeaux, un savant: en Égypte, sur la pas de Mariette pacha*, ed. C. Ziegler and M. Desti (Paris, 2004), 186–87.

²¹⁷ See EA 112, 117, 131, and 133, in William L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore, 1987), 186, 193–95, 212, 215; cf. Danièle Michaux-Colombot, “La prétendue glose Meluḥḥa-Kaši dans EA 133:17,” *NABU* 4 (1990): 110–11. See also ‘Abdi-Ḥeba’s complaint about “Kašites” at Jerusalem: Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 328.

²¹⁸ Mallowan, *Nimrud and Its Remains*, vol. 2, 528 and pl. VII figs. 443 and 446–48.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 530. According to Mallowan, neither stylistic comparanda nor archaeological context suggested any later date for the ivories at Fort Shalmaneser, but the possibility could not be altogether excluded (*ibid.*, 526 and 530).

²²⁰ ND 10048C, rev. 21’, in James Vincent Kinnier Wilson, *The Nimrud Wine Lists: A Study of Men and Administration at the Assyrian Capital in the Eighth Century B.C.* (London, 1972), 56, 91, 93, 138, and pl. 20; John Nicholas Postgate, *Taxation and Conscription in the Assyrian Empire* (Rome, 1974), 11 §6.4 and 144–45 §§2.3.2–2.3.3. For the date of this reference, see Stephanie Dalley and John Nicholas Postgate, *The Tablets from Fort Shalmaneser* (London, 1984), 22.

Reports designate as many as one thousand horses as either *KUR.kūsaya* or simply *kūsaya*.²²¹ Dalley notes a number of *kūsaya* men in Neo-Assyrian records who were associated with the care of horses, and one received the exalted title, “chariot driver of the Prefect of the Land.”²²² In 701 B.C.E., Sennacherib would explicitly state that he had obtained such Kushite charioteers as prisoners of war,²²³ though identical circumstances cannot necessarily be assumed for all the abovementioned Kushites attested in Assyria across the preceding century. Moreover, these Kushites do not appear to have been isolated individuals in Assyria, for the Nineveh Horse Reports mention the Crown’s provision of horses for the “settlement of Kush.”²²⁴

Unfortunately, the linkage that Trevelyan urged between social and political history has proven elusive in the case of Kushite expatriates, because the surviving evidence does not testify to their subsequent communication with Kush itself—much less with the Kushite kings. If Kushite foreign policy was indeed characterized by a “misjudgment of the competence of their armies in opposition to the well-organized might of Assyria,” as James has assumed,²²⁵ then either Kushite émigrés and merchants in the Near East cut ties with their kin at home, or Kushite royals neglected to make use of their reports. Neither circumstance is impossible, but they do raise the historian’s skepticism.

IV. CONCLUSION: KUSHITE INTERVENTION IN TEMPORAL PERSPECTIVE

A more detailed analysis of domestic governance in the Nilo-Sahel and its attempted translation into the structuralist language of anthropological

²²¹ Lisa Heidorn, “The Horses of Kush,” *JNES* 56/2 (1997): 108; Postgate, *Taxation and Conscription*, 8–9, 11–12.

²²² Stephanie Dalley, “Foreign Chariotry and Cavalry in the Armies of Tiglath-Pileser III and Sargon II,” *Iraq* 47 (1985): 31–48, esp. 45–46. For Kushites employed in other positions, see Heidorn, “Horses of Kush,” 110.

²²³ Chicago Oriental Institute Museum A2793, col. III, ll. 3–5, in Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib*, 32; with further bibliography in Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 102–105.

²²⁴ British Museum K 1005, rev. 4–8, in Robert F. Harper, *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters*, vol. 6 (London, 1902), 626 no. 575. For the proposal that small communities of Kushite émigrés may have settled elsewhere in the Near East, see Rodney S. Sadler, *Can a Cushite Change his Skin?: An Examination of Race, Ethnicity, and Othering in the Hebrew Bible* (New York, 2005), 40–46 and 78–81.

²²⁵ See n. 131 *supra*.

modeling lie beyond the scope of the present work,²²⁶ but several points from the foregoing discussion (III) would immediately seem to resonate with the documentary record of 25th Dynasty interest in the Near East (I.2). Most obvious is the corpus' repeated emphasis upon "Asiatic copper" (*ḥm.t Št.t*),²²⁷ to which might also be added the unusual prominence assigned by the Kushite royals elsewhere in their inscriptions to horses and cattle.²²⁸ Indeed, given the apparent significance of pastoralism in Kush, Taharqo's commemoration of a "cattle-road" in Lower Nubia cannot be dismissed as content too mundane for a royal inscription, nor can it be emended to give testimony of the Assyrian wars.²²⁹ More telling is Taharqo's lament to Amun regarding "your tribute from the land of Khor [Syria-Palestine] which is turned away from you;"²³⁰ emphasis is placed

²²⁶ In the above-cited works, Edwards and Fuller have repeatedly advocated classification of the Meroitic polity as a "Sudanic" or "segmentary state." The model was first introduced by: Aidan Southall, *Alur Society* (Cambridge, 1956). For extensive bibliography and discussion, see Pope, *The Double Kingdom under Taharqo*, 283–92. For approval of this model's application to Kush, see Robert Morkot, "The foundations of the Kushite state. A response to the paper of László Török," *CRIPPEL* 17, no. 1 (1995): 229–42, esp. 232; D. O'Connor and A. Reid, "Introduction—Locating Ancient Egypt in Africa: Modern Theories, Past Realities," in O'Connor and Reid, *Ancient Egypt in Africa*, 16; Roberto Gozzoli, "Old Formats, New Experiments and Royal Ideology in the Early Nubian Period (ca. 721–664 BCE)," in *Egypt in Transition: Social and Religious Development of Egypt in the First Millennium BCE*, ed. L. Bares, F. Coppens, and K. Smoláriková (Prague, 2010), 187 n. 22. For critical remarks, see Joyce Marcus and Gary M. Feinman, "Introduction," in *Archaic States*, ed. J. Marcus and G. M. Feinman (Santa Fe, NM, 1998), 7–8; László Török, "From Chiefdom to 'Segmentary State'. Meroitic Studies: A Personal View," in Godlewski and Latjar, *Between the Cataracts*, vol. 1, 149–78.

²²⁷ See nn. 56–57 *supra*.

²²⁸ For the burial of horses in the Kushite royal cemetery at el-Kurru, see Dunham, *El Kurru*, 116–17. For emphasis upon horses in the Great Triumphant Stela of Pi(ankh)y, see Cairo JE 48862, lunette and ll. 64–66, 89, and 110–114, in Grimal, *La stèle triomphale de Pi(ankh)y*, pls. I–III and VIII–X. Cf. also the horses delivered by "Shilkanni" to Sargon II in: Fragmentary prism Assur 16587 (=Vorderasiatisches Museum Berlin 8424), col. B, l. 10, in Weidner, "Šilkan(he)ni, König von Mušri," 40–53, esp. 43. For emphasis upon cattle in the royal inscriptions of the 25th Dynasty, see Griffith, "Napata, Sanam, Temple, Cattle and Town," pl. XL fragment 16; Vernus, "Inscriptions de la Troisième Période Intermédiaire (I)," 7 Fig. 6 and 10 Fig. 9.; R. A. Parker, J. Leclant, and J.-C. Goyon, ed., *The Edifice of Taharqa by the Sacred Lake of Karnak* (Providence, 1979), 66 nn. 16–17 and pl. 26; Cairo JE 48863, ll. 22–24, in Nicholas-Christophe Grimal, *Quatre stèles napatéennes au Musée du Caire* (Cairo, 1981), pls. III a and III; Redford, "Taharqa in Western Asia and Libya," 189 Ill. 1, ll. 11; but cf. earlier date proposed by Revez, "Une stèle inédite," 535–65 and pls. I–IV. For greater emphasis in the inscriptions of their Kushite successors, see Cairo JE 48864, ll. 60–99, in Grimal, *Quatre stèles napatéennes*, pls. XVIIa–XX; Berlin Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung 2268, ll. 37–58, in Schäfer, *Die aethiopische Königsinschrift*, Taf. IV, and Peust, *Das Napatansische*, 34–35.

²²⁹ See nn. 77–82 *supra*.

²³⁰ See n. 95 *supra*.

upon the loss of trade from client states, but unlike the Assyrian kings, Taharqo makes no mention of recalcitrance or revolt in Khor. Consequently, there would seem little reason to doubt that “trade was uppermost in the Sudanese Pharaohs’ minds”; the formalist argument that they could have obtained comparable products more economically “in their homeland far to the south of the Nile” fails to take account of the prestige attached to exotica and the consequent redistributive value of Levantine goods beyond considerations of “profit.”²³¹

Equally conspicuous is the tendency of Kushite narrative inscriptions to reference the Near East only as a vague domain of “sand-dwellers” (*hry.w-šy*), “Asiatics” (*Sty.w*), and “Mentyu-nomads of Asia” (*Mnty.w St.t*) whom the king has terrorized, slain, restrained, or even donated as laborers to temple estates. Absent altogether in the Kushite corpus are Levantine itineraries of the kind commissioned by Thutmose III, Ramses II, Sennacherib, and Esarhaddon, describing Asiatic countries traversed, foreign potentates vanquished in battle, and new boundary stelae erected to mark an expanded realm.²³² The formal idiom in which Asiatics are mentioned in the Kushite corpus is consistently that of the perpetual and peripheral raid rather than the singular historical event. In fact, Spalinger has observed that the military forces commanded by the 25th Dynasty, as represented in both their own records and those of Sennacherib, were focused principally upon “quickly moving units better able to harass and geared to a swift victory rather than to a prolonged battle wherein a large deployment of troops was required.”²³³ When set against a backdrop of “Nubian prototypes,” as clarified in particular by the recent works of Edwards and Fuller, the Kushite documentary and iconographic record of the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E. undermines the assumption made by Kitchen, Morkot, Redford, and Motyer that the 25th Dynasty would have entertained imperial ambitions of territorial acquisition and administrative overrule in Western Asia.²³⁴ Integration of the 25th Dynasty into Nubian Studies and Nilo-Sahelian history more generally suggests that trade in prestige goods should be given more weight than territorial acquisition in the evaluation of Kushite motives in Western Asia.

It must be emphasized that a long view of *Kuschitenherrschaft* does not yield definitive answers to the question of foreign policy during the 25th

²³¹ See nn. 113 and 193 *supra*.

²³² See nn. 31, 35, and 58–59 *supra*.

²³³ Spalinger, “Notes on the Military,” 54.

²³⁴ See nn. 115–17, 122, and 148 *supra*.

Dynasty, but it does provide some ground upon which to evaluate the various theories outlined above in Section II. Viewed from a Nilo-Sahelian perspective, the following tentative scenario may be proposed: the 25th Dynasty interacted with Levantine states according to the model of patron-client relations, and most prominent among the Kushite motives was a desire for such bulk goods and luxuries as cedar and copper, which could then be converted into political influence in Kush and Egypt through both conspicuous consumption and redistribution. Trade thus served another end: the dynasty's political legitimacy in Egypt and ability to claim that country as part of their royal patrimony. The Kushite stewardship of Egypt also appears to have driven their evolving response to Assyrian aggression: Levantine fugitives could not be harbored, lest they endanger domestic security, and military action by the 25th Dynasty in Western Asia was confined to defense of the southern Levantine buffer zone, rarely if ever reaching beyond. The various *hry.w-šy*, *Sty.w*, and *Mnty.w St.t* whom the Kushite pharaohs claimed to have restrained or even conscripted as laborers may have been procured during those defensive campaigns, but it is just as likely that they were obtained in raids closer to home or had simply crossed the border into Egypt as the flotsam of Levantine political upheavals.

Kushite foreign policy toward the Near East would therefore have been motivated principally by the interrelated concerns of long-distance trade and domestic legitimacy and security, without an imperial scheme geared toward territorial acquisition, garrisoning, or even sustained military deployment. Such a strategy could have resulted from royal ignorance of Near Eastern affairs, but it would also seem the policy most likely to result from an informed judgment of the region—particularly the discrepancy in military armament between Assyria and Kush. Kushite responses to the Assyrian threat were thus simultaneously conditioned by political ecology and political events: they served enduring priorities of Nilo-Sahelian statecraft, and the dynasts gradually learned how to implement those priorities in the contested Levant.

At the level of historiography, what the interpretation of Kushite foreign policy illustrates most clearly are the methodological limits of *l'histoire événementielle*, not the unique validity of a single historical theory. While “les documents et la chaîne des faits” contain multiple pieces of evidence demonstrating the 25th Dynasty's interest in Asiatic copper and cedar,²³⁵ their use of equestrian forces for brief defense of their Levantine

²³⁵ See nn. 56–57 *supra*.

neighbors,²³⁶ and their contrasting disinterest in sustained deployment and territorial acquisition,²³⁷ the significance of these details and their proposed relation to one another only become apparent when situated alongside the evidence from preceding and subsequent epochs in Section III above. The historian attempting to explain Kushite inaction, extradition, coalition, and intervention is thus best served by a synthesis of short- and long-term perspectives, one that places events and individual agency against a backdrop of continuity and tradition.²³⁸ The actions of the 25th Dynasty in 701 B.C.E. may not quite “speak for themselves” to all auditors, but they are consistent with patterns of political behavior in the Nilo-Sahel that extend well beyond Kush’s brief confrontation with Assyria.

²³⁶ See nn. 220–24 and 228 *supra*.

²³⁷ See nn. 31–35 and 59 *supra*.

²³⁸ For similar attempts to balance short- and long-term historical perspectives regarding the Kushite annexation of Egypt, see Pope, *Double Kingdom under Taharqo*, esp. 31–58 and 270–92. For broader discussion of the methodological challenges involved in such a balance, see William H. Sewell, Jr., *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago, 2005).

PART TWO

THE WEAPON OF AŠŠUR

FAMILY MATTERS: PSYCHOHISTORICAL REFLECTIONS
ON SENNACHERIB AND HIS TIMES

Eckart Frahm¹

*As the heavens for height, and the earth for depth, so the
heart of kings is unsearchable. (Proverbs 25:3)*

1. INTRODUCTION

What are the driving forces of history? Modern historians will undoubtedly point to political, economic, and ideological factors when grappling with this question, while possibly also adducing more specific ones such as gender relations or changes in the natural environment. All these factors have in common that they are highly impersonal: historical accounts based on them are likely to represent history as a process mostly governed by structural or systemic causes. Some scholars, however, continue to stress an additional factor: the transformative effects that individual human beings can have on the unfolding of history. To be sure, putting too much emphasis on the impact of ‘great men’ (or, for that matter, women) has become relatively unfashionable among serious historians in recent times.² But the biographical approach is certainly not dead—in the more popular branches of contemporary history writing, it continues, in fact, to flourish more than ever, as the endless production of new biographies of Cleopatra, Napoleon, or Lincoln demonstrates.

The present contribution does not wish to naively endorse the biographical approach, or downplay the historical significance of the aforementioned structural factors. That social rules, economic institutions, political systems, and religious or other ideologies have a considerable impact on the fate of both individuals and large communities is all but

¹ I would like to thank Seth Richardson and an anonymous reviewer for their insightful comments on a preliminary version of this article. Abbreviations include: CAD: *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* (Chicago, 1956–2010); PNA: H. Baker and K. Radner (eds.), *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Helsinki, 1998–2011); SAA: S. Parpola (ed.), *State Archives of Assyria* (Helsinki: 1987–).

² For a critical assessment of this ‘history from above’ approach within Assyriology, see M. Van De Mieroop, *Cuneiform Texts and the Writing of History* (London, 1999), 39–85.

obvious. But especially when one deals with civilizations that were ruled over long periods of time by powerful kings, there can be little doubt that these autocrats had an enormous amount of agency to shape the events of their times. And if we accept the equally plausible premise that the actions of the kings in question, like those of any human being, were influenced by emotions, passions, and mental traumata often rooted in their family lives, then a cautious attempt to explore such matters seems well worth the effort.

The emperors of the late Neo-Assyrian period were the most powerful men of their time. King Sennacherib, the protagonist of this volume, ruled over a territory that stretched from the Zagros mountains in the east to the Levant in the west, and from the Persian Gulf in the south to the Armenian highlands in the north. His siege of Jerusalem in 701 B.C.E. left a deep imprint on his contemporaries and posterity, becoming, in the words of Seth Richardson, “the first world event.”³ Surely, then, there is every reason to be interested in what kind of man Sennacherib was and which personal experiences shaped his political agenda. The problem is: do we actually have the proper means, both in terms of methodology and sources, to assess these matters?

2. PSYCHOHISTORY AND ITS METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

Let us begin with some reflections on the theoretical foundations of psychohistory. ‘Common-sense’ attempts to elucidate the psychology of important historical figures can be traced back to the historiography of the classical world; they are found, for example, in Herodotus’s *Histories*, Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives*, and Suetonius’s *Lives of the Emperors*.⁴ Many of the great historical works of the nineteenth century C.E. include a good deal of psychological analysis as well. Systematic explorations, however, of the psychological underpinnings of history only came into being with the rise of psychoanalysis in the late nineteenth and early twentieth

³ See Richardson’s contribution to the present volume.

⁴ For an analysis of Suetonius’s conception of character, see L. R. Cochran, “Suetonius’ Conception of Imperial Character,” *Biography* 3 (1980), 189–201. D. Konstan (*The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Aristotle and Classical Literature* [Toronto, 2006]) investigates the role of emotions in ancient Greece, with a focus on Aristotelian ideas. A more comprehensive project studying the social and cultural construction of emotions in the classical world is currently directed by A. Chaniotis at Oxford; see <http://www.classics.ox.ac.uk/research/projects/emotions.asp>.

centuries. The founding father of the field, Sigmund Freud, was the first to develop a comprehensive psychological theory and to apply it both to history as a whole—particularly in *Civilization and Its Discontents*⁵—and to famous historical personalities⁶—as in his studies on Leonardo da Vinci, and Moses and Akhenaten.⁷ Others, for example Erik H. Erikson and Kurt R. Eissler, followed the master's lead. Assuming that one could not only psychoanalyze the patient on the couch, but also, retroactively, long dead figures of the past, they produced lengthy psychoanalytical studies of Luther and Goethe, respectively.⁸

Wherever such attempts to apply Freudian ideas to prominent characters of history have done so with little critical adjustment, they have met with little sympathy among scholars—and rightly so, as the danger of anachronistic understandings is obvious in these cases. Efforts to create a rigid, Freud-based theory of psychohistory (for example by Lloyd deMause)⁹ did not fare any better. In a scholarly climate in which some of Freud's most fundamental ideas were increasingly regarded as pseudoscience, it was not surprising that several historians attacked deMause as a charlatan.¹⁰ The brutal assault on psychohistory led to a situation in the 1990s in which “both psychohistory and Freud had fallen into a kind of grand canyon of intellectual disrepute.”¹¹ The rise of cognitive and neuroscience studies in recent years has further compromised the field's

⁵ S. Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1930), in *Gesammelte Werke XIV* (Frankfurt/M, 1960–).

⁶ This represented, in a way, a reversal of Freud's assumption that stories about legendary figures of the past (most famously the Oedipus myth) provided keys to understanding the psychological infrastructure of modern men and women.

⁷ S. Freud, *Eine Kindheitserinnerung des Leonardo da Vinci* (1910), in *Gesammelte Werke VIII*, and *Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion* (1939), in *Gesammelte Werke XVI* (both volumes: Frankfurt/M, 1960–).

⁸ E. Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York, 1962); K. R. Eissler, *Goethe: A Psychoanalytic Study, 1775–1786*, 2 vols. (Detroit, 1963).

⁹ See L. DeMause, “The Independence of Psychohistory,” in *Psycho/history: Readings in the Methods of Psychology, Psychoanalysis, and History*, ed. G. Cocks and T. L. Crosby (New Haven, CT, 1987), 50–67, especially pp. 50 and 66.

¹⁰ One of the most severe critics of psychohistory has been David E. Stannard, whose agenda can easily be gauged from the title of his book *Shrinking History: On Freud and the Failure of Psychohistory* (Oxford, 1980).

¹¹ L. Hunt, “Psychology, Psychoanalysis, and Historical Thought,” in *A Companion to Western Historical Thought*, ed. L. Kramer and S. Maza (Malden, MA, 2002), 339. For an assessment of some of the main arguments directed against psychohistory, see also J. Szaluta, *Psychohistory: Theory and Practice* (New York, 1999), 49–59.

reputation, since it resulted in a “de-emphasis on personal subjectivity in favor of the (putatively) objective factors of brain chemistry.”¹²

Yet, however legitimate much of the criticism leveled against psychohistory may be, I cannot help thinking that it went too far, essentially throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Leaving the historical self completely unexplored, simply regarding it as a “black box,” is not really a satisfying strategy for the historian. One does not have to be an orthodox Freudian to acknowledge the importance of emotions, passions, delusions, and outbursts of irrational sentiment as driving forces of human action and, consequently, of history. The eminent cultural historian Peter Gay has quite convincingly pointed out that psychologically informed approaches to history can provide “dynamic, many-layered explanations of mental products that are far more adequate to their composite and puzzling nature than the grand simplicities that most historians have felt compelled to accept as satisfactory.”¹³ And while it is true that the historian cannot directly communicate with the dead in the same way a psychoanalyst can talk with a living patient, he enjoys the advantage that, unlike the latter, he often has information on the entire life span of his subject.

3. PSYCHOHISTORY AND THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

Despite the foregoing arguments in favor of a careful application of psychohistory in general, the question remains to what extent it can—or should—be used in ancient Near Eastern studies. Is psychohistory really a viable tool in a field that deals with languages and civilizations that have been dead for almost two thousand years and whose written sources, however numerous, tend to reveal very little on childhood experiences and the emotional life?

In Egyptology, the psychohistorical approach has some prominent advocates. Especially the Amarna period, and the ‘mad’ monotheistic king who defined it, Akhenaten, have attracted the attention of scholars interested in psychohistory. Freud’s aforementioned book on Moses and Akhenaten was only the first in a series of high-profile studies, of which one should

¹² Hunt, “Psychology,” 341.

¹³ P. Gay, *Freud for Historians* (Oxford, 1985), 142–43; see also Szaluta *Psychohistory*, 59–76.

single out Jan Assmann's brilliant 1997 work *Moses the Egyptian*¹⁴ and Franz Maziejewski's more problematic *Echnaton oder die Erfindung des Monotheismus* from 2010, a book whose highly speculative conclusions about incest and trauma in the Egyptian royal family recently received a significant amount of media attention in Germany.¹⁵

The civilizations of ancient Mesopotamia have been exposed to psychohistorical scrutiny to a far lesser degree. The only relevant book I am aware of that has made extensive use of psychoanalytical ideas was written by Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, psychoanalysts interested in ancient art, but not specialists in ancient Near Eastern studies. In their 1985 monograph *The Forms of Violence*, the two authors sought to analyze depictions of violent acts on Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs by applying Freudian ideas about sado-masochism and mimetic and non-mimetic desire.¹⁶ Otherwise, references to Freud—and later psychological theorists—can be found only on the margins of Assyriological scholarly inquiry.¹⁷

There are, however, several attempts to assess the emotional life of the people of ancient Mesopotamia in more general ways. Studies by J. V. Kinnier Wilson ("Mental Diseases of Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Diseases in Antiquity*, ed. D. Brothwell and A. T. Sandison [Springfield, IL, 1967], 723–33) and J. Scurlock and B. Andersen (*Diagnoses in Assyrian*

¹⁴ J. Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, MA, 1997); see especially the chapter on "Suppressed History, Repressed Memory: Moses and Akhenaten," 23–54.

¹⁵ J. Maciejewski, *Echnaton oder die Erfindung des Monotheismus: Zur Korrektur eines Mythos* (Berlin, 2010). See D. Bartetzko, "Von Freud über Moses zum ödipalen Echnaton," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 7, 2011, and J. Assmann, "Nofretete und ihr Gespür für Macht," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, June 11, 2011.

¹⁶ L. Bersani and U. Dutoit, *The Forms of Violence: Narrative in Assyrian Art and Modern Culture* (New York, 1985). For an illuminating reassessment of Bersani's and Dutoit's work, see M. Fales, "Art, Performativity, Mimesis, Narrative, Ideology, and Audience: Reflections on Assyrian Palace Reliefs in the Light of Recent Studies," *KASKAL* 6 (2009): 268–72.

¹⁷ See, for example, M. I. Marcus' "Geography as Visual Ideology: Landscape, Knowledge, and Power in Neo-Assyrian Art," in *Neo-Assyrian Geography*, ed. M. Liverani (Rome, 1995), 193–202, an article that seeks to demonstrate how certain images on Neo-Assyrian bas-reliefs express male (hetero)sexual anxieties. See also my own study of the repressive "humor" in Assyrian royal inscriptions (E. Frahm, "Humor in assyrischen Königsinschriften," in *Intellectual Life of the Ancient Near East: Papers Presented at the 43rd Rencontre Internationale*, ed. J. Prosecký [Prague, 1998], 147–62). This is now supplemented by Reade's remarks on examples of comparable "jokes" in Assyrian art (J. Reade, "Religious Ritual in Assyrian Sculpture," in *Ritual and Politics in Ancient Mesopotamia*, ed. B. N. Porter [New Haven, CT, 2005], 20). For the opposite phenomenon, an interest in the ancient Near East, especially the Gilgamesh epic, on the part of modern psychologists and psychoanalysts, among them Freud and Jung, see Th. Ziolkowski, *Gilgamesh among Us: Modern Encounters with the Ancient Epic* (Ithaca, NY, 2011), 29–30, 112–18, 194–95.

and *Babylonian Medicine* [Urbana, IL, 2005], 284–353, 367–85) scrutinize Mesopotamian medical and magical texts for references to neurological disorders, trauma, shock, and mental diseases, and a massive book by Margaret Jaques (*Le vocabulaire des sentiments dans les textes sumériens*, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 332 [Münster, 2006]) analyzes meticulously the Sumerian terms for sentiments and emotions. Of even greater importance for the purposes of the present article are the modern studies of the lives and careers of various ancient Mesopotamian individuals, especially kings. The most popular subject for such works has been the famous ruler and law-giver Hammurapi of Babylon (1792–1750 B.C.E.), who has been the center of no fewer than three recent monographs, all written by prominent Assyriologists.

Two of these studies—one by Klengel (1999 [1991]), the other by Charpin (2003)—stress that one cannot (yet) write a veritable biography of that king, since too little is known about his private life.¹⁸ Consequently, both Klengel and Charpin focus their attention on the political, social, and economic history of the age of Hammurapi. Marc Van De Mieroop, however, the author of the third study, argues that a more audacious approach is possible. Even though he likewise acknowledges that “we still are greatly at a loss when trying to determine aspects of [Hammurapi’s] personality and personal life,”¹⁹ Van De Mieroop, claiming that his protagonist is “possibly the earliest [figure in world history] for whom we can write a detailed biography,”²⁰ actually includes a chapter on “Hammurabi’s Character” (pp. 112–21). Thus, even though no Assyriologist will declare that it is easy to apply psychohistorical approaches to individual figures from ancient Mesopotamia, there are at least some who consider this a task worth attempting.

¹⁸ “[H]eute [ist] noch niemand in der Lage . . . , auf der Grundlage des überlieferten Quellenmaterials einen Lebenslauf Hammurapis zu verfassen, ein gesichertes Bild seiner Persönlichkeit und seines Charakters zu zeichnen”: H. Klengel, *König Hammurapi und der Alltag Babylons* (Düsseldorf, 1999 [1991], 10). “[I]l n’est pas encore possible, dans l’état actuel des sources, d’écrire une véritable biographie de Hammurabi; sa vie privée reste en particulier presque totalement inaccessible”: D. Charpin, *Hammurabi de Babylone* (Paris: 2003), 7.

¹⁹ M. Van De Mieroop, *King Hammurabi of Babylon: A Biography* (Oxford, 2005), 112.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, viii. See also chapter II of the book (pp. 135–45), “On Writing Hammurabi’s Biography.”

4. PSYCHOHISTORICAL REFLECTIONS ON SENNACHERIB: THE PROBLEM OF THE SOURCES

If, despite all its problems, a psychohistorical evaluation of Hammurapi seems feasible, then one should also be able to pursue a similar project with regard to the Assyrian king Sennacherib. In fact, at first glance, the sources required for such an endeavor seem richer and more promising for the case of Sennacherib than for that of Hammurapi.²¹ First and foremost, we have hundreds of inscriptions, comprising thousands of lines, in which Sennacherib records his own achievements and, at least occasionally, refers to his emotional responses to the challenges he faced.²² These *res gestae* could represent a real treasure-trove for psychohistorical investigations. There are also quite a few visual images of the king, on palace reliefs from Khorsabad and Nineveh, showing him both as crown prince and as king.²³ From the time when he was crown prince, we have several letters Sennacherib wrote to his father Sargon,²⁴ and from the early years

²¹ An even better study object would be the Assyrian king Assurbanipal (669–631 B.C.E.), who is, however, not the central character of the present volume. Assurbanipal left a particularly copious body of royal inscriptions, which includes an “autobiographical” sketch about his youth and long descriptions of how he tortured his enemies. He avoided going to war, had himself depicted, on a palace relief, slouching on a couch in a garden in the presence of his wife and several musicians, and hobnobbed with Elamite princes who stayed at the Nineveh court. Later sources, especially Ctesias, describe Assurbanipal, now called Sardanapallus, as an effeminate character with bisexual inclinations, a characterization that may have been more than an orientalist fantasy.

²² For editions of most of Sennacherib’s inscriptions, see D. D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*, Oriental Institute Publications 2 (Chicago, 1924), and E. Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, AfO Beiheft 26 (Vienna, 1997). In the latter study, I catalogued 187 Sennacherib texts, inscribed on more than 500 objects. Some of them, especially the inscriptions on clay prisms, can be quite long; the ‘King’ prism from 694 B.C.E., for instance, has 740 lines (see *ibid.*, 87), and an incompletely preserved Sennacherib prism written a few years later seems to have comprised even more text (*ibid.*, 89, T 13). Since 1997, several new Sennacherib inscriptions have become known; for a brief recent overview, see E. Frahm, “Sanherib,” *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie* 12 (Berlin, 2009), 15–16.

²³ For a relief from Khorsabad that probably depicts Sennacherib as crown prince together with his father Sargon, see P. É. Botta, *Monument de Ninive* (Paris, 1849), Vol. 1, pl. 12 (reproduced in SAA 1, p. 26). Depictions of Sennacherib as king on sculptures from his Southwest Palace at Nineveh are reproduced in R. D. Barnett, E. Bleibtreu, and G. Turner, *Sculptures from the Southwest Palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh* (London, 1998), Vol. 2, plates 35, 48, 60, 91, 108, 132, 191, 205–207, 342–45, 379, 466, and 479. There is no systematic study of the pictorial representations of Sennacherib in Assyrian art, but J. M. Russell’s *Sennacherib’s Palace Without Rival at Nineveh* (Chicago, 1991) provides an insightful general assessment of the bas-reliefs from the Southwest Palace.

²⁴ SAA 1, 29–40, SAA 5, 281. SAA 1, 153 and SAA 17, 183 are letters written to an Assyrian crown prince, probably Sennacherib.

of his reign a number of letters written to him by officials from Babylonia are known.²⁵ Finally, in addition to the vast amount of information that is available on Sennacherib's father, Sargon II, and his grandfather, Tiglath-pileser III, we have the unusual good fortune to know at least a few things about this king's mother, his siblings, his wives, and his children.²⁶

Unfortunately, a closer look at the sources reveals that they are not quite as adequate for uncovering the secrets of Sennacherib's personality as they would initially appear. Let us begin with Sennacherib's royal inscriptions. First of all, it was almost certainly not Sennacherib himself who composed them, even though practically all of them are written in the first person singular. Mesopotamian royal inscriptions were usually the work of professional scholars and scribes who were close to the rulers. In the Neo-Assyrian period, the kings' personal advisors and 'chief ideologues,' the so-called *rab tuṣṣarri* and *ummânu*, served as their 'ghostwriters.'²⁷ I have argued elsewhere that Sennacherib's earliest inscriptions were most likely composed by the famous Kalḫu scribe Nabû-zuqup-kênu, the scion of an influential scribal family whose descendants held high offices under Sennacherib's successors.²⁸ He may later have fallen into disgrace, for he stayed in Kalḫu instead of moving to Nineveh, the new royal residence

²⁵ See M. Dietrich, "Bêl-ibni von Babylon," in *dubsar-anta-men: Studien zur Altorientalistik* (Fs. W. Römer), ed. M. Dietrich and O. Loretz, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 253 (Münster, 1998), 81–108, and the overview by the same author in SAA 17, xxxvi–xxxvii. Establishing whether the letters listed by Dietrich really all belong to the reign of Sennacherib requires further study. For letters referring to Sennacherib after his death, see E. Frahm, "Šin-aḫḫe-erība," in PNA 3/I, 1127.

²⁶ See below, section 5.

²⁷ For a more detailed discussion of the evidence for such a scenario, see, most recently, E. Frahm, "Keeping Company with Men of Learning: The King as Scholar," in *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*, ed. K. Radner and E. Robson (Oxford, 2011), 520–24.

²⁸ E. Frahm, "New Sources for Sennacherib's First Campaign," in *Assur und sein Umland*, ed. J. Córdoba and P. Miglus, *ISIMU* 6 (Madrid, 2003, publ. 2007), 148, 157–60 (accessible at <http://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=3014249>). The evidence for Nabû-zuqup-kênu's 'authorship' of Sennacherib's early royal inscriptions is, admittedly, not that straightforward. The argument is based on the fact that two otherwise very similar Sennacherib inscriptions from around 702 B.C.E., one from Tarbiṣu and one from Nineveh, use different words to describe the dust cloud raised by the marching Assyrian army, namely *akāmu gerrīya* and *ḫillu*. The only tablet that includes an explicit equation between *a-gamu* (= *akāmu*) and *ḫillu* is 2 R 47 (ii 11), a lexical list with some commentary entries. The tablet was owned by Nabû-zuqup-kênu, which suggests, even though there is of course no proof, that it was he who composed the two Sennacherib inscriptions. Since the inscriptions in question show conspicuous similarities with some of the later inscriptions from the reign of Sargon, there is a certain likelihood that Nabû-zuqup-kênu authored those texts as well.

inaugurated by Sennacherib shortly after 705 B.C.E.²⁹ Other scholars must have assumed responsibility for the composition of Sennacherib's later inscriptions.

Beside the fact that Sennacherib did not actually write his inscriptions himself, one also has to take into account the often highly formulaic character of these texts. Assyrian royal inscriptions focus on very specific topics, most prominently war and construction projects. They tend to omit references to defeats and mishaps, and they have usually little to say about private matters. Sennacherib's early inscriptions also repeat verbatim whole phrases from the military and construction accounts of the inscriptions of his father Sargon,³⁰ which demonstrates how careful one must be when using them with the goal of assessing the character of the king in whose name they were written.

But it would be wrong to dismiss the inscriptions altogether. While it is clear that they were essentially composed by royal scribes, one should bear in mind that it is very likely that these 'ghostwriters,' at least in the case of important new texts, consulted the king before starting their work, and asked him which topics he wished them to cover, as indicated by the letters SAA 15, 4, and 16, 125 and 143. We can assume that especially those elements in royal inscriptions that transcended the topical, such as, in the case of Sennacherib, the detailed descriptions of technical innovations, go back to direct interventions of the king. So while it may be problematic to call the inscriptions of Mesopotamian kings 'autobiographies,'³¹ there is every reason to assume that their royal protagonists were more than mere 'honorary authors,'³² and that a careful analysis of the inscriptions may well yield information relevant for an investigation of their characters.

The numerous sculpted images of Sennacherib, it must be admitted, may be less helpful in this regard. Beside the fact that we no longer share the 'physiognomic' belief of the people of the ancient Near East (and some later civilizations) that the physical features of a human being tell

²⁹ On Nabû-zuqup-kēnu, see E. Frahm, "Nabû-zuqup-kenu, das Gilgamesch-Epos und der Tod Sargons II.," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 51 (1999): 73–90, and "Nabû-zuqup-kenu, Gilgamesh XII, and the Rites of Du'uzu," *Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires* 2005: no. 5, as well as H. D. Baker and L. Pearce, "Nabû-zuqup-kenu," *PNA* 2/II, 912–13 (with further literature).

³⁰ See Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 42, and "New Sources," 145–51, 159.

³¹ On this matter, see S. M. Maul, "Altorientalische Tatenberichte mit (auto)biographischen Zügen," in *La biographie antique*, ed. W. W. Ehlers, *Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique* 54 (Geneva, 1998), 7–32.

³² Thus K. Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 33.

us much about his or her character, there is the issue that all the Neo-Assyrian kings strongly resemble one another on the palace reliefs. Obviously, what we have are not actual portraits, but idealized representations of the kings' 'body politic.' The images represent the kings in an ageless state of dignity and detachment, hiding from us—rather than revealing—the more human sides of their personalities.

As for the letters, we have once again to acknowledge that they are less useful for our investigation than we would like. In contrast to the occasionally rather 'intimate' letters sent by Assyrian and Babylonian scholars to the kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, the correspondence from Sennacherib's time deals almost exclusively with political and practical matters. We also do not have anything that could compete with the remarkable letters dispatched to King Zimri-lim by diplomats from Mari posted in Babylon, which reveal so much about Hammurapi and his sometimes idiosyncratic behavior.³³ That said, the letters Sennacherib wrote as crown prince can still be considered a valuable source, especially for an assessment of his early political formation.

Finally, when it comes to Sennacherib's family background, we have to admit that the available information, while richer than anything we know about the preceding Neo-Assyrian kings, is still sparse. Obviously, none of Sennacherib's spouses or children left a diary, and references to them in the textual record are usually short. Nonetheless, a reassessment of Sennacherib's family life opens up some particularly fascinating perspectives.

Weighing the pros and cons, it seems worthwhile to proceed, albeit carefully, with our 'psychohistorical' inquiry into Sennacherib. Admittedly, I will frequently have to resort to what Jacques Barzan, in his 1974 book *Clio and the Doctors*, deprecatingly dubbed as 'weasel words'—phrases like "he must have," "it is not at all improbable," or "it would seem."³⁴ But I feel somewhat justified in my use of such terms by the fact that the uncertainty they indicate is an intrinsic element of almost all historical research, especially research devoted to the study of ancient civilizations.

³³ See D. Charpin, "Hammu-rabi de Babylone et Mari: Nouvelles sources, nouvelles perspectives," in *Babylon: Focus mesopotamischer Geschichte, Wiege früher Gelehrsamkeit, Mythos in der Moderne*, ed. J. Renger (Saarbrücken, 1999), 111–30.

³⁴ J. Barzan, *Clio and the Doctors: Psycho-History, Quanto-History, and History* (Chicago, 1974), 45; see also Szaluta, *Psychohistory*, 50–51.

5. SENNACHERIB'S FAMILY BACKGROUND: FUNDAMENTALS

A particular focus of this study will be on Sennacherib's family and its impact on the king, a topic on which several important discoveries have shed new light in the past 25 years. Even though many members of Sennacherib's family remain unknown to us, we can draw a genealogical tree (fig. 1) that provides some key information on his grandparents, parents, siblings, wives, children, and a few other relatives. In this tree, the names of kings are indicated in bold type and the names of women in italics. The dates after royal names indicate the regnal years of the kings in question, not their life spans. In case the identity not only of the father, but also of the mother of an individual is known, a line is drawn from the ∞ symbol that unites the parents. While an attempt has been made to provide comprehensive information on Sennacherib's own generation as well as that of his parents, grandparents,³⁵ and children, only the most important members of the generation of his grandchildren are considered.³⁶

Before embarking on an analysis of the impact that Sennacherib's family life may have had on his personality and his political decisions, several issues related to the genealogical tree and the supposed life spans of the

³⁵ In an effort to include all the information on the Assyrian royal family that can be retrieved from the newly discovered Nimrud tombs (see below), I also provide data on the preceding generations, from Tukulti-Ninurta II onwards. For the sources on which our knowledge about the various members of these generations is based, see the respective entries in PNA. For Ḥamâ, whose name and marital status as a wife of Shalmaneser IV are known from an inscription on a golden stamp seal from tomb III in Nimrud, see F. N. H. Al-Rawi, "Inscriptions from the Tombs of the Queens of Assyria," in *New Light on Nimrud: Proceedings of the Nimrud Conference, 11th–13th March 2002*, ed. J. Curtis et al. (London, 2008), 136, Text No. 16. Note that the Assyrian viceroy Šamši-ilu claims in an inscription from 773 B.C.E. that he had forced Ḥadiānu of Damascus to bring an extensive tribute to Assyria that included Ḥadiānu's daughter and her "dowry" (*nudunnû*) (for details, see S. Dalley, "The Identity of the Princesses in Tomb II and a New Analysis of Events in 701 BC," in Curtis et al. eds., *New Light on Nimrud*, 172). Perhaps this woman was no one else but Ḥamâ. Even though she would have been Shalmaneser's wife for less than a year, the possibility is supported by the fact that a golden bowl inscribed in the name of Šamši-ilu was found in tomb III (see Curtis et al. eds., *New Light on Nimrud*, 117).

³⁶ For an earlier, now slightly outdated attempt to draw a genealogical tree of the Late Assyrian royal family, see E. Frahm, "Kabale und Liebe: Die königliche Familie am Hof zu Ninive," in *Von Babylon bis Jerusalem: Die Welt der altorientalischen Königsstädte*, Vol. 2, ed. W. Seipel and A. Wiczorek (Milan, 1999), 321. For a new discussion of Assurbanipal's family, see J. Novotny and J. Singletary, "Family Ties: Assurbanipal's Family Revisited," in *Of God(s), Trees, Kings, and Scholars: Neo-Assyrian and Related Studies in Honour of Simo Parpola*, *Studia Orientalia* 101, ed. M. Luukko et al. (Helsinki, 2009), 167–177. Despite their skepticism, it is assumed here that Ešarra-ḥammat was Assurbanipal's and Šamaš-šumu-ukin's mother.

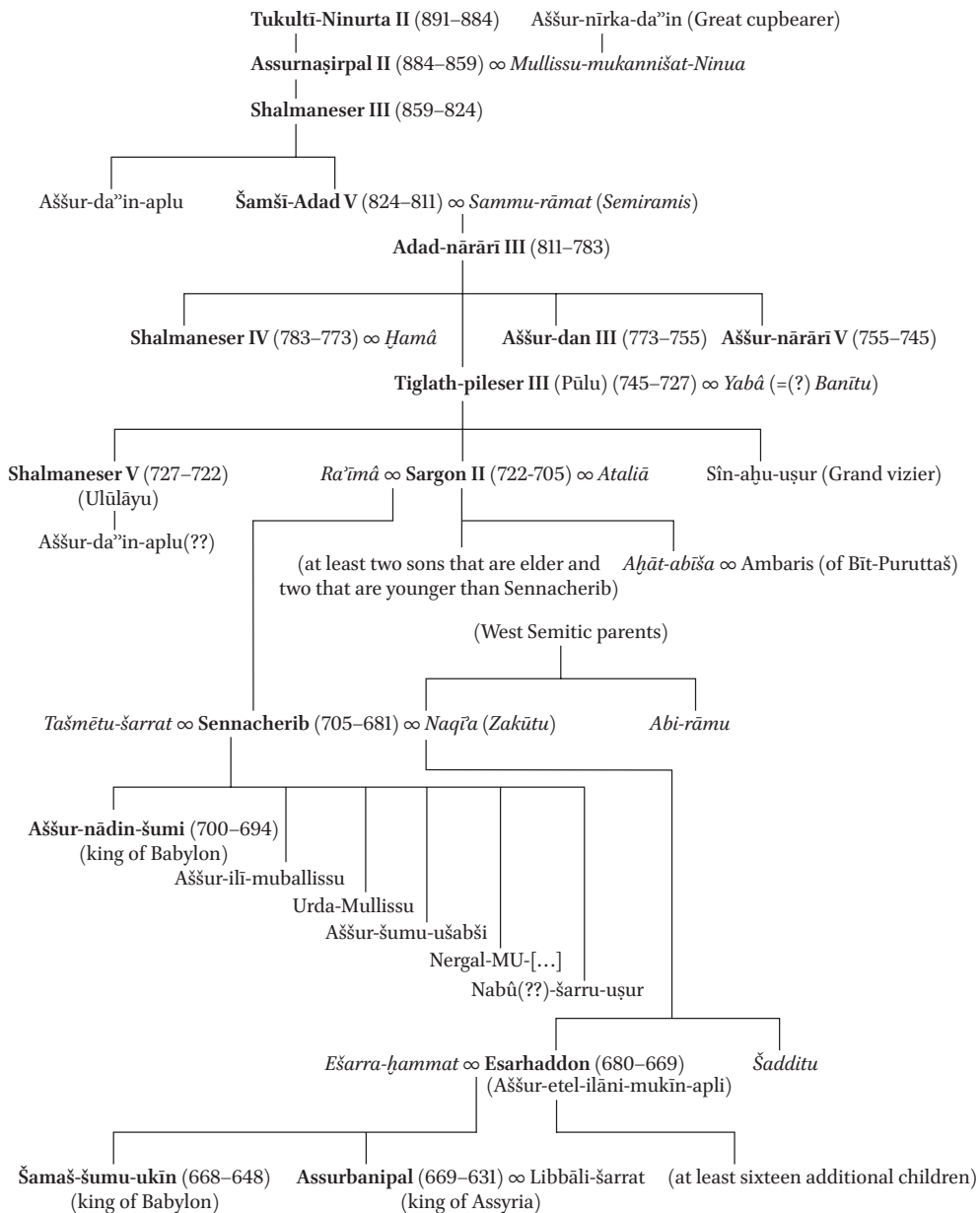


Fig. 1. Sennacherib's Family Tree.

members of the royal family require further discussion. Since both the present author and other scholars have provided detailed information on many of the sources informing the foregoing reconstructions in other publications,³⁷ I focus on some particular difficult and contested issues. The fairly long section that follows has in itself little bearing on the topic of ‘psychohistory,’ but it paves the way towards the subsequent analysis of Sennacherib’s mental constitution.

For reasons explored further below, Sennacherib mentions the name of his predecessor Sargon II, if at all, only once in his inscriptions.³⁸ Other sources, however, for example the colophon of an astrological tablet that calls Sennacherib *mār šarri rabû*—that is, literally, “eldest royal son” of Sargon³⁹—leave no doubt that Sargon was, in fact, Sennacherib’s father.⁴⁰ Sennacherib’s name, *Šin-aḥḥē-erība*, which literally means “(The moon-god) Šin has replaced the brothers,” indicates that Sennacherib had at least two elder brothers who had died before his birth.⁴¹ Considering that Sennacherib’s own eldest son, Aššur-nādin-šumi,⁴² should have been at least twenty years old when he became king of Babylon in 700 B.C.E., and

³⁷ See the following of my works: *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 1–4; “Kabale und Liebe”; “Šin-aḥḥē-erība,” 1113–17; “Observations on the Name and Age of Sargon II, and on Some Patterns of Assyrian Royal Onomastics,” *Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires* 2005: no. 44; and “Sanherib,” 12–14. See also Dalley, “Identity of the Princesses,” and A. Fuchs, “Sargon II.,” *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie* 12 (Berlin, 2009), 53, as well as the entries on the various members of Sennacherib’s family in PNA.

³⁸ The reference is found in 1904–10–9, 210 (Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 194–95), an incompletely preserved inscription of uncertain interpretation on a badly damaged small clay tablet. Sargon’s name is completely destroyed, but its restoration seems required by the context. The orthography of the tablet shows certain peculiarities suggesting that its text might have been copied some time after the reign of Sennacherib.

³⁹ BAK 512, line 5. The title *mār šarri rabû* indicates that Sennacherib was Sargon’s son and his crown prince; see E. Weissert, “Aššur-bāni-apli,” PNA 1/I, 162.

⁴⁰ For other sources confirming Sennacherib’s paternal descent, see Frahm, “Sanherib,” 12. For the most recent assessment of Sargon II and his time, see Fuchs, “Sargon II.,” with further literature.

⁴¹ Elnathan Weissert (personal communication) has pointed out to me that the name might have been conceptualized as the utterance of another surviving child of Sargon, in which case Sennacherib might have had an additional older brother who was still alive at his birth. We know nothing about such an older brother, however, and it is unlikely that Berossus’s reference to a (nameless) brother of Sennacherib who became king in Babylon at some point reflects actual events (see S. M. Burstein, *The Babyloniaca of Berossus*, Sources from the Ancient Near East 1/5 [Malibu, CA, 1978], 23 n. 71).

⁴² He is called GAL DUMU in an inscription from Assur (Luckenbill, *Annals*, 151–52, l. 3; Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 180, T 155). This can only be a garbled reference to his status as eldest son.

reckoning with generation spans of roughly twenty years (admittedly a somewhat uncertain assumption⁴³), we can date Sennacherib's birth to ca. 740 B.C.E. and that of his father to ca. 765 B.C.E.⁴⁴

Sargon himself was most likely a son of Tiglath-pileser III, also known as Pūlu, who ruled from 745 to 727 B.C.E. W. G. Lambert has recently put this into question, referring to a Late Babylonian copy of a letter of Nabopolassar that calls Sennacherib "the son of Sargon, offspring of a slave from Babylon" (*mār Šarru-ukīn ilittu dušmū Bābili*).⁴⁵ According to Lambert, we should trust the letter and assume that Sargon was not a scion of the Assyrian royal family, but of Babylonian descent.⁴⁶ However, two texts, a Sargon inscription and a Babylonian letter from the eighth century,⁴⁷ indicate that Sargon was, in fact, a son of Tiglath-pileser, which strongly suggests that Nabopolassar's claim to the contrary is Babylonian propaganda and an unsubstantiated attempt to humiliate the Assyrians. Tiglath-pileser himself had apparently been a younger son of Adad-nārārī III (811–783 B.C.E.). He had assumed power after several other sons of that king had ruled over Assyria.⁴⁸

Sargon was not in direct line to the throne. Tiglath-pileser's heir apparent was another of his sons, Ulūlayu, who ruled Assyria from 727 to 722 B.C.E. under the name Shalmaneser V.⁴⁹ We cannot say whether

⁴³ On the presumable age when Assyrian and Babylonian men and women married and began to have children, see Frahm, "Observations," 47, 49, note 10, with further literature. It is important to keep in mind that different rules may have applied to members of the royal court.

⁴⁴ S. Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, Part II*, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 5/2 (Kevelaer and Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1983), 231; Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 1; Fuchs, "Sargon II.," 53.

⁴⁵ W. G. Lambert, "The Enigma of Tukulti-Ninurta I," in *From the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea: Studies on the History of Assyria and Babylonia in Honour of A.K. Grayson*, ed. G. Frame (Leiden, 2004), 202.

⁴⁶ Note that it is actually not quite clear whether the label "offspring of a slave from Babylon" in the letter refers to Sargon or Sennacherib. *Dušmū* cannot refer to Sennacherib's or Sargon's mother, since it has a female counterpart, *dušmitu*, attested in the lexical series *Maliku*.

⁴⁷ E. Unger, "Kleine Mitteilungen," *Archiv für Orientforschung* 9 (1933/1934): 79, and SAA 17, 46, rev. 10–11 (see F. Thomas, "Sargon II., der Sohn Tiglat-pileser's III.," in *Mesopotamica – Ugaritica – Biblica: Festschrift für Kurt Bergerhof*, ed. M. Dietrich and O. Loretz, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 232 (Kevelaer and Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1993), 465–70.

⁴⁸ For a discussion of Tiglath-pileser's family background, see A. K. Grayson, "Assyria: Tiglath-pileser III to Sargon II (744–705 B.C.)," in *The Cambridge Ancient History* 3/II² (Cambridge, 1991), 73–74. It is not completely certain that Adad-nārārī III was really his father.

⁴⁹ On Shalmaneser V, see H. D. Baker, "Salmānu-ašarēd," *PNA* 3/1, 1077–78 and "Salmanassar V.," *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie* 11 (Berlin,

Ulūlāyu was a full brother or a half-brother of Sargon, since nothing is known about their maternal descent (see below). During his time as crown prince, Ulūlāyu wrote a number of letters to Tiglath-pileser reminiscent of the correspondence exchanged later between Sennacherib and Sargon.⁵⁰ Sargon seems to have succeeded Shalmaneser in 722 B.C.E. in the wake of a coup. We know very little about this episode, but it is revealing that Sargon charges his predecessor in his inscriptions with various misdeeds, apparently having little sympathy for him.⁵¹ Another, much more beloved brother of Sargon, his *aḫu talīmu*, was Sīn-aḫu-uṣur, who eventually became Sargon's 'Grand vizier,' led an army contingent, and received a residence of his own in Sargon's new palace complex in Dūr-Šarrukīn.⁵² Sargon also had at least one daughter, Aḫāt-abīša, whom he married to Ambaris, the king of Bīt-Puruttaš in Tabal.⁵³

While many basic facts regarding the male line of Sennacherib's ancestors were discovered in the early days of Assyriology, much of what we know about the female line is the result of more recent investigations that require some elaborate discussion. Before we go into details, a few brief remarks on the structure of Assyrian royal harems and the different types of royal women are in order.⁵⁴

2006–2008), 585–87. For a new edition of the few inscriptions that are extant from the reign of this king, see H. Tadmor and S. Yamada, *The Royal Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BC) and Shalmaneser V (726–722 BC), Kings of Assyria*, The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period I (Winona Lake, IN, 2011), 171–88.

⁵⁰ For the letters in question, see K. Radner, "Salmanassar in den Nimrud Letters," *Archiv für Orientforschung* 50 (2003/2004): 95–104; for what seems to be a reference to his later 'throne name' Shalmaneser in a Tiglath-pileser III inscription written before 734 BCE, see Frahm, "Observations," 49, n. 17.

⁵¹ For a recent discussion of the issue, see Fuchs, "Sargon II.," 53–54.

⁵² For references, see K. Mattila, "Sīn-aḫu-uṣur," PNA 3/I, 1182; for additional discussion, see N. N. May, "Ali-talīmu—What Can Be Learned from the Destruction of Figurative Complexes?" in *Iconoclasm and Text Destruction in the Ancient Near East and Beyond*, ed. N. N. May, Oriental Institute Seminars 8 (Chicago, 2012), 187–230.

⁵³ See S. Aro-Valjus, "Aḫāt-abīša 1," PNA 1/I, 59.

⁵⁴ For a discussion of these matters (on which much of the following overview is based), see S. C. Melville, "Neo-Assyrian Royal Women and Male Identity: Status as a Social Tool," *JAOS* 124 (2004): 37–57; and S. Parpola, "The Neo-Assyrian Harem," in *Leggo! Studies Presented to Frederick Mario Fales on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. G. B. Lanfranchi et al. (Wiesbaden, 2012), 613–26. On Neo-Assyrian (royal) women and their agency, see also S. Teppo, "Agency and the Neo-Assyrian Women of the Palace," *Studia Orientalia* 101 (2007): 381–420; S. Svärd, *Women's Roles in the Neo-Assyrian Empire: Female Agency in the Empire* (Saarbrücken, 2008), to which I had no access; and S. L. Macgregor, *Beyond Hearth and Home: Women in the Public Sphere in Neo-Assyrian Society*, State Archives of Assyria Studies 21 (Helsinki, 2012).

Documents show that the Neo-Assyrian kings maintained palaces in various Assyrian cities. Perhaps as many as twenty-two of them included 'harem' quarters⁵⁵ sometimes housing hundreds of women. Among these women were significant numbers of royal concubines, but also members of the harems of the king's predecessor, various female relatives of the king, and harem women of defeated enemy rulers.⁵⁶ In a way, having a harem was the correlate *in sexualibus* of the king's political and military power.

Two types of royal women with residences of their own held particularly important positions during the Neo-Assyrian period: on one hand, the mother of the king (*ummi šarri*), and on the other, his chief consort or queen, who bore the rather colorless title MUNUS.É.GAL (= Assyrian: *sēgallu?*), literally, "woman of the palace."⁵⁷ The MUNUS.É.GAL played a prominent role in the cult, and to a lesser extent in politics. It seems that, in principle, each Neo-Assyrian king was supposed to have only one MUNUS.É.GAL at a given time. But it is clear that some of the women bearing this title were allowed to keep it after their royal husbands passed away, and it cannot be excluded that occasionally, two (or more) women served as MUNUS.É.GAL simultaneously. At the beginning of his reign, the king's MUNUS.É.GAL would most likely be his first wife, whom he might have married before he ascended the throne⁵⁸ and who might already have borne him children, among them his heir apparent. Later, however, other women could be promoted to the position of MUNUS.É.GAL, in which case the question of royal succession was likely to become more compli-

⁵⁵ Even though Van De Mieroop (*Cuneiform Texts*, 146–60) criticizes applying the term 'harem' to ancient Near Eastern royal households, I continue to use it here. In my view, the 'harems' of Mesopotamian times have enough in common with their later counterparts of the Islamic period to justify this terminological practice. Both are palatial quarters, protected by guards, that house royal women. Furthermore, as recently pointed out by Parpola ("Neo-Assyrian Harem," 614), the Assyrian term used for women inhabiting the private quarters of royal palaces, *sekretu* "sequestered woman," is semantically close to *ḥarīm*, the Arabic word for "harem woman."

⁵⁶ They were probably all known as *sekretu*, a word that can be written MUNUS.ERIM.MEŠ.É.GAL, MUNUS.ŠĀ.É.GAL, or MUNUS.UN.MEŠ.É.GAL (see also the preceding footnote).

⁵⁷ See Parpola, "Neo-Assyrian Harem," 613–14, 619–20. Note that the Assyrians used the title *šarratu*, the female counterpart to the title of the Assyrian king, only for goddesses and foreign women who actually ruled, most prominently the 'queens' of the Arabs; see Melville, "Neo-Assyrian Royal Women," 43, 51.

⁵⁸ The marriage could have taken place before or after he had become crown prince. It seems the (main) wife of the Assyrian crown prince had a specific title, *bēlat bēti*, literally "lady of the house" (for discussion, see M. Luukko and S. Svärd, "Who were the 'Ladies of the House' in the Assyrian Empire?," in *God(s), Trees, Kings, and Scholars: Neo-Assyrian and Related Studies in Honour of Simo Parpola*, ed. M. Luukko et al. [Helsinki, 2009], 279–94).

cated. The following remarks concern the mothers and chief consorts of Sennacherib and his predecessors.

Until lately, the name of Sennacherib's mother was unknown. But new research by Elnathan Weissert (and to a lesser extent myself) may have finally uncovered her identity.⁵⁹ The key to the matter is an inscribed stela from the *Stelenreihen* in Assur, which has been known since Walter Andrae published it in 1913.⁶⁰ It was clear from the start that the stela in question is comparable to those of the Assyrian queens Semiramis and Libbālišarrat,⁶¹ and that its badly damaged text commemorates a woman who was associated in some way with Sennacherib. Most scholars believed she had to be a wife of the king, and several suggestions were made regarding her identity. Maximilian Streck thought the name on the stela had to be that of Sennacherib's spouse Tašmētu-šarrat;⁶² Irving Finkel read the name as ^{MUNUS} DÜG-X-^dNIN.LÍL¹ and assumed that it belonged to an otherwise unknown royal consort;⁶³ and finally, Stephanie Dalley suggested to read it as "Zakūtu," the Akkadian form of the name of Sennacherib's wife Naqī'a.⁶⁴ None of these readings, however, is in accordance with the traces of the signs that are discernible on the stela.

In fact, the inscription does apparently not refer to a "wife" (MUNUS.É.GAL or *aššatu/altu*) of Sennacherib, but to his mother (*ummu*). Weissert and I propose the following new reading of the text:

1) 'ša-lam' 2) ^{MUNUS} Ra-'i-ma-a' 3) 'AMA¹ Id^r30-PAB-ME(Š)-SU¹ 4) MAN ŠÚ 'MAN KUR AŠ-šur¹

Stela (*šalmu*) of Ra'imâ, mother of Sennacherib, king of the world, king of Assyria.

If our understanding of the inscription is correct, Sennacherib's mother was a woman called Ra'imâ. The name Ra'imâ, which means "Beloved," is apparently a variant of Raḥimâ, a West Semitic and most probably

⁵⁹ A re-edition of the stela is in preparation for publication by E. Weissert.

⁶⁰ W. Andrae, *Die Stelenreihen in Assur*, Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 24 (Leipzig, 1913), 9–10, no. 4.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 6–8, 10–11, nos. 1 and 5.

⁶² M. Streck, *Assurbanipal und die letzten assyrischen Könige bis zum Untergang Niveh's*, Vorderasiatische Bibliothek 7 (Leipzig, 1916), ccxvii. This suggestion is adopted by K. Radner in her article "The Seal of Tašmētum-šarrat, Sennacherib's Queen, and Its Impressions," in *Leggo!* (FS Fales), ed. G. B. Lanfranchi et al., 694.

⁶³ I. Finkel *apud* J. Reade, "The Historical Status of the Assur Stelas," in *Assyria and Beyond: Studies Presented to Mogens Trolle Larsen*, ed. J. G. Dercksen (Leiden, 2004), 463.

⁶⁴ S. Dalley, "Semiramis in History and Legend: A Case Study in Interpretation of an Assyrian Historical Tradition," in *Cultural Borrowings and Ethnic Appropriations in Antiquity*, ed. E. S. Gruen (Stuttgart, 2005), 17.

Aramaic name that was borne, according to Assyrian documents, by both men and women.⁶⁵ Hence Sennacherib's 'mother tongue' was most likely Aramaic.

Unfortunately, we have no direct evidence that would help us determine the precise origins of Sennacherib's mother—people speaking Aramaic and other West Semitic languages were spread throughout the Assyrian empire, the Assyrian heartland included. All we can do is indulge in some informed speculation, for which we turn our attention to an entry in Babylonian King List A. This text provides some tantalizing references to "dynasties" (*palû*) with which several kings listed were allegedly associated.⁶⁶ The Babylonian ruler Marduk-aplu-iddina (II), for example, is said to have belonged to the "Dynasty of the Sealand" (BALA KUR *tam-<tim>*).

Three Late Assyrian rulers were likewise linked to such "dynasties" in King List A. Shalmaneser V, called Ulūlāyu, was said to have belonged to a "Dynasty of Assur" (BALA BAL.TIL), while both Sennacherib and his son Aššur-nādin-šumi were presented as members of a "Dynasty of Habigal" (BALA *Ḥa-bi-gal*). Now, as we have seen before, there is every reason to assume that the fathers of each of the three rulers in question were scions of the Assyrian royal family. Could it therefore be that the references to Baltil (= Assur) and Habigal allude to the birth places, not of the fathers, but of the mothers of the respective rulers?⁶⁷ If that were the case, the mother of Shalmaneser V would have been a woman from the city of Assur,⁶⁸ whereas Sennacherib's mother would have originated from

⁶⁵ See P. Villard, PNA 3/I, "Raḫīmâ," 1028–29. An alternative reading of the name would be *munus'Ra-'u-ma-a'*. All things considered, however, this reading seems less likely, even though a woman of that name, a concubine of Nahor, is mentioned in Gen. 22:24. For the noteworthy omission from the inscription of any reference to Sargon, Ra'imâ's husband, see section 8.

⁶⁶ For an edition of the respective section, see A. K. Grayson, "Königslisten und Chroniken," *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie* 6 (Berlin, 1980–1983), 93.

⁶⁷ In dedicatory inscriptions, both Naqī'a and Libbāli-šarrat do, in fact, refer to their own *palû*, but in contexts that do not have "dynastic" connotations. Instead, the two women ask a deity for a "stable reign" (*kunnu palêša*) for themselves; see S. C. Melville, *The Role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics*, State Archives of Assyria Studies 9 (Helsinki, 1999), 43, 72, with discussion.

⁶⁸ Note that according to Sargon's "Assur Charter" (H. W. F. Saggs, "Historical Texts and Fragments of Sargon II of Assyria: The 'Aššur Charter,'" *Iraq* 37 [1975]: 11–20), Shalmaneser treated Assur quite badly during his tenure as king. If true, this would be somewhat ironic in the light of the king's "dynastic" association with that city. Obviously, it cannot be excluded that the charge made by Sargon was largely unfounded propaganda, aimed at disparaging Shalmaneser's close association with Assur.

Ḥanigalbat, which is probably what “Habigal” stands for;⁶⁹ in other words, she would have been a native of northern Syria.

Can we go even further? An important urban center of Ḥanigalbat was the city of Ḥarrān, the home town of an important temple of the moon-god Sîn.⁷⁰ Sennacherib’s theophoric name includes the name of this god, and there is evidence that Sennacherib had a special relationship with him—in one of his inscriptions, for instance, he invoked him in connection with his election to kingship.⁷¹ Sargon, Sennacherib’s father, points out in several inscriptions that he had granted Ḥarrān special privileges.⁷² Furthermore, it should be noted that a copy of the “Ḥarrān census” mentions an individual (albeit a man) from the Ḥarrān region who bore the name Raḥīmâ.⁷³ These circumstances could support the notion that Sennacherib’s mother came from Ḥarrān or nearby.

Of course, the foregoing observations do not amount to conclusive proof. King List A seems to include certain errors, which calls its general reliability into question.⁷⁴ An alternative interpretation of the reference to the “Dynasty of Ḥabigal” would be that Sargon, Sennacherib’s father, held a high military office in the west before he became king of Assyria, a position similar to that of the Middle Assyrian “King of Ḥanigalbat.”⁷⁵ But all in all, it is tempting to consider Ḥarrān as the origin of Raḥīmâ.⁷⁶

⁶⁹ For arguments in favor of this equation, see J. A. Brinkman, “Merodach-Baladan II,” in *Studies Presented to A. L. Oppenheim*, ed. R. Biggs and J. A. Brinkman (Chicago, 1964), 36–37.

⁷⁰ There were periods in which Ḥarrān would have been regarded as lying to the west of the land of Ḥanigalbat, which was centered in the Ḥabur triangle. But the Assyrians of the first millennium probably considered Ḥarrān a part of Ḥanigalbat, by that time an anachronistic geographic term. For discussion, see M. Fales, “Ḥanigalbat’ in Early Neo-Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: A Retrospective View,” in *The Ancient Near East in the 12th to 10th Centuries BCE: Culture and History*, ed. G. Galil et al., *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 392 (Münster, 2012), 99–119.

⁷¹ See Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 136–37, 216.

⁷² See A. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad* (Göttingen, 1994), 32:6, 75:5, and elsewhere. Note that Sargon mentions Ḥarrān several times together with the city of Aššur, the religious center of Assyria.

⁷³ Villard, “Raḥīmâ,” PNA 3/I, 1028, sub 1.

⁷⁴ Note, for instance, that Marduk-aplu-iddina, in a second entry, is called an ERIM Ḥa-bi (= Ḥabigal?), which seems to make no sense.

⁷⁵ E. Cancik-Kirschbaum, “Nebenlinien des assyrischen Königshauses in der 2. Hälfte des 2. Jts. v. Chr.,” *Altorientalische Forschungen* 26 (1999): 219–21.

⁷⁶ E. Leichty has recently argued for an origin of Naqī’a, Sennacherib’s wife, from the Ḥarrān region in his essay “Esarhaddon’s Exile: Some Speculative History,” in *Studies Presented to Robert D. Biggs*, ed. M. Roth et al. (Chicago, 2007), 189–91; for some brief discussion of this idea, see below, n. 126. The most famous queen mother who was a devotee

Another reference to Sennacherib's mother occurs in a debt-note dated to the 29th day of the month of Elul, 692 B.C.E.⁷⁷ The text proves that Ra'imâ, who is not named in the document, stayed alive well into the period of Sennacherib's tenure as king. Since she cannot have been born much later than 760 B.C.E.,⁷⁸ she must have been about 70 years old when the document was drafted. How much longer she lived remains uncertain, but a Sennacherib decree, probably written in 683 B.C.E., about the transfer of property from the queen mother to the mother of the crown prince may indicate that Ra'imâ stayed alive for several more years.⁷⁹

The identification of Ra'imâ as Sennacherib's mother has a bearing on our appraisal of two other royal ladies of the second half of the eighth century B.C.E., Yabâ and Atalyâ, and their relationship with Sennacherib. The existence of these two women had been unknown until 1988/89, when Iraqi archaeologists discovered a number of underground tombs in the domestic wing of the Northwest Palace in Kalḫu.⁸⁰ The burial-chamber of one of these tombs, Tomb II, held a stone sarcophagus in which two women were buried, together with an astounding array of jewelry and other grave goods. The woman on the bottom of the sarcophagus seems to have been the person for whom Tomb II was originally built. An alabaster tablet found in a niche of the burial chamber identifies her as Yabâ (MUNUS *Ya-ba-a*) the queen (MUNUS.É.GAL), and includes a curse against anyone who might remove her from her resting-place or put someone else into the sarcophagus.⁸¹ Inscriptions on two golden bowls found inside the sarcophagus, one of them of Egyptian design, provide the additional information that Yabâ was the queen and wife (*altu*) of Tiglath-pileser III.⁸²

of the god Sin of Harrân was, of course, Adda-guppi, the mother of the Babylonian king Nabonidus.

⁷⁷ SAA 6, 143. The text states that "one mina of silver (by the mina) of the king, *iškāru* money of the queen mother belonging to Nabû-taklāk," was put at the disposal of one Nergal-ilā'i.

⁷⁸ This date is based on the assumption, justified above, that Sennacherib was born around 740 B.C.E.

⁷⁹ SAA 12, 21–23, discussed by Melville, *Role of Naqia/Zakutu*, 20–23.

⁸⁰ The most important publications related to the tombs are M. Damerji, *Gräber assyrischer Königinnen aus Nimrud*, Jahrbuch des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums 45 (Mainz, 1999); M. Hussein and A. Suleiman, *Nimrud: A City of Golden Treasures* (Baghdad, 2000); and Curtis et al., eds., *New Light on Nimrud*. Due to the unstable situation in Iraq, research on the spectacular objects found in the tombs is not yet very far advanced.

⁸¹ Al-Rawi, "Inscriptions," 119–24 (Text No. 1), with earlier literature.

⁸² Ibid., 136–38 (Texts No. 18 and 19). D. Wicke ("Die Goldschale der Iabâ—eine levantinische Antiquität," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* 100

Despite Yabâ's curse on the alabaster tablet, a second woman was put into her sarcophagus at some point—remains of her body were found lying above Yabâ's. Inscriptions on a golden bowl placed on her breast,⁸³ a jar of rock crystal found elsewhere in the sarcophagus, and a bronze(?) mirror discovered on the ground of the burial-chamber, seem to identify her as Atalyâ (^{MUNUS}*A-ta-li-a*, ^{MUNUS}*A-tal-ia-a*), queen (^{MUNUS}.É.GAL) of Sargon II.⁸⁴

Matters are complicated, however, by the fact that the burial-chamber of Tomb II included two objects inscribed in the name of what appeared to be yet another Assyrian queen from the second half of the eighth century. A golden bowl found in the sarcophagus, in a location that seems, unfortunately, not to have been recorded, has an inscription that labels it as property of Banītu (^{MUNUS}*DÛ-ti*, genitive), queen of Shalmaneser V.⁸⁵ And a small bronze(?) container found on the floor of the burial chamber, apparently close to the aforementioned mirror inscribed with the name of Atalyâ, has an inscription that mentions Banītu (this time written ^{MUNUS}*Ba-ni-ti*) as well.⁸⁶ The mirror, it seems, had served as the lid of the container.⁸⁷

In the aftermath of the discovery of the Nimrud tombs, most scholars believed that the inscribed objects from Tomb II belonged to three women, who were thought to be the wives of Tiglath-pileser III, Shalmaneser V, and Sargon II, respectively. Some scholars suggested, furthermore, that Yabâ was the mother of Sargon II;⁸⁸ that Atalyâ was the mother of Sennacherib;⁸⁹ and that Yabâ might have been the mother of Atalyâ.⁹⁰

[2010]: 109–41) suggests that the bowl of Egyptian design was created in the southern Levant in the tenth century B.C.E. and was already an antique when it was deposited in the queen's tomb.

⁸³ For this detail, see Damerji *Gräber assyrischer Königinnen*, 7–8.

⁸⁴ Al-Rawi "Inscriptions," 137–38 (Texts No. 21, 23, and 24). Damerji (*Gräber assyrischer Königinnen*, 18) indicates that the mirror was made of electrum, Hussein and Suleiman (*Nimrud*, 246) argue for tin, and J. Curtis, "Observations on Selected Metal Objects from the Nimrud Tombs," in *New Light on Nimrud*, ed. J. Curtis et al., 245, suggests that the mirror might have been made of bronze.

⁸⁵ Al-Rawi "Inscriptions," 137–38 (Text No. 20).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 137–38 (Text No. 22). For the problem of establishing the material of the mirror, see above, n. 84.

⁸⁷ See Damerji, *Gräber assyrischer Königinnen*, 6, 18.

⁸⁸ See, for instance, Frahm, "Šîn-aḥḥē-erība," 1113–14.

⁸⁹ Thus S. Dalley, "Yabâ, Atalyâ and the Foreign Policy of Late Assyrian Kings," *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 12/1 (1998): 97.

⁹⁰ Thus Damerji, *Gräber assyrischer Königinnen*, 8.

Most of these assumptions, however, have been invalidated or put into question by the anthropological investigation of the human remains from the sarcophagus in Tomb II, and by new historical-philological research. The anthropological study of the bodies has established two important facts.⁹¹ First and foremost, it has shown that both women buried in Tomb II died between thirty and thirty-five years of age. And second, it has demonstrated that the woman found in the upper layers of the sarcophagus had been placed there at least twenty years after the woman on the bottom had received her last rest in the tomb.

A philological reinvestigation of the names of Yabâ and Banītu has likewise resulted in some interesting new perspectives. The name Yabâ was analyzed as “West Semitic or Arabic” by the present author in 2002, and tentatively linked to the Semitic roots *nby* “to name” or *yhb* “to give.”⁹² But Stephanie Dalley made what may be a more convincing suggestion.⁹³ Pointing out that Yabâ is very close to Hebrew *yph*, “beautiful,” she has argued that Banītu, which means “the beautiful one” in Akkadian, was simply an alternative name of Yabâ. In Dalley’s view, Yabâ and Banītu were one and the same woman.⁹⁴

At first glance, this suggestion seems somewhat problematic. Yabâ, after all, is consistently identified in the inscriptions from Tomb II as the “queen” and “wife” of Tiglath-pileser III, while Banītu is exclusively labeled as “queen” of Shalmaneser V. But as observed by Dalley, there are other cases in which wives of Assyrian kings were allowed to keep the title *MUNUS.É.GAL*, translated here as “queen,” after the death of their husbands.⁹⁵ Moreover, at least one Assyrian queen, Sennacherib’s wife Naqī’a-Zakūtu, demonstrably had both a West Semitic name and an Akkadian one that

⁹¹ See M. Schultz and M. Kunter, “Erste Ergebnisse der anthropologischen und paläopathologischen Untersuchungen an den menschlichen Skelettfunden aus den neuassyrischen Königinnengräbern von Nimrud,” *Jahrbuch des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz* 45 (1998): 85–128; and, for a short summary, M. Müller-Karpe, M. Kunter, and M. Schultz, “Results of the Palaeopathological Investigations on the Royal Skeletons from Nimrud,” in *New Light on Nimrud*, ed. Curtis et al., 141–48. Needless to say, for the author, a non-scientist, it is impossible to critically assess whether the results of the anthropological investigation are completely reliable. In the following, it is assumed that they are.

⁹² E. Frahm, “Iabâ,” *PNA* 2/I, 485.

⁹³ Dalley, “Identity of the Princesses,” 171. Dalley, “Yabâ, Atalyâ . . .,” 94 paved the way towards the new interpretation.

⁹⁴ Of course, one could make the same argument if the name Yabâ were Phoenician, Moabite, or Edomite.

⁹⁵ Dalley (“Identity of the Princesses,” 171) points out that this applies to Mullissumukannišat-Ninua, Semiramis, and Naqī’a.

was a translation of the former.⁹⁶ One can add to Dalley's arguments that it might not be by chance if the name Banītu is only attested in texts that associate the queen with Shalmaneser V. That king, after all, is said in King List A to have belonged to the "Dynasty of Assur," which suggests that he might have preferred the Assyro-Babylonian appellation Banītu over the West Semitic Yabâ.

Combining the anthropological data sketched out in the preceding section with Dalley's suggestion that Yabâ and Banītu are one and the same person, we can draw a number of preliminary conclusions. First, Yabâ cannot have been the mother of Sargon II. Given that she was still alive during the reign of Shalmaneser V, and in view of the fact that she died young, at an age of approximately 30–35 years, she cannot have married Tiglath-pileser before 745 B.C.E.—roughly twenty years after Sargon II was born.⁹⁷ For the same reasons, Yabâ can also not have been Sennacherib's grandmother. That Ra'imâ, and not Atalyâ, was the mother of Sennacherib we have already seen in the discussion of the stela from Assur. The anthropological evidence confirms that Atalyâ cannot have been Sennacherib's mother. It indicates that Atalyâ passed away at least twenty years after Yabâ's death, when she was 30–35 years old, so the earliest possible date for her marriage to Sargon II would be the year 725 B.C.E., when Sennacherib was about fifteen.

Since we know nothing about any children Yabâ/Banītu and Atalyâ may have had, we can only speculate about their life spans. The *terminus ante quem non* for Yabâ's death is the year 727 B.C.E., when Shalmaneser V ascended the Assyrian throne. The fact that not a single inscription written in the name of Yabâ/Banītu mentions a later king might be taken as an indication that she passed away during Shalmaneser's short reign, which lasted from 727 to 722 B.C.E. If that was the case, Atalyâ could have died in 705 B.C.E., the year when Sargon II was killed on the battlefield in Tabal. Such a scenario is, of course, entirely hypothetical since many more years might have passed between the two interments in Tomb II.⁹⁸ But it might help explain why Atalyâ's body had apparently been conserved through some dehydration process before her burial.⁹⁹ Perhaps Atalyâ

⁹⁶ Both Naqī'a and Zakūtu mean "Pure."

⁹⁷ For evidence that Sargon was born around 765 B.C.E., see the discussion above.

⁹⁸ Müller-Karpe, Kunter, and Schultz ("Results," 143) argue that the time span between the two funerals could have comprised up to fifty years. When we take into account all the relevant textual data, this is indeed the absolute maximum for the period in question.

⁹⁹ See Schultz and Kunter, "Erste Ergebnisse," 119.

had accompanied her husband on his campaign to Tabal in 705 B.C.E., and had been killed there when the enemy routed the royal camp. Assyrian survivors might have sought to conserve her body before transporting it back to Assyria, where, possibly due to the unstable political situation (and Sennacherib's unfriendly feelings towards her?),¹⁰⁰ Atalyā was buried in a somewhat haphazard way.¹⁰¹

It is unlikely that Yabâ/Banītu was the mother of Atalyā. Since incestuous relationships were not tolerated in Assyria, Sargon could not have married a daughter of his own father. But as has been observed by others, there are three pieces of circumstantial evidence indicating that the two women were indeed closely related. First and most obviously, they would otherwise hardly have been buried in the same sarcophagus. Second, as pointed out above, one of the finds from the floor in Tomb II, a bronze container with a lid in the form of a mirror, had apparently passed from the possession of Yabâ/Banītu to Atalyā. And finally, there is the onomastic argument, raised by Stephanie Dalley, that both Yabâ and Atalyā could be Hebrew names.

This last point, with its implications of possible Judeo-Assyrian or Israelite-Assyrian family ties, has been the most contentious in the whole debate about the queens from Tomb II, and the discussion will hardly stop with the publication of the present article. Dalley initiated it in 1998, when she argued that the name "Atalyā" is highly reminiscent of that of the ninth century B.C.E. Israelite Atalyâ(hu) (*'tyh[w]*), a daughter of King Ahab and (possibly) his Phoenician wife Jezebel.¹⁰² According to 2 Kings 8:16–11:16,¹⁰³ Atalyâ(hu) married into the royal family of Judah and later effectively ruled that country, first as queen mother and then as reigning queen. Dalley, as we have seen, also argued for a Hebrew etymology of the name Yabâ, and claimed, based on several rather complex additional considerations that we cannot discuss here in detail, that both Yabâ and Atalyā were most likely members of the Judean royal family. The close

¹⁰⁰ See Frahm, "Nabû-zuqup-kēnu, das Gilgameš-Epos . . ." and below, section 9.

¹⁰¹ Again, it must be stressed that this historical reconstruction is, for the time being, nothing but speculation. In fact, the omission of any reference to Shalmaneser (and, for that matter, any other Assyrian king) in Yabâ's alabaster inscription from the niche in Tomb II—an inscription that, unlike the others, was probably written after her demise—could be taken as evidence for a death of the queen after Shalmaneser's reign had come to an end.

¹⁰² Dalley, "Yabâ, Atalyā . . .," 94–95. Note that 2 Kings does not explicitly state that Jezebel was Atalyâ(hu)'s mother.

¹⁰³ //2 Chronicles 22:10–23:15.

family ties between Judah and Assyria explained for Dalley why Sennacherib treated Judah, in her view, rather leniently when he campaigned in the Levant in 701 B.C.E.

Dalley's linguistic arguments have been accepted by some scholars, among them, most prominently Simo Parpola, but others have challenged them. J. N. Postgate has pointed out that "the name Atalياهو in the Bible does not have a clear Hebrew etymology" and that it is uncertain whether it really includes the divine name Yahweh.¹⁰⁴ If Yabâ and Atalyâ were indeed brought to Assyria as a result of diplomatic marriages, Postgate argues, they might just as well have been daughters of the royal houses of Tyre, Sidon, or some other Levantine city. R. Zadok, the *doyen* of ancient Semitic onomastics, has recently stated that in the light of the Septuagint's rendering of Atalyâ(hu)'s name as Γοθολια the first element of the name has to derive from the root Ġ-T-L, which would make it unlikely that the name is the same as that of the Assyrian queen Atalyâ. For the latter, Zadok suggests an Arabic derivation.¹⁰⁵

Who is right here is difficult to decide. It is worth noting that not only Atalyâ's, but also Yabâ's name could be Arabic—during the reign of Esarhaddon, a queen of the city of Diḥrānu (modern Dhahran in northeastern Arabia) was called Yapa' (^{MUNUS}ya-pa-a').¹⁰⁶ This brings to mind a possibly similar situation under Sennacherib and Esarhaddon, when two Arabian royal women, Te'elḥunu and Ṭabūa, stayed at the Assyrian royal court. Te'elḥunu, "queen of the Arabs," had been captured by Sennacherib in Dūmat al-Jandal in 690 B.C.E., and Ṭabūa, a younger woman who grew up at Sennacherib's court, was sent back there several years later by Esarhaddon to become queen (*ana šarrūti*) of the Arabs herself.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Parpola, "Neo-Assyrian Harem," 621–22. J. N. Postgate, "The Tombs in the Light of Mesopotamian Funerary Traditions," in *New Light on Nimrud*, Curtis et al. eds., 178.

¹⁰⁵ R. Zadok, "Neo-Assyrian Notes," in *Treasures on Camels' Humps: Historical and Literary Studies from the Ancient Near East Presented to Israel Eph'al*, ed. M. Cogan and D. Kahn (Jerusalem, 2008), 327–29. K. L. Younger ("Yahweh at Ashkelon and Calah? Yahwistic Names in Neo-Assyrian," *Vetus Testamentum* 52 [2002]: 218, n. 49) opted for an Arabic etymology as well and criticized Dalley's assumption that the final element of the name represents the theophoric element "Yahweh" (pp. 216–18). Note that a stamp seal with an Arabic inscription was found in Nimrud in Tomb III; see Al-Rawi, "Inscriptions," 136, Text No. 17.

¹⁰⁶ Frahm, "Iapa'," PNA 2/I, 492–93.

¹⁰⁷ See I. Eph'al, *The Ancient Arabs: Nomads on the Borders of the Fertile Crescent 9th–5th Centuries B.C.* (Jerusalem, 1982), 118–30; Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 129–36; and M. Maraqtan, "Der Afkal/Apkallu im arabischen Bereich: eine epigraphische Untersuchung," in *Assyriologica et Semitica: Festschrift für Joachim Oelsner anlässlich seines 65. Geburtstag*, ed. J. Marzahn and H. Neumann, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 252

But Dalley's "Hebrew hypothesis" cannot be so easily discarded, especially in light of the fact that it allows us to regard Yabâ and Banîtu as one and the same woman, an assumption that moves some other problems out of the way. I still consider a "Canaanite" origin of Yabâ and Atalyâ at least possible. Whether the two queens were really associated with the royal house of Judah is uncertain, and an Israelite or Phoenician origin could be considered as well. But it is indeed intriguing that, as Dalley pointed out, the Judean king Ahaz is said in 2 Kings 16:7 to have called himself the "servant and son" of Tiglath-pileser III.¹⁰⁸ Should Yabâ have been his daughter, or perhaps his sister or some other female relative,¹⁰⁹ this self-predication would make a certain sense.¹¹⁰

We do not know whether Yabâ and Atalyâ were brought to Assyria together or on two different occasions. One conceivable, but of course highly speculative scenario is that they were both daughters, perhaps of different wives, of a foreign (possibly, but not necessarily Judean or Israelite) king who were brought to Assyria when Yabâ was in her early twenties and Atalyâ was still a young child. This could have happened during the years 738–732 B.C.E., when Tiglath-pileser was engaged in a number of military campaigns against Israel and other Western countries. The Judean king Hezekiah sent Sennacherib several of his daughters after the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem in 701 B.C.E.,¹¹¹ so our hypothetical scenario would not be without an actual parallel. It is also possible that Atalyâ came to Assyria several years later, during the reign of Sargon II.¹¹² Unfortunately, we cannot prove that Yabâ and Atalyâ were indeed sisters or even blood

(Münster, 2000), 264–66. It is conceivable that Te'elḥunu and Ṭabûa came from the same family, but we do not know the exact nature of their relationship. They might have been sisters, but it is also possible that Ṭabûa was Te'elḥunu's—and perhaps even Sennacherib's—daughter, begotten during Te'elḥunu's captivity in Assyria. This would imply, however, that she was no more than twelve years old when Esarhaddon sent her back to Arabia to make her queen.

¹⁰⁸ Dalley, "Yabâ, Atalyâ . . .," 89; see also Parpola, "Neo-Assyrian Harem," 622.

¹⁰⁹ Note that if it is true that Ahaz, as 2 Kgs. 16:2 claims, was only twenty years old when he ascended the throne of Judah, Yabâ cannot have been his daughter.

¹¹⁰ The golden bowl of Egyptian design that was inscribed in Yabâ's name might likewise point to an origin of the queen from the far west. Of course, this argument applies only if the bowl was part of her dowry, something we cannot prove.

¹¹¹ See Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 55, 59, line 58 (Rassam cylinder).

¹¹² Note that Sargon II calls himself the "subduer of Judah" (*mušakniš māt Ya'ûdu*) in one of his inscriptions: H. Winckler, *Die Keilschrifttexte Sargons nach den Papierabklatschen und Originalen neu herausgegeben* (Leipzig, 1889), 168: 8.

relations—attempts by geneticists of the University of Göttingen to analyze their DNA seem to have failed.¹¹³

When we turn our attention from the women married to Sennacherib's predecessors to Sennacherib's own wives, we are likewise confronted with a rather complex situation. Now that the woman whose name is inscribed on the Assur stela has been identified as Sennacherib's mother, and not his spouse, we are left with two principal wives of Sennacherib that we know by name: Tašmētu-šarrat and Naqī'a.

Tašmētu-šarrat was the first Assyrian queen since Mullissu-mukannišat-Ninua, the wife of Assuraširpal II, to bear an unequivocally Akkadian name, a name that means "(The goddess) Tašmētu is queen." All the known queens of the intervening period, that is, Sammu-rāmat, Ḥamâ, Ra'imâ, Yabâ, and Atalyâ, seem to have West Semitic names.¹¹⁴ Whether Tašmētu-šarrat was indeed an 'ethnic' Assyrian (or Babylonian) is not clear, however. The fact that her name, apparently unique in Assyria,¹¹⁵ includes the element *šarratu* "queen" could be taken as evidence that it was given to her, not at birth, but when she became queen (MUNUS.É.GAL) herself—or when her husband was nominated crown prince.¹¹⁶ The same may apply to the Akkadian names of Esarhaddon's wife Ešarra-ḥammat (lit., "[Mullissu of?] Ešarra is mistress")¹¹⁷ and Assurbanipal's wife Libbâli-šarrat (lit., "The Inner City [i.e., Ištar?] is queen"),¹¹⁸ even though it must be admitted that there is so far no clear independent evidence for a Late Assyrian practice

¹¹³ Personal communication, Michael Müller-Karpe, June 2011.

¹¹⁴ In the case of Sammu-rāmat, this is not completely certain. As pointed out by J. Novotny, "Sammu-rāmat / Sammu-ramât," PNA 3/I, 1083–84, the name might also be Akkadian.

¹¹⁵ See J. Llop, "Tašmētu-šarrat," PNA 3/II, 1320.

¹¹⁶ If Tašmētu-šarrat married Sennacherib while he was crown prince (see the discussion below), the theonym in her name may likewise have been chosen for a good reason. Tašmētu was the wife of the god Nabû, who as the son of Marduk was occasionally associated with the Assyrian crown prince: see B. Pongratz-Leisten, *Ina šulmi irub: Die kulttopographische und ideologische Programmatik der akītu-Prozession in Babylonien und Assyrien im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, Baghdader Forschungen 16 (Mainz, 1994), 98–99. If Tašmētu-šarrat was the mother of Aššur-nādin-šumi—whom King List A labels as another member of the "dynasty of Ḥabigal" (see above)—one could speculate that she came (like Ra'imâ?) from northern Syria; but this is a very uncertain hypothesis.

¹¹⁷ See K. Radner, "Ešarra-ḥammat," PNA 1/II, 406. Alternative translations are: "[Mullissu of] Ešarra gathers [all the powers]" or "[In] Ešarra, she is mistress" (W. Meinhold, *Ištar in Aššur: Untersuchungen eines Lokalkultes von ca. 2500 bis 614 v. Chr.*, Alter Orient und Altes Testament 367 [Münster, 2009], 244). It is also possible, as suggested to me by Seth Richardson, that the subject is simply the temple, Ešarra.

¹¹⁸ Or: "In the Inner City, [the goddess] is queen" (see C. Ambos, "Libbâli-šarrat," PNA 2/II, 660–61, Meinhold, *Ištar in Aššur*, 244). Neither the name Ešarra-ḥammat nor Libbâli-šarrat is known to have been borne by any other women.

of giving women new names when their husbands became king or crown prince.¹¹⁹

Tašmētu-šarrat is attested in texts from both Assur and Nineveh, and seems to have lived in residences of her own in both cities. From Assur, we have two short inscriptions in her name on alabaster vases found in a room of the Old Palace.¹²⁰ Their date is uncertain. The textual evidence for Tašmētu-šarrat from Nineveh is more revealing. In a long and unique text inscribed on monumental sphinxes that guarded one of the entrances to a suite in the west wing of his new Southwest Palace,¹²¹ Sennacherib proclaimed that he had given this suite to his “beloved spouse” (*ḥirtu narāmtīya*) and queen (MUNUS.É.GAL) Tašmētu-šarrat, whom he praises as a great beauty. Sennacherib expressed the wish to live with her in the palace in “physical and emotional bliss” (*tūb širi u ḥūd libbi*) for all time to come.

The inscription on the Nineveh sphinxes can be dated with some confidence to the years between 696 and 693 B.C.E.¹²² R. Borger, in his edition of the text, concluded from the description of Tašmētu-šarrat’s beauty that the queen had to be very young when the inscription was composed, and considered her a “late conquest” of the king.¹²³ It is of course possible that Borger was right, but there is no real reason why Sennacherib should not have found it appropriate to stress Tašmētu-šarrat’s good looks even if she was already in her late thirties or early forties. In that case, Tašmētu-šarrat could well have given birth to some or all of the elder sons of Sennacherib that are known to us and would probably have married the king

¹¹⁹ That Assyrian queens bore names assigned to them when their husbands rose to power is implicitly assumed by Meinhold (*Ištar in Aššur*, 244–45). For evidence that Mesopotamian women could receive new names on the occasion of their marriage, see K. Radner, *Die Macht des Namens: Altorientalische Strategien zur Selbsterhaltung*, SANTAG 8 (Wiesbaden, 2005), 29. Radner points out that a wife of Šulgi of Ur and a wife of Rīm-Sin of Larsa bore names that included the name of their respective husbands. Note that Parpola (“Neo-Assyrian Harem,” 621) recently argued that the name of Assurnasirpal II’s wife Mullissu-mukannišat-Ninua likewise “looks like a throne name.”

¹²⁰ See Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 184, and H.-U. Onasch, *Ägyptische und assyrische Alabastergefäße aus Assur*, Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 128 (Wiesbaden, 2010), 60–61, 182–1 and 182–2.

¹²¹ Edited by R. Borger, “König Sanheribs Eheglück,” *Annual Review of the Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia Project* 6 (1988): 5–10. See also J. Reade, “Was Sennacherib a Feminist?,” in *La femme dans le Proche-Orient antique*, ed. J.-M. Durand, CRRAI 33 (Paris, 1987), 140–41, and Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 121.

¹²² For details, see *ibid.*, 121, 123. Within the period in question, an earlier date seems more likely.

¹²³ Borger, “König Sanheribs Eheglück,” 6.

around 720 B.C.E. If Tašmētu-šarrat was not the mother of his elder sons, we have to assume that these sons were the children of another, thus far unidentified wife of the king.¹²⁴

The second wife of Sennacherib whom we know by name is the famous Naqī'a-Zakūtu.¹²⁵ Her origins are unknown.¹²⁶ Based on evidence that does not require further elaboration, we can be sure that she was the mother of Esarhaddon, Sennacherib's eventual successor, and of Esarhaddon's sister Šadditu, but not of the elder sons of Sennacherib. It is likely that Naqī'a gave birth to Esarhaddon between 715 and 710 B.C.E.,¹²⁷ which means that Sennacherib had at least two female consorts while he was still crown prince.¹²⁸

Naqī'a must have played an important role in Esarhaddon's promotion in 683 B.C.E. (or slightly earlier) and probably bore the title "queen" (MUNUS.É.GAL) ever since, if not before. I do not share Melville's skepticism in this regard and consider Radner's recent claim that she "never held" this title¹²⁹ doubtful. To be sure, the various inscriptions in which Naqī'a is called Sennacherib's MUNUS.É.GAL were all written, with one possible exception,¹³⁰ after Sennacherib's death, but this does not indicate that she assumed the title *ex post facto*. Apart from legal documents, very few texts

¹²⁴ A recently published stone vessel from the British Museum (see I. L. Finkel, "A New Assyrian Queen," *Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires* 2000: 8, and A. Searight et al., *Assyrian Stone Vessels and Related Material in the British Museum* [Oxford, 2008], 74 and pl. 49 [no. 511]) seems to provide the name of a new Assyrian queen, identified by Finkel as Ana-Tašmētu-taklāk ([^{munus}Ana-dTaš]-me-tu₄-^rtak^l-lak). The name of her husband is lost. She could have been another, and perhaps even the first wife of Sennacherib, but it is equally possible that she was married to some other Late Assyrian king. Since the inscription on the stone vessel is quite damaged, it might be worth collating it to make sure that the name of the queen is not to be read as [^{munus}-dTaš]-me-tu₄-^ršar^l-rat^l.

¹²⁵ For a comprehensive treatment of Naqī'a and her role at the Assyrian court, see Melville, *Role of Naqia/Zakutu*.

¹²⁶ As already noted, Leichty ("Esarhaddon's Exile") recently argued that Naqī'a came from Ḫarrān, an assumption that remains hypothetical. An indirect, and certainly not conclusive, argument against Leichty's theory is that Ḫarrān was the center of a rebellion against Esarhaddon, Naqī'a's son, in 671 B.C.E.

¹²⁷ Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 4; Melville, *Role of Naqia/Zakutu*, 13.

¹²⁸ It seems that in Neo-Assyrian times polygamy was fairly rare. There were, however, exceptions, and so it is not surprising that the crown prince, and probably other high officials as well, were entitled to have several wives; see K. Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden als Quelle für Mensch und Umwelt*, State Archives of Assyria Studies 6 (Helsinki, 1997), 125–26. Yet only the king was apparently supposed to possess an actual harem.

¹²⁹ Melville, *Role of Naqia/Zakutu*, 16–29; Radner, "Seal of Tašmētum-šarrat," 694.

¹³⁰ A poorly published bead inscription of (see H. D. Galter, "On Beads and Curses," *Annual Review of the Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia Project* 5 [1987]: no. 44) ascribes the title "MUNUS.É.GAL of Sennacherib" to Naqī'a and then breaks off. It is unclear whether the text originally also referred to her as the mother of King Esarhaddon.

from the last years of Sennacherib's reign have come down to us, and so the lack of a final proof that Naqī'a held the position of a *MUNUS.É.GAL* while Sennacherib was still alive is not surprising. What is uncontested is that Naqī'a remained extremely influential during Esarhaddon's reign and in the early years of Assurbanipal.

If Tašmētu-šarrat was the mother of Sennacherib's elder sons and stayed alive until the end of Sennacherib's reign (and possibly beyond), her relationship with Naqī'a probably deteriorated once Esarhaddon had been nominated crown prince. Tašmētu-šarrat may have died earlier, however, a possibility made more likely by the fact that not a single text among the numerous documents from Esarhaddon's reign mentions her by name.

A clay docket from Nineveh dated to IX/681 B.C.E., about one month before Sennacherib's murder, and inscribed with a list of textiles bears the impression of a recently published stamp seal probably owned by the Assyrian queen—it depicts the Assyrian royal couple approaching a goddess. Radner, who published the seal,¹³¹ ascribed it to Tašmētu-šarrat, but it is equally possible, in my view, that it was impressed on the docket by an administrator working on behalf of Naqī'a.

An anonymous letter from the early period of Esarhaddon's reign reports that during the chaotic days that followed Sennacherib's violent death, the governor of Assur went to the royal palace to retrieve his wife, whom "the king," i.e., Sennacherib, had earlier brought there, possibly to add her to his own harem.¹³² The reference to the king "stealing" the wife of one of his high officials is reminiscent of the legendary stories of Ninus and Semiramis and of David and Bathsheba, and one wonders who the woman in question was. If Borger is right that Tašmētu-šarrat was very young when Sennacherib made her his consort, it could have been her, but it seems more likely that the governor's wife appropriated by the king was a different woman.¹³³

¹³¹ Radner, "Seal of Tašmētum-šarrat."

¹³² SAA 16, 95. The date of the letter is not completely certain.

¹³³ There is no question that Sennacherib's harem(s) included many other women who were less important than Tašmētu-šarrat and Naqī'a. One of them was Aḫi-ṭalli, who is first attested as a regular harem woman and then, from 686 B.C.E. onwards, as *šakintu*, that is, "harem manageress" (see S. Teppo, "The Role and the Duties of the Neo-Assyrian *šakintu* in the Light of Archival Evidence," *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 16 (2007): 257–72); she bought numerous slaves and land "for the king's life" (see L. J. Bord, "Aḫi-ṭalli," PNA 1/I, 67–68). Radner ("Seal of Tašmētum-šarrat," 695) recently suggested that the woman in the letter "had been held hostage [by Sennacherib] to keep her husband, one of the highest officials of Assyria, under control," a scenario that is certainly feasible.

No fundamentally new information is available on Sennacherib's children, and since I have summarized the relevant evidence not long ago,¹³⁴ a few remarks on them will suffice here. We have already seen that Sennacherib's eldest son was Aššur-nādin-šumi, and that his father made him king of Babylon in 700 B.C.E. While it is feasible that this was meant to be a permanent arrangement, it is also possible that it was Sennacherib's goal to prepare Aššur-nādin-šumi through his appointment as Babylonian ruler for a future career as king of Assyria. Aššur-nādin-šumi's deportation to Elam in 694 B.C.E., probably followed by his execution, thwarted whatever plans Sennacherib had for his future. Sennacherib's second-eldest(?) son, his *māru tardennu*, was Aššur-ilī-muballissu, who is said to have been "begotten (*banû* N) at the feet of (the god) Aššur."¹³⁵ Aššur-ilī-muballissu had a house in Assur, but at times also resided at Nineveh. Other royal princes, whose exact place in the sequence of Sennacherib's sons is unknown, include Aššur-šumu-ušabši, the recipient of a house in Nineveh, Urda-Mullissu, who would later murder his father, Nergal-MU-[...] (Nergal-šumu-ibni?), and perhaps Nabû(?)-šarru-ušur.¹³⁶ Urda-Mullissu, whose power and wealth can be gauged from a dossier of legal documents related to him, seems to have become crown prince of Assyria at some point in the 690s,¹³⁷ but was later demoted, probably in 683 B.C.E., when Sennacherib decided to nominate Naqī'a's son Esarhad-don as his successor.

Sennacherib may well have had a number of additional sons. A short inscription on a clay tablet mentions several individuals with rather elaborate names who were apparently depicted, together with Gilgameš, Enkidu(?), Humbaba, and the scribal ancestor Egibi, on some relief or

¹³⁴ Frahm, PNA 3/I, 1114–15, 1121.

¹³⁵ One cannot help thinking that this statement points to some kind of "sacred marriage" that Sennacherib consummated (with Tašmētu-šarrat or a priestess of Aššur?) in the city of Assur. Or does the expression simply convey, in poetic language, that the prince was conceived in the Old Palace in Aššur, which was located in close proximity to the Aššur temple?

¹³⁶ Nabû-šarru-ušur is included in this list under the (admittedly questionable) assumption that *sr'šr* (i.e., (DN)-šarru-ušur), whom 2 Kgs. 19:37 names as one of two sons of Sennacherib who murdered their father in 681 B.C.E., is to be identified with Nabû-šarru-ušur, governor of Marqasi and eponym of the year 682. It should be stressed, however, that there is no unequivocal evidence that the governor in question was a son of Sennacherib.

¹³⁷ Based on the assumption that every reference to a *mār šarri* in the legal texts from Late Assyrian Nineveh refers to the crown prince, S. Parpola and T. Kwasman (SA 6, xxvii–xxxiv) have tried to establish an exact timeline for Sennacherib's changing succession arrangements. But since *mār šarri* may also designate other royal children, their reconstruction remains doubtful.

painting at Nineveh.¹³⁸ Since at least one of them, Aššur-ilī-muballissu, was a son of Sennacherib, it seems possible that the others, Ile³e-bulluṭu-Aššur, Aššur-mukanniš-ilīya, Ana-Aššur-taklāk(?), Aššur-bāni-bēli(?), Šamaš-andullašu(?), and Aššur-šākin-līti, were royal children as well. Finally, a document from 692 B.C.E. mentions an Egyptian named Šušānqu (Sheshonq) as a “son-in-law” (*hatnu*) of the (Assyrian?) king.¹³⁹

In the following subsections, I will engage in some ‘informed speculation’ on the impact that his family, and the circumstances under which he grew up, may have had on the personality of Sennacherib and the way he later ruled the land of Assyria. Much of the evidence on which the presentation is based has been discussed in the section at hand and will not be repeated again. I should stress that, being an Assyriologist and not an expert in psychology, I have usually refrained from dealing with the more technical aspects of this latter field in detail.

6. SENNACHERIB’S CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

In the midst of his tenure as king of Assyria, Sennacherib claimed that already in his prenatal state, the gods had felt great sympathy and affection for him. In a bull inscription from Nineveh, he declared that “(the goddess) Bēlet-ilī, the mistress of creation, had looked kindly upon me and created my features while I was still in my mother’s womb.”¹⁴⁰ Yet despite this retrospective assertion that he was the object of divine support from the start, it is clear that when Sennacherib was born, probably in the early years of Tiglath-pileser III, no one ever expected him to become a king of Assyria. The presumptive heir apparent at that time was Sennacherib’s uncle Ulūlāyu, the later Shalmaneser V.

Still, Sennacherib, as grandson of the reigning king, certainly enjoyed, from early on, a privileged life. How small children, whether of modest birth or of royal blood, were reared in Assyria is largely unknown.¹⁴¹ We can be fairly sure, however, that Sennacherib’s parents cherished their

¹³⁸ See Borger, “König Sanheribs Eheglück,” 7–8, 11; Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 212–13; Frahm, “Šin-aḫḫē-erība,” PNA 3/I, 1115.

¹³⁹ SAA 6, 142.

¹⁴⁰ Luckenbill, *Annals*, 117: 3–4.

¹⁴¹ For discussion of the little information that is available, see Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden*, 126–55. Radner, quoting Philippe Ariès’s famous study *L’enfant et la vie familiale sous l’ancien régime* (Paris, 1960), argued that the Assyrians did not regard childhood as a distinct stage in the development of a human being. Instead, they apparently differentiated between small children up to an age of five or six years who were

new son, even more so since at least two elder brothers of his had died before his birth. It is likely that during Sennacherib's early years, his mother Ra'imā was responsible for him. She was probably supported by a wet-nurse (*mušēniqtu*), which would have diverted Sennacherib's oral fixation from his mother to someone else, possibly weakening to some extent the emotional bond between Ra'imā and her son.¹⁴² After having been weaned, the young Sennacherib enjoyed almost certainly the ministrations of a nanny (*tārītu*), to whom he may have developed a strong and lasting attachment as well.¹⁴³ Sargon, Sennacherib's father, was probably somewhat removed during his son's early years, but since he was neither king nor crown prince at this early point, he was most likely not completely unapproachable.¹⁴⁴

Based on the discussion in the previous section, we can assume that Ra'imā communicated with her son in Aramaic, while Sennacherib's father Sargon spoke Assyrian with him. It is quite possible that this specific form of "gendered communication" had a long term impact on Sennacherib's attitude towards the world, instilling in him a notion of a masculine, aggressive, conquering Assyria, represented by his father, and a feminine, yielding, and passive Western periphery, embodied by his West Semitic mother.

As the years went by, Sennacherib acquired younger siblings. For most of the time, he probably lived with his parents in Kalḫu, which served until 706 B.C.E. as the seat of the Assyrian kings, but it cannot be excluded that Sargon, at least temporarily, had duties elsewhere and moved with

completely dependent on their mothers, and older children who were able to work and were largely treated like adults.

¹⁴² On the role of wet-nurses in ancient Mesopotamia, see M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and in the Bible: Its Mediterranean Setting*, Cuneiform Monographs 14 (Groningen, 2000), 181–92. Most of the evidence comes from the Old Babylonian period, but references in Assyrian texts to goddesses serving as wet-nurses (see, for example, SAA 3, 34, line 33; 39, obv. 19) make it likely that having one's children raised by a wet-nurse was deemed an appropriate practice by Assyrian elite families as well. More explicit statements on attitudes towards wet-nursing are, unfortunately, not available from Assyria, much in contrast to the evidence, for instance, from ancient Rome (see K. Bradley, "Wet-nursing at Rome: A Study in Social Relations," in *The Family in Ancient Rome*, ed. B. Rawson (Ithaca, NY, 1986), 201–29).

¹⁴³ This is suggested by a Middle Assyrian text that mentions a royal gift to a nursemaid of the king (see Stol, *Birth in Babylonia*, 191, for details).

¹⁴⁴ An orthodox Freudian would probably be tempted to use information regarding Sennacherib's later life in order to reconstruct his early relationship with his parents, but such an approach would yield results that could not be verified and would remain extremely uncertain.

his wife and children to some other places. At what time Sennacherib's formal education began and what exactly it comprised is unclear. There is a great likelihood, however, that the young prince engaged in physical exercise and received some military training, similar to that of the later king Assurbanipal, who wrote in his famous 'autobiography' about the activities of his youth:

This is what I did all of my days with a select companion: I cantered on thoroughbreds (and) rode spirited purebreds. I grasped the bow (and) let fly the arrow, as befits valor. I threw quivering lances as if they were darts. I held the reins (and) like a charioteer I made the wheels turn. Like a craftsman I shaped *arītu* and *kabābu* shields. I mastered the great technical lore of every single expert.¹⁴⁵

That Sennacherib accomplished similar feats we can more or less take for granted. Whether he also engaged in the intellectual pursuits for which Assurbanipal is famous, the study of writing, mathematics, and divination, is not so obvious. Probably, he received some elementary education in these areas, but never displayed the same zeal to master the scribal arts that prompted Assurbanipal in the mid-seventh century to found the great libraries of Nineveh.¹⁴⁶ A certain Ḫunnî, about whom almost nothing is known, may have served as teacher and mentor of Sennacherib and his younger siblings. In a letter from the time when Sennacherib was already crown prince, Ḫunnî informs Sargon that "the crown prince (*mār šarri rabû*) is well, and all the princes [who are in] Assyria are well."¹⁴⁷ This is a highly unusual statement for the introduction of a letter to the king, and it indicates that Ḫunnî was very close to Sennacherib and his brothers.

We can assume that the enormous expansion of Assyria's borders under the reign of Tiglath-pileser III filled the young prince with pride and confidence, and that the luxurious splendor of courtly life at Nimrud did not leave him unimpressed.

¹⁴⁵ Streck, *Assurbanipal und die letzten assyrischen Könige*, 256–57, L⁴, obv. i 19–25 (translation after S. Zamazalová, "The Education of Neo-Assyrian Princes," in *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*, ed. K. Radner and E. Robson [Oxford, 2011], 314–16).

¹⁴⁶ On the education of Assyrian princes, see Zamazalová, "The Education of Neo-Assyrian Princes"; on "learned kings" in ancient Mesopotamia and the degree of their literacy, see Frahm, "Keeping Company." One study that deals with representations of the childhood and youth of rulers in ancient Near Eastern royal inscriptions and literary texts but appeared too late to be used for this article is U. Bock, *Von seiner Kindheit bis zum Erwachsenenalter: Die Darstellung der Kindheit des Herrschers in mesopotamischen und kleinasiatischen Herrscherinschriften und literarischen Texten*, Alter Orient und Altes Testament 383 (Münster, 2012).

¹⁴⁷ SAA I, 133, obv. 9–11.

7. SENNACHERIB AS CROWN PRINCE

When Tiglath-pileser died in 727 B.C.E. and Shalmaneser V ascended the throne, Sennacherib was around thirteen years old. Presumably, his status within the royal family remained largely unchanged under the new ruler. Sennacherib continued to belong to Assyria's aristocratic 'jeunesse dorée,' yet his position was not extremely elevated. But when, in 722 B.C.E., Sennacherib's father Sargon became king of Assyria, the life of the young prince, now in his late teens, took a complete turn. As the eldest surviving son of his father, Sennacherib was the natural candidate to follow him on the throne, and he was probably soon formally nominated crown prince.

Since Sargon had become king against considerable internal opposition, there may have been circles at court that treated Sennacherib, the newly-minted royal heir apparent, with a poisoned friendliness at best. Most people he encountered, however, must have approached him from now on with the greatest possible awe and respect. We cannot be sure how all this affected the young prince. Extreme flattery can impart on its recipient a delusional 'superiority complex,' but Sennacherib was already around eighteen years old when his father ascended the throne and probably had a 'developed personality' by that time that protected him from becoming excessively arrogant and overbearing. The 'realism' that characterizes certain passages in his later royal inscriptions may reflect Sennacherib's continuing ability to distinguish hyperbole from truth.¹⁴⁸ The hidden hatred Sennacherib probably encountered among some of the courtiers, on the other hand, may have made him unreasonably suspicious and distrustful, a character trait that might have impacted the succession arrangements he implemented decades later when he was king himself.

As crown prince, Sennacherib had to assume a number of important political tasks. Again, it is instructive to take a look at Assurbanipal's account of his years as heir to the throne:

¹⁴⁸ Sennacherib does not hide, for example, that during his 'seventh campaign,' bad weather forced him to withdraw from Elam (see Luckenbill, *Annals*, 41, v 6–11), and he describes in great detail the difficulties of moving stone colossi from the quarries to the palaces for which they were destined (e.g., Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 73, 81, lines 38–49). For 'realistic' innovations in the art of his age, among them the elimination of the fifth leg, still customary under Sargon, on the palatial bull colossi and the use of a new perspective on the bas-reliefs of the Southwest Palace, see J. M. Russell, "Bulls for the Palace and Order in the Empire," *The Art Bulletin* 69 (1987): 520–39.

At the same time, I was learning (behavior) befitting a ruler (and) I acted all the time like a king. I stood before the king, my creator, giving orders to the nobles. Without my knowledge, no governor was appointed; no commander was assigned without me. The father, my creator, gazed upon the heroism the great gods had bequeathed to me. By the command of the great gods, he felt a great love for me.¹⁴⁹

Despite the slightly hyperbolic character of this passage, we can assume that it reflects the privileges and duties of Assyrian crown princes quite accurately. In the case of Sennacherib, confirmation that he was entrusted with important political responsibilities in his capacity as heir to the throne comes from a number of letters he wrote to his father Sargon while the latter was king. The missives show that Sennacherib had to deal with both international and domestic issues during this time. He received foreign emissaries and tribute and coordinated espionage activities,¹⁵⁰ but was also in charge of matters such as floods within the Assyrian heartland¹⁵¹ and provisions for the army.¹⁵² Especially during the years 710–707 B.C.E., when Sargon stayed in Babylonia, Sennacherib seems to have played a central political role.¹⁵³

Among the letters Sennacherib wrote to Sargon about the buffer states along the northern border of Assyria,¹⁵⁴ there is one that deals extensively with the treacherous behavior of the ruler of the city state of Ukku.¹⁵⁵ Sennacherib seems not to have forgotten the stubbornness of this opponent—in 697 B.C.E., in his ninth year as king, he conducted a devastating military campaign against Ukku and destroyed the city, an event that is depicted prominently in Sennacherib's throne room in the Southwest Palace at Nineveh.¹⁵⁶

Another formative experience of Sennacherib during his time as crown prince was his involvement in his father's building projects. Sennacherib seems to have played an important role in the construction of Sargon's massive new residence at Khorsabad and the creation of new royal

¹⁴⁹ Streck, *Assurbanipal und die letzten assyrischen Könige*, 256–59, L⁴, obv. i 26–30; translation after Zamazalová, “The Education of Neo-Assyrian Princes,” 314–16.

¹⁵⁰ See the contribution by P. Dubovsky in the present volume.

¹⁵¹ SAA 1, 36.

¹⁵² SAA 1, 37.

¹⁵³ Note especially SAA 1, 33, a letter in which Sennacherib asks Sargon whether he should receive tribute from Commagene himself or send it to his father in Babylon.

¹⁵⁴ SAA 1, 29–34.

¹⁵⁵ SAA 1, 29.

¹⁵⁶ See Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sannacherib-Inschriften*, 124–25.

gardens. The Sennacherib letter SAA 1, 39¹⁵⁷ deals with building work in Khorsabad, while the letter SAA 5, 281 concerns trees for royal orchards. Sennacherib is also mentioned in SAA 11, 17, a badly damaged administrative note about work on the walls of Khorsabad. Moreover, in several of his own inscriptions, Sennacherib describes in great detail the unsatisfactory means by which bull colossi were transported during the time of Sargon.¹⁵⁸ Clearly, the prince had personally experienced these problems, which are also discussed in a number of letters.¹⁵⁹ His participation in the aforementioned building activities explains why Sennacherib, once he was king himself, took such an active interest in the construction work he inaugurated at Nineveh, and why he describes the palaces, parks, and water works of that city in such detail in his royal inscriptions.¹⁶⁰ Unlike Assurbanipal, whose main concern during his time as crown prince was mastering the scribal arts, Sennacherib seems to have been fascinated by engineering, and it is not unlikely that this interest had a long-lasting impact on his view of the world, and his approach to it, in general.¹⁶¹

During his time as crown prince, Sennacherib experienced success in his political assignments and his building endeavors, but also faced a number of challenges and problems, especially within his family. Thus he was probably dismayed by the sad fate of his sister Aḥāt-abīša, who had been married by Sargon, for political reasons, to king Ambaris of Bīt-Purutaš in Tabal.¹⁶² In 713 B.C.E., Ambaris rebelled, but was defeated by the Assyrians; he and his family were deported to Assyria. We do not know what happened to Aḥāt-abīša, but if she was not already dead by the time of Ambaris's capture, she was probably facing a life in disgrace.¹⁶³ For Sennacherib, this episode must have provided a warning of how fragile family relations could be in the elite world of Assyria's leaders.

More importantly, there may also have been growing tensions in Sennacherib's relationship with his father Sargon. The letters he wrote to the king are rather business-like and never mention private matters, which makes it hard to draw psychohistorical conclusions from them. Yet even

¹⁵⁷ The attribution of the letter to Sennacherib is not absolutely certain.

¹⁵⁸ See, for example, Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sannacherib-Inschriften*, 73, 81, lines 38–49.

¹⁵⁹ For references, see *ibid.*, 84.

¹⁶⁰ For an overview of the relevant inscriptions, see *ibid.*, 267–76.

¹⁶¹ See below, section 12.

¹⁶² In a message to Sargon (SAA 1, 31), Sennacherib mentions that he is forwarding a letter sent by Aḥāt-abīša's major-domo to the king, which shows some involvement in the affairs of his sister.

¹⁶³ See S. Aro-Valjus, "Aḥāt-abīša," PNA 1/I, 59.

though one gains the impression that father and son trusted and respected each other for the most part, it is clear that with Sargon's ascension to the throne, the distance between the two increased. Like others who corresponded with the king, Sennacherib called his father "lord" in the introduction of his letters and presented himself as his "servant."¹⁶⁴ One wonders, moreover, what Sennacherib felt when Sargon decided, apparently some time after his accession to the throne, to take another wife, Atalyā, and make her his queen (MUNUS.É.GAL).¹⁶⁵ Sennacherib cannot have been happy with this marriage, since it meant a demotion of his own mother, Ra'imā, who most likely was Sargon's principal wife up to then.

To be sure, there is no indication that Sargon intended to immediately choose a new heir instead of Sennacherib. For the time being, any children that were born to Atalyā were too young to be considered for the office of crown prince. It also cannot be excluded that Sargon treated Ra'imā and Atalyā equally and allowed both of them to bear the title MUNUS.É.GAL. One wonders whether the MUNUS.É.GAL for whom a palace was built in Ekallāte during the reign of Sargon,¹⁶⁶ and the MUNUS.É.GAL for whom the crown prince Sennacherib collected tribute,¹⁶⁷ really was Atalyā or whether the title, in the texts that deal with these matters, might not rather refer to Ra'imā.

Be this as it may, Atalyā may nonetheless have hoped that one day a child of her own might replace Sennacherib. The finds from the sarcophagus that held the bodies of Yabā and Atalyā included a bracelet depicting an Assyrian king and a crown prince before a distorted image of the god in the winged disk.¹⁶⁸ The ornament seems to have belonged to Atalyā and may well have expressed her desire to eventually become herself the mother of the future Assyrian king. All this would have been reason enough for Sennacherib to be nervous about potential competitors who might deprive him of his succession rights, and would have removed him emotionally from Sargon, who was responsible for the situation. And yet,

¹⁶⁴ The standard introduction of Sennacherib's letters to Sargon reads: "To the king, my lord: your servant Sennacherib. Good health to the king, my lord! Assyria is well, the temples are well, all the king's forts are well. The king, my lord, can be glad indeed" (SAA 1, 29, lines 1–7, and *passim*).

¹⁶⁵ For Atalyā, see the discussion in section 5 above.

¹⁶⁶ See SAA 1, 99.

¹⁶⁷ See SAA 1, 34.

¹⁶⁸ For a discussion of the bracelet and the image depicted on it, see D. Collon, "Getting it Wrong in Assyria: Some Bracelets from Nimrud," *Iraq* 72 (2010): 149–62.

Sennacherib, during his tenure as crown prince, nonetheless followed the example of his father when he took like him, at least two female consorts the mother (perhaps Tašmētu-šarrat) of his elder sons and Naqī'a, the mother of Esarhaddon.

There was another matter that may have increasingly alienated Sennacherib from Sargon: the king's pro-Babylonian politics. Especially Sargon's long stay in the city of Babylon and his preference for Babylonian gods¹⁶⁹ seem to have annoyed the prince, who remained in Assyria during Sargon's absence, residing partly in Kalḫu and partly in Nineveh,¹⁷⁰ and probably endorsing what one could anachronistically call a vigorous Assyrian 'nationalism.' When he eventually ascended the throne, Sennacherib treated Babylonia, as we shall see further below, far less generously than his father. All this demonstrates the existence of a generational conflict that continued with Sennacherib's son and successor Esarhaddon, who endorsed again a more pro-Babylonian approach.

At the same time, Sennacherib could not fail to notice that Sargon was a highly successful conqueror who substantially enlarged the power of the Assyrian empire and used its newly acquired wealth for impressive building projects. Sennacherib must have admired Sargon for his military achievements and his construction work, and it is clear that he later imitated some of his father's activities in these areas.¹⁷¹

All in all, it seems that Sennacherib had a somewhat charged and ambivalent, but in several respects also a rather positive relationship with his father while the latter was king. When, however, Sargon finally met a sudden and highly inauspicious end, this relationship turned into a trauma that would haunt Sennacherib for the rest of his life.

8. SARGON'S DEATH AND THE TRAUMATIC BEGINNINGS OF SENNACHERIB'S REIGN

In 705 B.C.E., Sargon, now about sixty years old, went to central Anatolia to fight a certain Gurdî, who probably ruled over Til-Garimmu. However, Gurdî and his troops routed the Assyrian camp, killed the Assyrian king, and carried off his body. This was a major catastrophe for the Assyrians.

¹⁶⁹ On Sargon's pro-Babylonian attitude, see Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 228.

¹⁷⁰ See *ibid.*, 3.

¹⁷¹ See section 8.

The defeat suffered by their army was bad enough, but the death of their king and the fact that his body could not be recovered must have troubled them even more. It was clear for many, as is explicitly stated in a later text about an alleged ‘sin’ of Sargon,¹⁷² that the gods had punished the Assyrian king for some major wrongdoing, and there was every reason to fear that Sargon’s ghost would from now on roam about and relentlessly torment the living. When he learnt about Sargon’s end, the famous Kalḫu scholar Nabû-zuqup-kēnu—who may have composed the earliest royal inscriptions of Sennacherib—studied the twelfth tablet of the Gilgameš epic,¹⁷³ a tablet whose final lines, with their focus on the terrible after-life that awaits those who die in battle and remain unburied, must have seemed eerily relevant to him in this time of distress:

(Gilgameš:) “Did you see (in the Netherworld) the one whose corpse was left lying in the open countryside?” (Enkidu:) “I saw (him).

His ghost does not lie at rest in the Netherworld.”

(Gilgameš:) “Did you see the one whose ghost has no provider of funerary offerings?” (Enkidu:) “I [saw (him)].

He eats the scrapings from the pot and crusts of bread that are thrown away in the street.”¹⁷⁴

Sennacherib’s reaction to his father’s death was one of almost complete denial.¹⁷⁵ He apparently felt unable to acknowledge and mentally deal with what had happened to Sargon.¹⁷⁶ Sennacherib abandoned the lavish royal palaces of Khorsabad that Sargon had inaugurated only one year before his fatal final campaign, and moved the royal residence to Nineveh. Before starting any other major construction work, he rebuilt the temple of the god Nergal of Tarbišu, a deity closely associated with war, death, and disaster, but in the pertinent inscriptions failed to point out that his

¹⁷² SAA 3, 33.

¹⁷³ For this and the following, see Frahm, “Nabû-zuqup-kēnu, das Gilgameš-Epos . . .” and “Nabû-zuqup-kenu, Gilgamesh XII . . .,” both with references to further literature.

¹⁷⁴ Gilgameš XII 150–53: A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgameš Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2003), 735.

¹⁷⁵ Denial, in psychoanalysis, is “a defence mechanism involving a disavowal or failure consciously to acknowledge thoughts, feelings, desires, or aspects of reality that would be painful or unacceptable” (A. M. Colman, *A Dictionary of Psychology*, 2nd ed. [Oxford, 2006], 199).

¹⁷⁶ In “Totem and Taboo,” Sigmund Freud provided a sophisticated theory about the cultural implications the killing of the prime father had for the surviving sons. More orthodox Freudians might be inclined to apply this theory to Sennacherib, but the present author is skeptical, not the least because Sargon did not die through his sons. It is not impossible, however, that Sennacherib felt guilty that his aging father, and not he, had gone on the campaign against Gurdî.

work on that temple was meant to expiate for Sargon's putative wrongdoings and placate his spirit, which was most likely its actual purpose.¹⁷⁷ The new king sent a small army led by magnates to Anatolia against the man who had killed Sargon, but did not mention this campaign in any of his inscriptions.¹⁷⁸ He rendered images created by Sargon in the Aššur temple invisible by raising the level of a courtyard.¹⁷⁹ He buried Sargon's wife Atalyā, who had become prominent at the expense of his own mother Ra'imā, in great haste and in defiance of normal funerary practices in the sarcophagus of another woman, Tiglath-pileser's wife Yabā.¹⁸⁰ And last but not least, with one possible exception,¹⁸¹ he never mentioned the name of his father in his royal inscriptions. Even on the Assur stela that Sennacherib dedicated to the memory of his mother, there is no reference to her husband Sargon.

Denial, however, whether conscious or unconscious, is not a suitable strategy to fight a psychological trauma such as the one Sennacherib seems to have suffered in the wake of the catastrophic death of his father Sargon. It does not eliminate the anxieties triggered by the traumatic experience. Over time, these anxieties often take the form of physical or mental disorders, and there is some evidence that Sennacherib did display symptoms that are in line with a kind of post-traumatic stress syndrome.¹⁸² It seems that he became easily enraged by bad news and developed some serious psychological problems. A letter from the reign of his son and successor Esarhaddon mentions that Sennacherib had to struggle with the 'alû demon,' and that for a long time, none of his diviners dared to tell him of any untoward sign that had been observed.¹⁸³

The exact nature of the affliction caused by the *alû* demon is unclear, but there are some hints. The Babylonian-Assyrian 'Diagnostic Handbook'

¹⁷⁷ Frahm, "New Sources," 141, 144.

¹⁷⁸ For the eponym chronicle that deals with the campaign, see Frahm, "Nabû-zuqup-kenu, das Gilgamesch-Epos . . ." 83–84.

¹⁷⁹ E. Weidner, "Assyrische Emailgemälde vom achten Feldzuge Sargons II.," *Archiv für Orientforschung* 3 (1926): 3–6.

¹⁸⁰ For details, see the discussion in section 5.

¹⁸¹ The exception is the small tablet 1904–10–9, 210, discussed above in note 38.

¹⁸² Psychologists define this syndrome, formerly called traumatic neurosis, as "an anxiety disorder arising as a delayed and protracted response after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event involving actual or threatened death or serious injury to self or others. It is characterized by intense fear, helplessness, or horror lasting more than four weeks, the traumatic event being persistently re-experienced in the form of distressing recollections, recurrent dreams, sensations of reliving the experience, hallucinations, or flashbacks" (Colman, *Dictionary of Psychology*, 589–90).

¹⁸³ SAA 10, 109, rev. 1–13.

lists among the typical symptoms that the patient “does not know who he is; constricts his pupils; something like a stupor afflicts him; his limbs are tense; his ears roar; and he cannot talk.”¹⁸⁴ In a letter to King Esarhad-don, the chief exorcist Marduk-šākin-šumi describes a ritual “to drive out the evil *alû* demon and epilepsy (AN.TA.ŠUB.BA).”¹⁸⁵ And a Late Babylonian medical text lists prescriptions against “fever,” the evil *alû* demon, and “madness” (*dimmakurrû*), afflictions that were apparently regarded as related to one another.¹⁸⁶ We cannot be sure, but it is quite possible that Sennacherib’s illness was at least in part a consequence of the trauma that the death of Sargon had inflicted on him—the *alû* demon, after all, is often mentioned together with spirits of the dead (*eṭemmu*).¹⁸⁷

It is important, however, not to exaggerate the effects that Sargon’s end had on Sennacherib’s psyche. Despite the inauspicious events that led to his accession to the throne on Abu 12, 705 B.C.E., the new king was clearly capable of dealing competently with many of the challenges he faced. Sennacherib was about thirty-five years old when he became Assyria’s ruler, a good age to assume major political responsibilities. He had a lot of experience at this point in his life, but was still young enough to approach what lay ahead of him with energy and a capacity for change.

Sennacherib displayed great self-confidence by keeping his birth name *Šîn-aḥḥē-erība* instead of taking a new throne name, as had been the practice among at least nineteen out of twenty-one of his predecessors.¹⁸⁸ It seems that he wished to leave a personal mark on the new era that began with his accession. In his royal inscriptions, he assumed a number of rather exceptional epithets, calling himself, among other things, “guardian of the right, lover of justice, who lends support, who comes to the aid of the

¹⁸⁴ See Scurlock and Andersen, *Diagnoses*, 658.

¹⁸⁵ SAA 10, 238, obv. 9–10.

¹⁸⁶ I. L. Finkel, “Adad-apla-iddina, Esagil-kīn-apli, and the Series SA.GIG,” in *A Scientific Humanist: Studies in Memory of Abraham Sachs*, ed. E. Leichty et al. (Philadelphia, 1988), 153, 158–59, rev. 5¹–12¹.

¹⁸⁷ See CAD A/1, 376–77; Scurlock and Andersen, *Diagnoses*, 657–59. Joint references to the *alû* and the *eṭemmu* (GIDIM) are particularly common in the exorcistic series UDUG-ḪUL (M. Geller, *Evil Demons: Canonical Utukkū Lemnūtu Incantations*, State Archives of Assyria Cuneiform Texts 5 [Helsinki, 2007], 99, 196, line 63, and *passim*). Note, furthermore, that one of the symptoms associated in the ‘Diagnostic Handbook’ with the presence of the *alû* demon, the roaring of the ears, is elsewhere often linked to an assault by an *eṭemmu* (for examples, see E. Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries: Origins of Interpretation*, Guides to the Mesopotamian Textual Record 5 [Münster, 2011], 74).

¹⁸⁸ See Frahm, “Observations.” Whether the name of Sennacherib’s father, Šarru-ukīn, was a birth name, a throne name, or something else remains unclear.

weak.”¹⁸⁹ At the same time, once he had entered his high office, Sennacherib was, like every Assyrian king, stuck in a straightjacket of traditional expectations and ceremonial rules. In his royal inscriptions, he used many of the conventional titles most Assyrian kings bore,¹⁹⁰ and the focus he put in these texts on war and construction work followed the example of his predecessors. In fact, Sennacherib’s earliest annalistic reports drew heavily on texts from the reign of Sargon. Like the latter, Sennacherib fought at the beginning of his reign against Marduk-aplu-iddina II, the Chaldean archenemy of Assyria, and his descriptions of this event occasionally followed verbatim texts from the reign of his father.¹⁹¹ The same applies to Sennacherib’s early accounts of his construction work at Nineveh, which were clearly influenced by Sargon’s building inscriptions from Khorsabad.¹⁹² Incidentally, these parallels show us how ambivalent Sennacherib was with regard to his deceased predecessor. While he may have felt trapped in the large shadow of his father, he nonetheless emulated him, at least in some ways.

We cannot investigate here in detail how his accession to the throne affected Sennacherib in other respects. It can hardly be doubted that the enormous responsibility that rested on his shoulders now that he was the most powerful man in the world must have been a tremendous burden for him. The almost ‘divine’ role suddenly assigned to him cannot have left him unchanged either,¹⁹³ and the fact that, as commander-in-chief of the Assyrian army, he was now in a very immediate way concerned with war and extreme forms of violence will have marked his character as well,¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁹ See, for example, Luckenbill, *Annals*, 23, i 4–6. H. Tadmor (“Sennacherib, King of Justice,” in *Sefer Moshe: The Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume*, ed. C. Cohen et al. [Winona Lake, IN, 2004], 385–90) argued that these epithets refer implicitly to Sargon’s name, which was interpreted by some as “The king is just,” and were meant to signal that Sennacherib’s ethical values were not only nominal but real.

¹⁹⁰ On Sennacherib’s royal titles, and the changes they underwent in the course of time, see M. Liverani, “Critique of Variants and the Titulary of Sennacherib,” in *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: New Horizons*, ed. F. M. Fales (Rome, 1981), 225–57; and the further remarks in Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 248–51.

¹⁹¹ For examples, see Frahm, “New Sources,” 145–49.

¹⁹² For examples, see Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 42–43, 45, and “The Great City: Nineveh in the Age of Sennacherib,” *Journal de la Société canadienne des études mésopotamiennes* 3 (2008): 15.

¹⁹³ On the complex interplay between kingship and divinity in the Neo-Assyrian period, see, most recently, P. Machinist, “Kingship and Divinity in Imperial Assyria,” in *Assur: Gott, Stadt und Land*, ed. J. Renger, 5. Colloquium der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft (Wiesbaden, 2011), 405–30.

¹⁹⁴ On the use of violence, cruelty, and coercion by Neo-Assyrian kings and officials, see A. Fuchs, “Waren die Assyrer grausam?” in *Extreme Formen der Gewalt in Bild und Text des Altertums*, ed. M. Zimmermann (München, 2009), 65–119.

even though Sennacherib had dealt with military affairs already during his time as crown prince.¹⁹⁵

Sennacherib undertook eight 'official' major campaigns over the years, besides a number of smaller ones.¹⁹⁶ Two of these military enterprises deserve closer scrutiny in the context of our discussion: the Assyrian campaign against the Levant in 701 B.C.E., which culminated in the fight with Hezekiah of Judah, and Sennacherib's long-lasting conflict with Babylonia.

9. AT THE GATES OF JERUSALEM

In 701 B.C.E., in the course of his so-called "third campaign," Sennacherib attacked various cities and kingdoms in the Levant. After the death of Sargon, an event that was greeted with as much jubilation in the west as it was met with despair in Assyria,¹⁹⁷ the territories in question had sought to regain their independence and stopped paying Assyria their annual tribute. Sennacherib's campaign brought the rebels back into the fold. It ended with an assault on the land of Judah, where the Assyrian army captured and destroyed numerous cities. Judah's capital Jerusalem, however, was spared after King Hezekiah had announced his willingness to send rich tribute to Nineveh and become Sennacherib's vassal.¹⁹⁸

As mentioned above, in 1998 Stephanie Dalley published an important article in which she argued that Sennacherib's dealings with Jerusalem were heavily influenced by his family background. Her case was based on

¹⁹⁵ Sennacherib did not refrain in his inscriptions from mentioning brutal punishments such as impalement (see, for example, *Luckenbill, Annals*, 153: 27), but the respective passages do not reflect the same degree of almost sadistic pleasure that characterizes similar descriptions in the texts of Sennacherib's grandson Assurbanipal. In his dealings with Babylon, however, Sennacherib became increasingly inclined to use violence and describe it in great detail in his inscriptions (see below, section 10).

¹⁹⁶ For an historical overview, see, most recently, Frahm, "Sanherib," 16–18.

¹⁹⁷ It is possible that the mocking dirge against an unnamed 'Babylonian' king in Isaiah 14 was originally inspired by the death of Sargon (thus, among others, Frahm, "Nabû-zuqup-kêu, das Gilgameš-Epos . . .," 86), but note that S. M. Olyan ("Was the 'King of Babylon' Buried Before His Corpse Was Exposed? Some Thoughts on Isa 14:19," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 118 [2006]: 423–26), based on a close reading of Isa. 14: 19, has raised some doubts with regard to this assumption.

¹⁹⁸ The secondary literature on Sennacherib's 'third campaign' is vast. Two fairly recent and important studies are W. R. Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah: New Studies* (Leiden, 1999), and L. L. Grabbe, ed., *Like a Bird in a Cage: The Invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BCE* (Sheffield, 2003). For more discussion, see the other contributions to the present volume.

the new evidence that had come to light with the discovery, in 1989, of the remains of Yabâ, the main wife of Tiglath-pileser III, and Atalyâ, the main wife of Sargon II, in a subterranean palace tomb in Nimrud. Claiming that both queens had Hebrew names and that Atalyâ was most likely a Judean princess and the mother of Sennacherib, Dalley suggested that Sennacherib had spared Jerusalem and treated it very leniently because of his love for his Judean mother, Atalyâ. Even when it became clear that Atalyâ was apparently not the mother of Sennacherib, Dalley continued to insist that what she regarded as Sennacherib's favorable attitude towards Judah was a consequence of the prominent role Hebrew queens had played in Assyria during the reigns of his father and grandfather.¹⁹⁹

Dalley's case would be a nice confirmation of the working hypothesis of this article—that family matters influenced the politics of late Neo-Assyrian kings to a significant extent. But her argument has some weaknesses. First and foremost, it remains uncertain whether Atalyâ really was a Judean princess.²⁰⁰ Even if she was, however, this would hardly have prompted Sennacherib to favor Jerusalem and Hezekiah. On the contrary, since Atalyâ, when she became Sargon's queen, had sidelined Sennacherib's own mother Ra'imâ, the new king would have had more reason to actually treat Jerusalem with particular severity. Indeed, Sennacherib seems to have shown little restraint when he imposed on the city an enormous tribute, described in great detail in his 'Rassam Cylinder.'²⁰¹ His decision not to put Jerusalem under a long siege was probably not an act of mercy, but rather the result of a simple cost/benefit analysis—the effort to capture and destroy the well-protected city would have been so great that it made more sense for Sennacherib to leave its king in office as a loyal vassal of Assyria, following long-standing Assyrian policy.

While it is difficult to follow Dalley's argument that Sennacherib treated Jerusalem leniently, there are good reasons to accept her claim that Judah and Jerusalem were apparently of considerable significance for the Assyrian king. The conflict with Hezekiah represents the final climax in his written account of his "third campaign" and is described in great detail. Moreover, the first version of Sennacherib's royal annals that includes this account is known from more manuscripts than any other of

¹⁹⁹ See Dalley, "Identity of the Princesses."

²⁰⁰ See the discussion above in section 5.

²⁰¹ See Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 54–55, 59, lines 55–58.

his royal inscriptions.²⁰² This can in part be explained by Judah's function as a rising commercial power and important gateway to Egypt. But if Atalyā really was of Hebrew origin (admittedly, a big "if"), family matters might have contributed to Sennacherib's fascination with Judah and Jerusalem as well. The somewhat disproportionate joy the king expressed over his victory over Hezekiah of Judah could be explained as a correlate of the triumph he had experienced when he, and not a child of Atalyā, had become king of Assyria. For Sennacherib, the defeat of Judah may thus have represented a final vindication of his rise to power.

Indirect evidence that there were some strong links between the Assyrians and the Hebrews can be found in the Biblical account of Sennacherib's attack on Judah, which reports that the Assyrian *rab šāqê* was able to communicate with the people of Jerusalem in Hebrew.²⁰³ That one of the highest officials of the Assyrian empire spoke this language could indicate that it played a certain role at the Assyrian court, and perhaps even within the Assyrian royal family.²⁰⁴

10. THE BABYLONIAN TRAGEDY

Because it features prominently in the Hebrew Bible, Sennacherib's campaign against Judah has been in the focus of modern scholarship ever since the first inscriptions of Sennacherib were deciphered. For Sennacherib and the Assyrian elite, however, the most pressing conflict the Assyrians were involved in was not the one in the Levant. Of greater significance for them was the question of how to deal with their southern neighbor, Babylonia.²⁰⁵

The Assyrians had always had a special relationship with that country, not unlike the relationship the Romans had with the Greeks. The people of Babylonia spoke a language closely related to their own, and a significant portion of Assyria's religion, literature, and scholarship had been imported from there. This cultural indebtedness notwithstanding,

²⁰² See, provisionally, the list of manuscripts, *ibid.*, 47–50, now to be supplemented by a number of additional fragments.

²⁰³ 2 Kgs. 18:17–19:8; Isa. 36:2–37:8. Note that the historicity of the episode is debated.

²⁰⁴ It must be admitted, however, that for the time being such conclusions remain highly speculative.

²⁰⁵ For an assessment of the political dimensions of Sennacherib's 'Babylonian problem,' see L. D. Levine, "Sennacherib's Southern Front," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 34 (1982): 28–58.

Assyria competed with its southern neighbor over long periods of time for political hegemony and, in the eighth century, eventually gained the upper hand. In 729 B.C.E., towards the end of the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, Assyria annexed Babylonia. The country remained firmly in Assyrian hands under Tiglath-pileser's successor, Shalmaneser V (726–722 B.C.E.). At the beginning of the reign of Sargon II, the Babylonians, under their leader Marduk-aplu-iddina II, rebelled, but in 710 B.C.E., Sargon again took control of their land. He then did something quite unusual—instead of punishing the Babylonians, he assumed the traditional titles of the Babylonian king²⁰⁶ and spent a significant portion of the following three years in Babylon, endorsing and promoting its religion and culture.

I have already pointed out that Sennacherib, who remained in Assyria during this time, may not have been thrilled with his father's pro-Babylonian attitude—which, in fact, did not lead to Babylonian acquiescence to Assyrian imperialism. When Sennacherib eventually came to power, he immediately had to cope with another Babylonian rebellion. After suppressing the uprising, Sennacherib decided not to become king of Babylonia himself, but to enthrone a puppet king of Babylonian origin, Bēl-ibni. Unfortunately, the arrangement did not satisfy the Babylonians. In 700 B.C.E., they rose up yet again, only to be once again defeated. In the wake of these events, Sennacherib made his own son, Aššur-nādin-šumi, king of Babylon. But this measure was not a lasting solution to his 'Babylonian problem' either. In 694 B.C.E., the Babylonians revolted again and rendered Aššur-nādin-šumi to the Elamites, who probably killed him.

All these developments, but especially the Babylonian complicity in the death of his eldest son, must have made Sennacherib extremely angry.²⁰⁷ In 691 B.C.E., Sennacherib fought a brutal but indecisive battle with the Babylonians and their allies in the vicinity of the city of Ḫalulê. A text composed by his ghostwriters to commemorate the battle makes use of every possible rhetorical device to incriminate the enemy, and is tinged with unprecedented hatred:

I raged like a lion . . . Against all the hosts of the wicked enemies, I raised my voice like a devastating storm, rumbling like (the storm god) Adad . . . I promptly slaughtered them like fat bulls who have fetters put on them . . .

²⁰⁶ Especially, *šakkanak Bābīlī šar māt Šumeri u Akkadī*, "governor of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad" (see Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II.*, 374).

²⁰⁷ This anger finds an explicit expression in Sennacherib's account of the battle of Ḫalulê, which claims, among other things, that the king "raged like a lion" (*labbiš annadirma*) before he started the fight against the Babylonians and their allies (see below).

I cut off their (seemingly) precious lives. I made their blood flow upon the wide earth like a massive flood caused by a timely downpour. The speedy horses attached to my wagon plunged into the streams of their blood as into a river. The wheels of my battle chariot, which brings low the wicked and the evil, were bespattered with blood and excrement . . . I cut off their moustaches, destroying their dignity, and cut off their hands like ripe cucumber sprouts.²⁰⁸

However gruesome it may be—with its unrelenting barrage of comparisons and metaphors, Sennacherib's account of the battle of Ḫalulê displays poetic qualities that none of his other campaign reports possess,²⁰⁹ and it might seem tempting to regard it as an act of sublimation. Yet the hatred Sennacherib felt still shines through unrepressed,²¹⁰ and there are good reasons to assume that the account was written with the intent to pave the way for the king's next step: the complete annihilation of Babylonia as a political entity.²¹¹ In 689 B.C.E., the moment had come: Sennacherib conquered Babylon, devastated the city, killed its people, and destroyed or carried away its divine statues. His goal was to eradicate Babylon for all times from the political and religious map of the world.

It is plausible to assume that Sennacherib's actions against Babylon were to a significant extent prompted by emotional concerns. We have already mentioned the hatred that took possession of him when the Babylonians caused the death of his eldest son, Aššur-nādin-šumi. Another factor to be reckoned with is Sennacherib's ambivalent attitude towards his father. His wish to distinguish himself from Sargon certainly played a role in his decision to completely reverse the latter's largely pro-Babylonian politics. One can even speculate that the destruction of Babylon was an

²⁰⁸ Luckenbill, *Annals*, 44–46, v 67–vi 12.

²⁰⁹ See Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sannherib-Inschriften*, 254–55. For an assessment of the account in the context of other Mesopotamian descriptions of violence against enemies, see S. Richardson, “Death and Dismemberment in Mesopotamia: Discorporation between the Body and Body Politic,” in *Performing Death: Social Analyses of Funerary Traditions in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean*, ed. N. Laneri, Second Printing with Minor Corrections, Oriental Institute Seminars 3 (Chicago, 2008), 197.

²¹⁰ In psychoanalysis, sublimation is “a defence mechanism whereby a repressed or unconscious drive that is denied gratification is diverted into a more acceptable channel or form of expression, as when aggression is diverted into playing . . . or when libido is diverted into artistic or creative activity” (Colman, *Dictionary of Psychology*, 736). This definition does not fully apply to the case of Sennacherib's description of the battle of Ḫalulê.

²¹¹ Thus E. Weissert, “Creating a Political Climate: Literary Allusions to *Enūma Eliš* in Sennacherib's Account of the Battle of Halule,” in *Assyrien im Wandel der Zeiten: XXXIX^e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Heidelberg 6.–10. Juli 1992*, ed. H. Waetzoldt and H. Hauptmann (Heidelberg, 1997), 191–202.

act of displacement, to use a Freudian term: an unconscious attempt on Sennacherib's part to redirect his aggressive feelings from his father Sargon to a more tangible object, a city Sargon had loved.²¹²

Instead of imitating his father, Sennacherib seems to have chosen to follow the example of a much earlier Assyrian king, Tukulti-Ninurta I, who had conquered and plundered Babylon in the last quarter of the thirteenth century B.C.E. There are two clues that can serve as evidence for Sennacherib's admiration for Tukulti-Ninurta I and his Babylonian politics. One is the content of a clay tablet from Nineveh that reproduces three texts inscribed in the course of time on a lapis lazuli bead found by Sennacherib's soldiers during their sack of Babylon.²¹³ The first text is a label indicating that the bead had originally belonged to the Babylonian king Šagarakti-Šuriaš. A second inscription records that Tukulti-Ninurta I had looted the bead after his conquest of Babylon. A third inscription, written in the name of Sennacherib, explains that the ornament had been returned to the Babylonians at some point, but that Sennacherib had now again taken possession of it. The other clue for Sennacherib's fascination with Tukulti-Ninurta I is of a more indirect nature. A close analysis of his highly poetic account of the battle of Ḫalulê seems to indicate that the language and phraseology of this text has a number of parallels with the famous 'Tukulti-Ninurta Epic,' which was composed by Assyrian *literati* of the thirteenth century to celebrate Tukulti-Ninurta I's defeat of Babylonia. The epic was definitely still in circulation during the Late Assyrian period.²¹⁴

It seems that Sennacherib regarded Tukulti-Ninurta I—who incidentally, like him, also had founded a new royal residence—as a kind of imaginary substitute father, and that he deliberately imitated the actions and reflections of this long-dead ancestor, to the extent that they were still accessible in the political and cultural memory of eighth and seventh century Assyria.²¹⁵

²¹² Displacement, in psychoanalysis, is "a defence mechanism involving redirection of emotional feelings from their original object to a substitute object related to the original one by a chain of associations" (Colman, *Dictionary of Psychology*, 216).

²¹³ For the latest edition of the tablet, see K. Watanabe, "Die Siegelung der 'Vasallenverträge Asarhaddons' durch den Gott Aššur," *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 16 (1985): 385–87.

²¹⁴ For reasons of space, I cannot give here specific examples for these parallels; I intend to provide the necessary evidence elsewhere. It may seem at first glance that my suggestion is incompatible with Elnathan Weissert's idea that Sennacherib's account of the battle of Ḫalulê is characterized by numerous intertextual references to the Babylonian Epic of Creation (Weissert, "Creating a Political Climate"), but this is not necessarily the case—the account may well draw on two (or even more) different 'pre-texts.'

²¹⁵ In section 13, we will see that Sennacherib's identification with Tukulti-Ninurta may have led to fateful consequences, unanticipated by the king.

But the emotions that guided Sennacherib's Babylonian politics sprang not only from family matters. Assyria's relationship with Babylonia was in itself a highly emotional affair. The country's indebtedness to Babylonian culture was a two-sided sword—the Assyrians were in love with Babylon, but also wished to dominate her. Even though such 'gendering' is hardly ever made explicit in Assyrian royal inscriptions, there is little doubt that it was an implicit part of the Neo-Assyrian world view. For the Assyrians, Babylonia was expected to remain yielding and passive in political matters, while serving at the same time as a well-spring of civilization. When the beautiful Babylonian bride broke again and again away from the political embrace of her Assyrian would-be husband, the husband eventually went berserk, and the 'gendering' took a negative turn: References in Sennacherib's Ḥalulê account to the Babylonian king Mušēzib-Marduk as "a weakling who does not have 'knees' (a euphemism for genitals)"²¹⁶ make this abundantly clear.²¹⁷

Sennacherib not only attacked and devastated Babylon, he also made sure that this violation was accompanied by an unprecedented attempt to ridicule the memory of her rulers. For example, Sennacherib mentions gleefully in his inscriptions that the Babylonian king Mušēzib-Marduk and his Elamite colleague Ḥumban-nimena had left their feces and urine in their chariots when they fled the scene of the battle of Ḥalulê. The chariots had been captured by Assyrian soldiers and brought to Sennacherib's palace arsenal at Nineveh.²¹⁸ Aggressive humor is also found in Sennacherib's Bavian inscription, which describes the destruction of Babylon in 689 B.C.E. in the form of a "negative" building report.²¹⁹ The purpose of this derisive inversion of a well known Assyrian genre may have been to protect the Assyrian king and other Assyrians involved in the event from the emotional troubles that brutal behavior against human beings can

²¹⁶ Luckenbill, *Annals*, 41, v 20–21.

²¹⁷ For a comprehensive comparative study of gendered language in Assyrian and Biblical accounts of warfare, see C. R. Chapman, *The Gendered Language of Warfare in the Israelite-Assyrian Encounter*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 62 (Winona Lake, IN, 2004).

²¹⁸ For a discussion of the 'incontinence motif' in Sennacherib's inscriptions, and exact references, see Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 263; for the repressive 'humor' that underlies the motif, see Frahm, "Humor." While psychoanalysts coming across Sennacherib's obsession with the excrements of his enemies would probably have a field day, the present author prefers not to read too much into the evidence. What is clear, however, is that Sennacherib believed strongly in a need for purity and dignity in the royal sphere.

²¹⁹ This was demonstrated by H. D. Galter, "Die Zerstörung Babylons durch Sanherib," *Studia Orientalia* 55 (1984): 164–67.

create.²²⁰ The mocking did not even spare Babylonian religion. The famous ‘Marduk Ordeal,’ an Assyrian propaganda text probably composed under Sennacherib,²²¹ pokes fun at the Babylonian *Akitu* festival by depicting Marduk, its divine protagonist, as a criminal and the festival itself (which actually celebrated the god’s rise to the head of the pantheon) as a ritual re-enactment of Marduk’s imprisonment by other gods.

Such attempts to justify or repress the destruction of Babylon were, however, not the end of the story. In the wake of the events of 689 B.C.E., Sennacherib implemented a religious reform in Assyria that, somewhat paradoxically, made the Assyrian cult far more Babylonian than it had ever been before. The king introduced a new version of the Babylonian Epic of Creation in which Aššur usurped the role of Marduk but that was otherwise largely unchanged, and he redesigned the cultic topography of the city of Assur after the model of Babylon.²²² What we see here, one could argue, is a return of the repressed.

II. SENNACHERIB THE “FEMINIST”

When he inflicted his final punishment on Babylon, Assyria’s noncompliant and rebellious ‘political bride,’ Sennacherib may have shown the behavior of an oppressive and brutal patriarch.²²³ But in his dealings with the royal women who actually surrounded him, the king assumed a very different attitude, so different, in fact, that Julian Reade has famously asked: “Was Sennacherib a feminist?”²²⁴ Of course, this rhetorical question cannot be answered with an unqualified “Yes.” But one has to acknowledge that certain female members of the royal family seem to have enjoyed remarkable privileges under Sennacherib, and played a much more important role than under previous kings. Radner recently argued that this new attitude was inspired “by the king’s desire to shift power away from the

²²⁰ In his 1905 study *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten* (*Gesammelte Werke VI* [Frankfurt, 1960–]), Freud used the terms “ersparter Gefühlsaufwand” and “ersparter Hemmungsaufwand” to describe this function of humor.

²²¹ For an edition, see SAA 3, 34 and 35.

²²² On Sennacherib’s religious reform, see, *inter alia*, Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 282–88, and G. W. Vera Chamaza, *Die Omnipotenz Aššurs: Entwicklungen in der Aššur-Theologie unter den Sargoniden Sargon II., Sanherib und Asarhaddon*, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 295 (Münster, 2002), 71–167.

²²³ One should not forget, however, that Sennacherib left Babylon and Babylonia in a state of (at least formal) semi-independence during the first years of his reign.

²²⁴ Reade, “Was Sennacherib a Feminist?”

magnates to members of his immediate family.”²²⁵ This is certainly feasible, but perhaps the preferential treatment of female relatives was also Sennacherib’s way to compensate for his attempt to expunge the memory of his father.²²⁶ Perhaps it was, moreover, motivated to a certain extent by Assyrian encounters with several “queens” (*šarratu*) of the Arabs, who made important decisions and even went to war. Such queens are attested in Assyrian royal inscriptions since the time of Tiglath-pileser III.²²⁷ Sennacherib brought one of them, Te’elḥunu, as a hostage to Nineveh in 690 B.C.E.

There are several indications of an enhanced standing for women at Sennacherib’s court. As we have already seen, Sennacherib mentions his wife Tašmētu-šarrat quite prominently in a truly unique colossus inscription from Nineveh, and he made sure that a stela commemorating his mother Raīmâ was set up in Assur. This was, as far as we know, only the second Assur stela dedicated to the memory of a woman—the first one had been erected in the early eighth century B.C.E. in honor of Sammu-rāmat, the *urbild* of the famous Semiramis. Moreover, Sennacherib’s wife Naqī’a wielded considerable political power under his successors Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, and it stands to reason that this power had its roots in the reign of Sennacherib himself. It is also conspicuous that pictorial representations of Neo-Assyrian queens seem to multiply in the first decades of the seventh century B.C.E.,²²⁸ even though there are a few earlier examples.²²⁹ Probably from the reign of Sennacherib onwards, Assyrian queens even commanded their own standing armies.²³⁰

²²⁵ Radner, “Seal of Tašmētum-šarrat,” 692–93.

²²⁶ Psychologists define compensation as “the act or process of making amends, or something done or given to make up for a loss” (Colman, *Dictionary of Psychology*, 153).

²²⁷ See Eph’al, *Ancient Arabs*, 81–125.

²²⁸ See T. Ornan’s study, “The Queen in Public: Royal Women in Neo-Assyrian Art,” in *Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East*, ed. S. Parpola and R. M. Whiting, Proceedings of the 47th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Helsinki, July 2–6, 2001, Part II (Helsinki, 2001), 461–77.

²²⁹ The bare-headed woman depicted on a golden stamp seal from tomb III in Kalḥu (see Hussein/Suleiman, *Nimrud*, 399 and Al-Rawi, *Inscriptions*, no. 16) is most probably Shalmaneser IV’s queen Ḥamâ (see Radner, “Seal of Tašmētum-šarrat,” 691). Another early representation of the Assyrian queen is known from seal impressions from the reign of Sargon II; it shows her approaching a divine couple together with her husband (S. Herbordt, *Neuassyrische Glyptik des 8.–7. Jh. v. Chr.*, State Archives of Assyria Studies 1 [Helsinki, 1992], 200–01, nos. 114, 116; Radner, *loc. cit.*). The aforementioned depictions need to be added to Ornan’s catalogue.

²³⁰ See Radner, “Seal of Tašmētum-šarrat,” 692–93.

The enhanced role of royal women at Sennacherib's court has a counterpart in the greater prominence of female deities during the reign of the king. Several images on reliefs and a cylinder seal from Sennacherib's reign show the Assyrian national god Aššur together with a female companion, most likely the goddess Mullissu, whose role in these representations seems to mirror that of Sennacherib's own principal wife.²³¹ It is noteworthy that Mullissu is several times called *šarratu* "queen" under Sennacherib.²³²

With regard to Naqī'a's relationship with Mullissu, Reade has noted "some parallelism between goddess and queen" in a dedicatory inscription²³³ in which both are referred to by two different names. Under her Aramaic name, Naqī'a, the influential queen makes a dedication to Bēlet-Ninua (i.e., the Lady-of-Nineveh), and under her Assyrian name, Zakūtu, she does the same with respect to "Mullissu the queen." In Sennacherib's Nineveh, Aššur's wife Mullissu was considered identical with Bēlet-Ninua,²³⁴ and so there is indeed a strong resemblance between goddess and queen—both combined two different 'identities.'²³⁵

There are indications that the parallels between Sennacherib's family and the family of the god Aššur may have been even more pronounced. As we have seen, Sennacherib seems to have had two principal wives, Tašmētu-šarrat and Naqī'a. Even though some uncertainty remains, it is possible that they held this position, at least for a certain amount of time, simultaneously. Apparently, Aššur likewise had two wives during Sennacherib's reign, the goddesses Mullissu and Šerū'a.²³⁶

Mullissu had been Aššur's wife from the Middle Assyrian period (or even earlier times) onwards, although it was only during the seventh century B.C.E. that Assyrian scribes began to mention her marriage to Aššur

²³¹ For a provisional list of these depictions, see Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 187. The only known representations of the divine couple that may be earlier are found on the seal impressions from the reign of Sargon II discussed in note 229. Herbordt, *Neuassyrische Glyptik*, 200–201, assumes that the male deity represented here, a god standing on a bull and holding a mace, is Adad, but it cannot be excluded that it is, actually, Aššur.

²³² See, for example, Luckenbill, *Annals*, 134, line 91.

²³³ Reade, "Was Sennacherib a Feminist?," 143; J. Kohler and A. Ungnad, *Assyrische Rechtsurkunden* (Leipzig, 1913), 14. For the close relationship between the Assyrian queen and Mullissu, see now also Parpola, "Neo-Assyrian Harem," 619–20.

²³⁴ See Meinhold, *Ištar in Aššur*, 203–204 (and also Frahm, "Die Akītu-Häuser von Ninive," *Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires* 2000: no. 66).

²³⁵ Note, furthermore, that the Assyrian queen played an important role in certain rites that were performed in honor of Mullissu (see Meinhold, *Ištar in Aššur*, 240–45).

²³⁶ The following remarks are based on Meinhold, op. cit., 191–220.

more frequently. The union was based on Aššur's identification with the Sumero-Babylonian god Enlil/Illil, whose traditional wife was Ninlil, the model of the Assyrian Mullissu. At some point in time, probably under Tiglath-pileser III, and perhaps under Babylonian influence, some Assyrian theologians assigned Aššur another wife: the goddess Šerū'a, up to then regarded as his daughter. From the period preceding Sennacherib's reign, no textual evidence exists that mentions Mullissu and Šerū'a together in their capacities as Aššur's wives. But under Sennacherib, such a matrimonial constellation seems to have been explicitly acknowledged. In a stone inscription from Sennacherib's *Akītu* house in Assur, which includes a list of male deities and their spouses, Aššur is the only god who is associated with two goddesses, Mullissu and Šerū'a.²³⁷ The cult text BM 121206, of which significant portions were composed under Sennacherib, shows that there was apparently a certain competition between the two. The text mentions, for instance, that Mullissu's altar was to be placed next to Aššur's, while Šerū'a's was to stand next to Mullissu's. Here, Mullissu seems to have the upper hand over the other goddess.²³⁸ At the same time, BM 121206 makes it very clear to the reader that Šerū'a was, in fact, a fully legitimate wife of Aššur:

When the boiled meat is presented to Šerū'a, it is not good if the *daughter* of the king addresses her (with the words), "Šerū'a (is the) daughter of Aššur—thus they shall sing." But if the sister of the king addresses her (with the words), "Šerū'a (is the) wife (*altu*) of Aššur—thus they shall sing"—this is good.²³⁹

Even though Šerū'a was regarded by some as Aššur's wife before Sennacherib's reign, it is conspicuous that only under Sennacherib is she mentioned in this role together with Aššur's traditional spouse Mullissu. I suggest that this new 'bigamist' theology was an attempt on the part of the king to project his own matrimonial status onto the divine world, perhaps with the intention to add legitimacy to the arrangement he had with his two principal wives.²⁴⁰ This would be one of the clearest cases of 'family

²³⁷ Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 177, T 145.

²³⁸ For precise references and discussion, see Meinhold, *Ištar in Aššur*, 216–17.

²³⁹ After Meinhold, *loc. cit.*

²⁴⁰ Sennacherib's counterpart in this constellation was the god Aššur, and there is indeed textual evidence that points to a close relationship between the king and the god. See, for example, the reference to related images (*šalmu*) of both in the text written on the doors of the *Akītu* house outside the city walls of Assur (Pongratz-Leisten, *Ina šulmi irub*, 207–209; Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 222–24 [line 26]).

matters' influencing contemporary politics, in this case, religious politics, during Sennacherib's reign.²⁴¹

12. SENNACHERIB THE ENGINEER

We have already seen that Sennacherib had become fascinated with engineering and construction work during his time as crown prince. This interest did not diminish after he had ascended the throne. On the contrary, the detailed descriptions Sennacherib provided in his royal inscriptions of the massive building and water work projects he was engaged in demonstrate how important such activities remained for him during his reign. Sennacherib went so far as to claim that he invented himself new bronze working techniques²⁴² and new methods to transport water upwards a hill to irrigate gardens and parks.²⁴³ One has every reason to call Sennacherib an engineer on the royal throne.

Sennacherib's involvement in the transformation of landscapes and cities through large engineering projects may eventually have led the king to believe that he would also be able to "re-engineer" the social, political, and religious structures of his time. We have seen in some of the preceding subchapters the extent to which Sennacherib was willing to implement changes in these areas. Sennacherib seems to have enhanced the role of women and female deities; he experimented with various ways, from semi-independence to brutal oppression, of controlling Babylonia and keeping it in check; and he implemented a remarkable religious reform that aimed at making the city of Assur, the cult center of the Assyrian god Aššur, the new navel of the Mesopotamian world. Sennacherib's experiments and reforms had, of course, roots in the cultural and political realities of the

²⁴¹ Note, however, that a Babylonian cult ritual, the so-called 'Love Lyrics,' likewise enacted a divine *ménage à trois*, which comprised the god Marduk and the female deities Zarpānitu and Ištar of Babylon. For a preliminary edition, see W. G. Lambert, "The Problem of the Love Lyrics," in *Unity and Diversity*, ed. H. Goedicke and J. J. M. Roberts (Baltimore, 1975), 98–135. It cannot be excluded that this constellation (also) influenced Sennacherib's new Aššur theology.

²⁴² See S. Dalley, "Neo-Assyrian Textual Evidence for Bronzeworking Centres," in *Bronzeworking Centres of Western Asia c. 1000–539 B.C.*, ed. J. E. Curtis (London, 1988), 103–105.

²⁴³ See S. Dalley ("Nineveh, Babylon, and the Hanging Gardens: Cuneiform and Classical Sources Reconciled," *Iraq* 56 [1994]: 51–53), who believes that Sennacherib introduced the 'Archimedean screw'; and A. Bagg, *Assyrische Wasserbauten*, *Baghdader Forschungen* 24 (Mainz, 2000), 201–203, who remains skeptical with regard to this claim.

time; but the king's belief in the feasibility of physical transformations is likely to have driven them as well.

Not all of the changes Sennacherib made turned out to be successful. His son Esarhaddon repealed central elements of his religious reform, and the Babylonians were prompted by Sennacherib's brutal actions to develop an even deeper hatred for their Assyrian overlords, a hatred that would induce them three quarters of a century later to completely destroy Assyria. For Sennacherib himself, however, as we shall see in the next section, the most devastating consequences of his eagerness to make changes arose from his unsteady succession arrangements.

13. SONS AND KILLERS

Sennacherib gave unusual prominence not only to his wives, but also to his sons. In a departure from earlier practice, he mentioned several of them in a number of short inscriptions, pointing out that he assigned houses in Assur to his eldest son, Aššur-nādin-šumi, and his second eldest, Aššur-ilī-muballisu,²⁴⁴ and a house in Nineveh to yet another son, Aššur-šumu-ušabši.²⁴⁵ He apparently also mentioned the names of several of his sons—together with those of mythological figures—in an epigraph that is recorded on a clay tablet.²⁴⁶

Sennacherib's interest in drawing attention to his sons has, again, a parallel in certain changes the Assyrian pantheon experienced during the king's reign. The king's sudden emphasis on the family life of the state god Aššur did not remain limited to a new focus on the god's spouses²⁴⁷—his children came to greater prominence as well. This is shown, for example, by a decree from Assur in which Sennacherib is said to have sought to establish through an oracle query whether the warrior deity Zababa was, actually, a son of that god.²⁴⁸ It seems that Sennacherib, taking himself as the model, intended to provide Aššur with a family, something he had lacked before.

But as time went by, Sennacherib's relationship with his own children did not retain its exemplary quality. The reason for the increasing alien-

²⁴⁴ See Luckenbill, *Annals*, 151–52; Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 179–80.

²⁴⁵ See Frahm, *op. cit.*, 142–43, 180–81.

²⁴⁶ See above, note 138.

²⁴⁷ On this, see above, section 11.

²⁴⁸ SAA 12, 87; Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 240–41.

ation between the father and some of his sons was Sennacherib's inconsistent succession policy.²⁴⁹ For several years, Sennacherib's crown prince had been one of his elder children, Urda-Mullissu, who may have been a son of Tašmētu-šarrat. Around 683 B.C.E., however, the king decided to make a younger son, Esarhaddon, a child of Naqī'a, the new heir apparent. Understandably dismayed by these developments, Urda-Mullissu thought of revenge, and on Ṭebētu 20, 681 B.C.E. killed Sennacherib, apparently with the help of his brother Nabû(?)-šarru-ušur. But the coup did not succeed—Esarhaddon, who in the meantime had been driven into exile, returned to Nineveh, chased the regicides away, and followed Sennacherib on the throne of Assyria.

It may have been more than a bitter irony of history that Sennacherib, who seems to have regarded the Assyrian king Tukultī-Ninurta I as a role model,²⁵⁰ was eventually killed, like the latter, by his own sons. Perhaps Urda-Mullissu and his co-conspirators were aware of Sennacherib's identification with this famous ancestor and decided to carry it, in their very own way, to its logical conclusion. Be this as it may, there is no question that love and intrigue played a major role in the events leading up to Sennacherib's murder. The whole episode has an almost Shakespearean quality.

Sennacherib's end left a deep mark not only on Assyria, but also on Babylonia and even Judah. The events of 681/80 B.C.E. are briefly mentioned in 2 Kings 19:37 (//Isaiah 37:38 //2 Chronicles 32:21).²⁵¹ Recently, the present author has suggested that the story of Sennacherib's inauspicious succession arrangement and its consequences may be echoed, in a transformed and adapted form, in yet another—and far more prominent—biblical text: the story of Joseph in Genesis 37–50.²⁵² The way Sennacherib prefers Esarhaddon over his elder sons, the jealousy of those sons, described in stark terms in Esarhaddon's inscriptions, and the eventual exile and final triumph of the young prince find close parallels in the story

²⁴⁹ See Frahm, "Sîn-ahḫē-eriba," 1121 (with exact references).

²⁵⁰ See above, section 10.

²⁵¹ On these biblical passages and their relation with the Mesopotamian sources, see I. Kalimi, *The Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History in Chronicles* (Winona Lake, IN, 2005), 32–33.

²⁵² See E. Frahm, "Warum die Brüder Böses planten: Anmerkungen zu einer alten *Crux* in Asarhaddons Ninive A-Inschrift," in *Philologisches und Historisches zwischen Anatolien und Sokotra: Analecta Semitica In Memoriam Alexander Sima*, ed. W. Arnold et al. (Wiesbaden, 2009), 39–41. The issue is, obviously, complex and requires a more detailed discussion.

of Jacob's fondness for his younger son Joseph and the latter's sufferings and triumphant comeback. Even the episode of how Joseph rose to power in Egypt might have been inspired by the story of Esarhaddon, the first Assyrian king who managed to conquer that country. No final proof can be offered for a connection between the Esarhaddon story and the Joseph narrative, but if such a connection exists, we could claim that the vicissitudes of the life of the Assyrian royal family under Sennacherib influenced not only world politics, but also world literature.²⁵³

14. CONCLUSION

What I have offered in this study is only a sketch. One could probably, for example through a 'close reading' of Sennacherib's letters and inscriptions, arrive at a more nuanced and comprehensive assessment of the psychological factors that shaped Sennacherib's personality, and of the way the king's character influenced, in turn, his approach to politics. It must be admitted, moreover, that many ideas discussed in the preceding sections remain speculative, not the least because our fundamental premise—that the people of the ancient Near East experienced feelings such as love, hatred, and envy for the most part like us—needs to be more thoroughly tested.²⁵⁴ There is no question, after all, that emotions are at least to some extent culturally conditioned.²⁵⁵ Criticism can also be leveled against the rather unmethodical nature of the psychology that informs my analysis.²⁵⁶

²⁵³ For later stories about Sennacherib and Esarhaddon in various civilizations, see Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 21–28; S. Dalley, "Assyrian Court Narratives in Aramaic and Egyptian: Historical Fiction," in *Historiography of the Cuneiform World*, ed. T. Abusch et al. (Bethesda, MD, 2001), 149–61; and K. Ryholt, "The Assyrian Invasion of Egypt in Egyptian Literary Tradition," in *Assyria and Beyond: Studies Presented to Mogens Trolle Larsen*, ed. J. G. Dercksen (Leiden, 2004), 483–510.

²⁵⁴ Studies analyzing the Mesopotamian 'lexicon of emotions' are important starting points for an investigation of this type. Jaques, *Le vocabulaire*, provides such an analysis for the Sumerian language.

²⁵⁵ Note, for example, how the 'semantics of love' were transformed in the western world at the beginning of the romantic era, when the idealization of the object of love was largely replaced by an idealization of love itself. The process is described in detail by N. Luhmann, *Liebe als Passion* (Frankfurt, 1982). Luhmann, however, does not claim that the 'raw emotions' that accompany the feeling of love became completely different in the course of these changes.

²⁵⁶ The only justification I can offer in this regard is best summed up in a quote by the biologist H. Allen Orr ("Fooled by Science," *The New York Review of Books* 53/13 [2011]: 10): "As many have noted, our folk psychology differs from our folk physics in that, while the latter is notoriously poor, the former often seems remarkably good."

Despite all these difficulties, there seem to be a number of basic results that our psychohistorical investigation of Sennacherib and his times has yielded. One is that the rapport with his father Sargon was clearly of particular importance for Sennacherib's psychological development. Originally, Sennacherib seems to have been on good terms with his father, but in the course of time, more and more cracks appeared in their relationship. Sargon's violent and inauspicious death on the battlefield was a traumatic experience for our protagonist, who did everything during his reign to repress this fateful event. But even though he made sure that his father was no longer officially commemorated, Sennacherib continued, both consciously and unconsciously, to emulate him in certain areas, and he could not prevent that, on occasion, the repressed returned with a vengeance. Sennacherib's Babylonian politics, for the most part a reversal, but in some respects also a continuation of the model set by Sargon, cannot be fully understood without taking into account Sennacherib's 'father complex,' a complex that may also have impacted Sennacherib's relationship with his own sons.

Sennacherib apparently compensated for his loss in faith in fatherly authority by paying greater heed to the women in his environment, especially his mother and two of his wives. This 'feminism' seems to have strongly influenced Sennacherib's religious politics. It is unlikely, however, that a woman, Sargon's wife Atalyā, prompted Sennacherib to treat Jerusalem and its king Hezekiah more leniently, as has recently been suggested.

From early on, Sennacherib was fascinated by the massive engineering projects that took place in Assyria. Once king, he seems to have tried to apply his personal expertise in this area to other fields as well. But his attempts to 're-engineer' the political and religious landscapes of his time failed for the most part, and the king had to pay a high price for his passion for change—after nominating a new crown prince, the old one, together with some co-conspirators, killed Sennacherib.

Sennacherib's son and successor Esarhaddon had to fight his own demons—probably not the least because both his grandfather and his father had met violent ends, he seems to have developed symptoms of paranoid personality disorder.²⁵⁷ But unlike Sennacherib, Esarhaddon did

²⁵⁷ See E. Frahm, "Hochverrat in Assur," in *Assur-Forschungen: Arbeiten aus der Forschungsstelle "Edition literarischer Keilschrifttexte aus Assur" der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften*, ed. S. M. Maul and N. Heeßel (Wiesbaden, 2010), 131–33.

not seek to repress the memory of the inauspicious deaths of his predecessors. On the contrary: he openly addressed the issue in several texts and sought to exorcise the past through specific rituals held in the Aššur temple.²⁵⁸ Clearly, Neo-Assyrian kings dealt in very different ways with the psychological challenges they faced.

²⁵⁸ For details, see Frahm, “Nabû-zuqup-kēnu, das Gilgameš-Epos . . .,” 84–86.

THE ROAD TO JUDAH: 701 B.C.E. IN THE CONTEXT
OF SENNACHERIB'S POLITICAL-MILITARY STRATEGY*

Frederick Mario Fales

INTRODUCTION

Sennacherib's third campaign to the Levant in 701 B.C.E., which brought him to attack Judah and to threaten Jerusalem, is portrayed in the Old Testament as a dramatic event marked by utter abruptness at its outset, and by fast-moving developments: "In the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, king Sennacherib of Assyria marched against all the fortified towns of Judah and seized them" (2 Kings 18:13). Counter to this, it has been pointed out that the account concerning this episode in Sennacherib's own official annals in cuneiform presents neither narrative suddenness nor heightened tone of any sort; as E. Ben Zvi has put it: "It is part and parcel of the account of Sennacherib's third campaign, namely the one against the land of Hatti. In other words, the third campaign is one among others, and the campaign against Judah is a subset of this third campaign."¹

This statement may be accepted, on the face of it; the rigid annalistic cadence of Sennacherib's official inscriptions does, in point of fact, tend to

* The following abbreviations will be used throughout this contribution: Frahm, *Einleitung* = E. Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sannacherib-Inschriften* (Wien, 1997); Frahm, *Sennacherib* = E. Frahm, "Sin-ahhē-eriba," in PNA 3/1, 1113–27; Grabbe, *Cage* = L. L. Grabbe, ed., *'Like a Bird in a Cage': The Invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BCE* (Sheffield, UK, 2003); *New Light on Nimrud* = J. E. Curtis et al., eds., *New Light on Nimrud* (London, 2008); ARINH = F. M. Fales, ed., *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: New Horizons* (Rome, 1981); PNA = H. Baker and K. Radner, eds., *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Helsinki, 1998–2011); SAA I = S. Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part I: Letters from Assyria and the West* (Helsinki, 1987); SAA III = A. Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea* (Helsinki, 1989); SAA IV = I. Starr, *Queries to the Sungod: Divination and Politics in Sargonid Assyria* (Helsinki, 1990); SAA V = G. B. Lanfranchi and S. Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part II: Letters from the Northern and Northeastern Provinces* (Helsinki, 1990); SAA VI = T. Kwasman and S. Parpola, *Legal Transactions of the Royal Court of Nineveh, Part I* (Helsinki, 1991); SAA IX = S. Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies* (Helsinki, 1997); SAA XV = A. Fuchs and S. Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part III: Letters from Babylonia and the Eastern Provinces* (Helsinki, 2001); SAA XVII = M. Dietrich, *The Babylonian Correspondence of Sargon and Sennacherib* (Helsinki, 2003). Biblical quotes are after the JPS version.

¹ E. Ben Zvi, "Malleability and its Limits: Sennacherib's Campaign against Judah as a Case-Study," in Grabbe, *Cage*, 78.

smooth out the differences among the different locales described and the specific military events which are narrated. From a wider historical point of view, however, this campaign can hardly be dismissed as an example of routine Assyrian military activity. To the contrary, Sennacherib's ascent to the throne is nowadays reconstructed as marked by an inner ideological crisis of no small import, due to the untimely and inauspicious death of his father Sargon, which bore immediate consequences in foreign policy—namely, local rebellions in diverse but equally sensitive theaters, of which the Levant was one of the most important, all of which needed to be faced and put down as soon as possible.

It has been moreover argued that armed conquest was not a primary component of Sennacherib's princely buildup, insofar as he had been essentially trained by his father in palace and internal administration rather than reared on the battlefield, and thus found himself, once seated on the throne, having inherited an empire rather than having created one through expansion. Not by chance, no new province would be added to Assyria under his rule.² From this point of view, then, Sennacherib's sole military foray against Judah and the West—differently from Sargon, who had ample experience of the by-roads of the Levant—has been somewhat justifiably presented as a fully “exceptional” event in his career.³

On the other hand, the campaign against Judah should not be extrapolated from the ones led by the new king before it, starting in 704 B.C.E.—with the first rout of Merodach-baladan as a central feature—and from the one immediately following it in 700 B.C.E., in which the Chaldean enemy who had plagued his father and grandfather was finally vanquished. Only after this date, having re-established to some extent the *status quo* in the

² K. Radner, “Provinz. C. Assyrien,” in *RLA XI* (2006): 42–68, *passim*. The sole operation involving provinces during Sennacherib's reign would seem to involve the enlargement of the territory of Harhar, after the campaign of 702 B.C.E. (*ibid.*, 57). See already H. Tadmor, “World Dominion: The Expanding Horizon of the Assyrian Empire,” in *Landscapes: Territories, Frontiers and Horizons in the Ancient Near East (=Papers of the XLIV Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Venice 1997), Part I: Invited Lectures*, ed. L. Milano et al. (Padova, 1999), 61, according to whom “throughout his [=Sennacherib's] reign, the Assyrian borders remained more or less the same. In some places (such as Philistia) they even shrank slightly.”

³ The quote is from B. A. Levine, “Assyrian Ideology and Israelite Monotheism,” *Iraq* 67/1 (2005): 418. Levine's analysis here explicitly follows that of Tadmor (“World Dominion,” 61), although he omits quotation of the late Israeli scholar's description of Sennacherib's non-expansionistic military policy as “a dramatic departure from centuries-old norms.”

rebellious areas,⁴ could Sennacherib temporarily desist from yearly (or even more frequent) military campaigns, devoting himself to extensive building activities in his new capital city, Nineveh and in the outlying region;⁵ and only at this time, or shortly after, would he begin to underscore his conquests with a new, expanded, royal titulary which to some extent echoed the “world dominion”-status of Sargon.⁶

The present article will thus attempt to give an overview of the set of historical (ideological-political and military-strategic) circumstances—both nearer and more remote in time—which led Sennacherib “on the road to Judah,” and which may have caused him to take specific decisions after he arrived there. The collection of essays in which it is kindly housed is but the latest of numerous others on the same theme; there can thus be no doubt that the campaign of 701 B.C.E.—with its background and its specific outcomes—continues to represent fertile terrain for scholarly discussion, by Assyriologists, Biblicists, historians of Ancient Near Eastern religion and ideology, specialists on figurative culture, and archaeologists alike.⁷

THE PATH TO THE THRONE: DRAMA AND RESPONSE

The childhood and early years of Sennacherib are examined by Eckart Frahm elsewhere in this volume, and Peter Dubovský likewise touches on Sennacherib’s career as Crown Prince. To their observations, I will add four points, all of which aim to underscore in different ways the fact that no rift of any sort seems to have marked the relations between Sennacherib

⁴ This reading-out of the Judean campaign in the context of Sennacherib’s activities of “settling peace” in various sectors of the imperial domain during his first years of reign was propounded by B. Becking, “Chronology: A Skeleton without Flesh? Sennacherib’s Campaign as a Case-Study,” in Grabbe, *Cage*, 52.

⁵ For the most recent examinations of Sennacherib’s water works, carried out in the field in present-day Iraqi Kurdistan, cf. the paired reports by D. Morandi Bonacossi, “Il paesaggio archeologico nel centro dell’impero assiro. Insediamento e uso del territorio nella ‘Terra di Ninive’,” *Atti dell’Istituto veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, 171 (2012–2013): 181–224; and F. M. Fales and R. Del Fabbro, “Ritorno a Gerwan. Nuove indagini su un acquedotto imperiale assiro,” *ibid.*, 225–82, figs. 1–35, both with English abstracts.

⁶ Cf. M. Liverani, “Critique of Variants and the Titulary of Sennacherib,” in ARINH, 234–36.

⁷ The original essay was editorially emendated to harmonize with other contributions in this book. See the relevant cross-references, which unfortunately somewhat detract from the article’s former free-standing status. In any case, the editors are to be heartily thanked for their friendly cooperation.

and his father when the latter was alive. This makes it somewhat easier to envisage the foreign policy of Sennacherib (in particular, regarding Judah) as a partial continuation of Sargon's guidelines, as will be stated below.

First of all, Sennacherib's title as designated Crown Prince already appears, unequivocally, in a colophon of an astronomical tablet copied in Sargon's time, which reads: "Tablet of Aya-šuzubu-ilē'i, the scribe of the Chief Eunuch of Sennacherib, eldest royal son of Sargon, king of Assyria (*mār šarri rabû ša Šarru-kīn šar māt Aššur*)."⁸ His appointment is also clear from the salutation of the letter SAA I 133: 9–10: *šulmu ana Sīn-aḥḥē-eriba mār šarri rabê*, "all is well with Sennacherib, the Crown Prince," addressed to Sargon by an individual named Hunnî, who might have been a tutor of sorts to Sennacherib and to his younger brothers (who are also hinted at in this man's greeting).⁹ In the course of time, Sennacherib's dedication and efficiency to his position of major responsibility in affairs of state in lieu of his father is illustrated by such letters as SAA I 29–40 and V 281.

Secondly, to the remaining uncertainties concerning the identities of the royal women of Sennacherib's time, one might add the speculation that—if Atalia had survived Sargon (which does not, however, seem to have been the case)—she could theoretically have been eligible to become the wife of Sennacherib himself. In this hypothetical outcome, she would have shared the fate of an earlier queen buried alongside her at Nimrud, Mullissu-mukannišat-Ninua, who was the young wife of (the surely elderly) Aššurnasirpal II, but subsequently married his son, Šalmaneser III. On the other hand, it must be firmly stated that there is nothing to be deduced from the available evidence as to whether Atalia's presence and role at the Assyrian court had any bearing on Sennacherib's approach to the Judean question in 701 or not.

A third element to be kept in mind regards Sennacherib's various residences in the most important cities of the Assyrian "heartland" during his time as Crown Prince.¹⁰ The letters sent by him to Sargon¹¹ before and after 714 B.C.E. (and especially in the period 710–707) indicate that

⁸ See H. Hunger, *Babylonische und assyrische Kolophone* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1968), 138 no. 512.

⁹ See Frahm, Sennacherib, III3b.

¹⁰ On the roles of the various cities in the "Assyrian heartland" during the Neo-Assyrian period, cf. most recently K. Radner, "The Assur-Nineveh-Arbela Triangle: Central Assyria in the Neo-Assyrian Period," in *Between the Cultures: The Central Tigris Region from the 3rd to the 1st Millennium B.C.*, ed. P. A. Miglus and S. Mühl (Heidelberg, 2011), 321–29.

¹¹ Some letters, such as SAA I 39 (and p. 38), have been attributed to Sennacherib on the basis of handwriting and orthography: cf. K. Watanabe's review in *BiOr* 48 (1991): 88, casting serious doubts on the attribution.

Sennacherib was often at Kalhu, at that time still the royal capital, while his father was engaged in building works at Dur-Šarrukin or busy with Babylonian politics and administration, having seized the throne after Marduk-apal-iddina's 12-year-long and very popular rulership.¹² The following passage is very clear regarding the Crown Prince's location at Kalhu on the occasion of the arrival of a delegation from Ashdod:

The tribute of the Ashdodites (KUR.Sa-du-da-a-a) was brought to Kalhu. I have received it, and sealed it. I have placed the audience-gift (*na²-mur-tú*) inside the Palace. I am sending this letter to the king, my lord, on the 11th of Ululu (SAA I, 29: Rev. 22–26).¹³

On the other hand, it is also probable that a specific residence (the “Succession Palace”) was assigned to Sennacherib in Nineveh, but whether this building (later to be incorporated in Assurbanipal's Royal Palace) was the Crown Prince's actual administrative headquarters or not remains an open question.¹⁴ Of interest in this regard is a letter addressed to Sennacherib from an official in Nineveh, in which we may catch a glimpse of the Crown Prince's movements from one major city to the next:

To the Crown Prince my lord: your servant Nabû-ribo-ahhe. Good health to the Crown Prince, my lord! The surveillances are going very well. The Sidonians and their headmen neither went to Kalhu with the Crown Prince, my lord, nor are they staying put in the Review Palace of Nineveh. They loiter in the center of town, and each one (stays) in his own guest house. (SAA I 153)

It is also uncertain whether Sennacherib ever took up residence in his father's grandiose and painstakingly built capital city of Dur-Šarrukin (destined to be one of the greatest “white elephants” of Ancient Near

¹² As for the movement of correspondence in the opposite direction, no royal letters addressed by Sargon to Sennacherib are clearly attested as such; but many of the royal letters in SAA I, nos. 1–28 and SAA V, nos. 277–280 are fragmentary and thus lack the addressee's identity, and some of these could well have been directed to the Crown Prince. It may be however noted that a number of letters addressed to Sargon from various people operating in Babylonia, and surely relevant to the time when the king was present in the land, have come to us from Nineveh: thus M. Dietrich (SAA XVII, *Introduction*, xviii) has suggested that this correspondence was sent by Sargon himself to Kalhu for safekeeping, was thereupon moved to Dūr-Šarrukin upon the short-lived shift of the capital to this new city, and was finally transferred to Nineveh upon Sennacherib's ascent to the throne. If so, it is difficult not to imagine that Sennacherib had been in charge of the archival procedure from the very beginning, i.e., when he was Crown Prince.

¹³ Further letters in which Sennacherib acts for his father in receiving the gifts and tributes of incoming foreign delegations are SAA I 29 (tribute from the Mannans) and 33 (tribute from Kummuhu).

¹⁴ Cf. Frahm, *Sennacherib*, III6b, with a discussion of this hypothesis.

Eastern history), either before or immediately after its inauguration in pomp and circumstance in 706 B.C.E.¹⁵ But perhaps the point is that the Crown Prince seems to have been active in many places, administering works as diverse as the dispatch of craftsmen to Dūr-Šarrukin and the care of the royal orchards (SAA V 281), perhaps foreshadowing his later monumental engineering of artificial environments for plants and animals at Nineveh.

Finally, a point about the Urarṭo-Cimmerian war. As Dubovský also points out, the modern historian owes to the letters issued by Sennacherib's intelligence bureau crucial items of information in preparation for a direct strike against the powerful Urartian polity, such as actually took place beginning with the well-known eighth campaign of 714 B.C.E. A further point worth noting, however, is that Sennacherib's role in gathering all available information from a variety of sources, and summarizing the results in letter form for the benefit of his father, also concerned a campaign of the Urartian king Rusa against the mobile and warmongering people of the *Gimirrāyu*, identifiable with the Cimmerians named by Classical authors.¹⁶ The Cimmerian war had resulted in a complete rout for Urarṭu, with great bloodshed, with many of Rusa's magnates killed and/or taken prisoner, and the flight of the king himself from the battlefield. Thus, the Crown Prince's intelligence reports on the outcome of that conflict had a major influence on Sargon's decision to attack the somewhat weakened enemy polity of Urarṭu in 713.¹⁷

But let us now turn to the moment in 705, just a few months after having inaugurated Dur-Šarrukin, when the 65-year-old Sargon was killed on the battlefield in the course of a campaign against one Gurdî, king

¹⁵ E.g., Dietrich, SAA XVII, *Introduction*, xix, believes that Dūr-Šarrukin was in fact Sennacherib's residence at the moment of Sargon's death (cf. fn. 27, below).

¹⁶ The literature on the *Gimirrāyu* / Cimmerians in Neo-Assyrian letters is at this time relatively abundant: G. B. Lanfranchi, *I Cimmeri. Emergenza delle élites militari iraniche nel Vicino Oriente* (Padova, 1990); A. I. Ivantchik, *Les Cimmériens au Proche-Orient* (Fribourg-Göttingen, 1992); S. F. Adalı, *The Scourge of God. The Umman-manda and its Significance in the First Millennium B.C.* (Helsinki, 2011), 107–32; K. Strobel, "Kimmeriersturm' und 'Skythenmacht': eine historische Fiktion?" in *Leggo! Studies Presented to Prof. Frederick Mario Fales* ed. G. B. Lanfranchi, et al. (Wiesbaden, 2012), 793–842.

¹⁷ On the chronology of the Cimmerian revolt in relation to Sargon's military campaigns, see A. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad* (Göttingen, 1994), 468–69, who would place the episode after Sargon's eighth campaign of 714 B.C.E., since Rusa of Urarṭu was able on that occasion to summon an army and allies for the battle of Mount Wauš; whereas it shows a better fit with the scenario of the Assyrian king's next campaign of 713, the year in which some sources place the death of Rusa. See also A. Fuchs, PNA 3/l, 1056a.

of the Kulummu.¹⁸ The Kulummu were members of the Tabal coalition in the Anti-Taurus region, as we know from two chronicle texts, one of which might even suggest that a surprise enemy action on the Assyrian camp during the night was the cause of the ruler's death.¹⁹ The fact that the king's body was not subsequently brought back to Assyria,²⁰ and thus could not receive a proper royal funeral and burial in one of the royal crypts, seems to have delayed the ascent of Sennacherib to the throne for at least two weeks. The succession in itself was of course viewed as totally straightforward, but it seems likely that the unexpected event caused no small impression on Assyrian court circles, in view of its clearly inauspicious implications.

It has been thus suggested by E. Frahm that the recopying of the XII tablet of the Gilgamesh Epic (the "extraneous" tablet in the otherwise narratively linear canon, recounting the hero's visit to the Netherworld), which we know from the colophon to have been performed immediately after Sargon's death by the chief scribe Nabû-zuqup-kenu, was an attempt to investigate in depth the well-known passage in which Enkidu's shadow discusses the fate of the unburied dead, who were forced to move about restlessly and to live on the remainders of the food-offerings of others, and thus destined to be unremittingly mourned.²¹ Other clues suggesting a general sense of dire foreboding may be made out indirectly from the archaeological record. Several features imply an attempt to appease the deity behind the family tragedy: from the hasty abandonment of Sargon's capital city, thereupon reduced to a "ghost town" with little more than a military garrison until the end of the empire; the transferral of all palatial

¹⁸ For Gurdî, see PNA 1/II, 431a–b, with parallels for this name in Luwian (*Kura/iti, etc.). See also G. B. Lanfranchi, "The Ideological and Political Impact of the Assyrian Imperial Expansion on the Greek World in the 8th and 7th Centuries BC," in *The Heirs of Assyria*, ed. S. Aro and R. M. Whiting (Helsinki, 2000), 24 n. 68, who considers it "a good Anatolian name, cf. the Phrygian name Gordios." This comparison had already been made by W. Röllig, s.v. "Gurdî," in *RLA* III (1957–1971): 703b, with previous literature.

¹⁹ E. Frahm, "Nabû-zuqup-kenu, da Gilgameš-Epos und der Tod Sargons II.," *JCS* 51 (1991): 75, for the sources mentioned. Of particular interest is the passage in the Eponym Chronicle, B6, rev. 8–11, and specifically l. 10, where it is stated that "the king was killed, the encampment of the king of Assyria was plundered"; Frahm (*ibid.*, 76 n. 14) suggests that a surprise attack by the Tabalians could be hinted at here.

²⁰ The range of possibilities relevant to the fate of Sargon's body was illustrated by H. Tadmor: "either . . . it fell into the hands of the enemy or . . . it was lost on the battlefield; alternatively it may have been cremated in the absence of the means of embalmment" (H. Tadmor, B. Landsberger, and S. Parpola, "The Sin of Sargon and Sennacherib's Last Will," *SAAB* 3 [1989]: 3–51, and esp. 28).

²¹ Frahm, "Nabû-zuqup-kenu," 77–81.

apparatus and archival material to Nineveh; the sudden interruption of Sargon's architectural ameliorations in the cultic capital of Assur; and the reconstruction of a temple in the city of Tarbiṣu for Nergal, god of war, catastrophe, and the Netherworld.²²

But the dramatic atmosphere at the outset of Sennacherib's reign comes particularly to the fore in the literary-political composition commonly known as the "Sin of Sargon,"²³ although this text proves to require an attentive critical-historical consideration in regards to the exact role of Sennacherib himself during his earliest period of rule. The "Sin of Sargon" is a composition of great ideological complexity ("multi-layered, skillfully contrived, almost Machiavellian," in the words of its editor)²⁴ which dates from the reign of Esarhaddon (680–668 B.C.E.). Conceived by a specific and obviously pro-Babylonian sector of the Palace intellectuals, the text is a piece of propaganda favoring a policy of greater attentiveness to the harmonious balance of both the Babylonian and Assyrian gods. Whether its specific aim, however, was to extol Esarhaddon for his accomplishments in this regard or rather to spur him to further action is not totally clear.

In the narrative, the ghost of Sennacherib is made to speak, describing how a diffuse feeling that the will of the gods was adverse to the Assyrian ruling house had caused him to investigate by way of divination a possible "sin" of his father Sargon. This sin, in turn, could have caused the latter's ignominious death and turned him into an unquiet, roving, spirit; and extispicy had, in fact, confirmed that Sargon's preference for the gods of Assyria over those of Babylonia was the cause of his demise.²⁵ In a following (and fragmentary) passage, Sennacherib describes his fervent attempt to counter this inherited negativity, but this too ended in failure, because he too was misled by his diviners: thus his own one-sided attention to Assyrian cults had brought about his own infamous death at the hands of his sons. As the text implies, these two negative historical *exempla*²⁶ should have acted as guidance for Sennacherib's successor,

²² Cf. *ibid.*, 82–83, linking these developments in the archaeological and textual record of the time to the implications of Sargon's death.

²³ The text and translation are given in SAA 3 33; commentary and full discussion of the text is in Tadmor, Landsberger and Parpola, "Sin of Sargon."

²⁴ S. Parpola in *ibid.*, 51.

²⁵ It may be worth recalling that our knowledge of Assyrian extispicy procedures in the age of the Sargonids is based on a vast corpus of responses (assembled by I. Starr in SAA IV), but that this evidence is limited to the following reigns of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal.

²⁶ That the "impious" pro-Assyrian religious policies linking Sennacherib to his father Sargon were not a mere figment of the pamphleteer's imagination, or polemic vein, might be demonstrated by considering text K. 4732+ (published by A. George, "Sennacherib

so that he could finally place the religious-ideological cornerstone of the empire, the parallel cults of Aššur and Marduk, on a firm footing.

Accept what I have explained to you, and reconcile [the gods of Babylonia] with your gods! Aššur, the king of the gods, has victoriously marched [from sunrise to sunset]; the gods of Heaven and [Earth will prolong] your reign! (SAA III, 33: Rev. 26'–28').

Without falling prey to the obvious fascination that this ancient historical-ideological reflection on the destinies of the Assyrian ruling house exercises on the modern reader,²⁷ it may be asked to what extent this *ex post* evaluation of Sennacherib's psychological state concerning the fate of his father is a reliable testimonial concerning the early years of the king's reign. Considering that the negative focus of the "Sin of Sargon" composition seems to have been on Sennacherib's religious reforms in favor of the cult of the national god Aššur, which were effected in the course of his twenty-five year reign, the image of a heavily troubled mind conveyed by this text need not be considered a totally realistic one, or specifically relevant to Sennacherib's ascent to the throne. To be sure, on the other hand, the archaeological evidence mentioned above—coupled with the omission of

and the Tablet of Destinies," Iraq 48 [1986]: 144–46), which reads (l. 3' ff.), "When I had renewed(?) the statue of Aššur, [my lord . . .] and restored the cultic rites of E-šarra, I[. . .] my father as did Sargon, king of [Assyria], my father." In any case, these two *exempla* also implied parallels with the fates of previous kings, namesakes or dynastic founders: thus the roving spirit of Sargon recalls the fate of Sargon of Akkad, afflicted in some Chronicle texts with insomnia for his *hybris* in building a new city (although quite possibly a critique created in the time of Sargon II): see M. Van De Mierop, "Literature and Political Discourse in Ancient Mesopotamia: Sargon II of Assyria and Sargon of Agade," in *Munuscula Mesopotamica: Festschrift für Johannes Renger* ed. B. Böck et al. (Münster, 1999), 335–36. At the same time, the murder of Sennacherib by his sons implies a parallel with the demise of Tukulti-Ninurta II, who had also attempted to control Babylonia; see, e.g., J. A. Brinkman, "Sennacherib's Babylonian Problem: An Interpretation," *JCS* 25 (1973): 90.

²⁷ The possibility that a negative image of Sennacherib was actually transmitted to later times was raised by S. Parpola, "Assyrian Royal Inscriptions and Neo-Assyrian Letters," in ARINH, 120–21, who noticed that virtually no letters from the reign of this king survive, and thus posited that they were eliminated after his death as a consequence of a widespread *damnatio memoriae*. However, other possible reasons for this vast gap in the epistolary documentation have been offered: see, e.g., Frahm, *Einleitung*, 4–5: "Leider stehen Briefe . . . als Quellen für die Zeit zwischen 705 und 681 praktisch nicht zur Verfügung. Vielleicht wird man das Archiv, in dem die zweifellos auch unter Sanherib fortgesetzte Staatskorrespondenz aufbewahrt wurde, eines Tages finden, vielleicht wurde es aber auch durch Witterungseinflüsse vernichtet. Daß dieses Archiv, wie S. Parpola vermutet, nach Sanheribs Tod vorsätzlich zerstört wurde, halte ich für eher unwahrscheinlich." See also Dietrich, SAA XVII, *Introduction*, xix–xx, for the tentative identification of some letters addressed to Sennacherib from Babylonia.

Sargon's name in Sennacherib's titulary and self-descriptions²⁸—do seem to point to a certain sense of cosmically-determined unease lying behind Sennacherib's policies, especially in his earlier years.

On the other hand, as will be said below, some early policies of Sennacherib's, especially as regards international relations, may be read out as proceeding by and large in the footsteps of Sargon, or, at a minimum, as not deviating from the guidelines of territorial control and exploitation established by the latter. To that extent, we see a basic continuity with Sargon's political guidelines by Sennacherib, though he may have attempted to placate his personal unease about this as well as that of his scribal/divinatory entourage.

THE EARLY CAMPAIGNS: ON THE ROAD TO JUDAH

It seems well established that the sudden death of Sargon gave rise to attempts to break free from the Assyrian yoke in a number of subjected lands—whether on the basis of a perceived cultural-religious havoc affecting the Assyrian dynasty, or (more likely) for purely opportunistic reasons.²⁹ Thus, Sennacherib's early campaigns were by and large aimed at putting down these uprisings, and at restoring the *status quo* of Assyrian control, whether direct or indirect, in the relevant areas.

Only one immediate (704 B.C.E.) foray was presumably meant as an act of direct retaliation for Sargon's death, against the "Kulummeans." This action is attested in a fragmentary entry in a chronicle text, and is described as having been led by the "Magnates," and thus apparently without the active participation of Sennacherib himself.³⁰ It does not seem to

²⁸ See Frahm, *Sennacherib*, p. 1113b, for this point, which however, might not necessarily require consideration as an extraordinary phenomenon in 7th-century contexts.

²⁹ A possible testimonial to "the general relief felt at the demise of the great conqueror" all over the empire—and, in case, the sole of its kind to come down to us—has been read by many scholars in Isa. 14:4b–21, a poetic piece which was later adapted to Babylonia through initial and final additions (cf. N. Na'aman, "When and How Did Jerusalem Become a Great City? The Rise of Jerusalem as Judah's Premier City in the Eighth-Seventh Centuries B.C.E.," *BASOR* 347 [2007]: 28, with previous bibliography). To be sure, the following passage would fit Sargon's death perfectly: "(18) All the kings of nations were laid, every one, in honor / each in his tomb; (19) While you were left lying unburied / like loathsome carrion / like a trampled corpse / in the clothing of slain gashed by the sword / who sink to the very stones of the Pit."

³⁰ The reason for this absence could have been that Sennacherib was campaigning at the same time in Babylonia against Merodach-baladan (see A. Fuchs, *SAA XV, Introduction*, li–lii, n. 41).

have been terribly successful, insofar as it finds no mention in the king's official inscriptions.³¹ A further attempt by Sennacherib's generals against Sargon's alleged vanquisher, Gurdî, took place almost a decade later, in 695 B.C.E., if one accepts the idea that Kulummu and (Til-)Garimmu (the name of the kingdom attributed to Gurdî in the later source) referred to one and the same place.³² But even this time, there is no record that the culprit was apprehended and punished, although Til-Garimmu was "turned into hillocks and ruins" and its gods were abducted.³³

The remainder of Sennacherib's early warfaring moves were instead, as mentioned, directed at the suppression of uprisings in various sectors of the empire. In this light, Babylonia remained the greatest area of uncertainty for Assyrian rule, as it had been since the earliest Chaldean takeover of the Babylonian throne under Mukîn-zêri in Tiglath-pileser's time.³⁴ This remained the state of affairs all through Sargon's reign, especially in the fight against the prestigious chief of the Chaldean confederation of Bit-Yakin, Marduk-apal-iddina (the Merodach-baladan of the Old Testament).³⁵ The eventual success against him culminated in the Assyrian king's direct rulership of Babylon in 710–709 B.C.E.³⁶ All through the eighth century B.C.E., a number of internal factors caused Assyrian kings to seek specific solutions to the political rule of this region, whether by installing a vassal king of their choice or by taking the Babylonian crown themselves. These factors included, for instance, the complex social and political balance between the older and native Babylonian population inhabiting the main cities; the three strong Chaldean confederations; and

³¹ See Frahm, "Nabû-zuqup-kenu," 83–84, for the collated passage of the Eponym Chronicle in which this foray is mentioned; see also PNA 1/II, 413b.

³² As suggested by Frahm, "Nabû-zuqup-kenu," 75 n. 12; see also Lanfranchi, "Ideological and Political Impact," 23–24; and see most recently F.M. Fales, "Til-Garimmu," *RIA* XIII (2013), 690a–b.

³³ On this point, see S. W. Holloway, *Aššur is King! Aššur is King! Religion in the Exercise of Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Leiden, 2002), 112, 138.

³⁴ See, most recently, F. M. Fales, "Moving around Babylon: On the Aramean and Chaldean Presence in Southern Mesopotamia," in *Babylon. Wissenskultur in Orient und Okzident*, ed. E. Cancik-Kirschbaum et al. (Berlin, 2011), 91–112. The corpus of letters detailing Tiglath-pileser's struggle against Mukîn-zêri has now been fully republished by M. Luukko, *The Royal Correspondence of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II from Calah/Nimrud*, SAA 19 (Helsinki, 2012).

³⁵ PNA 2/II, 705–711 (H. D. Baker). The main study of this historical figure remains that of J. A. Brinkman, "Merodach-Baladan II," in *From the Workshop of the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary: Studies Presented to A. Leo Oppenheim, June 7, 1964*, ed. R. D. Biggs and J. A. Brinkman (Chicago, 1964), 6–53.

³⁶ A particularly interesting view of this period is yielded by the epistolary corpus: see A. Fuchs, SAA XV, *Introduction*, xiv–xxii, for an overview.

a number of Aramean tribes.³⁷ A further complicating factor was Assyria's reverent esteem of Babylonian historical-cultural exceptionality, which deterred it from applying its standard choices regarding foreign territories, i.e., incorporation into the empire as provinces or subordination as vassal/client states.

Upon his ascent to kingship, Sennacherib took up the direct rule of Babylonia following the example of his three predecessors, Tiglath-pileser III, Shalmaneser V and Sargon.³⁸ Two successive revolts in 703 B.C.E., however, brought to the throne a former governor of Babylon, Marduk-zākīr-šumi. Only a month later Marduk-apal-iddina returned from his self-imposed exile to Elam. During his previous tenure on the Babylonian throne (722–710 B.C.E.), the Chaldean chieftain had not been able to marshal a stable and coherent inner-Babylonian alliance around himself. Thus he had allowed Sargon's men to progressively draw cities and tribes to their side either through the show of arms or by diplomatic negotiations. This time, however, the allies of Merodach-baladan were not only more heterogeneous (including Elamites, Chaldeans, Arameans, and Arabs) but their deployment was more or less extended to a "southern" strategic axis instead of a mere pan-Babylonian front.³⁹

Thus, while Sennacherib chose to follow closely in his father's operational footsteps to put down Merodach-baladan's uprising, the outcome turned out quite differently. Sennacherib's campaign entailed longer and more wearying tactics of conquest, yet these would not, despite the effort, prove conclusive.⁴⁰ Departing from Aššur, Sennacherib first encountered a enemy contingent blocking his advance from the fortress of Cutha. He besieged the fortress and simultaneously sent out a vanguard unit to control Merodach-baladan—much as Sargon had done at Dur-Abiḥara in 710—but this time the Yakinite chief, trusting in his allied forces, came out of Babylon and defeated the Assyrians at Kish. Thus Sennacherib was

³⁷ Cf. most recently, F. M. Fales, "Arameans and Chaldeans: Environment and Society," in *The Babylonian World*, ed. G. Leick (New York, 2007), 288–98.

³⁸ The Assyrian-born rulers of Babylonia are singled out clearly in the chronographic text known as "Babylonian Kinglist A" (BKL A). On this text, cf. now F. M. Fales, "The Two Dynasties of Assyria," forthcoming in a celebratory volume to be published in the book series AOAT (Münster) in 2014.

³⁹ The southern axis was possibly the outcome of pre-existing commercial relationships which antagonized the "northern," Assyrian-dominated, routes of trade. On this point, which might have precise implications for Merodach-baladan's offer of alliance to Hezekiah (§5, below), see Fales, "Arameans and Chaldeans," 296.

⁴⁰ Fuchs, SAA XV, *Introduction*, xxii–xxiii, for a detailed comparison of the two kings' strategies in the same war theater.

forced to bring his main army to Kish. Here the Assyrians were engaged in a pitched battle by the rebel's allies, and possibly had some difficulty in gaining the day, though finally forcing Merodach-baladan to flee to Guzummanu, in the southern Mesopotamian swamps. Sennacherib then attacked Babylon, which yielded without a fight, and plundered Merodach-baladan's treasure in the palace. Pursuit of the fugitive leader was thereupon effected, but proved fruitless.

That the entire southern Mesopotamian region, with virtually no exception, rallied on this occasion behind Merodach-baladan (or at least was not inclined to side with the Assyrians as it had in the past) may be further demonstrated by the sequel. In the following months, Sennacherib was forced to confront and vanquish the territories of the four major Chaldean tribal confederations, one after the other, by taking on a vast number of strongholds (together with an even vaster aggregate of neighbouring sites, described as *ālāni šehrūti ša limētišunu*, "small towns in their environs"), along a north-south axis within the alluvial plain.

Finally, in the year 702 B.C.E.—i.e., in the "second campaign" of Sennacherib, as some sources specify—the king moved against the insubordinate communities of the Zagros range. First of all, the the Kassites and Iasubigalleans from the mountainous territory east of Namri, "who from of old had not been submissive to the kings, my fathers," were caught and settled in cities placed under the authority of the governor of Arrapha. Then the king moved on to Ellipi, lying between the Assyrian provinces of western Iran and the region of Elam: here king A/išpa-bara had been installed by Sargon after a war of succession, although his loyalty to Assyria was already considered questionable at the time.⁴¹ After Sargon's death, he quickly rebelled, but was forced to flee before the Assyrian army. Parts of his country were annexed and added to the Assyrian province of Harhar.⁴²

In sum, the campaigns preceding the expedition to the Levant seem to show (if only through the quick summaries given above) a number of traits that may be compared with the campaign of 701 B.C.E. These common features suggest that the latter is somewhat less unique than previously perceived.

⁴¹ On A/išpa-bara, also well-known from letters of the time of Sargon, see PNA I/1, 143a–b (A. Fuchs et al.). On his succession to the throne of Ellipi after the death of Daltâ, the king who had honored Sargon during the 714 campaign, see Fuchs, SAA XV, *Introduction*, xxix–xxi.

⁴² Cf. n. 2, above.

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE JUDEAN CAMPAIGN

On the other hand, so much has been written on the Judean campaign itself that only selected remarks under specific rubrics will be necessary here.⁴³ These include:

Vassalage and Rebellion

The status of Judah as a faithful vassal of Assyria prior to Sennacherib's time has been reviewed of late by Stephanie Dalley, who assembled a number of elements of visual evidence and especially textual quotes from what she called "everyday" Assyrian documents; not all of these are, however, equally cogent.⁴⁴ Perhaps the most interesting case is a passage from a letter sent by Marduk-rēmāni (a governor of Kalhu who was eponym in 728 B.C.E.), which shows that Judah with all the neighboring (i.e., Philistine and Trans-Jordanian) states, and even Egypt, were jointly delivering horses to the Assyrian capital as tribute during Sargon's reign: from this text, the status of Am/nqarruna (Ekron) as loyal vassal of Assyria may be also presumed:

I have received 45 horses for the country. The emissaries from the lands of Egypt (KUR.Mu-šur-a-a), Gaza (KUR.Ha-za-ta-a-a), Judah (KUR.Ia-ú-du-a-a), Moab (KUR.Ma-'a-ba-a-a), and of the "sons of Ammon" (KUR.Ba-an—Amma-na-a-a) entered Kalhu on the 12th, their tributes in hand. A (further) 24 horses of (the emissary) of Gaza (KUR.Ha-za-ta-a-a) were (also) available. (As for) the Edomites (KUR.Ú-du-mu-a-a), the Ashdodites (KUR.As-du-da-a-a), and Ekronites (KUR.An-qar-ru-na-a-a) . . . [rest lost]⁴⁵

⁴³ To my knowledge, the latest additions to the very long list of publications on the 701 campaign are the monograph by P. S. Evans, *The Invasion of Sennacherib in the Book of Kings: A Source-Critical and Rhetorical Study of 2 Kings 18–19* (Leiden, 2009), and the relevant chapter ("Die Westfeldzüge Sanheribs: Aufstände in den nördlichen und südlichen Gebieten") in A. M. Bagg, *Die Assyrer und das Westland: Studien zur historischen Geographie und Herrschaftspraxis in der Levante im 1. Jt. v.u. Z.* (Leuven, 2011), 244–52. More generally, cf. A.M. Bagg, "Palestine under Assyrian Rule. A New Look at the Assyrian Imperial Policy in the West," *JAOS* 133 (2013): 119–44.

⁴⁴ S. Dalley, "The Identity of the Princesses in Tomb II and a New Analysis of Events in 701 BC," in *New Light on Nimrud*, 173.

⁴⁵ NL 16 (H. W. F. Saggs, *The Nimrud Letters, 1952* [London, 2001], 219–21) = SAA I 110, rev. 4–13. In rev. 4, the expression ANŠE.KUR.RA.MEŠ ša [KU]R is usually translated "for the Palace," but the distinction between horses ša KUR, the ones which were to stay in the country (and participate, e.g., in the building activities in Dūr-Šarrukin), and horses ša KASKAL, those which were to be used for military campaigns, is clear in the so-called "Horse Lists" from Kalhu of this age (S. Dalley and J. N. Postgate, *Tablets from Fort Shalmaneser* [London, 1984], 204), so "for the country" seems a more likely interpretation here.

Moving now from this scenario to Sennacherib's official account of the 701 campaign,⁴⁶ it may be noticed that the kings encountered by the Assyrian ruler in the course of his foray into the Levant fall into three different political categories.⁴⁷ The first category includes the eight "kings of Amurru": Minihimmu of Samsimuruna, Tuba'lu of Sidon, Abdi-li'ti of Arvad, Uru-milki of Gubla (Byblos), Mitinti of Ashdod, Budu-ilu of Bit-Amman (Ammon), Kamusu-nadbi of Moab, and Malik-rammu of Edom.⁴⁸ By comparison with the tributaries listed above and through other parallels,⁴⁹ these kings may be considered vassals of Sargon who reaffirmed their loyalty to his successor, bringing heavy tribute to his feet.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ The *editio princeps* of the Oriental Institute Prism relating the campaign by D. D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib* (Chicago, 1924) is still at present the standard edition (the text is nowadays also available in an official edition online). On the value of Luckenbill's edition, see the critical remarks in Frahm, *Einleitung*, 31. A full transliteration of all the Assyrian official texts relevant to the 701 campaign, with an English translation—with little or no variation on Luckenbill's rendering—is given by W. Mayer as an appendix to his essay "Sennacherib's Campaign of 701 BCE: the Assyrian View," in Grabbe, *Cage*, 168–200 (esp. 186–200). A fully updated edition of the text is expected in A. K. Grayson and J. Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704–681 B.C.)*, Part II, RINAP 3/2 (Winona Lake, IN, forthcoming).

⁴⁷ For the benefit of non-Assyriological readers, the method adopted here for the interpretation of this and other passages in Sennacherib's official account is based on recent critical approaches concerning ideological and propagandistic intentions in the Assyrian royal inscriptions analyzed or quoted in F. M. Fales, "Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: Newer Horizons," *SAAB XIII* (1999–2001): 115–44 (esp. 119–20). In this light, I consider the study by A. Laato, "Assyrian Propaganda and the Falsification of History in the Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib," *VT 45* (1995): 198–226—at times quoted by Biblical scholars for guidance in the intricacies of Assyrian official accounts—to be based on a completely false premise at the very opening: "Recent studies dealing with the history of Israel and Judah generally regard the Assyrian royal inscriptions as reliable sources of historical information vis-à-vis events in Israel and Judah" (*ibid.*, 198). This assertion was not even true in Luckenbill's time (see previous footnote), let alone nowadays, and the author is thus obviously begging the question (*petitio principii*). Moreover, the bibliographical quotes adduced by Laato for this argument haphazardly, and uncritically, mix works by Biblicists and Assyriologists, many of which show more complex approaches to the annals of Sennacherib than the author's method implies. The rest of this lengthy contribution brings, in my opinion, absolutely no new methodological nor factual result to the discussion of the campaign of 701 B.C.E.—at least from the point of view of specialists on the ancient Near East.

⁴⁸ Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib*, 30, col. II ll. 50–57.

⁴⁹ Cf., e.g., p. 240, below, for Ashdod as tributary during Sargon's time. However, Sargon's annals indicate that it was made into the southernmost Assyrian province (together with Asdudimmu and Gath/Gimtu) in 711 (Radner, "Provinz. C. Assyrien," 58). Thus, the residual presence of a local king of Ashdod in Sennacherib's account, placed in the same position of a tributary vassal like the other rulers of the area, poses a problem, as was already noted by H. Tadmor, "Philistia under Assyrian Rule," *BA 29* (1966): 95. Tadmor, however, brought forth other possible instances of Assyrian governors co-existing with local rulers left in place (Que, Tabal).

⁵⁰ Except in the case of Tuba'lu of Sidon who, as related in a previous passage (Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib*, 30, col. II, ll. 47–49) had been set in place by Sennacherib in

The second category includes Šidqâ of Ashkelon who, being “unsubmissive,” was substituted by Sennacherib for Šarru-lu-dari, the son of the former king Rukibtu, who had been installed by Tiglath-pileser III; Šarru-lu-dari accepted tribute and vassalage.⁵¹ One may wonder here whether a problematical succession had originally brought Šidqâ as member of a collateral branch of Rukibtu’s family to the throne, similar to the case of Ellipi seen above (§4).⁵² The punishment for Šidqâ’s insubordination was correspondingly severe: he, with his entire family and relatives, together with the personal deities of his paternal household, were uprooted from Ashkelon and transferred to Assyria permanently, as the mention of the “seed (i.e., descendants) of his paternal household” would seem to imply.⁵³ Quite surely before Šidqâ’s surrender, and probably as a specific move to force this result,⁵⁴ Sennacherib had besieged and conquered four cities lying to the north of his capital “which had not bowed in submission at my feet quickly (enough).” On the other hand, it may be noted that there is no specific mention of any action against Ashkelon itself—in fact, as will be seen, Sennacherib’s itinerary did not actually follow the coastline.⁵⁵

The third category includes Padî of Amqarruna (Ekron) and his people. As may be seen, e.g., from the letter quoted above, Ekron was a faithful vassal of Sargon’s,⁵⁶ but the officials and subjects of the city decided to

place of the unsubmitive Luli, who had fled to Cyprus at the arrival of the Assyrian army. However, this reconstruction presents a number of problems, regarding sources, prosopography, and chronology: the reader is thus referred to PNA 2/II, 668a–669b (E. Frahm).

⁵¹ Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib*, 30–31, col. II, ll. 60–72. For Rukibtu, see PNA 3/I, 1053b–1054a (A. Fuchs).

⁵² This conclusion was already reached by W. R. Gallagher, *Sennacherib’s Campaign to Judah: New Studies*, (Leiden, 1999), 118, on the basis of a previous suggestion by H. Tadmor, “Philistia under Assyrian Rule,” 96–97.

⁵³ Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib*, 30, Col. II, ll. 62–64. However, during the reign of Esarhaddon, the Mitinti king of Ashkelon who was presented as a faithful vassal of Assyria may be identified with *mtt bn šdq’* occurring on a seal inscription (PNA 2/II, 758a), so it may be surmised that the “house” of Šidqâ had been later pardoned and reinstated in power.

⁵⁴ As would seem to be implied by the temporal expression *ina metiq girriya*, “in the course of my campaign” (Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib*, 30, col. II, l. 68ff.), although the account of these victories are given in the text after that of Šidqâ’s removal.

⁵⁵ See already Tadmor, “Philistia under Assyrian Rule,” 96–97, who suggested that “very possibly Ashkelon surrendered without a battle.” Much more radical is the judgment of E. A. Knauf, “701: Sennacherib at the Berezina,” in Grabbe, *Cage*, 142: “The loss of its northern possessions was enough for the Ashkelonites to depose their anti-Assyrian ruler, hand him over, and re-appoint his pro-Assyrian predecessor. The closest the Assyrian siege-machines ever came to Ashkelon was up to the walls of Beth Dagon, as Sennacherib clearly states.”

⁵⁶ For the status of Ekron as an Assyrian vassal, see also N. Na’aman, “Ekron under the Assyrian and Egyptian Empires,” *BASOR* 332 (2003): 83–84.

depose Pađi and thereupon hand him over to Hezekiah of Judah, who kept him in confinement “like an enemy” (*nakriš*).⁵⁷ In this particular circumstance, Sennacherib’s annals insist on the juridical-political-ideological implications of the gesture: whereas Pađi had solemnly sworn an *adē* and *mamitu* (“treaty and covenant”) of allegiance to the gods before Sargon, the usurpers were only capable of “banding together” (*katāru*) with the Egyptians against Sennacherib, with merely human moves, born out of nothing more than a simple fear for their lives. The actions of the enemies thus delineate an opposition between legitimacy and unlawfulness, moral righteousness and fear-induced misconduct, divinely-inspired goodness and chaotically-determined malevolence, all of which represent typical ideological and rhetorical expedients of Assyrian royal inscriptions.⁵⁸

The account of the rebellious Ekronites is thereupon interrupted (narratively, but not geographically)⁵⁹ by that of the pitched battle at Eltekeh against the Egyptians, a battle Sennacherib claims to have won hands down. This victory was claimed thanks to Sennacherib’s own personal, heroic, intervention on the battlefield, but nevertheless probably resulted in a stalemate, in the light of indirect evidence from the Egyptian sources.⁶⁰ Thereupon, having taken two towns belonging to Ekron by force,

⁵⁷ Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib*, 31, col. II, ll. 73–77. Another annalistic text, the Bull inscription Fl (ibid., 69, l. 22) specifies that Pađi had been cast in “iron fetters.”

⁵⁸ For *katāru* in Assyrian official texts, see M. Liverani, “*Kitru, katāru*,” *Mesopotamia* 17 (1982): 43–66. For the treaty and covenant terminology, see M. Liverani, “Terminologia e ideologia del patto nelle iscrizioni reali assire,” in *I trattati nel mondo antico. Forma, ideologia, funzione*, ed. M. Liverani et al. (Rome, 1990), 113–47. For the topical portrait of the enemy in these texts, see F. M. Fales, “The Enemy in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: The ‘Moral Judgment,’” in *Mesopotamien und seine Nachbarn* [=XXV Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, 3–7/VII/1978], ed. H. J. Nissen and J. Renger (Berlin, 1982), II: 425–35. The use of this terminology in the passage under discussion was aptly noted and discussed in Gallagher, *Sennacherib’s Campaign*, 120–21.

⁵⁹ Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib*, 31–32, Col. II, l. 82–Col. III, l. 5. As noticed by Knauf (“701: Sennacherib at the Berezina,” 143–44, with map), there is a straight NW-SE geographical sequence from the cities of Ashkelon like Yapu (Jaffa) to the territory of Ekron, the northern part of which is occupied by Eltekeh and Timnah. However, this author raises an issue of chronology (p. 144: “If there was a Cushite-Egyptian army in the field powerful enough to face the Assyrians in ranged battle, why then did Ashkelon capitulate already?”) and thus prefers to place the battle of Eltekeh, and the entire conclusion of the political situation at Ekron, after the surrender of Hezekiah at Jerusalem: ibid.: “Re-installing Pađi at Ekron (and settling the affairs of southern Syria for the next 20 years) must belong to the very end of the campaign, and the battle of Eltekeh with it.”

⁶⁰ See D. Kahn, “The Inscription of Sargon II at Tang-i Var and the Chronology of Dynasty 25,” *OrNS* 70 (2001): 2, ns. 10–11, for the overtly imperialistic titles claimed by the king of Kush, Shebitku, at the time of this battle. The young Taharqa, later to ascend the throne of Kush, also took part in the fray: D. Kahn, “Taharqa, King of Kush and the Assyrians,” *JSSA* 31 (2004): 109.

Sennacherib advanced upon the city (“I came near,” *aqrib*, is the expression employed), although, once again, no record of an outright attack upon it is given. In its stead, a three-fold solution to deal with the surrendering inhabitants is detailed: the governors and nobles who had “sinned,” i.e., had led the rebellion, met their death by impalement; another group of citizens (possibly high-ranking officials or military men) who had flanked them were deported to Assyria; and a final group of citizens, who were “blameless” (*ša aranšu la ibšû*) were pardoned and left in place.⁶¹ The final action regarding Ekron transports the reader to Jerusalem, where Padî was freed, reinstated to kingship, and allowed to submit as a legitimate vassal, with the consequent imposition of tribute.⁶²

In sum, leaving aside for the moment the case of Hezekiah of Judah, it may be noted that the status of the other kings of the Levant, in relation to their actions upon Sennacherib’s invasion and to the Assyrian reactions, left them all in a more or less equal state of submission as vassals and tributaries, with little or no difference to their previous condition under Sargon. This situation may be viewed in chart form as follows:⁶³

NAME / STATE	STATUS OF LAND UNDER SARGON	KING’S ACTIONS UPON ASSYRIAN INVASION	ASSYRIAN REACTIONS	STATUS AT END OF 701 CAMPAIGN
Minihimmu of Samsimuruna	tributary vassal	submission	/	unchanged
Abdi-li’ti of Arvad	tributary vassal	submission	/	unchanged
Uru-milki of Gubla	tributary vassal ⁶⁴	submission	/	unchanged
Mitinti of Ashdod	tributary vassal	submission	/	unchanged
Budu-ilu of Bit-Amman	tributary vassal	submission	/	unchanged
Kamusu-nadbi of Moab	newly imposed king; tributary	submission	/	unchanged
Malik-rammu of Edom	vassal			
Tuba’lu of Sidon				

⁶¹ Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib*, 32, Col. III, ll. 8–14.

⁶² *Ibid.*, ll. 14–17.

⁶³ The items between brackets refer to occurrences to be merely surmised from Sennacherib’s annals, and not explicitly recorded therein.

⁶⁴ Ashdod may, however, have been within an Assyrian province at the time; cf. n. 49, above.

(cont.)

NAME / STATE	STATUS OF LAND UNDER SARGON	KING'S ACTIONS UPON ASSYRIAN INVASION	ASSYRIAN REACTIONS	STATUS AT END OF 701 CAMPAIGN
Šidqâ of Ashkelon	tributary vassal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dynastic change →; political shift? <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • non-submission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • four cities attacked • king either deposed by his people or surrenders • king with gods and family deported • new king of old lineage installed. 	new king, new submission ↓ unchanged
Pađî of Ekron	tributary vassal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • king deposed by officials • king sent to Judah in captivity <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rebels call upon Egypt for aid • battle of Eltekeh (stalemate?) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • two cities attacked • no attack on capital city • measures on citizens: rebels put to death or deported, pardon for the rest • king freed from Judah • king reinstated in power 	king, new submission ↓ unchanged

The Shift of Political Climate in Judah

From the viewpoint of the political-ideological tenets espoused in Sennacherib's annals, it seems clear that Hezekiah of Judah was a prime candidate for punishment on more than one count. Not only had he relinquished his previous status as loyal vassal, but he actively supported the anti-Assyrian revolt in Ekron by holding Pađî as a captive in his capital city.⁶⁵ Finally, Hezekiah may have even borne (or shared) responsibility for a much vaster project of regional uprising against Sennacherib, possibly involving Egypt,⁶⁶ but also other allies, such as the much-discussed LÚ.*Urbi*⁶⁷ and

⁶⁵ It may be recalled that the Hebrew Bible makes explicit mention of an aggressive campaign of Hezekiah against the neighboring states that had not joined into his anti-Assyrian revolt: "He rebelled against the king of Assyria and would not serve him. He overran Philistia as far as Gaza and its border areas, from watchtower to fortified town" (2 Kgs. 18:7–8).

⁶⁶ This alliance, not directly mentioned as such in Sennacherib's annals (where the Egyptians are connected to the rebel Ekronites), is instead explicitly recalled in the accusation leveled at Hezekiah during the first speech of Rabshakeh (2 Kgs. 18:24).

⁶⁷ For the LÚ.*Urbi* as designation of a type or irregular troops—and thus in opposition to the following LÚ.*šābē-šu damqūti*, "his choice troops"—see N. Na'aman, "Habiru-like

the “choice troops” that he had brought into Jerusalem to help out, who were in the end deported to Assyria along with the tribute.⁶⁸

A related question may at this point be posed: when, exactly, and in what political framework did Hezekiah effect his shift of allegiances, turning into an anti-Assyrian ruler? No specific information on the matter comes to us from the cuneiform sources, but numerous authors have identified the turning-point in the episode of the embassy of Merodach-baladan to Hezekiah, related in 2 Kings 20:12–19, Isaiah 39:1–8, and 2 Chronicles 32:31. It is generally accepted that this embassy took actually place, and that—despite its sequential position in the Biblical text after the account of Sennacherib’s death—its probable date was actually prior to the invasion of 701, perhaps as early as 704 B.C.E.⁶⁹ The possibility that a military alliance of sorts was struck on this occasion cannot be concretely demonstrated. However, the LÚ.Urbi named above might constitute an opening in this sense. There are only two further occurrences of the LÚ.Urbi in all of the Assyrian royal inscriptions, but in both instances this particular ethnosocial group was connected with anti-Assyrian struggles in Babylonia: once during the campaign of Sennacherib against Merodach-baladan of 703, alongside Arameans and Chaldeans,⁷⁰ and the other time in the context of Assurbanipal’s clash with the Aramean tribe of Gambulu on

Bands in the Assyrian Empire and Bands in Israelite Historiography,” *JAOS* 120 (2000): 621–24 (against the opposite identification of the LÚ.Urbi with “Arabs,” for which see Frahm, *Einleitung*, 104–105—based on “*urbu* neben *‘arab* schon in der vorislamischen arabischen Literatur als Selbstbezeichnung bestimmter Gruppen von Arabern”—and M. Elat, “Arguments for the Identification of the LÚUrbi in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions,” in *Studies in Historical Geography & Biblical Historiography presented to Zecharia Kallai*, ed. G. Galil and M. Weinfeld [Leiden, 2000], 232–38). A third hypothesis, brought forth by Mayer, “Sennacherib’s Campaign,” 183–84, is that of an accidental metathesis of *b* and *r*, thus yielding an original noun **ubru*, “crony,” even “mercenary”; but this suggestion fails to take into account the occurrence of LÚ.Urbi in two further contexts within the Assyrian royal inscriptions (cf. fns. 70, 71, below), and thus may be considered untenable.

⁶⁸ Na’aman, “Habiru-like Bands,” 621, understands the passage in Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib*, 34, Col. III, l. 41, in accordance with the reading and interpretation given by Frahm, *Einleitung*, 104–105, against Luckenbill himself and CAD B, 176b. Specifically, the LÚ.Urbi did not “put a stop (to their service)” (*iršû baṭlāti*), i.e., abandoning the city, but were auxiliary troops of which Hezekiah “gained support” (*iršû tillāti*). See CAD T, 408a, for the endorsement of this corrected version.

⁶⁹ See, e.g., Brinkman, “Merodach-Baladan II,” 31–33; Gallagher, *Sennacherib’s Campaign*, 270–72, with previous bibliography; J. Blenkinsopp, “Hezekiah and the Babylonian Delegation: A Critical Reading of Isa. 39:1–8,” in *Essays on Ancient Israel in Its Near Eastern Context: A Tribute to Nadav Na’aman*, ed. Y. Amit et al. (Winona Lake, IN, 2006), 115–17.

⁷⁰ Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib*, 54, l. 52.

the lower Tigris.⁷¹ Thus the possibility that these fighting units had been sent all the way to Jerusalem from the southern Mesopotamian alluvium should not be discarded outright.

Finally, a point of interest in this connection is that of Hezekiah's grave illness and recovery (2 Kings 20:1–11), which is often viewed as a mere narrative opening to justify the Chaldean chief's friendly embassy. One may wonder, on the other hand, if the account of a physical ailment was not perchance a metaphoric rendering for a serious political perturbation which had struck Hezekiah after Sargon's demise. This entailed a dilemma between Hezekiah's temptation to defect to the camp of the "southern alliance" headed by Merodach-baladan, and a conflicting fear for his personal fate and for his kingdom in case of an Assyrian reprisal. Certainly, the response given (through Isaiah) by YHWH to the anxious query of the ruler, "I will add fifteen years to your life. I will save you and this city from the hands of the king of Assyria" (2 Kings 20:6), has an utterly "political" ring to it, similar to the tone of later corroborative prophecies delivered by the goddess Ishtar of Arbail to Esarhaddon.⁷² However this may be, the deity's words of support and solace—together with the application of a simple fig poultice—seem to have worked immediate wonders on Hezekiah, who decided in the end to press his luck against the new suzerain of Assyria, presumably with the aid of the (as-yet undefeated) Merodach-baladan. Thus, perhaps by way of providing assurance or surety, he allowed the Chaldean ambassadors to admire his rich treasury (2 Kings 20: 13).

"Like a bird in a cage"

The problem of the siege of Jerusalem—of its mechanisms, duration, and outcome—has long been a *crux interpretum*, especially when viewed through the obliquely refracting lens of the Assyrian and Biblical sources in a comparative light. In recent years, however, the notion that no actual siege of the capital city of Judah ever took place in 701 B.C.E. has gained ground, especially among Assyriologists.⁷³ Since this issue may be construed

⁷¹ R. Borger, *Beiträge zum Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals* (Wiesbaden, 1996), Prism A, Col. III l. 65 (p. 39), and Prism A, Col. III l. 65 (p. 228).

⁷² See SAA IX, *passim*.

⁷³ On this point, it may be useful to check the opinions expressed in panels which brought Bibliacists and Assyriologists together, such as Grabbe, *Cage*. See there, e.g., Knauf, "701: Sennacherib at the Berezina," 145 ("There never was a siege of Jerusalem—all Sennacherib's verbiage implies no more than that he had picketed the, or some, gates of

as a benchmark of some relevance for the overall evaluation of Sennacherib's military strength, strategic outlook, and political planning in the course of the 701 campaign, it deserves a few words of comment, including updated references to the relevant literature.

As seen above in the cases of Ashkelon and Ekron, cities of major size and political function in the Levantine area were not always taken on directly by Sennacherib, but were sometimes merely threatened with attack so as to obtain the required submissive response on the part of the local population and its leaders. On the other hand, both the Assyrian annals and the Biblical text specify that Sennacherib's forces were not above storming Judean fortified cities of smaller size and ranking, either—just as they had done in the vicinity of Ashkelon and Ekron—and the palace reliefs from Nineveh clearly indicate that even a large site such as Lakiš could be the subject of a massive assault “by means of building siege ramps, drawing battering-rams up close, hand-to-hand combat of heavy infantry (*zūk šēpē*), mines, breaches and assault ladders.”⁷⁴ In sum, in the course of its forays throughout the Levantine countryside, no particular impediment seems to have characterized Sennacherib's war machine from prosecuting rapid, fierce onslaughts against any number of fortified emplacements. However, the large capital cities were consistently left standing and untouched.

Why was this so? In a recent study, A. Fuchs has suggested that the siege-techniques of the Neo-Assyrian empire were much less advanced than is commonly believed; nothing less than two or three years of unceasing effort was necessary to bring down a large fortress or city. Especially the strongly-fortified centers of the small kingdoms in the Levant proved

Jerusalem with one or more cavalry troops, one of which might have dug itself in”); and Mayer, “Sennacherib's Campaign,” 181 (“Jerusalem was not besieged in 701. There are no wall reliefs such as those portraying the fall of Lachish that testify to a siege and no mention of one in Assyrian reports”). Totally different and somewhat surprising, on the other hand, is the approach of an Assyriologist, A. M. Bagg (*Die Assyrer und das Westland*, 248), who supports with no reservations the idea of an actual siege: “Wie weit die Belagerung fortgeschritten war, ist nicht bekannt. Doch wahrscheinlich wurde sie vor dem Ansturm beendet, da sich Hiskia ergab. Hätte Sanherib die Stadt gegen seine Pläne nicht erobern können und wäre er frühzeitig zurückgekehrt, hätte Hiskia keinen Tribut zahlen müssen.” This view is also noted on the side of Biblical studies, e.g. by Evans, *Invasion of Sennacherib*, 18, “most interpreters still understand the Assyrian annals and the biblical accounts as referring to a siege of Jerusalem.”

⁷⁴ Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib*, 32–33, Col. III, ll. 21–23. For the *zūk šēpē* troops, see most recently F. M. Fales, “The Assyrian Words for ‘(Foot)soldier,’” in *Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honour of Bustenay Oded*, ed. G. Galil et al. (Leiden, 2009), 71–94.

to be virtually immune to Assyrian conquest. Thus other solutions—of a political nature—had to be devised on many an occasion, as the wording of the official inscriptions may show, albeit somewhat cryptically.⁷⁵ Another recent study of even larger scope has also reiterated the well-known point that ancient siege warfare could, in specific circumstances and within specific timeframes, take an even greater toll on the assailants than on the besieged—especially if the attacking army was campaigning far away from its logistical bases and sources of supply.⁷⁶

And yet, it may be objected, a specific action in the general sphere of siege warfare was, in point of fact, undertaken by Sennacherib, who states in his annals:

Himself (=Hezekiah) I shut up inside Jerusalem, his royal city, like a bird in a cage. I constructed forts (*bīrāti*) against him. Anyone going out of the city-gate I turned back to his own misery.⁷⁷

The clause *kīma iššur quppi... esēru*, “to confine/shut up like a bird in a cage (*lit.*, caged bird)” was employed already in the annals of Tiglath-pileser III, with reference to the Assyrian attempt to conquer Damascus.⁷⁸ As has been noticed in a recent study on this text by D. Nadali,

The Assyrian text does not explicitly refer to the conquest of Damascus: it is stated that Tiglath-pileser forced Rezin to remain inside his city for 45 days; in the meantime, the Assyrian army systematically destroyed the rich orchards around the city—the famous oasis of the Gutah surrounding the Syrian city.⁷⁹

The analysis of this wording in Tiglath-pileser’s annals thus bears the following result for Nadali:

It seems that the simile of the king enclosed in his city like a bird in a cage stands for a kind of strategy used by the Assyrians to succeed—although it is not explicitly stated. At the same time, the simile can be seen as an indirect declaration that the city was not captured.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ A. Fuchs, “Über den Wert von Befestigungsanlagen,” *ZA* 98 (2008): 45–98.

⁷⁶ I. Eph’al, *The City Besieged: Siege and Its Manifestations in the Ancient Near East* (Leiden 2009), 1–2 and *passim*.

⁷⁷ Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib*, 33, Col. III, ll. 27–30.

⁷⁸ H. Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III* (Jerusalem, 1994), 78–79, Ann. 23, l. 11’; cf. Eph’al, *City Besieged*, 37 n. 9.

⁷⁹ D. Nadali, “Sieges and Similes of Sieges in the Royal Annals: the Conquest of Damascus by Tiglath-pileser III,” *KASKAL* 6 (2009): 137–49, esp. 139.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 140.

Thus, in practice, *kīma iššur quppi . . . esēru* would seem to have been used in Assyrian official inscriptions with a specific, deliberate technical meaning: the setting up of a blockade rather than an attacking siege of an enemy city. A blockade would entail a surrounding fortified “ring” of a decidedly wider circumference than in the case of a siege, but sufficiently well-guarded as to cut the city entirely off from its sources of food, water, and war materiel.⁸¹

The blockade was thus the means used by Sennacherib to isolate Hezekiah within Jerusalem: an encirclement of the urban site by a line of *birāti*, “forts, fortified structures” which forestalled any attempted break-out through the perimeter, even though it was theoretically possible for the locals to come out of the *abullu* (“city-gate”), e.g., for parleys with the Assyrian commanding officers such as the ones recorded in the Biblical accounts.⁸² Simultaneously, contingents of the Assyrian army were going on a rampage throughout the Judean countryside, attacking and storming the “46 strong, walled cities” and “innumerable” outlying villages,⁸³ prob-

⁸¹ Eph'al, *City Besieged*, 35.

⁸² For Assyrian definitions of such parleys and their attestations, see most recently F. M. Fales, “‘To Speak Kindly to him/them’ as Item of Assyrian Political Discourse,” in *Of God(s), Trees, Kings, and Scholars. Neo-Assyrian and Related Studies in Honour of Simo Parpola*, ed. M. Luukko et al. (Helsinki, 2009), 27–40.

⁸³ For a totally theoretical calculation of the number of these settlements of limited dimensions—lying somewhere between small town, village, hamlet and extended farmstead—it may be useful to compare the account of Sennacherib's first campaign against Merodach-baladan (see p. 234, above). This account presents the longest topographical list of all Assyrian royal inscriptions, covering four districts in the southern Mesopotamian plains, for a total of “88 strong walled cities of Chaldea, with 820 small towns of their environs,” i.e., with a proportion of cities and villages in the general range of 1:9. Were this proportion to be transferred “as is” to the Judean area, we would be dealing with no less than 400 villages or hamlets encompassed by the Assyrian term “countless” (*ša nibu la išû*). Yet even proceeding with caution in view of the much more fragmented rural landscape of Judah, it seems difficult to reduce their number to less than 300 vis-à-vis the 46 “strong, walled cities,” i.e., in a rough proportion of 1:6.5. In this connection, it may be recalled that in the by-now “classic” study of archaeologically-based demography by M. Broshi and I. Finkelstein, “The Population of Palestine in Iron Age II,” *BASOR* 287 (1992): 47–60, five categories of ancient sites were established: A = very small sites, 0.1–0.3 ha, mean 0.2 ha; B = small sites, 0.4–1.0 ha, mean 0.7 ha; C = medium sites, 1.1–4.9 ha, mean 3 ha; D = large sites, 5–9.9 ha, mean 7 ha; E = very large sites, 10 ha or more. In the various environments of the Judean region, some 250 sites were singled out, with at least 100 in category A, 65 in category B, and 66 in category C (pp. 51–52). This would leave site-types D and E in a rough 1:12 proportion vis-à-vis the remainder, allowing the ensuing suspicion that not all the 46 “strong, walled cities” were perhaps as large and powerful as they are described in Sennacherib's annals—i.e., that some of them could have been merely medium-size sites of category C, of 3 ha in mean size. The same suspicion, by the way, may arise in the case of the above-mentioned Chaldean settlements, since out of 88 “strong, walled cities” only a mere 13 toponyms bear the formative element Dür-, “fortress (of So-and-so).”

ably moving out from a single tactical operational center established by Sennacherib at Lakiš (where the Assyrian palace reliefs show the king in his encampment). Thus, after a certain time, unspecified in the texts but perhaps compatible with the “45 days” recorded for Tiglath-pileser III’s blockade against Rezin of Damascus, Hezekiah was forced to give in, because there was no way out, physically or politically, from the quandary he himself had created.

CONCLUSIONS

It is a common feature of studies on the 701 B.C.E. campaign to end with the question: for what reason did Sennacherib not conquer Jerusalem outright? In the eyes of many, the return of Sennacherib to Nineveh after having successfully blockaded (or, as is thought, besieged) the capital city of Judah represents an unexpected ending, “for it was not Assyrian policy to leave the capital of an insurrectionist kingdom standing on its tell.”⁸⁴ Thus the existence of specific “bargaining chips,” such as the release of Pađi and/or the possible economic expansion of Ekron as a long-term benefit of the *pax assyriaca*, have been invoked as the motives for Sennacherib’s strategy.⁸⁵ But this review of Sennacherib’s overall foreign policy during the early years of his reign contradicts that approach to the issue.

There was no bargaining chip in this “deal” because there was no need for one. Hezekiah’s voluntary surrender to the Assyrian king⁸⁶ entailed the complete removal of his rich treasury (gold, silver, precious stones, ivory and wooden furniture, “heavy treasure of all kinds”) and of his harem to Assyria; significant portions of his territory were cut out and reassigned

⁸⁴ Levine, “Assyrian Ideology,” 417. See also, e.g., L. L. Grabbe, “Of Mice and Dead Men: Herodotus 2.141 and Sennacherib’s Campaign in 701 BCE,” in Grabbe, *Cage*, 119–40 (esp. 138–39); “What is clear is that Sennacherib returned to Nineveh without defeating Hezekiah, and his listing of the destruction wrought on Judah and the resultant tribute by Hezekiah only confirms the peculiarity in Hezekiah’s being allowed to remain on the throne and the strange silence about the taking of Jerusalem.”

⁸⁵ For the notion and practice of *pax assyriaca*, see F. M. Fales, “On *Pax Assyriaca* in the Eighth–Seventh Centuries BCE and Its Implications,” in *Isaiah’s Vision of Peace in Biblical and Modern International Relations*, ed. R. Cohen and R. Westbrook (New York, 2008), 17–35.

⁸⁶ In Sennacherib’s words, “the terrifying splendor of my majesty overcame him”: Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib*, 33, Col. III, ll. 37–38. In the Biblical account, Hezekiah is made to send a message to Sennacherib, with these words of outright capitulation: “I have done wrong; withdraw from me; and I shall bear whatever you impose on me” (2 Kgs. 18:14).

to Gaza, Ekron, and Ashdod; his countryside was left in a shambles and a large part of its population was deported. Hezekiah's sole remaining assets were his life, his throne, and his capital city—more than enough for him, to be sure, but probably not sufficiently enticing to anyone else (e.g., the Egyptians) to include Judah within any anti-Assyrian alliance in the near future. In a nutshell, Hezekiah lost his wager to obtain economic freedom and regionally-based prominence—but at least the oracle delivered by his God proved truthful.

From Sennacherib's point of view, on the other hand, the expedition was a complete success: in a short span of time, he had curbed the secessionist tendencies of all the kings of the Levantine area, forced them to renew their solemn pacts of allegiance and vassalage to Assyria, and had gained an immense amount of booty, tribute, men and animals for his palace and his land. More importantly, he had restored with absolute precision the political and economic order that had been established or maintained by his father Sargon in this corner of the Near East. In sum, the campaign of 701 B.C.E. ("Operation Judah" would be its name nowadays) was conducted by Sennacherib in a largely risk-free mode of military intervention and in a conservative vein of foreign policy.

It was also an expedition carried out fully in the shadow of Sargon. Whether this "shadow" was for Sennacherib the benign inspiration of a sense of filial respect and duty, or whether it had instead become the haunting presence of an unburied corpse, to be deflected or overcome in its inauspicious implications, cannot be said. This is partly because Sargon's prior achievements were in no way recalled in his son's texts, perhaps as a form of taboo. In any case, during his return march to Nineveh, the Assyrian ruler may well have felt a certain sense of satisfaction: he had once again "held the fort" for the benefit of his land and ruling house, but this time "on the field" and from a position of absolute power. Mission accomplished—for the moment, at least.

SENNACHERIB'S INVASION OF THE LEVANT THROUGH THE EYES OF ASSYRIAN INTELLIGENCE SERVICES*

Peter Dubovský

I. INTRODUCTION

A study of Assyrian intelligence techniques, networks and their development over the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E. provides a new perspective on Sennacherib's reign and the events of 701 B.C.E. We might ask how a structural analysis on this topic casts new light on Sennacherib; the contributions are two. First, through it, we can reconstruct the king's career as an intelligence officer. This was no sinecure or brief stop on the *cursus honorum* for Assyrian crown princes: Sennacherib was the first heir-apparent to have substantial training in this area of statecraft, and the experience informed much of his reign. Sennacherib's tenure on the throne was characterized as much by geo-political strategic concerns as by military campaigning in the mould of the conquest kings who came before him. Nor was this a purely personal or characterological aspect of Sennacherib the man; the shift was part of the zeitgeist of the final phase of high empire, in which Assyria was increasingly concerned with the *control* of territory, for which information was crucial, rather than with its acquisition by force. Second, the precepts and procedures perfected by the end of the eighth century B.C.E. tell us much about the Levantine campaign itself, in particular what Sennacherib had to know before he set out for the campaign, the sources through which he might have obtained needed information, and how he exploited it in the field.¹ To properly appreciate these points, we must begin with a tour through the subject of Neo-Assyrian intelligence—its terminologies (II), operations (III), and historical development (IV)—before returning to focus on Sennacherib's career and the fateful campaign on 701 B.C.E. (V).

* I would like to express my deep gratitude to my colleague I. Hrůša who carefully read through my manuscript and made many valuable comments.

¹ Readers may also wish to consult my earlier work on this subject, *Hezekiah and the Assyrian Spies: Reconstruction of the Neo-Assyrian Intelligence Services and its Significance for 2 Kings 18–19* (Rome, 2006); the analysis here builds on that book in new and different ways.

Intelligence services are often associated with undercover infiltrators and murky ways of obtaining top-secret information. Seeing the variety of topics contained in the Assyrian letters, one could rightly ask how an internal communication or a purely administrative exchange constitutes an intelligence report. Yet were we to thumb through the files of modern intelligence agencies, we would be impressed by the amount of unsensational data. Intelligence services have always been interested in a vast spectrum of information:

Just about any fact can be of great importance, or no importance, depending on the use to which the recipient puts it. What is useless to one customer will be precious to another who has insight and the will to use it.²

From this perspective, Neo-Assyrian documents contain what a modern intelligence officer would call static facts (e.g., information on geography, climate, cultural and religious institutions), dynamic facts (e.g., tactical situations, current allegiances, plotting of revolts, religious feasts), and technical facts (e.g., the equipment of garrisons, location of bridges). Thus the question is not what kind of information was gathered, but how important this information was for a given ruling body. From the strategic and political importance of these letters, we can conclude that many of them would qualify as intelligence reports.

However, if intelligence, however important it might have been, was gathered only occasionally, we cannot speak about intelligence services but rather about occasional intelligence activities. A. Leo Oppenheim has convincingly argued the contrary.³ His study was based on the brilliant intuition of René Follet who, in analyzing Neo-Assyrian letters, concluded that the Assyrians established a *deuxième bureau* headed by the crown prince.⁴ Follet's understanding of intelligence was strongly marked by the western notion of intelligence agencies operating in democratic societies.⁵ Any comparison with modern intelligence agencies naturally is problematic, since the Neo-Assyrian Empire was not a modern, integrated socio-political nation-state. Consequently, the nature of modern agencies and the ancient intelligence *services* display some substantial differences.

² A. Codevilla, *Informing Statecraft: Intelligence for a New Century* (New York, 1992), 4.

³ A. L. Oppenheim, "The Eyes of the Lord," *JAOS* 88 (1968): 173–78.

⁴ R. Follet, "Deuxième Bureau' et information diplomatique dans l'Assyrie des Sargonides," *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 32 (1957): 61–81.

⁵ For the specific problems of intelligence operating in democratic systems see E. Denécé, *Renseignement, médias et démocratie* (Paris, 2009); I. Ben-Israel, *Philosophie du renseignement: Logique et morale de l'espionnage* (Paris, 2004).

Nevertheless, it is possible to point out some similarities between them as well, since some aspects have not changed with time. Being fully aware of these limits, I suggest that the Assyrians did not set up an independent intelligence agency as assumed by Follet, but exploited structures primarily established for other purposes. At the same time, Assyrian intelligence services were more similar to those of totalitarian regimes (e.g., the Russian NKVD and KGB, Czechoslovakian ŠtB, or Polish SB) than to those of the democratic systems (e.g., CIA or MI6)⁶ in their capacity to coerce their personnel to report on whatever the government deems important. Totalitarian systems can more easily make use of non-democratic, terror-based means; consequently, the whole state system could become one large information network, as was the case of Czechoslovakia between 1948 and 1968.⁷ Analogically, I propose that the Assyrians made the most of their administrative, military, and religious structures to secondarily exploit them for intelligence-gathering.

II. NEO-ASSYRIAN INTELLIGENCE TERMINOLOGY

According to the extant letters, the Assyrians used five terms for the spies operating on the ground: *dajjālu* (“patroller”), *bātiqū* (“denouncer”), *lišānu* (“tongue”), *ēnāti ša šarri* (“the eyes of the king”), and *ša uznī* (“ear-man”).⁸ The last two terms will be treated together, below.

A. “Patrollers”

The noun *dajjālu* is a nominal form *parrās*⁹ derived from the verb *dālu* (Assyrian *duālu*) meaning “to run about, to patrol” (SAA XV, 231). The verb

⁶ Е. Альбац, *Мина замедленного действия: Политический портрет КГБ* (Moskva: Russlit, 1992); J. Frolík, *Špión vyprovídá* (Köln: Index, 1979); H. Piecuch, *Brudne gry: Ostatnie akcje służb specjalnych* (Warszawa: Agencja Wydawnicza CB, 1998).

⁷ The Czechoslovakian ŠtB, for instance, penetrated almost the entire domestic scene, with interior ministry secretaries observing political parties, army, police, customs, prisons, archives, press and media, education, culture, art and sport; see J. Pešek and R. Letz, *Štruktúry moci na Slovensku: 1948:1989* (Prešov: Vydavateľstvo Michala Vaška, 2004), 119–254; K. Kaplan, *Nebezpečná bezpečnosť: Státní Bezpečnosť 1948–1956* (Brno: Doplněk, 1999), 12–17.

⁸ Every intelligence agency has developed its own jargon, for example “naked” (a spy operating without cover or backup), or “mole” (a penetration agent); for these reasons, I use the terms for Assyrian agents as documented in the extant letters. See <http://www.intelligencesearch.com/spycodes-2.html> (accessed March 12th, 2011).

⁹ GAG § 55o; F. R. Kraus, “Ein Sittenkanon in Omenform,” *ZA* 36 (1936): 303.

denotes moving around with or without any purpose,¹⁰ such as the wandering of a dog.¹¹ If applied to the military, the verb means the patrolling of troops along an exposed frontier.¹² The noun *dajjālu* is often translated “spy,” “scout” or “inspector.”¹³ Numerous attestations of the term in Neo-Assyrian letters and inscriptions¹⁴ provide sufficient material for the reconstruction of the nature of these “patrollers.” They were recruited as a part of the royal army, as when Esarhaddon drafted them together with other military groups in preparing his invasion of Egypt (*RINAP* 4 33 III 18). However, the “patrollers” are not listed in other lists of the Assyrian army,¹⁵ and are more often mentioned as a part of units controlling frontiers or stationed in outposts. The “patrollers” were under the direct command of Assyrian officials,¹⁶ and their mission was denoted by the verbs *šapāru* “to send out,” in order *amāru* “to see” (SAA V 3:7–8) or *ša’ālu* “to ask” (SAA V 85:5), and then *alāku* “to come (back)” and *qabū* “to tell (to me).”¹⁷ Thus the “patrollers” were Assyrians located in exposed territories and buffer zones and dispatched to enemy territory to collect strategic information¹⁸ or to verify rumors.¹⁹ They could also have been employed for other tasks (SAA V 105:16–23). There is no sign that any special training was required to become a “patroller.”

B. “Denouncers”

This term is derived from the verb *batāqu*.²⁰ Whereas in Neo-Babylonian texts the word *bātiqu* was often used in connection with *mukinnu*,

¹⁰ *AHw* 154–55.

¹¹ SAA XV 288; XVI 34; and XIII 190.

¹² SAA XIII 20; XV 156.

¹³ *CAD* D 27–28.

¹⁴ *RINAP* 4 33 III 18; SAA I 30 r.6; 82 r.6; 239:9.13; V 3:7; II r.4'; 12 r.1'–10'; 13:6'; 24:13; 31 r.7'; 35:23; 54 r.15; 55:4–8; 61:4–8; 83:4; 85:3; 87 r.4; 105:17; 246:6; 264:4'; VI 164 r.7; X 279 r.3.6; XIV 39 r.13; 53 r.2'; 104 r.13; 444 r.3'; XVI 97 r.7; XVIII 94:12.

¹⁵ T. Deszö, “A Reconstruction of the Army of Sargon II (721–705 BC) Based on the Nimrud Horse Lists,” *SAAB* 15 (2006): 124–25; J. N. Postgate, “The Assyrian Army in Zamua,” *Iraq* 62 (2000): 93.

¹⁶ SAA I 30; V 3, 24, 55, 83, 85, 87, 246.

¹⁷ SAA V 3:9; 83:6; 87 r.6–7. In at least one case, “patrollers” had to be sent out a second time to clarify details (SAA V 87:r.3–9).

¹⁸ F. Malbran-Labat, *L'armée et l'organisation militaire de l'Assyrie: d'après les lettres des Sargonides trouvées à Ninive* (Paris, 1982), 44.

¹⁹ SAA V 246:4–7. Though partially broken the preserved parts of the following letters describe the reports of the spies dispatched to foreign territory (SAA V 13:6'; 35:23; 54 r.13; 83:4–6).

²⁰ The verb was also used in the meaning of “to take off, to travel” in sense of “being cut off from someone, taken away from someone”; L. Oppenheim, “Lexikalische Unter-

“witness,” and referred to a person who denounced lawbreakers,²¹ no such use of the word is attested in Neo-Assyrian letters. In contrast, while in the Neo-Assyrian letters the verb *batāqu* is used in its basic meaning “to cut off, to hew,” *batiqtu* (“denunciation”) and *bātiqū* (“denouncer, informer”) were used in intelligence contexts.²² The noun *batiqtu* corresponded to raw intelligence gathered in the field, such as strategically important information about the movements of enemies and their troops, the results of enemy campaigns, or preparation for an invasion.²³ Such information was of two types: verified and not yet verified, in the latter case usually the first piece of information on a subject important enough to have been reported to the king.²⁴

Letter SAA XVI 124:r.3'–6' reveals some aspects of denunciation. Nani, an official active in Calah during Esarhaddon's reign,²⁵ received a visit from 1 LÚ.SIPA, “one shepherd” described as [*b*]a-te-qu-tú ú-tu-pi-[eš], “he has been acting as an [in]former.” By analyzing all occurrences of these terms in the SAA it is possible to conclude that a “denouncer” was a native spy living in a given region, in contrast to the “patrollers” who were Assyrian men dispatched to enemy territory. Both “patrollers” and “denouncers” reported similar types of intelligence, though in SAA XV 186 the “denouncers” remained anonymous and the information reached the Assyrians by means of a mediator who “ran” the “denouncer” and received his reports (*batiqtū*). Being a *bātiqū* was a dangerous job, since SAA VIII 567 mentions that a “denouncer” was killed.

C. “Tongues”

In the Mari letters, a “tongue” (*ša lišānim*, “one of tongue”) was usually a person captured and sent to be interrogated at the royal court. Once his tongue was loosened, he became a source of precious information, mainly

suchungen zu den ‘Kappadokischen’ Briefen,” *AfO* 6 (1939): 347–50. The verb also meant “to accuse.” Nouns derived from this verb assumed a similar semantic range of meanings; CAD B 161–66.

²¹ The term *mukinnu* was used as a legal term in private trials, whereas the term *bātiqū* (often preceded by the logogram LÚ) was another form for a witness whose denunciation led to a predetermined punishment; Kraus, “Ein Sittenkanon in Omenform,” 108–109.

²² SAA I 7:5'; 29:19; 30 e.10'; V 164 r.11.13; 173:7'; VIII 567 r.6; XV 173:7'; 186 r.9; 219:12; XVI 124 r.6'.

²³ SAA XV 186:7–r.10; SAA I 30:4'–r.2; V 173:3'–10'; and SAA I 29:8–21, respectively.

²⁴ SAA I 29:19; 30 e.10'; V 173:7'–8'.

²⁵ *PNAE* 2/II, 926.

concerning the movements of enemy troops.²⁶ Since a “tongue” was often captured through military action, this intelligence source can be labeled an involuntary or forced informer. Notwithstanding, the Mari letters also used the term “tongue” to describe informers who came together with other fugitives and provided information voluntarily (ARM 26/1 244). These two meanings of “tongue” can be traced in the Neo-Assyrian letters as well.²⁷ First, the term “tongue” described captured individuals sent to the royal court where they were interrogated (SAA XVIII 148 r.6–12).²⁸ In other cases, “tongues” were deserters (SAA XVI 148 r.21) or Assyrian collaborators.²⁹

Raw intelligence coming from a “tongue”-source was also called “tongue.” In the case of SAA XV 246:4–11, the king asked a “patroller” to be sent out to verify the “tongue” or, according to SAA I 12:2–8, the author recommended not trusting some particular “tongue” since it was slander.³⁰ From its occurrences in Neo-Assyrian letters³¹ it is possible to conclude that “tongue” was not so much the term for a field agent as a way in which information was acquired from a source: it meant information obtained after loosening up the speech of captured enemies or slander received often independent of the slanderer.

D. *The “eyes of the king” and “ear-men”*

These terms were most often used for spies in the Persian and Hellenistic era³² and occur only rarely in the Neo-Assyrian corpus. The term “the eyes of the king” (IGI^l.MEŠ ša MAN) is used in the Neo-Assyrian corpus only once,³³ when Ashur-bel-u-da’an, Sargon II’s official, stationed at the

²⁶ ARM 2 22; ARM 26/1 35, 325, 430, 475, 476; ARM 28 171.

²⁷ CAD L 214–15; *AHw* 556.

²⁸ To this group can also be added SAA XV 218; for a similar meaning of the term see ARMT XV, 217; F. Thureau-Dangin, “Textes de Mâri,” *RA* 33 (1936): 175.

²⁹ SAA I 12:4; V 217:18; XVIII 192:r.6. It has been suggested that this term can have two basic meanings: informer, spy and agent, provocateur; A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Winona Lake, IN, 2000), 174.

³⁰ The physical punishment of pulling out the tongue also points to the context of lies: SAA I 205:10; XI 144:i 4; XII 82:r.3; XIV 166:9; *RINAP* 4 I 1 26.

³¹ The occurrences of the term “tongue” not referring to intelligence services: SAA III 13:10; 39:7.27; VII 77:1.3; VIII 12:3; 60:3; 120:3; 121:3; 176:3; 264:3; 265:3; 358:3; 424:3; 472:3; XII 71:10. Tablet SAA XVI 122 r.9 is too damaged to enable one to determine the meaning of the term “tongue.”

³² J. M. Balcer, “The Athenian Episkopos and the Achemenid ‘King’s Eye,’” *AJP* 98 (1977): 252–63.

³³ SAA V 126:7; for other occurrences, see *CAD* I-J 154.

northern frontier, reported his intention to go and see a person so designated.³⁴ The term “ear-man” (*ša uzni*) was used once in a damaged context (LÚ.ŠÁ-GEŠTU^{II}.MEŠ, SAA XVII 34:22),³⁵ twice in liver omens,³⁶ and once in a Neo-Assyrian war ritual. This last text describes soldiers performing the ritual killing of an enemy, and an “ear-man” turning an open ear towards the enemy.³⁷ This symbolic gesture indicated that the “ear-man” heard information about the enemy. We can also add a description of these informer by means of participles: “the one who sees, hears, (and) reports” (YBC 11382:16).³⁸ Thus Nabu-ushallim informed Esarhaddon about the situation in Assur in 671 B.C.E.; in particular he reported on two dreams, one predicting the death of the Assyrian king and the other a great conspiracy in the city of Ashur headed by Abda, the governor.³⁹ For his fidelity to the king, the adversaries tried to corrupt him and even arrested him. Finally, a similar term is found in SAA XVII 43:r.10–11, *uz-ni ki áš-ku-nu*, “I listened closely/carefully,” “I paid attention.” Even though the terms “eyes of the king” and “ear-men” are used infrequently in the SAA corpus, the verbs “to see” and “to hear” are the verbs most used for describing intelligence activities in the Neo-Assyrian period and so, as suggested by Simo Parpola, “loyalty, fear of curses concluding treaty, and personal interests produced informers in such numbers as to make them an omnipresent royal eye and ear seeing and hearing everything.”⁴⁰

³⁴ A. Berlejung suggests that the eyes of the king could mean an Assyrian ruler; *PNAE* 2/I, 595. See also Oppenheim, “The Eyes of the Lord”: 173–75.

³⁵ The phrase *u GEŠTU^{II}.MEŠ-šú ut-[tir²-ma]* (SAA XIII 181:17) does not have the meaning related to the intelligence activities as suggested in SAA XVII 36.

³⁶ “. . . a spy (?) will infiltrate my army”; U. Koch-Westenholz, *Babylonian Liver Omens* (Copenhagen, 2000), 188:7 and 241:77. *CAD* U 371 translates this term “wise person,” but this translation is too general and the translations “spy” (Koch-Westenholz) or “der Ohrenmann” (B. Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel* [Rome, 1981]) are more accurate.

³⁷ Menzel, *Tempel 2* no. 41:12, has suggested reading LÚ ŠÁ GEŠTU^{II} GEŠTU^{III} u² KA¹-šú *i-pat-t[i]*: „Der ‘Ohrenmann’ öffnet Ohren und Mund (des ‘Feindes’).“ However after consulting the photograph of the tablet with W. R. Mayer, I think the signs appearing as *u² KA¹* are better read as UGU, thus LÚ ŠÁ GEŠTU^{II} GEŠTU^{III} UGU¹-šú *i-pat-t[i]*: “the ear-man opens (his) ears above (= towards) him (= the enemy).” This conclusion can be challenged, since the sign *u* is not clearly attached to the sign *KA*.

³⁸ E. Frahm, “Hochverrat in Assur,” in *Assur-Forschungen: Arbeiten aus der Forschungsstelle ‘Edition literarischer Keilschrifttexte aus Assur’ der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften*, ed. S. M. Maul and N. P. Heessel (Wiesbaden, 2010), 91–95.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 111–12.

⁴⁰ S. Parpola, “A Letter from Shamash-shumu-ukin to Esarhaddon,” *Iraq* 34 (1972): 30–31.

III. FIELDWORK: GATHERING INTELLIGENCE ON THE GROUND

Terms for ancient intelligence work admit a range of meanings; the same word might stand for a spy operating on the ground, his sources, or even ways in which information was collected. Here, I divide Neo-Assyrian intelligence into five groups, not according to linguistic criteria, but according to the structures and sources the Assyrians used to gather intelligence: army spies, enemy informers, administrative and vassal networks, special agents, and religious personnel.

A. *Army Spies*

There were two types of army spies: scouts and guards. Scouts were engaged in Esarhaddon's campaign against Egypt,⁴¹ for instance, and the presence of the "ear-man" in the war ritual also points to the importance of intelligence activities before and during the royal campaign. We may note also an information officer (*mutīr tēme*) listed among the logistical personnel of the military unit operating in Zamua.⁴² These spies were probably normally used for reconnoitering the terrain, the enemy forces, and the position of the enemy troops,⁴³ a suggestion confirmed by the sophisticated planning of Assyrian military operations which required a good knowledge of terrain and the enemy's military potential.⁴⁴ Along these lines, note Bel-ushezib's recommendation to consult a "connoisseur of that country" (LÚ.mu-de-e KUR, SAA X III r.11), a sort of terrain expert. The king's decision was to be mailed to troops operating in Mannea only after consultation with him. In sum, these spies were a regular part of the Assyrian army, and their main task was similar to that of Roman *speculatores* and *exploratores*.⁴⁵

⁴¹ RINAP 4 33 III 18'; Borger (*Esarh.* 106 III 18) considers the last sign in LÚ.da-a-a-ku to be a mistake and suggests reading *lu* instead of *ku*.

⁴² SAA V 215:20. Postgate, "Assyrian Army," 93. Based on the similarities with the royal inscriptions (*té-e-mu ut-te-ru-ni*; RIMA 2 A.0.101.1 I 75; see also I 101–102, II 23, 49–50, III 27; RIMA 3 A.0.102.14:147) it can be assumed that this officer was not a scout on his own but rather a man who was responsible for reporting the news to the king. Since he was separated from the group of scribes, he could have been a coordinator of the intelligence activities of a given military unit. The actual reconnaissance was most likely done by soldiers.

⁴³ Sometimes the activities of this group could be expanded for operations such as searches for fugitive enemies (OIP 2, 52 l. 34).

⁴⁴ P. Dubovský, "Tiglath-Pileser III's Campaigns in 734–732 B.C.: Historical Background of Isa. 7, 2 Kgs. 15–16 and 2 Chron. 27–28," *Bib* 87 (2006): 153–65.

⁴⁵ A.-M. Liberati and E. Silverio, *Servizi segreti in Roma Antica: Informazioni e sicurezza dagli initia Urbis all'impero universale* (Rome, 2010), 57–61; N. J. E. Austin and N. B. Rankov,

Once a campaign was over, an Assyrian presence was guaranteed in occupied lands by means of guards stationed along the frontiers and in the outposts.⁴⁶ Scholars have argued that the Assyrian empire functioned as a network empire that expanded not only through the provincial system and vassal treaties, but also by means of outposts and garrisons (*kādu, maššartu, bīrtu, bit dūri*), islands of control in the midst of hostile or semi-hostile territories.⁴⁷ The main task of these fortresses and forts was “to keep watch” (*maššartu našāru*) and “to be attentive” (*ḥarādu*). These general terms had above all a military meaning: to patrol exposed frontiers and protect outposts (SAA XV 156), and even to make occasional incursions into enemy territory. In addition, guards received enemy runaways and sent them to the king (SAA XVI 148:13–r.8), controlled trade traffic, prevented smuggling, collected taxes,⁴⁸ and surveilled strategic passes and crossroads.⁴⁹ As many as seven such Assyrian fortress outposts existed in the neighborhood of Judah and Philistia, capable of reporting on Jerusalem, Ekron, and Egypt.⁵⁰

Regular reports made outpost reports a precious source of first-hand information, as illustrated by the Assyrian monitoring of Urartu. The tense relations with Urartu during Sargon II's reign resulted in the construction of an Assyrian series of fortresses along that frontier (SAA I 31 r.23). The garrisons there played a crucial role in specifying the extent of the Urartian defeat after their campaign against the Cimmerians:

On the expedition against Cimmerians: his (the Urartian king's) troops have been entirely killed; three of his magnates along with their troops have been killed; he (the Urartian king) himself has escaped and entered his country; his army has not yet arrived (back). (ibid. r.11–15)

The letter further states that similar messages came from all the guards of the forts along the frontier (ibid. r.23–25). Such a report was worth its

Exploratio: Military and Political Intelligence in the Roman World from the Second Punic War to the Battle of Adrianople (London, 1995), 1–86.

⁴⁶ B. J. Parker, “At the Edge of Empire: Conceptualizing Assyria's Anatolian Frontier ca. 700 BC,” *JAA* 21(2002): 371–95.

⁴⁷ M. Liverani, “The Growth of the Assyrian Empire in the Habur/Middle Euphrates Area: A New Paradigm,” *SAAB* 2 (1988): 81–96; B. J. Parker, *The Mechanics of Empire: The Northern Frontier of Assyria as a Case Study in Imperial Dynamics* (Helsinki, 2001), 255–67.

⁴⁸ SAA I 17:12; see Dubovský, *Hezekiah and the Assyrian Spies*, 204–209; G. Honggeng, “The Assyrian Intelligence Activities During the Assyrian Empire,” *JAAS* 18 (2004): 61–62.

⁴⁹ Letter SAA V 24 illustrates surveillance. According to this letter Ashipa, Sargon II's official on the Assyrian northern frontier assigned “patrollers” to guard a mountain pass (ll. 13–15; see also SAA V 55:4–8).

⁵⁰ See the discussion in Dubovský, *Hezekiah and the Assyrian Spies*, 207–18.

weight in gold because the Assyrians were planning to invade Urartu.⁵¹ Thanks to this and other communiqués,⁵² Sargon II decided to change the itinerary of his eighth campaign and conquered Urartu.⁵³

Assyrian documents allow us to reconstruct a network of Assyrian outposts of various sizes.⁵⁴ Completing this picture with information from excavated fortresses,⁵⁵ I can suggest that the first branch of the Assyrian intelligence network was a system of physical installations and personnel distributed principally along frontiers. Given the great pressure on the commanders of the outposts to report news on a regular basis, we can conclude that there was a continuous flow of information coming directly or indirectly from the outposts to the court.

B. *Enemy Sources*

Another precious source of intelligence were enemies themselves. The study of the term “tongue” above indicated that the Assyrians used two types of enemies: those captured in raids and campaigns, and those who voluntarily joined the Assyrians. Based on the analysis of letter NL 29 dated to the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, Bradley J. Parker has concluded

⁵¹ G. W. Vera Chamaza, “Der VIII. Feldzug Sargons II. Eine Untersuchung zur Politik und historischer Geographie des späten 8. Jhs. v. Chr. (I),” *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* 27 (1994): 91–118; *idem*, “Der VIII. Feldzug Sargons II. Eine Untersuchung zur Politik und historischer Geographie des späten 8. Jhs. v. Chr. (II),” *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* 28 (1996): 235–67; W. Mayer, “Sargons Feldzug gegen Urartu 714 v. Chr., Text und Übersetzung,” *Mitteilungen Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft* 115 (1983): 73–113.

⁵² SAA V 3:6–14; 85:3–5; 87 r.3–9.

⁵³ Dubovský, *Hezekiah and the Assyrian Spies*, 133–53.

⁵⁴ Documents from Sargon II's reign show that Assyrian outposts were located in the Syrian province Supat (SAA I 176 r.37), in Kammanu (ten fortresses: A. Fuchs *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad* [Göttingen, 1994], 127, 324, l. 216–217), Kumme (SAA I 29:8), Shubria (SAA IV 18:9), Parsua (SAA V 199:14), Mazamua (SAA V 210 r.9), and Babylonia (a series of fortresses: SAA I 18 r.1–7; XV 142:5–r.4; 166 r.5; 222 r.1; XVII 22 r.19–20; 59:3; 62 r.7–e.1). In Sennacherib's reign, reports came from outposts in Gambulu (SAA XVII 115–120) and Babylonia (SAA XVII 95 e.1–2; OIP 2, 58 l. 24). In Esarhaddon's reign, there were outposts in Melid (SAA IV 1–11), the Sealand (SAA XVIII 89 r.2), and in Urartu, Mannea, Media and Hubushkia (SAA XVI 148:9–12). From Ashurbanipal's time, we also know of a fortress between Babylonia and Elam (ABL 462 r.13). We can also find Assyrian outposts along exposed frontiers, as for example at the frontiers with Ellipi (SAA IV 77:2–3, r.2–3), Mannea (SAA IV 30:2–3; 31:2–4; 267:2–4; V 131:3; XVI 148:9–12), Urartu (SAA I 31 r.7–8, r.23, V 2:14; 21:17; 115:7; XVI 148:9–12), and Parsua and its (northern?) enemy (SAA XV 54 r.11). The outposts were often located on strategically important rivers: along the upper Tigris (SAA V 5:4'6'), and other rivers (ND 2666; SAA XV 294 r.12; XVIII 87 r.5) and canals (SAA XV 166 r.5).

⁵⁵ The Assyrian presence in Israel is indicated by a series of fortresses at Tell Jemmeh, Tell esh-Shari'a, Tell el-Hesi, Tell Abu Hureirah, and Ashdod.

that “one method of gathering intelligence was to kidnap enemy soldiers or officials and transfer them under armed escort to the capital where they would be interrogated, probably through torture.”⁵⁶ This method of getting hold of informers, generally just called “people” (LÚ.ERIM.MEŠ), is well documented in the Assyrian sources. Thus Bel-ushezib asked soldiers to capture some people and get information about the Indareans from them. If the Indareans were positioned away from the Assyrian army, then the Assyrians could start their attack.⁵⁷

Information coming from captured enemies (or even collaborating enemy volunteers) had to be taken with suspicion, since it could be intentionally false. Assyrian letters mention a large number of deserters, defectors, fugitives, runaways, and refugees. The terminology used for this group is derived from verbs *maqātu* “to fall, come, appear,” *ḫalāqu* “to escape, flee,” and *abātu*⁵⁸ “to run away,” and does not distinguish between civilian defectors and refugees⁵⁹ on the one hand and military deserters (e.g., SAA XI 162:10') on the other. Instead, it points out two different aspects of this process: information from those escaping from the enemy camp in order to join Assyria (*ḫalāqu*, *abātu*) versus information deriving from persons otherwise falling into the hands of the Assyrians (*maqātu*). Among those who joined the Assyrians, we can find the entire range of personnel from high-ranking officers⁶⁰ down to simple soldiers.⁶¹

The role that these sources played can be demonstrated by the Urartian case. First, the Assyrians voiced their anger when the Shubrian king withheld Urartian fugitives and did not send them to Assyria. Since the Urartian fugitives could have been a source of precious information for the Assyrians, the Shubrian king was accused of thwarting the Assyrians'

⁵⁶ Parker, *Mechanics*, 222.

⁵⁷ SAA X III r.15–18. For further examples, see ND 2007:7'–12'; SAA V 55:4–13; XV 218:5–r.1; XVI 148 r.18–e.2; XVIII 146:14–16; 148 r.6–12; ABL 280:5–19. Other examples of this category was a brother of the runaway [Adad]-remani who was arrested and sent to the palace in order to provide information about him (SAA I 245 and 246).

⁵⁸ From *abātu* is derived *munnabtu* “refugee, fugitive” used rarely in the letters (SAA II 1:13; ABL 839:16) but more frequently in the royal inscriptions; for some occurrences, see CAD M/II 205.

⁵⁹ E.g., SAA V 245:8–13, a eunuch, the overseer of the house of Suitka. See also SAA XV 91 r.9–13; 214 r.1–13.

⁶⁰ E.g., SAA XVI 136:6–r.7; others are listed in the administrative records SAA XI 162; 163; 169.

⁶¹ SAA V 35:35–r.6. Deserters are mentioned also in SAA XV 147, 243, 244, 255, 294; XVII 67. Deserters played an important role during Sargon II's campaign against Babylonia (SAA XV 184 r.10–16).

plans.⁶² Assyrian officials elsewhere underlined in their reports that they did their best to get hold of Urartian and other fugitives.⁶³ Since this was considered a sign of loyalty towards the king, it could be used to their advantage. The Urartians and other enemies of Assyria were naturally aware of the importance of their own fugitives for the Assyrians. Therefore they did everything they could to prevent them from falling into Assyrian hands (SAA V 32).

C. *Assyrian Administrators and Vassals*

The real advance of the Assyrian intelligence services can be observed in their use of two interconnected administrative branches: their own administration and non-Assyrian vassals.

(1) *Assyrian Administration*

The Neo-Assyrian provincial system developed out of an older administrative structure. Since Tiglath-pileser III's time, provincial governors had acquired more and more responsibilities: they were appointed directly by the king and more power was transferred into their hands.⁶⁴ This transformation of the Assyrian Empire was fully implemented by Tiglath-pileser III's successors. The governor's residence "formed the operational hub of each province's administration, functionally and structurally replicating the royal palace."⁶⁵ This can be illustrated by the diplomatic visits the provincial governors received, about which they reported to the king (SAA XV 91:14–r.13). Governors also had to report on the situation not only in their own provinces but in neighboring regions as well, a duty that turned them and their palaces into real intelligence hubs. Provincial governors gathered intelligence by means of their own informers through both oral and written communication,⁶⁶ and passed their networks of his

⁶² T. Deszö ("Šubria and the Assyrian Empire," *AAnt* 46 [2006]: 33–38) has suggested that the attitude of Shubria, which had refused to hand over the Urartian fugitives to Assyria, was motivated by Shubria's special status as a sanctuary state.

⁶³ SAA V 35; see also XV 54:18–r.4.

⁶⁴ For the historical development of the Assyrian provinces and the discussion on Tiglath-pileser III's reform of provinces see J. N. Postgate, "The Land of Assur and the Yoke of Assur," *World Archaeology* 23 (2007): 253, and "Assyria: The Home Provinces," in *Neo-Assyrian Geography*, ed. M. Liverani (Rome, 1995): 1–17; K. Radner, "Provinz," in *RLA* XI, 43.

⁶⁵ T. Harrison, "The Neo-Assyrian Governor's Residence at Tell Tayinat," *Bulletin of the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies* 40 (2005): 24.

⁶⁶ SAA XVI 21; XVIII 85 r.4'–5'.

informers to the hands of succeeding governors, as illustrated in the following example. When Manu-ki-Ninua became the new governor of Kar-Sharrukin, he dressed informers in [purple] garments, put silver bracelets [on their wrists], and concluded a treaty with them:

[Just] as [you] previo[usly stood at the dis]pos[al] of Nabu-belu-ka"[in, found out wha]tever there was to report and [tol]d it to him, [in like] manner [stan]d now at my dispos[al] and send me whatever news [of th]e Medes you hear! I shall protect you just as Nabu-belu-ka" in protected you and shall say a good word about you before the king, my lord.⁶⁷

Military briefings coming from the outposts discussed above were always an important part of Assyrian intelligence, but the exploitation of the Assyrian administrative network for other kinds of intelligence-gathering represented a real advance. The first sign of this development can be observed in the types of information provided by the governors. The extant letters show that Assyrian interests were not limited to military affairs but extended to information on terrain, weather, local skirmishes, crimes, tribute delivery, smugglers, and so forth. The second improvement was in the extent of the Assyrian intelligence network. By the time of the death of Sargon II, the Assyrian Empire was divided into anywhere between sixty and eighty-nine provinces, with another ten provinces established during Sennacherib's reign.⁶⁸ If we take the lower estimate, i.e., seventy provincial governors, some of whom sent their written reports to the royal court on a regular basis, then about 100 letters reached the court every year.⁶⁹ From the reign of Sargon II alone, we have at least 1,032 letters; out of these, at least 305 were dispatched by provincial governors.⁷⁰ That being the case, the royal court would have received at least one letter every two weeks from a provincial governor. The third enhancement can be observed in reports coming from other provincial administrators⁷¹ as parallel or independent administrative sources. Among those we

⁶⁷ SAA XV 90:28–r.6. Subsequent reports coming from this region show that the transfer of informers was effective (SAA XV 98:5; 100:5).

⁶⁸ For a list of 99 provinces, see S. Parpola's list of provinces: <http://www.jaas.org/edocs/v18n2/Parpola-identity-App.II.pdf>, accessed March 24, 2011.

⁶⁹ S. Parpola is cautious, when analyzing tablet CT 52 904 mentioning 1,000 seals, and suggests that only a few officials "maintained a 'regular' correspondence with the king; the great majority of administrators received written orders from the king, but only rarely wrote to the king themselves." SAA I, XVII.

⁷⁰ SAA I, V, XV, XVII; most of the surviving letters from governors were from the second half of Sargon II's reign.

⁷¹ SAA I 176, 177, 183; XV 168; XVI 6; XVII 68:12–24.

know, the most important intelligence coordinator was Ashur-resuwa.⁷² His reports were not limited to intelligence issues, but also dealt with agricultural and administrative matters.⁷³ His major task, however, was to keep an eye on the Assyrian northern frontier during Sargon II's reign (SAA V 84–104). To this end he used military personnel, messengers, and “patrollers” whom he dispatched to enemy territory to obtain and double-check information. He carefully monitored the Urartian army, its whereabouts, when it was put on high alert, and when it was mobilized. He reported important details about the defeats and victories of Urartian troops, suspicious gatherings of the Urartian governors, and their building activities. He also informed the Assyrian court about a plot against the Urartian king and a purge in the Urartian capital. He reported on secret negotiations between Urartu and Kummē, and even discovered a clandestine network of smugglers operating between Urartu and Assyria. His letters were highly reliable and betray the features of an experienced intelligence officer. He double-checked information and never named his sources. He often dispatched word-by-word reports of what he heard, so that the king could distinguish a source from an interpretation.⁷⁴ If we situate Ashur-resuwa's reports in the context of tense relationships between the two top powers (Urartu and Assyria) of the late eighth century B.C.E., then the importance of his intelligence activities can be compared to Cold War espionage at its height.⁷⁵

If we take into consideration the frequency of letters coming to the court and complete this picture with the oral briefings regularly received during the visits of the provincial governors, messengers exchanged

⁷² Letters SAA V xxii and nos. 106 and 107 mention a *qēpu* official active in the area of Kummē and Ukku, but it is far from being certain that Ashur-resuwa can be identified with him; see *PNA* 1/I, 212–13; K. Deller, “Ausgewählte neuassyrische Briefe betreffend Urartu zur Zeit Sargons II,” in *Tra lo Zagros e l'Urmia: Ricerche storiche ed archeologiche nell'Azerbaigian iraniano*, ed. P. E. Pecorella and M. Salvini (Rome, 1984), 97–122. Since Ashur-resuwa communicated not only with the king and his crown prince but also with the other court and provincial governors, it is possible to conclude that he was on the level of provincial governors or higher.

⁷³ SAA V 97 r.2–8 and 98.

⁷⁴ M. Salvini, “La Storia della regione in epoca Urartea,” in *Tra lo Zagros e l'Urmia*, ed. Pecorella and Salvini, 9–52; R.-B. Wartke, *Urartu: Das Reich am Ararat* (Mainz am Rhein, 1993), 35–45.

⁷⁵ See, e.g., T. H. Bagley, *Spy Wars: Moles, Mysteries, and Deadly Games* (New Haven, 2007), VIII. For the activities of various agents and intelligence coordinators during the Cold War, see R. C. S. Trahair and R. L. Miller, *Encyclopedia of Cold War Espionage, Spies, and Secret Operations* (New York, 2009).

between the center and the provinces,⁷⁶ and the persons of interest sent by the provincial governors to be interrogated, then we can conclude that the provincial administrative structures represented the most important branch of Assyrian intelligence.

(2) *Non-Assyrian Vassals*

Hittite treaties contained only secondary references to intelligence-sharing, such as the one that bound Duppi-Teshub not to conceal from the Hittite king Murshili “evil words” about the king or the land of Hatti.⁷⁷ The Assyrians, by contrast, made reporting on everything the signatory parties saw and heard an essential part of their treaties.⁷⁸ Treaties thus represented an important tool of Assyrian expansionistic policy.⁷⁹ To this end, the Assyrian kings drew up a long list of matters which their treaty partners swore to report on, lest they be exposed to a series of maledictions.⁸⁰ The obligation to report also became part of the local contracts concluded between provincial governors and their peers (SAA XV 90:28–r.6). In this way, Assyrian intelligence acquired a non-Assyrian branch, as shown by the reports of Hu-Teshub and Urzana. Despite the divided loyalties of Shubrian kings towards Assyria,⁸¹ Sargon II asked Hu-Teshub to “[write] quickly whatever he heard” (SAA V 45:6–7), and thus he shared intelligence with Assyria,⁸² including a report on the Urartian king and his upcoming invasion of Zikirtu. The loyalty of Urzana, king of Musasir, towards Assyria was more questionable than that of Hu-Teshub,⁸³ but Sargon II did not hesitate to ask him for details regarding the Urartian king and his troops. And indeed Urzana did report, including sending news on the cultic activities of the Urartian king and governors in Musasir (SAA V 147). Other letters point to the importance of the vassal branch in

⁷⁶ SAA I 205 suggests that messengers carrying letters were also interrogated by the king. Therefore, even if we accept Parpola’s suggestion that only a few administrators sent written responses to the king, the messengers returning to the provincial governor after delivering a letter were also a source of important oral information.

⁷⁷ See the treaty of Murshili and Duppi-Teshub A II 46’–48’; for an English translation see *COS* II, 97.

⁷⁸ SAA XVIII 80 r.2–4; 80:3’–8’.

⁷⁹ Parker, *Mechanics*, 249–54.

⁸⁰ SAA II 3, 6, 8, 13.

⁸¹ Parker, *Mechanics*, 159–247; Deszö, “Šubria and the Assyrian Empire”; K. Kessler, “Shubria, Urartu and Assur: Topographical Questions around the Tigris Sources,” in *Neo-Assyrian Geography*, ed. M. Liverani (Rome, 1995), 55–67.

⁸² SAA V 44 and 45.

⁸³ P. Dubovský, “Conquest and Reconquest of Musasir in the 8th Century BCE,” *SAAB* XV (2006): 141–46; R. M. Boehmer, “Zur Lage von Musasir,” *BagM* 6 (1973): 39.

collecting information, especially when considered together with the regular visits of vassal kings to the court.⁸⁴ Kings of Ashkelon, Ekron, Israel and Judah, as well as various Arab sheikhs, had all accepted vassal status prior to the 701 invasion, and virtually all states in the region felt Assyrian pressure in those decades; the potential for reportage from these sources was very high.⁸⁵

D. *Special Agents*

However good intelligence networks may be, all intelligence agencies acknowledge the need for infiltrated spies.⁸⁶ The Assyrians were fully aware that their networks had to be rounded out with “special agents.” Thus the expression “I have written everything that I have seen to the king, my lord” (SAA XVIII 56 r.15–18) was common for agents belonging to the networks mentioned above, as well as for those whom we might classify as special agents. The latter represent the most variegated group of informers. Some were Assyrian administrators; others were local sheiks or business people. In most cases, the letters do not contain enough data to establish the identity of the senders, and some might have worked under cover.

No modern historians can describe all inner workings of intelligence services, because many of the communications remain oral, witnesses disappear, and governments do their best to protect their international reputation by not publicizing their darker side.⁸⁷ The same was true for the Neo-Assyrian Empire. The major part of communications were oral and the written material has been preserved only rarely or indirectly.⁸⁸ Moreover, Assyrian officials and scribes had to protect their sources. Probably for this reason we have only the expression in some cases “they told me.”⁸⁹ The best way to study this group would be to analyze them case by case,⁹⁰

⁸⁴ SAA I 30, 31; naturally, the reliability of this branch had to be carefully checked.

⁸⁵ Dubovský, *Hezekiah and the Assyrian Spies*, 218–20.

⁸⁶ “Not having a spy in the enemy camp means never knowing for sure—about what is being prepared for the future, but also about the true meaning of what has happened in the past. Not having a spy means relying on observation, with all its invitation to self-deception.” Codevilla, *Informing Statecraft*, 14.

⁸⁷ K. Pacner, *Československo ve zvláštních službách: Pohledy do historie Československých výzvědných služeb 1914–1989* (Praha, 2002), 6.

⁸⁸ Aramaic ostracoon VA 8384 studied by J. M. Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters* (Atlanta, 1993), 15–22; see also SAA XVIII 85 r.4'–5'.

⁸⁹ SAA XV 69:6; 219:9.

⁹⁰ This is often done in the studies on modern intelligence services; an excellent example is K. Pacner's *Výzvědačky pod rudou hvězdou: Ženy v komunistických tajných službách* (Praha: Nakladatelství Brána, 2005).

but for purposes of clarity, I will divide them into two types: local informers and Assyrian special officials.

(1) *Local Informers*

During Esarhaddon's reign, political machinations in Babylonia were one of the main interests of the Assyrian court. For these purposes, the Assyrians built up an entire network of informers who reported on the potential threats. For one thing, women at court were used to gather intelligence (SAA XVIII 125). After the brief reign of Nabu-zer-kitti-lishir in 680 B.C.E., the northern Sealand underwent a series of changes. Esarhaddon wanted a certain Hinnumu to become governor of Uruk; by gaining sympathizers there, the Elamite king Humban-haltash II hoped to obstruct Esarhaddon's plans.⁹¹ But the Assyrian court was well-informed about the situation in Uruk. The sender of one letter—probably one Bel-ushezib⁹²—informed the king about Elamite interference in the affairs of Uruk in illuminating terms: "Nobody knows anything of what he [i.e., Hinnumu] is thinking up [in his mind]. The lady Ta[... and NN] do not know what is in his heart."⁹³ The context indicates that the sender of the letter tried to undo Hinnumu's allegiance through his own sources. One of them was "the lady Ta[...]," but not even she was able to figure out "what (was) in his [Hinnumu's] heart." If this reconstruction is correct, then lady Ta[...] represents the first female informer so far identified in Assyrian sources.

Local informers were especially important in moments of danger.⁹⁴ The fragile political situation in Babylonia and Elam needed to be controlled not only by means of official networks but also through a network of informers collaborating with the Assyrian administrative branch. Thus among the informers operating in this area were Ra'iwanu, an individual from Nagiati who reported on a dangerous maneuver by Merodach-Baladan; a manservant from Bit-Yakin; and a citizen of Babylon who sent to Assyria the news about the king of Elam.⁹⁵ We may also add here Sharidu and Nabu-ahhe-eresh, citizens of Babylon, and Bel-iddina, a citizen of Borsippa, who informed on the political machinations of Bel-etir and

⁹¹ M. Dietrich, *Die Aramäer Südbabyloniens in der Sargonidenzeit (700–648)* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1970), 28–29.

⁹² This man was probably the correspondent in both SAA XVIII 102 and 125.

⁹³ SAA XVIII 102 19'–21': *mim-ma* [ma-la...] *i-ke-ši-pu mam-ma ka-la-me ul i-de MUNUS.t[a....] šá šà-bi-šú ul i-du-ú*.

⁹⁴ Compare the case of Israeli operations to recruit Palestinian informers: I. Black and B. Morris, *Israel's Secret Wars: A History of Israel's Intelligence Services* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991), 248–49.

⁹⁵ SAA XV 186:3–r.6; SAA XV 122 r.5; and SAA XV III, respectively.

Shamash-zero-iqisha,⁹⁶ and the Elamite “swindlers” (*LÚ.EN-za-ar-ru-ti*) who, after being asked, revealed that negotiations were going on between Babylon and Elam.⁹⁷

There are also some letters that do not contain the name of the sender.⁹⁸ For our purposes the most important document is an anonymous denunciation against Nabu-ahhe-iddina, who conspired against Esarhaddon (VAT 4923). According to this letter, Nabu-ahhe-iddina approached the Elamite king in order to obtain his support against Assyria by means of gifts. Based on line 6, mentioning the death of Sennacherib, Ernst Weidner suggested dating the letter around 680 B.C.E. Seeing that there is no other information about Nabu-ahhe-iddina and that, since that same date, Esarhaddon continued rebuilding Babylon, it is possible to conclude that this rebellion was crushed and guess that this anonymous informer played an important role in protecting Assyrian rule there.⁹⁹

(2) *Special Officials*

Other informers were far from being secret agents. Besides the regular administrative structures mentioned above, the Assyrians employed special officials to supervise certain areas.¹⁰⁰ These men were a source independent of the regular military, administrative, and vassal structures, whose officials could be compromised by all kinds of vices.¹⁰¹

Among these special officials, the most important were messengers (*mār šipri*). Their main role was to deliver written or oral messages.¹⁰² Because the messengers were usually interrogated by both senders and

⁹⁶ SAA XVI 21; see Parpola, “A Letter from Shamash-shumu-Ukin to Esarhaddon,” 30–32.

⁹⁷ SAA XVII 153:13–r.9. We can also add to this list informers in other parts of the empire, e.g., Rahis-dadi, an official operating in the North, who reported on Cimmerians (SAA XVI 15:3–11); an Assyrian servant Nabu-ushallim reporting on a betrayal in Assur (YBC 11382); Nabu-nasir, a staff-bearer, who denounced Sin-balassi-iqbi (SAA XVI 69:4–r.3); and a group of informers who denounced Tarsi, the scribe of Guzana (SAA XVI 63 r.9–21).

⁹⁸ SAA XVIII 81, 83.

⁹⁹ E. Weidner, “Hochverrat gegen Nabukadnezar II,” *AfO* 17 (1954/55): 5–9; G. Frame, *Babylonia 689–627 B.C.: A Political History* (Istanbul, 1992), 66–67.

¹⁰⁰ Since anyone could write a letter to the king, the royal court could receive information directly or indirectly from various people who were not part of the regular network such as scribes (SAA XVII 98, 100, 107), merchants (SAA XVII 136), etc.

¹⁰¹ SAA V 211, 256; XVI 42, 44.

¹⁰² According to S. Parpola the carriers of administrative mail are sometimes identified as chariot-fighters, mercenaries, mounted scouts. “The purpose of this can only have been to make sure that at least all important messages were delivered by soldiers, even when that is not explicitly stated.” SAA I, XIV.

addressees, they were a valuable source of information in their persons.¹⁰³ Their role was more than that of a simple mailman and some were fully involved in intelligence-gathering.¹⁰⁴ For example, one anonymous writer asked Esarhaddon to send a messenger to debrief him, since “there are matters relevant to the king” that he had heard (SAA XVIII 83 r.2–3). An interesting role of the messenger is also mentioned in SAA XV 219:10–15; according to this letter Sharru-emuranni sent his messenger to a Babylonian man, Sapia, to confirm the news he had received about Merodach-Baladan’s activity among the Puqudu. Sharru-emuranni promised to send a full report once the messenger was back. In this case the role of the messenger was similar to that of a “patroller.”¹⁰⁵ If we imagine the hundreds of messengers traveling back and forth between various Assyrian and non-Assyrians, then we can safely conclude that they were another important source of first-hand information—clarifying written messages, double-checking reports of governors and vassals, and functioning as field agents.

In contrast to the messengers (also attested in the Middle-Assyrian period¹⁰⁶), bodyguards (*ša qurbūti*) were introduced only in the Neo-Assyrian period.¹⁰⁷ E. G. Klauber and J. Lewy have demonstrated that these high-ranking officials belonged to the king’s entourage and were often dispatched on special missions.¹⁰⁸ Parpola has suggested that their main task was to deliver royal messages considered to be of special importance, and therefore they were couriers invested with special authority.¹⁰⁹ Like the messengers, the bodyguards were far from being simple postmen.¹¹⁰ Since the term *ša qurbūti* should be translated as something like “the close one,” then the main task of this official was to be in the king’s presence.

¹⁰³ SAA XV 25:4–17; 53:4–r.5; 119:20’–22’ and 169.

¹⁰⁴ For different roles and types of messengers see S. A. Meier, *The Messenger in the Ancient Semitic World* (Atlanta, 1988).

¹⁰⁵ For a similar case see SAA XVII 153.

¹⁰⁶ S. Jakob, *Mittelassyrische Verwaltung und Sozialstruktur: Untersuchungen* (Leiden, 2002), 293–303.

¹⁰⁷ CAD Q 315–17; spellings with final *-u* can be considered as Babylonianisms, SAAS XVI, 176 n. 526.

¹⁰⁸ J. Lewy, “On Some Institutions of the Old Assyrian Empire,” *HUCA* 27 (1956): 72; E. G. Klauber, *Assyrisches Beamtentum nach Briefen aus der Sargonidenzeit* (Leipzig, 1910), 106–108; J. N. Postgate, *The Governor’s Palace Archive* (London, 1973), 38. For the discussion on the term “bodyguard” see K. Deller and A. R. Millard, “Die Bestallungskunde des Nergal-Āpil-Kūmūja von Kalḫu,” *BagM* 24 (1993): 233.

¹⁰⁹ SAA I 29 r.15–17; see also SAA I, xiv. Royal messages were also delivered by cohort commanders (SAA I 45:4–6) and by royal messengers (SAA XIII 190 r.2).

¹¹⁰ SAA I 10, 14.

Yet another part of his task was to deliver royal messages and negotiate as a royal representative.¹¹¹ The importance of this office can be demonstrated from its frequent occurrence in Neo-Assyrian letters (273 times). These occurrences suggest that the role of “the close ones” in the intelligence network was similar to that of messengers, but on a higher level of security clearance.

The most important representatives of long-term intelligence officials, however, were *qēpu* (“believable, entrusted”) officials. These high-ranking officials, known already in the Middle-Assyrian period,¹¹² were appointed directly by the king to accomplish specific missions often lasting for several years. Assyrian documents confirm that *qēpu* were active in economic, religious, military, and administrative spheres.¹¹³ The responsibilities of these officials depended on the missions with which they were entrusted.¹¹⁴ We can find them active in city and provincial governments¹¹⁵ and in some cases even overseeing the governors.¹¹⁶ Thanks to their specific briefs, they had access to information that was not publicly available, and thus served as an important source of intelligence independent of the local structures. Their role in the intelligence sphere can be better understood when compared to Soviet advisors distributed in Eastern Europe during the Communist regime. These advisors supervised politics, culture, industry, science and education, but beside their main job of “advising,” they also reported to Moscow on a regular basis.¹¹⁷ Likewise, the *qēpu* officials were far from being secret agents, but they were publicly known as Assyrian officials. The local officials were required to collaborate with them, yet it was no secret that they reported everything they saw and heard to the king.

¹¹¹ Later the office *ša qurbūti* became a title of an officer who was no longer in the presence of the king: K. Radner, *Die Neuassyrischen Texte aus Tall Šēḫ Ḥamad* (Berlin, 2002), 13–14.

¹¹² Jakob, *Mittelassyrische Verwaltung*, 200–86.

¹¹³ Economic: SAA II 5 r.iii 6'–21'; religious: SAA X 352–355; XVII 43 r.4; military: *RINAP* I 42 26'; administrative: *RINAP* 4 8 r.47; *BIWA* 212; SAA XVII 152.

¹¹⁴ See, e.g., R. Byrne, “Early Assyrian Contacts with Arabs and the Impact on Levantine Vassal Tribute,” *BASOR* 331 (2003): 18.

¹¹⁵ SAA I 210 r.6–11; V 106:14'–15'.

¹¹⁶ SAA XV 35; see my article “The King’s Direct Control: Neo-Assyrian *qēpu* officials,” in *Organization, Representation, and Symbols of Power in the Ancient Near East*, ed. G. Wilhelm (Winona Lake, IN, 2012), 449–60.

¹¹⁷ L. Bátor, *Zločiny komunizmu na Slovensku, 1948–1989*, vol. 1 (Prešov: Vydavateľstvo Michala Vaška, 2001), 38–40.

Ambassadors have always been exploited, apart from their diplomatic function, for intelligence purposes. Especially in times of political tension, ambassadors and attachés served as sources of first-hand information. Thus for example, during the Cold War, the briefings of Soviet ambassadors from their Western embassies and the UN played an important role in intelligence-gathering.¹¹⁸ Similarly, during complicated diplomatic relations with Midas of Phrygia,¹¹⁹ an Assyrian messenger assumed the role of informer. Sargon II ordered: “you should not cut off your messenger from the Phrygian’s presence (...) and constantly listen to news about him” (SAA I, 4).

E. *Religious Personnel*

Since religion played a crucial role in ancient Mesopotamia, it was not only important to keep an eye on cultic activities,¹²⁰ but religious personnel became an important source of intelligence. Letters dealing with a variety of cultic issues reached the royal court on a regular basis. The intelligence contained in these letters can be divided into two groups: situation and divination reports.

(1) *Situation Reports*

Religious personnel occasionally served as intelligence sources, reporting on whatever they saw and heard¹²¹ or suggesting that “the king should know this” (e.g., SAA XIII 178 s.2). In the case of Babylonia, there were inspectors of temples who during their work “listened closely” (e.g., SAA XVII 43 r.9–18); they reported on the improper innovation of rituals,¹²² conspiracies,¹²³ criminal activities,¹²⁴ and so forth. Reports on these matters were dispatched as independent letters or encoded within divination reports.

¹¹⁸ An insightful book illustrating the role of Soviet embassies in intelligence is A. Kaznacheev's *Inside a Soviet Embassy: Experiences of a Russian Diplomat in Burma* (Philadelphia, 1962).

¹¹⁹ M. van de Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East ca. 3000–323 BC* (Oxford, 2004), 257–59; A. Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East, c. 3000–330 BC*, vol. 2 (London, 1995), 498.

¹²⁰ SAA XIII 6, 37, 56, 58, 144, 147, 152, 189.

¹²¹ SAA XIII 173:11–12; 190 r.7–8.

¹²² SAA XIII 47, 134, 135.

¹²³ SAA X 112, 117; XIII 178, 182, 185.

¹²⁴ SAA X 112; XIII 128, 138, 171.

(2) *Reports on the Results of Divination*

The basic presupposition of the Mesopotamian diviners was that

The signs in the sky just as those on the earth give us signals (...) A sign that portends evil in the sky is (also) evil on earth, one that portends evil on earth is evil in the sky (...) It has indeed occurred with regard to you in reference to an enemy or to a disease or to a famine.¹²⁵

For these reasons the celestial and terrestrial omina were carefully observed, categorized, compared with the manuals, other signs, and historical events, and then transmitted in written and oral form to the next generation of apprentices.¹²⁶ Provoked and unprovoked signs, if correctly interpreted, might serve as a tool for the Assyrians to learn what divinities wanted to reveal through “messages” incomprehensible to an uninitiated observer.¹²⁷ This divine source of information played an important role in Mesopotamia in predicting the future, in understanding past events, and for decision-making in the present.

The main goal of imperial divination was “to keep the watch of the king,”¹²⁸ i.e., the same expression used in the intelligence sources studied above.¹²⁹ Because the results of observations and interpretations were reported directly to the king,¹³⁰ he could learn of the divine plans that no traditional intelligence source could get hold of. At the same time, the divinatory specialists offered him remedies so that impending threats might be avoided.

The importance of divination can be seen in the number of reports, manuals, and copies an adept was required to complete before becoming a specialist in his field.¹³¹ The top specialists formed the innermost circle

¹²⁵ A. L. Oppenheim, “A Babylonian Diviner’s Manual,” *JNES* 33 (1974): 199–205, ll. 24, 41–46.

¹²⁶ We can compare the systematic study of signs in ancient Mesopotamia with the rigor of experiments and the categorization of data the empirical sciences require of a contemporary scientist. S. M. Maul, “Divination Culture and the Handling of the Future,” in *The Babylonian World*, ed. G. Leick (New York, 2007), 362. For an illustration of astronomic reports, see U. Koch-Westenholz, *Mesopotamian Astrology: An Introduction to Babylonian and Assyrian Celestial Divination* (Copenhagen, 1995), 140–51.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9–31.

¹²⁸ E.g., SAA X 118 r.8; 143 r.4; 163:5–6; for “to keep the watch of the king,” see SAA X, xxi–xxii.

¹²⁹ For other similarities: “When I wr[ote] to the king my lord, saying ‘the gods have opened the ears of the king [my lord],’ (I meant) if something [happens] to [the king and] he worries, th[e gods . . .] first send a message fr[om heaven]” (SAA VIII 63 r.1–7).

¹³⁰ SAA VIII and X.

¹³¹ S. Parpola divides Neo-Assyrian scholars into five major groups: astrologers, haruspees, exorcists, physicians, and lamentation priests; see SAA X, xiii–xiv; for a classification

of the court, and many of their letters have been preserved. Letters also came from local specialists. In problematic cases, for example, a kidney was sealed and sent to the king to be inspected by the specialists (SAA XIII 131 r.12–19). In this sense, the specialists of the inner circle were an intelligence hub through which sensitive information reached the king. Extracting information from the signs was a complicated process and for the purposes of our reconstruction we can identify three phases: 1. observation of signs; 2. interpretation based on canonical manuals, past events, and other information available to the diviner; 3. comparison of interpretations from other diviners and the clarification of disagreements.¹³² The complexity and sophistication of divinatory techniques and data procession lead us to conclude that the Assyrians believed that the intelligence obtained through these sources and their interpretation¹³³ was important for both domestic security¹³⁴ as for planning military invasions.¹³⁵

F. Summary of Intelligence Sources

Thus, by the end of the eighth c. B.C.E., the Assyrians were gathering information by means of three main networks: 1. the military, particularly through soldiers in the outposts; 2. the administration, in which the provincial governor functioned as a coordinator of regional intelligence-gathering; 3. the vassal system, through which the Assyrians forced treaty partners to share intelligence. These networks were complemented by special agents and enemy sources. This system represented a new step in the development of the Assyrian intelligence services, since they not only provided timely warnings about rebellions and military threats but gathered all sorts of seemingly quotidian information and thus guaranteed that the court was sufficiently informed about the situation throughout the

of diviners, see W. G. Lambert, "The Qualification of Babylonian Diviners," in *Festschrift für Rykle Borger zu seinem 65. Geburtstag am 24. Mai 1994*, ed. S. M. Maul (Groningen, 1998): 141–58.

¹³² G. B. Lanfranchi, "Scholars and Scholarly Tradition in Neo-Assyrian Times: A Case Study," *SAAB* 3 (1989): 109.

¹³³ The source of signs was diverse: the most important ominous sources were unprovoked signs—prophecies, celestial and terrestrial omina as well as birth, diagnostic, prognostic and dream omina. But information was also obtained through provoked signs, chiefly through extispicy, but less frequently through were observations of birds (ornithoscopy), water (lecanomancy), smoke (libanomancy) or flour (aleuromancy).

¹³⁴ SAA X 139–148.

¹³⁵ See for example the conflicts with Mugallu of Melid in SAA IV 1–12; VIII 512:5; IX 3 I 35. For a possible historical reconstruction, see *PNAE* 2/II, 761–62; *RLA* 8, 39.

empire. Besides HUMINT (“human intelligence”),¹³⁶ the Assyrians received information from “divine” sources (DIVINT). Whereas HUMINT was based on an intricate network of informers and agents, DIVINT was based on observation and learned interpretation of celestial and terrestrial signs.

IV. THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF ASSYRIAN INTELLIGENCE

Irrespective of whether intelligence services used an “express service” of sealed tablets or the latest generation of computers, their main task has not essentially changed because insurrections, conspiracies, betrayals, and secret allegiances have always been at work. This being the case, we can conclude that some aspects of the Assyrian intelligence services did not change over time. Thus for example military intelligence remained a priority throughout the whole Neo-Assyrian period. The Assyrians were always interested in the whereabouts of enemy troops, monitoring revolts, and checking on the loyalty of their partners. Even some techniques remained essentially unchanged: captured enemies, runaways, and deserters were always a welcome source of intelligence and the main technique of extracting information from them remained interrogation. The updates of vassals and provincial governors visiting the royal court, the use of local informers, and communication through letters and messengers were important sources of information in all phases of the Assyrian empire.

But intelligence agencies have to constantly adapt themselves to changing political and military situations in order to remain effective.¹³⁷ One would rightly expect Assyrian intelligence to undergo changes in topic and technique. Taking some insights from the reconstruction of the intelligence services in ancient Rome,¹³⁸ I suggest dividing Assyrian intelligence into three developmental phases: pre-systematic, systematic, and domestic surveillance.

¹³⁶ J. M. House, *Military Intelligence, 1870–1991: A Research Guide* (Westport, CT, 1993), 6.

¹³⁷ W. Laqueur, *A World of Secrets: The Uses and Limits of Intelligence* (New York, 1985), 260–64.

¹³⁸ R. M. Sheldon, *Intelligence Activities in Ancient Rome: Trust in the Gods, but Verify* (London, 2005); Liberati and Silverio, *Servizi Segreti in Roma Antica*.

A. *The Pre-systematic Phase*

The primary goal of intelligence services has always been to provide rulers with the information needed for military purposes.¹³⁹ Most intelligence of this type could be acquired on an *ad hoc* basis and with fairly simple tools.¹⁴⁰ Several royal inscriptions from the pre-Sargonid era indicate that Assyrian kings often received reports about revolts requiring punitive campaigns.¹⁴¹ The various studies on the beginnings of military intelligence services can be summarized by saying that military intelligence is concerned with three basic activities:¹⁴² reconnaissance, the collection of intelligence information by visual or other observation of an area; counter-reconnaissance, an attempt to prevent spies from acquiring important information by intercepting, driving away or capturing reconnaissance parties; and surveillance, involving the continuous observation of a single selected subject.¹⁴³

Other examples can be cited. According to Sargon II, the Urartian capital Turushpa was the origin of enemy spies that were regularly dispatched to gather information (TCL 3 300).¹⁴⁴ Nor were outposts a privilege only of emperors; smaller kingdoms also used outposts for intelligence purposes. Thus Ninurta-kudurri-usur, king of the land of Suhu and Mari, after

¹³⁹ House, *Military Intelligence*, 3.

¹⁴⁰ This sort of intelligence-gathering was practiced by most kings of the ancient Near East, e.g., when Thutmose III (1457–1424 B.C.E.) dispatched spies into enemy territory to learn the position of enemy troops, information then used for planning his famous campaign against Syria-Palestine. For the English translation see *COS II*, 7–9; for the historical reconstruction, see D. B. Redford, “The Northern Wars of Thutmose III,” in *Thutmose III: A New Biography*, ed. E. H. Cline and D. O’Connor (Ann Arbor, MI, 2006): 325–43; D. B. Redford, *The Wars in Syria and Palestine of Thutmose III* (Leiden, 2003), 195–244.

¹⁴¹ Thus Ashur-nasirpal II learned about a revolt in the city of Suru, the capture of Damdammusa by rebels, the revolt of sheikh Nur-Adad in the land Dagara, and a rebellion that broke out in Babylonia (*RIMA 2* A.O.101.1 I 75, I 101–103, II 23–25, and III 26–28, respectively). Shalmaneser III’s annals mention a similar report brought to the king about the revolt in Patinu (*RIMA 3* A.O.102.14:146–149 // 16:269’–273’).

¹⁴² F. Dvornik, *Origins of Intelligence Services* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1974), 3–47; R. M. Sheldon, *Espionage in the Ancient World: An Annotated Bibliography of Books and Articles in Western Languages* (Jefferson, NC, 2003).

¹⁴³ Similar types of pre-systematic intelligence can be also found in the Bible, including reconnaissance (Num. 13–14; Josh. 7–8; 14:7–8), counter-reconnaissance (Gen. 42:9–12), and surveillance (1 Sam. 14:16; 2 Sam. 18:24; 2 Kgs. 9:17).

¹⁴⁴ One might compare this to the dispatches coming from Egyptian outposts in the reign of Amenemhet III (1842–1797 B.C.E.) which provided the court with information about the movements of nomads on the border; see P. C. Smither, “The Semnah Dispatches,” *JEA* 31 (1945): 3–10; and Sh. Ahituv, “Sources for the Study of the Egyptian-Canaanite Border Administration,” *IEJ* 46 (1996): 219–24.

defeating Aramean “rebels,” built the city Dur-Ninurta-kudurri-usur in order to be “the open eyes of the land of Suhu” that watched the region.¹⁴⁵

We can label this early phase as pre-systematic intelligence. In this time, the Assyrians were primarily interested in the information necessary to conduct campaigns and learn about revolts in subdued territories. This intelligence did not require a sophisticated system of gathering and processing data, but continued to play an indispensable role in Assyrian warfare: the sources for the 701 campaign, for instance, reveal an Assyrian awareness of local terrain and Judah’s troop strength.¹⁴⁶

B. *Systematic Phase*

The birth of systematic intelligence in Assyria can be compared with that of Roman intelligence services. A.-M. Liberti and E. Silverio have convincingly argued that patriarchal society in ancient Rome did not need real intelligence networks because it already had sufficient mechanisms to monitor and eradicate hostile behavior on the clan, city and city-state level. The birth of systematic intelligence-gathering only took place when the Roman empire aspired to control the “entire world.” Since in this period hostile groups were incorporated into the empire, the Romans needed a more sophisticated system to warn them about incipient revolts and conspiracies. The systematic intelligence phase started in ancient Rome in the second c. B.C.E. on the magistrate level and was gradually transformed into an fully imperial network.¹⁴⁷

We can infer a similar shift towards systematic intelligence-gathering in Assyria. According to the royal inscriptions, elementary military intelligence remained an Assyrian priority during the Sargonid period,¹⁴⁸ Neo-Assyrian letters, however, point to a shift towards the regular gathering, processing, and verification of information. Since such a shift presupposes well-established provincial and central administration, a good system of roads and mail delivery, a wide network of collaborating vassals, a well-organized army, and sufficient economic resources to support all

¹⁴⁵ Ninurta-kudurri-ušur called it *ás-šú* EN.NUN *ana* KUR *su-ḫi* IGI^{II} *pe-te-ti* šá KUR *su-ḫi*, “Für die Bewachung des Lands Suhu ist diese Siedlung (wie) die offenen Augen des Lands Suhu”; see A. Cavigneaux and B. K. Ismail, “Die Statthalter von Suhu und Mari im 8. Jh. v. Chr.,” *BagM* 21 (1990): 343–57. For the English translation, see *RIMB* 2 S.01002.2.

¹⁴⁶ Dubovský, *Hezekiah and the Assyrian Spies*, 27–29.

¹⁴⁷ Liberati and Silverio, *Servizi Segreti*, 37–49.

¹⁴⁸ Sennacherib was informed about the rebellion in Babylonia (OIP 2, 49–50) and Ashurbanipal about the revolt of Taharkah in Egypt (*BIWA* B I 64; // A I 64 and C II 31) and about the invasion of Urtaku, king of Elam (*BIWA* B IV 43–48).

this,¹⁴⁹ it seems unlikely that such a transformation could have taken place before the time of Tiglath-pileser III. Consequently, I suggest that before 744 B.C.E. there was no stable intelligence network, and no rigorous criteria for the verification, protection, and double-checking of raw intelligence. However, due to the fact that we have no letters datable to before 744 B.C.E., I can only safely claim that this transformation was fully implemented by the time of Sargon II. Six features characterize this phase.

(1) *Mechanisms Guaranteeing Regular Reporting*

Since it was not the primary task of Assyrian soldiers, administrators, and vassals to provide information, they could easily “forget” to report. During Sargon II’s reign, three mechanisms were set up to enforce regular reporting. First, the royal court constantly urged the provincial governors, vassals, and other officials to write, and the king sent warning messages to those who failed in their duty: “Why is it that you heard but did not write?”; or “write quickly.”¹⁵⁰ This was not an invitation but a command of the king, and failure to carry it out had serious consequences. Pressure can also be observed in the numerous apologies proving the innocence and industriousness of letter-writers.¹⁵¹ Second, the royal court received information from multiple regular sources. Thus the king was supposed to be informed about any given event from guards, vassals, and provincial governors and administrators. If any one of them failed to inform the king of something reported by another regular source, their negligence would be verified and punished.¹⁵² The third system was the body of independent agents (messengers, *qēpu* officials, bodyguards, etc.) who served to double-check the regular intelligence networks mentioned above. These three mechanisms were meant to guarantee that Sargon II’s court was provided with precise and timely information on a regular basis.

(2) *First-hand Information*

The Assyrians also insisted on the quality of information. Above all, they valued first-hand information. Thus if an important message was received

¹⁴⁹ F. M. Fales, *L’Impero Assiro: Storia e amministrazione (IX–VII secolo a.C.)* (Bari, 2001), 59–71; K. Kessler, “‘Royal Roads’ and Other Questions of Neo-Assyrian Communication System,” in *Assyria 1995*, ed. S. Parpola and R. M. Whiting (Helsinki, 1997), 129; Y. J. Kim, “The Role of Communication in the Near Eastern Empires of the First Millennium BC” (Ph.D. thesis, Hebrew University, 1999).

¹⁵⁰ SAA I 125 r.11–12; cf. V 114 r.6’–7’; 221:5–6; “write quickly”: SAA V 45:5–6.

¹⁵¹ SAA I 176:40–42; V 211:5–r.11; XV 54 r.7–15.

¹⁵² SAA I 244 r.13–18.

in oral form, it was either quoted word-for-word, or the source himself was sent to the court to be interrogated in person.¹⁵³ If an important letter was received or intercepted, it was dispatched to the king.¹⁵⁴ Similarly, captured enemy messengers were sent to the king (SAA V 169). These precaution guaranteed that the court received not only an interpretation of information but had access to raw first-hand data as well.

(3) *Processing Information*

The improvement in quality can also be observed on four levels of processing information. The first level of information coming to the court represented “not yet verified” reports.¹⁵⁵ After an investigation, rumors were proved groundless (e.g., SAA XV 103) or true. The investigation was often done by dispatching “patrollers” or interrogating sources. Therefore, the second level was identified in letters as a “report,” or sometimes a “full report” (e.g., SAA XV 219:12). At this level, the king often received several subsequent reports and could follow the chronological development of events.¹⁵⁶ In some cases, the king asked for the clarification of details, and numerous letters responding to these requests have been preserved. Next, reports were compared: SAA XV 32, for instance allows us to see that certain scribes compared reports coming to the palace; if they did not agree, the senders had to send new reports.¹⁵⁷ The fourth and the last stage of processing intelligence was a summary briefing in which a high official—in Sargon II’s period it was his crown prince Sennacherib—summarized various reports coming from different sources and added his own remarks.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵³ SAA XV 186; and SAA XV 155, 161, respectively.

¹⁵⁴ SAA XV 120, 210; XVII 89:7–14.

¹⁵⁵ SAA V 173, 174; cf. also I 29:19; 30:10’.

¹⁵⁶ See Ashur-resuwa’s reports on the Urarto-Cimmerian war SAA I 30:1’–2’; 31:21–16; V 90, 92.

¹⁵⁷ The main challenge to interpreting intelligence was the massive amount of information flowing in. Numerous complaints, denunciations and reports reaching the Assyrian royal court prevented the king from directly accessing information and required a bureaucratic apparatus for processing it (SAA XVI 6). As a consequence, information could easily get lost or filtered out. This problem was perceived already in Esarhaddon’s correspondence, in which one reporter added at the end of his letter “Whoever you are, O scribe, who are reading (this letter), do not hide it from the king, your lord” (SAA XVI 32 r.17–19). This filtering bureaucracy, however, may have had an amplifying effect, with letters becoming even more heavily charged with denunciations and fear. As these aspects became more and more prominent, they must have had a negative impact on the performance of the intelligence service itself.

¹⁵⁸ SAA I 29–31.

(4) *Protecting Information*

The goal of intelligence is not only to gather intelligence but also to protect it. To this end, techniques of counter-intelligence were also improved. Besides getting hold of enemy spies, the Assyrians were also able to learn when the enemy intercepted internal communications: they knew that the others knew.¹⁵⁹ For this reason, a good deal of Assyrian attention was given to the protection of their own communications. To protect their letters, the Assyrians adopted an old system by placing tablets into sealed envelopes preventing free access to the content of the letter.¹⁶⁰ Comparing the seal impressions of senders and addressees represented a simple but reliable security measure. Doubts about the identity of a seal impression could indicate deception or fraud (SAA XV 125). Moreover, senders often mentioned letters that they had previously dispatched to or received from the king; thus both sides could have delivery confirmation, and could easily discover if a letter disappeared or was fake. The highest security measure to avoid deception is attested in two identical reports sent to the king by two different messengers (SAA XV 131 r.6–12). Despite these elementary but efficient security measures, communications still sometimes disappeared or were intercepted (SAA XV 35). In order to prevent this, letters were carried by professional messengers; if there was any suspicion concerning the identity of the messenger, he was arrested until the situation was clarified (SAA XVII 155:4–19).¹⁶¹

(5) *Covert Action*

Sargonid Assyrian intelligence was not limited to information gathering. We can identify a few covert actions as well, such as toppling a regime in Bit-Ha'ir, murdering a family in Marpada that was not favorable to the king, planning to capture the city of Darati by means of tunnels, and kidnapping or smuggling people in Uriakka and Media.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ SAA XV 218; SAA XV III r.4–10; see also Codevilla, *Informing Statecraft*, 29.

¹⁶⁰ SAA V 213–14.

¹⁶¹ Passing through an Assyrian city, messengers often received other accompanying letters or took the letters of a provincial governor to avoid the multiplication of messengers (SAA XV 161, 180).

¹⁶² SAA XV 131, 136, 199, and 85, 100, respectively.

(6) *PSYOPs*

Psychological warfare is also connected with intelligence services.¹⁶³ Several studies dedicated to this topic indicate that in the time of Sargon II, the Assyrians used techniques which even modern propaganda officers would be proud of. According to the extant letters the Assyrians were skilled in using counterpropaganda, incentives and promises, and the carrot-and-stick strategy.¹⁶⁴ If peaceful propaganda did not meet its goal, the Assyrians did not hesitate to make recourse to more violent means such as terrorizing the local inhabitants (SAA V 202), deporting entire regions, or executing rebels and displaying their flayed or impaled corpses in public. Messengers spread the terrifying news of exemplary punishments from city to city in order to soften up the resistance of obstinate rebels.¹⁶⁵ At Jerusalem, Sennacherib put to work such techniques as undermining trust in Hezekiah, broadcasting unsettling imagery, and the revelation of “shocking knowledge” of supposedly secret information in order to win the day.¹⁶⁶

This short presentation indicates that by the time of Sargon II, Assyrian intelligence services played an important role in controlling the empire in a systematic manner. The intelligence services were radically improved in organizing, processing, and protecting data. Furthermore, by this point Assyrian intelligence services had assumed all three dimensions intrinsic to intelligence: gathering, processing, and protecting information; undertaking covert action; and engaging in psychological warfare.¹⁶⁷ Therefore, I suggest that the first comprehensive intelligence services in the world were established in the time of Sargon II.

C. *The Shift to Domestic Surveillance*

J. Der Derian has suggested that two ever-present social forces exist in any society—alienation and surveillance—the balance of which help to

¹⁶³ W. E. Daugherty, *A Psychological Warfare Casebook* (Baltimore, MD, 1958); W. E. Bodom, “Psychological Operations and Political Warfare in Long-Term Strategic Planning,” in *Psychological Operations and Political Warfare in Long-Term Strategic Planning*, ed. J. Radványi (New York, 1990): 173–80.

¹⁶⁴ SAA XV 1; 184; and 159, 210, 305, respectively.

¹⁶⁵ SAA XV 221 r.7; see Dubovský, *Hezekiah and the Assyrian Spies*, 161–88; W. R. Gallagher, “Assyrian Deportation Propaganda,” *SAAB* 8 (1994): 57–65, and *Sennacherib’s Campaign to Judah: New Studies* (Leiden, 1999).

¹⁶⁶ For a full analysis of these techniques, see Dubovský, *Hezekiah and the Assyrian Spies*, 10–27, 229–38.

¹⁶⁷ A. N. Shulsky and G. J. Schmitt, *Silent Warfare: Understanding the World of Intelligence* (Washington, DC, 2002), 1–6.

shape its political institutions, including its intelligence services. According to Der Derian, alienation is the first force at work in any espionage run by the state. It is a psychological, political, and military process in which one entity consciously distinguishes itself from the other, and does not exclude military and violent methods. Alienation helps to define identity on the one hand, but also estrangements, mutual struggles for recognition, and wars.¹⁶⁸ This force determined several aspects of Sargon II's intelligence services. His expansionistic policy and military campaigns defined the interests and types of agents used by the Assyrians. The "patrollers," known mostly from letters dated to Sargon II,¹⁶⁹ are an illustrative example: their dispatch to collect strategically important information about enemies was the preferred tool of Sargon II's intelligence system. Their use around open frontiers marks an earlier concern about other states and the integrity of Assyrian identity in the context of an emerging empire.

Whereas alienation was the major force determining the interests and techniques of Assyrian intelligence in the time of Sargon II, by Esarhaddon's period the focus had shifted to surveillance, since normalization in global and domestic politics was at stake,¹⁷⁰ and the Assyrian state placed more emphasis on domestic security. Reading the letters in this light, we can notice a shift of royal interest towards mapping enemies primarily *in the homeland*. This shift resulted in a stricter, fear-based control relying heavily on denunciation,¹⁷¹ while, in parallel, HUMINT was incorporated into the divination system. Due to the limited corpus of the extant letters we can only say that this transformation was fully realized by Esarhaddon's reign,¹⁷² but it seems logical that a transformation of one socio-political into another must have been accomplished largely during Sennacherib's time. Let us consider three aspects of this transformation.

¹⁶⁸ J. Der Derian, *Antidiplomacy: Spies, Terror, Speed, and War* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), 46.

¹⁶⁹ In Esarhaddon's reign, "patrollers" were also recruited for the campaign against Egypt, causing similar problems similar to those Sargon II experienced in Urartu. However, in the east, "patrollers" were by and large replaced by messengers.

¹⁷⁰ Der Derian, *Antidiplomacy*, 46–47; D. Lyon, "Synopticon, and Scopophilia: Watching and Being Watched," in *The New Politics of Surveillance and Visibility*, ed. R. V. Ericson and K. D. Haggerty (Toronto, 2006), 35–54; T. Mathiesen, *Silently Silenced: Essays on the Creation of Acquiescence in Modern Society* (Winchester, UK, 2004), 80–90.

¹⁷¹ For the shift in the concept of kingship see B. N. Porter, *Images, Power, and Politics: Figurative Aspects of Esarhaddon's Babylonian Policy* (Philadelphia, 1993), 77–168.

¹⁷² Frahm, "Hochverrat in Assur," 112–14, 131–33. It is not to be excluded that strict control and denunciation were nourished by Esarhaddon's ill health and depression; *LAS* 2, 230–36, Frame, *Babylonia*, 92.

(1) *Denunciation*

Denunciation is not easily observable except in highly bureaucratized societies.¹⁷³ In Assyria, denunciation fed on the fear of lower officials of punishment or removal from office for negligence or rebellion.¹⁷⁴ The denunciation of colleagues was highly encouraged and became a way to obtain the king's grace. The atmosphere of fear encouraged denouncing before being denounced.¹⁷⁵ Many denunciations were self-interested (SAA XVI 42, 97). In some cases, denunciation was disinterested, driven by faithfulness to a treaty and loyalty to the king.¹⁷⁶ Irrespective of motive, the royal court learned many important details about others through denunciation—for example, Esarhaddon was informed that governors had squandered the goods of his household; that the associate of a letter-writer was a criminal; that newly-appointed cohort commanders were drunkards and violent men; that one governor obeyed while others did not; that high officials in Guzana committed crimes; that temple administrators covered up thefts; that widespread corruption was going on in Arwad.¹⁷⁷ Moreover, thanks to denunciations, the court was able to learn in time about violence after Sennacherib's death (SAA XVI 95) and plots against Esarhaddon.¹⁷⁸

(2) *HUMINT and DIVINT: Verification of Personnel*

An important improvement in this phase consisted of the mutual check between HUMINT and DIVINT personnel. In this way the king could check the veracity of "reliable" information and agents in both spheres. In the first place, HUMINT reported on religious personnel.¹⁷⁹ For example,

¹⁷³ It is not surprising that most of the studies on denunciation have focused on Nazi Germany and the USSR; Ch. Altenstrasser, *Handlungsspielraum Denunziation: Alltag, Geschlecht und Denunziation im ländlichen Oberdonau 1938 bis 1945* (München, 2005); K. Sauerland, *Dreissig Silberlinge, Denunziation: Gegenwart und Geschichte* (Berlin, 2000); F.-X. Nérard, *Cinq pour cent de vérité: La dénonciation dans l'URSS de Staline, 1928–1941* (Paris, 2004).

¹⁷⁴ E.g., SAA XVI 78; denunciation was used in Sargon II's period as well (SAA V 200, 210, 211).

¹⁷⁵ SAA XVIII 7 r.2–6; 82:11'–12'.

¹⁷⁶ E.g., SAA II 6; YBC 11382; for two types of denouncers, see S. N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge, 2006), 178.

¹⁷⁷ SAA XVI 42; 43; 115; XIII 124; XVI 63; XIII 138; and XVI 127, respectively.

¹⁷⁸ SAA X 112 r.3–33; XVI 10, 59, 60; YBC 11382; see M. Nissinen, *Reference to Prophecy in Neo-Assyrian Sources* (Helsinki, 1998), 127–50.

¹⁷⁹ Cross-checking was already practiced in a previous period; consider, e.g., Aqar-Bel-lumur, a reliable servant of the king (SAA XVII 102), active in Babylonia, who reported the words of the haruspex Šula (SAA XVII 105). However, it became more prominent in letters dated to Esarhaddon's reign.

Shamash-shumu-ukin received a denunciation against a haruspex and two astrologers who had withheld information from the king and were involved in a revolt; this denunciation was forwarded to the king.¹⁸⁰ Similarly, religious personnel provided important information on HUMINT. For instance, Shumu-iddina, the *šatammu* of the Esagil temple during Esarhaddon's reign, reported in 671–670 B.C.E. that a *qēpu* official had hidden two runaway eunuchs involved in a conspiracy and sent them to Borsippa.¹⁸¹ Since Shumu-iddina did not feel authorized to capture them, he asked the king to intervene as soon as possible lest they escape (SAA XIII 178:26–r.15). These two examples show that religious personnel as well as *qēpu* officials could become traitors; their mutual checks helped to disclose secret plots against the king.

(3) *HUMINT and DIVINT: Verification of Intelligence*

The interweaving of both spheres in practice meant that both systems became inseparable parts of the decision-making process. At first, HUMINT and DIVINT served as independent sources of intelligence. Secondly, extispicy was used for the verification of information coming from other sources. The best examples are dated to Ashurbanipal's reign: a rumor that Shamash-shumu-ukin had escaped to Elam, for instance, was not confirmed by extispicy; another query based on an intelligence report provoked unfavorable signs.¹⁸² But a third level was a more complex interaction between DIVINT and HUMINT which can be illustrated from tablet SAA X 111. The first eight lines documented the observation of a star, interpreted as a sign of victory over the Mannaeans (DIVINT); the next eight lines then presupposed a) basic military intelligence on the Mannaeans, and b) intercepted intelligence on the Cimmerians (both HUMINT). Bel-ushezib, taking into consideration the star and the barbarous behavior of the Cimmerians, next suggested that what the Cimmerians said was a lie, and made recommendations on how to organize an invasion. At the end of the text, Bel-ushezib recognized the limits of his suggestions and invited the king to consult a terrain expert.¹⁸³ The observations of the moon and the sun further buttressed his recommendations.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ SAA XVI 21; for details, see Parpola, "A Letter from Shamash-shumu-Ukin to Esarhaddon," 31–32.

¹⁸¹ Nissinen, *Reference to Prophecy in Neo-Assyrian Sources*, 127–35.

¹⁸² Shamash-shumu-ukin: SAA IV 282 r.7–10; unfavorable signs: SAA IV 280 r.5–15.

¹⁸³ For historical details see F. M. Fales and G. B. Lanfranchi, "The Role of the Cimmerians in a Letter to Esarhaddon," *East and West* 31 (1981): 9–33.

¹⁸⁴ SAA X 112 and 113; see also Lanfranchi, "Scholars and Scholarly Tradition in Neo-Assyrian Times," 110–11.

In this phase, Assyrian control of information reached its peak. It was based on fear-motivated denunciation, information-gathering through DIVINT and HUMINT, and a resulting cross-checking of sources. Assyrian sources thus knew in advance that their reports would be compared with both the reports of other informers and the omina. Moreover, the combination of DIVINT and HUMINT provided divination with an empirical aspect since it had to be confronted with intelligence reports gathered on the ground. Similarly, intelligence reports coming from different sources were exposed to divine judgment, guaranteeing an ulterior verification of information. And, finally, divination techniques, usually extispicy, also had to confirm decisions taken on the basis of both DIVINT and HUMINT. This system brought several Assyrian campaigns to their successful end.¹⁸⁵

V. ASSYRIAN INTELLIGENCE AND SENNACHERIB'S LEVANTINE CAMPAIGN

Now we can rightly ask what light this study can cast upon Sennacherib's invasion of the Levant. To this end, I will first present a profile of Sennacherib the crown prince and king as intelligence official. Sennacherib was not merely trained and active in this branch of statecraft—already no small matter; he oversaw the transition of Assyrian intelligence into a fully systematic service at a time when the empire was shifting its footing to management more than expansion, when information became as valuable as conquest. Secondly, I will explore how Assyrian intelligence was involved during the campaign against the Levant, arguing that the campaign was precipitated, prepared and prosecuted as much by its intelligence sources and services as by its military and political arms. Information was not just an interesting feature of the imperial age; it had become one of its driving forces.

¹⁸⁵ F. M. Fales and G. B. Lanfranchi, "The Impact of Oracular Material on the Political Utterances and Political Action in the Royal Inscriptions of the Sargonid Dynasty," in *Oracles et prophéties dans l'antiquité: Actes du colloque de Strasbourg 15–17 Juin 1995*, ed. J.-G. Heintz (Paris, 1997), 106–107.

A. Intelligence Profile of Sennacherib

(1) Intelligence Training as Crown Prince

Sennacherib while crown prince (*mār šarri*)¹⁸⁶ was introduced not only to the administration of the empire but also to the secrets of waging war¹⁸⁷ and intelligence-gathering.¹⁸⁸ In the previous sections I have suggested that Assyrian networks and the systematic gathering of intelligence was already fully functioning during the reign of Sargon II. The extant letters dated before 705 B.C.E. illustrate Sennacherib's oversight of many of those intelligence activities, especially while his father was on campaign.¹⁸⁹ Letters SAA I 29–32 witness that the crown prince Sennacherib was not just a passive observer of the new trend but an active coordinator of some strategically important operations.

The formation of an intelligence officer depends heavily on the spectrum and quality of information to which the officer has access. Information reaching Sennacherib's palace was often top secret and covered quite a wide range of topics. He was informed about the results of Urartian military campaigns, the whereabouts of the Urartian king, his troops and governors, some local skirmishes, Assyrian runaways, the construction of a strategically important fortress in Kumme, floods in Assyria, and tributes and audiences.¹⁹⁰

The depth of Sennacherib's immersion in the secrets of the Assyrian intelligence system is also reflected in his access to intelligence sources. From the letters we can infer that he was in contact with almost all branches of the intelligence services that were active during Sargon II's reign. He received reports from Sargon II's top intelligence coordinator Ashur-resuwa,¹⁹¹ from a governor of Birate, the guards along the Urartian border, and "patrollers" from the household of the Palace Herald.¹⁹² Moreover, he received messengers from vassals and "special agents" such as Arije, the Ukkean king, the ruler of Arzabia, the major-domo of Ahatabisha,

¹⁸⁶ For the various translations of the term see SAA VI, xxvii–xxix.

¹⁸⁷ F. M. Fales, *Guerre et paix en Assyrie: Religion et impérialisme* (Paris, 2010), 95–206.

¹⁸⁸ Fales, *L'impero Assiro*, 50–51.

¹⁸⁹ SAA I 29–40; V 281.

¹⁹⁰ Urartian campaigns: SAA I 29:24–35, 30:4'–r.2, 31:8–r.25, 32:11–16; Urartian king: SAA I 29 r.1–10; skirmishes: SAA I 29 r.12–17; runaways: SAA I 30 r.3–5; Kummean fortress: SAA I 29:8–21; floods: SAA I 36; audiences: SAA I 29 r.18–26; 33; 34. For Levantine tribute delivered to Assyria, see Dubovský, *Hezekiah and the Assyrian Spies*, 198–99.

¹⁹¹ SAA I 29:23, r.11; 30:2'; 31:21, r.4.

¹⁹² Birate: SAA I 31 r.5; Urartian border: I 31 r.23–25; "patrollers": I 30 r.6.

and (indirectly) Urzana, king of Musasir.¹⁹³ Furthermore, he received official messengers from the Mannean king (SAA I 29 r.18), Ašdod (SAA I 29 r.22), and Commagene (SAA I 33:8–14) who brought not only audience gifts but important information.¹⁹⁴

From the extant letters we can also conclude that, as crown prince, Sennacherib was fully aware of how information was transmitted and processed, and distinguished “not-yet verified reports” from full ones.¹⁹⁵ In contrast to the letters coming from other top officials¹⁹⁶ of Sargon II, Sennacherib was the only one who used summary briefings¹⁹⁷ in which he juxtaposed reports coming from different sources and then added his own evaluation;¹⁹⁸ only Shamash-shumu-ukin used a similar type of report.¹⁹⁹ Of particular importance also was Sennacherib’s attention to detail. In sensitive cases, such as the reports on the Urarto-Cimmerian war, he preferred to quote sources word for word (SAA I 29–31), and in his summary reports he also informed Sargon II of the date when he received reports (e.g., SAA I 29:23), information usually omitted in other reports.

As crown prince, Sennacherib was also introduced to some techniques used for obtaining information. His ability to interrogate or to supervise the interrogation of enemy sources can be illustrated through an episode involving captured Urartians. During this interrogation, Sennacherib was able to get out of this source important information regarding the depleted morale of the Urartian troops (SAA I 32:8–16).

The letters demonstrate that Sennacherib was well-acquainted with the latest ways of verifying data. First, from his correspondence with Ashuresuwa, we can conclude that Sennacherib could trace the development of a situation through multiple letters (SAA I 31:22–23). Such skills are crucial for the formation of top intelligence officers, since only in this way can they become aware of the limits of reporting and learn to wait patiently for updates that can radically change the picture of older reports. Second, Sennacherib could compare information coming from different sources. This cross-checking of simultaneous sources coming proved to

¹⁹³ Arije: SAA I 29:22; Ukku: I 31:20; Arzabia: I 29 r.12; Aḫatabiša: 31 r.26–29; Musasir: I 30:4.

¹⁹⁴ Mannean king: SAA I 29 r.18; Ašdod: I 29 r.22; Commagene I 33:8–14.

¹⁹⁵ E.g., the not-yet verified SAA I 29:19 versus the “full” report of I 30:r.2.

¹⁹⁶ SAA I 41–109.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ SAA I 29 r.18–26; 30 r.3–7; 31 r.19–29.

¹⁹⁹ SAA XVI 21; it is quite plausible to assume that it was Sennacherib who introduced summary briefings into Assyrian intelligence.

be important for evaluating the Urartian losses in the defeat inflicted by the Cimmerians.²⁰⁰ Third, according to SAA I 31 r.17–22, Sennacherib was also keeping an eye on the sources themselves. Thus he received not only information from but also about his agents. Fourth, he was also very careful to inform Sargon II about the channels through which information reached the court. For example, he informed Sargon II that the real source of information on the defeat of the Urartian king Rusa I came by way of Urzana, who wrote to Shulmu-Bel, who then sent a message to Sennacherib, who then sent a message to Sargon II (SAA I 30:2–r.2). Naturally, for Sargon II it was important to know whether the information came directly from the (reliable) Shulmu-Bel or from the (unreliable) Urzanu *through* Shulmu-Bel. Finally, Sennacherib was also introduced into the secrets of counter-intelligence. Thus when the construction of an Assyrian fortress in Kumme was compromised by the Urartians, Sennacherib not only learned about this information leak, but also who informed the Urartian king about it, and even about the Urartian counter-measures (SAA I 29:8–21).

It can be concluded that Sennacherib as crown prince received the best intelligence training available at the time. He had access to a wide range of secret information; he knew and efficiently used the available intelligence sources and networks; and he was introduced to the media and techniques used for gathering information. Finally, Sennacherib did not rely blindly on his sources and information, but double-checked both. To this list of *bona fides*, we can add his attention to detail, ability to interrogate sources, and assessment of the value of first-hand information. These talents, as we will see, would serve him well in his career on the throne of Assyria.

(2) *King Sennacherib and His Use of Intelligence*

After becoming the king of Assyria, Sennacherib intentionally kept his distance in some aspects from the politics of Sargon II,²⁰¹ but maintained his positive attitude towards these intelligence services. As the crown prince, Sennacherib had his residence in Dur-Sharrukin. Once he moved to Nineveh, however, he transferred the voluminous correspondence of his father with him to the new capital, according to M. Dietrich.²⁰² This

²⁰⁰ SAA I 30–31.

²⁰¹ H. Tadmor, "Sennacherib, King of Justice," in *Sefer Moshe: The Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume*, ed. C. Cohen, A. Hurvitz, and S. M. Paul (Winona Lake, IN, 2004), 389–90.

²⁰² SAA XVII, xix.

suggests that Sennacherib was fully aware of the importance of having access to his father's royal archive, including intelligence reports from all around the empire.

There are only a few letters that can be quite safely attributed to Sennacherib's reign,²⁰³ but they provide solid proof of his intelligence activities. For our purposes, the most important letters are those sent by Aqar-Bel-lumur and Nabu-shumu-lishir from Babylonia. Between 704 and 693 B.C.E., Merodach-Baladan once again became active there, and several letters reported on his whereabouts. Comparing the content of these letters with those dated to the time of Sargon II, we can see a similarity in vocabulary and topic. To report on Merodach-Baladan's whereabouts Sennacherib's informers used the same expressions as Sargon II's: "News of the son of Yakin: he is in Babylon."²⁰⁴ Similarly, Sennacherib used his intelligence networks to get information on the most recent developments in Babylonia and Elam, as had Sargon II. Sennacherib employed his agents to spy on his arch-enemy Merodach-Baladan; to learn about the death of his wife; about the submission of the local sheik Kalbi-Ukua; about negotiations with Babylonians and psychological pressure of Merodach-Baladan on them; and about an Elamite attack.²⁰⁵ Moreover, the letters indicate that Sennacherib and Sargon II used similar methods for obtaining information. SAA II 3 indicates that Sennacherib also used treaties²⁰⁶ as a tool to guarantee the flow of information to the court; SAA X 96 r.1–10 describes a denunciation against a priest; SAA XVII 110 points to a local network through which Aqar-Bel-lumur obtained information.

From the analysis of the Babylonian correspondence from Sargon II's and Sennacherib's reign, it is possible to conclude that there is no significant difference in the quality or style of the reports. In other words, the efficient use of intelligence networks and techniques set up by Sargon II continued throughout Sennacherib's reign.

²⁰³ For the list of letters dated to Sennacherib's reign see SAA XVII, xxxvi–xxxvii. For Sennacherib's campaigns against Babylonia, see W. Mayer, "Sanherib und Babylonien: Der Staatsmann und Feldherr im Spiegel seiner Bablonienpolitik," in *Vom alten Orient zum Alten Testament: Festschrift für Wolfram Freiherrn von Soden zum 85. Geburtstag am 19. Juni 1993*, ed. M. Dietrich and O. Loretz (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1995), 305–32.

²⁰⁴ Sargon II's informers SAA XV 158:7–9; 160:5'–6'; Sennacherib's: SAA XVII 106:5; 109:9–10; 112:6.

²⁰⁵ Merodach-baladan: SAA XVII 106, 107, 109, 110, 113, 115–119; wife's death: XVII 112; submission of Kalbi-Ukua: XVII 111; Babylonian negotiations: XVII 110; Elamite attack: XVII 120

²⁰⁶ B. Oded, *War, Peace, and Empire: Justifications for War in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions* (Wiesbaden, 1992), 85.

B. *Intelligence Background of Sennacherib's Third Campaign*

Sennacherib started his campaign against the West when he was about forty-four years old,²⁰⁷ by which point he was an experienced politician and intelligence coordinator. His intelligence profile demonstrates that this king used information for controlling subdued regions as well as for organizing campaigns. Sennacherib's campaign against the Levant was no exception. Even though we do not possess any letter from this period on the intelligence background of this specific campaign, we can point to other extant documents²⁰⁸ that—on the basis of the foregoing analyses—can cast new light on the role of intelligence in Judah in 701 B.C.E.

(1) *Sources Potentially Reporting on Judah*

If there were no intelligence sources reporting on the Levant—despite the sophisticated networks active in the East and in the North—all of Sennacherib's training would have been in vain. But, we can infer that Sennacherib received information from both Assyrian and vassal branches in the region.²⁰⁹ Since the reporting was part of the job description of the Assyrian governors, they had to gather and process information on Judah as well. From the extant documents we know that the Assyrian governors were already in Zobah, Hamath, Hatarika, Damascus, and Samaria.²¹⁰ These five centers represented the intelligence hubs active in the Levant before Sennacherib's invasion. The Assyrian archives contain thirteen letters from the West, from Zobah, Hamath, and Damascus. Two of them are dated to Tiglath-pileser III's reign, and eleven to that of Sargon II. This indicates that reporting had a long tradition in the West. Since Sennacherib did not abolish Sargon II's network in Babylonia, it is unlikely that he undermined such a long-active intelligence network in the West, but rather improved it. Moreover, if the *qēpu* office established by Tiglath-pileser III to oversee the Arabs (*RINAP* 1 43:25'–27') was still functioning, this might have been another reliable source of information, along with the tax inspectors,

²⁰⁷ E. Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sannacherib-Inschriften* (Vienna, 1997), 8.

²⁰⁸ Besides this book, important evaluations of the Assyrian sources have been made by B. Becking, *From David to Gedaliah: The Book of Kings as Story and History* (Fribourg, 2007), 123–46; W. Mayer, "Sennacherib's Campaign of 701 BCE: The Assyrian View," in *Like a Bird in a Cage: The Invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BCE*, ed. L. L. Grabbe (London, 2003), 168–200; and H. P. Müller, *Bibel und alter Orient: Altorientalische Beiträge zum Alten Testament von Wolfram von Soden* (Berlin, 1985), 149–57.

²⁰⁹ M. Cogan, "Judah under Assyrian Hegemony: A Reexamination of Imperialism and Religion," *JBL* 112 (1993): 403–14.

²¹⁰ For a list of governors, see Dubovský, *Hezekiah and the Assyrian Spies*, 191–92.

prefects, and city-overseers known to have been stationed in Levantine cities around the time of Sennacherib.²¹¹ We can safely assume that Padi, the king of Ekron, who was bound by treaty to Sennacherib and who because of his loyalty to Assyria was dethroned and put in prison,²¹² was the most important, but hardly the only, source of the Levantine vassal branch. And it is not to be excluded that information also came from the kings of Edom, Moab, some of the Philistine kings—and even from Hezekiah himself before his rebellion! In sum, even though there are no letters proving the existence of an intelligence network in the Levant before 701 B.C.E., it can be assumed that at least the regular administrative and vassal branches were active prior to Sennacherib's invasion.

(2) *What Did Sennacherib Need to Know Before Setting Off?*

The description of the campaign against the Levant itself points to information Sennacherib needed to bring this campaign to its successful end.²¹³ The very fact that the campaign took place already indicates that Sennacherib had to have been informed that a rebellion had broken out; obviously, no one musters an army and marches it 750 miles just to check and find out if something is wrong. More importantly, to conduct the campaign Sennacherib needed to know some strategic details. According to the Assyrian annals Sennacherib knew that Sidka and Hezekiah were the masterminds of the revolt, and that Jerusalem, Eltekeh, Timnah, and Ashkelon and its satellite cities had joined the anti-Assyrian coalition.²¹⁴ Sennacherib's rescue of Padi from Jerusalem also presupposed that Sennacherib knew in which city his loyal vassal ended up (OIP 2, 32 l. 73–75). Some information concerning the terrain must have been available, perhaps from previous Assyrian campaigns, in order to lead the campaign along the *via maris* more suitable for Sennacherib's troops²¹⁵ and to concentrate his main attention on Eltekeh, Timnah, and Lachish.

²¹¹ Ibid., 192–93.

²¹² Mayer, "Updating the Messages," 177–78.

²¹³ See my exposition of method for distinguishing ex-post facto justification from likely prior knowledge in Assyrian royal inscriptions (Dubovský, *Hezekiah and the Assyrian Spies*, 221–226), including the identification of sources, confirmation of parallel inscriptional material by intelligence reports, and patterns of data selection, in addition to the basic knowledge necessary to begin military operations.

²¹⁴ Sidka and Hezekiah: OIP 2, 30 l. 60–61, 32 l. 18–19; Jerusalem: OIP 2, 33 l. 40; Eltekeh and Timnah: OIP 2, 32 l. 6; Ashkelon: OIP 2, 30 l. 61; its satellite cities (Beth-Dagon, Joppa, Banaibarka, and Asuru): OIP 2, 31 l. 69–70.

²¹⁵ M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation* (Garden City, NY, 1988), 245. For similar interpretations see M. Nobile, *1–2 Re: Nuova versione, introduzione e commento* (Milano, 2010), 418.

Finally, the annals indicate that Sennacherib was aware of the desertion of *ʾurbi* mercenaries from Hezekiah, and perhaps of the fear paralyzing the enemy camp.²¹⁶ This last piece of information might be dismissed as either knowledge-after-the-fact or mere hyperbole, but it can also be compared to a similar comment regarding the fear paralyzing Urartu, a detail which Sennacherib had added to a report sent to Sargon II (SAA I 32:13–14), which must then have been an important element for planning the last moments of the latter's campaign; we may imagine it was meant to describe an actual situation.

(3) *What Did Sennacherib Need to Know Once in the Levant?*

The most important contribution of the intelligence services for the victorious end of Sennacherib's campaign was its information on Egypt. The negotiation between the Philistine rebels and Egypt, most likely top-secret, as well as the preparation of the Egyptian counterattack, could easily have caught the Assyrians by surprise and reversed the outcome in favor of the anti-Assyrian coalition if not detected in time.²¹⁷ However, there is no evidence that the Assyrian troops were taken off-guard. From the annals we can only infer that Sennacherib learned about the negotiation with Egypt and about the whereabouts of the Egyptian army (OIP 2, 31–32 l. II 79–III 15). The biblical account is more explicit: “He (the king of Assyria) received a report about Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia: He has set out to do battle with you” (2 Kings 19:9)²¹⁸ The expression *וַיִּשְׁמַע אֶל-*, meaning “he heard concerning,” occurs in the Hebrew Bible in this sense only this once. In all other cases it means “listen to,”²¹⁹ in expressions employing three types of prepositions to indicate that someone had heard news that someone else reported.

Phrases containing the verb “hear” were, however, typical in Assyrian royal inscriptions mentioning the report of undisclosed informers who were the ears of the king.²²⁰ Of particular interest is a note in Ashurbanipal's Prism A i 128–134:²²¹ Assyrian officials stationed in Egypt heard about preparations for an insurrection. Prisms A and C describe the way

²¹⁶ *ʾurbi* mercenaries: OIP 2, 33–34 l. 39–41; enemy camp: OIP 2, 31 l. 78.

²¹⁷ E. A. Knauf, “Sennacherib at the Berezina,” in *“Like a Bird in a Cage,”* ed. Grabbe, 141–44.

²¹⁸ Translation from M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, *II Kings*, 224.

²¹⁹ E.g., Gen. 16:11; 36:22. In Isa. 37:9, the preposition *אֶל* is substituted with *עַל*. A similar expression with the preposition *עַל* is in Gen. 41:15 and with *לְ* in Neh. 13:27.

²²⁰ See above, pp. 272, 282, 286; examples: *RIMB* 2 S 0.1001.1 20'–21'; S 0.1002.2 32'; *RINAP* 4 I ii 50–51; *BIWA* 22.

²²¹ // C ii 123–130.

they came to know about the insurrection. The officials captured messengers sent to Taharkah inviting him to join the insurrection against Assyria. Seeing the content of the intercepted letters, the Assyrians realized the imminence of the rebellion and immediately suppressed it.

Let us now place this biblical verse and its parallels from the royal inscriptions into the context of our previous studies. From the Assyrian archives, we have learned that Sargon II and Sennacherib closely observed the whereabouts of Urartian, Elamite, and Babylonian²²² troops. From the royal inscriptions, we learn that the term “I/he/they heard” described a report of undisclosed reporters. From Ashurbanipal’s annals we even learned that such a “hearing” meant the interception of secret correspondence that resulted in the suppression of an insurrection. It also seems improbable that Sennacherib, trained in intelligence operations, was not paying close attention to the whereabouts of the Egyptian king and his troops.²²³ Therefore information that “the Egyptian troops set out to fight against” Assyria (2 Kings 19:9) helped Sennacherib to prepare for the attack, defeat the Egyptian troops once they reached Philistia, and thus cut off the last hope of the rebels to expel the Assyrian invaders.

Despite the fact that we have no letters to show what intelligence had in fact been sent to the court, Sennacherib’s campaign against the Levant simply could not have been executed without these supporting efforts of his intelligence services. The king had access to information regarding the political and military movements of Egypt, details regarding the revolt, and basic topographic data. The strategic and tactical contributions of this knowledge were, in the end, as crucial to the Assyrian victory as any of its actual military actions.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper I have studied the activities and structures of the Assyrian intelligence services during the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E. I have demonstrated that at least fifteen years before Sennacherib undertook

²²² In particular, letters from Babylonia dated to the reigns of Sargon II and Sennacherib show that both kings were closely observing the movements of Merodach-Baladan and his army.

²²³ Before the Egyptian attack took place, the Assyrians had already conquered the coastal cities. Letters from the guards and personnel stationed along the northern frontier, after the Assyrian troops moved on to Lachish and other Judean cities, show that one of their main tasks was to report everything they saw, which would have included intelligence on the upcoming counterattack of the Egyptian army.

his campaign against the Levant, a sophisticated intelligence network was already well-established in the Assyrian empire. The Assyrians made most of their administrative structures to gather information, forced their vassals to report on the situation in their regions, and set up a network of independent agents and informers to double-check incoming information. Moreover, they developed a simple but highly reliable system of protection for their own information, and their processing of raw data bears all features of well-organized intelligence service.

Sennacherib as a crown prince had been fully immersed in his father's espionage services, and once he became the king of Assyria he successfully employed his father's intelligence network to map the situation in the East and to gather intelligence on Merodach-Baladan. It is certain, however, that intelligence itself had taken center stage among imperial concerns, having arrived as the chief new weapon of king and empire.

We have no documents directly proving intelligence activities in the Levant in the years immediately prior to 701 B.C.E. But taking into consideration how the Assyrian intelligence services operated all around the empire, it is possible to conclude that Sennacherib's campaign against the Levant must have relied on them to launch, execute, and conclude his military operations there. It is possible to conclude that the most important intelligence from the campaign was that confirming the upcoming Egyptian counterattack.

PART THREE

AFTER LIFE

MEMORIES OF SENNACHERIB IN ARAMAIC TRADITION

Tawny L. Holm*

INTRODUCTION

The Assyrian king Sennacherib was both revered and reviled in ancient Aramaic literary traditions. Mentions of Sennacherib in Aramaic literature span more than a millenium, from the fifth-century B.C.E. *Story and Proverbs of Aḥiqar*, written in Egypt by Arameans or Aramaic speakers who had moved there from Syro-Palestine and Mesopotamia, to the Syriac stories of Christian martyrs and saints of the Sassanian era (224–651 C.E.).¹ These portraits of the famous king range from that of a kindly patron of scholars to the ultimate pagan despot, who either killed his own children or was killed by them. Still, because Arameans closely identified with the Assyrian empire at times, their descendants remembered Sennacherib as an eminent ancestor as well.

Some of the Aramaic references to Sennacherib rely on the limited biblical accounts of his activities in 2 Kings, Isaiah, and Chronicles, while others must be due to long-lived native traditions in the region which used to be Assyria or under heavy Assyrian influence: northern inland Syria,

* Abbreviations used here include: AMS = P. Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum syriace*, 1–7 (repr. Paris, 1968 [1891]); LAS = S. Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal*, 1–2 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1983); TAD = B. Porten and A. Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt*, 1–4 (Jerusalem, 1986–1999). All translations and transliterations in this contribution are those of the author unless otherwise noted.

¹ Outside of literature, Sennacherib is mentioned in at least one historical document in Aramaic: the Assur ostracon (KAI 233), a letter from the mid-seventh century B.C.E. written during the time of Assurbanipal; M. Lidzbarski, *Altaramäische Urkunden aus Assur* (Leipzig, 1921), 5–15. For a recent interpretation, see F. M. Fales, “New Light on Assyro-Aramaic Interference: The Assur Ostracon,” in *Camsemud 2007: Proceedings of the 13th Italian Meeting of Afro-Asiatic Linguistics, Held in Udine, May 21st to 24th 2007*, ed. F. M. Fales and G. F. Grassi (Padova, 2010), 189–204. The mention of Sennacherib in KAI 233 occurs in a short list of past Assyrian rulers who deported conquered peoples. According to the list, Tiglath-Pileser exiled prisoners from Bit-Amukanni, Ululayu (Shalmaneser V) from Bit-Adini, Sargon from Dür-Sîn, and, in line 16, Sennacherib took captives from Kš^l?¹; Kšw according to Fales (*op. cit.*, pp. 195–197), or kš^ld¹ or Kš, that is, Chaldea or Kush according to J.M. Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters*, 2nd ed., Writings from the Ancient World 14 (Atlanta, 2003), 21–22.

northern Iraq and Iran, and southeastern Turkey. The Arameans had an uneven relationship with the Assyrian empire. In the late second millennium B.C.E., the Arameans were a semi-nomadic people who pressed into Assyrian-controlled regions and were able to form independent states in Syria (e.g., Damascus, Hamath, Zobah) and northern Mesopotamia on the upper and middle Euphrates (e.g., Bit-Agusi, Bit-Adini) and the upper Tigris (e.g., Bit-Zamani). Other Arameans migrated into Babylonia, where they often allied themselves with other groups, such as the Chaldeans, against the Assyrians.² From the ninth century onward, the independent nations in the north and west began to fall to Assyrian conquests and deportations, and their populations were absorbed into the Neo-Assyrian empire. Arameans became a significant percentage of the population of Assyria, and were even integrated into the ruling administration.³ Furthermore, from the eighth century onward, the Aramaic language and alphabetic script—more convenient than cuneiform—was adopted for official use especially to deal with the western provinces.⁴ Under Neo-Assyrian rule, the Arameans may have been only one ethnic minority in a multi-ethnic state,⁵ but their language unified what might be culturally labeled an “Assyro-Aramean” empire.⁶

The subsequent Babylonian and Persian empires adopted the Aramaic language as well, although not many Aramaic texts survive because of the perishability of media upon which they were often written, e.g., papyrus

² For a discussion of the ethnic identities and various tribal affiliations of Arameans and Chaldeans in Babylonia, see E. Lipiński, *The Aramaeans: Their Ancient History, Culture, Religion*, OLA 100 (Leuven, 2000), 416–22.

³ See, among others: A. Salvesen, “The Legacy of Babylon and Nineveh in Aramaic Sources,” in *Legacy of Mesopotamia*, ed. S. Dalley (Oxford, 1998), 139–61; W. Röellig, “Aramäer und Assyrer: Die Schriftzeugnisse bis zum Ende der Assyrerreich,” in *Essays on Syria in the Iron Age*, ed. G. Bunnens, ANESS 7 (Louvain, 2000), 177–86; F. M. Fales, “Assyrian-Aramaic Cultural Interrelation,” in *Tell Shiikh Fawqani 1994–1998*, ed. L. Bachelot and F. M. Fales (Padova, 2005), 506–616; M. Zehnder, “Die ‘Aramaisierung’ Assyriens als Folge der Expansion des assyrischen Reiches,” in “... der seine Lust hat am Wort des Herrn!": *Festschrift für Ernst Jenni zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. J. Luchsinger, et al., AOAT 336 (Münster, 2007), 417–38.

⁴ A relief from the time of Tiglath-Pileser III (745–727 B.C.E.) seems to be the first in which two scribes were depicted at work on official documents, one for each language; R. D. Barnett and M. Falkner, *The Sculptures of Aššur-Nasir-Apli II, 883–859 B.C., Tiglath-Pileser III, 745–727 B.C., Esarhaddon, 681–669 B.C.* (London, 1962), pls. V–VI.

⁵ S. Parpola, “National and Ethnic Identity in the Neo-Assyrian Empire and Assyrian Identity in Post-Empire Times,” *JAAS* 18 (2004): 5–22.

⁶ A. Lemaire, “Aramaic literature and Hebrew literature: Contacts and Influences in the First Millennium B.C.E.,” in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, ed. M. Bar-Asher, (Jerusalem, 1988), 9–24.

or parchment.⁷ Eventually Greek took the place of Aramaic as the Near Eastern *lingua franca*, but Aramaic still had a home in the religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Mandaeism, as well as in some independent kingdoms, such as Palmyra, Hatra, and Nabataea. To Syriac Christians especially, Sennacherib remained an iconic figure of the ancestral empire.

SENNACHERIB IN ARAMAIC *AḤIQA*R FROM EGYPT

Several members of the Neo-Assyrian royal family are mentioned in Egyptian Aramaic texts of the second half of the first millennium B.C.E. Sennacherib himself appears in the *Story and Proverbs of Aḥiqar* (late fifth century B.C.E.), while his son Esarhaddon features in both *Aḥiqar* and the fragmentary Sheikh Faḍl inscription (early fifth century B.C.E.).⁸ Moreover, three of Esarhaddon's children—Assurbanipal, Shamash-shum-ukin and their sister Šērū'a-ēṭirat—are at the center of the story of fraternal rivalry known as the "Revolt of Babylon" (also known as the "Tale of Two Brothers"; fourth or third century B.C.E.) in Papyrus Amherst 63, an Aramaic text written in Demotic script.⁹ Two of these compositions have a

⁷ Some thirty Aramaic documents dating to the fourth century B.C.E. Achaemenid empire were even found in Bactria, part of what is now Afghanistan; see J. Naveh and S. Shaked, *Aramaic Documents from Ancient Bactria* (Oxford, 2012). For an overview of Aramaic media, including Aramaic on clay, see F. M. Fales, "Multilingualism on Multiple Media in the Neo-Assyrian Period: A Review of the Evidence," *SAAB* 16 (2007): 95–122.

⁸ On Sheikh Faḍl, see A. Lemaire, "Les inscriptions araméennes de Cheikh-Faḍl (Égypte)," in *Studia aramaica: New Sources and New Approaches*, ed. M. J. Geller, et al., *JSS* Sup 4 (Oxford, 1995), 77–132; this inscription is *TAD* D23.1 in Porten and Yardeni, *TAD* IV, viii, 286–298 and foldouts 5–8. See also T. L. Holm, "The Sheikh Faḍl Inscription In Its Literary and Historical Context," *Aramaic Studies* 5 (2007): 193–224.

⁹ A preliminary publication of this narrative with photos of the text and a transliteration of the Demotic into Aramaic can be found in R. C. Steiner and C. F. Nims, "Ashurbanipal and Shamash-shum-ukin, Part 1," *RB* 92 (1985): 60–81. For a radically different translation, but without transliteration or commentary, see S. P. Vleeming and J. W. Weselius, *Studies in Papyrus Amherst 63* (Amsterdam, 1985), vol. 1, 31–37. For Steiner's revised translation, see "The Aramaic Text in Demotic Script," in W. W. Hallo and K. L. Younger, Jr., eds., *The Context of Scripture*, vol. 1, (Leiden, 1997), 322–327. For a preliminary translation of the entire papyrus, and a brief discussion of its origins, see Steiner, *ibid.*, 309–327, and "Papyrus Amherst 63: A New Source for the Language, Literature, Religion, and History of the Aramaeans," in Geller, et al., eds., *Studia Aramaica*, 199–207. See also T. L. Holm, *Aramaic Literary Texts* in the series *Writings from the Ancient World* (Atlanta, forthcoming). The "Revolt of Babylon" is an Aramaic version of the historical revolt of Shamash-shum-ukin, king of Babylon, against his brother, Assurbanipal, king of Assyria. The story includes the death of the former in a palace conflagration in 648 B.C.E., after failed attempts by first an unnamed general and then by Šērū'a-ēṭirat to reconcile Shamash-shum-ukin to his brother's overlordship (the fiery death of Shamash-shum-ukin is otherwise only known

Mesopotamian setting and perspective (*Aḥiqar* and the “Revolt of Babylon”), while the third contains a fundamentally Egyptian epic about the rebellion of the hero Inaros I against the invading Assyrians (the Sheikh Faḍl inscription). The authors of these texts were Arameans or Aramaic-speaking Jews¹⁰ who came to Egypt in the aftermath of Assyrian conquests across the Near East.¹¹ Their writings illustrate the nature of Aramaic literature as an international melting pot of cross-cultural genres and motifs from Mesopotamia to Egypt.¹²

The literary text from Egypt that mentions Sennacherib, the *Story and Proverbs of Aḥiqar*, has a well-known history throughout the ancient Near East, appearing in several languages. The earliest witness is an Aramaic papyrus from the second half of the fifth century B.C.E. found at Elephantine in the 1906–1908 archaeological seasons, which preserves fourteen of what may once have been up to twenty-one columns.¹³ Fragments of

from the Greek historian Diodorus [ii.27], who cites the earlier historian and physician Ctesias on this point). This composition does not mention Sennacherib.

¹⁰ The term “Aramean” in the Egyptian Aramaic papyri was used of Jews as well as ethnic Arameans; A. E. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford, 1923), xv–xvi.

¹¹ An Aramean and Aramaic-speaking Jewish presence in Egypt is known from perhaps the eighth-century B.C.E. onward, and especially from the military colonies of Syene and Elephantine on the first cataract of the Nile employed as mercenaries by the Persians in the fifth century; see B. Porten, “Settlement of Jews at Elephantine and Arameans at Syene,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, ed. O. Lipschits and J. Blenkinsopp (Winona Lake, IN, 2003), 451–70. According to Porten, the Jews had come from Judah, while the Arameans had come most immediately from the region around Samaria in Israel, but were ultimately from Aramean communities in Syria (perhaps from Arpad) and Mesopotamia (probably the lands of Rāši/Arāši or Ellipi, which were located between Babylonia and Elam), as indicated by Papyrus Amherst 63.

¹² International affairs are also the subject of interest in other Aramaic literary works: the biblical and parabiblical Daniel court tales, the Qumran *Tales from the Persian court* (4Q550), etc.; see T. L. Holm, “Daniel 1–6: A Biblical Story-Collection,” in *Ancient Fiction: The Matrix of Early Christianity and Jewish Narrative*, ed. J.-A. A. Brant, et al., SBLSS 32 (Atlanta, 2005), 149–66, and *Of Courtiers and Kings: The Biblical Daniel Narratives and Ancient Story-Collections*, Explorations in Ancient Near Eastern Civilizations 1 (Winona Lake, IN, 2013).

¹³ It is a palimpsest; that is, it was written over an older text, in this case an erased customs account, which dates to 475 B.C.E. The *editio princeps* of the Aramaic is found in E. Sachau, *Arämaische Papyrus und Ostraka aus einer jüdischen Militärkolonie zu Elephantine* (Leipzig, 1911), 147–82, pls. 40–50. Other editions include: A. Ungnad, *Aramäische Papyrus aus Elephantine* (Leipzig, 1911), 62–83; F. Stummer, *Der kritische Wert der altaramäischen Aḥiqartexte aus Elephantine*, Alttestamentliche Abhandlungen 5,5 (Münster, 1914); Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.*, 204–48. The Aramaic fragments have been re-edited by Porten and Yardeni as *TAD C1.1*; see *TAD III*, xv–xvi, 23–53, foldouts 1–9. Translations of *Aḥiqar* abound; two of the most recent include: Riccardo Contini, “Il testo aramaico di Elefantina,” in *Il saggio Aḥiqar: Fortuna e trasformazioni di uno scritto sapienziale*, ed. R. Contini and C. Grottanelli, Studi biblici 148 (Brescia, 2005),

the *Aḥiqar Story* (and possibly the *Proverbs*) exist in first-century C.E. Demotic,¹⁴ and there are late versions in Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, and Old Church Slavonic, as well as fragments in Ethiopic, none of whose extant manuscripts are earlier than the twelfth or thirteenth centuries C.E.¹⁵ Allusions to the story of *Aḥiqar*, including his relationship to Sennacherib and Esarhaddon, are also found in the deuterocanonical book of *Tobit* (1:21–22; 2:10; 11:18 and 14:10) from about 225–175 B.C.E.,¹⁶ which provides an intermediate version of the story between the fifth-century Aramaic version and the later Syriac-Arabic-Armenian versions or the Greek adaptation found in the *Life of Aesop*.¹⁷ The *Story* was obviously very popular throughout the Mediterranean and the Near East, and it is not surprising that it was also included in a supplement to some printed editions of the

113–39; H. Niehr, *Weisheitliche, magische und legendarische Erzählungen: Aramäische Aḥiqar*, JSHRZ 2.2 (Gütersloh, 2007). For the proverbs, see now: M. Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche aus Elephantine und die alttestamentliche Weisheitsliteratur*, BZAW 399 (Berlin, 2010).

¹⁴ The first manuscript is a Cairo papyrus (unknown number), published in G. P. G. Sobhy, “Miscellanea, 2. Demotica,” *JEA* 16 (1930): 3–4, and plate VII, 2; identified as part of *Aḥiqar* by W. Spiegelberg in, “Achikar in einem demotischen Texte der römischen Kaiserzeit,” *OLZ* 33 (1930): col. 961. The second is P. Berlin P 23729, and was probably written by the same hand as the first fragment. Both may date to the first century C.E. A third fragment containing proverbs that may or may not be part of *Aḥiqar* is P. Berlin P 15658. For translations of and commentary on the first two Demotic fragments, see K.-Th. Zauzich, “Demotische Fragmente zum Achikar-Roman,” in *Folia Rara*, ed. H. Franke, et al. (Wiesbaden, 1976), 180–85; and M. Betrò, “La tradizione di Aḥiqar in Egitto,” in *Il saggio Aḥiqar*, ed. Riccardo and Grottanelli, 177–91. For P. Berlin P 15658, see Zauzich in M. Küchler, *Frühjüdische Weisheitstraditionen* (Freiburg/Göttingen, 1979), 333–37. In addition, J. M. Lindenberger gives an English rendering of Zauzich’s German translation of the Demotic fragments; Lindenberger, *The Aramaic Proverbs of Aḥiqar* (Baltimore, 1983), 310–12.

¹⁵ There are still later translations in Georgian, Romanian, Old Turkish, Russian, Serbian, and neo-Syriac. See J. R. Harris, F. C. Conybeare, and A. S. Lewis, *The Story of Aḥiqar from the Aramaic, Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Old Turkish, Greek and Slavonic Versions*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1913); R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English* (Oxford, 1913), vol. 2, 715–84; A. Furayḥah, *Aḥiqār ḥakīm min aš-šarq al-adnā l-qadīm* [*Aḥiqar, a sage from the Ancient Near East*] (Bayrūt [Beirut]: Jāmi‘at Bayrūt al-Amirikiyah [American University of Beirut], 1962), 37–64 (Syriac), 115–46 (Arabic); F. Pennacchietti, “Il testo siriano antico di Aḥiqar,” in *Il saggio Aḥiqar*, ed. Contini and Grottanelli, 193–225; J. Ferrer and J. P. Monferrer, *Historia y enseñanzas de Aḥiqar o la antigua sabiduría oriental*, Studia Semitica Series Minor 2 (Córdoba, 2006).

¹⁶ J. A. Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature (Berlin, 2003), 52.

¹⁷ In one episode of the Greek *Life of Aesop* (chs. 101–23), it is Aesop who takes the role of Aḥiqar, in that he is sent by a Mesopotamian king (Lycurgus) to an Egyptian king (Nectanebo) in order to take part in a contest of wits, as in the later versions of *Aḥiqar*. See B. E. Perry, *Aesopica: Vol. I, Greek and Latin Texts* (Urbana, IL, 1952); L. Kurke, *Aesopic Conversations* (Princeton, 2011), 176–85.

Alf laylah wa-laylah (*One Thousand and One Nights* or the *Arabian Nights*) in more modern times.¹⁸

In the earliest Aramaic version, Aḥiqar, a minister of king Sennacherib of Assyria, adopts his nephew Nadin (or Nadan) as a son, and educates him to take over his position when Sennacherib's successor, Esarhaddon, begins to reign.¹⁹ The frequent praise of the great Aḥiqar is delivered in terms of his relationship to Sennacherib and Assyria, in the descriptions of Aḥiqar as a "wise and skillful scribe" (ספר חכים ומהיר), col. 1, line 1), "counselor of all Assyria" (יעט אתור כלה), col. 1, line 12), "father of all Assyria" (אבוי זי אתור כלא), col. 4, line 7), "[be]arer of the seal of Sennacherib, king of Assy[ria]" (ויצ'יב'ית עזקתה זי) [ר] [ויצ'יב'ית עזקתה זי], col. 1, line 3; cf. col. 1, line 19), "the master of good counsel" (בעל עמחא טבתא), col. 3, line 11) and variations on the same. We are also told numerous times that Sennacherib and Assyria used to rely on the words and/or counsel of Aḥiqar: "O Aḥiqar, father of all Assyria, upon whose counsel Sennacherib the king and the army of [al] Assyria [used to r]ely" (אחיקר אבוי זי אתור כלא זי על עמחא סנחארי'יב) (מלכא וח'י'ל אתור [כל]א' [הו]ו); 4, 7–8; cf. 2, 12; 3, 11–12; 4, 12–13). The portrait of Sennacherib here is of a sovereign who loves and trusts his loyal minister, and commends him to his army and the country at large. Aḥiqar, the "father of all Assyria," is the object of the highest reverence in Sennacherib's kingdom, and the abandonment of Aḥiqar by Sennacherib's son stings most sharply in the subsequent lines of the plot.

After the death of Sennacherib and Aḥiqar's advancement of Nadin, this adopted son falsely claims to Esarhaddon that Aḥiqar is plotting against the king, and Esarhaddon asks an army officer from Sennacherib's time, Nabusumiskun (reflecting Akkadian *Nabû-šum-iškun*, literally "Nabu established a name"), to kill Aḥiqar. Fortuitously, this officer had previously been saved by Aḥiqar from an "undeserved execution" (קטל זכי); Aḥiqar had pretended to kill him, and then had hidden him until Sennacherib's

¹⁸ "The History of Sinkarib and His Two Viziers" in the supplement produced by D. Chavis and M. Cazotte; in *Arabian Tales: Or a Continuation of the Arabian Nights Entertainments*, trans. R. Heron (Edinburgh, 1792) vol. 2, 177–242. The two viziers are named Hicar and Nadan.

¹⁹ The names could be either good Akkadian or Aramaic names; Aḥiqar means "My brother is precious" in both. The name of the nephew could be vocalized as either Nadin or Nadan, and appears as Nadan in the later Aramaic versions of *Aḥiqar*. *Nādin* in Akkadian would be an active participle, and thus a hypocoristic with the theophoric element missing: "(the god DN who) gives" or "(the god DN is)" "the giver"; e.g., Aššūr-nādin-apli, "Assur is the giver of the heir." The noun form *Nadān*, "gift," occurs in Akkadian as well.

anger passed, whereupon he presented him alive again, to Sennacherib's great joy. Aḥiqar asks Nabusumiskun to return the favor by recalling his own beneficence: "I presented you before Sennacherib the king, and I cleared your offenses before him so that he did no harm to you. Moreover, Sennacherib the king loved me very much because I kept you alive and did not kill you" (col. 4, lines 2–3). Nabusumiskun is persuaded by this reasoning, and hides Aḥiqar in his own home after killing a eunuch slave in his place. The characterization of Sennacherib in *Aḥiqar* is that of the typically capricious and sometimes easily-swayed monarch of folklore or the *Arabian Nights*, who grew angry at Nabusumiskun, but later regretted it and was delighted that his command was not actually carried out.

In the Aramaic version, the text breaks off here and several columns are missing, before it resumes with a series of proverbs. The proverb collection is older than the story to which it is attached and is in an earlier dialect, perhaps very early Official Aramaic or even late Old Aramaic, while the story is in Official Aramaic.²⁰ While most scholars agree that the proverbs are originally from Syria (even if there are some Neo-Assyrian parallels), it is not really clear if they were already attached to an earlier version of the *Aḥiqar* story in Assyria or this happened in Egypt. However, the most common supposition is that, in the fifth-century version, these proverbs were affixed to the end of the story which had its conclusion somewhere in the missing columns,²¹ unlike the later versions in which there are two sets of proverbs, one toward the beginning of the narrative as Aḥiqar's first counsel to his newly-adopted nephew, and one at the very end of the narrative. The later versions also preserve an Egyptian episode, in which after Aḥiqar has been hidden, an Egyptian pharaoh challenges the Assyrian king to a battle of wits, and Aḥiqar's loss is lamented by the king. Aḥiqar is then produced alive to go to Egypt and solve various riddles and impossible tasks, such as the pharaoh's demand that he build a castle in the sky.²² When he returns to Assyria, Nadin is handed over to him for punishment and a final lesson in the form of further proverbs and instructions; Nadin finds this torture so unbearable that he swells up and dies. While it is unknown whether or not the fifth-century Elephantine version

²⁰ For the position that it is in late Old Aramaic, see I. Kottsieper, *Die Sprache der Aḥiqarsprüche* (Berlin, 1990), 241–46; for some early form of Official Aramaic, see Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 646–47.

²¹ Porten, *TAD III*, 23.

²² Aḥiqar wins the castle challenge by training boys to ride on eagles' backs, and then commanding the Egyptians to take bricks to them, which of course they cannot. Aḥiqar's counter-challenge deftly turns the tables on the Egyptians.

originally contained the Egyptian episode, it is reasonable to assume that it included Aḥiqar's eventual restoration to the Assyrian court, and, if so, the plot had to provide some motivation similar to the Egyptian episode for his honorable return.²³

There may or may not have been a specific historical Aḥiqar from the seventh century B.C.E. behind the *Aḥiqar* narrative found in Egypt.²⁴ The name appears in a list of court scholars found on a tablet from Uruk dating to ca. 165 B.C.E. One Aba-Enlil-Dari is said to have been a sage (*ummānu*) in the days of Esarhaddon (W 20030,7: 19–20): “In the time of King Esarhaddon, ¹A-BA-^DNINNU-*da-ri*, whom the Arameans (^{LÚ}*Aḥlamû*) call *ᵐa-ḥu-ᵑu-qa-a-ri*, was *ummānu*.”²⁵

The Uruk text only attests to a Seleucid-era tradition of Aḥiqar, however, and does not necessarily represent a historical reality five centuries earlier.²⁶ In spite of all the sources we have that relate to the advisors of Sennacherib and Esarhaddon, Beaulieu notes that, “no advisor named Aba-Enlil-Dari or Aḥiqar/Ahuwaqar appears in them. On the other hand, the name Aba-Enlil-dari, which is a translation into learned Sumerian of the Akkadian name Mannu-kīma-Enlil-ḫātīn (“Who is a protector like Enlil?”),

²³ According to Porten and Yardeni (*TAD*), the Aramaic version has only room for four columns between the place where the story breaks off and where what is preserved of the proverbs begins. They do not believe there is enough space for the Egyptian episode. I. Kottsieper and J. Strugnell independently suggested, however, that the Aramaic version did indeed contain something of the contest between Aḥiqar and the Egyptian king, without which any rehabilitation of Aḥiqar makes little sense. See Strugnell, “Problems in the Development of the Aḥiqar Tale,” 204–11; Kottsieper, “The Aramaic Tradition: Ahikar,” in *Scribes, Sages, and Seers*, ed. L. G. Perdue, FRLANT 219 (Göttingen, 2008), 109–24. Weigl disagrees and argues that the reconstruction of Porten and Yardeni does not allow for any Egyptian episode; Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 693.

²⁴ It was, however, a perfectly common Akkadian name; there is at least one governor in the sixth century with it; F. Joannès and A. Lemaire, “Trois tablettes cunéiformes à onomastique ouest-sémitique,” *Transeuphratène* 17 (1999): 17–34, esp. 27–28.

²⁵ See J. J. A. van Dijk, “Die Inschriftenfunde,” in *Vorläufiger Bericht über die Ausgrabungen in Uruk-Warka*, 18, ed. H. J. Lenzen, ADOG 8 (Berlin, 1963), 39–62, esp. 45, 51–52, pl. 20a–c, 27; P.-A. Beaulieu, “Official and Vernacular Languages: The Shifting Sands of Imperial and Cultural Identities in First-Millennium B.C. Mesopotamia,” in *Margins of Writing, Origins of Cultures*, ed. S. L. Sanders, 2nd ed., Oriental Institute Symposium 2 (Chicago, 2007), 191–220, esp. 194–95. On the *ummānu*, or “sage,” as a court official, see E. Reiner, “The Etiological Myth of the ‘Seven Sages,’” *Orientalia* n.s. 30 (1961): 1–11.

²⁶ On the historical value of the Seleucid tradition in this regard, see *LAS* vol. 2, 449–50; J. C. Greenfield, “The Wisdom of Aḥiqar,” in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J. A. Emerton*, ed. John Day et al. (Cambridge, 1995), 43–52, esp. 44; F. M. Fales, “Storia di Aḥiqar tra Oriente e Grecia: la propettiva dall'antico Oriente,” *QuadStor* 19 (1993): 143–57, esp. 154–55, *contra* M. J. Luzzatto, “Grecia e Vicino Oriente: tracce della ‘Storia di Aḥiqar’ nella cultura Greca tra VI e V secolo A.C.,” *QuadStor* 18 (1992): 5–84, esp. 9, 66.

appears as an ancestral name in Nippur during the Achaemenid period.²⁷ Shortened forms of Mannu-kīma-Enlil-ḫātin appear twice among members of the Murašû family in the late fifth century B.C.E., and Beaulieu even suggests that, since Nippur was a heavily Aramaicized area already during the Neo-Assyrian period, it is quite possible that the tradition of Aḫiqar, an Aramean, and the writings associated with him, originated there. A Nineveh fragment of a *šulla* prayer to Ninlil (BMS 35 [K 2757]) even has as its colophon: “Nippur, house of Aba-Enlil-dari,” perhaps indicating that a scribal academy in Nippur traced its ancestry back to that scholar from the Middle Babylonian period.²⁸ Simo Parpola has suggested that Aba-Enlil-dari was possibly the author of the Babylonian *Counsels of Wisdom*, a series of admonitions; one wonders if the author of the *Story of Aḫiqar* then purposely chose the name as the perfect pseudonym for a court scholar.²⁹

On the other hand, Parpola has now proposed that the story of *Aḫiqar* reflects historical events, and was written and commissioned at the Sargonid court in Aramaic (not Akkadian), some time around 660 B.C.E., perhaps under the aegis of Naqia, the (possibly Aramean) mother of Esarhaddon.³⁰ The good officer who saves Aḫiqar, claims Parpola, could be the Nabû-šum-iškun who was a charioteer in the days of Sennacherib,³¹ and even the same fellow who was involved in his assassination, mentioned in a letter of Esarhaddon (SAA 18 no. 100).³² Furthermore, we know three of the names of Sennacherib’s scholars, or *ummānē*, from various years: Nabû-apla-iddina (or Nabû-bāni), Bēl-upaḫḫir, and Kalbu, and it is likely that Bēl-upaḫḫir was replaced by Nabû-zeru-lešir, the son of the famous

²⁷ Beaulieu, “Official and Vernacular Languages,” 194.

²⁸ 𐎠𐎺.𐎠𐎢𐎽𐎢𐏁 𐎠𐎺𐎠𐎢𐎽𐎢𐏁 translates as: “Nippur, house of Aba-Enlil-dari.” (“Fifty” is the sacred number of the god Enlil.)

²⁹ LAS 2, 450. For a comparison of the *Counsels of Wisdom* to *Aḫiqar*, see W.G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford, 1960), 96–97. Lambert later told Greenfield, in oral communication, that “Aḫiqar may have chosen this name consciously”; *apud* Greenfield, “The Wisdom of Aḫiqar,” 44. See also Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche aus Elephantine*, 8–9, fn. 23.

³⁰ S. Parpola, “Il retroterra assiro di Aḫiqar,” in *Il saggio Aḫiqar*, ed. Contini and Grottanelli, 91–112, esp. 106, 108, 111.

³¹ R. Mattila, *The King’s Magnates: A Study of the Highest Officials of the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, State Archives of Assyria Studies XI (Helsinki, 2000), 92.

³² SAA 18: 100 (F.S. Reynolds, *The Babylonian Correspondence of Esarhaddon* [Helsinki, 2003], 82. See also Parpola, “The Murderer of Sennacherib,” in *Death in Mesopotamia*, ed. B. Alster (Copenhagen, 1980), 171–82.

scribe Nabû-zuqup-kenu, when Esarhaddon took the throne.³³ Parpola speculates that Bêl-upaḥḥir was actually the Akkadian name of Aḥiqar,³⁴ and that Aḥiqar would have been the brother-in-law of Nabû-zuqup-kenu, whose important career stretched from the beginning of Sargon's reign to the end of Sennacherib's.³⁵ Historically, he himself was not an *ummānu*, but his son Nabû-zeru-lešir became one. In Parpola's scenario for the history behind the *Story of Aḥiqar*, Bêl-upaḥḥir (alias Aḥiqar) had no son to carry on as *ummānu*, so he adopted Nabû-zeru-lešir to take his place, thus benefitting both Nabû-zuqup-kenu and himself. Since the first letter we have of Nabû-zeru-lešir does not date until 679, one year after Esarhaddon's succession, Parpola suggests that there is a brief period of time in which Nadin could possibly have served and failed as *ummānu*, before Nabû-zeru-lešir stepped in as Bêl-upaḥḥir/Aḥiqar's permanent replacement. Thus, the *Aḥiqar* story would be seen to follow historical events. As intriguing as this scenario is, it seems difficult to prove.

Indeed, in terms of literary parallels, there are no non-Aramaic correspondences to the courtier story in Mesopotamia (the "court tale" genre is not Mesopotamian), and it is possible that the *Story of Aḥiqar* was composed in Egypt where it was connected to the Syrian proverb collection.³⁶ The setting of *Aḥiqar* and perhaps some of the rivalry is drawn from the Assyrian court as a mere literary frame.³⁷ For their part, the *Proverbs of*

³³ In E. F. Weidner, "Die grosse Königsliste aus Assur," *AJO* 3 (1926): 66ff. (Assur 14616c); *LAS* 2, 448–49. See also K. Radner and H. Baker, eds., *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire* 1/II, 336; 2/I, 598; 2/II, 804–805, 809.

³⁴ Parpola, "Il retroterra assiro di Ahiqar," 110. On the basis of the later texts of *Aḥiqar*, in which the childless Aḥiqar has a younger brother named Nabuzaradan who inherits in place of Nadan, he suggests that Nabuzaradan is a corruption of Nabû-zeru-lešir.

³⁵ He was known for copying the twelfth tablet of the Epic of Gilgamesh, and for his large library of omen and other scientific texts. See E. Frahm, "Nabû-zuqup-kēnu, das Gilgameš-Epos und der Tod Sargon II," *JCS* 51 (1991): 73–90.

³⁶ The court tale genre is otherwise unknown in Mesopotamia, and the *Story of Aḥiqar* is "not a calque of cuneiform models"; Beaulieu, "Official and Vernacular Languages," 194. On the other hand, court tales were extremely popular in Egyptian and Palestinian literature; see T. Holm, *Of Kings and Courtiers*, and "The Fiery Furnace in the Book of Daniel and the Ancient Near East," *JAOS* 128 (2008): 81–100.

³⁷ The letters of even the highest scholars in the Neo-Assyrian empire exhibit numerous rivalries and interpersonal struggles; *LAS* vol. 2, xviii. For example, one notes the history of Adad-šum-ušur (another son of Nabû-zuqup-kenu) and his son Urad-Gula. The latter started as a deputy of the chief physician in Sennacherib's reign, was a court exorcist in Esarhaddon's, but was kicked out of Assurbanipal's accession in 668. In spite of at least two petitions on his behalf by his father Adad-šum-ušur in 667–666 B.C.E., and several attempts of his own, Urad-Gula seems not to have been restored to the court; see Parpola, "The Forlorn Scholar," 269–71. Parpola speculates on the basis of certain other letters that Assurbanipal held Urad-Gula responsible for his wife's miscarriage when he was a crown

Aḥiqar do show some parallels with Neo-Assyrian writings, especially with Esarhaddon's letters.³⁸ These letters contain some of the same or similar proverbs to those in the fifth-century *Aḥiqar*, or Syriac.³⁹ Furthermore, the use of the adjective "merciful," (*rḥm̄n*), applied to Esarhaddon in the Aramaic text (e.g., *מלכא רחמן הו כמנדע*, "King Esarhaddon is merciful, as is [well-]known," col. 4, line 5; cf. proverb no. 25, where both God and the king are so called), recalls the description of Esarhaddon given in some letters addressed to him by some of his servants (Akk. *rēmānū*).⁴⁰ It is worth noting that Sennacherib's role as a scholarly patron in *Aḥiqar* is not necessarily inaccurate, although Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal are better known for their copious correspondence with scholars and their sponsorship of literary endeavors (and Assurbanipal for his famous library). While Sennacherib's main personal interests seem to have been in the technological sphere,⁴¹ he was known for commissioning some remarkable pieces of literature and art: for example, the reliefs and inscriptions in his "Palace Without Rival" in Nineveh; the rock inscriptions at Bavian, which accompanied two out of the four hydraulic engineering systems completed by Sennacherib (Northern System and the Khinis System); an Assyrian version of the Babylonian *Enuma Eliš*, in which Assur

prince. On Adad-šum-ušur, who was Esarhaddon's chief exorcist in his own time, see W. von Soden, "Die Unterweltsvision eines assyrischen Kronprinzen," *ZA* 43 (1936): 1–31.

³⁸ Greenfield thought they might have been compiled in Esarhaddon's time; Greenfield, "The Wisdom of Aḥiqar," 43–52. For the Mesopotamian background of the proverbs, see D. Bodi, "The Aramaic Proverbs of Aḥiqar and Some Akkadian and Hebrew Parallels," in *ALIEN TO: Corpus anciens et bases de donnés*, ed. M.-C. Bornes Varol and M.-S. Ortola (Nancy, 2011), 13–25, esp. 18; Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 677ff; Lemaire, "Remarks on the Aramaic of Upper Mesopotamia in the Seventh Century B.C.," in *Aramaic in its Historical and Linguistic Setting*, ed. H. Gzella, VOK 50 (Wiesbaden, 2008), 77–92; Parpola, "Il retroterra assiro di Aḥiqar," 94–104.

³⁹ For example, see *TAD* proverb no. 113 (previously no. 110); F. Israel, "La datazione del proverbio no 110 di Aḥiqar," *Semitica* 38 (1990): 175–78; Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 533–38. For a proverb from a Neo-Assyrian letter found in the Syriac *Aḥiqar*, see Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, 281.

⁴⁰ Greenfield, "The Wisdom of Aḥiqar," 49.

⁴¹ Von Soden noted Sennacherib's commemoration of his love of technology, including experiments and successes with new building stone, bronze casting, waterworks, and botanical and zoological gardens; W. von Soden, *Herrscher im alten orient* (Berlin, 1954), 105–118. One of his building accounts in the "Palace without Rival" praises a particular beautiful stone used in walls and sphinxes, previously esteemed only for necklaces; M. Russell, *The Writing on the Wall: Studies in the Architectural Context of Late Assyrian Palace Inscriptions*, Mesopotamian Civilizations 9 (Winona Lake, IN, 1999), 128. For the theory that Sennacherib's gardens at Nineveh served as a model for the tradition behind the hanging gardens of Babylon, see S. Dalley, "Nineveh, Babylon and the Hanging Gardens: Cuneiform and Classical Sources Reconciled," *Iraq* 56 (1994): 45–58 (cf. J. Reade, "Alexander the Great and the Hanging Gardens of Babylon," *Iraq* 62 [2000]: 195–217).

replaced Marduk as the victorious god who defeats Tiamat and the city of Assur replaces Babylon as the center of the universe; the account of the battle of Halule (691 B.C.E.); and so forth.⁴²

Interestingly, the *Aḥiqar* story may be open to seeing Sennacherib as more sympathetic to Aḥiqar and Arameans, an ethnic minority in Mesopotamia. It is possible that Sennacherib's wife Naqia (Naqqi'ā, "pure one"), the mother of Esarhaddon, was of Aramaic origin, since she had a West Semitic name with an Assyrian translation (Zaqtu). It has been argued that she was from Babylon, brought to Assyria by Sargon II in 712; at least four letters were written to her from Babylonia, and she owned property in Lahiru there.⁴³ Another suggestion is that she was from the west, either a Hebrew woman sent from Hezekiah to Sennacherib in 701,⁴⁴ or someone whose family came from Harran.⁴⁵ Perhaps "there is no reason to believe that having a West Semitic name would have been seen as unusual or particularly foreign" as Melville has contended,⁴⁶ but the use of two names, one a translation of the other, does make it seem likely that Naqia was not originally Assyrian (see now Frahm, this volume).

Furthermore, Aḥiqar is remembered in the Seleucid-era text from Uruk as an Aramean, and thus a cultural minority within an Assyrian realm. In fact, the theme of the successful courtier, suggests Beaulieu,

suits very well the position of a cultural minority, which sees its identity and hopes crystallized in the figure of one of its own who rises to the top in the political structure which governs them but over which they exert limited influence. The very fact that in Hellenistic Uruk a cuneiform text still recognizes the specificity of a group called *Ahlawû* demonstrates that in spite of

⁴² The account of the battle of Halule in Sennacherib's prism was described by Luckenbill as "the best description of a battle that has come down to us from Assyria": D. D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*, OIP 2 (Chicago, 1924), 23–47, 128–31, esp. 17.

⁴³ H. Lewy, "Nitocris-Naqqi'a," *JNES* 11 (1952): 264–86; see SAA VI, no. 255. Melville notes that others in the royal family also owned land in Lahiru; S. C. Melville, *The Role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics*, State Archives of Assyria Studies 9 (Helsinki, 1999), 15.

⁴⁴ C. H. W. Johns, *Assyrian Deeds and Documents* (Cambridge, 1923), vol. 4, 160; L. Waterman, *Royal Correspondence of the Assyrian Empire* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1931), vol. 3, 327.

⁴⁵ In a fragment of a bronze relief now in the Louvre (AO 20.185), she is depicted holding a mirror in her left hand (and a plant in her right), standing behind Sennacherib. Since the motif of a woman holding a mirror is Syrian/Anatolian, and appears here in Assyrian art for the first time, Parrot and Nougayrol contended that at least Naqia's family originated in Harran, even if she was born in Babylon; A. Parrot and J. Nougayrol, "Asarhaddon et Naqqi'a sur un bronze du Louvre (AO 20.185)," *Syria* 33 (1956): 147–60. Melville counters that the mirror might be a symbol of the Assyrian queen as consort of Assur; Melville, *The Role of Naqia/Zakutu*, 15.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 13–16, esp. 16.

their long history in Mesopotamia and despite the fact that their language had become the common vernacular of the Near East, the Arameans were still considered a separate ethno-linguistic group by some Babylonians.⁴⁷

Thus, the *Story of Ahiqar* exploits the pleasure taken from triumphing over one's overlord and rivals that is inherent to the court tale genre. However, at the same time as the Persian-period authors in Egypt flouted the success their kinsman Ahiqar had had at the Assyrian court two centuries earlier, the very existence of this papyrus argues that they continued to closely identify with Assyria, even though they were living on the first cataract of the Nile at this time.⁴⁸ This is reminiscent of the situation of the even later Aramean community in Egypt that produced Papyrus Amherst 63 in approximately the fourth or third century B.C.E. The compositions on this twenty-three column literary and religious miscellany continually express this group's close connection to Assyria and the hope that they would return to their homeland, a region east of the Tigris in Rashi/Arashi (Rāši or Arāši in Akkadian texts) or Ellipi.⁴⁹ Not only does the "Revolt of Babylon" on columns 18–23 reflect a pro-Assyrian view of historical events (particularly the rivalry between the brothers Assurbanipal of Assyria and Shamash-shum-ukin of Babylonia, which ended in the death of the latter in 648 B.C.E.), but, in the Sacred Marriage text of col. 17, these Arameans longed for their "cursed" land to be rebuilt (lines 17–18).⁵⁰

In any case, the fifth-century Aramaic *Story of Ahiqar* from Egypt likely attests to a strong sense of Assyrian identity, even while claiming Aramean cultural and literary superiority. Furthermore, while Aramaic *Ahiqar* is not a Jewish story *per se*, the papyrus on which it was preserved was found on the island of Elephantine at Aswan on the first cataract where there was

⁴⁷ Beaulieu, "Official and Vernacular Languages," 195.

⁴⁸ Parpola suggests that they may have expected a return to their Assyrian homeland; "Il retroterra assiro di Ahiqar," 108.

⁴⁹ Rashi/Arashi was a kingdom on the western side of the Zagros Mountains; S. Parpola, "Raši/u (Arašu)," *RLA* 11, 255–56; R. Zadok, *RGTC* 8, 179. Ellipi was northeast of Rashi in modern Luristan; its capital Marubishti was taken by Sennacherib in 702 B.C.E. after his reprisals against the rebellions of Marduk-apla-iddina II; F.W. König, "Ellipi," *RLA* 2, 357; I.N. Medvedskaya, "Media and Its Neighbours I: The Localization of Ellipi," *Iranica Antiqua* 34 (1999): 53–70.

⁵⁰ "Rebuild, O mortal(?), Ellipi, the cursed land," *bny-n' ?dm ?lp(y) (?)rq'l(y)l (?)*, col. 17, lines 17–18. Note also the narrator's dream of the Rashi of his youth in col. 11, lines 8–10: "In a dream, I was in my youth, (when) I was in the land of Rash. I would build a city, in Rash I would establish(?) it. Its name was Ellipi Piyat"; *bhlm ?n' bglmy ?n' brš mt(?) ?bn qry brš ?h(y)qmh{'} šmh ?lpy pyt* (cf. Akk. *piātu*, "edge, border"; *CAD* P, 358).

a Jewish military colony with a Jewish temple.⁵¹ Its themes of a triumphal minority likely resonated with the Jewish as well as the non-Jewish Aramean community at Aswan.⁵² For its part, the authors of the Hebrew Bible found tales of the successful courtier, in which a conquered minority feels itself to be superior to its ethnically-different overlords, to function as pleasant and wishful antidotes to their own predicaments (e.g., Daniel, Joseph, and Esther).⁵³ In addition, *Aḥiqar* itself was one of the sources for the Jewish story to be considered next: *Tobit*, a tale about a righteous man who suffered under Sennacherib's rule.

SENNACHERIB IN ARAMAIC *TOBIT*

The earliest extant manuscripts of the deuterocanonical book *Tobit* are in the Aramaic language, and a majority of scholars now think it likely that Aramaic was indeed the language in which it was originally composed.⁵⁴ Before 1952, the most important ancient versions of *Tobit* were in Greek and Latin (the earliest of which date to the fourth and fifth centuries C.E.), although it was also preserved in Arabic, Armenian, Sahidic Coptic,

⁵¹ Very few scholars have proposed that the *Aḥiqar* of the Elephantine text was Jewish or that the story had a Jewish author (since no character in the story is said to be Jewish and Yahweh is not mentioned among the many gods who appear); yet for a recent, and highly speculative, treatment of *Aḥiqar* as Jewish, see M. Chyutin, *Tendentious Hagiographies: Jewish Propagandist Fiction BCE* (London, 2011), 26–34.

⁵² The Jewish military colony at Elephantine interacted closely with the Aramean colony at Syene on the mainland nearby. The Elephantine archives bear witness to a very mixed ethnic and religious environment, and “Aramean” was a term used there for all Aramaic speakers, both Jews and ethnic Arameans. The Jewish community seems to have practiced a local variety of the Yahwism known in Judah, in which Yahweh was worshiped alongside Aramean and Egyptian gods, and the Jews and non-Jewish Arameans at Aswan seem to have intermarried with each other and with native Egyptians; B. Porten, *Archives from Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony* (Berkeley, 1968), esp. 151–86. The only other literary texts besides *Aḥiqar* from fifth-century Elephantine are on the Ḥor bar Punesh papyrus (*TAD* Cl.2), and they do not appear to be essentially Jewish either; the recto of the papyrus contains a typically Egyptian magician tale while the verso has a pseudo-prophecy or apocalypse featuring the city of Tanis in the Delta; see B. Porten, “The Prophecy of Ḥor Bar Punesh and the Demise of Righteousness: An Aramaic Papyrus in the British Library,” in F. Hoffmann and H. J. Thissen, eds., *Res severa verum gaudium*, Fs. Zauzich (Leuven, 2004), 427–66, pls. 35–36.

⁵³ Lawrence Willis calls this view a “ruled ethnic perspective” in *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King: Ancient Jewish Court Legends*, HDR 26 (Minneapolis, 1990), 37–42.

⁵⁴ What is preserved of the Aramaic version seems to indicate a story very close to the Long recension in Greek.

Ethiopic, and Syriac.⁵⁵ The discovery of cave four at Qumran, however, yielded perhaps six fragmentary manuscripts of *Tobit*, five in Aramaic and one in Hebrew, dating from 100 B.C.E. to 25 C.E.⁵⁶ Joseph Fitzmyer, the editor of the Qumran fragments for the Discoveries in the Judean Desert series, believes that *Tobit* was probably composed in Aramaic between 250 and 175 B.C.E.⁵⁷

As in the fifth-century version of *Aḥiqar*, in *Tobit* Aḥiqar serves under both Sennacherib (705–681 B.C.E.) and Esarhaddon (680–669 B.C.E.) and the names of the two Assyrian kings are in the correct order (in contrast to later versions of *Aḥiqar*, which tend to invert them). The adopted son of Aḥiqar is here known as Nadab and not Nadan/Nadin. Differently from all other versions, including the older Aramaic one from Egypt, is the fact that the book makes Aḥiqar Jewish—not only is he Tobit’s nephew (son of his brother ʿAnaʿel), but he is also a pious almsgiver (14:10)—and thus avoids the polytheism of the Aḥiqar tradition both earlier and later. Although *Tobit* does not retell the full story of *Aḥiqar*, *Tobit*’s allusions to it hint at some elaborations that are close to the later versions of *Aḥiqar*, such as the mention of an underground hiding place for Aḥiqar (14:10).

One fragmentary manuscript of the Aramaic *Tobit* from Qumran (4Q196 frg. 2) preserves the verses of chapter one in which Sennacherib is described (vss. 19–22). Earlier verses of this chapter are mostly missing, but it is likely that the Aramaic text named Shalmaneser as Sennacherib’s father instead of the historically accurate Sargon II, a fictional point found in the Greek and Latin texts of *Tobit*, where the murderous Sennacherib is unfavorably contrasted with Shalmaneser who behaves kindly to Tobit.⁵⁸ The righteous Tobit has been burying the dead—presumably those Jewish

⁵⁵ Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, 3–6. Note that there are also five Hebrew texts (or textual traditions) and one in Aramaic from the early Medieval period onward. These neglected versions of *Tobit* are not direct descendants of the Qumran texts nor are they translations of the Greek or Latin versions; L. T. Stuckenbruck and S. D. E. Weeks, “The Medieval Hebrew and Aramaic Texts of Tobit,” in *Intertextual Studies in Ben Sira and Tobit*, ed. J. Corley and V. Skemp, CBQMS 38 (Washington, DC, 2005), 71–86, esp. 72.

⁵⁶ J. Fitzmyer, “Tobit,” in *Qumran Cave 4, XIV: Parabiblical Texts, Part 2*, ed. M. Broshi, et al., DJD 19 (Oxford, 1995), 1–76, esp. 7, 41, 57, 61, 63. Note also a fragment of Tobit 14:4–6 in the Schøyen private collection, MS 5234, which used to be thought of as part of 4Q196, but has now been classified as a “new papyrus copy” (4Q196a) of *Tobit*; see <http://torleifelgvin.wordpress.com/english/>, accessed 28 Feb. 2013. This will be published in T. Elgvin, ed., *Gleanings from the Caves: Dead Sea Scrolls and Artifacts from the Schøyen Collection*, LSTS 71 (London, in press).

⁵⁷ Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, 50–54.

⁵⁸ Stuckenbruck and Weeks, “The Medieval Hebrew and Aramaic Texts of Tobit,” 71–86. Tiglath-Pileser is named as the father of Sennacherib in some later versions.

folk killed by Sennacherib in Nineveh as a retaliation for his army's defeat in the siege of Jerusalem in 701, as in Greek *Tobit*—and someone tells Sennacherib about it. Tobit runs away when he finds this out, and all his goods are confiscated. Forty days later, Sennacherib is killed by his sons, and they flee to the mountains of Ararat (4Q196 frg. 2, ln. 4; Tobit 1:21). We find then that when Esarhaddon ascends the throne, Aḥiqar intercedes on behalf of Tobit so that the latter can return to Nineveh (1:21). In *Tobit*, Aḥiqar is described as having previously been the chief cup-bearer (רַב שְׁקֵה), keeper of the signet rings (רַב עֹקֵן), comptroller (הַמְרַכֵּל) and “treasury accountant before Sennacherib, king of Assyria” (שִׁי זָפֵן קֶדֶם אֶסְרַחְדִּיב מֶלֶךְ אַשּׁוּר) (רַב שְׁקֵה), and, under Esarhaddon, he is put in charge as second-in-command (הַנִּיָּן לֵה, literally “second to him”).

Tobit's treatment of the historical fact that Sennacherib was murdered by a son or sons seems to follow the biblical tradition found in 2 Kings 19:37, Isaiah 37:38, and 2 Chronicles 32:21–22 (see also Kalimi, this volume).⁵⁹ On the other hand, while 2 Kings and Isaiah claim the assassins are Sharezer and Adrammelech, neither *Tobit* nor 2 Chronicles 32:21–22 name the murderers.

Then Sennacherib, king of Assyria, left, went home, and lived at Nineveh. When he was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisroch,⁶⁰ his sons Adrammelech (אֶדְרַמְלֵךְ) and Sharezer (שָׂרְאֶזֶר) killed him by the sword, and they fled into the land of Ararat. His son Esarhaddon reigned in his place. (2 Kings 19:36–37/Isaiah 37:37–38)

The Lord sent an angel who cut off every mighty warrior, commander, and officer in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned shamefaced to his own land. When he came into the temple of his god, some of his offspring (*qĕrē*: מֵעִי מַעִי) struck him down there by the sword. (2 Chronicles 32:21–22)

But not f[orty] days passed [when h]is [two sons killed him,] and they fled to the mountains of Ararat. His son Esarhaddon reigned [after him].⁶¹ (Aramaic *Tobit* 1:21 in 4Q196 2:3–4)

⁵⁹ All of these have Sennacherib murdered as a punishment for his attack on Jerusalem in 701; however, Sennacherib actually died some twenty years later.

⁶⁰ Possibly the temple of Nimrud, that is, of Ninurta; W. von Soden, “Gibt es Hinweise auf die Ermordung Sanheribs im Ninurta-Tempel (wohl) in Kalah in Texten aus Assyrien?” *N.A.B.U.* (1990): no. 22; C. Uehlinger, “Nisroch,” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. K. van der Toorn, et al. (Leiden, 1999), 630–32.

⁶¹ ולא הוה יומין א[י]רבעין וקמלוהי תרי בנו[יה]זי ואנון ערקו לטורי אררט [ומלך {ומלך} אסרחדין] [תהתוהי] 4Q196 frg. 2, lines 3–4.

Both Greek recensions of *Tobit* agree that it was two of his sons that killed Sennacherib, but do not name them. Outside of the Hebrew Bible, the Greek Babylonian scholar Berossos only names Adrammelech (in the forms Ardamusanus/Ardumuzan and Adramelus).⁶²

The murder of Sennacherib historically occurred on the twentieth of the month Tebet in 681, according to the Babylonian Chronicle, where only one unnamed son is blamed.⁶³ A stele of Nabonidus from Babylon also states the Assyrian king was killed by one son (*mār šīt libbišu*; “his own son”).⁶⁴ However, it seems possible that more than one son was involved, since Esarhaddon’s Prism B (his account of his succession to the throne) implicates plural “my brothers” in aggression at Nineveh in competition for the kingship, although Esarhaddon never quite claims they killed Sennacherib.⁶⁵ The theory that he was killed between two colossi or two doors is from an inscription of Assurbanipal (Cylinder A), in which the latter brought prisoners as a *kispu*-offering to the place where Sennacherib died in Nineveh near some statues or colossae.⁶⁶

In a 1980 essay, Simo Parpola exonerated Esarhaddon from any implication in Sennacherib’s murder and unmasked the real murderer.⁶⁷ The fragmentary letter SAA 18 no. 100 (already mentioned above) partly preserves the name of the murderer, ARAD-^DNIN.LÍL, which is to be read

⁶² As recorded by Eusebius in his *Chronicle*; see J. Karst, *Eusebius Werke, 5: Die Chronik*, GCS 20 (Leipzig, 1911), 14, 18. Eusebius cites Alexander Polyhistor for the first form, and Abydenus for the second.

⁶³ “On the twentieth day of the month Tebet Sennacherib, king of Assyria, was killed by his son in a rebellion”; A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, TCS 5 (Locust Valley, NY, 1975), 81, lines 34–35; J.-J. Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, WAW 19 (Atlanta, 2004), 198–99.

⁶⁴ H. Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon und Kyros’ des Grossen*, AOAT 256 (Münster, 2001), 516, 523.

⁶⁵ “Nachher wurden meine Brüder verrückt und verübten alles, was Göttern und Menschen missfällt; sie schmiedeten böse Pläne, rebellierten mit(?) den Waffen und stiessen sich in Ninive in gottloser Weise wegen der Ausübung der Königsherrschaft wie Ziegenböckchen”; R. Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons Königs von Assyrien*, AfO Beiheft 9 (Graz, 1956), 42–43, Nin. A–F, episode 2, lines 41–44.

⁶⁶ R. Borger, *Beiträge zum Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals* (Wiesbaden, 1996), 44, A IV 70–7, translated on p. 235; A. Tsukimoto, *Untersuchungen zur Totenpflege (kispu) im alten Mesopotamien*, AOAT 216 (Münster, 1985), 112–14; E. Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, AfO Beiheft 26 (Vienna, 1997), 19. See also von Soden’s interpretation of Assurbanipal’s Letter from a God; von Soden, “Gibt es Hinweise”; A. Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*, SAA 3 (Helsinki, 1989), no. 44. Parpola suggests that the murder took place between two orthostats at the entrance to the Ninurta temple of Kalḫu; Parpola, “The Murderer of Sennacherib,” 175. Babylon and Dūr-Šarrukīn have also been suggested as the place of Sennacherib’s murder.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 171–82.

Arda-Mulissi (Mulissu is the Neo-Assyrian form of the Akkadian name of the goddess Ninlil) rather than Arad-Ninlil, thus eliminating any discrepancy with the Bible and Berossus' name for one of the murderers: Adramelech, Adramelus, Ardumuzan.⁶⁸ The letter denounces two conspirators as well, Nabû-šumu-iškun and Šilla.

The historical Sennacherib seems to have had at least six sons, including Arda-Mulissi and Esarhaddon, but none who is known as Sharezer, as far as we are aware.⁶⁹ After the death of Sennacherib's eldest son, Aššūr-nādin-šumi, in Babylon, Esarhaddon apparently won the favor of his father, promoted over Arda-Mulissi who was otherwise next in line to the throne. In response, Arda-Mulissi killed his father, probably with the help of another son or sons of Sennacherib. The name Sharezer for the second assassin in Kings and Isaiah is an abbreviation of a theophoric name, but the theophoric element is missing, so it is not clear to which historical person the name might refer. Possibilities include Aššūr-šarru-ušur, Nergal-šarru-ušur, or Nabû-šarru-ušur—Nabû-šarru-ušur having the advantage of being the eponym of 681, the year in which Sennacherib was assassinated.⁷⁰ While the two murderers go to Urartu/Ararat in 2 Kings 19:37 (//Isaiah 37:38), Esarhaddon's inscriptions do not say where the brother(s) fled. Shubria, a nation on the western border of Urartu, is a possible location because, according to Prism A and Esarhaddon's "Letter to the God," Esarhaddon subjugated Shubria in 673 for giving asylum to Assyrian political refugees.⁷¹ Moreover, two of his own advisors were part of the conspiracy to murder Sennacherib and install the elder son—Nabû-

⁶⁸ Parpola's solution has convinced many, but not all; see for instance, S. Dalley, *Esther's Revenge at Susa: From Sennacherib to Ahasuerus* (Oxford, 2007), 38–45. On 𐎠𐎢𐎢𐎢 = Mulissu in Assyria (Mylitta in Herodotus 1.199), see Dalley, "The treaty of Barga'yah and Herodotus' Mylitta," *RA* 73 (1979): 177–78.

⁶⁹ Most are named in K 6109; C. Bezold, *Catologue of the Cuneiform Tablets in Kouyunjik Collection of the British Museum II* (London, 1891), 763. See also Borger, "König Sanheribs Eheglück," *ARRIM* 6 (1988): 5–11, esp. 8; and Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 3–4.

⁷⁰ See F. J. Gonçalves, *L'Expédition de Sennachérib en Palestine dans la littérature hébraïque ancienne*, *PIOL* 34 (Louvain-la-neuve, 1986), 429; W. R. Gallager, *Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah: New Studies*, *SHCANE* 18 (Leiden, 1999), 252, n. 356.

⁷¹ For the political and religious motivations behind the Shubrians admittance of the refugees, see T. Dezső, "Šubria and the Assyrian Empire," *Acta Antiqua* 46 (2006): 33–38. For more on how the campaign against Shubria relates to a subsequent successful campaign against Egypt, see I. Eph'al, "Esarhaddon, Egypt, and Shubria: Politics and Propaganda," *JCS* 57 (2005): 99–111; I. Eph'al and H. Tadmor, "Observations on Two Inscriptions of Esarhaddon: Prism Nineveh A and the Letter to the God," in *Essays on Ancient Israel in Its Near Eastern Context*, ed. Y. Amit, et al. (Winona Lake, IN, 2006), 155–70.

šumu-iškun and Šilla (denounced in SAA 18 no. 100), the first of whom shares a name with the good officer in the *Story of Aḥiqar*.

In sum, the verses in Aramaic *Tobit* that preserve a description of Sennacherib seem to rely on the Hebrew Bible, and Jewish concerns are paramount in the book (such as burial of the dead, almsgiving, Aḥiqar's relationship to Tobit). The Jewish author recalls Sennacherib at his worst, an oppressor and murderer of Israelites, vindictively killing those who had been deported to Nineveh after his army had failed to take Jerusalem.⁷²

SENNACHERIB IN SYRIAC: LATE AḤIQAR AND CHRISTIAN TEXTS

In the Syriac text of *Aḥiqar* Sennacherib and Esarhaddon's roles are reversed. Sennacherib is the ruler who is tricked into believing his minister Aḥiqar has committed treason, and Esarhaddon is merely allotted the role of Sennacherib's father and otherwise has no further part to play in the narrative.⁷³ Furthermore, in the Syriac text, Sennacherib, son of Sarḥadum (Esarhaddon), "king of Assyria and Nineveh," is not an unsympathetic figure, but someone who tries to protect Aḥiqar's property from Nadan, and who is very sorrowful over his minister's presumed perfidy. For instance, when Aḥiqar is tired of Nadan's detestable activities (which here include gross cruelty and mismanagement, such as the beating of Aḥiqar's servants and the ham-stringing of his horses and mules), the king loyally reinforces Aḥiqar's pronouncement that Nadan should no longer manage his property. Then, after Aḥiqar disinherits Nadan in favor of Nadan's brother Nebuzardan, and after Nadan produces forged letters to implicate Aḥiqar in a conspiracy against the king, Sennacherib weeps when he is forced to call for Aḥiqar's execution. In this version, Aḥiqar is allowed a funeral feast before his death, during which he asks the officer Yabusemakh-miskin (*Ybwsmk-mskyn*; probably a corruption of Nabusum-iskun) to save him. The officer subsequently hides Aḥiqar underground and kills a prisoner in his place. The king laments the supposed death of Aḥiqar, and commands Nadan to perform another funeral feast, which he does not do; he instead takes over Aḥiqar's house and wants to rape Aḥiqar's wife. When the officer presents Aḥiqar alive, the king is ashamed

⁷² That the author of *Tobit* was Jewish is commonly accepted; see, for instance: C. A. Moore, *Tobit*, AB 40A (New York, 1996), 39; Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, 35.

⁷³ In other late versions of *Aḥiqar*, such as the Slavonic and Armenian, Sennacherib's father is not named at all.

and grieved that he was ever tricked into believing Aḥiqar was a traitor. Upon Aḥiqar's triumphal return from Egypt, he celebrates by making a "great day" (*wywm'rb'bd*), places him as head of his household, and tells Aḥiqar to ask from him whatever he wants.

In contrast to *Tobit*, this version switches Esarhaddon with Sennacherib so that the latter is the persecutor of Aḥiqar, who is tricked into ordering his execution. It may well be that Sennacherib was by far the better-known Assyrian king, and thus tradition gave him the lengthier role, having forgotten the historical order of the two kings. Yet, unlike Esarhaddon in the earlier *Aḥiqar*, Sennacherib is a sympathetic figure; he is duped into ordering the death of someone he rather likes, and is relieved to find his friend preserved alive in spite of himself (cf. to Darius in Daniel 6; Ahasuerus in the biblical Esther). None of the details and little of the portrait of *Tobit's* vengeful Sennacherib are here.

Outside of the Syriac version of *Aḥiqar*, there are no Aramaic texts mentioning Sennacherib again until the Common Era. In Syriac Christianity, Sennacherib caught the imagination more than other ancient Assyrian kings. Perhaps this is because of the popularity of the biblical account of his siege of Jerusalem in Kings, Isaiah, and Chronicles, in which his confrontation with the Judahites is gleefully remembered as a prime example of a failed attack upon God's people by a prideful foreign ruler and his army. Syriac mentions of Sennacherib and his family are found especially in the accounts of various Christian saints in the Sassanian era such as Eugene (Mār 'Awgen), Behnam (Mār Behnām), Matthias (Mār Mattai), and Qardagh (Mār Qardāg). These seem to have a confused understanding of who he was, but probably rely somewhat on inherited local traditions as well as the Bible for their portrait of the king.⁷⁴

In these Syriac accounts, Sennacherib was the ancient pagan (that is, Zoroastrian) ancestor of the Armenian people. Various sources from late antiquity to modern times attribute the origins of some tribes of Armenians to Sennacherib, a fact which admits a distinct pride in this lineage. Moses (Movsēs) of Khoren writing in the eighth century C.E. states that the great tribes of Artsruni and Gnuni descended from Sennacherib.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Note also that two medieval Syriac apocalypses anachronistically link Sennacherib to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon: the *Apocalypse of Daniel* 5–6 and *Pseudo-Methodius* VI.3–5; M. Henze, *The Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel*, STAC II (Tübingen, 2001), 68–69, 113; G. J. Reinink, *Die syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, CSCO 540, SSyri 220—text; CSCO 541, SSyri 221—trans. (Louvain, 1993), p. 11 in text and p. 17 in trans. The latter even makes Nebuchadnezzar the adopted son of Sennacherib.

⁷⁵ *History of the Armenians* 1.23 and 2.5,7; see translation and commentary by R. W. Thomson, in Moses Khorenats'i, *History of the Armenians* (Cambridge, MA, 1978), 112, 134,

The Armenians themselves are called “Sennacheribians” according to Bar Hebraeus of the thirteenth century,⁷⁶ and still even in the nineteenth century some tribes of Kurdistan claimed to be the offspring of Sennacherib.⁷⁷ On the other hand, in the Mār Behnām story, Sennacherib kills his son and daughter for converting to Christianity. Moreover, in some medieval sources, such as the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, Sennacherib is chief of the “Assyrians,”⁷⁸ a term first disparagingly used for Muslim Arabs, then for easterners in general, but later a positive designation for the Syriac Church, especially the Assyrian Church of the East.

The earliest mention of Sennacherib in Syriac may be the story of Mār Behnām, probably from the fourth-sixth centuries C.E., which embeds the story of another saint, Mār Mattai. In it, Sennacherib is a pagan ruler whose children, Behnām and Sārā, convert to Christianity,⁷⁹ after which he has them executed for their faith. Nevertheless, he himself is later converted⁸⁰—a notable contrast to the Jewish tradition found in rabbinic sources, in which Sennacherib’s sons kill *him* before they convert to Judaism.⁸¹

138. The traditional fifth-century date for Moses of Khoren has been rejected; see Thomson’s introduction to *History of the Armenians*, esp. 58–61.

⁷⁶ Bar Hebraeus, *The Chronography of Gregory Abū’l Faraj*, trans. E. A. W. Budge (London, 1932), vol. 1, 179.

⁷⁷ A. Harrak, “Tales about Sennacherib: The Contribution of the Syriac Sources,” in *The World of the Aramaeans III*, ed. P. M. M. Daviau (Sheffield, 2001), 168–89. In *Pseudo-Methodius* (VI.3), Sennacherib’s biological sons are the product of his marriage to a Kurdish woman called Yaqnat; Reinink, *op. cit.*

⁷⁸ A. Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuqnīn Parts III and IV, A.D. 488–775*, MST 36 (Toronto, 1999), 138, 208.

⁷⁹ Fiey, *Assyrien chretienne*, vol. 2, 567.

⁸⁰ *AMS* vol. II, 397–441. See also G. Hoffmann, *Auszüge aus syrischen Akten des persischer Märtyrer*, AKM Bd. 7, Nr. 3 (Leipzig, 1880), 17–19; G. Wiessner, “Die Behnām Legende,” in *Synkretismusforschung: Theorie u. Praxis*, ed. G. Wiessner, GO 1 (Wiesbaden, 1978), 119–33; H. Younansardaroud, “Die Legende von Mar Behnam,” in *Syriaca: Zur Geschichte, Theologie, Liturgie und Gegenwartslage der syrischen Kirchen*, ed. M. Tamcke, SOK 17 (Münster, 2002), 185–96; H. Younansardaroud and M. Novák, “Mar Behnam, Sohn des Sanherib von Nimrud: Tradition und Rezeption einer assyrischen Gestalt im iraqischen Christentum und die Frage nach den Fortleben der Assyrer,” *AoF* 29 (2002): 166–94.

⁸¹ In rabbinic tradition, only Sennacherib, his two sons, his son-in-law Nebuchadnezzar, and a commander named Nebuzaradan survive the siege of Jerusalem; L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1913), vol. 4, 474–75. Upon his return to Assyria, Sennacherib finds a plank of Noah’s ark, worships it, and makes a vow to sacrifice his sons to it, but they overhear this, kill him, and flee to Qardū. They release Jewish captives, convert to Judaism, and march to Jerusalem. The famous Jewish scholars Shemiah and Abtalion are said to be the descendants of the two sons (Sanhedrin 96b; Gittin 56b; Targum II Kings 19:35, 37).

The basic story of Mār Behnām is recounted in the *Syriac Acts of the Persian Martyrs*, and in several independent manuscripts.⁸² His martyrdom was said to have occurred in “year 663 of Alexander,” or 362 C.E., during the reign of Julian the Apostate (361–363 C.E.), but it is hard to connect this date to any person of exactly that name. The story begins in the town of Amida in what is now southeast Turkey, at the time when Julian’s edict of tolerance (meant to restore paganism) was published. The Christian ascetics and monks in the monastery of Zūqnīn refused to worship idols, and fled when the townspeople requested soldiers from Julian. A certain ascetic named Mattai went to the land of Nineveh, which was under the rule of the Persians, and settled on Mount Alpaph. Rumors of his holy works spread and came to Sennacherib, king of Assur/Assyria (Ātōr), who was a Magian, i.e., a Zoroastrian (Syr. *mgūšā*). After seeing him in a vision, the king’s son Behnām found Mattai in a cave, and Behnām persuaded him to come with him back to Assur and heal his sister, Sārā, who was suffering from some kind of leprosy. When they were near Assur, Behnām hurried to tell his mother, and then brought his sister secretly to Mār Mattai, who healed her. Both Behnām and Sārā became Christians.

When Sennacherib found out, his advisors counseled him to test the children by asking them to bring a sacrifice to offer the pagan gods, to show that they still worshipped them. When the children refused to do so, he had them executed and burned; the earth miraculously opened up to take their bodies. A few days later when the king was sick, his wife is told through a dream that her husband would be healed if he were baptized at the place where his children were executed. She went there and prayed to Mār Behnām, and was instructed by her son in a dream to seek Mār Mattai. Mār Mattai then healed and baptized Sennacherib.

The remainder of the legend details the subsequent construction of various sacred buildings and the monks associated with them, especially a certain Mār Zakkai and Mār Ābrāhām. The king had a monastery built for Mattai and his many monks on Mt. Alpaph. The queen, with the support of the king, had a monastery erected at Kūhyātā, thenceforward called the House of Abraham, or the monastery of Kūhyātā. Later, a Persian pilgrim passing through was told in a dream to build another house of prayer.

⁸² Some Berlin manuscripts of the story of Behnām and Sara have recently been collated and reworked by Younansardaroud and Novak: Staatsbibliothek Berlin 75 (Sach 222), Nr. 11, fol. 147^a–166^b from the nineteenth century; and the story of Matthias (Mattai) in Staatsbibliothek Berlin 178 (Sach 83), Nr. 1, fol. 1^b–32^a. See Younansardaroud and Novák, “Mar Behnam, Sohn des Sanherib von Nimrud,” 190; Younansardaroud, “Die Legende von Mār Behnām,” 186.

Mār Ābrāhām asked the queen to back the construction of this monastery, which, according to the legend, was named the monastery of Bēt-Gubbē (“house of cisterns”), and wherein were buried the remains of Mār Behnām and his sister. This monastery is today located twenty-two miles south-east of Mosul.⁸³

The story cannot be historically authentic, and seems to preserve some very scattered traditions about the region. The name Sennacherib and the kingdom of Assur are obviously used anachronistically, and it is not clear whether the account intends for the “Sennacherib” in question to be a self-standing king of Assur or the satrap of another king.⁸⁴ The saints in question are also from different eras. Mār Mattai can be chronologically placed in the reigns of the Roman emperor Julian and the Persian emperor Shapur of the fourth century, while Mār Zakkai was a Syrian Orthodox monk from the sixth or seventh centuries. As for Mār Ābrāhām, he was an East Syrian monk from the seventh century. Behnām’s own name is unknown; it might be the Syriac form of the Persian Vahunām, a martyr who died in the rule of Ardaḥšīr II, viceroy of Adiabene during the reign of the Christian-persecuting Shapur II (and later great king after the death of Shapur II in 379 C.E.). Adiabene was the strongest Christian region during the Sassanian period, and belonged to the Nôd-Ardaḥšīragān satrapy.

Since the date of Behnām’s martyrdom, “year 663 of Alexander” (= 362 C.E.), during the reign of Julian the Apostate (361–363 C.E.), is hard to reconcile with the person of Vahunām, who died when Ardaḥšīr II was viceroy of Adiabene,⁸⁵ Helen Younansardaroud and Mirko Novák think that anything earlier than 377 is unlikely.⁸⁶ They believe that the actual place of martyrdom was Ganzak/Gazzak, south of Lake Urmia in the region of Adiabene, since this is where the Vahunām legend is located.⁸⁷ When Sennacherib was brought in, the location moved west to Nineveh and Nimrud on the Tigris, above its confluence with the Greater Zab. Mār Mattai was joined to the legend because he himself was from the Ninevite diocese in the Maqlūb mountains east of Khorsabad (ancient Dūr-Šarrukīn). As for Behnām and Sārā, it is unknown whether they were historical royal children or the children of some governor or satrap.

As for the ninth-century C.E. Syriac story of St. Eugene (Mār Awgen; *mr[y] ʔwgyñ*), it suggests unique details surrounding Sennacherib’s death.

⁸³ Fiey, *Mar Behnam*, 3.

⁸⁴ Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, vol. 2, 568.

⁸⁵ *AMS* II, 397.

⁸⁶ Younansardaroud and Novák, “Mar Behnam, Sohn des Sanherib von Nimrud,” 172–73.

⁸⁷ *AMS* II, 287.

The tale concerns an Egyptian monk named Eugene who purportedly lived in the fourth century and spread monasticism throughout Syria and northern Mesopotamia. The account mentions in an aside some particulars about Sennacherib's murder.⁸⁸

w-šarri d-netkrek b-qūryā b-qardō wad-naʿmed ḥanpē wad-neʿqōr {bēt} (bātt<ay>) ptakrē w-ʿetā qadmāʿīt la-qrītā d-bašpolay tūrā w-lā pariqā saggī men kēwēlā wa-šmāh sargūgā hay d-bāh ʿiteb (h)wā šārāsār bar sanḥērib kad ʿraq men nīnwē mdītā wa-bnā bāh bēt ptakrē d-ʿabū(hi) w-sāged (h)wā lēh wa-nṭīr (h)wā zarʿēh d-hānā w-yūbālēh ʿdammā l-zabnā haw d-bēh qaddišā mannaʿ l-tammān

And he (Eugene) began going around in the villages of Qardū, baptizing heathens, and demolishing temple<s> (lit. house<s> of idols). He came first to the village which was at the foot of the mountain and not very far from the Ark, whose name was Sargūgā, in which Sharezer son of Sennacherib had lived when he fled from the city of Nineveh. He built in it his father's temple (lit. house of idols) and worshiped (in) it, and the offspring and posterity of this one were preserved until that time in which the blessed one (Eugene) arrived there.

In both this Syriac account of Sennacherib's son's flight from Nineveh and the biblical account, the assassin or assassins of Sennacherib are said to have fled specifically to a region associated with the ark (Arārāt/Urartu or Jabal Jūdī/Qardū, two different places that have laid claim to the ark's resting place).⁸⁹ On the other hand, St. Eugene's story has only one assassin in contrast to the two of the biblical account, naming Adrammelech as the second.⁹⁰ Remarkably, the assassin son that it retains, Sharezer, is the one for whom we have little evidence on the Assyrian side (see above). Nevertheless, what the Syriac does add to the biblical account is the name of the city to which the assassin fled, Sargūgā, a city said to be among the villages of Qardū. In the Peshiṭta as well as Jewish and Muslim tradition, Qardū is a toponym synonymous with Arārāt, the destination of Sennacherib's assassins in the Hebrew Bible (2 Kings 19:37). Note that the Ark

⁸⁸ AMS III, 376–479, esp. 446.

⁸⁹ Mount Masis, the largest and best-known mountain of Armenia, became Mount Ararat to the Armenians, whereas the old Mount Qardū (Armenian Kordukh), now known as Jabal Jūdī (also the Qurʿān's name for the location of Noah's Ark), was still claimed as the mountain on which the Ark came to rest; Harrak, "Tales about Sennacherib," 172.

⁹⁰ Harrak confusingly claims that St. Eugene was just echoing the Peshiṭta by having only one assassin ("Tales about Sennacherib," 178); but the Peshiṭta actually does list both. By contrast, Berossus names only the second assassin, which are given in the forms Ardamusanus/Ardumuzan (according to Berossus via Alexander Polyhistor, as cited by Eusebius) or Adramelus (via Abydenus, as cited by Eusebius), as noted above.

comes to rest on the “mountains of Qardū” in the Peshiṭta of Genesis 8:3, not the “mountains of Ararat”; and in the Targumic Tosefta dealing with 2 Kings 19:37, the name of the land of flight is Qardū.⁹¹ Sargūgā itself seems to be either a fabrication based on similar names, or else a misspelling or deformation of another name.⁹² As in 2 Kings 19 and Isaiah 36 (and possibly Esarhaddon’s Prism B), the story also seems to imply that the murder of Sennacherib was at Nineveh.

Amir Harrak proposes that this anecdote about Sennacherib is a propagandistic effort to tie the little-known Eugene with the more famous Jacob (or James) of Nisibis (d. 338 C.E.), second bishop of Nisibis/Nusaybin, whose reputation was enhanced by the inclusion of ark-hunting in his resumé.⁹³ The general story of St. Eugene itself is highly unreliable, since this figure was unknown until the ninth century, and early sources about the spread of Persian monasticism mention no such saint.⁹⁴ The Eugene story even asserts that Jacob of Nisibis was the discoverer of the Ark, who gave a board of it to Eugene, and who then built the Monastery of the Ark upon its remains on Mount Qardū/Jūdī, a monastery which apparently existed as early as the fifth century.⁹⁵ Thus, the insertion of Sennacherib’s son’s flight to Qardū into the narrative emphasizes the paganism of the region before its conversion. In the words of Harrak, “Sennacherib seems to have represented paganism that was to be confronted by the power of Christianity.”⁹⁶

Sennacherib is briefly mentioned in the *History of Mār Qardagh*, which was probably written early in the seventh century, though the legend itself originated in the late Sassanian period in the region of Adiabene near

⁹¹ R. Kasher, *Targumic Toseftot to the Prophets*, SSJC 2 (Jerusalem, 1996), 149. In the Targum to Isaiah it is called Curdistān (Isa. 37:38); B. D. Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum*, AB 11 (Wilmington, DE, 1986), 75. That the Eugene tradition about Sennacherib’s assassins is ultimately based on the Syriac Bible or the Targums is likely but not certain, since Assyrian texts themselves too may hint that they fled to that general area to the north, particularly Shubria (see above).

⁹² The -ā ending is a typical Syriac addition to foreign personal names and toponyms. There are a number of toponyms with -ūg; see Harrak, “Tales about Sennacherib,” 177.

⁹³ See, for instance *ibid.*, 180.

⁹⁴ See J.-M. Fiey, “Aonès, Awun, et Awgen (Eugène) aux origines de monachisme méso-potamien,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 80 (1962): 52–81; S. Brock, *Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St. Ephrem* (Rome, 1985), 108; J. Fiey, *Jalons pour une histoire de l’église en Iraq* (Leuven, 1970), 100–102; *ibid.*, *Assyrie Chrétienne: Contribution à l’étude de l’histoire et de la géographie ecclésiastiques et monastiques du nord de l’Iraq*, Recherches publiées sous la direction de l’Institut de lettres orientales de Beyrouth 23 (Beyrouth, 1965), vol. 2, 565–609.

⁹⁵ *AMS* III, 435–437. The monastery of St. Eugene is at the foot of Izla mountain overlooking Nisibis.

⁹⁶ Harrak, “Tales about Sennacherib,” 183.

Arbela (modern Erbil [*Arbīl*] in the Kurdish area of Iraq).⁹⁷ The saint was thought to have lived during the time of Shapur II (309–379), in whose reign occurred a massive persecution of Christians called the “Great Massacre,” especially after 340 C.E. Mār Qardagh’s connection to Sennacherib appears early on:⁹⁸

hū hākēl qaddišā mār(i) qardāg ʾitāw(hi) (h)wā men gensā rabbā w-men šāqā d-malkūtā d-ʾātōrāyē w-ʾabū(hi) metyabbal (h)wā men šarbtā mšamahtā d-bēt nemrōd w-ʾemmēh men šarbtā mšamahtā d-bēt sanḥērīb w-men ʾabāhē ḥanpē w-tāʿyay b-tāʿyūtā da-mgūšūtā ʾetiled ʾabū(hi) gēr gabrā (h)wā īdīʿā b-malkūtā wa-mšamhā ba-mgūšē gūšnāwy šmēh

Now the blessed one, Mār Qardagh, was from a great people and from the stock of the kingdom of the Assyrians; his father was descended from the illustrious lineage of the house of Nimrod, and his mother from the illustrious lineage of the house of Sennacherib. He was born of pagan parents lost in the error of Magianism; indeed his father, whose name was Gushnoy, was a notable man in the kingdom and celebrated among the Magi.

This Mār Qardagh was ordered to the court of Shapur II, who was impressed with his zeal for Magianism (Zoroastrianism), as well as his comeliness, strength, and incredible feats in archery, polo, and hunting. Qardagh was made *paṭaḥšā* (“viceroy”) over Assyria and *marzbān* (“margrave”) from the Tormara River (the Diyala River in central Iraq) to the city of Nisibis. After he returned to Arbela, he celebrated a great festival and built a “fortress and a house” on a hill (*tellā* in Syriac) named Melqi, and at the bottom of the hill, a fire temple that he staffed with magi. Sometime during the two years it took to build these, Qardagh had a dream in which appeared a martyred knight (St. Sergius) who told him that he was destined to die for Christ in front of his fortress. Qardagh was subsequently converted after a series of encounters and a disputation with a saint named Abdišō. We further learn in this account that his parents had built fire temples in the region of Dbar Hewton, in one of which they lived.⁹⁹ When his lands

⁹⁷ J. T. Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh*, TCH 40 (Berkeley, 2006), 10.

⁹⁸ For a recent translation of Mar Qardagh’s story, see Walker, *Legend of Mar Qardagh*, 19–69. Walker’s translation is based on J.-B. Abbeloos’ edition of a medieval manuscript of the “History of Mar Qardagh,” now lost, which also cites variants found in two modern manuscripts; J.-B. Abbeloos, “Acta Mar Qardaghi, Assyriae Praefecti, qui sub Sapore II Martyr Occubuit,” *AB* 9 (1890): 5–105. See also H. Feige, *Die Geschichte des Mār ʾAbdišōʿ und seines Jüngers Mār Qardagh* (Kiel, 1890); Bedjan, *AMS* II, 442–506. Feige used a mid-seventeenth century manuscript as his base, whereas Bedjan used Abbeloos’ edition. The translation here is based on Bedjan.

⁹⁹ Walker, *Legend of Mar Qardagh*, 45; *ibid.*, “The Legacy of Mesopotamia in Late Antique Iraq: The Christian Martyr Shrine at Melqi (Neo-Assyrian Milqia),” *ARAM* 18–19 (2006–2007): 483–508.

were pillaged by enemies and his family was taken captive, Qardagh led a military campaign to return them. Once back home, he burned all the fire temples. After hearing of these things, King Shapur summoned him to explain his actions. Upon learning from his own lips that he had become a Christian, the king sent Qardagh back to his lands in chains to be judged by the religious leaders there. Qardagh freed himself, however, took command of his fortress, and succeeded to defend it for several months until he came out of his own free will. He was then stoned to death at its gate (with the final stone being thrown by his father), thus fulfilling the prophecy of his martyrdom.

The cult site of Mār Qardagh, the Christian warrior, was located at a village named Melqi outside of Arbela (modern Erbil), possibly on the site of the ancient *akītu*-shrine of Ishtar of Arbela,¹⁰⁰ which in Neo-Assyrian times was called Milqia (Akk. ^{URU}*mil-qi-a*). The Milqia shrine flourished in Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal's reigns in the seventh century as a center of royal rituals,¹⁰¹ and some segments of Neo-Assyrian victory rituals took place there.¹⁰² Arbela itself was a major center for the cult of Ishtar, a goddess closely connected to military and warrior imagery;¹⁰³ the sole monumental depiction of Ishtar of Arbela is the Tel Barsip relief, that shows her standing on a lion, crossed quivers on her back and a weapon sheath at her waist.¹⁰⁴

After about 600 B.C.E. there is no evidence of this shrine again until around 600 C.E., when the *History of Mar Qardagh* seems to indicate it was resettled in the Sassanian period as first a Zoroastrian and then a Christian site. The *History* claims that both a martyr's festival and a trading fair took place at Melqi after Qardagh's execution on the hill, although it is likely that the trading fair preceded the festival and was probably an

¹⁰⁰ Walker, "The Legacy of Mesopotamia in Late Antique Iraq," 483–508. On Ishtar of Arbela, see B. N. Porter, "Ishtar of Nineveh and Her Collaborator, Ishtar of Arbela, in the Reign of Assurbanipal," *Iraq* 66 (2004): 41–44; S. L. Allen, "The Splintered Divine: A Study of Ištar, Baal, and Yahweh Divine Names and Divine Multiplicity in the Ancient Near East" (PhD. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2011), 1–3, 233–339.

¹⁰¹ W. Röllig, "Milqia," *RIA* 8 (1993/7), 207–208.

¹⁰² B. Pongratz-Leisten, *Ina Šulmi ūrub: Die kulttopographische und ideologische Programmatik der akītu-Prozession in Babylonien und Assyrien im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Mainz am Rhein, 1994), 79–83.

¹⁰³ The warrior imagery of Qardagh and his family is also reinforced by the attribution of his father's house to the lineage of Nimrod (see the excerpt above). In Gen. 10:8–12, Nimrod is the first on earth to be a "mighty hunter before the Lord," a hero, and a builder of Mesopotamian cities.

¹⁰⁴ J. Börker-Klahn, *Alt Vorderasiatische Bildstelen und vergleichbare Felsreliefs* (Mainz am Rhein, 1982), 226 (#252).

explanation for it.¹⁰⁵ East Syrian writers from the ninth-twelfth centuries referenced the monastery complex,¹⁰⁶ but it seems to have been destroyed in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century during a period of anti-Christian violence.

As Walker notes, “while Scripture provided the basic template for Christian perceptions of Sennacherib, oral traditions in the Assyrian heartland may have retained garbled memories of local Assyrian sites.”¹⁰⁷ That Assyrian culture, religion, and sites were long remembered in the region, although often in a transformed fashion, is now readily accepted. For example, during the Parthian era, Assur was revived along with some of the old temples and rituals. A Parthian temple was built over the great temple of Assur, but Aramaic votive inscriptions show that it was still dedicated to Assur and his consort Sherua. The *akītu* temple outside the city was rebuilt around the same time, indicating that the New Year’s festival was still important.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, Harran (or Carrhae), fifty kilometers from Christian Edessa, remained pagan until at least the sixth century; the Persians granted it an exemption from tribute in 549 C.E. because it kept the “old faith” (δόξη παλαιά; Procopius, *Wars* 2.13.7).¹⁰⁹ Even in the ninth and tenth centuries, the Sabians of Harran claimed that city was “never defiled with the error of Nazareth.”¹¹⁰

CONCLUSION

Sennacherib inspired the imagination of Aramaic authors not only because of his role in the Hebrew Bible as the prideful king who flouted God and Jerusalem in a deadly showdown that ended in his comeuppance, but also through independent traditions. In the Aramaic *Story and Proverbs of Aḥiqar*, attested in Egypt in the fifth-century B.C.E., he was portrayed as the benevolent patron of Aḥiqar, an Assyrian sage and courtier, author of proverbial wisdom. The court tale served to reinforce an Aramean identification with the old empire, inasmuch as this ethnic and cultural

¹⁰⁵ P. Peeters, “La ‘Passionaire d’Adiabene,’” *AB* 43 (1925): 301.

¹⁰⁶ For example, the *Book of Chastity* by Iṣḥ’dnaḥ of Basra; Walker, *Legend of Mar Qardagh*, 257.

¹⁰⁷ Walker, *Legend of Mar Qardagh*, 505.

¹⁰⁸ Both Assur and nearby Hatra have many inscriptions in Aramaic in the Parthian era; Salvesen, “The Legacy of Babylon and Nineveh in Aramaic Sources,” 151–52.

¹⁰⁹ T. M. Green, *The City of the Moon God: Religious Traditions of Harran*, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 114 (Leiden, 1992), 53.

¹¹⁰ Bar Hebraeus, *The Chronography of Gregory Abū’l Faraj*, vol. 1, 153.

minority had assimilated into all levels of Assyrian society, to the point that its language was used as a vehicle for Assyrian administration and rule. The Aramaic language and the cultures associated with it, however, were to long outlast the empire.

Later, the Syriac *Aḥiqar* portrayed Sennacherib in his other traditional role, the inept monarch of folklore. Likewise, *Tobit's* allusions to the *Aḥiqar* tradition drew the sage into a Jewish world that regarded Sennacherib's death as a just punishment for his actions against Jerusalem. In the Syriac Christian saints' tales of the Common Era, however, Sennacherib appeared as the ultimate pagan, a Zoroastrian king, and a murdered murderer. Nevertheless, he was still a symbol of the glory that was once Assyria, a birth-right that could not be disowned. Sennacherib's multi-layered legacy lived on at Assur, Nineveh, Arbela, and in Qardū, where Noah's Ark allegedly came to rest, and still lives on today in the Syriac church.

In sum, the figure of Sennacherib came to encapsulate the ambiguities and contradictions with which the Aramaic tradition reflected upon itself. He was a symbol of power for Arameans when they needed to construct a strong identity and connect to an ancient lineage, as in *Aḥiqar* and the *History of Mār Qardagh*. When they were victims of Assyrian power (as in Jewish *Tobit*) or under religious persecution (as the Christians in the story of Mār Behnām), Sennacherib became the embodiment of unjust oppression and whimsical abuse. Syriac Christians, however, were able to have it both ways. In the story of Mār Behnām, Sennacherib was remembered as a Zoroastrian who killed his children. Yet, as someone who eventually relented and converted to Christianity, his figure could also serve as a device to bestow the legitimacy of antiquity and the patina of a illustrious past onto the Eastern Church at a time when an even newer religion, Islam, was arriving on the scene.

SENNACHERIB'S CAMPAIGN AND ITS RECEPTION IN THE TIME OF THE SECOND TEMPLE

Gerbern S. Oegema

INTRODUCTION

Sennacherib's campaign to Judah in 701 B.C.E. has been described in detail in the Hebrew Bible, notably in 2 Kings 18–19; Isaiah 36–37 and 2 Chronicles 32:1–23 as well as Herodotus' *Histories* 2.141, and has been perceived as an important world historical event ever since. This becomes evident from its reception history in the Second Temple Period (539 B.C.E.–135 C.E.), as the analysis of selected passages will show. We find evidence of this and acknowledge its importance in such writings as *Ahiqar* Col. I:1–10; *Tobit* 1:15–22; *Demetrius the Chronographer*, Fragment 6; 2 *Baruch* 63:1–11; 4 *Ezra* 7:40; *Testament of Adam* 4:6; and 3 *Maccabees* 6:1–15, apart from other passages in the Pseudepigrapha, such as the *Ascension of Isaiah* 3:2; *Joseph and Aseneth* 8:9 and the *Hellenistic Synagogue Prayers* 6:10. These writings present us with interpretations, actualizations, and allusions to this world historical event, that give us a view on its earliest reception history.

The interpretations and allusions seem to take two different directions. On the one hand, we can observe a clear and early interest in the relevance of Sennacherib's campaign for historiography and especially for the characterization of the Assyrians and their king in the Persian and early Hellenistic Periods (*Ahiqar*; *Tobit*; *Herodotus*; *Demetrius*). On the other hand, the same events are later interpreted from the point of view of apocalyptic and theological thinking with a focus on understanding political events in relation to the situation of the first and second centuries C.E. under Roman rule (2 *Baruch*; 4*Ezra*; *Testament of Adam*; 3 *Maccabees*). In other words, the historiographic approach clearly precedes the apocalyptic one, although both use the same material. The reason for this lies more in the fact that Jewish apocalypticism is generally spoken of a later phenomenon than historiography, than that there would be two or more "types" of the interpretation of the history of Israel, a deuteronomistically inspired historiographic one and an apocalyptic one. Finally, there is also the understanding of Hezekiah's prayer as one of many other prayers of

intercession (again *4 Ezra*, as well as *Ascension of Isaiah; Hellenistic Synagogue Prayers*). The presence or absence of Sennacherib and his campaign in the Qumran Scrolls, Philo, and Josephus should also be explained. For all these issues, we will proceed chronologically rather than topically.

With the themes partly already defined by 2 Kings 18–19, the first biblical report about Sennacherib, we will look into its later reception history, and focus on what later authors were able to—on the basis of the available material—and deemed themselves worthy to transmit, retell, and re-interpret. The major themes in 2 Kings 18–19 are: Hezekiah's reign and righteousness; Sennacherib's campaign against Judah and his threat against Jerusalem; his departure and death; and the literary and theological responses to these.

THE RECEPTION IN THE PERSIAN AND EARLY HELLENISTIC PERIODS

In order to understand the basis on which later generations received these stories, it is necessary to briefly contextualize its formation in the Hebrew Bible. The first time we hear about Sennacherib (705–681 B.C.E.) and his campaign against Judah is in the long narrative and annalistic passages of 2 Kings 18–19. Whereas these two chapters of 1–2 Kings may have been written in the seventh or sixth century B.C.E. by an author influenced by either the Deuteronomistic History and/or the Prophet Jeremiah, and furthermore will have had several stages of redaction, the most probable period in which it was written was between 560 and 539 B.C.E., given the latest mentioned event in 2 Kings 25:27–30. However, what will interest us here more is which of the themes and units of 2 Kings 18–19 identified above can be discerned in its reception history. One conclusion can already be made, namely that within the Hebrew Bible itself, Isaiah 36:1 and 37:17, 21, 37 offer quite similar versions of 2 Kings 18:13 and 19:16.20.36, whereas 2 Chronicles 32:1–12 offers an alternative narrative with quite a different perspective on the events and theological evaluation. With 2 Chronicles being a later work of ca. 400–375 B.C.E.,¹ this places 2 Kings 18–19 closer to the probable date of Isaiah. These observations lead to the conclusion that the passage about the righteous Hezekiah and the failed attack of

¹ See I. Kalimi, "The Date of Chronicles: The Biblical Text, the Elephantine Papyri and the El-Ibrahimiya's Aramaic Grave Inscription," in *Hebrew Bible and Related Literature—S. J. Devries Commemorative Volume*, ed. H. J. Ellens et al. (Harrisburg, PA, 2002).

Sennacherib and his eventual death are best understood in light of the theological concept of God's acting in history.

In short, before the canonization and final literary fixation of the Hebrew Bible we have different biblical accounts and different versions of these accounts of Sennacherib's campaign against Judah as well as an interdependency of these accounts and versions. The canonization of the Hebrew Bible does, however, not lead to a complete harmonization of the different versions and accounts or even an exclusion of these differences. Let us now turn to some of the later incarnations of the story, beginning with *Ahiqar*.

Ahiqar Col. I:1–5

Ahiqar is a very early writing, possibly even pre-dating the 500 B.C.E. Aramaic papyrus found in Elephantine, on which it was written.² It is more likely to be the Aramaic adaptation of an Assyrian court tale than an originally Jewish writing. Given the lack of references to Egypt and Judaism and its accuracy in spelling Assyrian names, its origin is most probably Mesopotamia. It has many later versions in several languages. The quoted passage itself—belonging to the narrative and not to the proverbs—is mainly about Ahiqar and his time during the reign of king Esarhaddon, son of Sennacherib, but does offer in verses 1–5 some information on Sennacherib himself. The reason Sennacherib is mentioned may have been to locate and date the setting of the story (with the beginning of verse 1 being the title of the work). Verses 2–4 read:

Ahiqar had [become a gre]at man: he had [become counselor of all Assyria and ke]eper of the seal of Sennacherib, king of Assy[ria]. He used to say, "[I] may not have any sons, but Sennacherib, king of Assyria, relies [on my counsel] and advice."

Verses 2b–4 imply from the narrator's perspective that Ahiqar was as important to Sennacherib as his own sons. Verse 5 ends this short introductory episode, by using Sennacherib's death to introduce the reign of his son, under which the story of Ahiqar then unfolds. Not a word is said about Sennacherib's campaign against Jerusalem or other military successes or even about any accomplishments during his reign. Most

² See James M. Lindenberger, *The Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar* (Baltimore, 1983); Herbert Niehr, "Die Gestalt des Ahiqar im Tobit-Buch," in *Biblical Figures in Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature*, ed. Hermann Lichtenberger and Ulrike Mittmann-Richert (Berlin, 2009).

importantly, however, is that also nothing is said about the reason and details of his death, which is so prominent in the biblical narrative. Overall, we can observe that Ahiqar offers a rather neutral image of Sennacherib as king, whereas the Biblical account on which the later receptions discussed below depend, is mainly negative.³ The reason to include Ahiqar here, in fact, is because of its relation with Tobit. As a non-biblical source that survived in the periphery of the biblical books, Ahiqar offers a very early glimpse into the development of the reception of one aspect of the campaign of Sennacherib against Judah, namely his eventual death.

Tobit 1:15–22

The apocryphal story of Tobit was written in Aramaic in the early second century B.C.E. or somewhat earlier (225–175 B.C.E.),⁴ as it presupposes a canonical authority of the Law and the Prophets (like the Prologue in Jesus Sirach; *terminus post quem*), knows of the story of Ahiqar, but does not know of Antiochus IV and the Maccabees (*terminus ante quem*) and it shows no signs of apocalyptic or Essene thinking. It may very well have been written in the Jewish Diaspora and shares certain common features with the books of Daniel and Esther, which are also situated (but not necessarily written) in the eastern Diaspora of Mesopotamia.⁵ We hear of Sennacherib in Tobit 1:15–22 (15.18–21) with a story that seems to combine elements from 2 Kings 18–19 and the Story of Ahiqar, albeit with some inaccuracy. Sennacherib's father is not Shalmaneser, but Sargon II, who was Shalmaneser's half-brother and a son of Tiglath-pileser III. This inaccuracy seems to point to the author's focus not being so much on historical facts, though perhaps he draws on 2 Kings 17:3, but on portraying Tobit as a faithful Jew. The reference to Media's dangerous roads and Tobit's inability to travel to Media is neither explained nor can it be confirmed from other sources that they were dangerous or not.⁶

Tobit's character as a faithful and righteous Jew is thus not only underlined against the background of these historical circumstances, but in the following episode, also narrated in great detail. This happens in the three

³ See also Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible. A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia, 1985), 409–594; Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period, Volume II: From the Exile to the Maccabees* (Louisville, 1994), Volume II, 369–597.

⁴ See Beate Ego, *Buch Tobit*, Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit (JSHRZ) (Gütersloh, 1999); Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Tobit* (Berlin, 2003).

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ See Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, 101–26, as well as B. Ego, „Tobit,“ in *Unterweisung in erzählender Form*, ed. Gerbern S. Oegema, JSHRZ VI.1.2 (Gütersloh, 2005), 115–50.

verses 16–18a on Tobit's almsgiving to his relatives and his own people, his sharing his food and clothing with the hungry and needy, and his burying of his own people's dead bodies and those put to death by the king. The king, however, as all Assyrian kings, is known for taking tribute and public executions, quite the antipode of Tobit's conduct. These acts of piety are examples of practical and popular wisdom and of wisdom literature, both in ancient Israel and early Judaism and in the whole of the Ancient Near East. Verse 18b thus connects the historical data referred to above with the hermeneutical framework of portraying Tobit as a pious Jew.

Tobit not only acted piously during the historical events, but also against and despite them: "I also buried anyone whom Sennacherib had put to death after he came back in flight from Judea in the days when the King of Heaven passed judgment on him for all his blasphemies." With God inspiration and standing behind Tobit's piety and the King of Heaven judging Sennacherib, it is as if the self-announced "king" Sennacherib and the pious Jew Tobit stand on trial before the throne of the Most High, and there is no doubt on whose side God is!. On Sennacherib and his wicked deeds a divine verdict is then given.

The following verses 18b–20 then place both persons and ways of life in opposition to each other through a direct confrontation. Sennacherib's anger after God had defeated him in Judea is now directed first against the Israelites, of whom he slew many, but then also against Tobit, who would steal and bury their bodies, so that Sennacherib could not find them. When, in verse 19, one of the Ninevites told the king about this, Tobit hid himself, obviously out of fear that the king would also execute him. As in the Qumran fragment 4Q196 2:1–2, the possibly more original form of the text, relates: he flees. Verse 20 confirms this reading, as Tobit now has become the target of the anger of the king, who confiscates Tobit's property. Only his wife Hannah and his son Tobiah are left to him. However, as verse 21a reports, God's counterattack does not take long: less than forty days later (or forty-five or fifty, as some manuscripts read) Sennacherib is killed by his two sons and Tobit then flees to the mountains or Ararat (a slight abbreviation of 2 Kings 19:37 // Isaiah 37:38). A new chapter is opened, and the story of Tobit now really begins. As a matter of fact, the whole of 1:3–3:17 is a historicizing introduction to the more theologically oriented story of Tobit in 4:1–4:15.

Verses 21b–22 then tell the story of Ahiqar, who came to power under the reign of Sennacherib's successor Esarhaddon, namely as the one in control of the king's credit and treasury accounts. Of interest here is the mention of Ahiqar being the son of Tobit's brother Anael, which also makes him a Jew, and that Ahiqar had already been chief cupbearer,

keeper of the signet ring, comptroller and treasury accountant under Sennacherib. He therefore knew of the fate of his uncle Tobit, and was now finally, under Esarhaddon as second in charge, in a position of helping his fellow Jew.

Apart from the fact that the book of Tobit obviously knew of the story of Ahiqar, new details are added to the story about Sennacherib, which gives it a historiographic character. The book of Tobit then uses the story about Sennacherib for more theological reasons, namely to highlight Tobit's piety and above all to underline that God is the one who can raise and bring about the end of the earthly kings. Finally, the figure of Ahiqar is used to mark the turn in the fate of Tobit from a persecuted and dispossessed person to one restored in honor. This happens through Ahiqar's intercession:

Demetrius the Chronographer (Fragment 6)

This fragment belongs to a lost work of a Jewish Demetrius the Chronographer, titled *περι των εν τη Ιουδαια βασιλευων* ("About the Kings of Judea"), a history about the early days of biblical Israel, which safely can be dated before or around 200 B.C.E., namely during the reign of Ptolemy IV (225–205 B.C.E.), which Demetrius chooses as the historical terminus for his calculations. The problem with our passage and the chronology therein is, however, that the dates are not accurate. In Demetrius' calculation, the 573 years he mentions minus the 338 years until Ptolemy IV is not 128 but 235 years, whereas the time between the exile of the ten tribes of Israel and that of Judah and Benjamin actually is 128 and not 235. Therefore, either the 573 or the 338 years until Ptolemy IV is wrong. Clement of Alexandria is aware of these implications when he introduces Demetrius' quote with the word "But," thus differentiating it from other ancient calculations previously quoted by him. Be this as it may, the fact is that Demetrius' interest in Sennacherib is purely of a chronographic nature and that he used a Greek translation of the Bible that was probably the Septuagint.

THE RECEPTION IN THE GRECO-ROMAN PERIOD

Herodotus, *Histories* 2.141

Herodotus (ca. 484–425 B.C.E.) in his *Histories* refers to Sennacherib; this is approximately contemporary with the books of Chronicles and *Ahiqar*.

Although he did not share the same belief in the God of Israel raising and destroying the kings of this earth, he did share a theological concept of divine fate. Here it is Sennacherib, spelled Sanacharib (spell the Greek name), who together with his army is defeated by the Egyptian army and an Egyptian priest through the interference of a multitude of field mice. Of this leader it is said by Herodotus that he was the “priest of Hephaestos, whose name was Sethos.”⁷

Thus we have—in addition to the first more general parallel of kings and rulers being dependant on a deity and/or righteous man—a second particular parallel with the biblical account, as also Hezekiah was a leader, whose righteousness led to the fall of Sennacherib. It is, however, quite impossible to say whether Herodotus was influenced by the “biblical” account.⁸ The Babylonian historian Berossus, as quoted by Josephus (see below), seems to know of Herodotus’s story about Sennacherib’s campaign against Egypt, but not of the biblical account of the campaign against Judah.⁹

In the works of Josephus, however, we find a lengthy description of the campaign of Sennacherib in *Antiquities* book 10.1–23. The narrative partly consists of a quotation from the Babylonian historian Berossus in *Ant* 10.1.5, and also refers to the account found in Herodotus. Whereas most of the material of this lengthy narrative is derived from 2 Kings 18–19 (// Isaiah 36–37) and 2 Chronicles 32, the references to Herodotus and Berossus are used to confirm the accuracy of the biblical accounts and to give it additional authority from external writings. Assuming the accuracy of Josephus’ quotation of Berossus, the latter even seems to be aware of the biblical accounts, as he mentions the murder of Sennacherib by his two sons. The biblical account is thus presented by Josephus as superior to the other sources. It serves Josephus’ purpose of writing an apology for the Jewish people, who possess such an accurate and ancient book as the Hebrew Bible, and at the same time gives extra credibility to his own work as an historian.¹⁰

⁷ Herodotus here clearly fabricates the name from his knowledge of former kings named Seti, as recently as ca. 600 B.C.E.

⁸ See further D. Grene, *Herodotus* (Chicago, 1987).

⁹ See in detail E. J. Bickerman, “The Jewish Historian Demetrios,” in *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults*, ed. J. Neusner (Leiden, 1975), Vol. III, 72–84.

¹⁰ See further Christopher T. Begg, *Josephus’ Story of the Later Monarchy* (Leuven, 2000), 413–16), and Christopher T. Begg and Paul Spilsbury, *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary, Volume 5: Judean Antiquities Books 8–10* (Leiden, 2005).

An important difference between this and the other known accounts of Sennacherib's campaign discussed above is that here it is not Sennacherib himself, but his general Rab-shakeh who sent two of his commanders called principal commanders, with great forces, to destroy Jerusalem. The titles of the two other commanders are Tartan and Rab-saris, who go up to besiege Jerusalem. By inserting these details, Josephus connects the biblical account of Sennacherib's campaign with the other known non-Jewish accounts of his failed campaign against Egypt. Sennacherib's campaign does not appear in the works of Philo, whereas the Dead Sea Scrolls make only very few vague references about his campaign against Judah (though the text of Isaiah 36:1 is found in 4Q56).

2 Baruch 63:1–11

In the *Syriac or Second Apocalypse of Baruch*, Hezekiah and Sennacherib are part of the interpretation of the apocalyptic "Vision of the Twelve Waters," which divides the history of Israel into twelve or fourteen dark and light or evil and righteous periods until the expected end of days, when the Messiah will come. One of the prominent theological themes in *2 Baruch* is the interpretation of history, which for that reason can even be referred to as *2 Baruch's* "theology of history." Unlike the theology of the Prophets, the author of *2 Baruch* does not believe that repentance and God's Day of Judgment will change the course of history. Instead, the fall of Adam has set a development in motion, which is irreversible, as the seed of sin in Adam carries the final destruction of mankind in it. The twelve or fourteen periods (*2 Bar* 56:5–74:4) are as follows:

Dark Periods:

1. Adam's Fall
3. Egypt
5. The Judges
7. Jeroboam and the Assyrians
9. Manassah

Light Periods:

2. The Patriarchs
4. Moses
6. David and Solomon
8. Hezekiah

- 10. Josiah
- 11. Destruction of Jerusalem
- 12. Rebuilding of Zion
- 13. The End
- 14. Messianic Reign

The time between 100 and 130 C.E. is the most probable date of the apocalypse. If one wants to be even more precise, one can think of the time between the Diaspora Revolt in 115–117 C.E. and the Bar Kochba Revolt in 132–135 C.E. The Bar Kochba Revolt is for sure the *terminus ante quem*, as no references are made to Bar Kochba's defeat and the Roman punishments. As *terminus post quem*, one can only think of 70 C.E. as the year of the destruction of Jerusalem, but given the proximity of the apocalypse to times with messianic expectations and aspirations, it would not be improbable to see 100/110 as *terminus post quem*. Only the passages 28:2; 32:2–4; 61:7 and 68:5 offer some clues to the historical events.¹¹

Within this theological framework, the conflict between Judah and Assyria is portrayed as both a personal conflict between Hezekiah and Sennacherib and as a cosmic conflict between good and evil. On the personal level, it is Hezekiah's righteousness and belief in God that decides the conflict in his and Judah's favor; on the cosmic level it is God who stirs up kings and who has his angels destroy them and their armies. This is true for all the other periods in Israel's history, and it is true for the time of Hezekiah and Sennacherib. Added to the prophetic interpretation found in Kings and Isaiah is therefore an apocalyptic view of history with the conflict between Israel and the nations seen as a cosmic battle of universal proportions. In this conflict, evil—often also personified as a heavenly adversary—as well as the angels both play a prominent role, and take part in an eschatological latter day battle between the Adversary and his army and God's Messiah and his angels.

4 Ezra 7:40

In this passage several examples of prayers of intercession are mentioned: Abraham for the Sodomites, Moses for the Patriarchs, Joshua for Israel, etc. until the last example is given, namely that of Hezekiah for his people in the time of Sennacherib. What follows is a question asked by Ezra,

¹¹ See in detail, G. S. Oegema, *Apokalypsen*, JSHRZ VI.1.5. (Gütersloh, 2001), 58–75.

whether it is still possible in his own time to pray for the ungodly and whether the prayer will be heard. The angel answers him, saying that the prayer will be heard at the end of days and that this day of doom marks the end of this world, its corruption, intemperance, and infidelity, but will also mark the beginning and growth of immortality, righteousness and truth. The author thus applies two changes to the biblical account. First, Hezekiah's prayer of intercession—like all prayers of intercession of the past mentioned by the author—no longer has relevance as a model of prayer for other people, but has become solely an example belonging to the past and only has a meaning in this world. In the world to come, things will be radically different. Second, the injustice done to Israel by Sennacherib will not only be punished in the present, but all the injustice done to Israel in this world will be revenged in the world to come. This needs to be understood within the context of an eschatological understanding of history, at the end of which the final judgment will be executed on those who deserve it, and rewards will come to the righteous.¹² Within this eschatological understanding of history the mentioned examples of the prayers of intercession of Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, Elijah, and Hezekiah not only mark key righteous figures in Israel's history, but also key historical moments. Of this history the Babylonian exile is the last moment by virtue of the fact that Ezra situates himself at the end of this chain of events.

Testament of Adam 4:6

The *Testament of Adam* consists of three different parts, the Horarium (ch. 1), the Hours (ch. 2), and the Prophecy (chs. 3–4), of which the combination and final Christian redaction dates from around 150–170 C.E. Although chapters 3–4 called the Prophecy are partly quoted in the fourth century *Syriac Transitus Mariae* and also share some similarities with the third century C.E. Coptic *Apocalypse of Elijah*, the Jewish portions may be older than the later Christian additions. As for *TestAd* 4:6, this may very well be part of that older Jewish tradition. What it says is that the sixth order of the (in total) six orders of the heavenly powers—the angels, archangels, archons, authorities, powers, and dominions—rules over kingdoms and decide over their victory and defeat in battle.¹³ These six orders

¹² See in detail, Oegema, *Apokalypsen*, 94–115.

¹³ See S. E. Robinson, "Testament of Adam," *OTP* 1, 989–95.

are best understood as six periods in history, as we can deduce from the following examples.

The examples of these kingdoms ruled over by these powers given here in 4:6–7 are: 1) the angel that defeated the Assyrian king (Sennacherib) and put an end to his campaign against Jerusalem; 2) the angel riding a red horse in the vision of Zechariah 1:7–11; and 3) the angel riding a red horse seen by Judah the Maccabee and resulting in the defeat of the wicked Antiochus IV. The author of this passage then concludes that wherever there is victory or defeat, it is prompted by the living God, who commands them in the hours of battle. The further details given to the example of Sennacherib's campaign are a) that an angel descended and ravaged the camp of the wicked, and that 185,000 men died in one moment, a detail taken from 2 Kings 19:35 ("That night the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp"), also mentioned by Josephus *Ant.* 10 and 2 *Bar* 53:7–8.

Because the last of the three examples mentioned here is that of the Maccabean Revolt (167–164 B.C.E.) and there is no detailed periodization of history as found in, for example, 4 *Ezra* and 2 *Baruch*, the passage *TestAd* 4:6–7 may indeed be pre-Christian and even date from the latter half of the second or first centuries B.C.E. *TestAd*'s periodization of history is therefore very basic and undeveloped compared to later ones, as it does not include a differentiation and characterization of these periods, for example in "light and dark." A further argument is that we do not really have an eschatological or apocalyptic interpretation of the three quoted events, but rather a post-exilic prophetic interpretation, in which two *theologoumena* dominate: 1. God acts in history, and 2. God acts through His angels. This specific theology of history is derived from 2 Kings 18–19 (and 2 Chronicles 32 and Isaiah 36–37 as well) and from Zechariah 1 and is then applied to Judah the Maccabee. In other words, the Maccabean Revolt is interpreted in a biblical and prophetic way and not from an apocalyptic perspective, as 4 *Ezra* and 2 *Baruch* would later do. The specific element added by the *Testament of Adam* to the mainly biblical theology is that of a detailed angelology and demonology, and that the dominions have power of political kingdoms. This perspective, of course, changes within the context of its final Christian redaction, and the comments made here only refer to the passage *TestAd* 4:6–7.

3 Maccabees 6:1–15

In this second or first century B.C.E. Alexandrian Jewish work, we find a prayer by a certain Eleazar, situated in the time of Ptolemy IV (221–204 B.C.E.), when the civil rights of the Jews in Egypt were threatened and a conflict arose between Ptolemy and the Jews. At the end of this conflict, Ptolemy IV decides that the Jews should be trampled down by five hundred elephants. At dawn, the aged Eleazar prays to God to intervene, and two angels, visible to all but the Jews, strike terror into the king and his troops and make the elephants turn back upon the king's troops (*3 Macc* 5:46–6:21). In Eleazar's prayer (*3 Macc* 6:2–15), there are several examples of God saving Israel, in the time of the Pharaoh, in the time of Sennacherib, and in the times of Daniel (as well as his three companions) and of Jonah (*3 Macc* 6:2–8). From these examples, in which the first two God is shown to have power over foreign rulers, the author argues in *3 Macc* 6:9–15 that also in his present situation of exile in Egypt, in which Israel is surrounded by Gentiles, the people should trust God, who has never turned His face from His people (followed by a quotation of Leviticus 26:44).

The author has somehow understood the figure of the Pharaoh during the time of Israel's exile in Egypt and the figure of Sennacherib during his campaign against Jerusalem, possibly on the basis of his knowledge of Sennacherib's campaign against Egypt, as two examples of the same phenomenon. A second and much clearer red thread in the passage is that of God intervening through his angels, already present in 2 Kings 19:35 and 2 Chronicles 32:21 and then picked up by quite a few later writings. Here in the prayer of Eleazar, God intervenes through angels in the cases of the Pharaoh, Sennacherib, and Daniel's three companions in the fiery furnace.

Further examples of Sennacherib's campaign are mentioned or hinted at in *Ascension of Isaiah* 3:2 (cf. 2 Kings 18:9–11); *Joseph and Aseneth* 8:9 (cf. 2 Kings 19:15), as well as in the *Hellenistic Synagogue Prayers* 6:10 (cf. 2 Kings 19:1–2). We may pass over any discussion of the text *Ascension of Isaiah* 3:2, however, as it deals with the time of Hezekiah and Isaiah before Sennacherib's campaign, and there is no reason to assume that the author deliberately left out any reference to the Assyrian king.¹⁴ The

¹⁴ See further J. Dochhorn, "Die Ascensio Isaiae," in *Unterweisung in erzählender Form*, ed. Gerbern S. Oegema, JSHRZ Vol. VI.1.2 (Gütersloh, 2005), 1–48.

references in *Joseph and Aseneth* from the second century B.C.E. or later are also really very vague, and only refer to the fact that Joseph's prayer to the creator is found in many other writings of the period as well (2 Kings 19:15). There are, however, no references to either Hezekiah or Isaiah or to Sennacherib. Finally, in a few words of a *Hellenistic Synagogue Prayer* 6:10 from a second century C.E. or later Alexandrian or Syrian context, we find a brief reference to Hezekiah and Sennacherib (2 Kings 19:1–2), but without any further detail or interpretation.

CONCLUSION

During the Second Temple Period, Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah has been interpreted in such writings as *Ahiqar* Col. I:1–10; *Tobit* 1:15–22; *Demetrius the Chronographer*, Fragment 6; *2 Baruch* 63:1–11; *4 Ezra* 7:40; *Testament of Adam* 4:6; *3 Maccabees* 6:1–15, as well as Herodotus' *Histories* 2.141 (while in other passages in the Pseudepigrapha, such as the *Ascension of Isaiah* 3:2; *Joseph and Aseneth* 8:9 and the *Hellenistic Synagogue Prayers* 6:10 the subject is barely mentioned). The interpretations and allusions discussed here take two different directions: on the one hand, there is a clear and early interest in the relevance of Sennacherib's campaign for historiography and especially for the characterization of the Assyrians and their king in the Persian and early Hellenistic Periods (*Ahiqar*; *Tobit*; *Herodotus*; *Demetrius*). On the other hand, in the first and second centuries C.E. under Roman rule, the event was understood from the point of view of apocalyptic and theological thinking and its interpretation in relation to the present political situations (*2 Baruch*, *4 Ezra*, *Testament of Adam*; *3 Maccabees*). And finally there was also the understanding of Hezekiah's prayer as one of many other prayers of intercession (*4 Ezra*; *Ascension of Isaiah*; *Hellenistic Synagogue Prayers*). Whereas Sennacherib and his campaign are mainly absent in the Qumran Scrolls as well as in the writings of Philo of Alexandria, Flavius Josephus is very detailed, and seems to want to give attention to all aspects found here.

While all two types of interpretation can appear simultaneously, the historiographic one is clearly earlier than the apocalyptic one. This is more likely due to the fact that Jewish apocalypticism is a later phenomenon than historiography. This general observation limits any conclusion one can draw in terms of the how and why of the particular interpretations. The differences and similarities found in the examples of the reception

history of the events connected with Sennacherib discussed here may be caused more by the specific historical and rhetorical situations of the various authors interpreting these events than any form of phenomenology or typology that could explain them. Reception history as a methodology is still so much in its infancy that it could offer any such phenomenology or typology. What we need are studies like this in a large number before we can even begin developing such a methodology.¹⁵

APPENDIX: TEXTS DISCUSSED

Ahiqar Col. I:1–5

1 [These are the wor]ds of one Ahiqar, a wise and skillfull scribe, which he taught his son. 2 N[ow he did not have offspring of his own but] he said, “I shall nevertheless have a son!” Prior to this, Ahiqar had [become a gre]at man: 3 he had [become counselor of all Assyria and ke]eper of the seal of Sennacherib, king of Assy[ria]. He used to say, “I] may not have any sons, 4 but Sennacherib, king of Assyria, relies [on my counsel] and advice.” 5 A[t that time Senna]cherib, k[ing of Assyria, died, and] his son Esarhaddon [arose] and became king in Assyria in pla[ce of his fa]ther [Sennacherib].¹⁶

Tobit 1:15–22

¹⁵ When Shalmaneser died, his son Sennacherib came to rule in his stead, and the roads to Media passed out of control; and I was no longer able to journey there. ¹⁶ In the days of Shalmaneser, I gave many alms to my relatives, to those of my people.¹⁷ I shared my food with the hungry and my clothing with naked; and if I saw the dead body of anyone of my nation tossed beyond *the wall of Nineveh*, I would bury it. ¹⁸I also buried anyone whom Sennacherib had put to death after he came back in flight from Judea in the days when the King of Heaven passed judgment on him for all his blasphemies. In his anger he slew many of the Israelites, but I would steal their bodies and bury them; when Sennacherib looked for them, he did not find them. ¹⁹But one of the Ninevites went and informed the king about me, that I was burying them; so I hid myself. When I learned that the king knew about me and I was being sought for execution, I became afraid and ran away. ²⁰All my property was confiscated, and nothing was left to me that did

¹⁵ As for the reception of Biblical and non-Biblical themes in the past 2000 years, the newly-launched *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, a twenty-volume work, is indispensable, and at the same time shows one of the directions into which future research is going. Furthermore, one can draw the attention to the reception-historical material collected in my co-edited six-volume work *Jewish Writings from the Hellenistic-Roman Period* (1999–2006) and the hermeneutics developed in my *Early Judaism and Modern Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2011).

¹⁶ Translation by J. M. Lindenberger, “Ahiqar,” *OTP* 2, 479–507, esp. 494.

not become part of royal holdings, except Hannah, my wife, and Tobiah, my son. ²¹Forty days did not pass before two of his sons killed Sennacherib, and they fled to the mountains of Ararat. His son Esarhaddon came to reign after him, and he appointed Ahiqar, the son of my brother 'Anael, over all the credit accounts of his kingdom; he had control of all the treasury accounts (of the king). ²²Then Ahiqar interceded on my behalf, and I came back to Nineveh. For Ahiqar had been the chief cup-bearer, keeper of the signet ring(s), comptroller, and treasury accountant under Sennacherib, the king of Assyria. Now Esarhaddon put him in charge as second to himself. Ahiqar was my nephew and one of my kindred (and of my family).¹⁷

Demetrius the Chronographer, Fragment 6

Fragment six (Clement of Alexandria, Strom 1.141.If.): But Demetrius says, in his (work) *On the Kings of Judaea*, that the tribe of Judah and (those of) Benjamin and Levi were not taken captive by Sennacherib, but from this captivity to the last (captivity), which Nebuchadnezzar effected out of Jerusalem, (there were) 128 years and 6 months. But from the time when the ten tribes of Samaria were taken captive to that of Ptolemy the 4th, there were 573 years and 9 months. But from the time (of the captivity) of Jerusalem (to Ptolemy the 4th), there were 338 years (and) 3 months.¹⁸

Herodotus, *Histories* 2.141

... when Sanacharib, king of the Arabians and Assyrians, marched his vast army into Egypt, the warriors one and all refused to come to his [*i.e.*, the Pharaoh Sethos'] aid. On this the monarch, greatly distressed, entered into the inner sanctuary, and, before the image of the god, bewailed the fate which impended over him. As he wept he fell asleep, and dreamed that the god came and stood at his side, bidding him be of good cheer, and go boldly forth to meet the Arabian host, which would do him no hurt, as he himself would send those who should help him. Sethos, then, relying on the dream, collected such of the Egyptians as were willing to follow him, who were none of them warriors, but traders, artisans, and market people; and with these marched to Pelusium, which commands the entrance into Egypt, and there pitched his camp. As the two armies lay here opposite one another, there came in the night, a multitude of field-mice, which devoured all the quivers and bowstrings of the enemy, and ate the thongs by which they managed their shields. Next morning they commenced their fight, and great multitudes fell, as they had no arms with which to defend themselves. There stands to this day in the temple of Vulcan, a stone statue of Sethos, with a mouse in his hand, and an inscription to this effect—"Look on me, and learn to reverence the gods."¹⁹

¹⁷ Translation by Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, 98–100.

¹⁸ Translation by J. Hanson, "Demetrius the Chronographer," *OTP* 2, 843–54, esp. 854.

¹⁹ Translation by G. Rawlinson; Edward Henry Blakeney, *The Histories of Herodotus*, Everyman's Library Series (London, [1964]), No. 405–406.

Josephus, *Antiquities* 10.1–23

It was now the fourteenth year of the government of Hezekiah, king of the two tribes, when the king of Assyria, whose name was Sennacherib, made an expedition against him with a great army, and took all the cities of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin by force; and when he was ready to bring his army against Jerusalem, Hezekiah sent ambassadors to him beforehand, and promised to submit, and pay what tribute he should appoint. Hereupon Sennacherib, when he heard of what offers the ambassadors made, resolved not to proceed in the war, but to accept of the proposals that were made him; and if he might receive three hundred talents of silver, and thirty talents of gold, he promised that he would depart in a friendly manner; and he gave security upon oath to the ambassadors that he would then do him no harm, but go away as he came. So Hezekiah submitted, and emptied his treasures, and sent the money, as supposing he should be freed from his enemy, and from any further distress about his kingdom. Accordingly, the Assyrian king took it, and yet had no regard to what he had promised; but while he himself went to the war against the Egyptians and Ethiopians, he left his general Rabshakeh, and two other of his principal commanders, with great forces, to destroy Jerusalem. The names of the two other commanders were Tartan and Rabsaris.

Now as soon as they were come before the walls, they pitched their camp, and sent messengers to Hezekiah, and desired that they might speak with him; but he did not himself come out to them for fear, but he sent three of his most intimate friends; the name of one was Eliakim, who was over the kingdom, and Shebna, and Joah the recorder. So these men came out, and stood over against the commanders of the Assyrian army; and when Rab-shakeh saw them, he bid them go and speak to Hezekiah in the manner following: That Sennacherib, the great king, desires to know of him, on whom it is that he relies and depends, in flying from his lord, and will not hear him, nor admit his army into the city? Is it on account of the Egyptians, and in hopes that his army would be beaten by them? Whereupon he lets him know, that if this be what he expects, he is a foolish man, and like one who leans on a broken reed; while such a one will not only fall down, but will have his hand pierced and hurt by it. That he ought to know he makes this expedition against him by the will of God, who hath granted this favor to him, that he shall overthrow the kingdom of Israel, and that in the very same manner he shall destroy those that are his subjects also. When Rabshakeh had made this speech in the Hebrew tongue, for he was skillful in that language, Eliakim was afraid lest the multitude that heard him should be disturbed; so he desired him to speak in the Syrian tongue. But the general, understanding what he meant, and perceiving the fear that he was in, he made his answer with a greater and a louder voice, but in the Hebrew tongue; and said, that "since they all heard what were the king's commands, they would consult their own advantage in delivering up themselves to us; for it is plain the both you and your king dissuade the people from submitting by vain hopes, and so induce them to resist; but if you be courageous, and think to drive our forces away, I am ready to deliver to you two thousand of these horses that are with me for your use, if you can set as many horsemen on their backs, and show your strength; but what you have

not you cannot produce. Why therefore do you delay to deliver up yourselves to a superior force, who can take you without your consent? although it will be safer for you to deliver yourselves up voluntarily, while a forcible capture, when you are beaten, must appear more dangerous, and will bring further calamities upon you."

When the people, as well as the ambassadors, heard what the Assyrian commander said, they related it to Hezekiah, who thereupon put off his royal apparel, and clothed himself with sackcloth, and took the habit of a mourner, and, after the manner of his country, he fell upon his face, and besought God, and entreated him to assist them, now they had no other hope of relief. He also sent some of his friends, and some of the priests, to the prophet Isaiah, and desired that he would pray to God, and offer sacrifices for their common deliverance, and so put up supplications to him, that he would have indignation at the expectations of their enemies, and have mercy upon his people. And when the prophet had done accordingly, an oracle came from God to him, and encouraged the king and his friends that were about him; and foretold that their enemies should be beaten without fighting, and should go away in an ignominious manner, and not with that insolence which they now show, for that God would take care that they should be destroyed. He also foretold that Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, should fail of his purpose against Egypt, and that when he came home he should perish by the sword.

About the same time also the king of Assyria wrote an epistle to Hezekiah, in which he said he was a foolish man, in supposing that he should escape from being his servant, since he had already brought under many and great nations; and he threatened, that when he took him, he would utterly destroy him, unless he now opened the gates, and willingly received his army into Jerusalem. When he read this epistle, he despised it, on account of the trust that he had in God; but he rolled up the epistle, and laid it up within the temple. And as he made his further prayers to God for the city, and for the preservation of all the people, the prophet Isaiah said that God had heard his prayer, and that he should not be besieged at this time by the king of Assyria that for the future he might be secure of not being at all disturbed by him; and that the people might go on peaceably, and without fear, with their husbandry and other affairs. But after a little while the king of Assyria, when he had failed of his treacherous designs against the Egyptians, returned home without success, on the following occasion: He spent a long time in the siege of Pelusium; and when the banks that he had raised over against the walls were of a great height, and when he was ready to make an immediate assault upon them, but heard that Tirhaka, king of the Ethiopians, was coming and bringing great forces to aid the Egyptians, and was resolved to march through the desert, and so to fall directly upon the Assyrians, this king Sennacherib was disturbed at the news, and, as I said before, left Pelusium, and returned back without success. Now concerning this Sennacherib, Herodotus also says, in the second book of his histories, how "this king came against the Egyptian king, who was the priest of Vulcan; and that as he was besieging Pelusium, he broke up the siege on the following occasion: This Egyptian priest prayed to God, and God heard his prayer, and sent a judgment upon the Arabian king." But in this

Herodotus was mistaken, when he called this king not king of the Assyrians, but of the Arabians; for he saith that “a multitude of mice gnawed to pieces in one night both the bows and the rest of the armor of the Assyrians, and that it was on that account that the king, when he had no bows left, drew off his army from Pelusium.” And Herodotus does indeed give us this history; nay, and Berosus, who wrote of the affairs of Chaldea, makes mention of this king Sennacherib, and that he ruled over the Assyrians, and that he made an expedition against all Asia and Egypt; and says thus:

“Now when Sennacherib was returning from his Egyptian war to Jerusalem, he found his army under Rabshakeh his general in danger [by a plague], for God had sent a pestilential distemper upon his army; and on the very first night of the siege, a hundred fourscore and five thousand, with their captains and generals, were destroyed. So the king was in a great dread and in a terrible agony at this calamity; and being in great fear for his whole army, he fled with the rest of his forces to his own kingdom, and to his city Nineveh; and when he had abode there a little while, he was treacherously assaulted, and died by the hands of his elder sons, Adrammelech and Seraser, and was slain in his own temple, which was called Araske. Now these sons of his were driven away on account of the murder of their father by the citizens, and went into Armenia, while Assarachoddas took the kingdom of Sennacherib.” And this proved to be the conclusion of this Assyrian expedition against the people of Jerusalem.²⁰

2 Baruch 63:1–11

63 1 *‘And the bright eighth waters which thou hast seen, this is the rectitude and uprightness of 2 Hezekiah king of Judah and the grace (of God) which came upon him. For when Sennacherib was stirred up in order that he might perish, and his wrath troubled him in order that he might thereby 3 perish, for the multitude also of the nations which were with him. When, moreover, Hezekiah the king heard those things which the king of Assyria was devising, (i.e.) to come and seize him and destroy his people, the two and a half tribes which remained: nay, more he wished to overthrow Zion also: then Hezekiah trusted in his works, and had hope in his righteousness, and spake with 4 the Mighty One and said: “Behold, for lo! Sennacherib is prepared to destroy us, and he will be boastful and uplifted when he has destroyed Zion.” 5 And the Mighty One heard him, for Hezekiah was wise, And He had respect unto his prayer, because he was righteous. 6, 7 And thereupon the Mighty One commanded Ramiel His angel who speaks with thee. And I went forth and destroyed their multitude, the number of whose chiefs only was a hundred and 8 eighty-five thousand, and each one of them had an equal number (at his command). And at that time I burned their bodies within, but their raiment and arms I preserved outwardly, in order that the still more wonderful deeds of the Mighty One might appear, and that thereby His name might 9 be spoken of throughout the whole earth. And Zion was saved and Jerusalem delivered: Israel also 10 was freed from tribulation.*

²⁰ For a new newer translation see now Begg and Spilsbury, *Flavius Josephus*.

*And all those who were in the holy land rejoiced, and the name of the II Mighty One was glorified so that it was spoken of: These are the bright waters which thou hast seen.*²¹

4 Ezra 7:40

36: Then said I, Abraham prayed first for the Sodomites, and Moses for the fathers that sinned in the wilderness: 37: And Jesus after him for Israel in the time of Achan: 38: And Samuel and David for the destruction: and Solomon for them that should come to the sanctuary: 39: And Helias for those that received rain; and for the dead, that he might live: 40: And Ezechias for the people in the time of Sennacherib: and many for many. 41: Even so now, seeing corruption is grown up, and wickedness increased, and the righteous have prayed for the ungodly: wherefore shall it not be so now also? 42: He answered me, and said, This present life is not the end where much glory doth abide; therefore have they prayed for the weak. 43: But the day of doom shall be the end of this time, and the beginning of the immortality for to come, wherein corruption is past, 44: Intemperance is at an end, infidelity is cut off, righteousness is grown, and truth is sprung up. 45: Then shall no man be able to save him that is destroyed, nor to oppress him that hath gotten the victory.²²

Testament of Adam 4:6

4:6. The sixth order, which is the dominions. This is its service: they rule over kingdoms, and in their hands are victory and defeat in battle. And this is shown (to be) so by (the example of) the Assyrian king. For when he went up against Jerusalem, an angel descended and ravaged the camp of the wicked, and 185.000 died in one moment.²³

3 Maccabees 6:1–15

[1] Then a certain Eleazar, famous among the priests of the country, who had attained a ripe old age and throughout his life had been adorned with every virtue, directed the elders around him to cease calling upon the holy God and prayed as follows: [2] “King of great power, Almighty God Most High, governing all creation with mercy, [3] look upon the descendants of Abraham, O Father, upon the children of the sainted Jacob, a people of your consecrated portion who are perishing as foreigners in a foreign land. [4] Pharaoh with his abundance of chariots, the former ruler of this Egypt, exalted with lawless insolence and boastful tongue, you destroyed together with his arrogant army by drowning them in the sea, manifesting the light of your mercy upon the nation of Israel. [5] Sennacherib exulting in his countless forces, oppressive king of the Assyrians, who had already gained control of the whole world by the spear and was lifted up against your holy city, speaking grievous words with boasting and insolence, you,

²¹ Translation by A. F. J. Klijn, “2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch,” *OTP* 1, 615–52, esp. 642–43.

²² Translation by B. M. Metzger, “The Fourth Book of Ezra,” *OTP* 1, 517–59, esp. 541.

²³ Translation by Robinson, “Testament of Adam,” 989–95, esp. 995.

O Lord, broke in pieces, showing your power to many nations. [6] The three companions in Babylon who had voluntarily surrendered their lives to the flames so as not to serve vain things, you rescued unharmed, even to a hair, moistening the fiery furnace with dew and turning the flame against all their enemies. [7] Daniel, who through envious slanders was cast down into the ground to lions as food for wild beasts, you brought up to the light unharmed. [8] And Jonah, wasting away in the belly of a huge, sea-born monster, you, Father, watched over and restored unharmed to all his family. [9] And now, you who hate insolence, all-merciful and protector of all, reveal yourself quickly to those of the nation of Israel—who are being outrageously treated by the abominable and lawless Gentiles. [10] Even if our lives have become entangled in impieties in our exile, rescue us from the hand of the enemy, and destroy us, Lord, by whatever fate you choose. [11] Let not the vain-minded praise their vanities at the destruction of your beloved people, saying, ‘Not even their god has rescued them.’ [12] But you, O Eternal One, who have all might and all power, watch over us now and have mercy upon us who by the senseless insolence of the lawless are being deprived of life in the manner of traitors. [13] And let the Gentiles cower today in fear of your invincible might, O honored One, who have power to save the nation of Jacob. [14] The whole throng of infants and their parents entreat you with tears. [15] Let it be shown to all the Gentiles that you are with us, O Lord, and have not turned your face from us; but just as you have said, ‘Not even when they were in the land of their enemies did I neglect them’ (Leviticus 26:44), so accomplish it, O Lord.”²⁴

Ascension of Isaiah 3:2

1. And Belchira recognized and saw the place of Isaiah and the prophets who were with him; for he dwelt in the region of Bethlehem, and was an adherent of Manasseh. And he prophesied falsely in Jerusalem, and many belonging to Jerusalem were confederate with him, and he was a Samaritan. 2. And it came to pass when Alagar Zagar [Shalmaneser], king of Assyria, had come and captive, and led them away to the mountains of the medes and the rivers of Tazon; 3. This (Belchira), whilst still a youth, had escaped and come to Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, but he walked not in the ways of his father of Samaria; for he feared Hezekiah. 4. And he was found in the days of Hezekiah speaking words of lawlessness in Jerusalem. 5. And the servants of Hezekiah accused him, and he made his escape to the region of Bethlehem. And they persuaded . . . 6. And Belchira accused Isaiah and the prophets who were with him, saying: ‘Isaiah and those who are with him prophesy against Jerusalem and against the cities of Judah that they shall be laid waste and (against the children of Judah and) Benjamin also that they shall go into captivity, and also against thee, O lord the king, that thou shalt go (bound) with hooks and iron chains’: 7. But they prophesy falsely against Israel and Judah. 8. And Isaiah himself hath said: ‘I see more than Moses the prophet.’ 9. But Moses said: ‘No man can see God and live’; and Isaiah hath said: ‘I have seen God and behold I live.’ 10. Know, therefore, O king, that he is lying. And Jerusalem also he hath called Sodom, and the princes of Judah

²⁴ Translation by H. Anderson, “3 Maccabees,” *OTP* 2, 509–29, esp. 526.

and Jerusalem he hath declared to be the people of Gomorrah. And he brought many accusations against Isaiah and the prophets before Manasseh. 11. But Beliar dwelt in the heart of Manasseh and in the heart of the princes of Judah and Benjamin and of the eunuchs and of the councillors of the king. 12. And the words of Belchira pleased him [exceedingly], and he sent and seized Isaiah.²⁵

Hellenistic Synagogue Prayers 6:10

Hezekiah in sickness, and concerning Sennachereim.²⁶

²⁵ Translation by M. A. Knibb, "Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah," *OTP* 2, 143–76, esp. 159.

²⁶ Translation by D. R. Darnell, "Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers," *OTP* 2, 671–97, esp. 685.

SENNACHERIB IN MIDRASHIC AND RELATED LITERATURE: INSCRIBING HISTORY IN MIDRASH

Rivka Ulmer

INTRODUCTION

The Assyrian king Sennacherib and his campaign in Judah are deeply inscribed in Jewish memory, in particular in the post-Biblical Midrashic interpretations and apocalyptic texts of late antiquity. From the viewpoint of modern historians, the Kingdom of Judah barely survived the attacks of the Assyrians, who retreated before they could destroy Jerusalem. In Midrash, Sennacherib is described as an unsuccessful conqueror who was the ancestor of two Sages, Shemaiah and Abtalyon. This chapter addresses the following four questions: Is there a religious-cultural memory or a historical memory of Sennacherib's campaign in rabbinic literature? How are the traces of his campaign interpreted? Has the textually encoded memory of Sennacherib been influenced by cultural transformations and rabbinic constraints of interpretation? What does Sennacherib symbolize in Midrashic and related literature? Methods applied to this inquiry include current literary theory and post-modern textual criticism.

METHODS

At the beginning of the scholarly analysis of Midrash, when the *Wissenschaft des Judenthums* recognized the existence of Midrash as a legitimate expression of rabbinic inquiry and analysis of the Bible, the so-called "ahistorical" aggadic material was basically ignored because it was considered merely legendary.¹ In Midrash, Sennacherib appears mainly in this "ahistorical material," which should be analyzed from a different perspective due to the dialectics of Midrash and history.² In later explorations of

¹ I. M. Gafni, "The modern study of Rabbinics and Historical Questions: The Tale of the Text," in *The New Testament and Rabbinic Literature*, ed. R. Bieringer, et al. (Leiden, 2010), 43–61.

² R. Ulmer, "Visions of Egypt and Roman Palestine: A Dialectical Relationship between History and Homiletical Midrash," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge/Frankfurt Jewish Studies Bulletin* 33 (2006): 1–33.

Midrashic narratives concerning historical personalities, subsequent to the *Wissenschaft*, these narratives were still considered as folklore (*aggadah*) that had no further intrinsic value, and they were viewed as useless in the reconstruction of historical events.³ Occasionally, such narratives were understood to contain a kernel of historical truth⁴ that could be extracted by discarding the “implausible” parts and reading the historically valuable parts that were co-referenced in external “historical” sources. According to Menachem Kister,⁵ a narrative may possess historicity, or a text may be historical, if it reflects a genuine exegetical tradition with polemical intent from a certain generation. In my opinion, Kister’s careful approach is mainly applicable to events occurring in close temporal proximity to tannaitic and amoraic texts. Midrashic texts often contain embedded traditions originating in a discrete historical context or event. This is the case in the material under analysis: Sennacherib was a “real” Assyrian king who conquered Israel and Judah, except for the city of Jerusalem.

Nevertheless, this chapter is not concerned with the historical veracity of the interpretations concerning Sennacherib in rabbinic literature. Currently, most rabbinic scholars focus upon the problem that rabbinic texts contain only statements but not the questions that elicited these statements. Thus, we usually do not have the questions posed by rabbis of late antiquity, only their dicta concerning a historical figure. As a result, contemporary Midrashic scholarship presents inquiries that are directed at the portrayal of a figure such as Sennacherib and the types of questions that rabbis may have asked with respect to said figure that led to the statements that we have in the rabbinic texts. Accordingly, some scholars attempt to discover the purposes of Midrashic descriptions of historical kings, heroes, and famous individuals. In attempting to comprehend rabbinic literature, we may assume that we encounter the phenomenon of a late antique culture of an intellectual quest seeking to provide a meaningful religious account of past encounters between God and Israel.⁶ The

³ H. I. Newman, “Closing the circle: Yonah Fraenkel, the Talmudic story, and rabbinic history,” in *How should Rabbinic Literature be Read?*, ed. M. Kraus (Piscataway, NJ, 2006), 105–36.

⁴ P. Schäfer, “From Jerusalem the Great to Alexandria the Small. The Relationship between Palestine and Egypt in the Graeco-Roman Period,” in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, ed. P. Schäfer, TSAJ 71 (Tübingen, 1998), vol. I, 129–40.

⁵ M. Kister, “Metamorphoses of Aggadic Traditions,” *Tarbiz* 60 (1991): 179–224 (in Hebrew).

⁶ J. Huizinga, “A Definition of the Concept of History,” in *Philosophy and History*, ed. R. Kibansky and H. J. Patton (New York, 1963), 10–11.

rabbinic version of this religious account was to be dispersed to the rabbinic circle of interpreters. In the case of Sennacherib, the motive for this account may have been to belatedly comprehend the Assyrian attack on Judah from a temporal and cultural distance. Based upon the assumption of “everything may be found in Scripture,” the rabbinic account and evaluation of the events from a religious perspective was achieved through interpretations of Scriptural lemmata with the result that Sennacherib was transformed from a historical character mentioned in the Bible (and non-Jewish sources) to an almost fictional character in post-Biblical literature⁷—a character that influenced Jewish memory.

Sennacherib’s name also served as a trope that was applicable to other oppressors, including the contemporary situations of the composers of rabbinic texts. In rabbinic texts, clusters of meaning focusing upon Sennacherib developed that were carried forward throughout the tradition until the Middle Ages. One of the main clusters of interpretation revolving around Sennacherib conveyed the involvement of God, who was understood to be profoundly engaged with Israel and in charge of the events on earth from His heavenly abode. After the Assyrian exile,⁸ which almost seamlessly transitioned into the Babylonian exile, Jewish texts imagined that God almost withdrew from His people. This predicament required focusing upon the suffering of God’s people in exile, while simultaneously seeking explanations for the existence of evil people such as Sennacherib.

The co-text of this chapter in this book contains several chapters focusing upon the Biblical and historical Sennacherib; therefore I present only a brief summary of the Biblical narrative⁹ that the writers of Midrash

⁷ Ch. Milikowski, “Midrash as Fiction or Midrash as History: What Did the Rabbis Mean?” in *Ancient Fiction: The Matrix of Early Christian and Jewish Narrative*, ed. J. A. Brant, et al. (Atlanta, 2005), 117–25. Y. Zachovitch, “David’s Last Days,” in *From Bible to Midrash: Portrayals and Interpretive Practices*, ed. H. Trautmann-Kromann (Lund, 2005), 37–52.

⁸ The Northern Kingdom of Israel was conquered by Tiglath-Pileser III (the Biblical Pul) and Shalmaneser V; the later Assyrian rulers Sargon II, followed by Sennacherib, completed the twenty-year downfall of Israel’s northern ten tribes. The tribes exiled by Assyria later became known as the Ten Lost Tribes (see below). The captivities began in approximately 740 B.C.E. (or 733/2 B.C.E.). In 722 B.C.E. Samaria, the ruling city of the Northern Kingdom of Israel was finally taken by Sargon II after a three year siege started by Shalmaneser V.

⁹ Scholarship in regard to the biblical Sennacherib is listed as more than 150 articles in the ATLA database (2013); the Rambi database lists approximately 100 articles. F. J. Gonçalves, *L’Expédition de Sennachérib en Palestine dans la Littérature Hébraïque Ancienne* (Paris, 1986), offers an extensive historical analysis of the Biblical passages. P. S. Evans, “Sennacherib’s 701 Invasion into Judah: What Saith Scriptures?” in *The Function of Ancient*

would have been able to access. The Sennacherib narratives in Midrash will be analyzed in relation to the Bible, the foundational text or matrix of rabbinic interpretation. The Biblical narrative of Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem begins after the destruction of the northern Kingdom of Israel. The account of Sennacherib's attack is found in several condensed Biblical passages in the Book of Kings (2 Kings 18:13–19:37) and in Isaiah (Isaiah 36:1–37:38); the Chronicler (2 Chronicles 32) offers a shorter, "revised" account.

Jerusalem, the capital of the southern Kingdom of Judah, survived an Assyrian siege staged by Sennacherib (in 701 B.C.E.), unlike Samaria, the capital of the northern Kingdom of Israel that had fallen some twenty years earlier. The survival of Jerusalem, according to Scripture, occurred at night when an angel of the Lord killed 185,000 men in Sennacherib's army. Subsequently, King Hezekiah of Judah ruled as a vassal of Assyria over his reduced kingdom. The Assyrian invasion, anti-Assyrian coalitions, and the constant shifting of loyalty between pro-Assyrian and anti-Assyrian Israelite and Judean kings form the background for much of early prophecy, i.e., Hosea, Amos, Micah, and Isaiah. Historians have reconstructed the events by combining and contrasting Biblical data, exploring non-Jewish texts¹⁰ and archaeological data concerning Sennacherib and his wars, whereas rabbinic literature interpreted the Biblical textual fragments concerning Sennacherib, in particular his siege of Jerusalem and his appearance in prophetic texts.

The post-Biblical Jewish interpretive texts concerning Sennacherib are scattered throughout different Midrashic and related texts such as pseudepigraphic, Targumic, and Talmudic literature. All of these texts adhere to basic methods of exegesis. The most sophisticated expression of exegesis is found in the hermeneutics of Midrash, namely rendering meaning to Scriptural lemmata through discernible hermeneutic *middot* ("rules"). Thus, the texts under consideration are in one way or another based upon

Historiography in Biblical and Cognate Studies, ed. P. G. Kirkpatrick and T. D. Goltz (New York, 2008), 57–77, takes a very narrow, literal view of select Biblical passages. A. Kuhrt, "Sennacherib's Siege of Jerusalem," in *Representations of Empire: Rome and the Mediterranean World*, ed. A. K. Bowman, et al. (Oxford, 2002), 13–33, offers the perspective of a classicist, which often intersects with Midrash.

¹⁰ For example, "Annals of Sennacherib," *ANET*, 287–88; the *Sennacherib Prism* (Oriental Institute, Chicago); the *Taylor Prism* and the *Lachish Relief* (both in the British Museum). A list of historical sources is found in I. Kalimi, *The Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History in Chronicles* (Winona Lake, IN, 2005), notes on Ilff.

or related to the Biblical lemmata in regard to Sennacherib. These lemmata are creatively and methodologically expounded to create portrayals of, and lessons to be derived from, Sennacherib. Furthermore, these uses of Sennacherib are shaped by rabbinic norms. The resulting interpretive texts are frequently disjointed and, at times, contradictory. There is no extended historiography of Sennacherib in Midrashic literature,¹¹ and the texts presuppose familiarity with the Biblical sources. In order to facilitate the understanding of the fragmented rabbinic texts, I have imposed some linearity upon my analysis, which moves from Hezekiah's and Sennacherib's preparations for the siege of Jerusalem, to King Hezekiah's prayer, the instrumentality of an angel in the defeat of Sennacherib, Hezekiah and Isaiah, the Assyrian exile and the Ten Tribes, and Sennacherib's escape.

HEZEKIAH'S AND SENNACHERIB'S PREPARATIONS FOR THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM

In Midrash and related texts, the attacks of Sennacherib against the Kingdom of Judah are depicted in great detail, showing massive armies deployed against Hezekiah. According to the Bible (see above), Hezekiah's rebellion against the Assyrians led to the capture of all the cities of Judah, except for Jerusalem. Hezekiah realized his mistake in his rebellion against the Assyrians and sent gifts and tributes to Sennacherib; however, Sennacherib ignored this gesture and marched his army against Jerusalem. Sennacherib sent his supreme commander, the Rab-shaqeh, with an army to besiege Jerusalem while Sennacherib went to fight with the Egyptians. The supreme commander met with Hezekiah's officials and demanded that they surrender, while delivering a speech that the people of the city could hear. In his speech he blasphemed God. When King Hezekiah heard of this, he tore his clothes (as was the custom for displaying deep anguish) and prayed to God.

Before conquering Judah, with the exception of Jerusalem, Sennacherib was viewed as having "gained control of the whole world" (3 Makk 6:5) or as having conquered the rest of the world (*b. Meg* 11b). The term

¹¹ This method of analyzing single texts and determining religious or other perspectives is in opposition to L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, vols. 1–8, trans. H. Szold (Philadelphia, 1968), vol. 4, 267–72, who attempted to create a cohesive narrative based upon multiple rabbinic and related sources.

“cosmocrator” (קוזמוקרטור) is applied to him, which has apocalyptic undertones, since the ruler of the world is depicted as a negative figure in the End of Days scenarios of apocalypses. Contrary to the Biblical account, in rabbinic literature it is stated that the city of Luz could not be conquered by Sennacherib or by Nebuchadnezzar. This Midrashic passage in *Gen. Rab.* 69:8 emphasizes that Luz is the location where the blue color of the fringes was produced; therefore, the city was considered to be out of reach of the Angel of Death.

Sennacherib advanced with a large army to capture Judah, and a passage in rabbinic literature comments:

Rabbi Judah said in the name of Rav: Wicked Sennacherib advanced against Israel with 45,000 princes, each enthroned in a golden chariot, accompanied by his ladies and concubines, with 80,000 warriors in coats of mail and 60,000 swordsmen running in front of him and numerous cavalry. (*b. Sanh.* 95b)¹²

Furthermore, it is claimed that this army was so large, namely 2,600,000 less one, that it emptied the Jordan River (*b. Sanh.* 95b). Sennacherib and his cavalry consumed the very waters they crossed; this could be viewed as an inversion of the crossing of the Reed Sea and the Exodus. In particular, Exodus 14:31 is cited in this Talmudic passage. In the same passage is the citation of the prophet Isaiah: “I dug wells and drank waters, I dried up with the sole of my foot all the streams of Egypt” (Isaiah 37:25). These are the boastful words of the Assyrian king, which are expanded to explain why the Jordan River became dry. The number of 2,600,000 less one is inconsistent with 2 Kings 19:35, which mentions 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. The expression “less one” may be based upon religious reasoning in order to detract something from the number of 600,000 people leaving Egypt at the time of the Exodus; “two million” indicates the overwhelming power of Sennacherib’s army.

Sennacherib’s planned attack against Jerusalem, God’s holy city, was delayed, which cost him his victory according to rabbinic texts. These texts make multiple claims, e.g., that one reason for the delay in Sennacherib’s attack was that he stopped at a way station, while another reason was that he took time to observe Jerusalem from a distance. In *b. Sanh.* 95a, it is inferred that Sennacherib, when he gazed at Jerusalem, denigrated the city in his assessment of its appearance. Moreover, he disregarded the warnings of his “Chaldean” astrologers who predicted that this delay

¹² *Talmud Bavli* (Vilna: Romm, 1893); A. Y. Katsh, *Ginze Talmud Bavli* (Jerusalem, 1975); regarding major MSS, see: <http://jnul.huji.ac.il/dl/talmud/bavly/selectbavly.asp>.

would cost him the victory. Sennacherib also contemptuously dismissed Jerusalem's power, which was invisible to his eyes. This deceptive invisibility probably refers to the power of God.

What is meant by "This very day he will halt at Nob" (Isaiah 10:32)? Rav Huna said: That day was left for [the punishment of] the crime [committed] in Nob.¹³ So [Sennacherib's] Chaldeans said to him, If you advance now, you will conquer [Jerusalem]; if not, you will not conquer it. The journey that should have taken ten days, he completed in one day. When Jerusalem was reached, cushions were piled up, until he ascended, and sitting on the top [of the cushions] he saw the entire city of Jerusalem. When he saw it, it appeared small in his eyes. He said: Is this the city of Jerusalem for which I set all my troops in motion, and conquered the whole country? It is smaller and weaker than all the cities of the nations which I have conquered by my power. Then he stood up and shook his head and waved his hand contemptuously toward the Temple in Zion, against the [Temple] court in Jerusalem. [The Chaldean astrologers] said, Let us attack immediately. He said: You are too weary, but tomorrow let each of you bring me a stone, and [the city] will be demolished. Immediately [after this Scripture says]: "And it came to pass that night the angel of the Lord went forth, and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; when morning dawned, they were all dead bodies" (2 Kings 19:35).¹⁴ Rav Papa said: Thus people say: If the verdict is postponed, it comes to nothing. (*b. Sanh.* 95a)

In the above interpretation of Isaiah 10:32 a lemma is cited concerning Nob; the continuation of the Biblical lemma is implied: "he will shake his fist at the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem." In Tobit 48:19 it is also stated that Sennacherib (or his Rab-shaqeh) "shook his fist and blasphemed God in his pride." These passages may have contributed to the Talmudic narrative claiming that Sennacherib stood up and shook his head and waved his hand in contempt. This Talmudic passage accomplishes two objectives: it firmly establishes that Isaiah was speaking about Sennacherib, while it applies further lemmata to Sennacherib's campaign.

The identification of Sennacherib as the invader in Isaiah 10:32 is also stated in *Targum Jonathan* on Isaiah.¹⁵ Furthermore, Sennacherib is portrayed as displaying the same type of contemptuous behavior.

¹³ Regarding Nob, see 1 Sam. 22:18–19: eighty-five priests were slaughtered at Nob. Additionally, in the Haggadah for Pesah we find the following reference to Nob: "He (Sancherib) threatened to be that day in Nob, before the advent of Pesach." In: *Passover Haggadah with Translation and a New Commentary Based on Talmudic, Midrashic, and Rabbinic Sources* by Rabbi Joseph Elias (ArtScroll Mesorah Series; New York, 1977), 209.

¹⁴ Cf. Isa. 37:36.

¹⁵ A. Sperber, *The Bible in Aramaic Based on Old Manuscripts and Printed Text. Vol. 2: Targum Jonathan to the Former Prophets* (Leiden, 1959).

While the day had just dawned and he had a lot of time to enter [Jerusalem], Sennacherib, King of Assyria, came and stood at Nob, the city of priests, opposite the wall of Jerusalem. He said: Is this Jerusalem, against which I set all of my troops into motion? It is weaker than all of the fortresses of the people that I conquered with the strength of my arms. He stood over it, shaking his head, waving back and forth with his hand.¹⁶

The previously cited Talmudic passage (*b. Sanh.* 95a) confirms a rabbinic dictum presented by Rav Papa, that the postponement of a verdict will lead to its nullification, i.e., what is not done immediately will never be done. This dictum refers to Sennacherib's order to collect stones from the walls of Jerusalem, because the Assyrians planned to stone the city. The planned stoning implies metaphorically that the city had committed adultery, which would require the Biblical punishment of stoning (Deuteronomy 22:23–24). The “adultery” of Jerusalem is a well-known metaphor, referred to by the prophets. The Talmudic narrative concerning Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem culminates in a quotation from 2 Kings 19:35, which states that God deployed an angel. The Biblical narrative concerning the angel's actions during the night before the attack is expanded to include events that are merely alluded to in 2 Kings 19:35 (the quotation in the rabbinic text), namely, that the divine purpose behind the delay of Sennacherib's attack was to save the city; this is construed as the fulfillment of the prediction of Sennacherib's astrologers in the Talmudic passage.

In 2 Kings 18:17 Assyrian high officials, among them the Rab-shaqeh,¹⁷ were sent by the king of Assyria to Hezekiah to negotiate with him. Sennacherib's terms of surrender, as phrased in the Rab-shaqeh's address,¹⁸ were as follows: “But if you say to me ‘We rely on the Lord our God,’ is it not He whose high places and altars Hezekiah has removed, saying to

¹⁶ Additional details of Sennacherib's siege that appear in *b. Sanh.* 95a–b are also found in *Tg.Ps.-j.* on Isa. 10:32.

¹⁷ Ch. Gvanyahu, “Rab-shaqeh's speech to the people on the wall of Jerusalem (1 Kgs. 18:19–35; Isa. 36:4–20),” in *Sefer Segal... Mosheh Tzvi Segal*, ed. Y. M. Grintz and Y. Liver (Jerusalem, 1964/65), 94–102 (in Hebrew).

¹⁸ E. Ben Zvi, “Who Wrote the Speech of Rabshakeh and When?” *JBL* 109 (1990): 79–92, finds evidence that the address was written in the Isaianic tradition. The term “Rab-shaqeh” fluctuated between a designation for a high official (“cup bearer”) and a personal name; on this point see S. D. Ryan, “The Rabshakeh in Late Biblical and Post-Biblical Tradition,” in *Biblical Figures in Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature*, ed. H. Lichtenberger and U. Mittmann-Richert (Berlin, 2009), 183–94. Ryan contends that the Rab-shaqeh was understood as an “apostate Israelite,” 184, e.g., in *b. Sanh.* 60a, Syrian and other Christian literature.

Judah and to Jerusalem, 'You shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem?' (2 Kings 18:22). From the Biblical as well as rabbinic perspective, it is blasphemy to abandon the commandments of the God of Israel and to worship the gods of other nations, which are the "work of human hands" (2 Kings 19:18), i.e., idols. In this passage Sennacherib attempts to punish Judah for insufficient payment of tribute, and decides for reasons undisclosed in the narrative that the payment received from Hezekiah was not sufficient. Hezekiah had paid tribute to Sennacherib by stripping the gold from the Temple doors; this act is omitted by the Chronicler (2 Chronicles 32:1–23).¹⁹ This omission may indicate "inner-Biblical" criticism of Hezekiah that was carried forward into rabbinic literature.

While Jerusalem's gates remained closed, Sennacherib continued to regard Hezekiah as a rebel. The Rab-shaqeh (2 Kings 18:19–25, 30) addressed the issue of "trust," whether Hezekiah trusted in the assistance of the Egyptian king or trusted in the Lord to protect Jerusalem. The speech assumes that Hezekiah had an alliance with Egypt (2 Kings 18:21; Isaiah 20:5; 30:2–3; 31:1; 31:3). Since God's high places and altars had been removed by Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:22), God is unlikely to help Hezekiah, according to the Rab-shaqeh. The latter knew of Hezekiah's reforms and claimed that the Lord was on the Assyrian side (2 Kings 18:25; Isaiah 10:5–11). In a rabbinic response (*Eccl. Rab.* 9:29) to the criticism of Hezekiah's reforms, a lemma in Ecclesiastes 9:18 is deconstructed. The first part of the lemma applies to Hezekiah, who ultimately has superior wisdom, while the second part of Ecclesiastes 9:18 applies to Sennacherib, who carries weapons. This Midrashic passage in *Eccl. Rab.* 9:29 enumerates the wisdom of Hezekiah in regard to prayer, tribute and preparation for the expected battle. The wisdom of Hezekiah shows some similarities to the Isaianic tradition. Additionally, the white garments mentioned may indicate sincere repentance.

Another interpretation: "Wisdom is better" (Ecclesiastes 9:18), this refers to the wisdom of Hezekiah, king of Judah, "than weapons of war" (*ib.*), [this refers to the weapons] of Sennacherib. Rabbi Levi said: Sennacherib caused three captivities:²⁰ in the first [captivity] he carried the tribes of Reuben and Gad into captivity, in the second the ten tribes, and regarding the third he came down against Judah. Immediately, Hezekiah stood up and armed the

¹⁹ On this issue, see I. Kalimi, "Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah: The Chronicler's View," 11–50 in this book, esp. 33–34.

²⁰ See also *Tanḥ. Mas'e 10 (Midrash Tanḥuma Ha-Qadum Ve-Ha-Yashan)*, ed. S. Buber (Vilna, 1885; repr. Jerusalem, 1964).

men with weapons beneath and clothed them in white garments on top, and prepared himself for three things: for prayer, tribute, and the battle. For prayer, as it is written, “And Hezekiah prayed unto the Lord, etc.” (Isaiah 37:15). For tribute, as it is written, “At that time did Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the Temple of the Lord, and from the doorposts” (2 Kings 18:16). For battle, as it is said, “And he made weapons and shields in abundance” (2 Chronicles 32:5). He also put a sword next to the entrance of the House of Study and said, Anyone who does not occupy himself with Torah, may this sword cut his neck. “Then came Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household” (2 Kings 18:37)—[he was] the superintendent, “and Shebna the scribe” (*ib.*)—[he was] the secretary, “and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder” (*ib.*), [he was] an officer. “But one sinner destroys much good” (Ecclesiastes 9:18), [this refers to] Sennacherib, as it is said, “So he returned with disgrace to his own land, etc.” (2 Chronicles 32:21), “And Esarhaddon, his son, reigned in his stead” (2 Kings 19:37) (*Eccl. Rab.* 9:29)²¹

This interpretation concerning Shebna and Eliakim the son of Hilkiah exemplifies the Midrashic strategy of contemporizing Biblical terms and artifacts to the era of the rabbis. Since Midrashic texts were mainly collected and edited before and during the Byzantine period, Biblical terms were sometimes replaced by Roman/Byzantine terms and artifacts. The rabbis render the Midrashic meaning “the superintendent [*spectator*]” for Eliakim, and “the secretary [*scriptorius*]” for Shebna. In the above text, a further lemma of Ecclesiastes 9:18 is applied to Sennacherib, who is compared unfavorably to Hezekiah; 2 Chronicles 32:21 is utilized to demonstrate that Sennacherib was embarrassed to return to Assyria without conquering Jerusalem. Furthermore, he loses his kingdom to his son (2 Kings 19:37). This Midrashic passage creatively and strategically uses Scripture to demonstrate that Hezekiah showed religious superiority by praying to God, while Sennacherib merely relied upon his weapons of war.

Although the Bible is used in selective ways in multiple post-Biblical interpretations, I have attempted to provide texts that clearly support the religious discourse or the interpretive goal of a Midrashic or Talmudic passage. The use of variant narratives or portrayals of Hezekiah are determined by the context in which they appear in rabbinic texts. In rabbinic tropes evaluating Hezekiah, his actions are scrutinized in regard to the repairs to Jerusalem’s infrastructure, including the construction of the Siloam water tunnel; thus diverting water from the Gihon spring to the city, initiating a program of mobilization for war (see texts below), fortifying the city with a wide wall, and stopping the water of all springs and

²¹ *Qohelet Rabbah*, in *Midrash Rabbah* (Vilna, 1887).

the wadi flowing through the land in preparation for the expected attack. In Midrashic texts, Hezekiah is mentioned as having stopped the water of the Gihon spring in order to deprive the Assyrians of water before Sennacherib arrived (*Seder Olam Rabbah*, chapter 23;²² *b. Ber.* 10b; *b. Pesah.* 56a; on 2 Chronicles 32:2–8, 2 Chronicles 32:3–4, 2 Chronicles 32:30).

Our masters taught: King Hezekiah did six things, three of which the Sages approved and they did not approve three of these. The three they approved were: He hid the *Book of Cures*, and they approved; he smashed the brazen serpent, and they approved; he dragged the bones of his father on a rope truckle bed [instead of a royal burial], and they approved. The three they did not approve were: He stopped up the waters of Gihon and they did not approve; he stripped the [gold off] the doors of the Temple and sent it to the king of Assyria, and they did not approve; he intercalated the month of Nisan [alternatively: a second Adar] during the month of Nisan [alternatively: of Adar],²³ and they did not approve (*b. Ber.* 10b).

Hezekiah's manipulation of the water sources of Jerusalem is criticized by the Sages. For example, *Sifre Deuteronomy*²⁴ 203 regards Hezekiah's action as a violation of a Biblical commandment, comparable to chopping down a fruit tree in warfare. Furthermore, he is criticized for stripping the gold off the doors of the Temple to appease Sennacherib (2 Kings 18:16). Hezekiah is also reprimanded for his intercalation of the month of Nisan (Adar). On the other hand, Hezekiah is praised for "hiding" the *Book of Cures*, in all likelihood a collection of magical remedies. He is commended for destroying the *nahushtan* (2 Kings 18:4), an image set up by Moses (Numbers 21:8f.), which was said to have healed those who looked upon it, and he is praised for denying his idolatrous father a royal burial. The Midrashic text carefully evaluates Hezekiah, providing examples of his conduct thus, viewing the figure of Hezekiah alternatively between praise and criticism.

Midrashic texts speculate that officials from Hezekiah's court, Shebna and Joah, were betraying the king during the negotiations concerning the fate of Jerusalem with the Rab-shaqeh and other officials. According to these texts, a secret letter of surrender was sent from Jerusalem to Sennacherib. Since the letter was sent by an arrow from a bow, a proof-text

²² *Seder Olam Rabba: Die grosse Weltchronik*, ed. B. Ratner (Vilna, 1897; repr. Jerusalem, 1988); *Seder Olam Rabbah*, ed. Ch. J. Milikowsky (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1969).

²³ The text is corrupt; the manuscripts have references to different Hebrew months.

²⁴ S. H. Horowitz, *Siphre ad Deuteronomium*, ed. L. Finkelstein (Berlin, 1939; repr. New York, 1969).

is chosen that mentions that evil people “bend the bow” (Psalms 11:2). According to the Midrash, it is King David who foresaw this in a prophecy received through the Holy Spirit.

Rabbi Berekhiah said in the name of Rav Abba bar Kahana: What had Shebna and Joah done? They had taken a sheet [of parchment] and written on it. They stuck it with an arrow and dispatched it through a window and sent it to Sennacherib. What had they written? “We and all the Israelites seek to make peace with you; it is only Isaiah and Hezekiah who do not seek to make peace with you.” This is what David had foreseen through the Holy Spirit, when he said, “For, lo, the wicked shall bend the bow” (Psalms 11:2), meaning Shebna and Joah; “They have made ready their arrow upon the string” (*ib.*), meaning upon the bow-string; “that they may shoot in darkness at the upright in heart” (*ib.*), meaning at two men of upright heart; and who were they? [They were] Isaiah and Hezekiah. (*Lev. Rab.* 5:5)²⁵

It is not clear whether there were two separate individuals during the reign of Hezekiah that both had the name of Shebna. One such Shebna was the “steward of the house” (“cup-bearer”) of Hezekiah as set forth in Isaiah 22:15, “Thus said the Lord, God of hosts, Go to this steward of the house, to Shebna.” This Shebna who opposed Hezekiah was removed from his office and replaced by Eliakim (Isaiah 22:15–22). The other Shebna, the scribe, was sent by Hezekiah to negotiate with the Assyrians who were besieging Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:18, 26, 37 // Isaiah 36:3). The Biblical texts seem to support that this second Shebna was not the same Shebna who was mentioned as the “steward of the house.” However, according to the Midrash the two persons named “Shebna” are one and the same. The “steward of the house” appearing in Isaiah 22:15 was understood to be unreliable, and his bad character was transferred to Shebna, the scribe, in order to create a new narrative that suggests treason against Hezekiah. This Midrashic procedure of transferring or confusing identities transformed the Biblical narrative in order to demonstrate that Shebna was not only a scribe, but a traitor. As a result of this Midrashic strategy, Shebna, the scribe (who was a traitor unknown to Hezekiah), together with Eliakim and Joah were sent by Hezekiah to meet the Rab-shaqeh. Isaiah 36:2–5 states: “And the king of Assyria sent the Rab-shaqeh from Lachish to Jerusalem to King Hezekiah with a great army. And he stood by the aqueduct of the upper pool in the highway of the Fuller’s field and there came out to him Eliakim, Hilkiyah’s son, who was in charge of the house, and Shebna the scribe,

²⁵ *Midrash Vayyiqra Rabbah*, ed. M. Margulies (Margalio) (New York, 3rd printing, 1993).

and Joah, Asaph's son, the recorder and the Rab-shaqeh said to them, Say now to Hezekiah, Thus said the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this in which you trust? I said, A mere word with the lips is your counsel and strength for war; now on whom do you trust, that you rebel against me?"²⁶

The Biblical episode concerning Shebna is continued in Isaiah 36:22, "Then came Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, who was in charge of the house, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah, the son of Asaph, the recorder, to Hezekiah with their clothes torn, and told him the words of Rab-shaqeh."²⁷ Joah was not among those sent subsequently by Hezekiah to the prophet Isaiah (2 Kings 19:2 // Isaiah 37:2). The omission of Joah from the Scriptural passage is interpreted by the Midrash as an indication that Joah had deserted Hezekiah and made common cause with Shebna, the "steward of the house."²⁸ Midrash paid close attention to the gap between the two Isaiah passages concerning Shebna, as well as to the other events pertaining to the Assyrian assault as recounted in the Bible, before the interpreters elected to alter narrative sequences and insert their own interpretations.

The Babylonian Talmud, *Sanh.* 26a, further adds that Shebna was going to surrender, but the angel Gabriel shut the gates of Jerusalem. Seder Olam Rabbah, chapter 23, mentions that Shebna was persuaded by the Rab-shaqeh to surrender. However, *b. Sanh.* 26b states that Shebna was cruelly punished by the Assyrians, who "bored holes through his heels and through these holes tied him to the tails of their horses and dragged him with their horses over thorns and thistles."²⁹

"Historical references," such as the above, are probably merely hermeneutical in Midrash, comprising a strategy to invoke past events in a meaningful way. Steven Fraade integrates the role of extra-textual, historical

²⁶ See also 2 Kgs. 18:17–25.

²⁷ //2 Kgs. 18:37.

²⁸ See also *b. Sanh.* 26a.

²⁹ This punishment resembles an incident reported by Arrian; after Gaza was subdued, Batis was killed by Alexander in a manner imitating Achilles's vindictive treatment of the fallen Hector. The ankles of Batis were pierced in order to force a rope through them and he was dragged by chariot until he died: "We learn from Curtius (iv. 28) and from Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*De Compositione Verborum*, 123–125) that Alexander treated the brave Batis with horrible cruelty. He ordered his feet to be bored and brazen rings to be put through them, after which the naked body was tied to the back of a chariot which was driven by Alexander himself round the city, in imitation of the treatment of Hector by Achilles at Troy. Cf. Arrian, vii. 14." (trans. E. J. Chinook, *The Anabasis of Alexander* [London, 1884], 136).

factors into his view of rabbinic hermeneutics.³⁰ For Fraade, history and Midrash are not mutually exclusive. In my view, Midrash operates under assumptions that are similar to the premise of Hayden White, namely, statements that speak about the *meaning* of a past event are deemed to be historical statements.³¹ Midrash as a hermeneutic enterprise has its own metahistorical approach to the essential meaning of events that resembles tendencies in late antique historians. Thus, one may contend that Midrashic sources cannot be summarized as an attempt to write history in the early modern sense, in Leopold Ranke's (1795–1886), often cited, terms: to find out how it really was.³² The writing of history from a nineteenth century Jewish perspective purported to defend Judaism against Christian hostility toward Jews, as demonstrated by the monumental work of Heinrich Graetz. Graetz's work is not objective in a critical sense,³³ although he professes objectivity in his preface, reminiscent of the pledge of an honest rendering of events by the historian Josephus.³⁴

Midrashic historical material may be understood within the framework of narrative history. Events were interpreted from the perspective of later episodes known to the Midrashic writers. Midrash focused upon a few monumental events, such as the siege of Jerusalem, and other seemingly insignificant "historical" elements, such as Sennacherib's army drinking from the river Jordan. These two perspectives functioned as the prism through which the rabbis attempted to understand both current and past events. Consequently, most other events and historical data recede into the background and only some of them figure prominently in Midrash. The Midrashic narratives could be read as incomplete condensations of the events, since there are no dates and no further descriptive elements

³⁰ S. Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary: Torah and Its Interpretation in the Midrash to Deuteronomy* (Albany, 1991), 14–15.

³¹ H. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore, 1973), 37–38.

³² L. Ranke, *Sämtliche Werke* (Leipzig, 1867–1890), vol. 33/34 (1885), 7. In respect to historical reasoning within different historical and ideological settings, see, for example, the summary by G. Himmelfarb, *The New History and the Old* (Cambridge, 2004, rev. ed.).

³³ H. Graetz, *History of the Jews*, (English trans., Philadelphia, 1945); for example, the beginning of this *History* reads: "It was on a spring day that some pastoral tribes passed across the Jordan..." (vol. 1, p. 1).

³⁴ *Josephus, V, Jewish Antiquities, Books 1–3*, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray (Cambridge, MA, 1930), 1 preface, 1; Josephus elsewhere states: "... [I] was myself interested in that war which we Jews had with the Romans, and knew myself its particular actions, and what conclusion it had, I was forced to give the history of it, because I saw that others perverted the truth of those actions in their writings..." (*Josephus II, The Jewish War, Books 1–2*, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray [Cambridge, MA, 1927], preface, 1).

of the war. If one compares Midrash to the works of Josephus and Tacitus, one can only emphasize that the rabbinic sages were not historiographers,³⁵ and that they did not claim to portray historical truth. The paradigmatic nature of the specific “historical events” that were emphasized in Midrash frequently served as a trajectory for occurrences of a similar nature that supposedly would transpire in the future.

The close contemporaries of Midrashic literature, Graeco-Roman historians, wrote with several stated purposes:³⁶ historical writings should be useful, true and entertain the reader.³⁷ Nevertheless, Lucian³⁸ stated that the main function of historical writing was practicality, i.e., usefulness; he requested that there be no *encomium* in the writing of history, because exaggeration and fabrication in historical writing should be reserved only for the writing of poetry. Thucydides demanded that historical writing be analytical and provide insights in order to act upon future comparable events;³⁹ however, his intended audience were statesmen. Dionysus of Halicarnasses⁴⁰ stressed the practicality of history and insights as to the causes of events. Appian ventured religious explanations for historical events.⁴¹ The last historian mentioned, Appian, aligns somewhat with the structure and content of historiography in Midrash, which is based upon the view that history was shaped by the vicissitudes of Israel’s relationship with God. The idea of the intervention of the divine in history, which is the main characteristic of Biblical history, continues in Midrash. The

³⁵ An analysis of ancient historians and rabbinic historical thought was presented by M. D. Herr, “The Concept of History of the Sages,” in *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Division C, Jerusalem 1973 (Jerusalem, 1977), Vol. III, 129–42 (in Hebrew).

³⁶ Some recent works apply new methodological insights that render the strict division between historiography and literature meaningless, see G. Lachenaud and D. Longrée, ed., *Grecs et romains aux prises avec l’histoire: représentations, récits et idéologie* (Rennes, 2003); Y. Syed, *Vergil’s Aeneid and the Roman Self: Subject and Nation in Literary Discourse* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2005); M. Hofmann and H. Steinecke, ed., *Literatur und Geschichte. Neue Perspektiven* (Berlin, 2004); E. Bradshaw Aitken and J. K. Berenson Maclean, eds., *Philostratus’s Heroikos: Religion and Cultural Identity in the Third Century C.E.* (Atlanta, 2005).

³⁷ Lucian of Samosata (2nd century C.E.), *How to write History*, trans. K. Kilburn (Cambridge, MA, 1959); the work is a manual addressing this question, since many writers at that time attempted to chronicle a contemporary “event,” namely, the second Parthian war (162–65 C.E.).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁹ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. C. F. Smith (London, 1919), 1:22.4; see also V. Hunter, *Past and Process in Herodotus and Thucydides* (Princeton, 1982), 21ff.

⁴⁰ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities, I, Books 1–2*, trans. E. Cary (Cambridge, MA, 1937), 1.2.1.

⁴¹ Appian, *Macedonian History*, in *Hist. Rom. (Historia romana). The Illyrian Wars. Roman History, I Books 1–8*, trans. H. White (Cambridge, MA, 1912), 9.19.1.

causes of events were related to the good or sinful actions of Israel, such as the rebellion against God's order and law. This notion that historiography had moral values was also expressed by some ancient historians.⁴²

Midrashic versions of Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem claimed that extraordinary things transpired. The core narrative of the Sennacherib legend tells of a king resisting the Assyrians. This narrative became a cherished legend bringing hope and comfort to the audience who studied the Midrash, and who found little hope elsewhere. One of their historical kings had defied the oppressors and their war machinery. In terms of Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of language this would be a case of "giving new spiritual form to a specific given material which it employs for new purposes without at first changing its content."⁴³ Midrashic interpretation turns the structural relations of historical time into relations of space; the Midrashic narrative turns time into the space of Jerusalem. Time—the past—is viewed as the major aspect of Biblical warfare, whereas the space of the Temple and Jerusalem, exist only in the Midrashic imagination after their destruction. Midrash envisions a future reversal from time to space, namely, returning to Jerusalem and recreating the Temple. In the Midrashic metahistorical approach to the Sennacherib episode in the Bible, history becomes a part of the cultural memory transferred to the rabbinic interpreters and filtered into lessons about God and His involvement in Israel's history. Thus, the seemingly hopeless situation of Hezekiah defending Jerusalem must have been God's plan. Perhaps Hezekiah was placed by God in this precarious situation to teach Hezekiah a lesson, since he abolished some of the "Lord's" cultic centers outside of Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:4). God acts in history sometimes directly. However, in this case it is important to emphasize that Sennacherib was punished through God's agent (an angel), rather than by Himself (*b. Sanh.* 94b). In respect to the texts above, it is critical to emphasize that Midrash had a theological, ideological, and frequently a polemical agenda.⁴⁴

⁴² Isocrates, *Isocratis orationes*, ed. Gustavus Eduardus Benseler, Bibliotheca Teubneriana (Chicago, 1983), 9.77.

⁴³ E. Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. Volume One: Language*, trans. R. Manheim (New Haven, CT, 1953, repr. 1968), 216.

⁴⁴ R. Ulmer, "Theological Foundations of Rabbinic Exegesis," in *Encyclopedia of Midrash* (Leiden, 2005), vol. 2, 944–64.

KING HEZEKIAH'S PRAYER

Like other pious kings,⁴⁵ Hezekiah appeals to God. A repentant Hezekiah (2 Kings 19:1// Isaiah 37:1) through prayer (2 Kings 19:14–19 // Isaiah 37:15–20) turned Sennacherib's sweeping victory into a major defeat. His prayer reaffirms that the Lord, enthroned above the Cherubim in the Temple, is God, creator of heaven and earth, and that all the kingdoms of the earth should know the difference between God and the gods of the other nations. Hezekiah requests that Jerusalem be delivered by the Lord. *Lam. Rab.*⁴⁶ Petiḥta 30 provides an analysis of Hezekiah's prayer. This homiletic passage enumerates four Israelite kings who asked God for help, nevertheless the text affirms that Hezekiah's request is different from the request of the other kings in that Hezekiah deferred to God to intervene against Sennacherib. The other kings only asked for courage to act on their own. This interpretation is an attempt to highlight Hezekiah and construct the vision of a pious king.

Finally, Hezekiah rose up and said: I have not the strength to slay, to pursue, or to chant a song, but I will sleep in my bed and You do what is required. The Holy One said: I will do so, therefore it is stated "And it came to pass that night the angel of the Lord went forth, and struck down the camp of the Assyrians" (2 Kings 19:35). (*Lam. Rab.* Petiḥta 30 // *Yal.* II, 163).

Still another version has that the Rab-shaqeh heard the Hallel that was chanted and subsequently suggested that Sennacherib withdraw (*Yal.* II, 241). This implies an awareness of the power of God. In the Bible, the Lord's deliverance responds directly to the prayers uttered by Hezekiah and Isaiah. Hezekiah is said to have saved Jerusalem by praying the Hallel (*Song Rab.* 18:5; *Tosefta Targum*⁴⁷ on 2 Kings 19:35–37; *Seder Olam Rabbah*, [chapter] 23; *y. Pesah.* 9:4, 36d).⁴⁸

Hezekiah's prayer is specifically related to the Exodus from Egypt in *Exod. Rab.* 8:2 and 8:5, which refer to the Passover liturgy, when the Hallel is chanted.⁴⁹ According to the Midrashic interpretation set forth below,

⁴⁵ David, 1 Chron. 17:16–27; Solomon, 2 Chron. 5:13–6:42.

⁴⁶ *Eikhah Rabbah*, in *Midrash Rabbah; Midrasch Echa Rabbati*, ed. S. Buber (Vilna, 1899; repr. Hildesheim, 1967).

⁴⁷ P. de Lagarde, *Prophetae Chaldaicae* (Leipzig: 1872; repr. Osnabrück, 1967).

⁴⁸ *Talmud Yerushalmi* (Krotoszyn, 1866); *Synopse zum Talmud Yerushalmi*, vols. 1–, ed. P. Schäfer et al. (Tübingen, 1991–).

⁴⁹ *Pesiq. Rab.* 52:2, ed. R. Ulmer, in *A Synoptic Edition of Pesiqta Rabbati Based Upon the Extant Manuscripts and the Editio Princeps*, R. Ulmer, 3 vols. (Atlanta, 1998–2000; repr. Lanham, 2008), and *Sifre de-aggadata, ad. loc.*, (*Sifre de Aggadata 'al Megillat Ester: Salomon*

Sennacherib's army was annihilated during Passover when Hezekiah recited the Hallel Psalms (Psalms 113–118). In *Exod. Rab.* 8:2 the liturgical recital of the Hallel by Hezekiah and Israel is mentioned; the Midrash states that this is a customary recital during Passover. In the applicable sections of the Bible only Hezekiah and Isaiah pray to God. In the Midrash set forth below Israel, meaning all the Jewish people, including Hezekiah, recited the Hallel together. This insertion into the Midrash may have reflected the contemporary liturgical practice at the time of *Exod. Rab.* concerning the observance of Passover.

Israel and Hezekiah sat that night and recited the Hallel, since it was Passover, but they were terrified for fear that at any moment Jerusalem might fall at [Sennacherib's] hand. When they arose early in the morning to recite the *shema'* and pray, they found the corpses of their enemies; that is the reason why God said to Isaiah: "Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz [hasten for spoil, hurry for plunder]" (Isaiah 8:3), and he made haste to plunder their spoil. Another called him "Immanuel [God is with us]" (Isaiah 7:14) that is, "I will be with him," as it says: "With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God" (2 Chronicles 32:8). (*Exod. Rab.* 8:2)⁵⁰

Exod. Rab. 8:2 points to the perceived difference between Sennacherib and Israel by juxtaposing the verse Isaiah 7:14 with 2 Chronicles 32:8, stating that Israel has God with them, whereas the enemy has only the power of a human being. In the following Midrashic text (*Exod. Rab.* 8:5), Exodus 12:29 is cited to provide the connection between two nights of deliverance, the night in Egypt, when God smote the Egyptian firstborn, and the night when Sennacherib's army was destroyed: "And it came to pass at midnight" (Exodus 12:29) . . . When Sennacherib attacked us, You defeated him at night, as it is said: "And it came to pass that night that the angel of the Lord went forth, and stuck down the camp of the Assyrians" (2 Kings 19:35) (*Exod. Rab.* 8:5). In the Haggadah for Pesah we find the following interpretation of the verse "It came to pass at midnight" (Exodus 12:29): "The blasphemer (Sancherib) had planned to raise his hand against Jerusalem; You laid low his dead by night."⁵¹

Buber (Hg.): *Sammlung agadischer Commentare zum Buche Esther* [Vilna, 1886]. The Buber edition preserves the connection between the night of Passover, the singing of the Hallel, and Sennacherib, who is compared to Pharaoh.

⁵⁰ *Shemot Rabbah*, in *Midrash Rabbah; Midrash Shemot Rabbah, chs. 1–14*, ed. A. Shinan (Tel-Aviv, 1984).

⁵¹ Rabbi Joseph Elias, *Passover Haggadah with Translation and a New Commentary Based on Talmudic, Midrashic, and Rabbinic Sources*, (ArtScroll Mesorah Series; New York, 1977), 203.

Thus, one scenario of redemption involving the destruction of an enemy is mapped upon a previous scenario—the Exodus from Egypt is compared to the rescue from Sennacherib’s siege of Jerusalem. Redemption from slavery and the avoidance of renewed enslavement is implied by comparing the nights of rescue in two different Biblical passages. The relationship between Sennacherib’s defeat and the Exodus from Egypt is further analyzed in a reference to Hezekiah in a series of people who recited the Hallel, e.g., Moses and Israel at the Reed Sea, as well as Deborah and Barak after the battle against Sisera. “Rabbi Eleazar ben ‘Azariah said: Hezekiah and his companions uttered it [the Hallel] when Sennacherib attacked them. They exclaimed: Not unto us, and the Holy Spirit responded” (*b. Pesah.* 118a). Another evaluation of the prayer of Hezekiah is found below:

... they took Sennacherib’s power away not with weapons nor with a shield, but with prayer and supplication to the Lord, as it says: “And Hezekiah, the king, and Isaiah, the prophet, son of Amoz, prayed because of this, and cried to heaven” (2 Chronicles 32:20). “And the thirsty panted after their wealth” (Job 5:5). Who was it that “panted after” Sennacherib’s wealth? Hezekiah and Isaiah and all that were with them. (*Pesiq. Rab.* 18:9; Ulmer ed.)

In the above homiletic text, which is part of a long homily concerning the bringing of the *Omer* to the Temple, the focus is upon an appeal to prayer and repentance in order to overcome perilous situations; the example presented by the homilist is the threat of an attack by Sennacherib. The message in this homiletic context is that prayer alone can vanquish enemies without the use of weapons; the proof text is Job 5:5. The Midrashic interpretation leads to the conclusion that religious piety is potent.

THE INSTRUMENTALITY OF AN ANGEL IN THE DEFEAT OF SENNACHERIB

The Biblical narrative recounts a reversal suffered by the Assyrians while Jerusalem lay at their mercy; they are destroyed by an angel.⁵² The Bible is rather vague in stating: “That very night the angel of the Lord went forth and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; when morning dawned, they were all dead bodies” (2 Kings 19:35 // Isaiah 37:36). Similarly 1 Makk. 7:41 mentions the angel of God that struck down 185,000 Assyrians.

⁵² Herodotus also wrote of a divinely-mandated disaster destroying the army of Sennacherib (*Hist.* 2:141). Although there are remarkable similarities between this account by Herodotus concerning the Egyptian king’s fear of Sennacherib and the description of Sennacherib’s siege of Jerusalem in the Bible, the interrelationship of the two events is mainly based upon religious explanations of outcomes in ancient warfare.

In various interpretations of the Biblical passages (2 Kings 19:35 // Isaiah 37:36) different names for the angel were cited, whereas at the same time several Midrashic passages contain general allusions to the events and do not provide the name of the angel (*Tanḥ Tazri'a* 10, Buber ed.; *Tanḥ Tetzaveh* 3, Buber ed.). The following passage views the deployment of an angel as an act of contempt by God towards Sennacherib. Since Sennacherib addressed Jerusalem through messengers (2 Kings 18:17), God sent His messenger to punish Sennacherib.

“And those who despise Me shall be treated with contempt” (1 Samuel 2:30) refers to Sennacherib, King of Assyria, as it says, “By your messengers have you taunted the Lord, etc.” (2 Kings 19:23). Therefore the Holy One, Blessed be He, treated him with contempt, and only exacted punishment from him by means of an angel, as it says, “The angel of the Lord went forth, and struck down the camp of the Assyrians, etc.” (2 Kings 19:35). (*Num. Rab.* 8:3)⁵³

This scenario of contempt is repeated in *Num. Rab.* 9:24, in which Sennacherib is compared to Absalom (see also *Num. Rab.* 11:7). The destruction of Sennacherib's 185,000 soldiers through an angel transpired because he, according to the Midrash, was arrogant. Sennacherib viewed himself as a god according to a Midrashic text:

Does God only see those on high, while He does not see those below? Is it not stated: “They are the eyes of the Lord that run to and fro the whole earth” (Zechariah 4:10). Rabbi Berekhiah says that this refers to the arrogant who declare themselves to be gods. God makes them into abominations in the world. So we find that because Sennacherib behaved arrogantly, he became an abomination in the world, as it is said: “And it came to pass that night the angel of the Lord went forth, and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians” (2 Kings 19:35). (*Exod. Rab.* 8:2)

The full lemma in Zechariah 4:10 states: “For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the building tool in the hand of Zerubbabel. These are the eyes of the Lord that run to and fro the whole earth.” This verse was understood to mean that Zerubbabel would complete the restoration of the Temple with divine support. A reversal of fortune is also indicated in a series of punishments meted out to historical figures in which Sennacherib went from a conqueror to a conquered king:

⁵³ *Bemidbar Rabbah*, in *Midrash Rabbah; t. Sot.* 3:18, ed. M. S. Zuckerman, *Tosefta 'al pi Kitve Yad Erfurt U-vin* (Pasewalk, 1880; repr. with suppl. by S. Lieberman, Jerusalem, 1970); S. Lieberman, *The Tosefta according to Codex Vienna*, 4 vols. [New York, 1955–73]; ARNa 1:27 adds: “God despised him” (S. Z. Schechter, ed., *Avot de Rabbi Natan bi-she Nushaot* [New York, 1967, 2nd ed.].

Sennacherib [was punished by God], because he had behaved arrogantly when he said: "Who are they among the gods of these countries, that have delivered their country out of my hand" (Isaiah 36:20); he was punished by fire, as it is written, "And under His glory there shall be kindled a burning like the burning of fire" (Isaiah 10:16). (*Lev. Rab.* 7:6)

Instead of burning Jerusalem, Sennacherib's army is burnt by divine fire. This punishment is carried out by an angel. In the following passage the angel that destroyed Sennacherib's Assyrian army is identified as Michael; the Midrash affirms that the destruction transpired on the eve of Passover.

"And it came to pass at midnight" (Exodus 12:29)... When Sennacherib attacked us, You defeated him at night, as it is said: "And it came to pass that night that the angel of the Lord went forth, and struck down the camp of the Assyrians" (2 Kings 19:35). Rabbi Neḥemiah said, See how abundant is the love of the Holy One, Blessed be He, for Israel. The same ministering angels, who are "mighty in strength, that fulfill His word" (Psalms 103:20), were appointed by God as the custodians of Israel. Who are they? Michael and Gabriel, as it says: "I have set watchmen upon your walls, O Jerusalem" (Isaiah 62:6). When Sennacherib came, Michael came out and struck them, and Gabriel, at God's command, delivered Hananiah and his companions.⁵⁴ Why was this? Because God had made a condition with them concerning this. When? When He desired to descend in order to deliver Abraham from the fiery furnace,⁵⁵ Michael and Gabriel said: Let us go down and deliver him. But He said to them: If he [Abraham] had descended into the fiery furnace for the sake of one of you, then you would have delivered him. But since he went down for My sake, I Myself will descend and save him, as it says: "I am the Lord that brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans" (Genesis 15:7). But I will establish for you another time when to descend, because you were anxious to save him for the glory of My name. You, Michael, will descend upon the camp of the Assyrians, and you, Gabriel, on the camp of the Chaldeans... (*Exod. Rab.* 8:5)

Michael also did what he had been promised, for it says: "And it came to pass that night that the angel of the Lord went forth, etc." (2 Kings 19:35). We have learned:⁵⁶ All the generals and officers were drinking wine and left their vessels scattered around. God said to Sennacherib: you have done your part, as it says: "By your messengers you have taunted the Lord" (2 Kings 19:23), so will I too send My messenger. What did He do to him? "And under His glory there shall be kindled a burning like the burning of fire" (Isaiah 10:16). (*Exod. Rab.* 8:5)

⁵⁴ Cf. Dan. 3:20–23.

⁵⁵ Cf. *Pseudo-Philo* 6:16–17 in J. H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (New York, 1985), 2:312; *Gen. Rab.* 44:13; *Deut. Rab.* 2:29; *Song Rab.* 8:5; *Tanh. Tetzaveh* 12.

⁵⁶ Cf. *b. Sanh.* 95b.

What is the meaning of “And under His glory”? (Isaiah 10:16) He burned their bodies inside, leaving their garments outside untouched, since the glory of man is in his garments. Why did He leave their garments? Because they were the descendants of Shem, as it says, “The sons of Shem: Elam, and Ashur” (Genesis 10:22), and God said: I owe it to them for their father’s sake, because he and Japheth took their garments and covered the nakedness of their father, as it says: “And Shem and Japheth took a garment” (Genesis 9:23). This is the reason why God said to Michael: Leave their garments untouched, but burn their souls. What is written there? “And morning dawned, they were all dead bodies” (2 Kings 19:35), therefore it says, “Morning by morning will I destroy all the wicked of the land” (Psalms 101:8). (*Exod. Rab.* 8:5)

In the above passage the interventions of the angels Gabriel and Michael are compared: Gabriel delivered Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah from the fiery furnace. When Gabriel came down to deliver them, he commanded the fire to scorch all those who had hurled Hananiah and his companions into the furnace. In parallel construction, Michael saved the people of Jerusalem by using fire against the Assyrians. The rabbinic interpretation compares divine interventions in different eras without marking the specific historical time period. One of the reasons that the garments of the Assyrians were not burned was, as the text reasons, that they were descendants of Shem who covered his father’s nakedness when he was in a drunken stupor. The proof text refers to “Ashur,” Assyrians (Genesis 10:22). In the above text Psalms 101:8 is cited to corroborate that the wicked will be destroyed in the morning, just as the angel destroyed the Assyrians by the morning. Several additional Midrashic and apocalyptic passages claim that the Assyrians were burnt during the battle, but their garments and armor remained intact (*2 Bar* 63; *b. Sanh.* 94a; *Tosefta Targum* on 2 Kings 19:35; *Targum*⁵⁷ on 2 Chronicles 32:21; *Tanḥ* Noah 21, Buber ed.; *Midr. Ps.* 11⁵⁸). This deliberate exemption of the garments and the armor from the fiery destruction emphasizes that divine intervention was responsible for the demise of the Assyrian army.

A different angel, Ramiel, is mentioned in an apocalyptic text concerning the destruction of the Assyrian army:

And thereupon the Mighty One commanded Ramiel, His angel, who speaks with you. And I went forth and destroyed their multitude, the number of whose chiefs only was 185,000, and each one of them had an equal number

⁵⁷ *The Targum of Ruth/the Targum of Chronicles (Aramaic Bible)*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie; ed. & trans. J. S. McIvor (Wilmington, DE, 1994).

⁵⁸ *Midrash Shohar Tov ‘al Tehillim*, ed. S. Buber (Vilna, 1890; repr. Jerusalem, 1967).

[at his command]. And at that time I burned their bodies within, but their garments and weapons I preserved on the outside, in order that the still more wonderful deeds of the Mighty One might appear, and that thereby His name might be spoken of throughout the whole earth. And Zion was saved and Jerusalem delivered: Israel also was freed from tribulation. And all those who were in the holy land rejoiced, and the name of the Mighty One was glorified so that it was spoken of. These are the bright waters which you have seen. (*2 Bar* 63:6–11)⁵⁹

The above vision of Baruch refers to the same miracles as the Midrashic passage, the bodies of the Assyrians sent by Sennacherib were destroyed, but not their garments.

In another passage (*Pesiq. Rab.* 35:6, Ulmer ed.) that has apocalyptic features—angels are fighting battles during the apocalypse—it is claimed that Nebuchadnezzar attributes the power of fire to the angel Gabriel during his battle against Sennacherib. In this Midrash the action of Gabriel is related to Zechariah 2:9; the particular description of a weapon spewing fire made use of by Gabriel is reminiscent of Roman and Byzantine military weapons.⁶⁰ The use of a particular weapon ascribed to the angel Gabriel during his attack against the Assyrians, shows that the interpretative unit was updated to fit the Midrashic author's own time frame.

Another interpretation: “The appearance of the fourth [man is like a son of god]” (Daniel 3:25). When Nebuchadnezzar saw Gabriel, he recognized him and said: This is the one I saw in the war of Sennacherib, the one who consumed in fire the hosts of Assyria. Rabbi Eliezer the Elder said: When Nebuchadnezzar saw Gabriel, all his limbs trembled and he said: This is the angel I saw in the war of Sennacherib, in which a nozzle spouting flame consumed Sennacherib's entire camp in fire, therefore it says, “a wall of fire round about” (Zechariah 2:9). (*Pesiq Rab* 35:6; Ulmer ed.)

The angel Gabriel is also mentioned in the *Targum* on 2 Chronicles 32:21 as the one responsible for the annihilation of the Assyrian army; in a later Midrash it is repeated that Gabriel burnt the Assyrians (*Midr. Zuta Cant* 8:6, ed. Buber).⁶¹ In a Talmudic discussion (*b. Sanh.* 95b) Gabriel's method

⁵⁹ I utilized the almost literal translation by R. H. Charles, *The Apocalypse of Baruch* (London, 1896), 105–106.

⁶⁰ J. H. Pryor and E. M. Jeffreys, *The Age of the ΔΡΟΜΩΝ: The Byzantine Navy ca. 500–1204* (Leiden, 2006), 608–609. The chief method of deployment of “Greek fire” (an incendiary weapon used by the Byzantines) was its projection through a tube (*siphōn*) and a portable *cheirosiphōn* (ibid., 617). In general, see R. Gonen, *Weapons of the Ancient World* (London, 1975).

⁶¹ *Midrash Zutah 'al Shir ha-Shirim, Rut, Ekhah ve-Qohelet... 'im nusha sheniyah 'al megilat Ekhah... ya-'alehem nivvah Yalqut Shim'oni 'al Ekhah*, ed. S. Buber (Berlin: Mekitze Nirdamim, 1895).

of killing the Assyrians is scrutinized; several explanations are deliberated and related to Scriptural lemmata, as well as the “history” of Israel with God. Gabriel’s finger is compared to the “finger”⁶² that was involved in the Exodus. One argument views Gabriel as the carrier of a sickle: “Rabbi Eliezer ben Rabbi Jose said: The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Gabriel: Is your sickle sharpened? [Gabriel] said: Master of the Universe, it has been sharpened since the Six Days of Creation, as it says: ‘For they fled from the swords, from the drawn sword, etc.’ (Isaiah 21:15)” (*b. Sanh.* 95b). Further discussions mention that Gabriel killed the Assyrians either by taking their breath away⁶³ or by clapping his wings so violently that he destroyed them through the noise. The lemma Isaiah 40:24 is interpreted as Gabriel blowing through his nostrils a fierce wind upon the Assyrians, causing their death; a second lemma from Ezekiel 21:22 is understood as referring to Gabriel clapping his hands (wings) together and causing the death of the Assyrians. One argument maintains that the angel opened the ears of the Assyrians so that they would hear the *hayyot* (“the living creatures” in Ezekiel 1:5, and often) singing praises to God in heaven. This liturgy was divine and was concealed from human ears. Apparently this action by Gabriel had a fatal effect upon the Assyrians, similar to the sirens in the *Odyssey*.⁶⁴

Others say: He [Gabriel] breathed into their nostrils, and they died, as it is written, “and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither” (Isaiah 40:24). Rabbi Jeremiah ben Abba said: He afflicted them with his hands [clapping loudly his wings], and they died, as it is written, “I will also strike My hands together, and I will cause My fury to rest” (Ezekiel 21:22). Rabbi Isaac Napaḥa said: He unsealed their ears for them, so that they heard the *hayyot* sing [praises to God] and they died, as it is written, “at Your exaltation the peoples were scattered” (Isaiah 33:3). (*b. Sanh.* 95b)

The above passage contains apocalyptic motifs, such as an angel fighting a battle and the references to Ezekiel.

HEZEKIAH AND ISAIAH

In the Bible King Hezekiah consults the prophet Isaiah when he is under mortal threat by Sennacherib and had been humiliated by the Rab-shaqeh.

⁶² Cf. Exod. 8:19.

⁶³ This is also alluded to in *Num. Rab.* 20:13.

⁶⁴ Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. A. T. Murray (Cambridge, MA, 1919), XII; see also a mosaic from Sepphoris in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, depicting the sirens.

The servants of Hezekiah hear Isaiah's promise that he will place a spirit in Sennacherib (2 Kings 19:7) that will compel him to retreat. Hezekiah prays to the Lord (2 Kings 19:15–19) and Isaiah informs him that the Lord will respond favorably to Hezekiah's prayer (2 Kings 19:20), as well as that Sennacherib will withdraw his army encamped outside the city before it can take any military action against Jerusalem (2 Kings 19:33–34). Furthermore, Isaiah assures Hezekiah that the Kingdom of Judah will slowly recover and the people will survive the catastrophe. According to Bruce Chilton, the aborted campaign of Sennacherib is a "chronicled emblem of Israel's redemption," unnoticed by King Hezekiah;⁶⁵ Hezekiah is unaware of the role he plays in Israel's redemption.

On the apocalyptic-messianic level, in a hypothetical scenario King Hezekiah could have been the King Messiah "if Hezekiah had chanted a Song [of Triumph]." If Hezekiah had done so, Sennacherib and his armies would have been rendered Gog and Magog⁶⁶ in an End of Days scenario. Nevertheless, Hezekiah is criticized for displaying insufficient gratitude to God in respect to the defeat of the Assyrian army. It is claimed that Hezekiah did not sing a "Song of Triumph" over the fall of Sennacherib; this is part of a long passage in *Song Rab.* 4:8ff. that focuses upon Sennacherib.

Rabbi Berekhiah in the name of Rabbi Eleazar: Hezekiah should have chanted a Song [of Triumph] over the fall of Sennacherib, as it is written, "But Hezekiah rendered not according to the benefit done unto him" (2 Chronicles 32:25). Why? "For his heart was lifted up" (*ib.*). Hezekiah was a righteous king, and you say, "For his heart was lifted up" (*ib.*)? Rather that he felt above chanting a song. Isaiah came to Hezekiah and his counselors and said to them, "Sing unto the Lord" (Isaiah 12:5). They said to him: Why? He said, "He has done gloriously. They said: That is already made known on the entire earth" (*ib.*) . . . Rabbi Shimon ben Laqish said: if Hezekiah had chanted a Song [of Triumph] over the fall of Sennacherib, he would have become the King Messiah and Sennacherib would have been Gog and Magog, but he did not; rather, he said: "Now I know that the Lord saves His anointed [Messiah], etc., Some trust in chariots, etc." (Psalms 20:7–8). What is written after this? "Save, Lord, Let the King answer us in the day that we call" (Psalms 20:10). (*Song Rab.* 4:20)⁶⁷

⁶⁵ B. Chilton, "Sennacherib: A Synoptic Relationship among Targumim of Isaiah," *SBLSP* 25 (1986): 544–54; on Sennacherib in Isa. 10:32–33, see 545.

⁶⁶ These two figures derive from Ezek. 38:2; see R. Ahroni, "The Gog Prophecy and the Book of Ezekiel," *Hebrew Annual Review* 1 (1977): 1–27; R. Ulmer, "Gog and Magog," in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, Vol. 8 (Berlin, forthcoming).

⁶⁷ *Shir Ha-Shirim Rabbah*, in *Midrash Rabbah; Midrash Shir ha-Shirim*, ed. E. Halevi Grünhut (Jerusalem, 1981).

The above passage is based upon some perceived criticism of Hezekiah in 2 Chronicles 32:25, which is further explained by lemmata from Isaiah. Hezekiah would have been the Messiah, if he had offered more praise to God in verbal form instead of just feeling “relieved.” Hezekiah lost his chance of becoming the Messiah at that time and Sennacherib did not become like “Gog and Magog.”

An extensive passage in *b. Sanh.* 94a–95b concerning Sennacherib reads like a Midrash on Isaiah’s prophecies that were fulfilled through the death of the Assyrians. It includes a large interpretive unit on Hezekiah as a Messiah; the Talmudic unit is somewhat parallel to *Targum Jonathan* on Isaiah 10:32 and *Yal.*⁶⁸ II, 415. This exegetical narrative is a composite passage that combines multiple Midrashic statements with other texts in its discourse that partially concerns the Messiah and commences with a quotation from Isaiah 9:6.

“Of the increase [*le-marbeh*] of [Hezekiah’s] government and of peace there shall be no end” (Isaiah 9:6). Rabbi Tanḥum said: Bar Kappara explained this verse in Sepphoris: Why is every [letter] *mem* in the middle of a word open and this is closed? The Holy One, Blessed be He, wished to designate Hezekiah as the Messiah, and Sennacherib as Gog and Magog. The Attribute of Justice said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: Master of the Universe! If You did not make David the Messiah, who spoke so many hymns and psalms before You, will You designate Hezekiah [as the Messiah], who did not praise You in spite of all these miracles You worked for him? Therefore [the *mem*] was closed. Immediately the earth said: Master of the universe, as proxy for this righteous man, I will utter a song before You, [please] designate him [Hezekiah] the Messiah. And the earth broke into song before Him, as it is written, “from the uttermost ends of the earth have we heard songs: Glory to the Righteous” (Isaiah 24:16). Then the Prince of the World said to the Holy One, Blessed be He, as proxy for this righteous man, the earth has just now fulfilled Your request. But a divine voice called out and said, [the delay in the coming of the Messiah] “is My secret, My secret” (Isaiah 24:16). The prophet said: “Woe is me” (*ib.*). “Woe is me” (*ib.*) [which means:] how long [will it take?]. A divine voice cried out, “until the faithless, who acted faithlessly will themselves have been betrayed” (*ib.*). (*b. Sanh.* 94a)

The above text focuses upon the well-known inconsistency of the letter *mem* in the writing “Of the increase [*le-marbeh*] of government” (Isaiah 9:6), לְמַרְבֵּחַ הַמְּשֻׁרָה, which has the final *mem* instead of the medial form of the *mem* in the middle of the word. The above passage concerns the

⁶⁸ *Yalqut ha-niqra Shim'oni hu ha-ḥibur ha-gadol she-ḥiber Rabenu Shim'on Rosh ha-darshanim... mi-q.q. Vranqvurt* (Frankfurt/Oder: Gottschalk, 1709; repr. Vilna, 1898).

Prince of Peace in Isaiah 9:6; this is explained as referring to Hezekiah as the Messiah (*b. Sanh.* 94a). The Attribute of Justice argues with God in regard to the messiahship of Hezekiah, since the stringent voice of Justice maintains that the king did not show sufficient gratitude to God. This places Hezekiah in contrast to his ancestor, King David, who on numerous occasions praised God. An interpretation of Isaiah 24:16 infers that the earth sang praises on behalf of King Hezekiah. An angel, the Prince of the World, takes the argument a step further, namely, that God's request has been fulfilled. According to the Talmudic passage, God speaks through Isaiah. The result is that the End of Days and the coming of the Messiah are God's secrets, i.e., they have not yet been revealed. This expresses a rabbinic position concerning messianic speculation. A further quote from Isaiah 24:16 implies that the "faithless" have to be punished before salvation can occur. Subsequently in the passage (*b. Sanh.* 94a) Hezekiah is envisioned by God to punish Sennacherib, since, according to the Talmudic text, Hezekiah strengthened Israel's devotion to God.

An apocalyptic passage concerning Sennacherib refers to him as Gog and Magog; the foreign kings that will lead the nations in a war against Israel. Their defeat will usher in the days of the Messiah. According to this textual interpretation, the Messiah will not come until Israel's enemies have been destroyed. In *Pesiqta Rabbati* Sennacherib is listed as one of the particular fulfillments of prophecy that will lead in a step-by-step path to the messianic era. The sequence of messianic redemption was "determined" before the beginning of time and it includes the appearance of Sennacherib.

"[Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed, and in Your book they all were written,] the days ordained for me, when as yet there were none of them" (Psalms 139:16), Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Joshua [had different opinions]. Rabbi Eliezer said, "day" means "his day," each on a particular day: the day of Sisera, of Sennacherib, and of Gog... (*Pesiq. Rab.* 23:2, Ulmer ed.)

The text in *b. Sanh.* 94b states that Sennacherib needs to be destroyed because of the "oil" of King Hezekiah;⁶⁹ this refers to the oil of anointment. A dictum by Rabbi Hillel states, "There shall be no Messiah for Israel because they have already enjoyed him in the days of Hezekiah" (*b. Sanh.*

⁶⁹ See M. Hadas-Label, "Hezekiah as King Messiah: Traces of an Early Jewish-Christian Polemic in the Tannaitic Tradition," in *Jewish Studies at the Turn of the Twentieth Century: Proceedings of the 6th EAJS Congress*, ed. J. Targarona-Borrás and A. Sáenz-Badillos (Leiden, 1999), vol. I, 275–81, who maintains that Hezekiah was a messianic figure.

99a); Rabbi Hillel expressed the belief that the onset of the messianic era leading to redemption was no longer necessary, since Israel already had experienced the Messiah in the person of Hezekiah. Rabbi Hillel's belief was in contradiction to the belief in the imminent coming of Hezekiah as the Messiah mentioned by Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai on his death-bed. Ben Zakkai expressed a Jewish messianic hope in opposition to Christian expectations of the second coming of their own Messiah. Chilton, who focused upon the Targumic interpretation of Isaiah 10:32–33, also noticed a post-Biblical intensification in the belief that Hezekiah was the Messiah.⁷⁰

King Hezekiah undertook several reforms, which from today's perspective may be termed "religious reforms." Hezekiah purified the Jerusalem Temple, abolished worship at sacred groves and High Places, smashed idols, as well as called upon the remnant of Israel to observe Passover in Jerusalem after the fall of Samaria (2 Kings 18:4; 2 Chronicles 29–30). Hezekiah's reforms before the arrival of Sennacherib contributed to the defeat of this Assyrian King.

"The yoke shall be destroyed because of the oil" (Isaiah 10:27)—Rabbi Isaac Napaḥa said: Sennacherib's yoke was destroyed because of Hezekiah's providing oil that burned in synagogues and in houses of study. What did Hezekiah do? He thrust a sword into the ground at the entrance to a house of study and said: He who will not occupy himself with Torah will be pierced with this sword. (*b. Sanh.* 94b)

Hezekiah's reforms that are mentioned in the Bible were "updated" to conform to the contemporary concerns of the rabbis. The above Talmudic text mentions the rabbinic institution of the house of study and that Hezekiah was going to execute those who would not study Torah. The devotion to the study of Torah is an eschatological vision based upon the notion that only the faithful followers of God will be saved.

In the continuing Talmudic discussion of the prophecies in Isaiah 8 and 9, the question is raised if Sennacherib is culpable, since God had determined that Judah would be destroyed. The role of Sennacherib in history, immediately following Isaiah's prophecies, is mentioned: "After these things and the truth of these, Sennacherib, King of Assyria, encamped against the fenced cities and wanted to win them for himself" (*b. Sanh.*

⁷⁰ Chilton, "Sennacherib," 545–46.

94b). This “historic” comment is a remarkable integration of history and prophecy.

THE ASSYRIAN EXILE AND THE TEN TRIBES

Sennacherib conquered the Kingdom of Israel, and almost conquered the entire Kingdom of Judah during his campaigns; he is referred to as a vicious warrior during his battles. The following rabbinic text describes Sennacherib as being extremely cruel to his victims; this is accomplished by applying a verse from Proverbs to him, while his actions are being detailed by the prophet Hosea.

“But the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel” (Proverbs 12:10). This applies to Sennacherib, of whom it is written, “The mother was dashed in pieces with her children” (Hosea 10:14).⁷¹ (*Lev. Rab.* 27:11)

The extreme cruelty of Sennacherib is also mentioned in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Isaiah 10:32–3; he is described as being crueler than Pharaoh. It is also mentioned that Sennacherib will be punished by his own sons. On the other hand, in a Midrash (*Gen. Rab.* 89:6) the “wicked” Sennacherib claims in his speech citing Scripture that he possessed strength, wisdom and understanding in his attack upon Judah. The Midrash contextualizes a lemma from Isaiah 10:13.

Another interpretation: “And he sent and called for” (Genesis 41:8): This teaches that every nation in the world appoints five wise men as its ministers. Moreover, the Holy One, Blessed be He, grants [a nation] three things: wisdom, understanding, and strength. For thus said the wicked Sennacherib: “By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I possess understanding” (Isaiah 10:13). (*Gen. Rab.* 89:6)⁷²

The Assyrian exile was the major outcome of Sennacherib’s campaign, with great significance in Jewish history. The Biblical account of Sennacherib’s siege of Jerusalem begins with the destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and its capital Samaria. This is how the ten northern tribes came to be known as the Ten Lost Tribes, because they were carried off and settled with other peoples, in accordance with the Assyrian policy

⁷¹ *Tanh* Mas’e 10.

⁷² *Midrash Bereshit Rabba mit Kritischem Apparat und Kommentar*, ed. Y. Theodor and H. Albeck (2nd ed. Jerusalem, 1962; based upon the Frankfurt am Main edition of 1932).

that is mentioned in 2 Kings 17:6, 20–23. At the time that the Rab-shaqeh presented Sennacherib's demands for surrender, he mentioned that the people of Judah would find themselves in a similar land (2 Kings 18:32), which in effect would be like a new "promised land." This new "promised land" was in fact a land of exile.

The Assyrian exile, followed by the Babylonian exile, and the subsequent return to Israel by the exiles, were seen in rabbinic literature as pivotal events in the Biblical drama between God and His people. Just as they had been ordained by God to become enslaved in Egypt and thereafter saved from bondage, it was prophesied that the Israelites would go into captivity under the Assyrians and the Babylonians as a result of their idolatry and disobedience to God, and then be redeemed once more. The Assyrian and Babylonian exiles had a number of significant impacts upon the development of Judaism and Jewish culture. The Jewish view of history was transformed from a perspective of cyclical events in which events endlessly repeated themselves to a different perspective of a linear conception of time in which there was a beginning of the world (creation) and an end to the world, namely, apocalypse and redemption. God revealed Himself in the past and He would eventually bring salvation to Israel. After the Assyrian exile, there were always sizable numbers of Jews living outside the Land of Israel; the Assyrian/Babylonian exiles also mark the beginning of the Jewish Diaspora. Nevertheless, the post-Biblical memory of Sennacherib pales in comparison with Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, who after a long siege captured Jerusalem, burnt the Temple (586 B.C.E.), stole the holy vessels and exiled the Judeans to Babylon.

In rabbinic literature the tropes of the exile became a focal point of engagement: Assyria-Babylon became one of a number of metaphors for the Jewish Diaspora. The assumption that Sennacherib returned in battle several times and took the people of Israel into captivity in waves is reiterated in the following Midrash (see also *Num. Rab.* 23:14).

When Sennacherib came to persuade Israel to make peace, what did he say to them? "I come and will take you away to a land like your own land" (2 Kings 18:32). He did not say, to a land better than your own land, but "to a land like your own land" (*ib.*). (*Sifre Deut.* 37)

This textually inscribed argument of Sennacherib that was conveyed by the Rab-shaqeh was understood to indicate that Sennacherib did not find any fault with the Land of Israel. The following Midrashic text speculates as to the possible reasons that brought about the captivity. This Midrashic passage has a parable of a man who wanted to marry a woman; the man

compares his house to her father's house. The man who symbolizes Sennacherib insists that his house is better than the house in which the woman resides, i.e., Israel. The amazing result is that the landscape of Assyria is perceived to be similar to Israel's. The ten northern tribes that were exiled first are viewed as having rebelled against God (2 Kings 17:7–23); the ten tribes are presented as rebellious sons. A quote from Biblical law is utilized (Exodus 21:15) to create an antithetical comparison, in which a king had ten sons who rebelled and had to be sent away:

“He that strikes his father” (Exodus 21:15)—God said: If Ham, the father of Canaan, who did not smite, but only looked, was condemned with his descendants to perpetual slavery, then how much more so [is he condemned] who curses and strikes? To whom may this be compared? To the ten tribes who refused to bear the yoke of God, with the result that Sennacherib came and led them into captivity. It is like a king who had ten sons that rebelled against him and nullified his edicts, whereupon he said to them: As you have nullified my edicts, I will summon the “fly”⁷³ [mentioned by the prophet Isaiah] to exact vengeance from you. Similarly the ten tribes rebelled against God and disregarded the Torah, as it says, “They have belied the Lord, and said: It is not He” (Jeremiah 5:12); He therefore brought upon them the “fly,” as it says, “That the Lord shall hiss for the fly” (Isaiah 7:18)—this is Sennacherib. When Israel disregarded the Commandments, it is as if they had cursed their parents, for God is our father, as it says, “But now, O Lord, You are our father” (Isaiah 64: 7), and the Torah is our mother, since it says, “And forsake not the teaching of your mother” (Proverbs 1:8). She nurtured us at Sinai, as it says, “I have taught you in the way of wisdom” (Proverbs 4:11). (*Exod. Rab.* 30:5)

Violating the divine commandments is compared to cursing one's parents. Paternal and maternal relationships are invoked in the above passage, leading to the result that God is in the position of a father and the Torah is in the position of a mother. Sennacherib fulfills a prophecy against Israel and its sinful ways; he is referred to as the “fly” that God will bring to Israel. The text is based upon the assumption of distributive justice. In another text God's perceived absence during Sennacherib's campaign is analyzed. The question in the following Midrash concerns the hiding of God's face, for example, at the time when Sennacherib raided Israel.

⁷³ Isaiah implicitly referred to each of the armies of Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, Pharaoh Necho, and Nebuchadnezzar as the “fly”: “And it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall hiss for the fly that is in the farthest part of the rivers of Egypt and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. And they shall come, and shall rest all of them in the desolate valleys and in the holes of the rocks, and upon all thorns and upon all bushes.” (Isa. 7:18–19)

Here God retreats from history and His involvement in human affairs is questioned:

... And in what way did He hide His face from them?⁷⁴ He brought Sennacherib, king of Assyria, up against them, as it is said, “Now it came to pass in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah Sennacherib, King of Assyria, came up [against all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them]” (Isaiah 36:1).⁷⁵ What is the meaning of “captured them” (*ib.*)? Rav Abba bar Kahana said [in the name of Rabbi Samuel ben Nahman]: Three [divine] decrees were sealed on one day: The decree that the ten tribes were to fall through the hand of Sennacherib; the decree that Sennacherib would fall by the hand of Hezekiah; the decree that [Vilna ed.: Uzziah] Shebna should be affected by leprosy. “Upon a nation” (Job 34:29) means Sennacherib, of whom it is written, “For a nation is come up upon My land” (Joel 1:6); “man” (Job 34:29) means Israel, of whom it is written, “And you, My sheep, the sheep of My pasture are men” (Ezekiel 34:31); “one” (Job 34:29) refers to Uzziah who was afflicted with leprosy, as it is said, “And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death” (2 Chronicles 26:21). (*Lev. Rab.* 5:3)

The above text offers a detailed analysis of three events concerning Sennacherib and Israel: the ten tribes would be conquered by Sennacherib, Hezekiah’s triumph over Sennacherib, and the traitor Shebna’s leprosy. The famous legend of the ten tribes that were taken to Africa is also ascribed to Sennacherib’s campaign (*b. Sanh.* 94a); another version of this narrative mentions that the ten tribes have been “beyond the river Sambatyon” (*Gen. Rab.* 73:6) since the time of Sennacherib. Sambatyon is a legendary river, which rested on the Sabbath. The Sambatyon was known to Pliny the Elder (24–79 C.E.) who described the river, and his observations concur with the rabbinic sources. He also claimed that the river ran rapidly for six days in the week and rested on the Sabbath (*Nat. Hist.* 31:24). This characteristic of the Sambatyon prevented the ten tribes from leaving their place of exile, since they could not cross the river during the six days of the week, and though it rested on the seventh day, the restrictions on travel on the Sabbath rendered the crossing equally impossible. Stories about the ten lost tribes and reports of an independent

⁷⁴ Job 34:29.

⁷⁵ The traditional edition of *Midrash Rabbah* (Vilna) has a different proof-text: “Now it came to pass in the fourth year of King Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of Hoshea, son of Elah, King of Israel, that Shalmaneser King of Assyria came up against Samaria, and besieged it... And the King of Assyria carried Israel away... because they hearkened not to the voice of the Lord their God, but transgressed His covenant” (2 Kgs. 18:9–12). *b. Sanh.* 94a suggests that Shalmaneser was in fact Sennacherib.

Jewish kingdom in the East have stirred the imaginations of both Jews and Christians throughout the ages.⁷⁶

The Sambatyon and the exile are mentioned in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*⁷⁷ on Exodus 34:10: "I will take them from there and place them on the other side of the Sambatyon River." According to the rabbis, the ten tribes experienced three exiles: once beyond the Sambatyon River, once to Daphne of Antioch, and once when the divine cloud descended upon them and covered them (*y. Sanh.* 10:6, 29c; *Lam. Rab.* 2:9).

Furthermore, Sennacherib is viewed as having "mixed up all nations" (*m. Yad.* 4:4; *t. Yad.* 2:17; *t. Qidd.* 5:4; *b. Ber.* 28a; *b. Soṭah* 46b; *b. Yoma* 54a), since he took captives from different areas that he conquered. The comingling of all nations is mentioned in a passage concerning the conversion of Ammonites and Moabites to Judaism (*b. Ber.* 28a), who may not "enter the Assembly of the Lord." In this passage Rabbi Joshua questions: "Do Ammon and Moab still reside in their original homes? Sennacherib, King of Assyria, long ago went up and commingled all the nations, as it says, 'I have removed the bounds of the peoples and have robbed their treasures and have brought down as one mighty their inhabitants' (Isaiah 10:13); and whatever strays is assumed to belong to the larger section of the group." Due to the comingling of the nations all restrictions concerning the Amorites and Moabites in regard to conversion were invalidated. This is a remarkable acknowledgement that historical events may have an important influence upon halakhic rulings. The actions of Sennacherib had to be considered in halakhic discussions. The legend of the exiled ten tribes and the deeds of the Assyrian king Sennacherib were inscribed in the Midrashic interpretation and had to be addressed on a pragmatic level, in halakhah.

SENNACHERIB'S ESCAPE

A legendary Talmudic account of Sennacherib's flight from Judah includes folkloristic elements: Sennacherib was met by an "old man," an appearance of God among human beings. God appears to Sennacherib who is afraid of those kings whose sons were killed in battle under Sennacherib's leadership. Sennacherib is questioned by the "old man" as to how

⁷⁶ U. Ecco, *Baudolino*, trans. W. Weaver (New York, 2001).

⁷⁷ M. McNamara and M. Maher, *Targum Neofiti and Pseudo-Jonathan: Exodus*, ArBib 2 (Collegeville, MN, 1994).

he would respond to the kings. Sennacherib admits that he is afraid of this pending meeting with these kings, and he is advised by the “old man” to cut off his hair; this would render him unrecognizable. This element is reminiscent of the story of Samson and Delilah, in which Samson’s strength is related to his long (Nazirite) hair (Judges 16:17, 19). The loss of hair may similarly symbolize the loss of Sennacherib’s power. The angels are involved in executing God’s punishment of Sennacherib. According to the Talmudic narrative, as Sennacherib enters a house to fetch shears to cut his hair, he is met by angels disguised as humans, who agree to provide him with shears, if he grinds a certain amount of grain for them. The house is a mill next to a river. This delays his departure to meet the “old man” a second time. Since it has grown dark, Sennacherib has to light a fire. While fanning the flames his beard is singed and he loses his hair as well as his beard. The role of the angels is to grind grain; this is somewhat reminiscent of Greek myths, in which semi-gods were employed as the markers of time and tragic events. This Talmudic legend has elements of a folktale as well as of a religious tale;⁷⁸ the tale depicts a mortal who encounters God and angels. The story follows a well-structured pattern, according to which the hero (an actual tragic anti-hero), Sennacherib, has to overcome three obstacles. However, his “successful” disguise is turned into his utmost defeat. The tale is presented within a long passage that also weaves Sennacherib’s frustrated campaign into a messianic narrative in *b. Sanh.* 94a–96b.

Rav Abbahu said: Had it not been written, it would have been impossible to believe it: “In the same day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired, namely, by the riverside, by the king of Assyria, the head, and the hair of the legs: and it shall consume the beard” (Isaiah 7:20). The Holy one, Blessed be He, went and appeared before [Sennacherib] as an old man; He said to him, When you go to the kings of the east and the west, whose sons you led and caused their death, what will you say to them? [Sennacherib] said, I am afraid. What shall I do? [The old man] said: Go, disguise yourself. [Sennacherib asked:] How shall I disguise myself? [The old man said:] Bring me a razor, and I myself will shave [you]. He said, From where shall I get it?

⁷⁸ H.-J. Uther, *Classifying Folktales: The Third Revision of the Aarne-Thompson Tale Type Index* (A. Aarne, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography* [Helsinki, 1961]) and S. Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Medieval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends* (Bloomington, IN, 1955–1958, rev. ed.) enumerate structural markers of tales.

[The old man said:] Go into that house and take it. So he went and found it there. But the Ministering angels appeared to him in the shape of men grinding palm kernels. [Sennacherib] said to them: Give me the razor. They said: Grind a *gerivah* of palm kernels, and we will give it to you. He ground a *gerivah* of palm kernels, and they gave him the razor. When he returned, it had become dark. [The old man said:] Go and bring fire. He went and brought fire. When he was blowing on it, it caught hold of his beard. [The old man] shaved off the hair of his head together with his beard. The [sages] said: That is what is meant by the phrase, “and it shall also consume the beard” (Isaiah 7:20). (*b. Sanh.* 94a–94b)

This Talmudic tale functions⁷⁹ as an extended exegetical effort to interpret Isaiah 7:20. This Scriptural passage provides the elements that structure the tale: the involvement of God in shaving the hair of the Assyrian king with a razor that has been acquired close to a river. All of these elements are explained in the tale.

According to Biblical and post-Biblical sources, Sennacherib and his sons survived the war against Judah. While fleeing from Judah, Sennacherib worshiped a plank of Noah’s ark that he discovered. After his flight his sons killed him (*b. Sanh.* 96a; *Tanḥ.* Metzora’ 12, Buber ed.), released Jewish captives and converted to Judaism. According to some rabbinic texts, Sennacherib initially was on a destructive mission to carry out God’s judgment against Judah. Paradoxically, the concept of “judgment” is reversed in the text under discussion in that Sennacherib is no longer carrying out a judgment, rather he himself is judged by his sons to be unworthy of life. One version of Sennacherib’s retreat from Jerusalem implies that Sennacherib had knowledge of the story of the Biblical Noah; Sennacherib praised “the great god” who saved Noah. Amir Harrak points out that St. Eugene mentions the ark of Noah and the assassination of Sennacherib in one passage;⁸⁰ however, we cannot determine the time and the extent of cultural transfer between this text and the rabbinic texts. The death of Sennacherib raises the issue, whether the rabbis relied solely upon the Bible in their interpretations or if other sources influenced their rabbinic interpretation.

⁷⁹ V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. L. Scott (Austin, TX, 1968, 2nd ed.), 3:1, 5–6, maintained that the functionality of a story is critical. This functionality has also been applied to rabbinic stories, which interpret Biblical lemmata.

⁸⁰ A. Harrak, “Tales about Sennacherib: The Contribution of the Syriac Sources,” in *The World of the Aramaeans: Studies in Honour of Paul-Eugene Dion*, vols. 1–3, ed. Michèle Daviau et al., JSOTSu 324–326 (Sheffield, 2001), 1, 168–89, 185.

Sennacherib bound himself by a vow to sacrifice his sons if he would win the battle. In this narrative the sons hear about his plan and kill their father:

[Sennacherib] left and found a board of Noah's ark. He said: It is the great God who saved Noah from the flood. If I go and succeed, I will sacrifice my two sons to You, he vowed. But his sons heard it and they killed him, as it is written, "And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer, his sons, struck him with the sword, etc." (2 Kings 19:37). (*b. Sanh.* 96a)

The assassination of Sennacherib (2 Chronicles 32:21–22; 2 Kings 19:37) by his sons while he was praying to his god is also mentioned in Tobit 1:24: "But after forty-five days, the king was killed by his own sons." Tobit, which presents the view of a Judean during the Assyrian exile, contains an extremely abbreviated history of Sennacherib. In Tobit 1:18 the text states: "I also buried any whom King Sennacherib put to death when he came fleeing from Judea in those days of judgment that the king of heaven executed upon him. For in his anger he put to death many Israelites..." Tobit refers to the defeat of Sennacherib, which occurred as a result of divine intervention, and Tobit mentions the subsequent rage of Sennacherib during his flight in which he kills even more Israelites. Tobit buried the bodies of the Israelites. Tobit 1:21 states: "But not forty days passed before two of Sennacherib's sons killed him, and they fled to the mountains of Ararat..." The events in Judah are only alluded to in Tobit and they are viewed as punishment for Sennacherib's blasphemy; this is also found in *Tosefta Targum* on 2 Kings 19:37; *b. Sanh.* 95b–96a. Sennacherib vowed that if he was triumphant in his next battles he would sacrifice his sons. His sons overheard this vow and put him to death (*b. Sanh.* 96a). In the Biblical and rabbinic texts there is no "noble" death of Sennacherib; he does not give a speech summarizing his accomplishments or regretting his mistakes. The punishment of Sennacherib is alluded to in 2 *Bar* 63 in an eschatological statement that those who are suffering now will be rewarded in the future; those who are in control now will be overthrown in the future.

A different version of the narrative concerning Sennacherib and his sons is presented in a Midrash:

Another explanation: "He [the Chaldean] is terrible and dreadful" (Habakkuk 1:7)—this alludes to Sennacherib who said: "Who are they among all the gods of these countries that have delivered their country out of My hand?" (Isaiah 36:20). "His judgment and destruction proceed from himself"

(Habakkuk 1:7) refers to his sons, since it is said, "And it came to pass, as he [Sennacherib] was worshipping in the house of Nisroch, his god, that Adrammelech and Sarezer, his sons, struck him with the sword" (2 Kings 19:37). (*Lev. Rab.* 18:2)

In *Lev. Rab.* 18 a speech is created—Sennacherib through his representative, the Rab-shaqeh, is speaking with the Biblical lemmata from Isaiah. The short speech is located between lemmata from Habakkuk; thus, the speech provides a connecting element between discursive elements. Sennacherib as a Chaldean is characterized as having been terrible, and in the second lemma he demonstrates that he questions the "gods." No reliance upon any Assyrian god is mentioned in the Biblical text;⁸¹ the struggle was between an attacking king and the gods of these peoples. This becomes a major confrontation in Midrashic interpretation, Sennacherib against God. *Yalqut Shim'oni* I, 250, has an edited version of the accusation that Sennacherib is punished for referring to himself as a god: "Pharaoh called himself god . . . and Sennacherib called himself god, as it says: 'Who are they among the gods of these countries, etc.' (Isaiah 36:20)."

After the destruction of the Assyrian army, the king of Egypt and the king of Ethiopia were discovered; they had planned to assist Hezekiah, but were captured by the Assyrians. After these two kings were liberated by Hezekiah's people, they spread the greatness of God everywhere (*Song Rab.* 4:20); this is a reversal of their former behavior (*Est. Rab.* 7:3).⁸² Furthermore, all the vassals in Sennacherib's army were liberated by Hezekiah and became proselytes (*b. Menah.* 109b; *Seder 'Olam Rabbah* 23). The text in *b. Menah.* 109b states in part: "The following [Baraita] was taught: After the downfall of Sennacherib Hezekiah went out and found princes sitting in their golden carriages. He implored them not to serve idols." In *Yal.* II, 236, Hezekiah freed all the people who had come with Sennacherib and they became proselytes. Sennacherib's sons fled to Qardu⁸³ (*b. Sanh.* 96a) where they released the Jewish captives. Together with the former captives they marched to Jerusalem and became proselytes. The *Peshitta*, ad.loc., equates the location of Qardu in its version of Genesis 8:4 (in the Hebrew Bible this site is called Ararat) with the location of Ararat of 2 Kings 19:37. This may be the underlying reasoning of the Talmudic passage mentioning that Sennacherib discovered a plank of Noah's ark,

⁸¹ Ben Zvi ("Who Wrote the Speech": 88) claims this in regard to the Biblical text.

⁸² *Esther Rabbah*; in *Midrash Rabbah*. <http://www.schechter.ac.il/rabaENG.asp>

⁸³ *b. B. Bat.* 91a states that Abraham was imprisoned in Qardu.

which would be in the Biblical location of Ararat. According to the applicable Talmudic passage his sons fled to Qardu after they had killed their father. It is significant to note that in the Talmudic era Qardu and Ararat were probably understood to be one and the same location.

Sennacherib's descendants include the Sages Shemaiah and Avtalyon, who were proselytes from Alexandria (*b. Git.* 57b; *b. Sanh.* 96b; *Tanḥ.*⁸⁴ Va-yakhel 8). HARRAK⁸⁵ mentions that in Syriac literature Sennacherib appears as a pagan ruler whose sons converted to Christianity and were killed as martyrs; this trope of the conversion of Sennacherib's sons supports to some extent the rabbinic tradition that Sennacherib's sons converted to Judaism.

Several Midrashic collections from the medieval period contain compilations of the interpretations pertaining to Sennacherib. For example, *Midrash 'eser galuyot* (The Midrash of the Ten Exiles) retells Sennacherib's actions⁸⁶ and *'Aseret ha-melakhim* (The Midrash of the Ten Kings) also has cohesive narrative sections pertaining to the fate of Sennacherib.⁸⁷ *Yalqut Shim'oni* arranged the interpretations according to Scriptural lemmata; thus, showing the strong preference of the editor/author who continued to describe the ancient history of Israel through its interpretations. Sennacherib is found in cohesive sections in *Yal.* II on Kings and Isaiah mainly without significant variations from the classical Midrashim; the *Yalqut* does not express a preference for one of the variants.

The rabbis claim that Sennacherib's name was virtually blotted out, since no Jew would name his child after him, whereas Jews are named after the patriarchs and their descendants. On the other hand, one may note, from a historical perspective, Jews named their children after Alexander the Great, who was considered a benevolent conqueror.

"But the name of the wicked shall rot" (Proverbs 10:7). Rabbi Samuel ben Nahman said: The names of the wicked are like weaving implements, as long as you use them, they remain taut, if you lay them aside, they slacken. Thus, have you ever heard a man call his son Pharaoh, Sisera, or Sennacherib? But he calls him Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Reuben, or Simeon, Levi or Judah. (*Gen. Rab.* 49:1)

⁸⁴ *Midrash Tanḥuma* ("printed edition"). *Midrash Tanḥuma*, ed. Hanokh Zundel (repr. Jerusalem, 1974); A. Kensky, *Tanḥuma ha-nidpas* (Ph. D. Diss., The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1990).

⁸⁵ HARRAK, "Tales," 182.

⁸⁶ *Otzar Midrashim*, ed. J. D. Eisenstein (New York, 1915), 437–39.

⁸⁷ *Otzar Midrashim*, 223–27.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction of this chapter four questions were presented. In response to the first question whether there is a religious-cultural memory or a historical memory of Sennacherib's campaign in rabbinic literature, I conclude that the answer should not be phrased in an either/or response. In my judgment, the rabbinic texts reveal a religious-cultural memory, as well as a historical memory. The "historical references" in the texts effectuated a strategy to invoke past events in a meaningful way. The rabbis endeavored to present a consequential religious account of the historical encounter between God and Israel. The essential meaning of events was part of the religious-cultural memory of the rabbis who, through their rabbinic interpretations, presented lessons about God and His involvement in Israel's history.

The reconstruction of historical events in Midrash contained narratives containing a kernel of historical truth. Midrashic texts often contain embedded traditions originating in a discrete historical context or event. This is the case in the material under analysis; Sennacherib was a "real" Assyrian king who conquered Israel and Judah, except for the city of Jerusalem. The texts examined in this chapter could have been a belated attempt to comprehend the Assyrian attack on Israel from a temporal and cultural distance.

The second question: How are the traces of his campaign interpreted? The Midrashic accounts of Sennacherib convey the involvement of God, who is profoundly engaged with the fate of Israel. Sennacherib denigrated God's holy city, Jerusalem, treated it with contempt and blasphemed God. Sennacherib was both contemptuous and ignorant of the power of God. In Midrash he is viewed as a self-destructive king, who brought upon himself and his army, God's contempt and divine punishment. The rabbis perceived a divine purpose behind the delay of Sennacherib's attack against Jerusalem, namely, to save the city. The wisdom and piety of Hezekiah were contrasted with Sennacherib who merely relied upon his weapons of war. Clearly piety is potent. Sennacherib's defeat reveals God's role in history by having His agent, the angel, destroy the Assyrian army. Israel has God with them, while the enemy has only the power of a human being. The campaign of Sennacherib is symbolic of Israel's redemption.

The third question: Has the textually encoded memory of Sennacherib been influenced by cultural transformations and rabbinic constraints of interpretation? The apocalyptic tendencies in rabbinical literature resulted in Sennacherib and his army being depicted as negative figures,

similar to Gog and Magog at the End of Days. In contrast, the messianic hope of the Jewish people is symbolized by the figure of Hezekiah. Sennacherib is understood to be a critical individual in bringing about the messianic era. The negative attitude towards superstitious practices and magic is expressed in the praise of Hezekiah for destroying the *Book of Cures* and the brazen serpent. The enduring cultural memory of the Exodus is transferred over and over again in rabbinic literature; in this instance, Sennacherib's defeat reassures the Jewish people of the redemptive role of God in Jewish history. The critical value of studying Torah as one of most important aspects in the life of a Jew is retroactively inserted into the time of Hezekiah.

The fourth question: What does Sennacherib symbolize in Midrashic and related literature? Sennacherib is portrayed as an evil, arrogant oppressor who, like Pharaoh, thought of himself as a god. The cruel and vicious nature of Sennacherib is cited in the texts. Nevertheless, he is also understood to be God's agent, sent by God to punish the Israelites for their abandonment of the divine commandments. The Midrashic texts utilized Biblical lemmata to create the above portrayals of Sennacherib and to present lessons to be derived from the accounts concerning this Assyrian king. In the theological evaluation of the rabbis, Sennacherib was a sinner, a "wicked" oppressor, who fulfilled God's plan of punishing His "children."

The succession of interpretations concerning Sennacherib in Midrashic texts are mediated through different narratives. Major pieces of what the rabbis remembered of the story of Sennacherib depended upon the interpretation of perceived gaps in the Biblical text. Mainly, the reinterpretation of the events surrounding Sennacherib's campaigns, as assembled in rabbinic texts, focuses upon divine intervention. The Midrashic interpretations suggest that all events in history are controlled by God who determines Israel's fate, including the Assyrian exile and the dispersion of the ten tribes. Prior "historical" events could be understood within the context of Midrash as symbolic expressions of religious phenomena. The language encoded in Midrash was the way in which meaning and experience were transmitted among the rabbis and their followers, and subsequently was passed down as the "historical" record.

It is very difficult for any reader to analyze Midrashic "historical" material, because Midrashic texts were a means for moral and religious evaluations of historical encounters and Midrash contained ideologically charged representations of the events themselves. The rabbis appear to

have concluded that the future should not consist of the mere memorization and subsequent reconstruction of the past. The oppressors of Israel and the “wicked” kings that attacked Israel would have no power in the eschatological future. Midrash attempted to comprehend what would have been possible, not what actually occurred, in its discursive analysis of lemmata from Scripture. Some of the rabbis who shaped Judaism entertained a synoptic view of the Biblical narratives concerning Sennacherib and they freely moved between the narratives to support their arguments and their worldview. Sennacherib was also important to the other group that interpreted Biblical texts; Christians continued to engage with this Assyrian king beyond rabbinic engagement with him.⁸⁸ Jewish post-Biblical interpretive literature displays some collective memory concerning the Assyrian king Sennacherib, who sent his army to conquer the city of Jerusalem, resulting in a terrifying situation for King Hezekiah and the other inhabitants of the city. Through divine intervention, the Assyrian army was destroyed and the city of Jerusalem was saved. The only explanation that the Bible and the Midrash offer is that the destruction of the Assyrian army and the flight of Sennacherib were caused by God’s angel. This “memory” was the basic core that inspired the rabbinic interpretations.

⁸⁸ Ryan, “Rab-shakeh,” 192–93.

THE DEVIL IN PERSON, THE DEVIL IN DISGUISE: LOOKING FOR KING
SENNACHERIB IN EARLY CHRISTIAN LITERATURE*

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INTRODUCTION

King Sennacherib quite understandably is not mentioned in any of the writings of the New Testament. Why should he? The man lived some 700 years earlier, the empire he had reigned over had long been destroyed, and his campaign against Judea had ended in a disaster for the royal army. The campaign is presented in the biblical accounts as the continuation of the one organised by Sennacherib's predecessor Shalmaneser which had ended so gloriously with the capture of the Northern kingdom and its capital Samaria (see the sequence in 4 Kingdoms [LXX] 18:9–12 and 13–16).¹ Sennacherib's invasion had started most promisingly (18:13), but the siege before Jerusalem proved to be catastrophic, not in the least because of the courageous intervention of the prophet Isaiah rallying king Hezekiah and his staff to hold out against the invader.² Yet somehow Sennacherib had pointed out the future of the capital of Judea, and not that long after—somewhat more than one century, a period that is covered in six chapters in 4 Kingdoms (20–25)—Jerusalem in turn met its end at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar.

* Standard abbreviations for cited material following include: ACCS = Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture; CCSG = Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca; CSCO = Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium; GCS = Die Griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte; OCA = Orientalia Christiana Analecta; PG = Patrologia Graeca; and SC = Sources chrétiennes.

¹ As is well known, the biblical account does not mention in this regard the role of king Sargon II, who may well have been the primary, if perhaps not the sole, Assyrian monarch responsible for the capture of Samaria. The account of the campaign and its consequences in 4 Kingdoms 18–20 is “doubled” in 2 Chron. 32 and is told also in Isa. 36–39. There are echoes of it in several other biblical texts (see, a.o., Tob. 1:21; 1 Macc. 7:41; 2 Macc. 8:19 and 15:22; Sir. 48:17–25). The story also impressed Muslim authors: see J. F. A. Sawyer, *The Fifth Gospel. Isaiah in the History of Christianity* (Cambridge, 1996), 7.

² On the profile of Isaiah in this episode, see J. Blenkinsopp, *Opening the Sealed Book. Interpretations of the Book of Isaiah in Late Antiquity* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2006), 34–36.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

Nebuchadnezzar's campaign is not related in the New Testament—again: why should it?—though C. H. Dodd suggested long ago that it may have played a role in the way Luke presents the capture and destruction of Jerusalem in his account of the apocalyptic discourse of Jesus in Luke 21:20–24.³ The Sennacherib episode may have left a few disparate traces left and right. The two witnesses prophesying “clothed in sackcloth” (περιβεβλημένοι σάκκους) in Revelation 11:3 are linked in NA²⁸ to the reactions of king Hezekiah and his staff upon hearing the threatening news Sennacherib's messengers had brought (4 Kingdoms 19:1–2 and // Isaiah 37:1–2).⁴ This suggestion found its way also into the commentaries. The phrase is of course not unique to the Sennacherib episode (see 3 Kingdoms 20[21]:16, 27; 1 Chronicles 21:16; Judith 4:11; Jonah 3:6, 8; 1 Maccabees 2:14; 3:47), but its combination with (a form of) the verb περιβάλλω is less often attested than with (a form of) the verb περιζώννυμι, and this might point to 4 Kingdoms being the primary parallel. The motif of the city of Jerusalem being given to the nations and trampled over also points in the same direction. It should also be noted that the motif of the sackcloth is not repeated in 4 Kingdoms when Jerusalem is conquered by Nebuchadnezzar.⁵

³ C. H. Dodd, “The Fall of Jerusalem and the ‘Abomination of Desolation,’” *Journal of Roman Studies* 37 (1947): 47–54. The view never won the day, but it was noted by G. R. Beasley-Murray in his critical survey of the research on Mark 13 and parallels, and continues to be cited in commentaries on Luke: see G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Future* (London, 1954), 101 n. 1; J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X–XXIV*, Anchor Bible 28A (New York, 1985), 1255: “Dodd has overplayed his hand”; *ibid.*, 1343–44, on Luke 19:41–44, which Dodd also wants to explain from Nebuchadnezzar: “That may be, as far as the terminology is concerned, for Luke likes to make his accounts echo similar OT stories. But the question remains, Why has he substituted these covert references to the destruction of Jerusalem under the Romans for the Danielic ‘abomination of desolation?’” (on Luke 21:20–24).

⁴ The passage has no parallel in 2 Chron. 32, where king Hezekiah instead is all courage and defiance and stands together with the prophet Isaiah in organizing the defence against Sennacherib.

⁵ Such a link with Jerusalem is found in most of the other passages cited above. Judith 4:11 uses it to describe the population's reaction upon hearing of Holofernes' campaign, but this one proved to be a failure, as was Sennacherib's. Likewise, the reference in 1 Chron. 21:16 is in the context of a threat to the city (by Yahweh!) that eventually fails to materialise. Most dramatic perhaps are the two passages from 1 Maccabees, for here the city has indeed been sacrilegious. Jonah, on the other hand, uses the motif for the population of Nineveh, Sennacherib's capital, expecting the destruction of their city, which is avoided thanks to the intervention of a Jewish prophet.

The quotation in Acts 4:24 has elements that are also found in 4 Kingdoms 19:15 and its parallel in Isaiah 37:16, but Exodus 20:11, Psalm 145(146):6, and, to a lesser degree, 2 Ezra 19:6, offer a closer parallel, which also mentions the second half of v. 24 (“the sea and everything in them”). A more plausible parallel may be found in John 5:44 with the motif of “the only God” that does not occur so often in the LXX but is twice repeated in the Sennacherib episode (4 Kingdoms 19:15, 19 and Isaiah 37:16, 20). The same may be true of the motif of the avenging angel of the Lord in Acts 12:23, which can be compared with 4 Kingdoms 19:35 (Isaiah 37:36 instead reads ἀνεῖλεν), which in turn had been already repeated verbatim in 1 Maccabees 7:41 and in Sirach 48:21. Of course, the motif is known also from other texts and in Acts is applied to an individual, but the formula with “the angel of the Lord” is not the most common variant. Finally, Paul’s μὴ οὖσιν θεοῖς in Galatians 4:8 might well echo 4 Kingdoms 19:18 (// Isaiah 37:19). This list is most probably not complete,⁶ but it is obviously not in the New Testament writings themselves that one should look for what Christians had to say on Sennacherib, but in the works of early Christian commentators.

A. Rahlfs in his edition of the Septuagint systematically spells Sennacherib’s name as Σενναχηριμ, but the Greek manuscript evidence of both the biblical books and ancient Christian writings shows a broader variety. By far the most common form, it would seem, is Σεναχηρείμ, with single *nu* and a diphthong at the end, but one also encounters variants with double *nu* and with all possible variations for the second half of the name.⁷ In Latin, by contrast, the name is always given as Sennacherib. Obviously, the large majority of instances is found in commentaries or sermons on biblical books, but occasionally his name also occurs elsewhere. In this essay I will limit myself to the evidence from authors writing in Greek. This accounts already for a quite substantial contribution and allows me to give a rather exhaustive survey of what Christian authors have been doing with and to Sennacherib. As one might expect, the picture they have created is an utmost negative one. Sennacherib is a villain, but as

⁶ Could something be said for drawing a (faint) parallel between Matt. 10:34 (// Luke 12:51) and 4 Kingdoms 18:25? One finds there the same kind of rhetorical question (in Luke) as well as the rather strange βαλεῖν εἰρήνην ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν (Matt.) that could be compared to 4 Kingdoms’ ἀνέβημεν ἐπὶ τὸν τόπον τοῦτου.

⁷ The TLG lists instances with -χαρειμ, -χειρειμ, -χειρηβ, -χειρημ, -χειριβου, -χειριμ, -χειρίμος, -χειριμ, -χερειμ, -χερι, -χεριμ, -χηρειβ, -χηριβ, -χηριμ, -χηρίνα, -χηρίναν, and -χιρειμ. Many of these forms are printed in editions with or without an accent, but that is of course often a decision of modern editors.

will become clear, villains too can be useful—precisely why this character can be introduced to illustrate good Christian teaching, warning, and exegesis.

SENNACHERIB AND EARLIER CHRISTIAN AUTHORS

Theophilus of Antioch (fl. 2nd c. C.E.)

The first reference to Sennacherib in Greek Christian literature dates from the second century. The apologist Theophilus in his work *ad Autolyicum* (2.31) mentions the king's name in passing at the end of a long section surveying the history and kings of ancient Chaldea and Assyria. The section is part of his argument that biblical authors were in general far superior to pagan authors, who, as the argument ran, had hardly anything to say about this period worth recording. Sennacherib is mentioned in the company of his predecessors Teglaphasar (a somewhat idiosyncratic rendering of Tiglath-Pileser) and Shalmaneser. He is said to have had as his "triarch" (τρίαρχος) one Adramelech "the Ethiopian," who ruled over Egypt.⁸ This information is not found in biblical tradition. It probably results from a confusion, on the part of Theophilus or his source, and would then be an argument (quite ironically), at least against his own trustworthiness as an author, if not against his specific claim about the superiority of biblical authors.⁹

Clement of Alexandria (d. before 215), Origen (d. 253/4) and Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339)

Another reference in a similar context is found in Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata*. Chapter 21 of the *Stromata*'s first book consists of a very long (and somewhat complicated and boring) comparative study of various chronologies, for which Clement has relied on a number of lost or partially lost sources, among them the Jewish historians Demetrius and

⁸ Text in G. Bardy, *Trois livres à Autolyicus / Théophile d'Antioche*, SC 20 (1948), 180.

⁹ The title "triarch" does not occur in the LXX. 4 Kingdoms twice mentions an Adramelech. He is one of the two sons of Sennacherib that committed parricide (19:37) and it is the name of one of two deities to which the Sepharvites bring child offerings (so in 17:31). The link with Egypt and the sobriquet "the Ethiopian" remain a mystery. 4 Kingdoms 19:9 (cf. Isa. 37:9) says that Tirhakah "king of the Ethiopians" defied Sennacherib and forced him to send a second delegation to Hezekiah, which claims that Assyria has indeed defeated Egypt (19:24; the first delegation had only warned Judah that Egypt is an unreliable ally: 19:21).

Eupolemus.¹⁰ He refers to the former for a note on which Jewish tribes were not taken captive by Sennacherib (Judah, Benjamin, and Levi), and for calculating the interval between Sennacherib's campaign and that of Nebuchadnezzar as being 128 years and six months (1.21.141.1). The information is not found in Scripture, where the focus is on Judah and Jerusalem only, and the passage from Demetrius has not survived. Clement's presentation of ancient chronologies with the purpose of creating a universal chronology with focus on the birth of Christianity has been compared to that of Theophilus and is considered to be "beaucoup plus détaillée" and "vigoureux."¹¹

Origen mentioned Sennacherib twice in passing. In his *Commentary on Matthew*, in commenting on Matthew 16:1, he paid much attention to the (in his opinion) remarkable alliance between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. He likens it to the sudden friendship between Herod and Pilate that follows from their dealings with Jesus (as Luke had pointed out), and also, somewhat less appropriately, to the heated enmity there once was between Nebuchadnezzar and Pharaoh and Sennacherib and Tirhakah (in this order), which actually did not develop into any sort of friendship.¹² In his *Letter to Africanus* (19), answering his correspondent's questions—how it was possible that Jews were killed in Babylon when one of them was the king's concubine, and how it was that some Jews managed to grow rich in exile (Africanus, *ad Originem* 6)—Origen first pointed out that the man was actually citing from the book of Tobit, whose very canonicity (or authenticity) he doubted, and then added two more quotations from the same work, which Christians did of course accept, providing evidence for the second element, as well as for the fact that these "rich" Jews took care of their less fortunate compatriots (Tobit 1:12–14 and 1:16–18, mentioning Sennacherib's wrath against the exiles after his defeat in Judah).¹³

Eusebius of Caesarea mentions Sennacherib five times in his *Commentary on Isaiah*. In all of these cases, Sennacherib is just part of the

¹⁰ On the sources of Clement in this work, see the old but still useful analysis by W. Christ, *Philologische Studien zu Clemens Alexandrinus* (München, 1900).

¹¹ C. Mondésert, *Clément d'Alexandrie. Les Stromates. Stromate I*, SC 30 (Paris, 1951), 35.

¹² Text in E. Klostermann, ed., *Origenes Werke. Zehnter Band: Origenes Matthäusevangelium I*, GCS 40 (1935), 70.

¹³ Text in N. de Lange, *La Lettre à Africanus sur l'Histoire de Suzanne*, SC 302 (1983), 560. There is still a third instance. PG (12, 1245) cites among the *Selecta in Psalmos* that go or have been collected under the name of Origen an excerpt on Ps. 19:2–3 that likens this passage to Hezekiah's prayer for help in times of urgent danger in 4 Kingdoms 19:14–15. The authenticity of the fragment is not established.

background, recalling the situation in which Shebna is mentioned (Isaiah 22:15–25, with due attention to the fact that the prophet is very critical of the man, something that is lacking in 4 Kingdoms 18–19), or Hezekiah (comments on Isaiah 36:1–3 and 39:1–2).¹⁴

Basil the Great (d. 379) and Gregory of Nazianze (d. 390)

Sennacherib serves as an example in a quite amusing comment by Basil the Great on Psalm 32:17 (“Unreliable is a horse for deliverance . . .”).¹⁵ This inspires Basil to a comparison with Sennacherib boasting on his cavalry in the speech his messengers address to Hezekiah, while at the same time aiming at Egypt (see 4 Kingdoms 19:23, 24),¹⁶ only to find out that “his horses were caught asleep,” an obvious pun on the drama narrated in 4 Kingdoms 19:35 and the Lord’s angel striking the king’s camp.¹⁷

A quite obvious comparison between Sennacherib and another “king” is found in Gregory of Nazianze’s *Contra Julianum*. Written in the aftermath of the dramatic death of the emperor Julian “the Apostate,” and preserved as Discourses 4 and 5 among the works of Gregory, the *Contra Julianum* constitutes a twofold invective against the deceased emperor.¹⁸ In *Or.* 4.110, Julian is criticised for trying to lure the Christians into giving up their faith, just as Sennacherib’s chief officer Rab-shakeh tried in vain to convince the populace to give up the city of Jerusalem (4 Kingdoms 19:23).¹⁹ The comparison is somewhat more developed, but basically identical, in *Or.* 5.26 when Gregory likened the efforts of Julian to Sennacherib’s failed attempts, and Christian resistance to the emperor to the city and the walls of Jerusalem (“We who have left as our army, our walls and our defence nothing else but our hope in God”). He further described the faithful, in good rhetorical mood, as “God’s great heritage, the holy people, and the royal priesthood,” gained their reward by becoming victims of the emperor’s foolish actions. It would have been a most undeserved

¹⁴ Text in J. Ziegler, *Eusebius Werke. Neunter Band. Der Jesajakommentar*, GCS 56 (1975), 147, 231, 246.

¹⁵ PG 29, 345.

¹⁶ Basil has noted the hint, as is clear from his citing Deut. 15:1 right after the reference to Sennacherib.

¹⁷ The comparison with Egypt reminds one of how Herodotus (*Hist.* 2.141) tells the (obviously legendary) story of the king’s shameful downfall when campaigning in Egypt after mice destroyed the bowstrings of his soldiers. See Blenkinsopp, *Interpretations*, 36.

¹⁸ See J. Bernardi, *Grégoire de Nazianze. Discours 4–5 Contre Julien*, SC 309 (Paris, 1983), 33: “Le deuxième discours stigmatise le sort de l’apostat comme le premier critiquait sa vie.”

¹⁹ Text in *Ibid.*, 266.

fate for a people that had originally contributed to save the emperor's life (5.27).²⁰ This was an allusion (similarly, *Or.* 4.3; 4.21; 4.91) to the fact that Christians had helped Julian and Gallus escape from the massacre of the imperial family that followed the death of Constantine. The two passages presented here are not the only ones in which Julian was likened to an Assyrian king. In 5.3, he has the dubious honour of being compared to Jeroboam, Achab, Pharaoh, and Nebuchadnezzar, all at the same time, with the last one being cited in his capacity as a temple robber (N. τὴν ἱεροσυλίαν, πάντων ὁμοῦ τὴν ἀσέβειαν).²¹

Athanasius (d. 373) and Didymus the Blind (d. 398)

A list of a rather different character and purpose is cited in Athanasius' *De incarnatione verbi* (36.3). In identifying the "king" who came to power "before he could name his father or mother" (Isaiah 8:4), Athanasius asks the reader which Jewish king can claim this privilege, as well as the honour of being expected by all nations. Quite to the contrary, Athanasius continues, answering his own question, the nations and their kings have always been hostile to Israel and Jerusalem. What follows is a long list of all those who have attempted to attack and seize the land and the city; of the Jewish kings who fought foreign invaders (David, Josiah, and Hezekiah facing Sennacherib); and of foreigners resisting Jewish leaders such as Moses and Joshua.²² A relatively harmless reference to Sennacherib occurs in the *Letter to Marcellinus*, in which Athanasius deals with the interpretation and significance of the Psalms. In order to illustrate that the Psalms not only contain songs but can occasionally "switch genre" and mediate legal material (Psalms 33:15), he compares it to the Pentateuch and the Prophets, and cites Daniel's Susannah and Isaiah 36–37 as evidence of how a prophet at times can "write history" (ἱστορεῖν ποτε).²³

A variant form of this latter comment occurs in what seems to be an isolated excursus in Didymus the Blind's *Commentary on Zechariah* (at Zechariah 1:8) who presents Isaiah as a prophet, legislator, historian, and poet, citing an example for each of these qualities, with the Sennacherib

²⁰ Ibid., 344.

²¹ Ibid., 298.

²² Text in C. Kannengiesser, *Sur l'Incarnation du Verbe*, SC 199 (1973), 392–94.

²³ Text in PG 27, 20. The *Synopsis Scripturae sacrae* that figures in PG 28 under the name of Athanasius is a dubium. It refers to Sennacherib in summarising the contents of 4 Kingdoms (28, 20 and 324) and the book of Isaiah (364).

episode as an illustration of the third category.²⁴ More typical is the reference in the *Commentary on the Psalms* to Sennacherib's address to the representatives of Hezekiah in 4 Kingdoms 18:33–35 (cf. Isaiah 36:19) asking them how the Lord will save the city, to illustrate what is asked in Psalms 41:4: "Where is your God?"²⁵

SENNACHERIB AND THE ANTIOCHENES

Diodore of Tarsus (d. before 394)

Diodore mentions Sennacherib several times in his *Commentary on the Psalms*, probably composed sometime in the 370's,²⁶ not limiting himself to a mere passing reference. As a matter of fact, a good number of Psalms are consistently explained by him with reference to king Hezekiah, which is well in line with the 'historicising' interpretation with which he rightly has been credited.²⁷ I will keep to those Psalms in which Sennacherib is mentioned. He is first named in Psalm 13. The rationale for explaining the Psalm in an historicising way is found in the opening words: indeed, εἰς τὸ τέλος means that what is said here will sometime be realised, as Diodore informs the reader on this and other occasions.²⁸ The choice of the Sennacherib episode illustrates that the event it tells continued to impress, chosen over other passages which could have been quoted for the same

²⁴ Text in J. Doutreleau, *Sur Zacharie*, SC 83 (1962), 206. The excursus, which also mentions David in this regard, is not really connected with anything that is said in the verse that is commented upon.

²⁵ Text in M. Gronewald, *Didymus der Blinde. Psalmenkommentar V*, Papyrologische Texte und Abhandlungen 12 (Bonn, 1970), 50.

²⁶ The battle for the authenticity of this Commentary seems now to be won by those who defend it. See the discussion in the edition of J.-M. Olivier, *Diodorus Tarsensis Commentarii in Psalmos I*, CCSG 6 (Turnhout: 1980), ciii–cvi. The Greek citations are from this edition. The English translation is taken from R. C. Hill, *Diodore of Tarsus: Commentary on Psalms 1–51*, SBL Writings from the Greco-Roman World 9 (Atlanta, 2005).

²⁷ See on this, both with regard to Diodore and to Theodore, M.-J. Rondeau, *Les Commentaires patristiques du Psautier (III^e–V^e siècle)*. II. *Exégèse prosopologique et théologique*, OCA 220 (Rome, 1985), 276, 304 and passim. In much more detail, F. Thome, *Historia contra Mythos. Die Schriftauslegung Diodors von tarsus und Theodors von Mopsuestia im Widerstreit zu Kaiser Julians und Salustius' allegorischen Mythenverständnis*, Hereditas 24 (Bonn, 2004), esp. 84–119 (Diodore) and 124–49 (Theodore). On the clash with Cyril and their condemnation later on, see most recently, J. Behr, *The Case Against Diodore and Theodore. Texts and Their Contexts* (Oxford, 2011), 66–82, on biblical scholarship and exegetical method.

²⁸ "Εἰς τὸ τέλος" ἀντὶ τοῦ εἰς ὑστέρους χρόνους ἀποβήσεται (Olivier, *Diodorus Tarsensis*, 73; Hill, *Diodore of Tarsus*, 41).

purpose. Diodore in any case does his best to link the Psalm as much as possible to the campaign. The fool's οὐκ ἔστιν θεός in 13:1 is explained with reference to Sennacherib's messengers challenging the court officials. It can mean that God does not exist, or that he "does not look after his own" as Diodore notes,²⁹ which is indeed closer to the way Rab-shakeh, the chief officer speaking for the delegation, formulates it in 4 Kingdoms 18:30, 33 (2 Chronicles 32:14; Isaiah 36:18, 20). The latter is said to have been an apostate from Judaism, "as the story goes" (ὡς ὁ λόγος ἔχει), but of course such a "story" cannot be confirmed: the phrase is a stock expression referring to oral tradition. Still, it certainly adds to the shaming and insolence of the chief officer that he speaks as a fool and that he is said "to have surpassed everyone in godlessness."³⁰

Diodore further marvels at the gift of David not only to prophesy the events of the future, but even to look into a man's heart (see 13:1). He dwells on the consequences of such a foolish attitude and has of course noticed that the final line of v. 1 (as indeed also vv. 2–3a) are cited by Paul in Romans 3:11–12. Paul understood these words as referring "in general [to] all human beings," but that does not disturb Diodore in his historicising reading, understanding that Paul, in good rhetorical tradition (lit.: "a literary characteristic," ἰδιώμα γὰρ ἐστὶν γραφικόν), was merely generalising what originally was meant to be a specific reference. Diodore was familiar with the coda in v. 3 (as was Theodore after him), which actually reproduces the continuation of Romans 3:13–18. He has a word to say on each element of the extra passage, and once more refers to Rab-shakeh's deluded speech, specifically to 4 Kingdoms 18:31 (cited in part when explaining v. 3d ταῖς γλώσσαις αὐτῶν ἐδολιούσαν). The difficult v. 4, with the bread metaphor, is particularly apt to express the fate awaiting the Jews when taken captive ("[our enemies] wish to treat us like a meal of bread," as Diodore paraphrases it), especially in light of the promises made by Rab-shakeh in 18:32. The fate of those "fearless" enemies is described in v. 5a and explained as a reference to the punishment the Lord's angel brought on Sennacherib and his army (4 Kingdoms 19:35). They should have known that the Lord stands with his righteous (v. 5b), and that He is the hope of the poor, by which was meant Hezekiah's intention not to take up arms against the enemy but instead to rely on prayer: "you (i.e.,

²⁹ ἢ μὴ εἶναι θεόν, ἢ μὴ προνοεῖν τῶν οικείων (Olivier, *Diodorus Tarsensis*, 73; Hill, *Diodore of Tarsus*, 42).

³⁰ πάντας εἰς ἀσέβειαν ὑπερεβάλετο (*ibid.*).

the enemies) are in a position to know that by hoping in God, he does what is deserving not of shame but of understanding and restoration.”³¹ Sennacherib and his company would have known better had they read this Psalm!

Psalms 19 and 20 are to be read as a diptych, as Diodore introduces his comment; the first part expressing the people's fear and distress in the face of the threat of Sennacherib's army and the second shouting out the joy upon hearing of the enemy's fate.³² The psalmist's "day of tribulation" (19:2) picks up "the actual words of Hezekiah" (αὐτὰς τὰς φωνὰς τέθεικε Δαυεΐδ) upon hearing the messengers' speech (4 Kingdoms 19:3).³³ Diodore smoothly connected to this the second part of Hezekiah's address to Isaiah, about the birth pangs (19:3). To Diodore, it looked as if good David had already taught the king and his court what they would have to say on that ominous day. As Diodore explained it, the reference to "the God of Jacob" in Psalm 19:2b was meant to emphasise that He was the God the Assyrians were mocking when they called into question whether the Lord would ever be able to help his people (4 Kingdoms 18:33–35); help was guaranteed for those who had zealously kept to the temple cult (so v. 4); and what else could a king's heart desire, but the "the toppling of the enemy and the victory of his own?" (so Diodore on v. 5).³⁴ Great joy there would be, as prophesied in vv. 6–7. It is a most fortunate thing the Psalm at the end also mentions chariots and horses (v. 8) and concludes with another prayer (v. 10), for the former was what the Assyrians in vain had relied upon (cf. 4 Kingdoms 19:23) and the latter was what Hezekiah did after receiving the messengers' letter in 4 Kingdoms 19:15. The "fit" is so remarkable that one might well see how these elements convinced Diodore to explain also this Psalm in light of the Sennacherib episode.

And it also works for the following Psalm, though perhaps less well and mainly dependent on the preceding one. The king's joy is expressed in Psalm 20:2, but it is not further linked to the episode itself.³⁵ But by v. 5 we are on track again: the king pleading for (his) life was, by Diodore's argument, a reference to the illness that befell him as punishment (4 Kingdoms 20:1), and the generous gift of extra time an allusion to the

³¹ Ibid., 44; Olivier, *Diodorus Tarsensis*, 77.

³² Ibid., 118; Hill, *Diodore of Tarsus*, 64–65.

³³ Ibid., 65; Olivier, *Diodorus Tarsensis*, 119.

³⁴ Τί δὲ εἶχεν ἕτερον ἢ βουλή τοῦ Ἐζεκίου ἢ τὸ πεσεῖν μὲν τοὺς πολεμίους, νικῆσαι δὲ τοὺς οἰκείους (ibid., 120); Hill, *Diodore of Tarsus*, 65.

³⁵ 4 Kingdoms does not mention such thing as the crowning in v. 4, but it actually is a mere metaphor (so Diodore, thereby anticipating any such criticism).

fact that the man was granted an additional fifteen years of life (20:5). The fortunate outcome of the siege was to add to Hezekiah's glory in eternity (Psalms 20:7), while the harsh words of Psalms 20:10–11 could easily be transposed to Sennacherib and his offspring. And the same seemed true for Diodore about the failed plan in 20:12b and the enemies having to flee in 20:13. The Lord's wrath did not stop there, but pursued the fugitives, as when the king was murdered by his own sons and which Diodore, quite ingeniously, wants us to read in v. 13b.³⁶ But I guess by now the reader was already supposed to have been prepared to buy everything that might link this Psalm to Sennacherib and Hezekiah.

Psalm 32 does not carry a title beyond a mere "For David," but for Diodore this did not present a problem as it seemed clear from the text itself that it was about Hezekiah and his victory of the Assyrians.³⁷ The preceding and the following chapters had also dealt with this topic, and Diodore probably saw no reason not to explain this Psalm from the same perspective. Yet in this case, it would seem, such a decision was based on circumstantial rather than on "hard" evidence. The expression of joy in 32:1–3 is rather too general to be specifically linked to Hezekiah, but apparently Diodore did not feel it posed a problem. The same was true for vv. 4–9, for which he interpreted "the word of the Lord" in vv. 4 and 6 as referring to his verdict against the Assyrians. Maybe some argument could be made from v. 10 ("the Lord frustrates nations' plans")—and Diodore does not fail to do so (as "the plans of the Assyrians"). Verses 11–15 are again too general in character, and so is the rest, but it did not trouble Diodore who confidently identified the king with great power of v. 16 as "hinting at Sennacherib" (ἵνα τὸν Σενααχηρείμ αἰνίξῃται).³⁸ Once more, it seems, he is saved by the horses. Verse 17's "worthless a horse for safety" offers the key: obviously, for Diodore, this was about the Assyrians boasting about their horses (4 Kingdoms 18:23; Isaiah 36:8), only to find out that cavalry is useless if one is defying the Lord. Additional evidence was found in the reference to famine in v. 19, which Diodore "naturally" explained in light of the upcoming siege³⁹ (cf. 4 Kingdoms 18:27), even though Isaiah's address to the king is quite reassuring in this regard (see 4 Kingdoms 19:29).

³⁶ Οὕτω γὰρ ἐγένετο· φυγῶν ὁ Ἀσσύριος ἄχρι τῆς αὐτοῦ πόλεως καὶ εἰσελθὼν προσκυνῆσαι τὸν ἴδιον θεόν, ὅτε ἐνόμισεν ἐν ἀσφαλείᾳ εἶναι, τότε ὑπὸ τῶν ἰδίων ἐσφάγη τέκνων (Olivier, *Diodorus Tarsensis*, 126); Hill, *Diodore of Tarsus*, 68–69.

³⁷ Καὶ ὁ τριακοστὸς δεύτερος τῆς κατὰ τὸν Ἐζεκιάν ὑποθέσεως ἔχεται (Olivier, *Diodorus Tarsensis*, 186); Hill, *Diodore of Tarsus*, 98.

³⁸ Olivier, *Diodorus Tarsensis*, 191; Hill, *Diodore of Tarsus*, 103.

³⁹ Olivier, *Diodorus Tarsensis*, 192; Hill, *Diodore of Tarsus*, 103.

Diodore did not mind: Psalm 47 is again explained in light of the victory over Sennacherib, who is mentioned by name in the comment on v. 5, even though the verse speaks of kings in the plural. Diodore duly notes this, and then continues, “actually, one king advanced on [Jerusalem] at that time, Sennacherib, but as I said, it refers as kings to all the high and mighty ones advancing.”⁴⁰ The explanation might not impress the modern reader, and for the rest, there is even less to go on. Diodore does not play out the phrase “the great king” in v. 3, referring to God, against the claims and aspirations of the Assyrian king, nor does he seem to care (or missed the opportunity) to point, in coming across the “woman in labour” in Psalms 47:7, to Hezekiah’s distress as described in 4 Kingdoms 19:3. “The ships of Tarshish” smashed by the wind in v. 8, however, formed the basis for an all too easy and rather unspecific metaphor for “the Babylonians” being crushed, but again Diodore did not care. That v. 9a reflects the viewpoint of Hezekiah works only for one who is prepared to read the Psalm in this perspective, and even then the link is not impressive.

Hezekiah really plays a secondary role, and only when his prayer for life is called in to illustrate what was meant by “God established it [Jerusalem] forever” in Psalm 47:9d. This should of course not be taken too literally, Diodore notes, for we all know that Jerusalem was besieged and destroyed by other enemies later on. It is to be read as hyperbole: it is a well-known phenomenon in Scripture “to call temporary things eternal,” as the Psalmist also does in 20:5, which Diodore paraphrases, quite loosely, as, “He [i.e., Hezekiah] asked life of you, and you gave him length of days forever,” though actually the king was only given an additional fifteen years. Maybe one should conclude that Diodore after all seems to have realised that the application did not work too well in this instance, for after v. 9 any link to Hezekiah or the Assyrians is lacking and this whole line of interpretation seems to have faded away.

Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428)

Theodore mentions Sennacherib four times in his *Commentary on the Twelve Prophets*. He is referred to in the Prologue to the commentary on Hosea in a historical note introducing the prophet as Sennacherib’s contemporary, but strangely Theodore mixes things up and also makes

⁴⁰ ἐπει κατὰ τὸ ἀληθές εἰς βασιλεὺς ἐπήλθεν αὐτῇ τὸ τρικαῦτα, ὁ Σενααχηρείμ, ἀλλ’ ὅπερ εἶπον, πάντας τοὺς ἐπελθόντος βασιλεῖς καλεῖ ὡς δυνατούς; Olivier, *Diodorus Tarsensis*, 286–87; Hill, *Diodore of Tarsus*, 152.

Sennacherib the conqueror of the Northern kingdom, adding that this had been announced already by David (τῶν Ἀσσυρίων αὐτάς [i.e., αἱ δέκα φυλαί] πολιορκούντων ἄχρις οὗ παντελῶς αὐτάς τῶν οἰκείων τόπων ὁ Σενναχηρείμ ἀφελῶν εἰς ἄλλοτρίους μετώκισε τόπους).⁴¹ The reference to the same Assyrian king in the Prologue to the commentary on Nahum serves more or less the same purpose, but this time Theodore links to it the failed campaign against Jerusalem and Sennacherib's shameful death at the hands of his sons as related in 4 Kingdoms 19:35–37.⁴² In this regard, the second Prologue in a sense complements the first one.

If in these two cases he is the only one of the Assyrian kings to be mentioned, he gets company in the commentary on Joel. In the introduction, Joel is made the contemporary of Hosea, maybe as a result of the fact that Theodore places him second after Hosea.⁴³ Sennacherib is one of four kings to be mentioned in connection with the disasters announced in Joel 1:4, representing the “young locust” over against his predecessors Tiglath-Pileser and Shalmaneser, whereas “the Babylonian king” (Nebuchadnezzar) represents the blight, and made responsible for the fall of Samaria (the ten tribes).⁴⁴ But such disasters can be escaped if only one trusts in God, as Theodore continues to explain in commenting on 2:1,

⁴¹ Text in PG 66, 124. Translation in R. C. Hill, *Theodore of Mopsuestia. Commentary on the Twelve Prophets*, Fathers of the Church 108 (Washington, D.C., 2004), 37: “the Assyrians besieging them to the point where Sennacherib completely removed them from their own places and transported them to other places.” On the historical note as such, see *ibid.*, 20–21 and 37 n. 2: “a blind spot,” “or did Antioch’s text read ‘Sennacherib?’” at 4 Kingdoms 17:1–6 (and/or 4 Kingdoms 18:9–12), for which there actually is no indication. The verb μετώκισε is a good way to bring together the double ἀπόκισεν . . . καὶ κατώκισεν of the LXX at 17:6.

⁴² ἀλλὰ γὰρ εὐθὺς μὲν βαρυτάτην αὐτοῖς διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου τὴν πληγὴν ἐπήγαγεν ὁ θεός, τρέψας δὲ τοὺς λοιποὺς εἰς φυγὴν πολυτρόποις περιβέβληκε τοῖς κακοῖς· καὶ τὸ τελευταῖον ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκείας χώρας γεγονῶς μετὰ πολλῆς τῆς ἀτιμίας Σενναχηρείμ ὁ τότε τῶν Ἀσσυρίων βασιλεὺς τὴν ὑπὸ τῶν ἰδίων υἰῶν ὑπομεμένηκε σφαγὴν (PG 66, 400; Hill, *Theodore*, 246: “In fact, God immediately inflicted a severe blow on them by means of the angel, putting the rest to flight and investing them with troubles of many kinds; finally, while in his own country, Sennacherib, king of the Assyrians at the time, fell to the sword of his own sons”).

⁴³ So Hill, *Theodore*, 104 n. 4. This assimilation of the two prophets is not accepted by modern commentators. Text in PG 66, 212; transl. Hill, *Theodore*, 104.

⁴⁴ ἐπ’ ἐκείνοις Σενναχηρείμ βρούχου δίκην κοινὸν ἀφανισμόν ἐπάγων ταῖς δέκα φυλαῖς Ἰσραήλ (PG 66, 213; transl. Hill, *Theodore*, 105: “after them Sennacherib, like a young locust wreaking general destruction on the twelve tribes of Israel”). Again this is not how modern commentators interpret this verse, who instead of Theodore’s figurative reading, “prefer to find a real locust plague described” (*ibid.*, 105 n. 7). Theodore’s interpretation of the locusts and the blight has found an echo in Isho’dad of Merv: see C. Van den Eynde, *Commentaire d’Iso’dad de Merv sur l’Ancien Testament. IV. Isaïe et les Douze*, CSCO 303 (Leuven, 1969), 78–79; transl. in A. Ferreiro, *The Twelve Prophets*, ACCS OT 14 (Downers Grove, IL, 2003), 60 (there also on Theodore). On the influence of Theodore on Isho’dad in this and other

thereby doubtless playing on the reference to Mount Zion in this verse (and in 4 Kingdoms 19:31), and once more referring to the disastrous outcome of the king's Judea campaign: τοῦτο γὰρ δὴ καὶ προσγεγονός ἐπι τοῦ Σενναχηρείμ' Ἐζεκίου βασιλεύοντος τῆς Ἰουδαίας τοῖς περὶ τὸν τόπον ἐκεῖνον οἰκοῦσιν, εὗροι τις ἄν προδῆλως.⁴⁵ Victory and defeat were each other's companion, so it seems.

Theodoret of Cyr (d. ca. 466)

Theodoret is the third hero of the great Antiochene tradition, and the one who in a sense also brought it to an end. It remains debated whether he ever was a formal pupil of Theodore, but his exegesis is rooted in the same interest for the historical-philological, without giving up on the allegorical.⁴⁶ The references to Sennacherib's campaign are numerous and they are found in several of Theodoret's commentaries.⁴⁷ Most of his commentaries were composed in the thirties and forties of the fifth century. An absolute order of these works is difficult to reconstruct, but it is possible to establish a relative order on the basis of some indications in his own work about previous publications. His commentaries on the Song of Songs, Daniel, Ezekiel, and the Twelve Prophets, for instance, all preceded the major one on the Psalms. Here I will address references to Sennacherib found in no fewer than eight of Theodoret's works: the *Quaestiones in Octateuchum*, his commentaries on *Daniel*, on *Ezekiel*, on *the Twelve Prophets*, on *Psalms*, on *Isaiah*, on *Jeremiah*, and finally in his *Church History*.

The *Quaestiones in Octateuchum*, in which Theodoret explains a great number of obscure passages, cannot be dated with any certainty. The king is mentioned twice. In dealing with how (or why) Scripture mentions "good luck" (*QGen* 88 διὰ τί ἡ γραφὴ μέμνηται τύχης;), Theodoret cites Leah's εὐτύχηα in Genesis 30:11 and draws a parallel between Pharaoh rejection of Moses' message to let the Hebrews leave Egypt and

instances, see Van den Eynde, *ibid.*, CSCO 304, xii–xvii. For a critique from Theodoret, see below n. 65.

⁴⁵ PG 66, 220; Hill, *Theodore*, 110.

⁴⁶ On Theodoret as biblical scholar, see esp. J.-N. Guinot, *L'exégèse de Théodoret de Cyr*, *Théologie historique* 100 (Paris, 1995); *ibid.*, *Théodoret de Cyr exégète et théologien* (Paris, 2012): two volumes of collected essays, several of which are on Theodoret. See also G. W. Ashby, *Theodoretus of Cyrrhus as Exegete of the Old Testament* (Grahamstown, 1972).

⁴⁷ On the role of Ashur and Babylon in Theodoret's oeuvre, see Guinot, *L'exégèse*, 381–93, and the general comment in the opening lines of this section: "Il est peu de prophéties dont le commentaire n'amène l'exégète à faire référence à l'empire d'Assur ou à celui de Babylone" (p. 381).

Sennacherib's threat to Jerusalem, citing (one after another) Exodus 5:2 and a combination of 4 Kingdoms 19:10 and its parallel in Isaiah 37:10. He emphasizes that these were not the words of holy men, but of pagans and that they were recorded for the sake of "writing history" (ἄτε δὴ ἱστορίαν συγγράφων). Pharaoh's words are said to have been those "of a wicked king" and are opposed to such words that are divinely inspired (ἀλλ' οὐ τοῦ θεοῦ πνεύματος οὗτος ὁ λόγος, ἀλλὰ τοῦ δυσσεβοῦς βασιλέως). Though left unsaid, the qualification no doubt also applies to his Assyrian counterpart, and both are termed allies "in blasphemy," which is to be condemned under all circumstances (ἀλλ' οὐ βλασφημεῖν ἐντεῦθεν μανθάνομεν ἀλλὰ βλασφημίας κατηγορεῖν).⁴⁸ It shows the importance given to the motif of the "boasting Sennacherib," and also how it was to be interpreted in light of what happened to Pharaoh.

In commenting on 4 Kingdoms 18–19 in the same work, Theodoret shows a special interest in explaining why Hezekiah at first did not pay taxes to Sennacherib, but then resolved to do so and even to take gold from the Temple treasure for this purpose. Hezekiah is first compared to his father Achaz, who called upon Tiglath-Pileser to protect him from the king of Damascus (*Q4Kings* 51).⁴⁹ Then it is explained in *Q4Kings* 52 that the king took the right decision in order to prevent greater damage: he even breaks out the doorposts (for that is what the word means, adds Theodoret in one of his typical comments.⁵⁰ The whole question focuses on Hezekiah's wise decision (see the repeated qualification ὁ σοφώτατος βασιλεύς). Theodoret cites at large from the account in 4 Kingdoms, including the king's prayer in 19:15–18 and his opponent's fatal return home (ὁ δὲ Σενναχηρίμ τὸν θάνατον διέφυγεν), where he met his "just fate" (τὴν δικαίαν πληγὴν) for his blasphemies, which are now labelled *δυσσεβεῖς*, hence introducing an

⁴⁸ N. Fernández Marcos and A. Sáenz-Badillos, *Theodoretī Cyrensis Quaestiones in Octateuchum. Edition Critica*, Textos y Estudios "Cardenal Cisneros" 17 (Madrid, 1979), 78–79. Translation in R. C. Hill, *Theodoretus of Cyrus. The Questions on the Octateuch*, I, The Library of Early Christianity 1 (Washington, D.C., 2007), 173: "From this we learn, not to blaspheme, but to condemn blasphemy," and see the comment in n. 1: "Though Leah and her father did not deliberately oppose God, their remarks seem to him as reprehensible as those made by God's avowed enemies, the Pharaoh of the Exodus and Sennacherib." I am not sure the author really wants to push the parallel so far as to put Leah completely on the same line with the two enemy-kings. Rather the point is that Scripture does record such words only to illustrate how unbelievers speak.

⁴⁹ Marcos and Sáenz-Badillos, *Theodoretī Cyrensis*, 231.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 231–35, here p. 232: τοὺς σταθμοὺς τῶν θυρῶν. Τοῦτους γὰρ ἐστηριγμένα οἶμαι κληθῆναι, cf. 4 Kingdoms 18:16, ἵνα μὴ πολέμῳ κρατήσας ὁ Σενναχηρίμ, καὶ τὸν ναὸν καὶ τὴν πόλιν ἐμπρήσῃ.

echo of the reference to Sennacherib in *QGen*.⁵¹ In the commentary on 2 Chronicles 32, the king is mentioned once when citing v. 1. The point and purpose of the whole episode, retold in some detail, is briefly but aptly summarised right after the quotation of 32:1: all this happened because God wishes to test even the pious ones.⁵²

There are four references to Sennacherib in the *Commentary on Daniel*, written around 433 C.E.⁵³ The comment on Nebuchadnezzar's blasphemous rage against the three young captives in Daniel 3:15 almost naturally brings to mind, or so it is presented by Theodoret, Sennacherib's blasphemy, itself recalled by a long quotation from Isaiah 37:10–13 and a reference to his defeat and violent death, regarded as the fulfilment of the very words the king had uttered against God as being unable to stop him (ἐπειδὴ γὰρ κατὰ τοῦ Ποιητοῦ τὴν γλῶτταν ἐκίνησε, δέχεται τὴν σφαγὴν παρὰ ἀνθρώπων οὐς ἐγέννησεν).⁵⁴ The terrible fate of the Assyrian hardly impresses the Babylonian king, Theodoret continues, and so he too is confronted with God-sent powers—through no angel this time, as with Sennacherib, but three young captives who would withstand his claims.⁵⁵ There is another double-mention in the comment on Daniel 4:1, which inspires Theodoret to a long passage on the power of Ashur-Babylon—as usual, the two were identical for him, and Nebuchadnezzar's reign was merely the continuation of Sennacherib's—and to an extensive quotation from Isaiah 10:5–16 to the effect that these rulers and their empires were tools in the hands of God, though it was only Nebuchadnezzar who was finally able to subdue Jerusalem.⁵⁶

The *Commentary on Ezekiel* mentions Sennacherib on more than one occasion. A first mention is found right at the beginning, in the Preface,

⁵¹ Ibid. The echo is strengthened by the fact that Theodoret also picks up the motif of the ill-inspired king in 19:7, which he further illustrates with a quotation from 2 Tim. 1:7 that functions as its counterpart.

⁵² Ibid., 294: Δηλοῖ δὲ ὁ λόγος ὅτι καὶ τοὺς θεοσεβεῖς ἀνδρας δοκιμάζων ὁ τῶν ὄλων Θεός, συμφοραῖς περιπεσεῖν συγχωρεῖ, εἴτα ἐπικουρῶν διαλύει τὰ σκυθρωπά. It is formulated a bit differently later on by quoting Luke 14:11.

⁵³ See R. C. Hill, *Theodoret of Cyrus. Commentary on Daniel*, Writings from the Greco-Roman World 7 (Atlanta, 2005), xiv.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 72–73: “the words he directed against the creator were fulfilled in his execution by people he had begotten.” I would not reckon this passage as an instance of confusion between the two kings (*pace* *ibid.*, 73 n. 76).

⁵⁵ Ibid., 72 and also xxx, on the motif of the captives' youth, which is hard to fit in with their residing at the court for a long time already: “Theodoret is not for spoiling a good story with the facts, for all his commitment to ἱστορία.”

⁵⁶ Ibid., 102–104. On these two passages and how they are interconnected, see Guinot, *L'exégèse*, 382 n. 242.

in a brief overview of Jewish history. Here are listed the four foreign kings that threatened and conquered Israel. Sennacherib was the third of these, and his campaign and its fatal outcome are told in some detail, paraphrasing the biblical account, but with the notable exception that Sennacherib is also said to have led many Judeans into exile, which is rather what was said to occur under Nebuchadnezzar.⁵⁷ The oracle against Egypt in Ezekiel 29, with its reference to the rod of reed in v. 6, its downfall in v. 7, and Nebuchadnezzar at the end in vv. 17–21, were considered sufficient grounds for introducing Sennacherib as the one given the power to subdue Egypt, further illustrated by a quotation from Isaiah 36:6 in which the same image of the rod is used.⁵⁸

The next mention follows shortly after in the comment on Ezekiel 31:3. Pharaoh is criticized for likening himself to mighty Ashur, and the end of the verse is compared to Sennacherib's boast that not even God could protect Jerusalem from him (freely citing 4 Kingdoms 18:29) and to Nebuchadnezzar glorifying himself (Daniel 13:1ff). Haughtiness was their sin and haughty their behaviour.⁵⁹ The same words of the king are cited once more in commenting on Ezekiel 35:10 in the oracle against Mount Seir, cited for the same purpose of demonstrating arrogance.⁶⁰

Theodoret found another rather remarkable reference to Sennacherib in the oracle against Gog, in his comment on Ezekiel 38:14–16. Sennacherib's appearance on earth was to be proof of God's greatness. Such proof had become redundant by Theodoret's day, as he argued, since people had already been illuminated by the coming of Christ, but was very much needed in earlier days, as when God destroyed Sennacherib's army to demonstrate his power (then follows a citation of Psalms 75:2).⁶¹ Sennacherib here is given the (obviously dubious) honor of being staged

⁵⁷ καὶ πολλοὺς μετῴκισεν αἰχμαλώτους (PG 81, 812). The information on Sennacherib leading Judeans into exile would be in harmony with that king's own account, but of course there is no reason to think that Theodoret knew about this.

⁵⁸ Οὕτω καὶ ὁ Σενναχηρεῖμ παρὰ τῷ Ἡσαΐα τὴν Αἰγυπτίων βοήθειαν προσηγόρευσε, with the quote from Isaiah (PG 81, 1105).

⁵⁹ Κάνταυθα τοῖνον τὴν υπερήφανον αὐτοῦ γνώμην δι' αἰνιγμάτων ἐδήλωσε (PG 81, 1120).

⁶⁰ After citing 35:10, Theodoret continues, καὶ τοῖς τοῦ Σενναχηρεῖμ ἀλαζονικοῖς ἔοικε λόγοις, followed by the quotation from 4 Kingdoms. This time, Sennacherib occurs in the company, not of the king of Babylon, but of the Idumaeans, which fits the context, who likewise are said to have challenged the God of Israel.

⁶¹ Τὰ ἔθνη νῦν οὐ χρῆζει τοῦ Γῶγ εἰς διδασκαλίαν τοῦ τῶν ὅλων Θεοῦ· διὰ γὰρ τοῦ Δεσπότης Χριστοῦ τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν ταύτην ἐδέξατο. Πάλαι δέ, πρὸ τῆς τοῦ Κυρίου ἐνανθρωπήσεως, τῶν τοιούτων ἐδείτο θαυμάτων. καὶ γὰρ τοῦ Σενναχηρεῖμ ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ τὰς πολλὰς ἐκείνας ἀπώλεσαντος χιλιάδας, ἐπέγνω τὰ ἔθνη διὰ τοῦ θαύματος τὸν τῶν ἀπάντων Θεόν (PG 81, 1205).

as a kind of prefiguration of Gog himself. The parallel is continued in the final reference, in his comment on 39:11 about Gog's burial place, which was to be a mass grave, just as the one given to the army of Sennacherib slain by God.⁶²

The *Commentary on the Twelve Prophets* also contains a good number of references to Sennacherib. The first one is found in the prologue to Hosea. This prologue serves to situate the prophet called by God to instruct his people in the north and in the south, but indirectly, and most significantly, to illustrate that God's purpose in threatening is not so much to punish as to deter humankind from continuing to ignore or be forgetful about God. But of course rightful punishment cannot be avoided, and so it was that Hosea came both to announce rescue from the hands of Sennacherib and the downfall at the hands of the Babylonians.⁶³ The promise of divine help in Hosea 1:7 is illustrated, "most clearly," in the king's defeat by the angel of the Lord.⁶⁴ In a similar vein, God's promise in 10:11 to raise his hand against Ephraim but pass by Judah is illustrated from the same episode. Jacob's courage is exalted and interpreted in light of Hezekiah's withstanding the king's threat.⁶⁵ The source and format of this courage is not further explained, and one might wish to detect some tension between this more "political" interpretation and the "theological" one of 1:7, but that is obviously not the idea Theodoret wanted to convey. The king's courage is simply linked to God's intervention and purpose.

Theodoret is critical of "some" (see above on Theodore) who interpret the locusts of Joel 1:4 in the light of the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions, with Sennacherib as the third of these, and rather argues on the basis of what can be read in Amos (4:7), that this verse refers to real natural

⁶² Ἀναμνησκει δὲ αὐτοὺς διὰ τούτου τῆς ἐπὶ τοῦ Σενναχηρείμ γενομένης τῶν Ἀσσυρίων σφαγῆς· ὅτι καὶ τότε τῆς αὐτοῦ ἐπικουρίας ἀπήλαυσαν, καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα τῆς αὐτοῦ τεύξονται προμθείας (PG 81, 1212).

⁶³ τὴν τε ἐπὶ τοῦ Σενναχηρείμ γενησομένην σωτηρίαν προαγορεύσαι, καὶ τὸν ἐπὶ Βαβυλωνίων ἐπαχθισόμενον αὐτοῖς ἄλεθρον προσημῆναι (PG 81, 1553); "to predict the salvation that would be achieved in the time of Sennacherib and to signal in advance the destruction that would be inflicted on them under the Babylonians" (Ferreiro, *Twelve Prophets*, 2). On the order in which the various kings are mentioned in this sketch and elsewhere in Theodoret, see Guinot, *L'exégèse*, 384–85 and nn. 247–50.

⁶⁴ Σαφῶς δὲ διὰ τούτων ἐδήλωσεν κατὰ τὸν Σενναχηρείμ γεγεννημένα (PG 81, 1560).

⁶⁵ Ἀσσυρίοις γὰρ αὐτὸν οὐ προηήσομαι, ἀλλὰ τοῦ Σενναχηρείμ δαπανήσω τὴν δύναμιν, ἐπειδὴ ἐνισχύει αὐτῷ Ἰακώβ (τοῦ γὰρ Ἰακώβ τέως Ἰούδας τὴν ἀρετὴν ἐπιδείκνυται). διὸ καὶ τῆς ἐμῆς ἀπολαύει προνοίας. Αἰνιττεται δὲ διὰ τούτων τοῦ Ἐζεκίου τὴν ἀρετὴν, . . . (PG 81, 1608).

plagues.⁶⁶ The supplication in Joel 2:17, on the other hand, was without any difficulty or further explanation (apart perhaps from the fact that the genre itself recalls Hezekiah's prayer for help) be safely linked to the confrontation between the king of Assyria and his opponent in Jerusalem.⁶⁷

Sennacherib is also referred to in a number of other books. The phrase κατέναντι φυλῆς ("before a tribe") in Amos 3:12, in combination or in contrast with Samaria, reminds Theodoret of Judea's heroic resistance and Sennacherib's ignominious defeat.⁶⁸ The prologue to Jonah offers an opportunity to draw a sketch of Israel's history and confrontation with foreign powers, including Sennacherib. This one is much broader than the one that is found in the prologue to Hosea, for it also makes reference to the "Macedonians," before turning to the greatness of Ashur.⁶⁹ The reference to Judea and the gates of the city of Jerusalem in Micah 1:9, and especially also the mention of the lamentations of dragons and the mourning of the daughters of Sirens in v. 8, again reminds Theodoret of the Assyrian invaders and inspires him to a comment on the significance of myths.⁷⁰ Likewise, the mention of Lachis and Sion in 1:13 suffice for Theodoret to recall the Assyrian king marching off from the former city on his campaign into Judea, as well as his Babylonian counterpart who took the capital by storm.⁷¹ The prologue to Nahum contains yet one more reference to Sennacherib, as was the case also for Jonah, though this time its format is rather like that of the prologue to Hosea, limited to the old enemies from Ashur and Babylon and focusing on the theological issues involved.⁷² The evil words addressed at God of Nahum 1:11 are again easily connected with Sennacherib's blasphemy, which is told in some detail with reference to 4 Kingdoms and the account in Isaiah.⁷³ A final reference is found in the comment on the prophecy on Zerubbabel in Haggai 2:20–23. God

⁶⁶ 'Εγὼ δὲ ἀληθὴ μὲν ἠγοῦμαι καὶ ταῦτα ὑπολαμβάνω δὲ καὶ κατὰ τὸ ῥητὸν νονούμενα τῷ ὄντι γεγενῆσθαι (PG 81, 1636). On the contrast with Theodore, see Guinot, *Exégèse*, 668–669; cf. also M. Harl et al., *Les Douze Prophètes*, La Bible d'Alexandrie 23.4–9 (Paris, 1999), 37.

⁶⁷ 'Ενταῦθα μὲν οὖν σαθῶ, ἐδίδαξεν, ὅτι περὶ τοῦ Σενναχηρείμ ἡ ἱκετεία προσήγετο (PG 81, 1648).

⁶⁸ παραδηλοὶ ὡς ἡ τοῦ 'Ιούδα φυλὴ τέως ἀπίρατος μενεὶ τούτων τῶν κακῶν. 'Επελθὼν γὰρ τῇ 'Ιερουσαλὴμ ὁ Σενναχηρείμ μετ' αἰσχύνης ἐπανήλθε τὴν στρατιὰν ἀπολέσας (PG 81, 1681).

⁶⁹ PG 81, 1721.

⁷⁰ Sennacherib and his general learn the truth the hard way: τῇ πείρᾳ μεμάθηκεν, ὡς οὐδενὸς περιέσται μὴ βουλομένου θεοῦ... (and on v. 8): εἴρηκεν ἀπὸ τῶν ἐν τοῖς μύθοις περιφερομένων δεῖξαι τῆς ἀνίας τὴν ὑπερβολὴν βουληθείς (PG 81, 1745).

⁷¹ PG 81, 1748.

⁷² PG 81, 1788.

⁷³ οὕτω τῶν λογισμῶν αὐτοῦ τὴν ἀλαζονείαν γυμνοῖ (PG 81, 1793).

“shaking the sky, the sea, the earth and the dry land” inspires Theodoret to a vivid recollection of Sennacherib’s defeat.⁷⁴

More important still than the *Commentary on the Twelve* is the one on the Psalms. Psalm 13 is the first of a number of psalms that Theodoret proposes to read, as a whole, in the light of Sennacherib’s campaign against Judea and Jerusalem. To illustrate this, Theodoret gives a long summary account of the events recorded in 4 Kingdoms 18–19 and then comes back to it a couple of times. The first specific reference is found right at the beginning when the fool stating “there is no God” (v. 1) is identified as both Sennacherib and his Rab-shakeh blaspheming the God of Israel.⁷⁵ There follows an indirect reference to Sennacherib’s boasting and threatening to annihilate Judea in commenting on vv. 4–5.⁷⁶ This is further illustrated by repeating v. 2, taken as a reference to God speaking judgement “from above” against “the Assyrians” and is here combined with an indirect reference to Isaiah 40:22.⁷⁷

Psalm 19 is read by Theodoret as David’s foretelling of the events that would come to pass under Hezekiah. Theodoret again offers a brief summary, but this time he is particularly interested in the episode of “marvellous” Hezekiah receiving the “blasphemous” letter to surrender, which he “somewhat dramatizes” to explain v. 2, in the words of R. C. Hill.⁷⁸ The one element that could link the psalm to Sennacherib beyond the general motif of trust in God is the mention of chariots and horses in v. 4, which Theodoret merely paraphrases without even naming the name of king.

Sennacherib is not mentioned by name in the commentary on Psalm 28, but Hezekiah is when it is noted that the prophecy it contains can be explained by reference either to this king or to that other king, “the king

⁷⁴ οὐχ ἀπλῶς εἶρηκεν, ἀλλὰ τῆς ἐπὶ τοῦ Σενναχηρείμ εὐεργεσίας ἀναμνήσκει· καὶ γὰρ ἐκεῖνοις αἰφνίδιον ἐπαγαγὼν ὄλεθρον, ἅπασαν γῆν καὶ θάλατταν τοῦ φρικώδους ἐνέπλησε διηγήματος (PG 81, 1872).

⁷⁵ Σφόδρα τοῖς τοῦ Σενναχηρείμ καὶ τοῦ Ῥαψάκου λόγοις συμβαίνει τοῦ ψαλμοῦ τὸ προοίμιον (PG 80, 948). English in R. C. Hill, *Theodoret of Cyrus. Commentary on the Psalms. Psalms 1–72*, Fathers of the Church 101 (Washington, D.C., 2000), 107. There follows a long excursus on Hezekiah’s wise handling of the affair, which is put together from various manuscripts and may not be authentic (ibid., 107 n. 3).

⁷⁶ “. . . my people will not be easily taken by you, nor will you consume them like some bread for eating, since you despise my providence. . . For this reason, you who speak boldly and fear no one will experience fear and dread and take to flight” (ibid., 109; PG 80, 952).

⁷⁷ In v. 2 God is depicted “in human fashion, to show that he sent down punishment from heaven on the Assyrians” (Hill, *Theodoret of Cyrus*, 109); ἀνθρωπίνως ἐσχημάτισε, δεικνὺς ὡς οὐρανόθεν Ἀσσυρίοις τὴν τιμωρίαν κατέπεμψε (PG 80, 952).

⁷⁸ See ibid., 139 n. 1. Text in PG 80, 1000.

of us all.”⁷⁹ Theodoret is in for a daring enterprise here. He first proposes to read the invitation in v. 2 to worship the Lord “in his holy court” as a reference to Hezekiah’s exhortation to the people of Jerusalem to pray to God for protection, and the image of thunder in v. 3 as God’s punitive intervention against “the Assyrians.”⁸⁰ He then continues by arguing that this is only a mirror of what the psalm really wishes to express:

... but since the Old is a type of the New, come now, let us bring substance to the shadow and show the similarity: in one case a pious king, here Christ, the teacher of piety; there a people obedient to the one, here a people saved by the other; there war and destruction of Assyrians, here revolt and overthrow of demons.⁸¹

Hezekiah was like a messiah for his people, he argues, but the real Messiah was still to come. As one can expect from an author who takes his readers on such a journey, the thunder and the “many waters” of v. 3 do not pose much of an interpretive problem, for was it not God’s voice that was heard at Jesus’ baptism: so water and thunder at leisure!⁸²

The same “double reading” is applied to Psalm 32:10–11, read as a reference to God’s intervention against Sennacherib and against “the rebellions of the nations throughout the world against the apostles.”⁸³ This shows the importance that Christian readers had by now given to the Sennacherib episode, and impression it had made: what had once happened in Jerusalem now happened all over the world. Theodoret finds additional evidence for his explanation in the final words of v. 11: the phrase εἰς γενεάν και γενεάν is taken as referring to “both what happened then and what would come later.”⁸⁴ The king is mentioned once more in commenting on vv. 16–17 as an example of what the psalm says about vain

⁷⁹ PG 80, 1061; Hill, *Theodoret of Cyrus*, 181.

⁸⁰ Ibid. ‘Ο θαυμασίος Ἐζεκίας τῶν Ἀσσυρίων περιγινόμενος, καὶ τῷ παραδόξῳ τῆς νίκης ἐπαγαλλόμενος, παρακελεύεται τῷ λαῷ θυσίαις ἀμείβεσθαι τὸν Θεόν, καὶ ὕμνους αὐτῷ καὶ δοξολογίαν προσφέρειν, καὶ ἐν τῇ αὐτῷ τῆ ἀγία τὴν νενομισμένην λατρείαν ἐπιτελεῖν.

⁸¹ Ibid., 182; PG 80, 1064.

⁸² “Now, the verse forecasts the voice emanating from heaven at the Jordan” (Hill, *Theodoret of Cyrus*, 183); PG 80, 1064.

⁸³ Hill, *Theodoret of Cyrus*, 205; PG 80, 1097: οὐ γὰρ μόνον τῶν Ἀσσυρίων, καὶ τοῦ Σενναχηρείμ, καὶ τοῦ Ῥαψάκου διεσκέδασε τὰς βουλὰς... ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν κατὰ τὴν οἰκουμένην ἔθνῶν τὰς κατὰ τῶν ἀποστόλων ἐπαναστάσεις διέλυσε.

⁸⁴ Ibid.: δύο γενεῶν ἢ μνήμη διδάσκει καὶ τὰ τῆνικαῦτα γενόμενα, καὶ τὰ μετὰ ταῦτα ἐσόμενα.

power: “Sennacherib abounded in all of these, all to no avail, and instead he suffered ruin.”⁸⁵

Like modern commentators, Theodoret noticed the similarities between Psalms 13 and 52: “there is one theme for both: both condemn the blasphemies of Sennacherib and Rabshakeh, and forecast the destruction happening to the impious.”⁸⁶ In two ways, however, Theodoret goes beyond what can be found in modern commentaries. First, he seems to know the meaning of the mysterious *μαελεθ* in the title, citing Theodotion, Symmachus, and Aquila who all translate it as “in dance” or “dancing,” which he considers to be an apt rendering in view of the downfall of the Assyrian king: “That was the reason it had the title about dancing, which they performed who gained salvation and sang praise to God.” As elsewhere, he also bases his interpretation on the phrase “to the end” (*εις τὸ τέλος*) in the title, which he takes as an indication that the psalmist wishes the reader to connect it with future events: “‘To the end’ is also attached on account of the prophecy reaching fulfilment at a later time.”⁸⁷ Why this should have been Sennacherib is not argued as such. Second, Theodoret not only sees a link between this psalm and Psalm 13, but also with the immediately preceding one. It is a rather ingenuous interpretation, which brings together the arch-traitor Doeg (mentioned in the title) and that other famous traitor, Rab-shakeh, as Theodoret says at the beginning and repeatedly points out in reading the whole of the psalm from this double perspective.⁸⁸ Sennacherib’s general had been mentioned before, as a rule together with his master, but once at least also on his own and on the same level as Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar.⁸⁹ In the comment on Psalm 52,

⁸⁵ Hill, *Theodoret of Cyrus*, 206 and PG 80, 1100: ἐν τούτοις γὰρ ἄπασιν ὁ Σενναχηρεὶμ πλουτῶν, οὐδὲν ἐντεῦθεν ἀπάνατο, ἀλλὰ τὴν πανωλεθρίαν ἐδέξατο.

⁸⁶ Hill, *Theodoret of Cyrus*, 308; PG 80, 1260: καὶ γὰρ ἡ ὑπόθεσις ἀμφοτέρων μία. Τῆς γὰρ τοῦ Σενναχηρεὶμ καὶ τοῦ Ῥαψάκου βλασφημίας κατηγοροῦσιν ἀμφοτέροι, προθεσπιζουσι δὲ καὶ τὸν γεγενημένον τῶν δυσσεβῶν ἄλεθρον.

⁸⁷ Hill, *Theodoret of Cyrus*, 308; PG 80, 1260.

⁸⁸ See the first mention in the comment on the title itself: “It also contains at the same time a prophecy of the frenzy of Rabshakeh, who left the company of the Hebrews, then was taken captive and learned the impiety of the Assyrians who had reduced him to slavery; he used blasphemous words against God, and tried to cheat the Jewish populace with deceptive speeches” (Hill, *Theodoret of Cyrus*, 304); PG 80, 1253. I have less difficulties than Hill (*Theodoret of Cyrus*, 304 n. 3: “It is not immediately clear how Theodoret finds in the title a reference to that Rabshakeh”) has to see the reason for drawing the parallel: it is Doeg of course.

⁸⁹ See the comment on Ps. 11:3–4 and the forceful triple τοιοῦτος with which each of the three are introduced (PG 80, 944; Hill, *Theodoret of Cyrus*, 102–103). Hill regards this interest in Sennacherib’s general as remarkable and somewhat strange: “a fascination for

after having been mentioned together with the king in the introduction, it is again the general who is picked up to explain v. 6. Theodoret sticks with the reading ἀνθρωπαρέσκων, but also mentions the variant rendering by Aquila and Symmachus as παρεμβάλοντων περί σε (“those encamped around you”), which would fit his interpretation even better and may have played a role in identifying, almost as if it were the obvious, “the one who pleases men” with Rab-shakeh:

Now, you would not be wrong to see Rabshakeh referred to as pleasing human beings, since though springing from the Hebrews he hurled blasphemous words against the God of all with the intention of winning favour with the Assyrians.⁹⁰

And this is not the end of the story: there follows a jab at a much more recent event—the sorry apostasy of all those who left the church to follow the emperor Julian in his foolish campaign to restore paganism!⁹¹

Psalm 75 is the last psalm Theodoret reads with an eye on Sennacherib’s campaign, chiefly on the basis of the phrase πρὸς τὸν Ἀσσύριον in the title, though here he debates its use. Theodoret notes that the phrase does not occur in the Hexapla, though found “in some copies.” He thinks the addition can be defended on the basis of the contents of the psalm: “The psalm does contain this theme, however: it forecasts events involving Sennacherib and the punishment inflicted on the army.”⁹² While it is certainly possible to read the difficult text in such a perspective and the qualification as “forecast” allows for a certain degree of difference, it must be noted that there is no clear indication in the text that would link it to Sennacherib’s fate beyond the rather general reference to God’s

marginal figures,” pp. 19 and 168 n. 10 (on the mention of Mephibosheth in the comment on Ps. 24:22). But the psalmist displays the same kind of “fascination” for a secondary character as Doeg and in this case at least it is the general, not the king, who offers the parallel. As for the passage in Ps. 11, there may be an element of irony involved when the king is now replaced by his general to figure in the presence of these “truly great ones” as Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar.

⁹⁰ Hill, *Theodoret of Cyrus*, 310; PG 80, 1261–1264: οὐκ ἂν δέ τις ἀμάρτοι καὶ τὸν Ῥαψάκην ἀνθρωπαρέσκων ὀνομάσας . . .

⁹¹ “As some who also left God were abandoned by him—I mean in the time of Julian the Apostate, who ruled at the time” (Hill, *Theodoret of Cyrus*, 310), with Hill’s comment in n. 6: “Theodoret’s reference to it is a rare comment on circumstances of the period, though before his time”; PG 80, 1264.

⁹² R. H. Hill, *Theodoret of Cyrus. Commentary on the Psalms. Psalms 73–150*, Fathers of the Church 102 (Washington, D.C., 2001), 22. Ταύτην μέντοι ἔχει τὴν ὑπόθεσιν ὁ ψαλμός· τὰ γὰρ κατὰ τὸν Σενναχηρείμ προθεσπίζει, καὶ τὴν ἐπενεχθείσαν τῇ στρατιᾷ τιμωρίαν (PG 80, 1472).

punishment of the enemies' army in v. 4, which is certainly not how the story is told in 4 Kingdoms 19 or Isaiah 37. In view also of the difficulties with the textual transmission, Theodoret's may just be a "last-resort" interpretation,⁹³ though the tactic is a quite obvious and familiar one.⁹⁴

Theodoret's comments on Psalm 79:14 are a typical mix of allegory and "scientific" information. In vv. 9–13 Israel is compared to a vine that stands unprotected for passers-by to feed on. In v. 14, the latter are then identified as a forest boar or any sort of solitary wild beast. Actually, what the Psalm refers to (so Theodoret) is the whole series of Assyrian kings that ravaged Israel and Judea, which here also include Nebuchadnezzar, beside Shalmaneser and Sennacherib (τὰς διαφόρους τῶν Ἀσσυρίων ἐφόδους διὰ τούτων ἐδήλωσε).⁹⁵ He adds that the imagery is well-chosen, for boars like grapes and the latter king behaved particularly savagely. The interpretation fits rather well with the preceding, where the vine extending its branches is compared to Israel's expansion under David and Solomon, hence also introducing an historical dimension. This is the last substantial reference to Sennacherib and would be a "worthy" ending.

But the truly last mention of Sennacherib in the *Commentary on Psalms* follows in the comment on Psalm 118:21, about God rebuking the haughty. These are many: Absalom and Saul are among them from the Jewish side, as are the usual trio of Pharaoh, Sennacherib, and Nebuchadnezzar, καὶ ἕτεροι μῦθοι. They are all said to be suffering from "the disease of haughtiness."⁹⁶ The image is no excuse for pity, for they will be victims of divine retribution. Accordingly, the cure that is proposed is that they will simply be cursed by God (v. 21b, with reference also to Deuteronomy 27:26)—a fitting end for such a group of people.

Most probably written towards the end of the 'forties, perhaps sometime around 447, the *Commentary on Isaiah* contains numerous references to Sennacherib. A good number of these notes are purely historical. The king

⁹³ So Hill, *Theodoret of Cyrus. Commentary on the Psalms. Psalms 73–150*, 24 n. 5: "Theodoret is naturally struggling to find meaning in a psalm whose text Gunkel thought 'repeatedly very corrupt'. Sennacherib 'the Assyrian' has been left far behind."

⁹⁴ See F.-L. Hossfeld and E. Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100* (Freiburg, 2000 [2nd ed.]), 401: "Dass Israel in Ps 76 dabei JHWH gerade gegen die weltmacht Assur profilierte, gehört in die Linie der rettungserinnerungen, die Israel als ihr kulturelles bzw. Theologisches Gedächtnis konturierte und als Gegen-Welt konstituierte, in der es in Notzeiten rettung und Geborgenheit fand."

⁹⁵ PG 80, 1516. "By this he indicated the different incursions of the Assyrians": Hill, *Theodoret of Cyrus. Commentary on the Psalms. Psalms 73–150*, 48.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 250; PG 80, 1828.

is first met in the comment on Isaiah 3:2–4.⁹⁷ The reference to the mockers who will rule Judea is linked to the time of the Roman invasion, as are other parts of the oracle. This is argued by contrast from earlier threats posed to the holy city. Indeed, in the time of Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar the great prophets were still around, and for the former also the pious king Hezekiah. Hence, the argument goes, the oracle cannot refer to any of these episodes.⁹⁸ There follows another such purely historical reference in the comment on Isaiah 7:8–9 to explain the downfall of Ephraim, which was a gradual process involving four kings and concluded by Sennacherib.⁹⁹ Sennacherib is mentioned a second time in the same chapter in comment on the destructions caused by the Egyptians and Assyrians. This time, Sennacherib is said to be the first of the Assyrian kings to have attacked Judea, while Nebuchadnezzar came to finish the job.¹⁰⁰

But there is also another side to the references to Sennacherib. In commenting on Isaiah 10:7–11, in the oracle against the Assyrians, Theodoret notes that the claims made by the Assyrian ruler about conquering the world fit perfectly with what Sennacherib told Hezekiah, then illustrated by a long quotation from Isaiah 37:10–13.¹⁰¹ There follows a second reference in the same context, when Theodoret explains v. 21 as what happened to those who escaped Sennacherib's campaign in the North and settled in Jerusalem to be "instructed" (ἐξεπαίδευσεν) by king Hezekiah about the God of Israel—a free and imaginative reconstruction of what might have happened after the fall of the northern kingdom (which, as a matter of fact, was not Sennacherib's initiative).¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Modern commentators, on the other hand, have found a first allusion to the Assyrian invader already in Isa. 1:8; see Sawyer, *Fifth Gospel*, 193.

⁹⁸ Text and French translation in J.-N. Guinot, *Théodoret de Cyr. Commentaire sur Isaïe* 1, SC 276 (1980), 210 (section 2, lines 223–26).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 282 (3, 302–306). On the somewhat muddled information, including the mention of a king "Phoua" and the usual omission of Sargon II, see *ibid.*, 282 n. 1 and 63 n. 2. Theodoret wisely (or out of embarrassment?) abstains from commenting on the date of 65 years mentioned in v. 8.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 294 (3, 442–47). "Théodoret ne fait pas une distinction très nette entre les Assyriens et les Babyloniens," but in this he was true to Scripture (see Isa. 14:22–25, and below), as Guinot notes, with reference also to Herodotus (295 n. 3).

¹⁰¹ J.-N. Guinot, *Théodoret de Cyr. Commentaire sur Isaïe* 2, SC 295 (1982), 26 (4, 172–83). One should note that Theodoret, unlike LXX, twice reads v. 8 in the negative ("You are not the sole ruler") and consequently takes vv. 9–10 to be the king's reply to this criticism. He also adds that his is the common interpretation among commentators (*ibid.*, 28: καὶ τὰτα τῷ αὐτῷ συνήρμωσαν οἱ λοιποὶ ἐρμηνευταί), but he gives no names. Eusebius at least reads differently and puts these words in the mouth of God, nor is Cyril fully in line with Theodoret's reading (*ibid.*, 28 n. 1).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, II, 34 (4, 267–72).

The same confusion between Assyria and Babylon met before occurs once again in the opening lines of the comment on the oracle against Babylon in Isaiah 13:1. Theodoret seems to assume that the capital of the empire at one point was moved from Nineveh to Babylon.¹⁰³ The two empires are put side by side in Isaiah 14:23.24–25, and so it is no surprise to read that to Theodoret these were simply the same people: *καὶ ἐντεῦθεν δῆλον ὡς τοὺς αὐτοὺς καὶ Ἀσσυρίους καὶ Βαβυλωνίους καλεῖ*,¹⁰⁴ and v. 25 in his view obviously refers to the calamities that befell Sennacherib's army when campaigning in Judea.¹⁰⁵

A quite unexpected and remarkable reference to Sennacherib occurs in the comments on Isaiah 18:7, the final verse of the oracle against Damascus. Two peoples (so Theodoret) are said to bring offerings to the Lord: one, the downtrodden people of Jerusalem; the other, the “great one,” the Christians who truly sacrificed to the Lord and rejoiced upon hearing the story of Sennacherib's downfall read in church.¹⁰⁶ Two peoples were thus connected by a common interest in the same enemy king, though the second actually never suffered from him and only referred to him to glorify God.

Egypt is said to become fearful of Judea in the comments the prophet adds to the oracle against this country in Isaiah 19:17. Theodoret reads the previous verse in light of the Roman conquest (Rome is “the hand of God”), and Egypt's fear as a reference to its conversion to Christianity, which involves respect for Judea as the birthplace of the Lord.¹⁰⁷ Consequently, he denies any links to Sennacherib subduing Egypt, as “some” (*τινες*) have suggested, for that country continued to pose a threat to Judea. For Theodoret, the prophecy was to be fulfilled only in a later time, not in Israel's history itself.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, II, 64 n. 1, reckons with the influence of Herodotus: “Théodoret s'en souviendrait-il?”; but this is difficult to prove.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 94 (5, 357–58): “he regards the Assyrians and the Babylonians as the same people.”

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 94 (5, 358–62). Theodoret also adds, without further illustration, that the downfall of these two empires also was most lucky also for Europe: “On voit mal à quoi il fait allusion en parlant de l'Europe” (*ibid.*, II, 95 n. 2).

¹⁰⁶ *Λαὸν δὲ μέγαν τὸν Χριστιανικὸν καλεῖ, οὐ πάσα πλήρης ἡ οἰκουμένη· οὗτος γὰρ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον δῶρα κυρίῳ προσφέρει καὶ τὴν τοῦ Σενναχηρίμου παράδοξον κατάλυσιν ἐν ταῖς ἐκατηστίαις ἀκούων ὕμνοις τὸν δυνατὸν καὶ φιλόανθρωπον δεσπότην ἀμείβεται* (*ibid.*, II, 126 [6, 175–180]).

¹⁰⁷ *Οἶμαι . . . ὡς τῆς πλάνης ἀπαλλαγέντες οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι καὶ τὸ ἀποστολικὸν δεξάμενοι κήρυγμα [φοβηθήσονται] τὴν Ἰουδαίαν γῆν ὡς ἐν αὐτῇ γεννηθέντος τοῦ τῆς οἰκουμένης σωτήρος . . .* (*ibid.*, II, 128–40 [6, 339–43]).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 138 (6, 332–35). This critique of a (semi-)Judaising interpretation may have been directed against Theodoret; see *ibid.*, I, 85.

In commenting on the oracle in chapter 27, which Isaiah had already connected with the Assyrian exile (27:13), Theodoret addresses a king—who proves to be Sennacherib¹⁰⁹—in person when explaining vv. 7–9.¹¹⁰ But this whole threatening episode ended well (at least for a while, until Nebuchadnezzar appeared, as Theodoret notes) and the destruction of the idols mentioned in v. 9 is regarded as a glorious deed accomplished by “admirable Hezekiah” (with explicit reference to the accounts in 4 Kingdoms and 2 Chronicles), who in this had preceded the Lord himself, who latterly freed the whole world of its ignorance and error.¹¹¹

The same flexibility in moving through history and time that was met already before is found once more in the comment on Isaiah 28:4. The “early fig” of v. 4 refers to those who escaped the rage of Sennacherib and found a temporary refuge in the mountains before settling in the Galilee after the king’s retreat. They thereby inhabited the same ground that would later give us the “holy choir of the apostles!”¹¹² Sennacherib once again is the villain who, unintentionally, produced good fruit.

Some fine exegesis is found in Isaiah 29, in dealing with the oracle against Ariel, i.e., Moab’s most remarkable city, as Theodoret explains. In 29:7, the perspective is widened to include also all those who ever marched against Jerusalem. What is then said in v. 8 about dreaming and self-deception, is what actually happened to Sennacherib, who indeed hoped and dreamt of conquering the city—and then got everything he had not dreamt of (as Theodoret puts it not without any sense for rhetoric) when his army was destroyed and he was made aware of his own weakness.¹¹³ The latter is of course not said in so many words in the biblical account, but reflects the spirit of that account.

The next mention of Sennacherib—actually several in the same context—occurs in the comment on Isaiah’s version of the king’s campaign in chapters 36–37. Perhaps the most important passage comes right at the beginning in the comment on 36:1, introducing the setting and significance of the episode. As Theodoret formulates it, it is a prime example of the fact that the prophet speaks the truth: just as this prophecy (for that is how the account is called, quite unlike its presentation in Isaiah 36)

¹⁰⁹ See *ibid.* II, 226 (7, 768–70).

¹¹⁰ Note the double Σύ and the second person ἤλπισας (*ibid.*, II, 224).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, II, 226 (7, 765–67).

¹¹² *Ibid.*, II, 234 (8, 32–41).

¹¹³ καὶ γὰρ ἐκεῖνος ἀπόνως ἐλπίσας ἀνάστατον ποιήσειν τὴν Ἱερουσαλήμ οὐ μόνον οὐ δέδρακεν ἅπερ ἤλπισεν ἀλλὰ καὶ πέπονθεν ἅπερ οὐκ ἤλπισεν. . . οὕτω γὰρ κάκεινος μετὰ τὸν ἄλθερον τῶν πολλῶν μυριάδων αἰσθῆν τῆς οἰκειίας [ἔσχεν] ἀσθενείας (*ibid.*, II, 252 [8, 286–88, 291–92]).

about Sennacherib came true, so all other prophecies by this same prophet would prove to be true.¹¹⁴ What follows, slightly in contrast with this programmatic statement, is a mere paraphrase of the biblical account, with an occasional reference to parallels in 4 Kingdoms and 2 Chronicles, and to a variant reading in one of the other translators, but with hardly any comment on the king himself or his behaviour, except at the very end in dealing with Isaiah 37:35–38. Sennacherib's escape of the disaster that befell his army is not a proof of his superiority over and against the angel of the Lord—who would have thought this to be case anyway?. Instead “he”—Sennacherib is no longer referred to by his name, but with the sobriquet “the impious king”—was allowed to flee in order to become the living proof of God's power. He receives his “righteous punishment” (δικαιοσύνην ποιήν) and dies a shameful death, strangled by his own sons, at the very moment that he is worshipping his “god” (ψευδώνυμος θεός) who are unable to protect him. What is more, his death would soon prove to be the beginning of the end of his empire, soon overwhelmed by the Babylonians.¹¹⁵ It looked as if all was won—and then suddenly, all lost.

There follow two more brief references in the comment on Isaiah 40:23. First is a comment about vain power, for which Sennacherib and his “companion” Nebuchadnezzar once more offer a helpful illustration (οὕτω γὰρ καὶ τὸν Σενναχηριμ καὶ τὸν Ναβουχοδονόσορ καὶ μυρίους ἑτέρους κατέλυσεν),¹¹⁶ and finally in the comment on Isaiah 51:9. Second comes a comment about the death of the dragon, where the king is mentioned in the company of that other “brother in arms,” Pharaoh, both of them examples of haughty rulers who deny the existence of the true God and are punished for it (ἀλλ’ ὅμως κάκεινον καὶ τοῦτον τιμωρίᾳ παρέδωκεν).¹¹⁷

The overall perspective is obvious: Theodoret shows a particular interest in his commentary on Isaiah in the figure of Sennacherib, though he

¹¹⁴ [ἐνταύθα] αὖ εἰκότως μέμνηται τῆς ἱστορίας, ἵνα δείξῃ τῆς προφητείας τὸ ἀψευδὲς καὶ ὅτι, καθάπερ τὰ κατὰ τὸν Σενναχηριμ [τετύ]χηκε πέρατος, οὕτω δὴ καὶ τὰ ἄλλα πάντα ὅσα προεῖρηκεν εἰς ἔργον ἀχθήσεται (ibid., II, 346 [II, 14–17]). “La reprise du développement concernant Sennacherib ne saurait être pour Théodoret une simple redite” (ibid., 347 n. 2).

¹¹⁵ Ibid., II, 374–76 (II, 380–97). Theodoret thinks it worthwhile to spend a note on determining the true reading of the label that accompanies Sennacherib's god in v. 38, and opts for the reading πάτετρον, “idol.”

¹¹⁶ Ibid., II, 410 (II, 214); “And so He [i.e., the Lord] brought down Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar and countless others.” The reader clearly is expected to appreciate the slightly hyperbolic “and countless others.”

¹¹⁷ J.-N. Guinot, *Théodoret de Cyr. Commentaire sur Isaïe* 3, SC 315 (1984), 122–24 (16, 264–270).

is mentioned solely for his campaign against Judea and its fatal consequences. He is, however, the only king to receive individual attention, which allows Theodoret to present him as the one who brought down the empire. This history was told to teach a lesson, not to neutrally collect and transmit facts.¹¹⁸

The *Commentary on Jeremiah* offers fewer occasions to bring Sennacherib onstage, but he is not altogether absent. The comforting words of Jeremiah 2:3b are illustrated from the fate of Sennacherib who came “to eat” Israel (Judea) and thought he could best God himself (with a quotation from Isaiah 37:10).¹¹⁹ The prophet’s words in 10:23 offer another opportunity for Theodoret to recall Sennacherib’s fate. Indeed, one should know not only that no ruler could march against Israel without the consent of God, but also that neither could he be successful against any people having sought shelter with God.¹²⁰ “I know,” Theodoret adds (thereby taking up the first word of the biblical verse), that this is what happened to Sennacherib (οἶδα γὰρ οἶα Σενααχηρείμ πέπονθεν). It was the same God who threatened and protected. Judea and Jerusalem were threatened by divine punishment in Jeremiah 13:8 and destruction and exile would be their share according to v. 19. The one called to execute the verdict was not Nebuchadnezzar, as one might expect, but once again the Assyrian, regardless of the facts of history.¹²¹ The explicit reference to the kings of Ashur and Babylon threatening “the wandering sheep” of Judea/Israel in 50(27):17 calls forth the usual procession of kings that took active part in Israel’s downfall, but emphasizing that they would be punished for it (v. 18).¹²² Theodoret here keeps silent about the difficult issue of whether

¹¹⁸ Compare the concluding comments of Guinot, *L'exégèse*, 387: “Dans la mesure où le règne d'Asarhadon (Nakhordan) est à peine mentionné, celui d'Assurbanipal totalement ignoré, la défaite des armées de Sennachérib devant Jérusalem, d'après la vision historique qu'imposent les commentaires, paraît sonner le glas de l'empire assyrien”; and n. 259: “Plus qu'aux faits eux-mêmes, l'exégète s'intéresse à l'exemplarité de l'histoire.”

¹¹⁹ Οὐδὲ γὰρ ὡς τῷ Θεῷ διακονοῦντες ἐπολέμουν οἱ πολιοῦντες τῷ Ἰσραήλ· ἀλλ' ὡς αὐτοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ περιγενήσεσθαι δυνάμενοι (PG 81, 504).

¹²⁰ Οὐκ ἂν ἐκείνος, φησὶν, ὥρμησε καθ' ἡμῶν μὴ βουλομένου σου, Δέσποτα· εἰ δὲ καὶ ὥρμησεν, οὐκ ἂν κατάρθωσεν ἄπερ ἠθέλησε, τῆς σῆς δεξιᾶς ἡμῶν προμηθομένης (PG 81, 569).

¹²¹ Πολλὰς γὰρ τῆς Ἰουδαίας πόλεις Σενααχηρείμ ἐξηνδραπόδισε... Κελεύει δὲ καὶ τῇ Ἱερουσαλὴμ τῶν ἐρχομένων ἀπὸ βορρᾶ πολεμίων ἰδεῖν τὸ πλῆθος (PG 81, 588). Strictly speaking Theodoret mentions Sennacherib only for the conquest of Judea and for threatening the capital, not for the exile, but the commentator does not bother about such details. The king marching south, i.e., approaching the city from the north, not only reflects the course of events, but also creates a parallel with “the south” in v. 19.

¹²² PG 81, 741–44.

these kings marched at the order of God and just keeps to “the facts.” The words of Lamentations 4:12 offer a last opportunity to mention Sennacherib’s fatal campaign: his army destroyed, he himself was delivered into the hands of his enemies because of his crimes and mistakes.¹²³

Finally: bishop, biblical scholar, and heresiograph, Theodoret was also active as an historian. His *Church History*, which covers the years 325–428 C.E. and was composed around 449/450, contains a remarkable reference to the Sennacherib story when recounting the events of the siege of Theodosiopolis (Reshana) in 421 as one in a series of examples of how God protects the pious ruler. The city was beleaguered by the son of the Sassanid king Yazdgird and defended only by a courageous bishop. Upon hearing how one of the vassal kings imitates “the calumnies of Rabshakeh/Rapsakes and Sennacherib” (τὴν συνήθη βλασφημίαν τετολμηκότες καὶ τὰ Ῥαψάκου καὶ Σενναχηρείμ φθεγξαμένου), the bishop has the man killed with one shot from the walls—his death is told in a most vivid and horrible way—an act which caused the besiegers to retreat and seek for peace from fear (καὶ δέισας τὴν εἰρήνην ἐσπέισατο).¹²⁴ Sennacherib thus continued to haunt the minds of commentators and church historians long after he had gone and far beyond the realm of biblical stories.

A Few Other Antiochenes

Besides the “big three,” a few other Antiochene authors should be mentioned. The moderate Arian homilist and commentator Asterius (d. after 341), called “the Sophist,” was a disciple of Lucian of Antioch; several of his (partially fragmentary) homilies on the Book of Psalms have been preserved. In line with the historicising exegesis of his teacher, these mention Sennacherib in commenting on Psalm 13:1 (*Hom.* 25.17). Sennacherib is one of three kings, together with Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar, said to have blasphemed and been punished for it. The interest of Asterius was above all in the one who inspired these kings to such foolishness: that they had been possessed by the devil who spoke through them. Far from

¹²³ Εἶχον γὰρ ἐνέχυρα μεγάλα τοῦ πιστεῦσαι τὰ κατὰ τὸν Σενναχηρείμ, οὗ τὴν στρατιάν ἐν βραχεῖ μορίῳ νυκτὸς κατηνάλυσε. Παρεδόθη δὲ τοῖς πολεμίοις καὶ διὰ τὴν τῶν ψευδοπροφητῶν ἐξαπάτην, καὶ διὰ τὴν τῶν ἱερέων μαιφόνιαν (PG 81, 801).

¹²⁴ L. Parmentier and G. C. Hansen, *Theodoret: Church History*, GCS NF 5 (1998), 341 (HE 5.37.8) and P. Canivet, *Histoire Ecclésiastique*, SC 530 (2009 [2nd ed.]), 487 (here with a different numbering: 5.39.13). The vassal king not only imitates the Assyrian king, but apparently also integrates elements of Nebuchadnezzar’s exploits when also threatening to destroy “the divine temple,” i.e., the church (καὶ μανικῶς ἀπειλήσαντος τὸν θεῖον πυρπολήσειν νεῶν).

being an excuse, it rather is an opportunity for the homilist to add two more names to the list, one being Judas who was misled by the devil (John 13:2), the other being “the Jews” whom “he instructed to kill the Lord,” as Asterius puts it most bluntly on the basis of John 9:29 (τοὺς Ἰουδαίους κυριοκτονεῖν ἐδίδαξεν, ἐπειδὴ ἔπεισεν αὐτοὺς ὅτι Ἰησοῦς οὐκ ἔστι θεός).¹²⁵ Acute anti-Judaism here mixes in with moralising exegesis.

Quite surprisingly, Sennacherib’s name also shows up in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, an anonymous compilation of canon law in eight books that was put together, maybe in Antioch or in any case in an Antiochene milieu, at the time of the council of Constantinople in 380 c.e., though it is not possible to determine whether before or after. The reference is found in canon 37 of Book 7; Book 7 itself consists of 49 canons, of which the first 32 are like a reprint of the *Didachè*. Canons 33–38 have been identified as (a part of) a liturgical prayer collection of Jewish origin,¹²⁶ which the compiler or his source had adapted for Christian use. Canon 37 is a short prayer recalling God’s providence and listing the benefits God has granted to his faithful. There follows an enumeration, from Abel to Mattathias,¹²⁷ of all those who prayed to God and whose prayer has been heard. Among them is Hezekiah, who prayed twice and was heard twice (Ἐζεκία ἐν ἀρρωστίᾳ καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ Σενναχηρείμ; cf. 4 Kingdoms 19:15 and 20:2). Hezekiah is preceded by Jehoshaphat praying “in battle” (ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ) and followed by his son Manasseh (2 Chronicles 33:13). The latter is of course a figure of a somewhat more dubious status, as he prayed only after God had punished him. The reference to Jehoshaphat is a bit ambiguous. The phrase “in battle” seems to refer to his crying out in distress (rather than praying), mentioned in 2 Chronicles 18:31; or should it be taken in a somewhat more flexible way as referring to the king’s prayer in 2 Chronicles 20:6 before facing the Moabites and the Ammonites? Regardless, the prayer places Hezekiah in a long list of heroes of Israelite history and invites the comparison of Sennacherib to that other notorious general, Sisera, the only other enemy general to be mentioned by name, a connotation further strengthened by the fact that Jael is

¹²⁵ Text in M. Richard, *Asterii Sophistae Commentariorum in Psalmos quae supersunt*. Accedunt aliquot homiliae anonymae, Symbolae Osloenses 16 (Oslo, 1956), 195. On the verb κυριοκτονέω, see W. Kinzig, *Asterius. Psalmenhomilien*, II, Bibliothek der griechischen Literatur 57 (Stuttgart, 2002), 436 n. 75.

¹²⁶ See the discussion in M. Metzger, *Les Constitutions Apostoliques*, I, SC 320 (Paris, 1985), 20.

¹²⁷ Actually the list ends with Jael (Judg. 5:24), who falls out of the chronological order, as do a few others in between.

mentioned last. The text concludes with an application for Christians: “Hear now (God) the prayers your people offers to you through Christ in the Spirit” (37.5).

Antiochene exegetical tradition was clearly very interested in king Sennacherib, who was mentioned repeatedly for purely historical reasons (to date the prophets), but even more so for the homiletic and theological potential this tragic figure carried with him. One will also have noticed (and maybe appreciated) the strong impact of earlier representatives of this tradition on their successors.

SENNACHERIB AND THE ALEXANDRIANS

Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444)

It is, as is well known, quite a different world when, coming from Diodore or Theodore, one starts reading the commentaries of Cyril of Alexandria. Yet the man quite often refers to historical events that would have been at the background of certain passages in Scripture, including references or allusions to the Sennacherib episode. But just as often, Cyril, after duly having mentioned these things, and not infrequently in great detail, hastens to add that these are “historical interpretations,” which are now to be completed (replaced?) by Christological or ecclesiological ones. To cite just one instance of such an observation: early on in the *Commentary on the Twelve Prophets*, Cyril refers in some detail to the defeat of Sennacherib when explaining Hosea 1:7—how the Lord will save Judah from its enemies without using arms, horses, or horsemen, but he then goes on to say: ἀλλ’ ἱστορικῶς μὲν ἡμῖν εἰρήσθω ταυτί· ἴωμεν δὲ αὖ καὶ ἐφ’ ἑτέρας ἐννοίας, φημί δὲ δὴ πάλιν τὰς ἐπ’ αὐτῷ τῷ Χριστῷ.¹²⁸ Cyril does not say he was inspired by the motif of the horses to link this passage to Sennacherib (a motif used differently there), but that may well have been the case. Instead he cites only the description of the king’s punishment from 4 Kingdoms 19:35, but combines it with a quotation from Psalm 19:8–9,

¹²⁸ The *Commentary on the Twelve Prophets* is cited in the edition of P. E. Pusey, *Cyriilli Archiepiscopi Alexandrini in XII Prophetas* (Oxford, 1868), here I, 34. I have also added a reference to the unfinished translation (up to Habakkuk) of R. C. Hill, *St. Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Twelve Prophets*, Fathers of the Church 115–16 (Washington D.C., 2007), here I, 55: “So much for the factual sense; however, let us in turn proceed to other senses, namely, to those again referring to Christ.”

which also speaks of the same motif and had been connected with Sennacherib by Diodore.

Most of the references to Sennacherib are found in the *Commentary on the Twelve* and on *Isaiah*. The one about the horses is the second of these references to Sennacherib in the *Commentary on the Twelve*; it had been preceded by a lengthy presentation of the events of 4 Kingdoms 18–19, part of an even longer section offering historical information, to illustrate the mention of Hezekiah and a number of other kings in Hosea 1:1. The information Cyril gives is taken from 4 Kingdoms, which is elegantly paraphrased.¹²⁹ In addition, there is also a tacit reference to Sennacherib's retreat in the commentary on Hosea 10:11 when explaining why the Lord castigated Ephraim but passed over Judah and Benjamin while they were ruled “every now and then” by good kings.¹³⁰

The next reference is found at Amos 7:1–3. Cyril daringly identifies “king Gog” (Amos 7:1LXX) with Sennacherib.¹³¹ Apparently Cyril gives this as his own opinion (οἰόμεθα), after he had already interpreted the locusts in the same verse as a metaphor for Assyria.¹³² He does not in any way argue for this interpretation; he does not look for any clue or link in 4 Kingdoms; and he does not try to explain why he regards this identification as plausible, or even whether that would mean that the siege of 701 B.C.E. should be given an apocalyptic or eschatological dimension. Instead he quotes at length from Ezekiel 38 (on Gog) and merely repeats his view on the locusts and Gog when introducing his comments on 7:4–6 and on 7:7–9, but something of this dimension is then introduced when he brings in the prophecy of Matthew 1:23 for explaining the latter of these two passages from Amos.¹³³ The set of Gog and the locusts is repeated once more at Amos 8:1, but without any specific application.¹³⁴ A somewhat similar use and comparison is found in the comment on Amos 8:8, when the comparison of the surging earth with the rising of the Nile is taken one step further and the latter is itself likened to Sennacherib invading Samaria *μυριάνδροις στρατιάς* and trailing behind him *ἀναριθμητον αἰχμαλωσίαν*.¹³⁵

¹²⁹ Ibid., I, 13 (= I, 37).

¹³⁰ Ibid., I, 217 (= I, 202). Sennacherib is here called a “Babylonian” king.

¹³¹ LXX differs here with MT. See further the comment of Hill, *ibid.*: “While the Antiochene commentators are content to take the Gog of Ezek. 38–39 as an historical character in his own right, Cyril prefers to see him as a figure for Sennacherib.”

¹³² Ibid., I, 497 (= II, 97).

¹³³ Ibid., I, 502 (= II, 101).

¹³⁴ Ibid., I, 508 (= II, 105).

¹³⁵ Ibid., I, 516 (= II, 110).

The sackcloth, the mourning, and especially the motif of the bitter day in Amos 8:10 invite another reference to the invasion of Samaria and the consequences this had for Judah, whereby the last motif is given prominence by also citing Isaiah 37:3 (the day of affliction combined with that of the birth pangs).¹³⁶ The repetition of the motif of Amos 8:8 in 9:5 also brings about another reference to the same invasion.¹³⁷

As with Hosea 1:1, the mention of Hezekiah in Micah 1:1 is an opportunity for Cyril to repeat basically the same historical information.¹³⁸ The gates of Jerusalem in Micah 1:9 are just as naturally connected to the siege of 701 B.C.E., without adding any further comment except the observation that the city could not have been conquered thanks to God.¹³⁹ The fate of the cities mentioned in v. 10 is then likened, in the same vein, to Rab-shakeh's challenging address as formulated in Isaiah 36:19–20,¹⁴⁰ and this motif is continued into the comment on vv. 11–13, where one finds once more a reference to horses and chariots, but without Cyril linking this explicitly to the account in 4 Kingdoms.¹⁴¹ Instead, he is more interested in pointing out that Lachish, mentioned in that same verse 13 as the cause of Zion's sins, was the place from where Sennacherib moved towards Jerusalem.¹⁴² Sennacherib makes a last appearance on stage in the comment on 4:11–12, when his failed campaign is mentioned again as a kind of preliminary remark, often repeated already, as Cyril notes, to the motif in v. 11a of the many nations gathering against Jerusalem.¹⁴³ Cyril concludes his comment on this passage with one more detailed reference to the notorious campaign.¹⁴⁴

The comforting words of the prophet Nahum at 1:14 offer yet another opportunity for Cyril to summarize the dramatic campaign of 701 B.C.E., in which he jumps from paraphrasing 4 Kingdoms 18:9–13 to 19:35, but also refers, quite out of tone, to the fall of Jerusalem under Nebuchadnezzar and goes beyond the story as it is told in 4 Kingdoms 25 by pointing out that “the whole of Judah was bandaged” (as was said about Sennacherib

¹³⁶ Ibid., I, 518 (= II, 112).

¹³⁷ Ibid., I, 531 (= II, 121).

¹³⁸ Ibid., I, 601 (= II, 182).

¹³⁹ Ibid., I, 614 (= II, 191).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., I, 615 (= II, 192).

¹⁴¹ Ibid., I, 618 (= II, 194). Cf. Ferreiro, *Twelve Prophets*, 149: “the military disaster at Micah 1:10–16 likely refers to the invasion of Sennacherib in 701 B.C.”; but he does not cite any author for this.

¹⁴² Hill, *St. Cyril*, I, 620 (= II, 195).

¹⁴³ Ibid., I, 671 (= II, 230).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., I, 672 (= II, 231).

conquering Samaria for Amos 8:8) and that in this way Judah “joined” Samaria.¹⁴⁵ In commenting on Nahum 2:2 (“the Lord has turned aside the abuse of Jacob, like the abuse of Israel”), Cyril once more comes back to the same episode, first pointing out that “Israel” (i.e., Judah and Benjamin) was saved from Sennacherib, and then adding to it that eventually they were freed by Cyrus, as were the Samaritans (i.e., “Jacob” in the prophet’s words).¹⁴⁶ The lion’s den of Nahum 2:11 is identified with Nineveh, the destruction of which is mocked by the prophet, as Cyril points out:

[I]n my view the word ‘Where’ does not suggest a questioner—I think we should avoid such a fatuous idea—but rather someone mocking and by this means highlighting the fact that it was so completely destroyed that no trace of it remained; ‘it is finished; it is gone,’ as he himself says.

Four kings are mentioned by name: Pul, Shalmaneser, Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar.¹⁴⁷ The Sennacherib campaign is again referred to in commenting upon the opening verse of the book of Zechariah, but now while citing in full the text of 4 Kingdoms 21:2–7, 10–15 and without the kind of comparison between Nebuchadnezzar and Sennacherib that was made in the comment on Nahum 1:14.¹⁴⁸ The same four kings that were mentioned at Nahum 2:11 are listed again, and in the same order in the comment on Zechariah 3:7b (LXX).¹⁴⁹ A shorter version of the same account is given in Cyril’s comment on Zechariah’s vision (1:8), with one more reference to the four kings.¹⁵⁰ There follows yet another one in the comment on Zechariah 1:21 about “the horns that destroyed Judah and Jerusalem.”¹⁵¹

Isaiah’s prophecy against Jacob and Israel, and Ephraim and “the dwellers in Samaria” in 9:8–10 offers Cyril a first, rather unexpected, opportunity to recall the story of Sennacherib’s supposed campaign against the latter, which is told in much detail citing 4 Kingdoms 18:9–13, 32–34

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 27–28 (= II, 299–300): προστέθεικε τοῖς ἐκ Σαμαρείας διὰ τοῦ Σεναχηρείμ ἄπενενηγμένοις.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 38 (= II, 308).

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 46 (= II, 313).

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 168–71.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 223.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, II, 293. Sennacherib is said to have “bound” what was left of Samaria and to have burned down many towns in Judaea. “Phoula,” king Pul of Assyria is mentioned in 1 Chron. 5:26 and is said to have conquered the tribes in Transjordan, Shalmaneser conquered Samaria, and Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem and led “Israel” into exile. One will note the climactic build-up of the series.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, II, 301.

as well as the outcome of it in 19:35, but also the final downfall under Nebuchadnezzar, for which Jeremiah (17:5) and Isaiah himself (14:27b) are cited as evidence.¹⁵² The perspective of the oracle of 9:8–10 is thus expanded to include also the fate of Judah. A second reference is found in the comment on v. 25 (“I will break the Assyrian in my own land”). It makes for a strange reversal of fortune: the verse from 14:27 that was held against Assyria by the prophet was first cited by Cyril against Jerusalem, but now the perspective is “corrected” again and the focus is on the failed campaign of Sennacherib, citing from Isaiah 36:18 and 37:36. With little concern for the original context, Cyril explains the description of God’s wrath in Isaiah 17:12–13 not as a warning for Damascus but as a reference to what happened to Sennacherib and by way of conclusion cites Isaiah 37:29 as further evidence of this.¹⁵³ Isaiah’s version of the Sennacherib episode is commented upon rather briefly, and for a reason: the story is so well known that Cyril feels he does not need to spend much words on it. That is how he begins his comment;¹⁵⁴ there then follows a short resume of the story in the comment on 36:1–2 that brings nothing new.

The comment on chapter 37 is significantly longer, but it stays very close to the biblical text. The king is mentioned in the comment on vv. 14–17. His behaviour is qualified by Hezekiah as arrogant (*ἀλαζονείας . . . ἀπονοίας*) in his prayer to God and his comparing of the Lord with other gods is called an act of impiety (*ἀνοσίως*).¹⁵⁵ In the comment on v. 21 his blasphemy is contrasted to Hezekiah’s zeal for God.¹⁵⁶ But in commenting on vv. 30–32, Cyril points out that it is not clear for whom these words were meant. If for Hezekiah, they were words of comfort and encouragement to endure the siege; if for Sennacherib, they were words of warning that he would be engaged in an endless siege proving disastrous for his logistics. Cyril thinks that both options are possible.¹⁵⁷ Sennacherib is mentioned a final time in this context in the comment on vv. 36–38 in what looks like a *tour de force*. His miserable fate is described in close contact with the biblical text, but then, quite unexpectedly, the perspective is opened (or rather, changed completely) and it is argued that the city of Jerusalem

¹⁵² PG 70, 260–61.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 433: ταύτης διαμέμνηται τῆς ἱστορίας ὁ προφητικὸς ἡμῖν ἐν τούτοις λόγος.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 756–57: ἐναργῆς μὲν ἅπασι τοῖς φιλομαθεστέροις τῆς ἱστορίας ὁ λόγος· ἐρῶ δ’ οὖν ὅμως βραχυλογήσας ὡς ἐνι.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 769.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 772: ἀποδέχομαι τὸν ζῆλον, οἶδα τὴν φιλοθείαν, ἀφόρητον ἐποιήσω τὴν κατ’ ἐμοῦ δυσφημίαν.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 777 and 780.

is the *typos* of the Church, which is the true Jerusalem. Sennacherib becomes identified with Satan himself—with no regard whatsoever of what that might mean for the way the king met his end—and Paul (1 Timothy 6:20; Titus 3:10–11) and Matthew (16:18) are called in to prove that Satan and his companions would never be able to prevail against the Church!¹⁵⁸ After that, Sennacherib is mentioned two more times. First, his death is recalled in a passing comment to 39:1–2,¹⁵⁹ then he is staged one more time in the comment on 40:23–24 to illustrate how “famous” people continue to disregard the Lord and to worship their own creations, a reference to 37:38.¹⁶⁰

Cyril’s commentary on the Book of Psalms survived only in catena fragments, the authenticity of which pose a problem of their own. In the comment on Psalm 19:2, Cyril first explains the words of David historically, with reference to Hezekiah and his courtiers praying God for help, and then “allegorically” (ἀλληγορικῶς) with reference to the disciples praying God to assist Jesus in Gethsemane—what a slip of the pen this is!—and finally also with reference to each of us, urging the reader to pray in moments of distress and not to forsake.¹⁶¹

And a Few Others (Again)

Synesius of Cyrene (d. 413/414), in condemning one Andronikos of Berenice, governor of Pentapolis for preventing Christians from visiting churches, compared the man, quite originally, to Phalaros of Agrigente, the old Pharaoh Chephren, and Sennacherib (in this order), all three of them liable of most horrible crimes. Indeed, Synesius stated that these three were even superseded by this man, who had insulted Christians in a way that the others would have refrained from.¹⁶² He then really goes in

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 781 and 784.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 792.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 816: καὶ γοῦν ὁ Σενναχηρείμ ὑπονοστήσας ἐκ τῆς Ἰουδαίας εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ, προσκυνεῖν ἐλέγετο τὸν πάτραρχον αὐτοῦ. Προσεκόμιζον γὰρ καὶ τοῖς τεθνεώσι θυσίας, ἡρώας τε καλοῦντες αὐτοὺς ἀπεγράφοντο θεοῦς.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., PG 69, 833. The *Collectio dicatorum Veteris Testamenti* that goes under the name of Cyril and “the great Maximus” (i.e., the Confessor) is most probably spurious and can be left aside, even though the amateurish etymology of the king’s name in the comment on 2 Chron. 32:2–4 as πειρασμὸς ξηραίνων ἢ ὀδόντες ἡκονημένοι, ὁποῖός ἐστι ὁ διάβολος is worth mentioning, as is the etymology of Babylon, which is said to mean “confusion” (σύγχυσις) as it is the place where the king was murdered by his own sons (PG 77, 1265 and 1268).

¹⁶² *Ep.* 42(58).22: ἀνατεινόμενος δὲ τοῖς ἱερεῦσι τοῦ θεοῦ ταῦτα ἅ κἀν Φάλαρις ὁ Ἀκραγαγαντίος κἀν Κεφρήν ὁ Αἰγύπτιος κἀν Σενναχηρείμ ὁ Βαβυλώνιος ὤκνησεν, ὁ πέμψας εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ τοὺς ὀνειδιούντας Ἐξεκία καὶ τῷ θεῷ. Text in A. Garzya and D. Roques, *Synesios de Cyrène. II.*

overdrive when adding that this deed was like a second crucifixion of the Christ, and Andronikos like a Pilate *redivivus*. It is all a bit over the top.

Isidore of Pelusium (d. ca. 435) also mentioned Sennacherib's campaign and fate in one of the six letters he wrote to an otherwise unknown bishop Alphios (letter no. 1425). Actually the "letter" is a short note that summarizes the biblical episode with no context or any further comment whatsoever. In this regard it is quite different from some of the other letters addressed to this same bishop, which deal with such things as the dangers of rhetoric (nos. 1467, 1486) or the value of repentance (no. 1624). Of some interest is the way scribes have tried to worsen the outcome of the slaughter of Sennacherib's army as told in 4 Kingdoms 19:35 by stating that the king was the only one to escape to Nineveh, which of course is not found in the biblical account.¹⁶³

IN LATER YEARS . . .

From the sixth and early seventh centuries, a number of authors and works of various genres should be cited, most of which have only one or two somewhat occasional references to Sennacherib, but are not without any interest. Olympiodore of Alexandria, author of numerous commentaries on books of the Old Testament, of which only fragments have been published so far, mentions Sennacherib in explaining Jeremiah 50:17, a clear reference to the downfall of Israel and Judea that seems to have gone unnoticed by earlier authors. The lion devouring the flock is here interpreted as an allusion to the exile.¹⁶⁴

The famous commentator Procopius of Gaza (d. ca. 538), author of commentaries on numerous books of the Old Testament, mentions Sennacherib on no less than six occasions in his *Commentary on Isaiah*. The king is met the first time in the comment on Isaiah 9:8–17 (the prophecies addressed to Israel) as the one who subdued Samaria (the same

Correspondance. Lettres i–lxiii (Paris, 2000), 55. It may be correct to say that the three villains, taken on their own, "sont généralement considérées comme des exemples typiques de la démesure humaine" (145 n. 13), but they show up here together for the first time.

¹⁶³ The correct reading most probably is ἀγαπητὸν ἡγήσατο τὸ διασωθῆναι μόνον, which translates as "and thought himself lucky only to have escaped," but for which some manuscripts read instead ἀγαπητὸν ἡγήσατο διασωθῆναι μόνος. Text in P. Evieux, *Isidore de Péluise. Lettres II* (SC 454; Paris, 2000), 33 and n. 2 (my translation after the French of Evieux, which reads: "et s'estima heureux de seulement en réchapper").

¹⁶⁴ Ἀσσύριος ὢν ὁ Σεναχηρείμ πρῶτος τὰς δέκα φυλάς, σάρκας οὔσας ἔφαγε, τουτέστιν ἡχμαλώτισεν (PG 93, 716).

mistake turns up again and again!) before marching on Judea, because, as Procopius adds, “Israel had sinned more than Judea” (μείζω γὰρ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἠσέβησεν Ἰσραηλ).¹⁶⁵ But this was only the beginning, and Sennacherib’s crimes (δεινά) were after all minimal compared to what was to follow when Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem and sent the inhabitants into exile, or when, much later, Antiochus sacked city and temple and finally the Romans came to finish the job, “because of the great impiety with which they challenged the Saviour,” as Procopius adds most ominously.¹⁶⁶ The perspective evoked is highly dramatic and hyperbolic, reading this one section from the prophet strictly in the light of a history of almost 800 years. If the first and third of these aggressors met their fate in a rather humiliating way (a fact which Procopius does not omit), all four of them came as a sign of the wrath of God (ἡ θεία δίκη is a key notion all through the passage), and they did indeed all come from the East and West to devour Judea, as the prophet had announced in v. 12. Isaiah’s prophecy on God’s intervention against the “many peoples” and “the nations” that threaten Israel in the oracle against Damascus in 17:12–14 is illustrated with a reference to the ill-fated campaign of Sennacherib and his tragic death and a quotation of Isaiah 37:29 that explicitly points to the king’s punishment, the result of his disrespect for “the God of the Jews.”¹⁶⁷ Shebna, not Sennacherib, is the protagonist of the oracle on “the Valley of Vision” in Isaiah 22. The former comptroller of the household (in LXX he is called τὸν ταμίαν, “the treasurer”) is criticized in vv. 15–16 for having built a pompous tomb and threatened with a shameful death in a faraway country in v. 18, which Procopius interprets as the result of the man’s treason and defection to the king of Assyria. It is the fourth and last, and certainly the most important of the prophet’s criticisms.¹⁶⁸ Contrary to what Procopius writes about “the Hebrew,” no such information can be found in Isaiah, Hebrew or Greek. The several references to the king in the comments on Isaiah 36–37.39 offer no further information beyond what the prophet says about Sennacherib and his campaign, except for the rather redundant note to 39:1 that king Merodach, of Babylon, who

¹⁶⁵ PG 87b, 2013.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 2016: διὰ τὴν μεγίστην ἀσέβειαν, ἣν κατὰ τοῦ Σωτήρος ἐτόλμησαν.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 2129: ὅς τοῦ τῶν Ἰουδαίων καταφλυαρήσας Θεοῦ, τὴν δι’ ἀγγέλου νυκτερινὴν ὑπέστην πληγὴν. The verb καταφλυαρέω is not found in the LXX, but is recorded as a variant reading at Jer. 20:7 in Symmachus. The simplex occurs in 3 John 10, the noun in 1 Tim. 5:13.

¹⁶⁸ Τὸν δὲ Σομνὰν ἔλεγεν ὁ Ἑβραῖος ἄσεμνόν τε καὶ ἀλαζόνα γενέσθαι καὶ ἀβροδιαίτου ἀρχιερέα, αὐτομολῆσαι τε πρὸς Σενναχερείμ προδεδωκότα τὸν λαόν (ibid., 2177).

sent gifts to Hezekiah, was not the son of Sennacherib but of Baladan (so his name in MT for LXX *Λααδαν* in Isaiah, but Baladan in both versions in 4 Kingdoms 20:12).¹⁶⁹

In the middle of the sixth century, a somewhat mysterious author called Cosmas and nicknamed Indikopleustes, a tradesman who travelled to India (or Ceylon) and turned monk in his later years, wrote a voluminous work entitled *Christian Topography*, in which he dealt with issues of astronomy and geography and in that context also discussed relevant biblical passages. He mentions Sennacherib in passing when discussing Hezekiah's prayer in 4 Kingdoms 20:1–11 (// Isaiah 38:1–8) and his demand for a sign that he would be healed by God; he then later refers to this “miracle” of a shadow withdrawing once more to argue for the truth and reliability of what the prophet Isaiah says in 40:22 about God “stretching out the skies like a curtain.”¹⁷⁰ It is all a bit bizarre, but argued at great length and with quite some confidence.¹⁷¹

In his *Commentary on Revelation*, Andrew of Caesarea, writing sometime in the last decades of the sixth or the first years of the seventh century, in commenting on the prophecy about the coming of Gog and Magog in Revelation 20:7–8, argues forcefully against those (they remain unnamed) who would like to connect this with an historical event, be it threats posed by the Scythians (Josephus, *Ant.* 1.6.1 had identified them with Magog's descendants) or more recently by the Huns (so Theodoret, HE 5.37.4). Instead the prophecy refers to the end-time. That this should be the case is obvious, in Andrew's opinion, from the visions of Ezekiel in chapters 38–39, which “some” had in turn erroneously tried to explain in light of various historical events—the campaign of Sennacherib, “which happened a long time prior to the prophecy of Ezekiel,”¹⁷² or the attempts by the kings of Persia to have the governors of Syria prevent the rebuilding of Jerusalem (see Theodoret again, this time in his *Commentary on Ezekiel*, 38:8), or even the meddling of Antiochus Epiphanes. Sennacherib shows

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 2309, 2317, and 2325 (οὐ τοῦ Σενναχηρείμ, ἀλλὰ τοῦ Βαλδάν, ἐξ ἑτέρου γένους).
¹⁷⁰ PG 88, 388 (8.5) and 397 (8.24).

¹⁷¹ On the *Topography* in general and on the commentary on Hezekiah's prayer in particular, see W. Wolska, *La Topographie chrétienne de Cosmas Indicopleustès. Théologie et Science au VI^e siècle*, Bibliothèque byzantine. Etudes, 3 (Paris, 1962), 24–25.

¹⁷² ὅπερ τῶν ἐρμηνευτῶν τινὲς μὲν εἰς τὴν ἐπὶ Ἐζεκίου τῶν σὺν τῷ Σενναχηρείμ Ἀσσυρίων πῶσιν ἐξελάβοντο, πρὸ πολλῶν χρόνων γεγενημένην τῆς τοῦ Ἰεζεκιήλ προφητείας (PG 106, 416). English in W. C. Weinrich, *Greek Commentaries on Revelation* (Downers Grove, IL, 2011), 192.

up in quite notorious company, and the great Theodoret twice turns out to be on the wrong side.¹⁷³

The *Chronicon Paschale*, an anonymous chronicle that surveys the history of the world from Adam up to 629 C.E. and was most probably composed in Constantinople, gives a summary reading of the account in 4 Kingdoms 18–19, with verbal echoes of the biblical account. It focuses on the extent of the destruction that was caused, the payment that was extorted from Judea, the threats uttered against Hezekiah's officers, and the dramatic outcome of the Assyrian's campaign, while at the same time it completely mixes up the names and functions of the officers: Shebna/Σόμνας—Σοβνᾶς in the *Chronicon*—is made a high priest and the commander-in-chief (Θαρθαν) is even promoted to the king of Ethiopia and enemy of Assyria.¹⁷⁴ It concludes with a moralising comment by the chronicler on the saving power of prayer.¹⁷⁵ History is told, even when in the format of the chronicle, to instruct and to educate.

A highly allegorical exegesis can be found in Maximus Confessor's *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* (ch. 49). In commenting on the biblical account, Maximus interprets Hezekiah blocking up the springs outside the city (2 Chronicles 32:3) as a symbol for “all the senses”.¹⁷⁶ In a similar way, Sennacherib is plainly identified as the devil in person.¹⁷⁷ Consequently, his death can only be explained as an act of God (“the mighty One”) protecting the soul from the senses.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ On the various opinions and possible sources, see *ibid.*, 191–92 (notes) and E. Scarvelis Constantinou, *Guiding to a Blessed End. Andrew of Caesarea and His Apocalypse Commentary in the Ancient Church* (Washington, D.C., 2013), 174: this is one out of eighteen passages in the Commentary where Andrew refers to sources and authors he does not identify further.

¹⁷⁴ The origin of this mistake is easy to detect: 4 Kingdoms 19:9 speaks of the enmity of Ethiopia against Assyria (as is the cause of the confusion); the king is Θαρακα (Tirhakah).

¹⁷⁵ Text in L. Dindorf, *Chronicon Paschale*, CSHB 10 (Bonn, 1832), 215–16: δεινυται κἀντεῦθεν σαφῶς ὅσον ἰσχύει δικαίου προσευχῆ ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ἐντολαῖς τοῦ θεοῦ περιπατοῦντος. See also *Chronicon Paschale* 284–628, transl. Michael and Mary Whitby, *Translated Texts for Historians* 7 (Liverpool, 1989).

¹⁷⁶ See C. Laga and C. Steel (eds.), *Maximi Confessoris Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, I, CCSG 7 (Turnhout – Leuven, 1980), 363 (49.205–209).

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 359, 361 (49.160 and 170).

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 361 (49.192–198).

CONCLUSION

Sennacherib seems to be all over the place in early Christian Greek literature.¹⁷⁹ Of course, he also found a home in Latin and Syriac literature and he is also often met later on in Byzantine chronicles dealing with the period in which he lived, but I have limited myself to the early Greek material.¹⁸⁰ I am fully aware that mine is a quite “perspectival reading,” focusing on such instances that mention Sennacherib and as a rule disregarding alternative explanations that could often be cited along with these.¹⁸¹

Allegorising plays a role, but a marginal one only. Sennacherib primarily is and remains a historical figure. But history, too, can teach the reader a lesson. The king has the dubious honour of being cited or alluded to as a prototype of the evil king. His boasting is a warning for all, his failed campaign a sign of God’s wrath and a beacon of hope for the faithful. But occasionally he is also staged as a tool and instrument of divine punishment. He mostly shows up in such places where one would expect him, especially in the core biblical passages that deal with his campaign, though in this context commentators not infrequently were more interested in Hezekiah than in Sennacherib. He also shows up in such verses that mention Ashur or Babylon (the two merge quite easily as we have seen), usually speaking out against (but occasionally for) these empires and their rulers. In a few instances, he is mentioned in chronological discussions or presentations, but even then there seems an element of warning or advice involved. He

¹⁷⁹ Yet one should also note that at least one of the “giants” of Greek Christianity hardly has taken notice of the figure of Sennacherib. In contrast to the other great Antiochenes, John Chrysostom mentions the king only rarely. In the commentary on Matt. 24:16 (PG 58, 693) and in the one on Isa. 6:13 (PG 56, 76), he is called in, together with Antiochus (Epiphanes), to illustrate the terrors of war. There are also a couple of references in the catena on Jeremiah, but their authenticity cannot be established (cf. PG 64, 812, 924, 1025). *The Synopsis Scripturae Sacrae* (PG 56, 355 and 377) and the comments on Ps. 75 (PG 55, 595), 94 (PG 55, 617), and 118 (PG 55, 680) are all spurious.

¹⁸⁰ To cite just some random examples from Latin and Syriac literature: cf. Jerome, *CommIsa* (on Isa. 17:12–14; 36–37); Aphrahat’s *Demonstration* 5.4 (on Isa. 10:15); and in an indirect way, Ephrem, *Hymns on the Nativity*; all cited by S. A. McKinion, *Isaiah 1–39*, ACCS: OT 10 (Downers Grove IL, 2003), 86 and 132, 250–51, 257–59, 264.

¹⁸¹ One case in which such alternatives have been mentioned is the interpretation of Joel 1:4 by Theodore and Theodoret. To mention just one other example: the latter’s interpretation of Joel 2:17, now with reference to Sennacherib, had been preceded by that of Gregory of Nazianze who instead of Hezekiah here thought of such other biblical figures as Noah, Job, and Daniel, all of them praying to God for help. See *Or.* 2.89 and cf. Ferreiro, *Twelve Prophets*, 71.

is mentioned on his own and for his own, or he “enjoys” the company of fellow villains, most naturally his predecessors and the Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar who would supersede his empire, but occasionally also some more unexpected guests.

He lived in a time long gone, but his deeds and demise lived on well beyond his passing from this earth. He could be used forever, in numerous circumstances and for numerous purposes. The range of possibilities to refer to the king was broad and the ancient authors used all of them. Part of the material repeated what had been said by predecessors, or built on it, and probably also on the way his story was told in church and catechism, for which Theodoret gives us some most rare and interesting information. But there are also a number of more innovating, ingenuous, and even rather outlandish ways of dealing with this king when bringing him on stage. He is mentioned to threaten and to be dismissed, to be a warning and himself be warned, to criticise others and to be criticised, to play the fool and be ridiculed, to portray one possessed by evil and rebuked for it, and finally also to glorify God and condemn those who blaspheme Him. Sennacherib is an all-rounder, but one the reader should never try to imitate or emulate in anything he did or said. He was the perfect negative character.

THE FIRST “WORLD EVENT”: SENNACHERIB AT JERUSALEM

Seth Richardson*

PROSPECT

The encounter between the agents of Sennacherib and Hezekiah at the Jerusalem gates in 701 B.C.E. was hardly the first international incident of the ancient world; nor the first reflected in both contemporary and later sources of more than one culture; nor even the first whose memory survived into modern times reasonably intact. It may, however, be one of the few ancient historical events to satisfy all of these criteria, and the subject has long excited historical questions on everything from military strategy to language to chronography;¹ and historiographic questions on the possibilities and limits of writing histories-of-events, the external confirmation of evidence, and historicity. As compelling as such subjects are, I will pass them by to consider one basic but very different historiographic question: why did Sennacherib-at-Jerusalem hold such appeal and durability as a basis for *Volksgeschichte* towards the latter end of antiquity?

I will approach that question in several steps. The first quarter of this essay surveys stories about Sennacherib in the seven cultural traditions in which they are known (“Complex”), and an examination of the original

* This paper has benefited from the attention of Annalisa Azzoni and Cliff Ando. All abbreviations and sigla follow *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, Vol. 20, *U and W*, ed. M. T. Roth et al. (Chicago, 2010). Other abbreviations include: ABD (*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. N. Freedman [New York, 1992]); COS (*The Context of Scripture*, ed. W. W. Hallo [Leiden, 1997–2002]); ETCSL (*The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*: <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk>); PNAE (*The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, ed. H. Baker and K. Radner [Helsinki, 1998–2011]).

¹ The most prolific literature has centered around a) questions of whether or not Sennacherib conducted two Palestinian campaigns—there is now a firm consensus that he did not—and b) what the sequence of Egyptian regency was for the 25th Dynasty pharaohs Shabaka-Shebitku-Taharqa. See, e.g., F. Yurco, “The Shabaka-Shebitku Coregency and the Supposed Second Campaign of Sennacherib Against Judah: A Critical Assessment,” *JBL* 110/1 (1991); W. Gallagher, *Sennacherib’s Campaign to Judah* (Leiden, 1999), 122f.; R. D. Bates, “Assyria and Rebellion in the Annals of Sennacherib: An Analysis of Sennacherib’s Treatment of Hezekiah,” *NEASB* 44 (1999), cf. W. H. Shea, “Jerusalem Under Siege: Did Sennacherib Attack Twice?” *Biblical Archaeological Review* 25 (1999); see also M. Cogan and J. Pope (this volume).

formative conditions that fostered their widespread popularity (“Formation”) in the cosmopolitan wake of the Assyrian empire. Next, I will look at a number of functions revealed by common elements in the stories. The second part looks at themes which reflect the imperial(ized) societies in which the stories were set and re-told, including a new emphasis on protagonists who were non-royal; a preference for narrative development by miracles and fantastic events; and an underlying disquiet revealed in themes of flight and hiding. Third, I will look at the role these stories played in constructing social memory in an imperial age, especially through the operation of historical forgetting. Fourth and finally, I will look back on the crucial role the event played in establishing the new historical sensibility that came to characterize the late antique Near East, in which historical change was not dispensed by gods through the agency of kings, but effected by the actions of men.

I will take a few pages to lay out my premises and arguments a little more clearly, since some return in the various sections in different ways. The “Formation” section, to begin with, draws two historiographic connections between the event and its reception history. First, there is the connection between the international character of the actual historical incident and the widespread appeal of the story in later times—an appeal going beyond the mere availability of the Hebrew Bible. The specific characteristics of the Jerusalem encounter contained much that was desirable to the symbolic needs of first millennium imperialized publics, to the millions of “colonials” living under the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian empires far beyond the hills of Judah. Second, it is not accidental that many of the polities figuring *in* the Biblical and Assyrian accounts were historically dispersed in great numbers through subsequent deportations, creating a new and mixed audience of listeners for popular historical stories: the story’s international popularity was a reflection of its subject matter. Not only a product of cultural diversity, the story also took root in multiple genres, permeating different registers of historical discourse—state accounts, theological parables, and vernacular tales (especially those with a parodic voice). The *topos* of Sennacherib-at-Jerusalem was an ideal vehicle for the emerging political sensibilities of a colonized world, and its propagation was aided by educated tellers and interested hearers as a “readerly text.” The story was ideal for the world-historical conditions of imperial cultures in the centuries following 701 B.C.E. It was critical of kingship as well as kings: thousands of communities, once under the watchful eyes of local kings, now experienced kingship at a distance, a

force now neither intrinsically bad nor good but seemingly amoral, arbitrary, and capable of great violence.

I will also discuss the stories' corollary role in replacing an earlier "great tradition" of kingship mythos with a new folk tradition that celebrated and valorized the authority of what Eisenstadt called "autonomous elites." These administrators and political actors lived in dominated polities, but usually outside of palatial households, and came under stress from both hegemony who pressed them to govern on their behalf and local forces which pressed them to resist to varying degrees. These elites "enjoy[ed] autonomous symbolic [usually religious] definitions" and "serve[d] as activators of the alternative conceptions of social order," but saw their powers limited in the political sphere.² They were conflicted and liminal figures caught between core and periphery, troubled by the ambivalence of vassal culture; not independent, but autonomous in terms of the reference point of their social authority. The Sennacherib stories foregrounded these new elites while remanding kings to the narrative background.

The promulgation of this new second-tier elite archetype was accelerated by a programmatic forgetting about kingship, with a wide range of traditional codes of royal legitimacy quietly being mothballed by the Sargonid, Nabopolassar, and Achaemenid dynasties. As I will argue toward the end of this essay, *imperium* fit awkwardly into the social and political templates of *regnum*, and Ancient Near Eastern empires struggled to shoehorn their authority into them. One partial solution was the recasting or decommissioning of specific practices in ritual, religion, royal inscriptions, dynasticism, and knowledge production. "Forgetting" kingship in this way was as important a mechanism as "remembering" it in the production of reception histories, and its function will be considered in light of ideas about social memory. These twin processes—the celebration of a rising, literate autonomous social authority, and the programmatic forgetting of the imperial *nouveau rois*—reveal that the stories I will discuss were engendered as much by the ideological depletions of imperialism, busily trying to assert new forms of legitimacy, as by any active resistance politics of vassal culture.

² S. N. Eisenstadt, "Cultural Orientations, Institutional Entrepreneurs, and Social Change: Comparative Analysis," *American Journal of Sociology* 85/4 (1980): 849–51: in Eisenstadt's language, autonomous elites were "embedded in broader ascriptive collectivities" than merely imperial administrations.

Thus, any idea of seeing these stories as manifestations of a “resistance literature” has to be complicated by acknowledging their celebratory and apologetic functions.³ The colonial elites who were the authors, readers, and subjects of such implicitly anti-imperial narratives as these were already compromised by their legacies of political collaboration with and cultural emulation of their imperial overlords. This ambivalence is familiar to postcolonial theorists: imperial core cultures are unstable, even revolutionary, while peripheral ones struggle to balance compliance with the measure of resistance bound up in self-interest and postures of authenticity—all of which of course problematizes the categorical integrity of organizing terms like “core” and “periphery.” The “Sennacherib complex” reflected these conflicts, illustrating the spirit of the age mostly by identifying that spirit as anxiety.

Finally, I will give some attention to the ancient understanding of Sennacherib-at-Jerusalem as a historical “event.” Why was it important for late antique thought to couch its narrative and ideological needs in a historical voice? Or what was it about the historicity of the subject that made it so productive of new stories? These questions seem more likely to lead to answers about 701 B.C.E. than traveling down well-worn paths and once again interrogating the sources for historical accuracy. A glance at the range of stories already tells us that some unity lay behind the perception and reproduction of the story as world-changing—in their conscious expression of historical significance—but an engagement with “event theory” teases out the new significations and structural transformations the historical voice entailed.

THE “SENNACHERIB COMPLEX”: AN ARCHIPELAGIC LITERATURE

The “complex” of stories I will discuss includes mostly those about the Jerusalem incident and Sennacherib’s second campaign, but also associated tales in which Sennacherib figures as an archetypal despot—including stories touching on the death of the Assyrian king twenty years later (inextricably linked as cause and effect by 2 Chronicles 32:21, 2 Kings 19:37, and Isaiah 37:38). This “Sennacherib complex” never was at any point a corpus as such. Rather, the distribution of the stories—linguistically, geo-

³ Cf. Anatheia Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI 2011).

graphically, temporally, and generically—constituted an *archipelago* of narratives, independent of but allusive to each other.

By "archipelago" (and "complex," terms I will use interchangeably), I wish to denominate a group of narratives which have no discernible manuscript tradition or transmission history—no visible connection between the written components, its "islands"—but which emerge from a shared fund of traditions and sensibilities.⁴ We should not create castles in the air or lean on absent evidence; but we also cannot abandon object permanence when we look at the past, and think that only what we can see is what existed. Nor is this to presume a predominant oral tradition to a written one; archipelagic stories are generated with a *knowledge of multiplicity*: of sources (both oral and written), of intercultural influences, of genres. Generic layering is especially important to the promotion of archipelagos; they are most effectively propagated by a robust referentiality between genres, which redoubles the power of stories, boosting the force of metaphoric truth with the authority of historical documentation, amplified by the allure of narrative (especially when delivering anti-authoritarian titillation). The stories were thus perceived as both true and "cool"—manifestations of a literary subject emerging from submerged discourses, from influences and shared ideas not visible above the surface of the page.⁵

Stories about Sennacherib and the encounter at Jerusalem were among the most widespread of the ancient world. Some recounted the events in their specifics; others made use of parts of the story as takeoff points for other narratives; still others used the character of Sennacherib only generally, but in harmony with critical themes about hubris and power. What bound the complex together was the use of Sennacherib as an archetypal despot set against a backdrop of radical world-historical change. This awareness was constituted at two levels. First was at the level of historical consciousness: the tradition was formed in the heightened emotional atmosphere and ritual-theatrical setting of the imperial zenith. The insecurity

⁴ Compare with Stephanie Dalley's approach to the traditions informing the Book of Esther in *Esther's Revenge at Susa* (Oxford, 2007), especially chapter 9, "From History into Myth."

⁵ Stephanie West has referred to *thema* moving between literatures as "migratory motifs" for their transposability, in her essay "Croesus' Second Reprieve and Other Tales of the Persian Court," *The Classical Quarterly* 53/2 (2003).

and structural dislocations of world empire imbued thousands of colonial communities with a sense of consequence and cultural improvisation.⁶

The second level of awareness was later and historiographic in nature, brought about through an acknowledgement of the multiplicity of sources. The 10th c. A.D. Arab geographer Al-Mas'ūdi, for instance, was aware of both Biblical and Greek accounts of Mesopotamian antiquity, while the 3rd c. B.C.E. chronographer Berossos, writing in Greek, had access to archives of Babylonian scientific and historical texts.⁷ Such authors no longer wrote only of their subject, but also of their sources; they wrote not so much in a critical capacity as an antiquarian one, intrigued by the new possibilities presented to write comparative histories. No single ancient author or reader would have known the full extent of the Sennacherib archipelago, but would have been aware, in reading or hearing any given story, that it nested within a larger tradition of history and myth.⁸

It is not my goal to catalog every one of these compositions, especially since other chapters in this volume cover many of them in detail⁹—but an overview of their historiographic versatility is still helpful. The 701 B.C.E. story is found, of course, in Assyrian annalistic and display inscriptions, and in the various Biblical verses. But the complex of Sennacherib stories also branched out into ancient Aramaic, Egyptian, Greek and Latin literatures in antiquity, and then enjoyed new and different forms in late antique and medieval Syriac, Latin,¹⁰ and Arabic,¹¹ in Talmud and

⁶ See the final section of this essay; these attributes of historical consciousness are articulated by William Sewell, Jr., "Historical Events as Transformations of Structures: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille," *Theory and Society* 25/6 (1996): 860–78.

⁷ Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, "Mesopotamian National Identity in Early Arabic Sources," *WZKM* 92 (2002): 58–61; Geert De Breucker, "Berossos and the Mesopotamian Temple as Centre of Knowledge During the Hellenistic Period," in *Learned Antiquity*, ed. Alasdair A. MacDonald et al. (Leuven, 2003).

⁸ I see this as a relatively deliberate type of intertextuality and set of "writerly" texts: see G. Greco and P. Shoemaker, "Intertextuality and Large Corpora: A Medievalist Approach," *Computers and the Humanities* 27 (1993): 349–55, who argue against "the intertext [as] a vast social space, a complex system of signs where authors and their intentions play little role" and in favor of a "conscious rewriting and adaption [which] create[s] specific links between an individual text and large corpora."

⁹ See also the masterful discussion by S. W. Holloway in his book *Aššur is King! Aššur is King! Religion in the Exercise of Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Leiden, 2001), 1–9.

¹⁰ A. Harrak, "Tales About Sennacherib: The Contribution of the Syriac Sources," in *The World of the Aramaeans III: Studies in Language and Literature in Honour of Paul-Eugène Dion*, ed. Michèle Daviau et al. (Sheffield, UK, 2001), 178–79.

¹¹ C. Janssen, *Bābil: The City of Witchcraft and Wine: the Name and Fame of Babylon in Medieval Arabic Geographical Texts*, Mesopotamian History and Environment, Series II Memoirs 2 (Ghent, 1995); Hämeen-Anttila, "Mesopotamian National Identity."

Mishnah, and through the Ahiqar stories also into Armenian,¹² Slavonic, Georgian, Romanian,¹³ Turkish, Russian, Ethiopic, Serbian, and perhaps even Middle Persian.¹⁴

In the Christian West, Sennacherib also remained a durable and malleable subject through the Biblical verses, firing the imaginations of late antique, medieval, and early modern writers (to say nothing of painters and illustrators)¹⁵ to a variety of purposes. Jerome, for instance, used the Assyrians in one letter as allegorical figures of sin, encouraging us to "slay the Rabshakeh within."¹⁶ Maimonides referenced the story in quite another way, drawing on the Assyrian deportation as the historical precedent allowing Jews to live among foreigners in cases where exile had made national residence meaningless to the sense of community.¹⁷ Dante saw an allegory of faith in false gods, proven by the fact that Sennacherib died while praying to his idols.¹⁸ Roger Bacon mentioned Sennacherib as a mere historical detail in a thirteenth century A.D. geographical treatise on "greater Armenia,"¹⁹ while Milton used the figure of "Nisroc" in his 1667

¹² J. Russell, "The Shrine Beneath the Waves," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 51 (2007): 142.

¹³ Principally, Slavonic and Romanian versions of the Aramaic Ahiqar story are known to have been perpetuated: J. R. Porter, "Folklore Between the Testaments," *Folklore* 91/2 (1980): 135.

¹⁴ F. de Blois, "The Admonitions of Adurbad and their Relationship to the Ahiqar Legend," *JRAS* (1984): 41–53; see also Harrak, "Tales About Sennacherib," 183.

¹⁵ Most famously "The Defeat of Sennacherib" (c. 1616) by Peter Paul Rubens (cf. the identically-titled work by Hendrik Pietersz. de Hondt, also 17th c.) and "Destruction of the Army of Sennacherib" (1886) by Gustav Doré, but also various miniatures by unknown medieval artists (e.g., a c. 1300 Italian work now at the J. Paul Getty Museum; another from the 1372 French *Bible Historiale*; a third by the Master of Otto van Moerdrecht, c. 1430) all the way through the late 19th c. (e.g., James Tissot and William Brassey Hole). Sennacherib was also a popular subject for woodcuts by, e.g., Georg Pencz and Marten de Vos (both 16th c.), A. Tempesta (1613), D. Martin (1700), C. Luiken (1712), Ph. J. de Louthembourg (18th c.), and J. Schnorr von Carolsfeld, G. F. Detire, and Byam Shaw (all 19th c.), among many others. Images of Tobit were even more popular in European art, most famously in a series of drawings and paintings by Rembrandt (1620's and 30's), but also Jan Massays ("The Healing of Tobit," c. 1550), Matthias Stom (same title, 17th c.), A. De Pape ("Tobit and Anna," c. 1658), L.-J. Le Lorrain ("Tobit burying the dead in defiance of the orders of Sennacherib," 18th c.), W.-A. Bouguereau ("Tobias Saying Good-Bye to his Father, 1860), and many others.

¹⁶ See J. Verheyden, this volume. S. D. Ryan, "The Rabshakeh in Late Biblical and Post-Biblical Tradition," *Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Yearbook 2008* ed. H. Lichtenberger and U. Mittmann-Richert (Berlin, 2008): 183–98.

¹⁷ Maimonides, *Mishne Torah, Hilchot Melachim* 5:4, 7–8; cf. Mishnah Yad. iv.4, which repealed prohibitions against Ammonites in congregations on the grounds that Sennacherib's dispersal of them had made it subsequently impossible to certainly identify one.

¹⁸ Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio* xii 52–54.

¹⁹ Roger Bacon's *Opus Majus* used the Sennacherib story as a garnish for its learned expositions on historical geography; similarly, see the interpolation of the Sennacherib-Hezekiah

Paradise Lost as he “of Principalities prime” and thus alluding to Sennacherib himself as one “escap’t from cruel fight, Sore toil’d, his riv’n Armies to havoc hewn.”²⁰

Principally, Sennacherib was a symbol of pagan rapacity. Most common was the sustained use of the epithet “a new Sennacherib,” hurled against almost any hated monarch, perhaps as early as Berossos.²¹ The fourth century A.D. chronicler Theodoret turned to the simile toward the end of his *Ecclesiastical History* (V:36) to vilify the Persian ruler Vararanes. The tale of the Syrian saint Mār Afrem compared the Roman emperor Valens (r. A.D. 364–378) to Sennacherib, describing him as having “pillaged the Temple in Jerusalem, desecrated its golden vessels with carousing, then was murdered by his own son while thanking his gods for victory.”²² The ninth century A.D. Bulgarian Khan Krum was also called “the New Sennacherib” and accused of using the skull of the Byzantine emperor Nikephoros I as a drinking vessel; Thomas à Becket likened Duke Frederick II of Swabia to Sennacherib with the same words after the duke’s 1167 siege of Rome was broken up by pestilence;²³ and Pope Nicholas V cast the epithet against the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II around 1450.²⁴ The Kazan Tatars defeated by Ivan III in the late fifteenth century were likened (in a later letter to Ivan the Terrible) to Sennacherib’s routed army, and characterized as a good omen for the Russian victory that came in 1552.²⁵ That such expressions were drawn from a common fund of biblical verses hardly depletes their potency; Sennacherib remained (over other possible symbols) generative of fresh metaphors, a protean icon—an embodiment of evil, an emblem of paganism, a miscegenator, a witless foil against divine power, an allegory of arrogance, an historical curiosity.

story in the earlier sixth century AD cosmographic work by Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Christian Topography*, Book 8.

²⁰ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book VI, lines 447–49.

²¹ S. Dalley, “Sennacherib and Tarsus,” *Anatolian Studies* 49 (1999): 76, suggests that Berossos made an implied negative comparison between Sennacherib and Antiochus I.

²² A. Palmer, “The Prophet and the King: Mar Afrem’s Message to the Eastern Roman Emperor,” in *After Bardasian*, ed. G. Reinink and A. Klugkist (Leuven, 1999), 231–32. Valens was, however, killed in battle against the Goths, not by parricide.

²³ P. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* vol. 5 (Oak Harbor, WA, 1997); see n. 138 at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/hcc5.txt>, accessed July 2013.

²⁴ C. Patrinelis, “Mehmed II the Conqueror and His Presumed Knowledge of Greek and Latin,” *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 2 (1972): 349.

²⁵ I. Ševčenko, “Byzantium and the Eastern Slavs after 1453,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 2/1 (1978): 8.

Let us give some shape to the stories of this literary complex, which speak past each other in their local historiographic concerns. What follows here is a gallery of sources rather than a *catalog raisonné*; a fleshing out of the basic extent of the complex. I will briefly discuss the “clusters,” the islands of the archipelago, made up of related and dependent sources; they are typically, but not of necessity, associated by language, and I address them in the rough chronological order of their origin: the Assyrian, Hebrew Bible, Aramaic, Egyptian, Greek, Syriac/Armenian and Arabic clusters. (Readers already familiar with these sources may wish to skip ahead to the analyses following.)

1. *The Assyrian Cluster*

This cluster includes (1a) Sennacherib’s campaign accounts proper (part of a wider narrative about world domination), first composed in 700 B.C.E., the year after the Jerusalem encounter.²⁶ There is also (1b) the depiction of the third campaign in wall reliefs at Nineveh, especially (but hardly limited to) the siege of Lachish (see Ussishkin, this volume).²⁷ These two sources have received much attention not only for their importance relative to the later Biblical accounts, but for the ways in which they are atypical of the Assyrian repertoire. The written accounts are highly unusual in that they describe the submission of an enemy monarch (Hezekiah) being enacted well after the military campaign; the campaign reliefs are unusual for the amount of attention lavished on a single campaign (unique until, perhaps, the Elamite reliefs of Aššurbanipal), and in the case of the Lachish reliefs, on a subject entirely unmentioned in the annals.

Non-Assyrian stories in the archipelago also linked to the third campaign events the Assyrians never would have connected themselves, but were nevertheless deeply concerned with: (1c) the death of Sennacherib and its sequelae in terms of dynastic strife.²⁸ The campaign and

²⁶ Gallagher, *Sennacherib’s Campaign*, 9–14, enumerates the various annals, bull inscriptions, and palace reliefs which touch on the Palestinian campaign; it also discusses the so-called Azekah inscription.

²⁷ Although the Lachish panels in Room XXXVI of the Ninevite palace are the most famous, we must take note that Sennacherib devoted the entire decorative program of no fewer than eleven rooms—and portions of two others—to the depiction of the third campaign (see J. M. Russell, *Sennacherib’s Palace without Rival at Nineveh* [Chicago, 1991], 164).

²⁸ Such material includes Babylonian Chronicle 1 iii 34–36, but also the story recounted in both Esarhaddon’s inscriptions, the Nabonidus Stela, and various letters as discussed

Sennacherib's death were, of course, never linked in Assyrian historiography at all,²⁹ existing only in the logic of divine retribution employed by the Biblical account (2a) and stories which drew from it. In Assyrian thinking, the death of the king belonged to an entirely different historical *chaîne opératoire*, one related to dynastic instability beginning with Sargon's usurpation of the throne; his "sinful" treatment of Babylon's gods; his resulting death in battle;³⁰ the strife between Esarhaddon and his brothers; the strife between Aššurbanipal and *his* brother; and the decades-long "hunt" for the parricides and their kin—an entirely different historiographic skein. So why include it here? The central place of succession problems in Assyria generally, and of Sennacherib's assassination specifically, undoubtedly bolstered the logic and historicity of the Biblical account. In fact, I argue that the Biblical authors chose Sennacherib's assassination as the denouement of the Jerusalem account precisely because they knew how much the succession issue troubled the Assyrian *mentalité*. Going further, as I do below (see "Formation"), it must be recognized that the Assyrian rationale for Sennacherib's death was similar to, if not informative of, the Biblical explanation in seeing the death of the monarch as retribution for hubris before God (whether Yahweh or Marduk). Thus the historical topoi were joined at the hip.

Relevant material to the (1c) stories survived in the account of Berossus (1d), mostly as related to chronology and dynastic strife, but also about Sennacherib's campaigns against Tarsus and (possibly) Egypt. Yet Berossus did not attribute to Sennacherib a siege of Jerusalem. Despite this, we may note that Eusebius topically paired Berossus' discussion of Sennacherib and Hezekiah as contemporaries with his account of Nebuchadnezzar II's siege of Jerusalem, an implied identity.³¹ The Berossus material should

by S. Parpola in "The Murderer of Sennacherib," in *Death in Mesopotamia*, ed. B. Alster, Mesopotamia 8 (Copenhagen, 1980), 171–81.

²⁹ Such a link could possibly be supported on the strength of the conjecture that the Judean royal family married into the Sargonid dynasty and in some way influenced Assyrian policy towards Judah (see S. Dalley, "Yabâ, Atalyâ, and the Foreign Policy of Late Assyrian Kings," *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 12/1 [1998]); but see now Frahm, this volume, after the earlier doubts of K. L. Younger, "Yahweh at Ashkelon and Calah? Yahwistic Names in Neo-Assyrian," *Vetus Testamentum* 52 (2002): 207–18.

³⁰ H. Tadmor et al., "The Sin of Sargon and Sennacherib's Last Will," *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 3/1 (1989); cf. A. Weaver, "The 'Sin of Sargon' and Esarhaddon's Reconception of Sennacherib: A Study in Divine Will, Human Politics, and Ideology," *Iraq* 66 (2004).

³¹ G. Verbrugghe and J. Wickersham, *Berossos and Manetho, Introduced and Translated* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2001), 54–57.

probably be understood as deriving mostly from cuneiform evidence, but perhaps with an awareness of Biblical material as well.³²

Finally, beyond these official accounts, we are unusually lucky to have Neo-Assyrian administrative texts (1e)—however fragmentary—supporting the general historicity of the 701 events. There is, for instance, external confirmation of Padi's re-enthronment in the form of a small tag from Nineveh, dated to 699 B.C.E., reading "1 talent (of silver measured) by the royal light (talent). Pidi, the ruler of Ekron."³³ Other contemporary Ninevite texts noted the arrival of tribute-bearers from Judah in company with emissaries from Moab, Byblos, Ammon, and elsewhere, bearing tribute (*madattu*, SAA I 110; 10 minas of silver, SAA XI 33); SAA XI 57 documents one talent of silver sent as tribute from an unidentified king (the royal name may be lost in a break) called only "the Judean," likely to be either Hezekiah or Manasseh. These little tags, of course, did not register in any set of popular stories, but they do reflect that the enactment of tribute to Assyria by Judah was a feature of regular vassal relations.

2. *The Hebrew Bible Cluster*

The Sennacherib accounts of 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, and First Isaiah (2a1, 2a2, 2a3) are of course set within a common theological narrative about Yahweh's special destiny for Judah and the city of Jerusalem in particular. Divergent within these accounts, however, are explanations critical of Hezekiah's centralization of cultic authority, versus those in which his role is that of a heroic resister of the Assyrian empire. The 2 Kings and Chronicles accounts are essentially historically-voiced accounts of Judah's relations with Assyria which begin with a prelude covering the time of Tiglath-pileser III up until the capture of Samaria by Šalmaneser V (2 Kings 15:17–18:12);³⁴ an account of the invasion of Judah by Sennacherib

³² This remains unclear, however: Verbrugge and Wickersham, *Berosos and Manetho*, 52–56, 76, 78; 15: "In what remains of Berosus's *History* there is no indication of what specific or particular sources he used."

³³ SAA XI 50; another tribute list mentioning Ekron, SAA XI 34, is unfortunately not dated. N. Na'aman ("Ekron under the Assyrian and Egyptian Empires," *BASOR* 332 [1974]: 83–84) proposes that Padi was a puppet installed by Sargon II after the revolt of 720 B.C.E., and that this king continued to enjoy "preferred status . . . among the Assyrian vassals in the west" after his 701 reinstatement.

³⁴ The Chronicler greatly abbreviates this prelude, touching on it only in 1 Chron. 5:26 and 2 Chron. 28:16–21; both Šalmaneser and Sargon go entirely unmentioned (and the same gap between Tiglath-pileser III and Sennacherib occurs in Berosus).

and his death (2 Kings 18:13–19:37),³⁵ and a postlude relating Hezekiah's illness and the delegation from Babylon (2 Kings 20:1–20).³⁶ The Isaiah account differs in recounting the Assyrian episode mostly in the allusive voice of prophecy (e.g., Isaiah 7:18, 20) more than a historical one,³⁷ and in the interpolation of poetic material within the illness account (i.e., Isaiah 38:9–21).

A variety of other Judahite sources (2b) were widely believed, from antiquity to the present, to support the authenticity of the Biblical accounts, including excavated remains in and around Jerusalem, including the Siloam inscription (2b1), the so-called "Hezekiah Tunnel" (2b2), and the fortification walls which some have dated to the eighth century B.C.E. (2b3).³⁸ A little further afield, the *lmlk* stamp sealings (2b4)³⁹ recovered in modern times, from Lachish and elsewhere, have similarly bolstered the historicity of the event (see Ussishkin, this volume).

We should also see the account of Josephus (2c, *Antiquities* X.1–23; cf. *Wars* V.387–408) as straightforwardly dependent on the Hebrew Bible accounts, though re-purposed as part of a heroic Judaeon past in the face of Roman imperialism.⁴⁰ Josephus does, however, add some colorful details not found in any other account, including Sennacherib's pledge not

³⁵ || 2 Chron. 32:1–23, from which the prophetic material is absent; Isa. 36:1–37:38.

³⁶ || 2 Chron. 32:24–33; Isa. 38:1–39:8; C. Seitz opines that the consecution of action in absolute chronological terms in Isaiah is contested, and probably hopelessly muddled ("Isaiah, Book of (First Isaiah)," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* III, 477–78).

³⁷ There is one mention of Sargon in Isa. 20:1, the only place this king is referred to by name in the Hebrew Bible.

³⁸ The literature on the archaeological remains of eighth century B.C.E. Jerusalem is too vast to consider here; for a brief and programmatic statement, see D. Ussishkin, "Jerusalem at the time of Hezekiah—An Archaeologist's View," *New Studies on Jerusalem* 10 (2004): 63–66, in which he weighs in on a late eighth century date for the fortification walls (expanded to accommodate Israelite refugees fleeing Sargon II's conquests) and royal compound (which "crystallized during the 8th century"), but a much older date for the water system as a whole, including Siloam, dating it to the Middle Bronze Age; compare with N. Na'aman, "When and How Did Jerusalem Become A Great City? The Rise of Jerusalem and Judah's Premier City in the Eighth-Seventh Centuries B.C.E.," *BASOR* 347 (Aug., 2007).

³⁹ For the most recent discussion of the sealings' chronology and historical importance, see the opposing views of O. Lipschits et al., "Royal Judahite Jar Handles," *Tel Aviv* 37/1 (2010): 3–32, and D. Ussishkin, "The Dating of the *lmlk* Storage Jars and its Implications," *Tel Aviv* 38/2 (2011): 220–40.

⁴⁰ See C. T. Begg and P. Spilsbury, *Flavius Josephus: Judean Antiquities 8–10*, v. 5 of *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*, ed. S. Mason (Leiden, 2005), 205–13. It is clear that Biblical sources were primary for Josephus' project (though he wrote in Greek), and so I group it here; Josephus was obviously also familiar with Herodotus' account, however, directly comparing it to the Biblical one (see X.18ff.), and note his inclusion of an Egyptian campaign of Sennacherib.

to harm Jerusalem (*Ant.* X.2), the "cowardice" of Hezekiah (*Ant.* X.5),⁴¹ and the attribution of the death of 185,000 Assyrians to "pestilence" (*loimós*) rather than to an angel (*Ant.* X.21; cf. the more vivid account of the illness in his *Wars* V.404–408).⁴² This last detail appears to be in harmony with another use of the term by Josephus to indicate divine retribution rather than an ordinary sickness.⁴³

One might also include various Second Temple period writings from Mishnah,⁴⁴ Talmud (e.g., Sanh. 94a–b, 95a–b, 96b), and other Rabbinic sources (2d) which of course presupposed a knowledge of the (2a) accounts without always drawing on their details (see further Oegema and Ulmer, this volume). The most colorful such story comes from Talmud: as Sennacherib fled Jerusalem, Yahweh, disguised as an old man, advised the Assyrian king (who "sat in fear" just like the nations he had so recently subjugated) to disguise himself by cutting off his beard. Accepting this advice, Sennacherib was encouraged by the old man to sit ever closer to his campfire so that his divine barber might have enough light to do the job—only to have the old man set fire to Sennacherib's beard and hair. Sennacherib runs off into the night towards Nineveh, screaming in pain and bewilderment: a good joke.⁴⁵ In another tale, Sennacherib was

⁴¹ L. Feldman, "Josephus's Portrait of Hezekiah," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111/4 (1992).

⁴² W. McNeill figured that Hezekiah's stopping up of water sources outside the walls of Jerusalem might have forced the Assyrians "to drink contaminated water and thus expose themselves to widespread infections," an event later magnified by "pious interpretation" ("Infectious Alternatives: The Plague That Saved Jerusalem, 701 B.C.," in *What If? The World's Most Foremost Military Historians Imagine What Might Have Been*, ed. R. Cowley [New York, 1999], 9–12).

⁴³ S. S. Kottke, for instance puts this "pestilence" (*loimós*) in line with the one in *Ant.* IX.288–89, when a group of Persians settled in Samaria (2 Kgs. 17:25) was so afflicted; that "pestilence" abated once they took up worship of the Lord (*Medicine and Hygiene in the Works of Flavius Josephus* [Leiden, 1994], 40–41, 152–52). J. Jouanna notes the original use of *loimós* in tragedy (e.g., in *Oedipus Rex*), where the "miasma" causing pestilence is tied to "spilt blood" (*Greek Medicine from Hippocrates to Galen: Selected Papers* [Leiden, 2012], 124). See further L. H. Feldman, *Studies in Josephus' Rewritten Bible* (Leiden, 1998), 363–75, 381–82, esp. 374–75; Begg and Spilsbury, *Flavius Josephus*, 212 n. 86, make no remark on the departure from the biblical text other than to acknowledge it, though noting that Josephus' *Wars* V.362–419 does attribute the disease to "the angel of the Lord." My thanks to Jonathan J. Price for directing me on this question.

⁴⁴ Neusner, *Making God's Word Work: A Guide to the Mishnah* (New York, 2004), 54–55 (Tosefta-Tractate Sotah 3:18–19) and 58–59 (Leviticus Rabbah XVIII:II). Note also mentions of Sennacherib in mYad 4:4 I.

⁴⁵ G. Newby, "Abraha and Sennacherib: A Talmudic Parallel to the Tafsir on Sūrat Al-Fil," *JAOS* 94/4 (1974): 435. Note also the Roman-era rabbinic sages Shmaya and Avtalyon, who were said to have descended from Sennacherib (Gittin 57b); see Ulmer, this volume.

said to besiege the mythical city of Luz, invested by legend with miraculous qualities, and ostensibly located somewhere on the Phoenician coast; the Babylonian Talmud (Soṭah 46b) tells us that “Luz, the city known for its blue dye, is the city which Sennacherib entered but could not harm.”⁴⁶ The imperviousness of Luz to Sennacherib mirrors his inability to capture Jerusalem, only now it was recast in a Phoenician setting; the Luz story probably conflates Sennacherib’s Jerusalem siege with Nebuchadnezzar’s siege of Tyre.⁴⁷ Of course, most commonly, one finds Sennacherib appearing as a paradigmatic bad guy; as the Babylonian Talmud (Sanh. 94a) put it, “his very conversation was strife.”

Rabbinic literature commented on Sennacherib as late as the medieval period.⁴⁸ Further out, one of course finds the reproduction of the Sennacherib stories in the Septuagint and the Vulgate (2e), and then an almost limitless number of reuses of the story in popular allegories of the Christian West (2f, as discussed in the Introduction), beginning with early Christian literature (see Verheyden, this volume).⁴⁹ These outgrowths, as Oegema argues (this volume), represented both historiographic and theological-apocalyptic strains of thinking about royal power.

3. *The Aramaic Cluster*

This cluster is mostly limited to the two stories of the wise counselors Ahiqar (3a) and Tobit (3b)⁵⁰ which color Sennacherib as a fickle, vengeful, and eminently dupable overlord (see Holm, this volume). Though these stories are historically coincident with the Hebrew Bible cluster, as are the Syriac tales, neither in fact owes its substantial derivation to Biblical

⁴⁶ E. Reichman and F. Rosner, “The Bone Called Luz,” *The Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 51/1 (1996): 53, citing Babylonian Talmud Soṭah 46b.

⁴⁷ Ibid.; Babylonian Talmud Soṭah 46b says that Nebuchadnezzar also entered Luz, but could not destroy it, calling Luz “the city over which the angel of death has no power; outside the walls of which the aged who are tired of life are placed, where they meet death.”

⁴⁸ E.g., the ninth century C.E. Italian *Pirḳe de Rabbi Eliezer*, in which Sennacherib descended from the Egyptian pharaohs who had been transplanted to Nineveh.

⁴⁹ The so-called pseudepigraphical “Martyrdom of Isaiah (second century C.E.), for instance, resituates Isaiah’s counsel to Hezekiah following the invasion of Samaria by “Alagar Zagar” (presumably Šalmaneser V) rather than Sennacherib’s invasion of Judah; J. H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA, 2010), 159 sub. 3d. Cf. the fanciful paternity for Sennacherib in Tobit, “Enemessar,” presumably also Šalmaneser.

⁵⁰ The Book of Tobit is, of course, only fully preserved in the Greek Septuagint, but its Aramaic witnesses are clearly in conversation with the Ahiqar story, and broadly identical to the Greek manuscripts.

material.⁵¹ What seems more pertinent than the small number of stories is the geographical spread of the tradition over a great swath of the late antique Near East (see above, p. 439).

The memory of the Jerusalem encounter may also have found its way into Aramaic magic (3c) in the form of an incantation bowl alluding to the avenging angel of story (2a).⁵² That angel in turn, unnamed in the Bible itself, is identified (as Oegema and Ulmer show, this volume) as Ramiel in 2 Baruch, and in the Aramaic Toseftot Targums (3d) as (variously) Michael or Gabriel. These stories added such specific details such as that the angel arrived "appearing from the Temple Wall and burning all the [Assyrian] camps with fire," escorting Sennacherib to Gehonim to be burned with sulfur and fire, or smiting the Assyrian army with a scythe which had been kept in readiness since Creation itself.⁵³

4. *The Egyptian Cluster*

Only a few indirect references to Sennacherib trouble the contemporary Kushite (i.e., 25th Dynasty) record (4a).⁵⁴ For any unambiguous references to the time of Sennacherib, one must turn to the much later stories of Inaros,⁵⁵ his son Pemu, and other heroic resisters of Assyrian aggression (4b), which Kim Ryholt has characterized as the products of the "traumatic experience" of invasion and occupation.⁵⁶ Ryholt details

⁵¹ Unless, of course, one insists on counting Tobit as canonical and non-apocryphal, etc. Whether or not the Ahiqar stories subsequently influenced or found their way into Aesop's fables, Arabian folktales, and the like, as A. Salvesen has suggested ("The Legacy of Babylon and Nineveh in Aramaic Sources," in *The Legacy of Mesopotamia*, ed. S. Dalley [Oxford, 1998], 147–48), is of no relevance to our study, since the historical specificity of Sennacherib has not only been lost in those works, but there is no evidence of an awareness of the sourcing; in short, they reflect archetypes rather than outgrowths.

⁵² E. M. Cook, "An Aramaic Incantation Bowl from Khafaje," *BASOR* 285 (1992): 79.

⁵³ R. Kasher, "Angelology and the Supernal Worlds in the Aramaic Targums to the Prophets," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 27/2 (1996): 174; Sanh. 95b (implying that it is Gabriel who actually kills Sennacherib). Another Talmudic story (Yalk. Isa. 4:28) had it that, in the afterlife, Yahweh would allow the "Angel of Death" to fight both Pharaoh and Sennacherib; note, finally, Targum Jonathan, which retrospectively considered 1 Sam. 2:4 to have been a prophecy of Sennacherib's rout.

⁵⁴ See Pope, this volume, discussing the stela Kawa IV and V; he otherwise argues that Kushite reticence on the subject reflects an informed policy of cautious non-engagement with Assyria rather than disinterest or ignorance.

⁵⁵ The Inaros of these stories is not to be confused with the fifth century Libyan king who rebelled against Persian rule, though the homonymy may have been a deliberate strategy of the anti-Assyrian literature.

⁵⁶ K. Ryholt, "The Assyrian Invasion of Egypt in Egyptian Literary Tradition," in *Assyria and Beyond: Studies Presented to Mogens Trolle Larsen*, ed. J. G. Dercksen (Leiden, 2004).

nine stories known from Egypt (one of which is the Ahiqar tale), most of which focus on military resistance to the Assyrian invasion: the Assyrian king is stymied by Inaros' siege of an important fortress; Inaros slays an Assyrian sorceress, transformed into a colossal griffin over 200 feet long, whose wings "covered the sun"; the Third Dynasty figure Imhotep appears as well, undertaking an expedition to recover the "divine limbs" of Osiris from Assyria.⁵⁷ The stories together advance a thema of successful resistance to Assyrian invasion and depredation, and the restoration of divine images stolen by them.

The Assyrian king in these stories—usually Esarhaddon, but consistently identified as Sennacherib's son—appears mostly as a foil for the deeds of an Egyptian hero repelling his invasion. (It is only in Herodotus and Josephus that Sennacherib is "remembered" as having invaded Egypt.) The Assyrian king is characterized by passivity and a dependence on magic and magicians, in contrast to the independence of a mighty and resourceful Egyptian champion. It has also been suggested that Herodotus' account of Sennacherib's invasion of Egypt derived from a now-lost Egyptian Königsnovelle (4c); if this were true, it would add a specifically *Unheilsherrscher* twist to the Egyptian tradition about Assyrian kingship.⁵⁸ More emphatically than any other cluster, the Egyptian stories reflect something like a national mythos about resistance to empire; Ryholt concludes:

These are texts that mostly celebrate a glorious past where Assyrians—alongside Kushites, Persians, and other foreigners—were defeated and humiliated. Seen in this light, the material offers a valuable insight to an Egyptian history that was based on a vague memory but largely invented, and that evolved continuously during the many centuries of foreign occupation from the Assyrians to the Romans.⁵⁹

On the further history of the Assyrian invasions of Egypt and their effects, see D. Kahn's "The Assyrian Invasions of Egypt (673–663 B.C.E.) and the Final Expulsion of the Kushites," *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 34 (2006): 251–67.

⁵⁷ Cf. the Talmudic accusation that Sennacherib stole away the treasures of King Asa of Judah, but that these were subsequently recovered by Hezekiah (Pes. 119a); Sanh. 96a tells that Sennacherib took a beam of Noah's Ark and carved it into an idol. These stories recast tribute paid to the Assyrians as emblems of national identities held hostage.

⁵⁸ J. Dillery, "Cambyses and the Egyptian *Chaosbeschreibung* Tradition," *The Classical Quarterly* 55/2 (2005): 391–92; cf. the earlier speculation of S. West ("And It Came To Pass That Pharaoh Dreamed: Notes on Herodotus 2.139, 141," *The Classical Quarterly* 37/2 [1987]: 267–71) that the field-mice story may have had a background in Central Asian folklore.

⁵⁹ Ryholt, "Assyrian Invasion," 506.

5. *The Greek Cluster*

Other than by Josephus (above, 2c), the Sennacherib-at-Jerusalem story is only told in Greek literature by Herodotus in his *Histories* (II.141; 5a), though there it is confused with an Egyptian campaign (Josephus renders the stories separately). It is not improbable that this is the result of familiarity with a lost Egyptian or Levantine historical tradition, but does not reflect any otherwise unknown Egyptian or Levantine *campaign*.⁶⁰ The Jerusalem story may also dwell in the background of Eusebius' account (5b, attributed to Berossus; known also from earlier works by Polyhistor and Abydenus) of a victorious but costly campaign over Tarsus by Sennacherib,⁶¹ because of topical and chronological details that seem to conflate cuneiform and Biblical sources related to Jerusalem and Tarsus.⁶² The Tarsus story has been well chewed-over for its potential historical accuracy, but in topical terms it introduces rather neutral material, averring merely that Sennacherib rebuilt Tarsus in the image of Babylon, and left there a statue of himself and a cuneiform inscription—worthy deeds of an ancient king.

Though they do not mention Sennacherib by name, it would be difficult to believe that other Greek historians (5c) did not draw on this specific king as a model for their stories of the legendary Assyrian Ninus (not to mention Semiramis). This group includes Ctesias (*History of the Persians*, Frag. 1 §§2–20, ca. fifth century B.C.E.) and Diodorus Siculus (*Hist.* II.1–22,

⁶⁰ R. Rollinger, “Herodotus and the Intellectual Heritage of the Ancient Near East,” in *The Heirs of Assyria*, ed. S. Aro and R. M. Whiting, Melammu Symposia I (Helsinki, 2000), 75 and n. 80.

⁶¹ Dalley, “Sennacherib and Tarsus,” 73, identifies Polyhistor and Abydenus, who either added or preserved additional details of the story, as the intermediate sources between Berossos and Eusebius; Eusebius merely reported of Sennacherib that “many of his own troops were killed.” On Polyhistor’s reliance on Berossus, see now G. De Breucker, “Alexander Polyhistor and the Babylonaica of Berossos,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 55/2 (2012): 57–68; cf. Aristobulus of Cassandrea’s story about Nebuchadnezzar having built Tarsus “in a single day.”

⁶² Though the campaign was clearly against “Greeks” (and though Sennacherib indeed undertook a Cilician campaign), Alexander Polyhistor specifies (Verbrugghe and Wickersham, *Berossos and Manetho*, 54–55) that Sennacherib ruled eighteen years following it—placing the Tarsus campaign in 700 B.C.E., closer to the Palestinian campaign, instead of 696 B.C.E. (the proper date). Eusebius himself seems to note the connection of Tarsus with Jerusalem, since he pairs his discussion of them, cf. the implied pairings of Jerusalem and Luz/Tyre (p. 446) and Sennacherib and Hezekiah (p. 442), discussed above. R. Gmirkin understands Abydenus to have relied on Berossus (*Berossus and Genesis, Manetho and Exodus: Hellenistic Histories and the Date of the Pentateuch* [New York, 2006], 257–58 n. 5), but I am unable to assess the reliability of this claim.

first century B.C.E.).⁶³ Parallels of Ninus to Sennacherib are not wanting: Ninus was the builder of Nineveh, married to a strong-willed queen, and unseated by the coup of a son (here called Ninyas).⁶⁴ Though the historical specificity of Sennacherib was erased from these tales, both authors were well-versed in their Herodotus, certainly knew his Sennacherib account, and would easily have incorporated Sennacherib-specific material from it.⁶⁵ Zawadski has argued that Nicolaus of Damascus's account of the assassination of Semiramis is so similar to the story of Sennacherib's demise that "if we replace the name(s)," it points to a dependence on another, now-lost source.⁶⁶ The objective of these Ninus stories, of course, was not historical accuracy as such, but a contrast between Near Eastern and Greek political life: as elsewhere, Greek authors cast the Oriental despot as powerful but indolent, with Sennacherib simply belonging more strongly to the first of those categories.

6. *The Syriac Cluster*

In addition to the strong profile of the Ahiqar story in Syriac, the flight of the Assyrian parricides to Anatolia connects up to another cluster of stories in that language about Sennacherib's descendants. Sennacherib's assassin sons functioned in this literature as "good pagans," foreshadowing the conversion to Christianity (see Holm, this volume). The royal lineage of Sennacherib is alluded to in stories about the fourth century C.E. personages St. Eugene (6a, a story of ninth century C.E. vintage) and the martyrs Mār Behnam (6b) and Mār Qardāg (6c). The St. Eugene story, based partly on Biblical material, recounts that a "Šar-ušur son of Sennacherib" had settled in a village in Qardū (Ararat) after fleeing Nineveh.

⁶³ Nicolaus of Damascus (first century C.E.) probably drew on Ctesias' work, as did other first century C.E. authors, including Pliny (*Nat. Hist.* XIII, XXVI) and Strabo, *Geography* XVI:1, 1–3.

⁶⁴ S. Dalley and A. T. Reyes, "Mesopotamian Contact and Influence in the Greek World: 2. Persia, Alexander, and Rome," in *Legacy of Mesopotamia*, ed. Dalley, 118. Note also in Diodorus' account (II.16.6) that Semiramis summons Phoenician shipwrights to build boats for an Assyrian invasion (of India). This may allude to Sennacherib's use of Phoenician sailors and shipbuilders in his 694 B.C.E. campaign against Elam.

⁶⁵ Overall, however, Ctesias was famously critical of Herodotus as a mendacious "creator of stories" (Jan Stronk, *Ctesias' Persian History: Introduction, Text, and Translation* [Düsseldorf, 2010], 55); see also S. Holloway, *Aššur is King! Aššur is King! Religion in the Exercise of Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Leiden, 2002). Cf. n. 51 above, where I disallow other cases of influence on different grounds.

⁶⁶ S. Zawadski, "Oriental and Greek Tradition About the Death of Sennacherib," *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 4/1 (1990): 71–72.

In this account, assassin though he was, the son "built his father's temple and worshipped in it, and the offspring and progeny of this one was preserved until the time in which the holy man [Eugene] arrived there,"⁶⁷ blurring a distinction between paganism and piety.

The Mār Behnam story assigns Syriac Christian origins more deeply into antiquity. Behnam was identified both as a "Persian prince" and a "son of Sennacherib," martyred for his refusal to worship the gods of Sennacherib. Testimony to the enduring power of this story, A. Harrak has recently translated a dedicatory inscription from the Church of Mār Behnam, thirty-five kilometers south-east of Mosul, dated to the sixteenth or seventeenth century C.E. The inscription identifies the saint as the "son of Sanhārīb," and that he was co-martyred with his sister Sarah; the "queen mother Šīrīn is said to have built for her martyred children a shrine containing their remains after the conversion of the father [i.e., Sennacherib!] to Christianity."⁶⁸ The Mār Qardāg story also centers on a purifying martyrdom of the Assyrian royal family: here, the hero was both a descendant of Sennacherib and a "Zoroastrian," then martyred for his conversion to Christianity. The story's Neo-Assyrian roots may run deep, according to one Qardāg scholar: his church, the site of his festival at Melqi, near Arbela, "stood directly over the ruins of a major Neo-Assyrian temple, the *akītu* shrine of the goddess Ishtar of Arbela... [thus] the story of a local saint facilitated at Melqi the Christianization of an ancient pagan shrine."⁶⁹

Sennacherib specifically, however, was also known in this tradition as a symbol of pagan impiety, weighed against his descendants' virtues. Thus

⁶⁷ A. Harrak, "Tales About Sennacherib: The Contribution of the Syriac Sources," in *The World of the Aramaeans III*, ed. P. M. Michèle Daviau et al. (Sheffield, UK, 2001), 169–70. The St. Eugene story clearly relies on the Biblical account in reproducing Šar-ušur from Šarezer (taken in turn, as Harrak hazards, from Assyrian Aššur-šarra-ušur ["Aššur-protects-the-king," quite an ironic name for a royal assassin]); though no fewer than twenty-five persons of this name are known from Neo-Assyrian sources, none appears to be an unrecognized son of Sennacherib (*PNAE* I/1, 218–21).

⁶⁸ Harrak, "Tales," 182–183; *ibid.*, *Syriac and Garshuni Inscriptions of Iraq*, Répertoire des Inscriptions Syriaques 2 (Paris, 2010), vol. 1, 306, 311. On these and related stories, see also M. Novák and H. Younansardaroud, "Mār Behnām, Sohn des Sanherib von Nimrūd. Tradition und Rezeption einer assyrischen Gestalt im iraqischen Christentum und die Frage nach den Fortleben der Assyrer," *Altorientalistische Forschungen* 29/1 (2002): 166–194. S. Parpola has curiously little to say on this topic in his essay "National and Ethnic Identity in the Neo-Assyrian Empire and Assyrian Identity in the Post-Empire Times," *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies* 18/2 (2004).

⁶⁹ J. T. Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh* (Berkeley, 2006), 20, 210, 246–49; Harrak, "Tales," 183; later reference to such stories was made by Moses Khorenatsi, the ninth century C.E. historian.

we have on the one hand the comparison of Valens to Sennacherib in the Mār Afrem story (6d), mentioned in the Introduction; on the other hand, at least one Armenian king proudly took “Sennacherib” as his throne name (Sennacherib Ioannes Artsruni, King of Vaspurakan, r. 1003–1024? C.E.)—all of which points to the ambivalence of the tradition.⁷⁰ In general, though, it was the folk history of the Assyrian royal lineage in post-imperial exile that was the truly persistent thema. The tradition that Armenia and Kurdistan were populated by families descended from Sennacherib’s line survived into the nineteenth century C.E. As early as Michael the Syrian (6e, twelfth century C.E.), Sennacherib was considered one of a few ancient kings who were more than mere historical curiosities, but forebearers of the ancient flame of an “Aramaean race” (Syriac *gensā*, “race,” literally expressed as the “*gensā* of Sennacherib”)⁷¹—an ethnic heritage of blood, language, and land.⁷²

The leitmotif of the Assyrian ethnogenesis was also incorporated into an Armenian epic cycle about the ancient noble heroes of the Sasun district (6f), who were descended from “Adramelik’ and Sanasar, the sons

⁷⁰ The princely Artsruni family, “an offshoot of the Orontids, Achaemenian satraps and subsequently kings of Armenia,” claimed full dynastic descent from Sennacherib (*Encyclopedia Iranica* II/6: 664–65). I suggest that the Sennacherib name may have been used by them as early as 88 B.C.E., when Josephus tells us Mesopotamia was entrusted to a certain Mithridates Sinnaces (P. Arnaud, “Doura-Europos, microcosme Grec ou rouage de l’administration Arsacide,” *Syria* 63/1–2 [1986]: 137–41). Another Sinnaces was documented by Tacitus in his *Annals* (6 31.3, 36.3), an Armenian nobleman who played at intrigues pitting Roman and Parthian interests a century later, in the time of Tiberias (first century C.E.). This latter Sinnaces’ father Abdagases, we are told, was in a position to bring “the royal emblems” to Tiridates, a pretender against Artabanus II (A. Shahbazi, “The Parthian Origins of the House of Rustam,” *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 7 [1993]: 155–63). My conjecture would require that the name “Sinnaces” (not clearly of either Roman or Parthian derivation) obscures a third-hand rendering of the Akkadian name “Sennacherib” into Latin/Greek through Syriac or Armenian, which is hardly clear, though I think preferable to existing proposals: Arnaud, *ibid.*, 139 and n. 19, linked the name to a place mentioned by Plutarch (*Crassus*, 29.5–6), Sinnaca, near Carrhae; F. Justi suggested in his *Irisches Namenbuch* (Marburg, 1895) that it derived from Old Pers. *çaena-*, “army, power.” As a dynastic name, “Sinnaces” from “Sennacherib” seems more likely to me. My thanks go to Clifford Ando and Matthew Canepa, who both gave some thought to this issue for me, but are not responsible for my guessing.

⁷¹ The fourteenth century C.E. Syrian Orthodox scholar Rabban Saliba of Hah wrote of “Mar Qardagh of the *genso/gensā* of Sennacherib, who was crowned on a Friday”; A. Palmer, review of Walker, *Legend of Mar Qardagh*, in *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 10 (2007): 78–79.

⁷² Walker, *Legend of Mar Qardagh*, 267; L. van Rompay, “Jacob of Edessa and the Early History of Edessa,” in *After Bardasian*, ed. Reinink and Klugkist, 277, relying principally on Eusebius. L. Feldt (*The Fantastic in Religious Narrative from Exodus to Elisha* [London, 2012], 237) argues that miraculous events are especially tied to ethnogenetic etiologies.

of Senek'erim king of Assyria" (or in some versions, Sennacherib was called "Caliph of Baghdad").⁷³ The tenth century C.E. account of T'ovma Artsruni (6g), in contrast, emphasized the non-royal origin of the men of Sasun, calling them "Assyrian peasants who were forced to leave their country in the times of Adramelik' and Sanasar, the sons of Sennacherib, King of Assyria and Nineveh. They call themselves by their king's name, Sanasanayk'."⁷⁴ Even in the stories tying the heroes to the royal family, however, it was crucial that the Armenian queen of Sennacherib conceived miraculously—and the sons thus purely Armenian heroes.⁷⁵ Against this background, the Jerusalem story was retold featuring a pagan, "Arab" Sennacherib fumbling his campaign against a Christian Jerusalem:⁷⁶

Some time later, the Caliph said to the lady Dzovinar: "I am going to take Jerusalem away from the infidels." He gathered his troops and equipped his army with everything he needed for a long siege. . . . [*Dzovinar pleads on behalf of Christian Jerusalem, warning Sennacherib of danger seen in a dream.*] . . . And he arose and went to fight. The Caliph Sennacherib marched on Jerusalem with all his forces and after seven years of fighting defeated the Christians. He drove the survivors into the monastery of Jerusalem and thought not one of them would come out alive. One evening a vardapet said to the people in the church: "We have no bread and no water left and we shall starve to death and die of thirst. Only God can save us from those men." The vardapet arose and celebrated mass. They all raised their voices to God, they sang hymns and cried until dawn. God sent angels with fiery swords who fell on the Caliph's army and so great was the confusion and slaughter that the Arabs killed one another. The battle reached the Caliph's tent. He tried to escape on his big Damascus camel. He called on his chief idol to come to his aid. "I vow to offer you forty heifers in sacrifice, if you will save me from these infidels!" But how could his idol help him? "I will give you all the gold and silver I possess!" Well, what can you expect from the idols of the pagans? They could do nothing for him. "O my idols, my idols, help me overcome the infidels and I will offer my sons Sanasar and Balthasar in sacrifice!" A couple of devils got into his camel and whisked him off to Baghdad. . . .⁷⁷

The mixed esteem in which the Assyrian Sennacherib was received into the Syriac and Armenian traditions—pagan, but royal; cruel, but powerful; evil, but the ancestor of the nation—these ambivalent traditions bespeak

⁷³ Russell, "Shrine": 141–42; Harrak, "Tales," 183.

⁷⁴ A. Eghiazaryan, *Daredevils of Sasun: Poetics of an Epic*, trans. S. Peter Cowe (Costa Mesa, CA, 2008), 49.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁷⁶ L. Z. Surmelian, trans. *Daredevils of Sassoun: the Armenian National Epic* (Denver, 1964), 34f.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 41–42.

a pluralistic frontier culture, incorporating diverse cultural imperatives. The Syriac traditions flourished in the same borderlands once caught between Assyria and Urartu/Phrygia, near ancient Šubria which had harbored Sennacherib's murderous sons, according to Esarhaddon.⁷⁸ The uncertain geopolitical position of this border region in the seventh century B.C.E. may be reflected in the regional stories which descended from and about that time.

7. *The Arabic Cluster*

With the works of geographers, historians, and chronographers writing in Arabic, we encounter another group of stories partly informed by the Hebrew Bible, but also conflated with other traditions and tales about antiquity. Here, Sennacherib often appears as a heroic "worthy" of the pre-Islamic past; his historical specificity is not in doubt, though many details have been misconceived.⁷⁹ The *adab* writer al-Mas'ūdī in his tenth century *Murūj* (7a) presented the king "Sannajārib" as a mighty warrior against Isrā'īl and Hezekiah,⁸⁰ though titling him king of Bābil rather than Nineveh.⁸¹ Sennacherib's name was also preserved (if usually garbled) in lists of ancient kings (7b) which celebrated a glorious Mesopotamian past; these lists are found in Mas'ūdī, but also in al-Ya'qūbī (ninth century), and whatever earlier sources they drew on.⁸² In al-Ṭabari's version from the ninth century C.E. (7c), however, Sennacherib was not a heroic figure: he was portrayed as a contemporary (and cousin!) of Nebuchadnezzar II, with

⁷⁸ I. Eph'al, "Esarhaddon, Egypt, and Shubria: Politics and Propaganda," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 57 (2005): 100–101 and n. 3. For Esarhaddon's account of the Šubrian campaign, see E. Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680–669 B.C.)*, The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 4 (Winona Lake, IN, 2011), 79–86 (Esarhaddon 33).

⁷⁹ As one author mildly put it, "the Muslim historians . . . were not well informed about the history of classical antiquity": M. Zakeri, *Sasanid Soldiers in Early Muslim Society* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Utah, 1993), 133.

⁸⁰ In al-Mas'ūdī's account, Sennacherib was a contemporary and opponent of "Ḥazaqīyā b. Ajāz," the latter renowned for the smashing of "sculpted images and idols" (Janssen, *Bābil*, 45, 172).

⁸¹ See, e.g., S. Dalley, "Nineveh, Babylon and the Hanging Gardens: Cuneiform and Classical Sources Reconciled," *Iraq* 56 (1994); cf. Janssen, *Bābil*, who wonders: "How many Nimrūds?," 55, 157ff.

⁸² R. Y. Ebied and L. R. Wickham, "Al-Ya'kūbī's Account of the Israelite Prophets and Kings," *JNES* 29/2 (1970): 81–82 (on sources) and 96 (on Sennacherib). A. M. H. Shboul (*Al-Mas'ūdī & His World* [London, 1979], 120), noted that although some of al-Mas'ūdī's information probably came from Eusebius and Michael the Syrian, it cannot account for all the names in his lists; Janssen, *Bābil*, 55, 176, quoting al-Mas'ūdī as saying that Sennacherib is "mentioned in many books and ephemerides of the stars."

both men present at a siege of Jerusalem. In this account, God destroys Sennacherib's entire army except for the king and five scribes; the king of Jerusalem then paraded him around the city for sixty-six days before permitting him to return to "Babylon."⁸³

Finally, the legendary king Nimrūd of Arabic historical tales (7d), like the composite figure of Ninus in Greek stories, was probably modeled on Sennacherib (just as Buḥtnaṣṣar was modeled on Nebuchadnezzar), though some, including Ibn Khaldun's, distinguished Nimrūd and Sanjarif as historically distinct kings.⁸⁴ Like the figure of Ninus, Nimrūd was meant to evoke the power and rapacity of ancient monarchy by drawing on historical material. The tenth century C.E. works of Ibn Rusta, for instance, assigned to Nimrūd the prosecution of "fiendish tortures" visited upon conquered peoples: "He was the first to assassinate, crucify, (mutilate people and) expose them on the pillory, set (them) on fire, tear out the(ir) eyes, and rip open the(ir) stomachs." These seem too similar in spirit to the punishments advertised by the Neo-Assyrian kings to dismiss out of hand.⁸⁵

Such stories were not composed in a cultural vacuum, of course; some compositions in Syriac (e.g., the "Testament of Adam"), Greek,⁸⁶ Aramaic (principally, Ahiqar), and of course the Hebrew Bible, were translated into Arabic by the ninth and tenth centuries C.E.⁸⁷ The Jerusalem siege may even have been the literary model for some Qur'ānic material, including the *Sūrat al-Fīl* (Sura 105), with Sennacherib transformed into the Abyssinian sultan Abraha, plotting to sieze the Ka'aba in Mecca.⁸⁸

⁸³ R. Sack, *Images of Nebuchadnezzar* (London, 2004), 45.

⁸⁴ Janssen, *Bābil*; M. Zakeri *Sasanid soldiers*, 132.

⁸⁵ Janssen, *Bābil*, 42.

⁸⁶ In general, Greek historical works were not translated into Arabic in medieval times as much as philosophical and scientific works. Among the Greek authors mentioned above, however, other works of Nicolaus of Damascus (on philosophy and natural sciences) did come into Arabic. A. Whealey has also recently demonstrated the transmission of material from Josephus' Jewish Antiquities through Syriac into Arabic ("The Testimonium Flavianum in Syriac and Arabic," *New Testament Studies* 54 [2008].) It is therefore not unreasonable to think that Arab scholars were aware of Greek historical works.

⁸⁷ Note, e.g., Abu' l-Faraj 'Abdallāh ibn aṭ-Ṭaiyib, an eleventh century C.E. Christian writer whose Biblical commentaries (including a discussion of Sennacherib) made their way into Ge'ez: R. W. Cowley, "A Ge'ez Document Reporting Controversy Concerning the Bible Commentaries of Ibn aṭ-Ṭaiyib," *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici* 30 (1984–1986): 5–13.

⁸⁸ Cf. Sura 17 (Al-'Isrā', the "Night Journey") which characterizes the Assyrian invasions of Israel by Sennacherib (among others) as a foreordained punishment. Newby, "Abraha and Sennacherib"; cf. R. W. Thomson, *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, Translated Texts for Historians 31 (Liverpool, 1999), 297, on the probability that the Armenian historian

Notwithstanding, the basic interest of most tales in Arabic about the Assyrian past was the assertion of a heroic, pre-Islamic Mesopotamian past which excluded Arabs and Persians. This assertion was part of the regional translation movements of the era (Persian most prominent among them) which pushed back against a monolithic Arab Islamic culture that constructed everything pre-Islamic as *jahiliyya* (“darkness”), as subjects of no interest.⁸⁹ This regionalism emphasized *‘asabiyya*—the solidarity of tribes and states—over the universalism of the *ummah*. In such contexts, Sennacherib was transformed into a local hero, a symbol of Iraq’s ancient greatness, challenging prevailing Arabian and Persian cultural chauvinisms.

THE FORMATION OF THE ARCHIPELAGO

Parts and versions of the 701 B.C.E. story thus survived from Elephantine to Greece, from southeast Europe to Arabia, from western Europe to Armenia, as islands of an imaginative archipelago. Through these storylines survived a historico-literary figure popular enough throughout late antiquity, medieval times, and into modernity to have attracted the attention of Lord Byron when he penned “The Destruction of Sennacherib” in 1815, just in time for the dawning age of Assyriology. How had these seeds been so widely sown? How did Sennacherib in particular, over other ancient kings, begin such a rich historical afterlife?

Since the metaphor of the literary “archipelago” (discussed in more theoretical terms below) relies on the premise of a substrate discourse (oral, vernacular, and multi-generic), we should think about what conditions of imperial culture lay in its background. It is no accident that the stories gained popularity in all the same regions involved in the original events, or that all those regions were now ruled by distant imperial centers, especially in the millennium of Persian and Roman/Byzantine powers. Egypt, Judah, Armenia, and Arabia had all had their first sustained contacts with empire as imperialized peripheries in the time of the Sargonids. It was in this imperial soil that the roots of all these later stories were first set down; unsurprisingly, the common theme of the literary complex was resistance to Assyria’s expanding world domination. Let us take a look, then, at the historical environment in which the story-archipelago was formed.

Sebēos modeled his account of the Byzantine emperors Heraclius and Constans II on the Biblical account of 701 B.C.E.

⁸⁹ Hameen-Anttila, “Mesopotamian National Identity.”

The Assyrian king Sennacherib spent his first two military campaigns quelling a widespread rebellion in Mesopotamia, and only turned his attention to compelling obedience from rebellious vassals in Syria-Palestine in his third. The list of Assyria's regional enemies was lengthy: Sennacherib recaptured and replaced rebellious monarchs in Tyre, Sidon, Aškelon, and ten other walled cities;⁹⁰ plundered Eltekeh and Timnah, which had supported foreign invaders; punished the nobles of Ekron, who had handed over their king, Padi, to Hezekiah; and sacked "forty-six fortified cities" belonging to Hezekiah of Jerusalem, including Lachish.⁹¹ Eight kingdoms not directly involved in the conflict took the opportunity of Sennacherib's victory to reaffirm their subservience to Assyria;⁹² Sennacherib may have "liberated" other Philistian cities from Hezekiah's brief control (e.g., Gath and Gezer);⁹³ and the campaign may have forestalled incipient incursions by Qedarite Arabs and Kush.⁹⁴

The events thus spanned almost the entire Levantine seaboard from Arvad to Gaza, a theater of operations some 400 kilometers from north to south, involved no fewer than seventy polities, and resulted in the deportation of tens of thousands of people. It is not too much to say that at least a million people were aware of or affected by Sennacherib's third campaign. Local knowledge of the Assyrians already existed by the time of Sennacherib's arrival, of course: interactions with Assyria had been steadily intensifying in Israel and Judah over the late eighth century

⁹⁰ Bit-Zitti, Zarephat, Mahalliba, Ušu, Akzibi, Akko, Beth-Dagon, Joppa, Bana-barqa, and Azuru.

⁹¹ Archaeological evidence may support a 701 B.C.E. destruction for a half-dozen sites in southern Judah; see J. A. Blakely and J. W. Hardin, "Southwestern Judah in the Late Eighth Century B.C.E.," *BASOR* 326 (May, 2002): 53. Though the granularity of the archaeological record may not be fine enough to make such determinations in specific cases, Sennacherib's campaign forms one of two "important horizons in the stratigraphy" of Iron Age Judah, according to L. Grabbe, the other being the campaign of Nebuchadnezzar ("The Kingdom of Judah from Sennacherib's Invasion to the Fall of Jerusalem: If Only We Had the Bible . . .," in *Good Kings and Bad Kings*, ed. L. Grabbe [London, 2005], 89). It would probably be difficult to overstate the sense of catastrophe felt by early seventh century Jerusalemites who looked out over a Judah in which perhaps as much as 90% of settlements had been destroyed (*ibid.*, 81–82).

⁹² Samsimiruna, Arvad, Byblos, Ašdod, Gaza, Ammon, Moab, and Edom. Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign*, 106f., feels it likely that the "fourfold" payment of tribute by these "kings of the Westland" indicates their earlier passive rebellion by leaving off tributary payments in the years following Sargon II's death.

⁹³ The so-called "Azekah" inscription—still not definitively dated—indicates that Hezekiah had taken control of at least one "royal city of the Philistines" sometime between 720–701 B.C.E.; cf. 2 Kgs. 18:8.

⁹⁴ Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign*, 53, 56, 59.

through diplomacy and trade, and indirectly through contact with the neighboring Aramean kingdoms since even earlier times, through Assyrian administration, military presence, standing monuments, etc.⁹⁵

Nor were the implications of the Levantine rebellion limited to this one region alone. The campaign was carried out in the atmosphere of a new global consciousness which had emerged in the wake of the death of Sargon II. Sargon's demise was precisely what had inspired many of Assyria's subject states to simultaneously rebel in 705 B.C.E. Not only Judah, but Tabal, Cilicia, Melid, Ellipi,⁹⁶ and, of course, Babylonia all seized their main chance in those years.⁹⁷ These revolts were well-timed, politically and militarily, but they were also characterized by an intense personal animus against the Assyrian king. As Isaiah 14:3–20 put it, Sargon's death was greeted with rejoicing not only throughout all lands, but down to the very depths of a Hell which eagerly awaited his arrival.⁹⁸ Many now hoped that a generation of Assyrian expansion beginning with the reign of Tiglath-pileser III in 745 B.C.E. had come to an end. The death of Sargon II and accession of Sennacherib were thus the first "world news" shared in all lands, with the Jerusalem encounter as its climax. The Assyrians themselves saw Sargon's death (and the failure to rescue his body) as a major rupture in the world order, and used divination to ascertain what might have precipitated these dire events.⁹⁹

The Palestinian campaign also took place amidst an unprecedented level of international contact. Both Assyrians and rebels had knowledge of events in—and coordinated their actions with—distant major states. The action in Isaiah shows us that the court at Judah, though a relative backwater, had working knowledge of the political situation in Assyria and across the Syro-Phoenician world.¹⁰⁰ The Biblical account further implies

⁹⁵ For an outstanding summary of these issues of communication and ideological transmission, see S. Z. Aster's "Transmission of Neo-Assyrian Claims of Empire to Judah in the Late Eighth Century B.C.E.," *HUCA* 78 (2007).

⁹⁶ D. T. Potts, *The Archaeology of Elam: Formation and Transformation of an Ancient Iranian State* (Cambridge, 1999), 268.

⁹⁷ *Cambridge Ancient History*, 3rd ed., 92–93.

⁹⁸ K. L. Younger ("Recent Study on Sargon II, King of Assyria: Implications for Biblical Study," in *Mesopotamia and the Bible: Comparative Explorations*, ed. M. W. Chavalas and K. L. Younger [Grand Rapids, MI, 2002], 319), joining others, believes this passage to refer to Sargon II specifically; cf. S. Olyan ("Was the King of Babylon Buried Before His Corpse Was Exposed?" *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 118 [2006]: 423–26), who proposes the translation "cast out" rather than "unburied" for the king's corpse in Isa. 14:19, potentially compromising the identification of Sargon II.

⁹⁹ Tadmor et al., "Sin of Sargon"; Weaver, "Sin of Sargon."

¹⁰⁰ Seitz, "Isaiah," 478; Isa. 7:18–20; 8:4; 10:9; 11:11, 14; 13:17; etc.

that Hezekiah stood ready and willing to benefit from Egyptian aid, without saying whether or not he had actually solicited it.¹⁰¹ It is unclear which Kushite monarch it was who would have capitalized on the pretext of foreign assistance to Levantine states, but it is an inescapable conclusion that decisions being made in Memphis and Napata were taking Ninevite policies actions into account.¹⁰² The dependability of the information that survives is not so important as recognizing that intelligence about world events was not the sole prerogative of the Assyrian hegemon.

Babylon and Elam also acquired intelligence and acted on it. A Babylonian delegation sent from Marduk-apla-iddina II (Merodach-baladan) to Hezekiah may have organized the 703–701 B.C.E. resistance movement in Palestine as one front in a broad anti-Assyrian coalition set up after the Yakinite chief seized the Babylonian throne.¹⁰³ The historicity of the mission to Judah is a distinct possibility, according to cuneiform sources: Merodach-baladan's preparations in 703 B.C.E., according to Sennacherib's invective, included sending Babylonian emissaries to Elam and to Chaldaean, Aramean, and Arab tribes. Thus, though no known cuneiform account corroborates the specifics of the Isaiah 39:1–8 account (though Josephus repeats it, *Ant.* X.30–35), Levantine-Babylonian coordination would be perfectly consistent with the diplomatic events of those years.

The degree of fidelity between accounts is sometimes considered an index of historical accuracy. Yet even very "local" parts of individual story clusters, despite clear intertextuality, sometimes differ sharply, even as other themes and details pop up in very "distant" quarters of the archipelago. For instance, the inner-Biblical sources for Sennacherib (2a1, 2a2, 2a3) were partly shaped by conflicting ideologies of national autonomy and historical authenticity. Thus, the accounts of 2 Kings and Isaiah mention Egyptian and Babylonian assistance to Judah but do not mention Hezekiah's defense preparations at Jerusalem,¹⁰⁴ whereas Chronicles makes no reference to Egypt or Babylon, but details the war-preparedness

¹⁰¹ The Assyrian account instead assigned the invitation of Kushite interference to the nobles of Ekron who had overthrown their king, Padi.

¹⁰² M. Elat, "The Economic Relations of the Neo-Assyrian Empire with Egypt," *JAOS* 98/1 (1978); L. Heidorn, "The Horses of Kush," *JNES* 56/2 (1997). Memphis and Napata had established trade relations a generation earlier, in the time of Tiglath-pileser III.

¹⁰³ Isa. 39; see J. Blenkinsopp, "Hezekiah and the Babylonian Delegation: A Critical Reading of Isaiah 39:1–8," in *Essays on Ancient Israel in Its Near Eastern Context. A Tribute to Nadav Na'aman*, ed. Y. Amit et al. (Winona Lake, IN, 2006); *pace* Bob Becking, "Sennacherib and Jerusalem: New Perspectives," *Journal for Semitics* 16:2 (2007).

¹⁰⁴ 2 Kgs. 18:21, 19:9–13; Isa. 36:6 (perhaps echoed in 30:1–5, 31:1–3).

of a fiercely independent Jerusalem.¹⁰⁵ Yet other explanatory themes were common across the archipelago. Biblical, Assyrian, and Greek explanations for the downfall of Sennacherib, for instance, all had to do with his hubris before a major god (Yahweh, Marduk¹⁰⁶ and “Vulcan”), all allusive to inordinate royal power.¹⁰⁷ My point is that neither narrative divergence nor fidelity can by themselves be litmus tests for historicity within or between texts; what these models and departures tell us about instead is an authorial awareness of other sources.

The dawn of Sennacherib’s reign also coincided with a global theater of conflict and diplomacy, as well as global audiences uniquely aware of a historically liminal moment. The condition most influential to this new sensibility was the radical expansion of Assyria’s deportation practices under the high empire. Prior to the accession of Tiglath-pileser III in 745 B.C.E., the last substantial Assyrian deportations of subject peoples had been more than seventy-five years earlier, when Šamši-Adad V (823–811 B.C.E.) had expatriated 36,200 persons in six separate actions. Between 745 and 705 B.C., a period of only forty years, Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II claimed to have deported and resettled almost twenty times that number, more than 632,000 people in 118 removal episodes. Sennacherib’s deportations accelerated the pace of this program. Characterized by fewer, larger episodes, Sennacherib’s thirty-seven known resettlements claimed to have moved more than 469,000 people in only twenty-three years—the single-largest deportation totals of any Assyrian king. Taking the numbers at face value, these groups of captives averaged almost 25,000 each—parades of deportees about four times larger than those of his predecessors.¹⁰⁸

Plenty of critical analysis has been applied to the numerical figures appearing in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, and the “high-exact” figures

¹⁰⁵ 2 Chron. 32:1–8, 10–15, 30, e.g., the building and repair of fortifications, the manufacture of weapons and shields, and the deprivation of water to the attacking Assyrians (cf. 2 Kgs. 20:20).

¹⁰⁶ Tadmor et al., “Sin of Sargon”; Weaver, “‘Sin of Sargon.’”

¹⁰⁷ It is also possible that the Biblical claim of 185,000 Assyrian dead was a parody of the patently ridiculous Assyrian claim to have deported 200,150 people, or Assyrian royal rhetoric generally. Such numbers are not, however, out of place in similar Biblical contexts (e.g., 1 Chron. 5:18–22); cf. the Midrashic description of Sennacherib’s army of “2,600,000 less one,” discussed by Ulmer, this volume. See M. de Odorico, *The Use of Numbers and Quantifications in the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, State Archives of Assyria Studies 3 [Helsinki, 1995], 114–15, 173; D. M. Fouts, “Another Look at Large Numbers in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions,” *JNES* 53/3 [1994]: 208.

¹⁰⁸ B. Oded, *Mass Deportations and Deportees in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Wiesbaden, 1979), 20.

of Sennacherib have come in for especial skepticism. Of the deportation figure of 200,150 people from Judah, M. De Odorico said simply (of a land whose total population "did not exceed 300,000 in this period"): "...if this quantification refers to the people actually deported, as the inscriptions would lead us to think, the only possible conclusion is that it is unfeasible."¹⁰⁹

Setting aside the essential untrustworthiness of the number, its deployment is still informative: Sennacherib felt it necessary to depict the Judaeen deportation—alone over nineteen others—as having the magnitude of the Babylonian one (208,000 people, from his first campaign).¹¹⁰ This backs up our impression that the Judaeen campaign was unusually important to Sennacherib, from his dedication of eleven rooms of the Ninevite palace to its depiction, and in the unusual flexibility afforded to Hezekiah's post-siege delivery of tribute.¹¹¹

Not only the magnitude but the makeup of the Judean deportation is significant: the deportees from Judea were far more homogeneous than those of his first campaign. From Babylonia, Sennacherib enumerated deportees from Kutha, Uruk, Nippur, and Kiš; palace personnel from Babylon, Elamite, Arab, and Sutean mercenaries; people from seventeen different Aramean tribes; and Chaldeans from eighty-eight "fortified towns" and 820 villages belonging to the major tribes of Bit-Yakin, Bit-Dakkuri, Bit-Sa'alli, and Bit-Amukkani. The deportees from Judah, meantime, were simply called "captives." Notwithstanding the probable Assyrian insensitivity to local ethnography, the Judean deportation was plainly more intensive and homogeneous than the Babylonian one.

For the close-knit population of Judeans in exile, the legacy of Sennacherib would have been part of an immediate and very personal history, a foundation myth of the diaspora. Unfortunately, we know nothing from the Bible about where and how the Judaeen deportees of 701 were resettled, in contrast to earlier episodes,¹¹² and from Assyrian records, the most

¹⁰⁹ De Odorico, *Use of Numbers*, 115.

¹¹⁰ The Bellino Cylinder and BM 113203 (see M. Cogan's translations, COS 2.119A–B) differ from the Taylor prism in separately enumerating human prisoners *and* livestock; could it be that the 200,150 number was a conflation of the two sets of numbers, producing a new total? cf. Midrash 'Eser Galiyot, which credited Sennacherib with the first *four* of ten historical exiles of the Jews.

¹¹¹ Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign*, 132.

¹¹² Cf. 2 Kgs. 18:11, that earlier Samarian deportees of "Šalmaneser" were taken to Kalḫu, Guzana, and "the towns of the Medes," and 1 Chron. 5:26, speaking of a deportation by Tiglath-pileser III, with resettlements in "Halah, Habor, Hara, and the river of Gozan" (in turn, cf. 2 Kgs. 15:29, "to Assyria," and 16:9, "to Kir").

we can say¹¹³ is that Judeans do not appear among the groups Sennacherib listed as corvée laborers at Nineveh.¹¹⁴ Sennacherib's annals do report that personnel from Hezekiah's royal household were among the tribute sent by Hezekiah to Nineveh at some point after 701, including troops, palace women, singers, daughters, and a diplomatic emissary "to do obeisance."¹¹⁵ At the very least *these* Judaeans would have encountered deported Israelites and Samaritans, people long settled at Nineveh but with whom they might share an appetite for diasporic literature about Jerusalem, Sennacherib, and his fate.

Nor would Judeans have been the only consumers of such stories in Assyria. At Kalḫu and Nineveh, Judaeans would have mingled with deportees and other resident aliens hailing from Phoenicia, Nubia, and Urartu.¹¹⁶ Within Assyria's imperial core there were diasporic audiences, deportees receptive to (and productive of) counter-narratives to the ones produced by the court. Just as importantly, Assyrian colonists went out to such places as Hamath and Samaria (2 Kings 17:24, Ezra 4:10); contact between the conquerors and the conquered thus began to become

¹¹³ Unlike the Israelite and Samaritan deportations under Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II, which produced cuneiform evidence for deportees at Nineveh, notably as mercenaries and charioteers: Oded, *Mass Deportations*, 13, 31; S. Dalley, "Foreign Chariotry and Cavalry in the Armies of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II," *Iraq* 47 (1985): 31–48.

¹¹⁴ After E. Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, AfO Beiheft 26 (Vienna, 1997), 72–3 (ll. 26–30) and 81: "I deported the inhabitants of the land of Chaldea, the Arameans, and the (people of) the lands Mannea, Que, Hīlakku [= Cilicia], Philistia, and the city [var: land] of Tyre, who had not submitted to my yoke, (and) made them carry the headpad and mold bricks." This list includes people who were brought to Nineveh substantially later than 701 B.C.E., e.g., the men of Bit-Yakin captured during the sixth campaign (694 B.C.E.), but illustrates the Assyrian practice of integrating captured ethnic groups. Sennacherib's inscriptions (cumulatively) specify seven major groups (*tenēšētu*) comprising the Nineveh workforce: Chaldaeans (at least 6 subgroups), Aramaeans (13 subgroups), Mannaeans, men of Que and Hīlakku (paired; with 2 local groups, from Illubru and Ingira), Phoenicians (of Tyre and Sidon), Philistians, and Babylonians (i.e., citizens of Babylon and Sippar).

¹¹⁵ See above on the administrative texts regarding Judean tribute at Nineveh. The report of 2 Chron. 33:11–13 that Hezekiah's successor Manasseh was later deported during the reign of Esarhaddon probably reflects that Assyrian king's specification that he summoned twenty-two kings from the west to bring materials for the construction of his palace; see Leichty, *Royal Inscriptions*, 23, 46 (Esarhaddon 1 v.55 and 6 vi.7'). Despite the biblical text's "Babylon," Manasseh was almost certainly brought to Nineveh; see S. Dalley, "The Influence of Mesopotamia Upon Israel and the Bible," in *Legacy of Mesopotamia*, ed. Dalley, 63.

¹¹⁶ Dalley, "Foreign Chariotry," 44 and *passim*. SAA VII:24 lists women weavers in Assyria from Kush, Tyre, Dor, and Ašdod, among other places; SAA VII:47 addresses business between a Kushite eunuch and a man of Kummuh; SAA XIII:13 concerns grain for Kushites and Egyptians in Aššur; SAA XVI:78 Kushite girls in the palace; SAA XI:48 and XVI:55 mention Ionians and Egyptians in broken context.

integrated throughout the empire, with sustained interactions well beyond the brief, hostile border encounters of earlier times. Counter-narratives would have been a natural result wherever regular dealings with Assyrians occurred. The experiences of exiles abroad and the dominated at home were also increasingly mediated through a tongue common to both conqueror and conquered—Aramaic—a vernacular which permitted a greater degree of mutual awareness between the populations. These interlocking social, geographic, and linguistic mutualities were important preconditions for the formation of the archipelago.

Beyond inspiring new audiences, involving diverse actors, and intermingling them demographically and linguistically, there is a further point to consider: the Sennacherib complex operated at multiple generic levels. The topic's presence in state histories was echoed in folklore, learned commentary, magic, and allegory. The simultaneous treatment of the topic in multiple genres established exactly the kind of referentiality and saturation that discourse requires—endlessly deferring any question of historical "accuracy" by producing the kind of omniscience implied by the timeless, deeper truths of legend. This was not merely a matter of orality buttressing textuality: canonical accounts permitted audiences for folk stories to hear them as historically grounded and true; the context of folk stories enlivened historical accounts as moral pageants; the leaching of this material into magic and allegory lent it the gravity of divine agency.

That the stories do not directly reference one another is beside the point: these were "writerly texts," with associations made by readers and hearers, not by writers and tellers. It would be unimaginable, for instance, that anyone of the fourth century B.C.E. would have known the words of Ahiqar, but not of Isaiah, or *vice-versa*,¹¹⁷ or that anyone listening to the Mar Qardagh martyrology did not know a historical account descending from cuneiform sources of the parricides and their flight. The name "Sennacherib" in one would have produced echos of the other. The generic diversity of the story-complex, its integration at so many different levels of discourse, allowed it to attain its strength and resilience through referentiality.

Finally, we should not forget that this signal was boosted between media. Not only was the archipelago evoked through texts and oral tales, but incised on the rock reliefs of Assyrian emperors strewn throughout

¹¹⁷ The Biblical material is already generically diverse, related in both historical (Deuteronomistic) and prophetic voices.

the post-Assyrian landscape;¹¹⁸ in the depiction of the siege of Lachish and the third campaign at Nineveh;¹¹⁹ by the tunnel to Siloam pool, the inscription there, and the theatrical stage of the upper pool at Jerusalem's walls; by the provocative ruins of Tarsus and the Armenian shrines; by the monumental palace-cities of Nineveh and Dur-Šarrukin (as the scene of Sennacherib's demise) themselves—indeed by an entire narrative topography, as the story took up movement and conflict across Babylon, Philistia, Judah, Assyria, “Ararat,” and Egypt. The story was embedded in a real and mythical landscape of monuments and cities, traversed or known to all its hearers; it was a story which evoked the whole world, because the whole world told it—and vice-versa.

THEMES FOR THE NEW GENTRY: OF MEN, MIRACLES, AND MOBILITY

The Sennacherib archipelago pushed to the foreground two strong themes: the figure of the wise counselor as the narrative protagonist, and the conception of crucial historical events as effected by miracles, magic or martyrdom. These themes reflected the sensibilities of an emerging cultured class which preferred to tie heroism to wisdom instead of kingship, and which viewed divinity as active in the world, often unexpectedly, directly or through the agency of sages and saints, powers not controlled by kings. In speaking of this class of savants, I take an Akkadian term, *ummânu*,¹²⁰ and use it to denote the wider community of administrators and scholars everywhere who made empires work. In their communities, what distinguished such officials in this period was that they ultimately wielded authority on behalf of non-native political powers, often without the imprimatur of a local palace, relying on local status and authenticity to effect that authority.

A third and less deliberate theme may be discerned, too, one which speaks to the imperial *weltanschauung*: flight, hiding, and registration.

¹¹⁸ Harrak, “Tales About Sennacherib,” 184, points out that the Syriac authors of later tales knew of rock reliefs as Khinis, Bavian, and elsewhere.

¹¹⁹ Russell, *Sennacherib's Palace*, 254, argues that the very conscious division of third-campaign subject matter between text and image bespeaks a specific manipulation of information for different audiences. This manipulation by itself suggests the degree of referentiality between accounts available at least to literate audiences.

¹²⁰ In Neo-Assyrian parlance, *ummânu* more strictly meant a very highly educated scholar of scientific, magical, and esoteric texts, normally someone tied to the court; one could think also of the Neo-Assyrian *rabbûte*, the “great ones” or “magnates,” but I prefer *ummânu* to preserve the connotation of learnedness.

The motif of flight and hiding in these stories reveals colonial anxieties generally, but which members of the *ummânu* class felt in a particular way: as leaders in a mobile, imperial society which disassociated power from place, such elites could never be certain of their social location. In contrast to earlier, independent palatial states, vassal states were unstable entities; they had power without legitimacy, and were subject to the arbitrary violence of faraway overlords. The new gentry class was empowered to rule locally, but without the protections of palace-household membership, and they were the targets of imperial punishment and exile just as often as general populations. Correlative to flight and hiding, political membership under empire was increasingly defined by registration and alienation (both of groups and individuals, through deportations and censuses), processes which defined communities by external standards.

The ummânu as Protagonist

The emergence of the *ummânu* as a foil to the person of the king in the "Sennacherib complex" leads me to characterize the archipelago as a kind of colonial resistance literature. The first reason for doing so should be fairly apparent: with the exception of the Assyrian material itself, the stories were openly or implicitly anti-imperial: critical of Assyria's imperial power, and secondarily allusive to later empires (Babylon, Persia, Macedonia, and Rome). The second reason comes not far behind: the literature foregrounded non-royal persons as agents of historical change¹²¹ and relegated kings to the background as passive, even absent figures. Together, the popular stories about the 701 encounter and its aftermath were part of a vernacular critique of empire as well as a celebration of the social elites who grew up without appointments in local palaces: Eisenstadt's "autonomous elites." The archipelago was manifest in manuscript and oral traditions independent of one another, but the conformity of these traditions as a social-political response to the experience of imperial governance reveals its substrate unity.

The term "resistance literature" *suggests* political independence and cultural autonomy for subalterns—and the stories nod in that direction—but it is crucial not to misunderstand the category as a simple opposite to imperial narratives. In cases from ancient to modern, outright defiance hardly fits the reality of the elite compliance which broadly characterized

¹²¹ M. Carasik, "Who were the 'Men of Hezekiah' (Proverbs XXV 1)?" *VT* 44/3 (1994).

colonial governance under empires. A proper post-colonial critique of our stories should clearly distinguish between posture and function. The producers and consumers of the Sennacherib stories were, in many cases, the very same metropolitan-educated native elites who worked closely with imperial administrations, emulated imperial culture, and whose lip-service to resistance was not much more paternalistic toward their fellow countrymen than the attitudes of their governing Assyrian overlords.

R. Guha terms these dominant groups in native society under colonial rulers “*élèves*,” a class with numerous historical analogs, with a range of compliance.¹²² In colonial India, to give a mild example, the Bengali *bhadralok* (“respectable people”) who aspired to middle-class Victorian respectability by emulating British domesticity—in dress, manner, speech, even culinary and hygienic practices—represent an internalized but fairly mild and apolitical kind of collaboration.¹²³ A middling example of collaboration is found in the Korean *chihilpa* (lit., “friendly to Japan”): these were Japanophile Koreans who sometimes merely celebrated Japanese culture, but were also more openly political, and at times materially aided Japanese imperialism in the early 20th century. At the farther end of this spectrum, we can look at the Spanish empire’s collaborating *cacique*-chiefs of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries A.D., native leaders who were rewarded with local sovereignty on *cacicazgo* lands in exchange for their direct help in collecting imperial taxes and fighting imperial wars.

The authority of collaborating native elites to articulate what was culturally traditional and politically authentic for their own populations was of course deeply compromised by their complicity in effecting imperial governance, in everything from tax collection to economic opportunity to conformity in language and dress; these were hardly the authors of genuine “folk traditions.” So, as convenient as it might be to look at the Sennacherib stories as a native critique of despotism, and to imply that the *ummānu* was a foxish, postcolonial hero, and the Assyrian *šarru* was the bumbling, colonialist bad guy, it is more accurate to identify them as mediating instruments, as ideological apologia for the rule of the *ummānū* class, justifying their power as culturally authentic and meritocratic.

The ambivalent position of the authors and audiences for the Sennacherib complex becomes clearest in the consistent placement of the

¹²² R. Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies III: Writings on Indian History and Society* (Delhi, 1984).

¹²³ D. Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for ‘Indian’ Pasts?,” *Representations* 37 (1992): 1–26.

ummānu—as wise man, as court official, as communicant with the gods—at the center of narrative action, yet not openly as its hero, while kings were positioned as passive actors or altogether absent. The agentive-historical function of the complex was to identify the *ummānū* as historically important while de-emphasizing the role of kings as uniquely influential in world history. But the focus on the *ummānū* also reveals the ambivalence of the treatment, using a buffering effect to deflect historical *responsibility* from this class even as it celebrated it. The Sennacherib complex temporally sets resistance to empire in the past—all of these stories were primarily in circulation centuries after the events described—deferring any actual “liberation” or “resistance” in favor of a presentist purpose: to buttress the social authority of elites who enjoyed authority derived from distant imperial capitals, but exercised it over grudging local populations. Resistance to empire, as such, was safely domesticated by placing it in a deeper past. The allusive power of the stories titillated present discontents by hinting at resistance, but it stayed safely contained within the playful confines of folk-tale.

Who were these “autonomous elites” in the stories?¹²⁴ Their prominence is best established in the Aramaic cluster, as Ahiqar and Tobit are archetypal wise counselors. Crucial to their success is the ignorance and arbitrary cruelty of the kings who appear as their foils; the kings are not presented as masterminds or arch-villains, but as gullible men, dependent on the advice of counselors, for whom violence was as casual an instrument as promotion. Indeed, it is not only Ahiqar, the protagonist, who exercises wise action, but also his would-be assassin, Nebosumiskin, who devises the plan of escape; and not only is Sennacherib duped by the villainous Nadan, but the just-so story concludes with Ahiqar outsmarting yet another ruler as well (Pharaoh) through a series of tests.¹²⁵ Tobit, too,

¹²⁴ S. Eisenstadt, “Cultural Orientations, Institutional Entrepreneurs, and Social Change: Comparative Analysis of Traditional Civilizations,” *American Journal of Sociology* 85/4 (1980): 841–44. As useful as Eisenstadt’s conception of “autonomous elites” remains, the high degree of variability in story traditions calls into question his model of imperial societies as entailing “a high degree of coalescence” in political identity (including conflict), institutional structure, and cultural expression. (Indeed, Eisenstadt’s hierarchy was fairly hidebound in this sense: he saw “patrimonial” societies as “noncoalescent,” city-states as “partially coalescent,” and empires as fully “coalescent”). In fact we see the opposite here: imperial culture seems to have thrived on—even produced—the flexibilities and ambiguities of both social location and core-periphery relations.

¹²⁵ As Holm (this volume) points out, however, this last episode is not known until the later medieval Ahiqar manuscripts.

escapes the clutches of a power-hungry Sennacherib, and so too his son Tobias, with the book repeating the ethical admonition “it is good to keep close the secret of a king, but honorable to reveal the works of God,” which reads as the veritable motto of the *ummānu* class.

These themes are already rooted early on in the prominence of Eliakim (“who was in charge of the palace”), Šebnah (“the secretary”), Joah (“the recorder”), and the senior priests of the Biblical accounts.¹²⁶ These men appear as negotiators, advisors, translators, and conveyors of prophetic messages. First among them, of course, was Isaiah himself (2 Kings 19:2 and *passim*). As the prophet is presented to us, Isaiah was no wild-eyed, hairy *mahḥu*, but a cultured and scholarly figure who had authority within the palace and knowledge of foreign affairs between Judah, Babylonia, Assyria, and Syria (Isaiah 7:1–9, 8:5–8, 17:1–14). Moreover, Isaiah’s words betray a distinctly educated religious background—that he worked within a “distinct theological framework [which] . . . distinguished [him] from [his] prophetic contemporaries.”¹²⁷ Schmitt points out that although Isaiah “lashes out against those who have a pretended wisdom” (i.e., scholarly poseurs), nevertheless “some [of his] sayings suggest a real wisdom background”—and that his knowledge of *Realpolitik* is consistent with the atmosphere of sophistication and awareness about foreign practices in evidence throughout much of the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Ezra 4, Isaiah 47:1, 13, Jeremiah 10:2–3, etc.).¹²⁸ Nor should we be misled by the biblical account into thinking that the Assyrians were ever very far away from Jerusalem after 701, either. To the contrary, Judah remained surrounded by Assyrian provinces through the seventh century, continued to render tribute to Assyria, and Jerusalem itself may have been monitored, without being occupied outright, from close-by imperial garrisons.¹²⁹ In short, it was not hard for such men to know what was going on in the world.

Arrayed against the servants of Hezekiah at the walls of Jerusalem, of course, was not the Assyrian king himself, but *his* agents and their

¹²⁶ 2 Kgs. 18:18, 26; || Isa. 36:3; 2 Kgs. 19:2.

¹²⁷ Seitz, “Isaiah,” 477–78; such a reading supposes, of course, that an historical Isaiah was similar to the figure shaped by the biblical editors; yet that very shaping proves the esteem for scholarship.

¹²⁸ J. J. Schmitt, “Prophecy (Preexilic Hebrew),” *ABD* V (1992): 482–89.

¹²⁹ Moshe Elat, “The Political Status of the Kingdom of Judah within the Assyrian Empire in the 7th Century B.C.E.,” in *Investigations at Lachish: The Sanctuary and the Residency (Lachish V)*, ed. Y. Aharoni (Tel Aviv: 1975), 63–66; see also Grabbe, “Kingdom of Judah,” 83, on Ramat Raḥel as a possible “Assyrian administrative center.”

counterparts: the *rab šaqê*, *turtānu*, and "*rab saris*."¹³⁰ Hezekiah and Sennacherib remain well in the background of the encounter,¹³¹ and in Josephus' retelling Hezekiah becomes positively craven, cowering deep within his city (2 Kings 18:18 specifies that the Assyrians initially called for Hezekiah himself; his officials appeared in his stead, under orders not to negotiate).¹³² The foregrounding of the non-royal actors generally, and the subordination of Hezekiah specifically, are of course likely consequences of a later redaction by the scholarly class who edited the material, rather than any palatial elite, and may reflect some historical resentment against Hezekiah for his centralizing reforms as well.¹³³

In Sennacherib's own account, of course, the royal figure was in no way subordinated, but rather the sole agent and actor—par for the course with Assyrian royal inscriptions. One may note a few deviations from this principle in Sennacherib's Jerusalem account, however, e.g., the active role of the nobles of Ekron and the helplessness of Padi, their overthrown king. Note also the *dénouement* of Hezekiah's submission, in which the formal enactment of vassalhood was performed through a diplomat sent to Nineveh, and not by the king himself, as other submissions were enacted, with subdued vassal kings personally delivering gifts and kissing the feet of Sennacherib. And, drawing the frame back a bit, it is clear that some imperial officers gained power in these years, as through Sennacherib's acknowledgement that his *rab šaqê* and governors were the ones to initiate his first campaign, the one against Merodach-baladan.

¹³⁰ On the *rab saris*, see H. Tadmor, "Rab-saris or Rab-shakeh in 2 Kings 18," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth* (FS Freedman), ed. C. L. Meyers and M. O'Connor (Winona Lake, IN, 1983).

¹³¹ Cf. Babylonian Talmud Sanh. 94a, which implies a more *mano-a-mano* conflict in claiming that both Hezekiah and Sennacherib had eight names. Compare also to Hezekiah's reception of Merodach-baladan's delegation as part of a deliberate plan to oppose Assyria (Isa. 39:1–8, || 2 Kgs. 20:12–19); Blenkinsopp, "Hezekiah and the Babylonian Delegation," argues persuasively that the envoys of Merodach-baladan must have been sent prior to 701 B.C.E.

¹³² The Assyrian technique of threatening and bargaining by officers at the gates of besieged city was a standard one; its use at rebellious Babylon is attested in the time of Tiglath-pileser III (H. W. F. Saggs, "The Nimrud Letters, 1952: Part I," *Iraq* 17 [1955], 23–24). A century and a half before, Tukulti-Ninurta II patterned his Euphrates campaign on the arrival at a city to be attacked in the evening, camping before it overnight, and then accepting its surrender without a fight in the morning (RIMA 2 A.100.5.49–68).

¹³³ The historicity of the "reforms" is of course not universally accepted; see L. S. Fried, "The High Places (*bāmôt*) and the Reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah: an Archaeological Investigation," *JAOS* 122/3 (2002).

The prominence of such men in the biblical account is thus less unusual than one might think.

One vexing historical problem is that, despite the regular Assyrian practice of naming years eponymously (the *limmu*-year system) after such high officials as the *rab šaqê* and *turtānu*, the identity of these *particular* officers from the 701 B.C.E. encounter remains a mystery. The reasons for this are too lengthy to go into here,¹³⁴ but it is not unrelated to our subject: in brief, palace officials and high-command military men appear to have been politically eclipsed in this system of honorary year-names by territorial governors under Sargon II and Sennacherib. The early years of Sennacherib's reign were a transitional period: before Sargon II, the empire was largely run by such men as the *rab šaqê* and *turtānu*; but by the end of Sennacherib's reign, scholars and magnates (the *rabbûte*, the "great ones") had come to greater prominence at the capital. Space does not permit an extensive review of this subject, but the secondary literature in Neo-Assyrian studies would leave one in little doubt about the extent to which scholars—the true *ummānu*—policed the corridors of Neo-Assyrian imperial power.¹³⁵ The access of scholars to the person of the king, the reliance of the king on divination for the conduct of foreign policy, and the centrality to royal ideology of knowledge curation and production at this time all point to the rising position of scholars in the Assyrian empire under Sennacherib.

The conspicuousness of the non-royal actor is also pronounced in the Egyptian tales set in the time of Sennacherib's son Esarhaddon (Aserḥetani), the "Chief of Aššur." Sennacherib is already dead in the setting of these stories, but "the name of Esarhaddon's father Sennacherib . . . is consistently used as a patronymic."¹³⁶ Though six historical Egyptian kings are featured in the Egyptian cluster (Necho, Petubastis, Pekrur, Nehka, Bokennife, and Nakhthornashen), the active roles in these heroic tales fall to warrior-princes and wise men, and not to the kings

¹³⁴ It is my intention to publish a brief article on this subject in the near future.

¹³⁵ Radner, "Royal Decision-making." For an extensive bibliography on Neo-Assyrian scholarship and politics, see K. Radner's website <http://knp.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/bibliography/#politics>; but note in particular there F. M. Fales and G. B. Lanfranchi, "The impact of oracular materials on the political utterances and political actions of the Sargonid dynasty," in *Oracles et prophéties dans l'antiquité*, ed. J.-G. Heintz (Paris, 1997), 99–114; and J. Péčirková, "Divination and politics in the Late Assyrian empire," *Archiv Orientální* 53 (1985): 155–168.

¹³⁶ Ryholt, "Assyrian Invasion," 485; Sennacherib's name, however, is consistently rendered *Wšh-rn=f*, meaning only "his name is long."

themselves. The stories never culminate with the heroes ascending the throne or establishing a dynasty: though Inaros, for instance, is identified as a prince—the son of Bokennife, ruler of Athribis—kingship as such plays no role in any of the several narratives.¹³⁷ The role of Inaros, rather, is as a warrior, his lance and armor important symbols; he is a wise commander whose rivals are the scribes and magicians of the Assyrians, not their kings. The sage Imhotep and the “mighty warrior” Naneferkasokar also figure into the Egyptian mythos of resistance to Assyria, as does Ahiqar.¹³⁸

These heroes were arrayed against non-royal foes: an Assyrian sorceress who turns herself into a griffin; Esarhaddon’s scribe Sinuqi; yet another Assyrian sorceress called Sheshemnefertum; the evil and ungrateful Nadin, nephew of Ahiqar. The Assyrian king is a passive actor in most of these stories: in one, he is caught sleeping; in another, he frets uselessly about his army’s safety. In yet another, he is publicly shamed by the Egyptian hero: Naneferkasokar cuts such a bold and merry figure that he causes the face of the Assyrian king to become red and angry, then weak and embarrassed, prompting his magnates to abandon him. The dynamic between the non-royal status of the “elites” and that of the kings gently subverts royal power from two directions, by lionizing the former and ignoring (or belittling) the latter.

This dynamic prevailed in Syriac literature, as well, where the heroes of the stories included the “daredevil” princelings Adramelik and Sanasar, disdainful of Sennacherib’s royal power and ultimately driven to assassinate him. Significantly, they themselves did not become kings in exile, but ancestors to a proto-Christian population settled in pious villages centered around a monastery near Mount Qardū.¹³⁹ The hagiographies of St. Eugene, Behnam, and Qardāg all position Sennacherib’s descendants as learned holy men rather than royals. Šar-ušur, for instance, rebuilds a temple, and his lineage settles down to await the arrival of Christianity in the form of St. Eugene. Behnam appears as a prince who chooses martyrdom over kingship, and even prompts Sennacherib himself to convert to Christianity. In the Qardāg story, the line of descent from Sennacherib actually comes through the hero’s mother. Qardāg is restored to power by the Persian king Šapur, and returns to Arbela to rule Assyria—but is

¹³⁷ Similarly Amyrtaios, son of Petubastis (*ibid.*, 505).

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 497–98; see Holm, this volume: the earliest fragments of the Ahiqar stories come from Egypt.

¹³⁹ Harrak, “Tales,” 175ff.

persuaded by a dream-vision and the teachings of a Christian ascetic to denounce the “Magian” heresy, become a “servant of Christ,” and eventually accept martyrdom for it. These stories set up an evolution away from kingship/paganism towards wisdom/Christianity; the Syriac villages and lineages saw themselves as emerging from a heroic past of pagan monarchism, transformed into the confessional community of Christianity.

The Greek accounts related to Sennacherib generally do not celebrate any literate elites over royal figures.¹⁴⁰ This is surprising insofar as the celebration of “Oriental wisdom” and the disparagement of “Oriental despotism” was probably the largest ambivalence in the Greek reception of ancient Near Eastern culture. Herodotus’ Egyptian king Sethos (a priest himself) indeed proves to be hamfisted and vain; and the warrior class Sethos despised is juxtaposed to the “shop-keepers, craftsmen, and men of the marketplace” who eventually came to the pharaoh’s aid; this cannot be said to emphasize scholarly elites. Greek accounts of Sennacherib’s deeds are Tarsus were either value-neutral or implicitly celebratory: he is said to have waged a tough campaign, then built a city and a monument, and no characters other than the king are said to take action. Ironically, the site of Tarsus is among the few in the West from which genuine Neo-Assyrian cuneiform scientific texts has been recovered; Dalley has speculated that a later Greek regard for Tarsus’s philosophical school may have ultimately derived from its reputation as a center of knowledge in Neo-Assyrian times.¹⁴¹ Certainly this kind of retrospective Orientalism was behind Eusebius’ interpolation (perhaps via Polyhistor) that “Pythagoras the sage” was a contemporary of Sennacherib and Hezekiah.¹⁴² But one cannot push this too far.

In the literary figure of the *ummânu* as “autonomous elite,” we face the confusing cultural intersection of the collaboration with and critique of empire. Without doubt, the central place of these figures in the literary complex mirrored the rise of non-palatial elites to positions of social authority throughout the imperial ecumene between the late Neo-Assyrian period and into late antiquity. What I primarily wish to suggest is not merely that art here imitated life, but that the nature of that imitation

¹⁴⁰ West, “Croesus’ Second Reprieve,” has argued that the role of Croesus of Lydia continuing his career as advisor to Cyrus I may be modeled on Ahiqar as advisor to Sennacherib—but plainly the point of the Croesus story was substantially different: to make a cultural contrast between Greek common-sense and Persian superstition, and not an intellectual one between wisdom and kingship; Croesus was, after all, a former king himself.

¹⁴¹ Dalley, “Sennacherib and Tarsus.”

¹⁴² Verbrugge and Wickersham, *Berosos and Manetho*, 56.

indicates the unease and ambivalence of political life in this time. The heroic, anti-imperial implications of the tales had no pretence to the restoration of local kingships, or to the uncompromised authority of "autonomous elites." In a sense, one is left with a gaping hole in the political fabric where kingship once had been; the monovocality of royal states had been replaced by the de-centered voices of a punditocracy.

Miracles, Magic, and Martyrs

Other important mechanisms in the archipelago—miracles, magic, and martyrdom—formed a unity in terms of narrativity and the mechanics of action rather than in topic. These devices had divergent purposes within their "home" literatures, but what they had in common was their departure from the king as sole purveyor of narrative focus and historical change. The literary monopoly of heroic kingship was broken not only by changing the protagonist—i.e., the focus on the *ummānu*—but also by altering the expected mode of change in the rising action and climax of the narrative from royal agency to divine intervention. The stories shifted explanations for historical change away from the expected and inevitable plots turns of the Assyrian royal inscription¹⁴³ and the Egyptian *Königs-novelle*, and towards something more like Greek, Biblical, and Arabic literature—in which one expects only the unexpected and entertaining, and an implicitly critical view of kingship.¹⁴⁴

By "miracles," I mean those occasions on which divine agents worked in the world both directly (i.e., unmediated by other agents, especially kings) and dramatically (i.e., unexpectedly). This definition thus consists of both theological and literary qualities. "Miracles" are distinguished from the royal enactments of divine will pervasive in royal literature, in which the appointed king is the sole medium of the gods' agency, theologically speaking, and his performance of their will is the inevitable, logical consequence of his office.¹⁴⁵ In the narrative terms of earlier Assyrian and other royal literature, a king's action was foreordained, exclusive, central, and

¹⁴³ Feldt, *The Fantastic*, 241, draws a contrast between the Bible's ubiquity of miracles and Mesopotamian literature, which finds "its primary cultural expression in monstrous agents, rather than in fantastic events."

¹⁴⁴ For a recent examination of miracles in another setting (medieval Europe), see Michael E. Goodrich's *Miracles and Wonders: The Development of the Concept of Miracle, 1150–1350*. (Aldershot, UK, 2007), arguing for radical changes in cultural conceptions of the miraculous in fairly short periods of time.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Feldt, *The Fantastic*, 244–45, who prefers the term "fantastic" to "miraculous" to avoid an "implied hierarchy of miracle vs. magic terminology," defining such events thusly:

unfailingly effective; in historical terms, change was understood to derive from divine right and predestination. But in the arrival of the angel of the Lord at Jerusalem (2 Kings 19:35), we see an event carried out not only irrespective of Sennacherib or Hezekiah's will, but entirely unforeseen (except perhaps to Isaiah).¹⁴⁶ The unexpectedness of the development not only removes agency from the hands of the kings, it ruptures the larger ideological rationale of their relationship, in this case the legal validity of Judah's contractual obligation to deliver tribute to Assyria.¹⁴⁷ Such a rupture sets up a tension between the semantic categories of royal ideology and a popular notion of miraculous change which was immanent and universal.¹⁴⁸

The miraculous aspect, unsurprisingly, is best reflected in biblically-derived traditions. As Ulmer and Oegema (this volume) shows, a number of Second Temple and Midrashic stories elaborate on this thaumatological device. 2 Baruch embroiders the Biblical tale by specifying that the bodies of the Assyrians were burned within their clothing and armor, but their "raiments and arms preserved" as evidence of the miracle performed.¹⁴⁹ The "Testament of Adam" adds by placing Sennacherib in the company of demons arrayed against angels, i.e., within an apocalyptic context of demonology and angelology. In the Tobit story, the death of Sennacherib

"outright violations of expectations to the normal and the everyday, and only rarely are they benign."

¹⁴⁶ Compare Hezekiah's response to the letter of Sennacherib in Isa. 37:14–20 (||2 Kgs. 19:14–19) to the absence of royal response to the Isaiah's letter of prophecy following Isaiah 37:35 (||2 Kgs. 19:34); cf. 2 Chron. 32:20–21 and Josephus *Ant.* X:3.

¹⁴⁷ Elsewhere, I have studied the various categories of ideological claims which rebellion reveals by its inverses, e.g., that, just as kings are like shepherds, rebels are like stray sheep: S. Richardson, "Writing Rebellion Back Into the Record: A Methodologies Toolkit," in *Rebellions and Peripheries in the Cuneiform World*, ed. S. Richardson (New Haven, CT, 2010). In fact, Sennacherib's particular account of Hezekiah does little to characterize the nature of his violation beyond his stated obligation to render tribute prior to the siege ("I imposed dues and gifts for my lordship upon him, in addition to the former tribute, their yearly payment," *COS* 2.II9B).

¹⁴⁸ Feldt, *The Fantastic*, 236–37, ties the "transgressive imagery and excessive violence" of fantastical events to "the deity's fundamental opacity"; his is an "irreducibly ambiguous presentation." In this sense, the miraculous is suprahistorical, relegating mere histories in the form of royal annals, chronicles etc., to the mundane, whereas the divine cannot be represented historically.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Tosefta Tractate Sotah 3:18, "And all of them were kings, with their crowns bound to their heads": J. Neusner, *Making God's Word Work: A Guide to the Mishnah* (New York, 2004), 54–55. One wonders if some articles of Assyrian armor had at some point been kept as trophies.

is itself the first of a series of miraculous events that leads to the deliverance of an entire family of Jewish *ummânû*.¹⁵⁰

The recourse to the device of the miracle is perfectly consistent with the encapsulating narratives of these literatures, in which history's divine course was enacted using kings as passive figures, not the figures who directed it. Especially in the Hebrew Bible, Assyria, Babylon, and Persia were pawns in an unfolding divine eschatology; their kings were subjects, not agents.¹⁵¹ But miraculous stories of the Jerusalem siege took root outside of Biblica and Judaica, as well. In Herodotus' story of the Pelusium siege, it is the multitude of field-mice who devour the Assyrian arms and armor and thus effect Sennacherib's defeat;¹⁵² the divinely-induced dream received by pharaoh was only a premonition of this event. Josephus' account of the action adds to Herodotus' field-mice story a pestilence sent by God on the Assyrians at Jerusalem. Egyptian and even Assyrian accounts of the post-701 era took up just-so stories of divine intercession in human affairs, such as Esarhaddon's apologetic account of Marduk's turning the "tablet of destinies" upside down to alter the abandonment of Babylon from 70 years to 11 years. Indeed, Esarhaddon virtually removed Sennacherib from the story of Babylon's destruction altogether, a cataclysm perpetuated directly by the gods themselves.¹⁵³

In contradistinction to "miracles," magic was made by men, not gods. Magic is most evident in the stories of the Egyptian Inaros cycle, in the form of evil Assyrian sorcerers with shapeshifting abilities, demons summoned by angry gods, images animated to war on the battlefield, and the progress of armies checked by celestial events. The imperviousness of Luz to Sennacherib had a magical basis (at least, this power was not attributed to the divine), and the Aramaic incantation bowl alludes to magical defenses against the Sargonids. An unlikely turn in the Tobit story finds his son Tobias attacked by a fish on his journey to Media; Tobias slays the fish and turns its internal organs into magico-medical ingredients ultimately

¹⁵⁰ See nn. 41–44 above, on various Talmudic stories which imply Yahweh's intercession.

¹⁵¹ One might contrast this to the "disputational turn" towards the end of late antiquity, when historical explanation via the miraculous was exchanged for the rationalist modes of causation embodied in disputations between religious scholars—events often commissioned by kings (personal communication, R. Payne).

¹⁵² Cf. 1 Sam. 5:6; a later commentary of Rabbi Isaac Nappaḥa also attributed Sennacherib's defeat to the tumult (*shirah*) of the beasts of the field (cf. Sanh. 95b).

¹⁵³ Weaver, "Sin of Sargon'."

used to drive away the demons which afflict his future wife, Sarah.¹⁵⁴ The Armenian Sasun legends had even Sennacherib himself making recourse to magical intrigues with demons and devils. Magic and ritual played a pronounced role at the Assyrian court of Sennacherib's time; divination was the premiere knowledge art of the day, but it existed alongside a wide variety of apotropaic and prophylactic magical practices used at all levels of society. Of such bits and scraps one should perhaps not make too much—even by the loose standards of the “archipelago” concept, magic sits at the margins. But magic represents another device of popular literatures: royal control of magical power was vilified, while non-royal control of it was coded as heroic.

Third, let us take note of the prominence of the martyrology of the Syriac cluster. Hagiographies and martyrdoms were perfectly consistent with the world view of early Christianity, and have little to do with Sennacherib as such. Yet the folk tales about Sennacherib and the Assyrian royal line, set in the deep pre-Christian past and hybridized with stories about saints who lived a thousand years later, showed a particular intention to unify two lines of the heroic past. The precondition for martyrdom's narrative importance was an emphasis on the pagan background. The tale of St. Eugene, for instance, showed a basic biblico-historical fidelity in identifying “Šar-ušur” as the progenitor of a pagan family line set down long before the arrival (though in anticipation) of Christianity; the Mār Behnam martyrdom climaxes with the conversion of Sennacherib himself; the Sasun cycle recognizes Sennacherib as an Arab Muslim. These temporally-elastic narratives share an essential belief in the Assyrian royal origin of (variously) the Armenian or “Aramean” people anterior to the arrival of Christianity, and form a basic sequence of events in this respect.

In the conversion or overthrow of Sennacherib, and in the relinquishment of kingship in favor of piety and martyrdom, the stories of the saints and heroes direct attention away from royal power and towards resistance by noncompliance. As with miracles, which removed kings from the chain of causal events, privileging an unmediated and omnipotential exercise of divine power in the world, and as with magic, employed both by and against non-royal heroes and wise men, we see yet again the mechanisms of narrative change devolve on agents other than kings. It would by now

¹⁵⁴ Strictly speaking, Tobias' ability to perform these acts is underwritten by the angel Raphael, disguised as a kinsman, who advises him on the composition of the medicine; this case is thus an admixture of the miraculous and the magical.

belabor the point to enumerate all the corresponding cases, but helpful to think in general terms, that in every instance in which a non-royal actor effects narrative change, a king is thereby denied the position of agent. Further below, I will make the case that the emergence of the *ummânu* and these new modes of narrative change were inadvertently abetted by a deliberate historical “forgetting” of Assyrian kingship engineered by the Assyrian court itself.

Flight, Hiding and Registration

Before I expand on “forgetting,” I want to point to one more topos of the archipelago which reflects the instability of the waning Iron Age: the pervasive theme of flight and hiding. The stories of the complex are shot through with perilous journeys, false identities, and frenetic movement. In one sense, the incessant movement could be said to point towards positive qualities of first-millennium empires, to the mobility and cosmopolitanism they engendered, e.g., in Tobias’ journey to Media, the heroic emigration of Sennacherib’s descendants to Anatolia, or the secret mission of Merodach-baladan to Hezekiah. Yet none of the journeys in these tales would have been necessary had Assyria not threatened the safety of the world in the first place. Movement in the archipelago was impelled by diaspora or escape, characterizing an underlying disquiet: the permanent state of emergency which empires engender. Just as importantly, the themes of flight and hiding reveal crises in the social and political identities of the age, down to the level of individual identity under imperial systems of registration: the implied corollary of the refugee is the census.

Unsurprisingly, Assyrian sources already showcase this sense of disruption and motion. Sennacherib’s account of the third campaign opens with the flight of Lulli of Sidon overseas, the deportation of Šidqa of Aškelon, and the counter-invasion of the Egyptian and “Ethiopian” armies. These were, of course, stock images from Assyrian annals—terrified kings and armies flee to the mountains or across seas and rivers; the king’s army hurries to pursue them through hostile environs in a campaign of conquest and speed against not only enemies, but against landscape and nature itself; the enemies are regrouped, yoked, and dispatched to far-off lands via deportation. The Assyrian imperial project was not merely one of removing individual enemies from the scene, but of destabilizing localism and political individuality altogether. Looking throughout the archipelago, the precarious political position of groups and individuals is indexed

by their physical displacement through invasion, deportation, exile, flight, return, or correspondence.

Notable in the Biblical cluster is not merely the Assyrian invasion as the occasion for a parable about Jerusalem's "living God" as distinct from the "gods of the nations," but the frenetic sense of movement attending it—and not only in the movements of the Assyrian armies (plural), the arriving Egyptians, and the messages sent back and forth, but in the story's poetics as well. Isaiah 37:24–28 underscores the semantic relationship between the vanity of imperial project and its incessant movement, mocking Assyrian rhetoric about the traversing of high mountains, deep forests, remote wells, and the streams of Egypt: "I know your rising up and your sitting down," Isaiah scolds Assyria, "your going out and coming in, and your raging against me . . . I will turn you back on the way by which you came."

This is hardly the place to make a full examination of the restlessness inhabiting the entire genre of Assyrian royal inscriptions, in their relentless account of pursued enemies, conquered landscapes, and far-ranging, speedy armies. But its dramatic importance for the archipelago should be exposed: Assyrian invasions predicate not only the Assyrian and Biblical accounts, but also those of the Aramaic (3a, 3c, 3d), Egyptian (4b), Greek (5a, 5b), Syriac (6f), and Arabic (7a, 7b, 7d1) clusters. This places Sennacherib leading armies everywhere from Tarsus to Pelusium to Luz to Nisrin to Armenia—even, eventually, to Hell itself. The furious pace and incessant motion of the Assyrian war machine is enough to give the reader vertigo. An unintended consequence of this unceasing movement, however, was that as much as Assyria's conquests, reconquests, and "reminder" campaign accounts were meant to establish a sense of imperial omnipresence, they inevitably produced a complementary sense of frenetic scurrying—of impermanence and insecurity—though this was surely counter to their purpose.

The deportation and resettlement of large populations, already mentioned for its capacity to have formed new historical audiences, also appears as a topos of flight within the archipelago. Sennacherib's campaign against Judah resulted in a single massive deportation, bracketed by other deportations of Israelites and Judeans under Tiglath-pileser III, Šalmaneser V, Sargon II, Esarhaddon, and Aššurbanipal,¹⁵⁵ to say nothing of the Babylonian exile of the sixth century. These deportations successively

¹⁵⁵ On Ashurbanipal, see Ezra 4:10.

became literary models for the Israelite exilic/diasporic identity that formed over the next thousand years.

Yet foreign deportation and resettlement cannot be so easily distinguished from the domestic Judean situation: earlier Assyrian conquests had already forced Israelites and Judeans within the safety of Jerusalem's walls (2 Chronicles 30:25), and Hezekiah was said to have welcomed the multitudes with something like a "right of return" (2 Chronicles 30:6–13), registering all the tribes anew and redistributing land and residency to them (2 Chronicles 31:11–19). Indeed, Hezekiah's linkage of cultic reforms to resettlement programs was already known to the Assyrians—such a level of intelligence is likely, given Sennacherib's knowledge of Hezekiah's complicity in the revolt at Ekron—at least as it was voiced in the siege narrative: "Was it not this same Hezekiah who took away [God's] high places and his altars and commanded Judah and Jerusalem, saying 'Before one altar you shall worship...?' " (2 Chronicles 32:12).¹⁵⁶ As a counterweight, Sennacherib's agents offered an alternative not generally well-advertised in Biblical accounts, namely the possibility that resettlement would actually *improve* the socio-economic lot of at least some Israelites and Judeans:

(Isaiah 36:16–17) Make peace with me and come out to me. Then each of you will eat fruit from your own vine and fig tree and drink water from your own cistern, until I come and take you to a land like your own—a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards.¹⁵⁷

The implied contrast was not only between the horrors of a siege¹⁵⁸ and a pleasant life in exile, but between the "people on the wall" (Isaiah 36:11) and Hezekiah and his officials (Isaiah 36:12). This "wedge issue" suggested that deportation was not only better than starving, but that Assyrian rule was more benevolent than Hezekiah's.

The theme of exile is also underscored in other clusters, as with the Assyrian expropriation of the limbs of Osiris (objects constitutive of

¹⁵⁶ Cf. 2 Kgs. 18:22, which places the emphasis differently, by pointing to the offense against the God in whom the Judeans hope for protection in the dismantling of shrines, rather than Hezekiah's high-handedness as such.

¹⁵⁷ Those familiar with Assyrian rhetoric will recognize this language of plenitude and compassion as a classic, if subdued, trope—with no necessary implications about its veracity.

¹⁵⁸ The siege, the Assyrians warn, will ultimately require the besieged "eat their own excrement and drink their own urine," Isa. 36:12.

Egyptian cultural identity),¹⁵⁹ the Armenian diaspora of Sennacherib's bloodline, the indistinction of Assyrians and Arabs in the Inaros stories and Greek accounts, Berossus' account of Sennacherib's deportation of the Babylonians,¹⁶⁰ and, more tentatively, the implication by Berossus and Eusebius of an Assyrian colony at Tarsus, a city "in the image of Babylon." The deportation, exile, and colonial life of entire ethnic groups is implied in the exilic position of Ahiqar and Tobit in Nineveh, and the descendants of Sennacherib populating the later Syriac tales. What is just as noteworthy are the themes of individual flights and perilous journeys, mobilized to dramatize the sense of dislocation. One of the delightful ironies of the Ahiqar tale is that, in fleeing and hiding from Sennacherib (as Tobit 14:10 puts it, "brought down alive into the earth"), the "happy ending" to the story is that he is restored at court in Nineveh, and not returned to some (unspecified) land of origin. For Tobias, his perilous journey to Media also climaxes in a safe return to Nineveh; there, after curing Tobit's blindness, he is warned to flee Nineveh before it is destroyed—but he emigrates back to Media rather than to Jerusalem. The flight of the Assyrian paricides (Adrammelech and Šarezer) to Ararat represented in the Biblical and Syriac traditions similarly points to the peril of the individual traversing the imperial landscape. In this tradition, later Assyrian Christians identified themselves as a community in diaspora no less than their Israelite counterparts.

Peril was not for the imperialized alone: the flight of Sennacherib from Jerusalem was celebrated not only in the Biblical tradition, but also in the Aramaic, Greek, Syriac, and Arabic clusters. Clearly nothing delighted audiences more than the idea of a shamed and humiliated Assyrian monarch, pursued by angels, whisked away by devils on camelback, paraded by captors, running off terrified and screaming into the night, his beard set aflame by Yahweh himself. These images echo the real, historical experiences of the Assyrians with fugitives and exiles. Of course Assyrian royal inscriptions of this period are full of fleeing enemy kings pursued to high mountain peaks or remote citadels, not the least of them, in Sennacherib's

¹⁵⁹ Ryholt, "Assyrian Invasion," 500–501: "The looting of temples and the removal of deities during periods of foreign invasion or occupation caused a severe trauma to the Egyptians, and the retrieval of exiled divine images is a well-attested topos in literature and propaganda during the Greco-Roman period." cf. Leichty, *Royal Inscriptions*, 87–88, 185–86: though Esarhaddon claimed to have looted Egypt so thoroughly that he "did not leave a single person there to praise (me)," he did not specifically mention taking cult statues.

¹⁶⁰ Verbrugge and Wickersham, *Berossos and Manetho*, 54.

case, the king of Elam, who is said to have defecated in his chariot out of fear, and fled in fear like an eagle to a high mountain.¹⁶¹ From a strong field of contenders, though, Sennacherib's pursuit of Merodach-baladan, with his troops bushwhacking through the canebrakes and embarking across rough seas, probably stands out as the most famous manhunt of cuneiform antiquity.

But the cancer went deeper: flight and exile blighted the Assyrian royal family itself. The abandonment of Sargon II's corpse on a Cimmerian battlefield first marked, if metaphorically, the theme of Assyrian royalty lost in foreign lands. Next came the abduction of Sennacherib's son Aššur-nādin-šumi, from Babylon to Elam, a dozen years later. Following this event arose a curious parallel: Esarhaddon was spirited away from Nineveh, possibly to Harran, in protective custody, seemingly in response to danger presented by his soon-to-be-parricide brothers. Then the situation reversed, with flight and pursuit: Sennacherib's assassin sons, Arad-Mulišši and "Sharezer," fled to "Ararat," and Esarhaddon—all speed and motion—made a heroic blitzkrieg return to Nineveh to claim the kingship.¹⁶² This set in place a decades-long hunt for the fraternal branch of the family behind Sennacherib's assassination, including reprisals by Esarhaddon and Aššurbanipal against various individuals and, assuming the campaign against Šubria was indeed a retaliation for its non-extradition of the parricides, military action along the northern frontier. Suffice to say, the dynastic instability that attended the Sargonids was not a family feud confined to one palace, but a series of pursuits and flights from Harran to

¹⁶¹ A partial list of fleeing kings in this era would include: fleeing from **Tiglath-pileser III**: the Median Ramateya, Sarduri of Urartu, Hanunu of Gaza (to Egypt), and several unnamed "enemy kings," (H. Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III, King of Assyria* [Jerusalem, 1994], 49, 53, 65, 71, 101, 133–35, 141); fleeing from **Sargon II**: Sib'u of Egypt, Mittani of Zikirtu, Ursa of Urartu (who subsequently died); Mutallum of Kummuhu, Urzana of Mušāšir (for whom an empire-wide A.P.B. was issued), Merodach-baladan II of Babylon (with his family bones), Sidka of Ashkelon (with his family gods) (Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, 3, 8, 10, 23, 94, 121, 130, and 142); fleeing from **Esarhaddon**: Nabû-zer-kitti-lišir, Governor of the Sealand ("like a fox," to the King of Elam, who executed him; his brother immediately fled to Assyria from Elam), Abdi-Milkūti of Sidon ("into the midst of the sea"), and Laialê of Iadi' (E. Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680–669 B.C.)*, RINAP 4 [Winona Lake, IN, 2011], 15–16, 21–22; cf. ABC 1 iii 39–42); fleeing from **Aššurbanipal**: Ummanaldaš of Elam (who fled naked, Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, 308).

¹⁶² Esarhaddon recounted (Leichty, *Royal Inscriptions*, 13–14): "I did not hesitate one day (or) two days. I did not wait for my army. I did not look for my rear guard. . . . Like a flying eagle I spread my wings to drive back my enemies. With difficulty and haste, I followed the road to Nineveh. . . . I made all of my troops hop over the wide Tigris River as if it were a small canal." Cf. the flights of Nebuchadnezzar II and al-'Abbās b. al-Ma'mūn from Harran/Tarsus to Babylon/Baghdad to claim their thrones on the deaths of their fathers.

Šubria to Nineveh to Babylon and across the Persian Gulf. When one considers, across the subsequent centuries of imperial rule, the proliferation of pretenders,¹⁶³ royals-in-exile,¹⁶⁴ and cadet-branch para-royalty¹⁶⁵ in this age, one can see how themes of royal flight, refuge and return were popular ones, as the safety of local palaces was a concept that receded into the past.

As a final matter, we should mention the role of message-sending in the complex. Messaging was required by, and in turn facilitated, the incessant movement of individuals, armies, and peoples. The Biblical accounts of Sennacherib's parley with Jerusalem alone (2a) attest to nine separate written communications,¹⁶⁶ a fact somewhat overshadowed by the theatricality of the face-to-face verbal parley between the Assyrian and Judean officials. Even Sennacherib's account of the encounter concludes with the arrival of Hezekiah's messenger at Nineveh, "to deliver the tribute and to do obeisance."¹⁶⁷ The residue of empire-wide communications systems

¹⁶³ The imperial era was rife with non-royal pretenders impersonating royalty. Most famous were the cases which followed in the wake of the accession of Darius the Great: the twin cases of "pseudo-Smerdises," i.e., the "Magian" Gaumata and the Persian Vahyazdata, and two supposed sons of Nabonidus, Nebuchadnezzar III and Nebuchadnezzar IV. Seleucid period episodes included a 309 B.C.E. attempt to restore a supposed heir of Alexander of Macedon over the Diadochi, a "false Heracles," and Alexander I Balas (d. 146 B.C.E.), the supposed heir of Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

¹⁶⁴ Most notable was the Assyrian practice of keeping junior members of foreign royal and cadet-branch families as hostages (*litu*) in the Assyrian capitals for observation, education, and potential re-insertion as vassal rulers in peripheral capitals. See S. Zawadzki, "Hostages in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions," in *Immigration and Emigration within the Ancient Near East*, FS Lipinski, ed. K. Van Lerberghe and A. Schoors (Leuven, 1995); K. Radner, "After Eltekeh: Royal Hostages from Egypt at the Assyrian Court," in *Stories of Long Ago*, FS Roaf, ed. H. D. Baker et al. (Münster, 2012); cf. A. Miglio's treatment of royal exile populations under the terms *mādārūm* and *kaltum* in the appendix of his *Solidarity and Political Authority During the Reign of Zimrī-Līm* (c. 1775–1762 B.C.) (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2010).

¹⁶⁵ See Mattila, *King's Magnates*, 129–30.

¹⁶⁶ 2 Kings provides the clearest examples: Hezekiah writes Sennacherib (18:14); the speech of the *rab šaqê* (18:19f.; cf. 2 Chron. 32:9; he undoubtedly reads from a letter, per Isa. 36:4, which reproduces the greetings formula of Assyrian letters); Sennacherib will hear a rumor (19:7); the *rab šaqê* hears that Sennacherib has left Lachish (19:8); Sennacherib hears of Tirhakah's movements (19:9); Sennacherib sends "messengers again to Hezekiah" (also 19:9); Isaiah condemns Sennacherib's "messengers" (19:23; cf. Isa. 37:24, "servants"); the envoys and letters from Merodach-baladan (20:12). Also in 2 Chron. 32:17, Sennacherib is said to have written other "letters of contempt" against the God of Israel. It is not always possible to distinguish references to communicative acts as exclusively written or spoken, but I have at least attempted to limit this accounting to messages which must have come across some significant geographic distance, not including, e.g., the prayers, signs, and Hezekiah's "writing" in Isa. 38:9. See Ulmer, this volume, on the avenging angel as a "messenger."

¹⁶⁷ The account of the surrender is different enough to have drawn attention to it as categorically different from other surrenders, e.g., Elat, "Political Status," 61.

is visible in the remains of Assyrian royal correspondence excavated at Nineveh; the letters belonging to the time of Sargon II alone amount to more than 1,200 documents; and it has been estimated that the royal court sent and received more than 15,000 letters annually, not including communications on paper/parchment, about two million across the period of the high empire (745–612 B.C.E.).¹⁶⁸

Messaging figures prominently in the Ahiqar and Inaros stories. The device by which Nadan betrayed Ahiqar was to forge incriminating letters in his hand to the kings of Persia and Egypt, promising to deliver Sennacherib's kingdom to each, and a third letter to Sennacherib, apparently to deceive him. It is by letter that the king of Egypt challenges Sennacherib to a duel of wits, and it is by letter that Ahiqar then tricks Pharaoh out of 900 talents of gold. The largest existing fragment of the Inaros Epic opens with Esarhaddon counseled to write to Inaros, with a message said to “burn more than flame” (apparently a metaphor for its belligerence); the letter is carried for three days and three nights by courier, and finally read to Inaros (and here the fragment breaks off).

The movement of information across the landscape was instrumental to the control of the empire; information about movement and location was even more so. Neo-Assyrian deportations were not exercises in driving people en-masse, pell-mell into the historical sunset; deportees were accounted for by age, sex, profession, and belongings,¹⁶⁹ resettled and reorganized into new communities.¹⁷⁰ The Nineveh archives include lengthy tallies of people, animals, and crops in the Harran region and elsewhere. This was not a census project—not a realized one, at any rate—but it represents the beginnings or ambitions of one in its scale and attention to detail. By resettling and registering “unreliables,” the Neo-Assyrian empire

¹⁶⁸ SAA I xvi; for the most part, however, messaging systems themselves received little attention in royal inscriptions until the time of Aššurbanipal, who referred in several cases to important news he received on the battlefield by courier (see Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, 292f., 341, 349, 355).

¹⁶⁹ SAA XI 174, 201–206; texts such as SAA XV 54 make clear that references to the well-being of the deportees reflect the accountability of officials for them, rather than any moral responsibility.

¹⁷⁰ Outgoing Assyrian colonists seem to have been scrutinized less than incoming deportees. Assyrians settling in the imperial periphery in other than military contexts (e.g., SAA I:177, V:215) are well-attested, but the references do not give a sense of anything as programmatic as the deportations: SAA I:1 (“over the mountains”); SAA III:31 (to Elam); V:15? (at Ašīpa); SAA XV:268 (settled with Tabaleans); SAA XVII:82 (to Ašdod and Tabal); see also above about Assyrians at Hamath, Tarsus, and Samaria. More carefully-documented land grants such as those in SAA XII (esp. 19 and 48) were for lands generally within the Assyrian heartland. Still other letters reveal an awareness of Assyrians who had fled to other lands (SAA V:52, X:354, XVIII:185).

broke localism and opposition by reforging and licensing community and individual identity. In a sense, the millennium as a whole gravitated towards registration as a governing ethos, in the Neo-Babylonian registration of time in chronicle form, in the Assyrian registration of knowledge through its Nineveh library project, in the scholarly registration of the movements of the sun, moon, stars and planets—projects of classification which had not had such prominence before the rise of empires.

Themes: Conclusion

What can we conclude from an examination of these themes? None of the stories is really *about* social elites, miracles, or the alienation of the individual from the polity, any more than they are *about* Sennacherib. The Ahiqar story was a celebration of wisdom, Isaiah expounded a theology of Yahweh's unique compact with his people, the Sasoun cycle propagated a heroic folk etiology for the Armenian race; such were the diverse purposes of these stories, no more directly interested in social analysis than they were in historical accuracy.

That the archipelago reflects these themes, though—that they lie beached in so many stories, in so many languages, like so much flotsam after the tide goes out—is a window into the anxieties of the age. The *ummânu* may have been an ideal new literary protagonist, but his real-life counterpart was an ambivalent figure, upholding local identity while colluding with empire. Miracles and magic may have reflected a new ideal of unmediated access to divine powers, but these were as unpredictable as they were liberating; magic may have reflected access to the supernatural, but in the wrong hands it could wreak more harm than good. The mobility people enjoyed under empire permitted the free movement of goods and people, and gave rise to an unprecedented cosmopolitanism, but it but came at the cost of disrupted local identity for the deported and a degraded identity for the registered. The hopes and fears of the age, a conscious sense of profound changes, their promises and their problems, all were carried on the currents of these historical stories, left washed up on the shores of the Sennacherib archipelago.

REPLACEMENT AND FORGETTING

I turn to my penultimate point about the role these stories played in constructing new senses of the past. Sennacherib tales did more than simply adopt a superficial historical atmosphere as a matter of expedience or

popular appeal; nor did they just "get the past wrong" through mere disregard for accuracy. A more deliberate condition enabled the archipelago's historicism to attain hegemonic cultural authority: the programmatic dismantling of the traditions the complex *replaced*, i.e., the "great tradition" of kingship mythos. Sennacherib stories were not merely popular in their own right; they occupied a particular niche—answered a cultural need—for mytho-history, a niche left vacant by the empires themselves which had ransacked older kingship traditions for their potency and left them empty.

This may strike the reader as tendentious, especially since the Neo-Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian, and Persian empires all cultivated antiquarianism in particular respects. These empires even staked their authority partly on claims that they were the very incarnations, the realizations, of a long succession of traditional forms of authority. But I hope to show what I mean by outlining the ways in which the Neo-Assyrian empire in particular engaged in a deliberate, if quiet, program of *replacing* some of the same modes of authority used to establish its power in the first place. I can then address the usefulness the new stories had for *forgetting* inconvenient pasts.

Replacement

Let us briefly consider what kinds of traditions were abandoned or put in abeyance by the Sargonids. To begin with, the last Assyrian King List, as far as we know, was composed in or shortly after the reign of Šalmaneser V, probably no later than the 710's B.C.E. That this is the latest recension could be an accident of preservation, but its meaning is illuminated by the facts that not only were paternities omitted from royal inscriptions of the Sargonids—an awkward subject for them—but the expression of long genealogies were also put into mothballs, and that the last surviving entry for the Assyrian Eponym Chronicle is for 699 B.C.E., six years into Sennacherib's reign.¹⁷¹ The cultic veneration of older inscriptions¹⁷² and

¹⁷¹ The composite text does, however, end as a result of breaks at the end—thus it is unclear not only whether or not other, subsequent tablets existed, but even where the extant copies would have concluded. Summary regnal lengths for each king, however, were no longer recorded after Šalmaneser IV, and the accession information for both Sargon II and Sennacherib is muddled together with other news. Millard notes, however (*Eponyms*, 5, following Brinkman), that the texts "become even more detailed" for the final visible entries of 714–700 B.C.E.

¹⁷² Cf. RIMA 1 192–93 and RIMA 2 178.

ancestor kings¹⁷³ also went out of practice in the eighth century. The deep history of Assyrian kingship had become ideologically unproductive for the Sargonids, and even counterproductive: not only did their power not descend in a clear way from this genealogical line, but continued reliance on genealogical legitimacy would oblige them to recognize collateral (e.g., agnatic and cadet) branches of the royal family, who were entirely unwelcome competition. Only a few oddments—the occasional *Distanzgaben*¹⁷⁴ or Esarhaddon's unique claim to be the *liblib dārû* (the “eternal seed”) of the Bēlu-bani lineage—find the Sargonids pointing to the distant past of Assyrian kingship.¹⁷⁵

Sennacherib's reign also saw innovations that actively drew attention away from Assyrian traditions and history. For starters, as Frahm notes (this volume), Sennacherib was nearly unique in keeping his own name for the throne, instead of adopting some more venerable name. Indeed, the last Assyrian monarch to have taken a novel throne name at all (i.e., not a II, III, IV, etc.) was Aššurnaširpal I, more than three hundred years earlier. Sennacherib also adopted a number of innovative epithets as well, and I have alluded above his substantial reconfiguration of the annual *limmu* office. Sennacherib's Ninevite palace was the first to abandon large mural inscriptions,¹⁷⁶ ushering in an era in which historical events were primarily depicted rather than described on palace walls. He radically remodeled Assyrian religion (especially as regards the cult of Aššur) and cultic topography on a Babylonian model, and undertook engineering, palace-building and lavish pleasure-garden construction on an unprecedented scale. Sennacherib was also the first Mesopotamian king to have completely destroyed—or at least claimed to have completely destroyed—another Mesopotamian cult city: Babylon. He was also the first Mesopotamian king to have openly claimed to have destroyed cult statues, and

¹⁷³ Aššurbanipal briefly re-introduced these practices, probably in connection with his generally antiquarian approach to Assyrian kingship, e.g., the revival of genealogies and cult for royal ancestors (Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, 323, 377).

¹⁷⁴ Though most Assyrian *Distanzgaben* were Middle Assyrian in date, the three late cases include, curiously enough, one statement by Sennacherib and two by Esarhaddon; see R. Pruzsinszky, *Mesopotamian Chronology of the 2nd Millennium B.C.* (Vienna, 2009): 136–46, esp. 137 n. 648.

¹⁷⁵ Leichty, *Royal Inscriptions*, Esar. 47; for parallels, see p. 341 sub. Bēl-bāni.

¹⁷⁶ J. R. Russell, *The Writing on the Wall: Studies in the Architectural Context of Late Assyrian Palace Inscriptions*, *Mesopotamian Civilizations* 9 (Winona Lake, IN, 1999), 18.

the first Assyrian king in more than a century to have built gods, as well.¹⁷⁷ These were not, in sum, minor tinkering with the ornaments of power; between civic and decide, between theological and political innovations, Sennacherib's reign was one of radical new precedents in the scope of Assyrian kingship.

But the building of a future required an eclipse of the past. The Sargonid era also marked a visible drop-off in the production of literary works about heroic kingship. Celebratory works about Gilgameš, Sargon of Agade, Nebuchadnezzar I, and even Tukulti-Ninurta I were not being copied in great numbers at Nineveh. Though it was a Ninevite recension of the Gilgameš Epic that brought the story back to the attention of the world in the late nineteenth century, this fact would be somewhat misleading as any reflection on its popularity at Nineveh. Somewhere around 26,000 library tablets and fragments have been recovered from Nineveh, of which only thirty-four or thirty-five belong to the Gilgameš Epic—around .1% of the total—against, say, the 760 or so divinatory texts found there.¹⁷⁸ The overwhelming proportion of identifiable compositions excavated from Nineveh and listed in the library records were divinatory, ritual, and religious texts, not epics about heroic kings.¹⁷⁹

Neither was the Epic of Gilgameš well-represented in other first millennium libraries: it was not in the collections at either the temple of Nabû at Dur-Šarrukin or the Ebabbar temple at Sippar; it was represented at the temple of Nabû at Kalḫu, but only as "a small selection of excerpts"; and the Epic was among texts found at the Eanna temple in Uruk, but these tablets "were thrown away as rubbish and possibly broken on purpose;"¹⁸⁰ a few Late Babylonian fragments, finally, probably come from Babylon.¹⁸¹ In all, Andrew George reports that, although there

¹⁷⁷ See S. Richardson, "The Hypercoherent Icon: Knowledge, Rationalization and Disenchantment at Nineveh," in *Iconoclasm and Text Destruction in the Ancient Near East and Beyond*, ed. N. N. May (Chicago, 2012): 239–40, 245–46.

¹⁷⁸ A. George, *The Babylonian Gilgameš Epic* (Oxford, 2003), 380. By way of corroboration, the so-called "Assyrian library records" (inventories of tablets arriving from Babylonia) list somewhere in the neighborhood of 2,300 tablets and writing boards. These "library records" more or less mirror the proportions of the excavated Nineveh texts by genre in that "only a tiny fraction . . . consists of what could be called *belles-lettres*, i.e., epics, myths, etc."—and "these include [only] one tablet of the Gilgameš Epic" (or, .04%). See S. Parpola, "Assyrian Library Records," *JNES* 42/1 (1983): 4–6.

¹⁷⁹ J. Fincke, "The Babylonian Texts of Nineveh," *AfO* 50 (2003/2004).

¹⁸⁰ DeBreucker, "Berossos and the Mesopotamian Temple," 16–17; George, *Babylonian Gilgameš Epic*, 381 expresses some optimism that more manuscripts will be forthcoming from Uruk.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 381.

are now “seventy-three currently known manuscripts of the [Standard Babylonian] epic,” all dating “from the middle of the first millennium to the end,” the Epic probably had no “life as literature outside pedagogy” by the time of Sennacherib was on the throne.¹⁸² My point is hardly to argue that Gilgameš did not remain a part of the scribal repertoire—it is from the first millennium that most of our SB manuscripts derive—but rather that it formed only a marginal place in the school curriculum, let alone in the wider culture.

If not Gilgameš, what of Sargon (of Agade)? Of the twenty-three stories ever composed about the kings of Agade, only three are known to have still been in circulation by Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian times.¹⁸³ Representing the hero-king Sargon were only the “Sargon Birth Legend” (in three copies from Neo-Assyrian Nineveh and one from Neo-Babylonian Dilbat) and the *šar tamhari* (with one fragment from Aššur, and another from Nineveh).¹⁸⁴ Meanwhile, the more popular “Naram-Sin and the Enemy Hordes,” which commented on themes of good and bad kingship, was known from a total of eight copies—six from Neo-Assyrian Nineveh, one from Neo-Assyrian Sultantepe, and one from Neo-Babylonian Kiš.¹⁸⁵ In all, twelve copies of these stories are Neo-Assyrian, two are Neo-Babylonian copies, and not one is Late Babylonian. The numbers are hardly overwhelming to begin with, but the drop-off in production is perceptible, and only six of the fourteen lionized the hero-king Sargon.

The situation is similar for the figure of Nebuchadnezzar I. The composition known as “The Seed of Kingship,” for instance, is known from a handful of fragments from the Aššurbanipal library and Late Babylonian

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 380–81; A. George, “Gilgameš and the Literary Traditions of Ancient Mesopotamia,” in *The Babylonian World*, ed. G. Leick (London, 2007), 455.

¹⁸³ J. Westenholz, *Legends of the Kings of Akkade: The Texts*, Mesopotamian Civilizations 7 (Winona Lake, IN, 1997). Summarizing the sources, Westenholz (pp. 4–5) shows sixteen of the twenty-four Agade compositions to be Old Babylonian, the clear heyday of the stories’ production (Texts 1, 3–4, 6–7, 10–14, 16–17, 19–20B, 23; of these, 3, 4 and 23 were written in Sumerian); another two texts are either Old Babylonian or early Middle Babylonian (Texts 5 and 8). Of the remaining six texts, one was Old Akkadian (Text 15), two were Middle Hittite (18 and 21B), and one was peripheral Middle Babylonian (Texts 18 and 21B). The stories are only represented in three first millennium editions: Texts 2 (Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian, of which one Neo-Babylonian copy was a school exercise), 9 (9D is Neo-Assyrian, probably from Aššur, and 9E is from Nineveh; both are in Standard Babylonian), and 22 (in eight copies: six from Neo-Assyrian Nineveh, one from Sultantepe, and one in a school exercise from Neo-Babylonian Kiš).

¹⁸⁴ Weidner felt that the Aššur witness of *šar tamhari* was Middle- (and not Neo-) Assyrian (*ibid.*, Text 9).

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 296–97.

contexts,¹⁸⁶ but all other Nebuchadnezzar texts of the first millennium are only known from single exemplars. Of these, only the text known as "Nebuchadnezzar and Marduk" (K. 3426) even preserves the name of the king being celebrated, while two others do not, i.e., the pseudepigraphic "War with Elam" (K. 2660, from Nineveh)¹⁸⁷ and the Late period manuscript "Nebuchadnezzar to the Babylonians" (VS 24 87, from Babylon), which includes a speech or letter to that city's citizens.¹⁸⁸

Even such a "native son" as Tukulti-Ninurta I could hardly get a mention at Neo-Assyrian Nineveh, it seems. Of the six known manuscripts of the "Tukulti-Ninurta Epic," five are Middle Assyrian, while the sixth, though indeed coming from the Aššurbanipal library, was part of "a tablet of excerpts of Assyrian 'epic' poetry—including the epic of Tukulti-Ninurta's predecessor, Adad-nirari I—produced for scholastic and/or bibliographic purposes."¹⁸⁹

Thus all of these traditions about hero-kings were still remembered in the first millennium; yet they only survived in fragments, in excerpts, and in numbers small enough to show us how marginal their place had become. To compare with another case, there were, from Old Babylonian Nippur alone, more than 450 tablets recovered preserving compositions about earlier kings, in hymns, epics, and letters,¹⁹⁰ compared to the fifty or so compositions discussed above from all of Assyria in the Neo-Assyrian period.¹⁹¹ In this light, we begin to get a sense of how impoverished

¹⁸⁶ W. G. Lambert, "Enmeduranki and Related Matters," *JCS* 21 (1967); see also B. Foster, *Before the Muses*, 2nd ed., vol. II (Bethesda, MD, 1996), 290–301.

¹⁸⁷ H. Tadmor, "Historical Implications of the Correct Rendering of Akkadian *dāku*," *JNES* 17/2 (1958): 137–139.

¹⁸⁸ Though, as A. George writes, "the identification of the sender of the report with Nebuchadnezzar I seems inescapable" (review of J. van Dijk, *Literarische Texte aus Babylon*, *BiOr* 46 [1989]: 383). There need be little doubt that copyists and readers would have identified the king with or without the name provided—indeed, it argues for the king's continued fame that his name need *not* have been mentioned; allusion and context sufficed—still, the showing is fairly weak in terms of text witnesses.

¹⁸⁹ P. Machinist, *The Epic of Tukulti-Ninurta I: A Study in Middle Assyrian Literature* (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1978) 9–16; three of the Middle Assyrian copies came from Nineveh (but one apparently from the Ninevite palace of Aššurnāširpal II, thus "secondarily dislocated and thus out of chronological context"), and two from Aššur.

¹⁹⁰ E. Robson, "The Tablet House: A Scribal School in Old Babylonian Nippur," *RA* 95 (2001): 53–59.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 53–54; ETCSL 1.8.1.1–1.8.1.5.1 (provenances and museum numbers cited under transcriptions). The inventory of identified texts from Old Babylonian Nippur includes forty-six copies of Šulgi's Hymn A (already only one of more than two-dozen Šulgi hymns), fifty-six copies of Lipit-Ištar A (one of eight hymns known for that king), and more than 150 copies of various Sumerian Gilgameš stories.

the status of heroic kingship literature had become by the eighth century B.C.E. The late Neo-Assyrian period saw the last efforts at copying such works, but was therefore the first time in which those same texts failed to become either generative fore-texts for future copying or models for the production of new tales.¹⁹²

Though it might sound counterintuitive, this disinterest in carrying forward the heroic tradition has much in common with the antiquarianism of the seventh and sixth centuries, in Aššurbanipal's curation of texts, or the excavations and "museums" of Nebuchadnezzar II and Nabonidus. Antiquarian efforts (e.g., the designation of wisdom texts as antediluvian, from "Enmeduranki") were rear-guard historiographical actions because they were only superficially allusive to the antiquity of their subjects with little attention to the historical content of those models. It was more important that texts and objects were coded as "old," but unimportant—even counter to their purpose—to actually reproduce the past in any detail;¹⁹³ Nabonidus might dig up Sargon of Akkade's temple foundations, but did not emulate Sargonic kingship in any substantial respect. Such initiatives mark the demise rather than the renaissance of old traditions.

In fact, Mesopotamian antiquarian efforts were actually more closely related to the kinds of radical cultural innovations which might at first seem their opposites. As Michalowski has argued, these were all parts of a "heterodox movement" to recreate "a self-conscious collective subculture that resisted the axial institutionalizations that were taking shape all around them."¹⁹⁴ For our purposes, substitute "imperial" for "axial," and we are largely talking about the same thing: what looks superficially like a quintessentially conservative cultural impulse was more a reshaping of the role the past played in producing authority. The superficial appropriation of the names of Naram-Sin and Hammurabi as emblems legitimating otherwise *de novo* projects marked those uses as innovations no less than the projects they authorized—the reconstruction of Marduk, the

¹⁹² Cf. Frahm, this volume, who argues that the Tukulti-Ninurta I Epic may have influenced Sennacherib's account of the battle of Halule, and thus that "the epic was definitely still in circulation during the Late Assyrian period."

¹⁹³ As N. Veldhuis puts it, "[The] canonicity [of first-millennium texts], their intention and ability to prescribe a direction, is not in defining what newly created literature should be like": "Mesopotamian Canons," in *Homer, the Bible, and Beyond: Literary and Religious Canons in the Ancient World*, ed. M. Finkelberg and G. Stroumsa, *Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture* 2 (Leiden, 2003), 28.

¹⁹⁴ P. Michalowski, "Mesopotamian Vistas on Axial Transformations," in *Axial Civilizations and World History*, ed. J. P. Arnason (Leiden, 2005), 177.

refashioning of the Aššur cult, the rebuilding of Babylon—because their sole function was to authenticate them. What is thus maybe most remarkable is that this dismantling of the “great tradition” of kingship mythos was as much a result of deliberate, Ninevite subversion as of any external resistance literature from the imperialized cultures. Why would an empire do this? Because traditional, dynastic kingship, inextricably tied to fixed places, confining customs and an unchanging past, was unhelpful to the innovative, universalist needs of imperial rule.

In this way, new stories about Sennacherib complemented a tailing-off of epic, hymnic, and pseudepigraphic stories about kings, and generic developments in historical literature, especially chronicles. What the Sennacherib tales had in common with chronicles was to turn kings from agents into subjects in narrative terms, but they also changed their *character*, turning kings from protagonists and heroes to either secondary characters (in literary terms as tritagonists or foils) or outright antagonists or villains—supervillains, even. Historical analogues to such “royal villains” are surprisingly few, though many nations had their share of bad kings. Greece had its many tyrants and demagogues, Rome its Nero and Caligula, Russia its Ivan—but relatively few came to attain the kind of discourse-saturation Sennacherib did, such as Wallachia’s Vlad III (re-incarnated as “Dracula”), or England’s King John (the villain of the Robin Hood tales) and King Richard III. Perhaps the closest comparison from antiquity comes from the Roman (and medieval, and Renaissance) treatments of Tarquinius Superbus, last king of Rome.¹⁹⁵ Yet in literary terms, Vlad, John, and Richard stood as foils to good kings—as Naram-Sin did to Sargon, or Samsuiluna to Hammurabi—but Sennacherib was more like Tarquin, a rascal indeed, but the real villain was *kingship*. The Sennacherib stories are not a case of *damnatio memoriae*; they were the indictment of an institution, empire vilified against the virtues of an autonomous elite.

Sennacherib was the earliest of a number of royal figures on whom a critical tradition of kingship devolved: historically, on Esarhaddon, Aššurbanipal,¹⁹⁶ Nebuchadnezzar, and Nabonidus; fictionally, on Ninus, Sardanapoulos, and Nimrūd. Sennacherib stories not only swam in this new tradition of royal villains, they stood at the head of it. The new tradition already informed the reception histories of kings immediately

¹⁹⁵ T. N. Gantz, “The Tarquin Dynasty,” *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 24/4 (1975); T. P. Wiseman, *Historiography and Imagination: Eight Essays on Roman Culture* (Liverpool, 1996), esp. Ch. 1, “The Origins of Roman Historiography.”

¹⁹⁶ See E. Frahm “Images of Ashurbanipal in Later Tradition,” *Eretz Israel* 27 (2003).

preceding Sennacherib—on Tiglath-pileser III (the “Pul” of 2 Kings 15:18), Šalmaneser V (the “Selampsas”/“Salmanasses” of Josephus’ account),¹⁹⁷ and Sargon (who may be the object of Isaiah 14:9)—but none attained narrative or traditional coherence. Only with Sennacherib did a consistent image come into focus, as if after a period of adjusting a historical lens.¹⁹⁸ As B. Parker has argued of Sennacherib, “his historical importance . . . outpaced his historical role,” resulting in a “portrayal of him as the paradigmatic Assyrian enemy,” over and above other candidates in Second Temple writings (e.g., 2 Maccabees 15:22–24, 3 Maccabees 6:2–9) and beyond—not only because of his temporal primacy, but because, as the only king among these to have met defeat anywhere (especially at Jerusalem), he became, uniquely, “theologically paradigmatic in the understanding of deliverance and redemption.”¹⁹⁹

All this lampooning of kingship was still secondary to emphasizing the authority of the *ummânûtu*: the “Sennacherib stories” as I have gathered them here are not really stories *about* Sennacherib, after all, and the complex was not openly anti-monarchical. The new scholarly genres and enterprises of the *ummânû*—divination, astronomy, chronicles, commentaries, and the multifarious efforts to collect and collate scientific knowledge—not only topically marginalizing kings and kingship, but implicitly moved to center stage the very same learned, non-royal figures who used them. Even cuneiform literary production during this millennium eroded the cultural value of heroic kingship—not so much by censoring or criticizing it, but by ignoring it and valorizing non-narrative literary forms. Scientific texts, of course, had force *without* narrative, with neither protagonists nor villains, tacitly authorizing their exterior authors and users, i.e., the scholars themselves, rather than their subjects. (And sometimes not so tacitly: increasingly, antediluvian sages and ancient scribal lineages were cast as the historical ancestors of Mesopotamian civilization, and not the Sargons, Šulgis, and Hammurabis of the world.)²⁰⁰ The shift to new genres

¹⁹⁷ The name “Selampsas” appears in Josephus’ extract from Menander of Ephesus’s work, concerning a siege of Tyre; Josephus immediately clarifies the name as “Salmanasses” (*Ant.* IX 283–87); see also Oegema, this volume, on an apparent reference to Šalmaneser V in the “Ascension of Isaiah” text.

¹⁹⁸ Note that Berossus’s account skips straight from “Pul” to Sennacherib—skipping over Šalmaneser V and Sargon II.

¹⁹⁹ Bradley Parker, “The Sennacherib Error” in Theodore of Mopsuestia’s Commentary on the Twelve Prophets: Light from the History of Interpretation,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 3/2 (2009).

²⁰⁰ E. Reiner, “The Etiological Myth of the ‘Seven Sages,’” *Orientalia* 30 (1961); Lambert, “Enmeduranki”; the myth of Oannes seems also relevant here.

not only removed kings and kingship from topical focus, it also put them in a position of dependence on different forms of authority.

Thus in several ways, we see a subtle process of replacement underway; nothing so immediate as the wholesale replacement of one tradition for another at any one moment, but the replacement of one kind of architext with another. As Beate Pongratz-Leisten recently put it:

In Mesopotamia, any text was considered to have [a] traditional referential quality, a kind of intertextual pre-text or *architext* which formed the building block or "foretext" for any new text. [This] composite structure is a salient feature of texts in Mesopotamia and allows for the . . . use of structural elements from different text categories.²⁰¹

Pongratz-Leisten goes on to note that in addition to the interruption of manuscript and generic practices, first millennium culture changed the notion of authorship and textual authenticity.²⁰² The interruption of this chain of referentiality—between *topoi*, narrative focus, even narrativity itself—was a rupture in discourses more than the demise or rise of any particular text or genre in its own right.

This is all so much more than the mere "death of cuneiform" (though indeed that awareness also probably emerged in the eighth century B.C.E.), or the incorrigible, recidivist, and wrong-headed notion of culture change via the technical capacities of alphabetic scripts, but a change in the ideas that writing carried—ideas about history, the future, and the purpose of producing literature.

I have touched on *why* it was that one set of ideas was being warehoused while another was cobbled together for a new imperial citizenry (whether *ummânu*, deportee or emperor), but here we must turn to the *how* of it: the function. Surely literature is more than a simple mirror of social and political reality, but a looking-glass on intangible hopes and anxieties; indeed, we must think about how it is that historical folklore generates new dreams and allays new fears. If we are to think of the stories of the archipelago as the folkloric documentation of history, we should have to judge them very bad history indeed; yet if we are to think of them as mere campfire tales, with only moral, didactic, or aetiological purposes, then we would have to ignore their clear interest in the past, and most importantly their recourse to history as a *genre*. They seem too

²⁰¹ B. Pongratz-Leisten, "From Ritual to Text to Intertext: A New Look on the Dreams in *Ludlul Bêl Nêmeqi*," in *In the Second Degree*, ed. P. Alexander et al. (Leiden, 2010): 139–40.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 145.

inaccurate, even deliberately so, to be good history; and yet they are too historical-minded to be “just stories.” The historical modes of expression in the archipelago, I will argue here, re-narrativized the past experiences of empire’s communities *therapeutically*: the repetition of reinvented pasts preserved collective identity beyond the traumas of conquest and domination which needed to be “forgotten.”

Forgetting

Collective historical discourses have been much discussed in recent decades under the rubric of “cultural memory,” the complex of receptions fashioned by the interactions of history *qua* history, civil society, monuments, memorial practices, and so forth.²⁰³ This approach can also be distinguished from “reception history” partly by its engagement with sources too diffuse and disorganized to arise from or resolve into clearly identifiable topics or traditions normally understood as “historical.” This irresolution in turn finds cultural memories often addressing issues of ambivalence—complex and conflicting responses to problematic pasts.

The term has drawn some criticism for imposing a biological model on a cultural process—that cultures cannot have “memories” as such, which must be uniquely tied to individuals. As a corollary, not only can collectives not share memories, neither can individuals “remember” history, at least not historical events they have not witnessed.²⁰⁴ These criticisms are fully justified, in my opinion; “discourse” seems a more appropriate term. Despite poor nomenclature, though, so much good scholarship has been done on the subject to require accepting it as a *terminus technicus*. In any event, as J. Wilce says, “Treating [‘remembering’] seriously need not entail a realist view of memory.”²⁰⁵ And, following amiably along, it seems opportune to extend the metaphor by treating the dark side of the

²⁰³ The work of Jan Assmann on cultural memory is probably most familiar to scholars of the ancient Near East and Egypt; see, most recently, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization* (New York, 2011). Also compare with E. Hobsbawm’s *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, UK, 1983); much like “motivated forgetting,” “invented traditions” are inculcated not only by a patterned form of fictions disguised as historical facts, but through repetition (see below, on the importance of re-narrativization); see also S. Foot, “Remembering, Forgetting, and Inventing: Attitudes to the Past in England at the End of the First Viking Age,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 9 (1999): 188.

²⁰⁴ E.g., *ibid.*: 187: “I am uncomfortable not so much with the concept of ‘social’ or ‘collective memory’ as with the use of that particular label for the process to which it refers, which seems to me semantically flawed.”

²⁰⁵ J. Wilce, “Genres of Memory and the Memory of Genres: ‘Forgetting Lament in Bangladesh,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44/1 (2002): 165.

"cultural memory" approach: that if it is possible for cultures to construct and mediate historical accounts by "remembering," then it ought to be possible to look at the operations of cultural "forgetting," too.

Writing on the subject of "cultural forgetting" turns out to be almost as prolific as writing on "cultural memory"—if less well-known and implicitly less well-regarded (noting the aptness of M. Siegel's title, "'History is the Opposite of Forgetting'").²⁰⁶ The range of available case studies is dizzying: from tribal Malaysia to tribal Tanzania;²⁰⁷ from traditional Bangladesh to interwar France;²⁰⁸ from post-Viking England to French-Canadian Arcadia;²⁰⁹ from post-war Germans coping with the Nazi past (in many ways the paradigm case for modern treatments of forgetting) to Australian expatriates living in New Guinea.²¹⁰ A range of treatments for Greco-Roman antiquity find the historical problems coming fast and thick: disgrace, oblivion, purge, ruins, *damnatio memoriae*, etc.²¹¹ The subject of forgetting is as polynomial as "cultural memory," traveling under such other names as "motivated forgetting," "structural amnesia," "genealogical amnesia," "collective forgetfulness," "illusions of remembering," etc.²¹²

²⁰⁶ M. Siegel, "'History is the Opposite of Forgetting': The Limits of Memory and the Lessons of History in Interwar France," *The Journal of Modern History* 74/4 (2002); P. Ricoeur, "Memory and Forgetting," in *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy*, ed. R. Kearney and M. Dooley (London, 1999); M. Wehner, "Typologies of Memory and Forgetting among the Expatriates of Rabaul," *The Journal of Pacific History* 37/1 (2002): 72: "Forgetting has an inauspicious history."

²⁰⁷ J. Carsten, "The Politics of Forgetting: Migration, Kinship and Memory on the Periphery of the Southeast Asian State," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 1/2 (1995); B. Weiss, "Forgetting Your Dead: Alienable and Inalienable Objects in North-west Tanzania," *Anthropological Quarterly* 70/4 (1997).

²⁰⁸ Wilce, "Genres of Memory"; Siegel, "'History is the Opposite of Forgetting'."

²⁰⁹ Foot, "Remembering, Forgetting"; R. Rudin, *Remembering and Forgetting in Arcadie: A Historian's Journey through Public Memory* (Toronto, 2009).

²¹⁰ A. Lüdtkke, "'Coming to Terms with the Past': Illusions of Remembering, Ways of Forgetting Nazism in West Germany," *The Journal of Modern History* 65/3 (1993); Wehner, "Typologies of Memory."

²¹¹ N. Loraux, *The Divided City: On Memory and Forgetting in Ancient Athens* (New York, 2002); Ch. Hedrick, Jr., *History and Silence: Purge and Rehabilitation of Memory in Late Antiquity* (Austin, 2000); D. Spencer, "Lucan's Follies: Memory and Ruin in a Civil-War Landscape," *Greece & Rome* 52/1 (2005); cf. H. I. Flower, *The Art of Forgetting: Disgrace and Oblivion in Roman Political Culture* (Chapel Hill, 2006).

²¹² One finds the terminologies extend cross-culturally: the Sabarl of New Guinea ritually "disremember the dead," calling it "finishing the memory" (Carsten, "Politics of Forgetting": 330); the root of the English word "amnesty" comes from the ancient Greek *mnēsikakein*, an oath against "remembering past evils" (Loraux, *Divided City*); among the Haya tribe of Tanzania, the final process of funerary ritual was to "forget the dead" (*okwebwa omufu*) (Weiss, "Forgetting Your Dead"); Wilce, "Genres of Memory," 174–75

Under any of these names, “forgetting” has much to do with Sennacherib and the rupture in discourses about kingship. In the first place, the dynamic of motivated forgetting goes a long way towards explaining both the archipelago’s shortfalls and desiderata as history proper, and the historical ambitions of its story-telling. Secondly, attention to “forgetting” as a theoretical problem leads us directly to several themes at the heart of the Sennacherib complex, especially cultural trauma, diaspora, and re-narrativization.

So what is “cultural forgetting”? To begin with, there are two basic understandings of what “forgetting” is. On the one hand are the analyses of some psychologists, historians, and philosophers who focus on forgetting as an editorial function, as much a part of the normal process of narrativizing the past as “remembering.” On the other hand are the studies of cognitive scientists, organizational dynamicists and linguists, for whom forgetting is a defect or problem in recall—as well as for other psychologists and historians for whom forgetting represents an unhealthy and deliberate suppression of painful information, the very antithesis of history.²¹³ It would be too easy to say simply that we are concerned only with the first kind of forgetting, and that latter kind is an unrelated problem.²¹⁴ Unfortunately, things are not this simple, though it is not the task of this essay to sort it out; it is enough to note that, even from a cognitive point of view, the two positions are hardly irreconcilable:

Significantly, memories often require context or stimulation . . . in order to be brought back into the present. A radical (and alarming?) way of understanding memory and forgetting, then, is to suggest that an individual’s primary state is one of forgetfulness rather than remembrance. That it is the capacity to forget that creates the self—enabling it to usefully function in the world—rather than the capacity to remember.²¹⁵

points to Indonesian phrases like “managing the heart to brighten the face” and “forgetting what it is to remember” as strategies for dealing with brutality and violence.

²¹³ See, e.g., D. Schacter *The Seven Sins of Memory* (New York, 2001); P. M. de Holan and N. Phillips, “Remembrance of Things Past? The Dynamics of Organizational Forgetting,” *Management Science* 50/11 (2004): 1603–15; “The Role of Inhibitory Control in Forgetting Semantic Knowledge,” S. K. Johnson and M. C. Anderson, *Psychological Science* 15/7 (2004): 448–53.

²¹⁴ Cf. Carsten (“Politics of Forgetting”: 331), who argues that both in cognitive and “folk model” approaches, “the way in which people forget, and what they forget, are not random, but systematic and patterned.”

²¹⁵ Wehner, “Typologies of Memory”: 71. See also A. Schinkel’s disappointing reply (“History and Historiography in Process,” *History and Theory* 43/1 [2004]) to F. R. Ankersmit’s “The Sublime Dissociation of the Past: Or How to Be(come) What One Is No Longer,” *History and Theory* 40/3 (2001). Siegel (“‘History Is the Opposite of Forgetting’”) presents an

It is the disposition to see forgetting as *doing something* that I admire here. The Sennacherib archipelago, I argue, was formed by a "motivated forgetting," more consistent with a programmatic interest in the past. A truly maladaptive recall defect would not result in the historical voice we find here. The stories were purposeful re-editions of existing historical knowledge, rather than uninformed, deliberately false, or suppressive kinds of "bad history."

But does all this mean that it is impossible to see the Sennacherib archipelago as "bad history"? In a word, yes. For one thing, we have established fairly clearly, above, both the awareness of other traditions and the discourse-saturation of the topos. Even were it possible to write such a thing as a "bad history," with no reference to memory or sources—to invent a *purely* fictitious account—one would finally and fairly call this type of writing *fiction* and not history anyway, with neither intention toward historical authority nor recourse to historical fact. As ridiculous as such a proposal might sound, it begins to remind us how often we view historical inaccuracies in the ancient record as two-dimensional revisions of self-interested scribes and institutions—as simplistic propaganda, like the transparent lies of a child—as if even the worst lies revealed none of the motivation of the liar, which are themselves historical facts.

What we find instead, as Lüdtke points out, is that the eradication of even the most burdensome historical memories must, paradoxically, be processed *through historical explanation*. This is a generic or narrative transformation (or sublimation): it is simply not possible to "forget" without engaging memory; even wholesale suppression signposts that certain topics, narratives, or coded language are off-limits—thus revealing and reinscribing their existence.²¹⁶ Indeed, the inverse is true: one "remembers," of course, in order to not "forget"—neither act is possible without

intriguing counter-case, in which History and memorial, as handmaidens to the nationalism which drove Europe into the bloodshed of World War I, were perceived as problems in and of themselves in 1920s France.

²¹⁶ Ankersmit, "Sublime Dissociation": 295–96 mobilizes the parable of Kant's mnemonic note to "forget Lampe" (a servant he had dismissed for theft, an episode he felt with some regret), introducing the ludicrous situation that "this greatest of all philosophers" had to constantly remind himself to forget something. Such apparent paradoxes are closer to the heart of the historiographic issue than we might think: consider, for instance, that the Roman *damnatio memoriae* required the continued observation of public memory in order to achieve "the success of repression" (Hedrick, Jr., *History and Silence*); in post-war Germany, Adorno argued, the rubric "coming to terms with the past" (*Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit*) meant, effectively, "to finish off tedious questions" (Lüdtke, "'Coming to Terms'").

reference to the other. What I mean to emphasize is that it is unhelpful to see forgetting as merely maladaptive or a failure of mnemonics; it is irrevocably tied to the larger process of historical remembering with which it shared a goal of *interpretation*.

But what process are we talking about? Literature on forgetting is closely tied to issues of trauma, identity (especially diasporic identity), and re-narrativization as a therapeutic act. This bundle of concerns is at least as old as Nietzsche (for whom historical forgetting was an act of liberation), Freud (who viewed suppression as a defense mechanism in the face of trauma), and Renan, who famously wrote: "The essence of a nation is that all the individuals hold many things in common, and also that also all of them have forgotten many things."²¹⁷ Though these principles have been articulated and typologized in a number of ways,²¹⁸ the basic model is that memory and history, tools useful to stable individuals and societies, are ill-suited to process trauma, when memories form obstacles to recovery. For the individual, forgetting can enable functionality in the face of unfathomable personal pain; for the collective, it preserves group identity in the face of colonialization, war, deculturalization, and diaspora.²¹⁹

Some modifications to the model are noteworthy. For Ricoeur, forgetting effected a reconciliation between the traumatized and his community, but it was thus not a process symmetrical to remembering "because the duty to remember is a duty to teach, whereas the duty to forget is a duty to go beyond anger and hatred."²²⁰ Here, forgetting implies forgiving, promising, and the restitution of identity. For Ankersmit, forgetting could only achieve rapprochement between trauma and identity when attended by dissociation, through the power of the sublime (for which angels, mir-

²¹⁷ Quoted by Carsten, "Politics of Forgetting"; or, as Weiss puts it ("Forgetting Your Dead": 164): "forgetting can in some instances be seen as an intentional purposive attempt to create absences that can be crucial to the reconstruction and reevaluation of social meanings and relations."

²¹⁸ E.g., Ricoeur, "Memory and Forgetting"; Ankersmit, "Sublime Dissociation"; cf. Schacter, *Seven Sins*.

²¹⁹ The connection between "forgetting" and diaspora is particularly strong; see for example D. Neufeld's review of Rudin's *Remembering and Forgetting* in *The Public Historian*, 32/1 (2010); Carsten, "Politics and Forgetting"; and Wehner, "Typologies of Memory." Foot, "Remembering, Forgetting": 190, speaking of the connection between forgetting and the destruction of community in England following the Viking raids of the ninth century A.D. writes: "Not only had the repositories of written record, the monastic archives, been lost, but, worse, the dispersal of the communities responsible for their safekeeping and the secularisation of their lands had put an end to organised forms of corporate remembrance..."

²²⁰ Ricoeur, "Memory and Forgetting," 11.

acles, and martyrs present themselves as appropriate agents of change). If forgetting was a defense mechanism, the discarded identity required a newly-created one if individuals or cultures were not to fall into the mortal tailspin of "a profound sense of loss."²²¹ Both approaches stress the generative power of identity re-formation, a step which comes along with or after forgetting, though Ricoeur stresses a kind of restoration, while Ankersmit argues for a radical break with the past. It seems to me that Ankersmit's understanding is best suited to the Sennacherib archipelago in both its background and reflection of major changes in world-historical society, rather than any restitution of the *status ante quo*.

What comes through most strongly in these studies is the stress on narrative's relationship to memory. Narrative is not a passive medium for forgetting, but the tool which activates it—indeed, the mechanism which allows the past to escape the orbit of memory, as Foot argues:

Narrating the past imbues it with meaning; narration establishes relationships between disparate fragments of imperfectly recollected time, providing a sense of direction and repairing the traumatic break of dislocation by providing [a] substitute for the memory that has been lost. . . . Memory and inquiry appear to be working together. But this is an illusion. In fact narrating a supposed common past in this fashion dislocates the story from memory.²²²

Narrative enables the relocation, dislocation, and sublimation of memory, and "narrative memory [is] a creative but also editorial process."²²³

Most importantly, the *reiterative* quality of narration—the *re-telling*—is the mechanism which salvages damaged identities. In terms of cultural memory, groups do not simply decide on a new version of the past, encode it, and move on. Forgetting requires repeated tellings to achieve memorial and discourse saturation; that's what tales do. Carsten argues that we must not only distinguish between narrative and memory but "consider how, over time, through small everyday acts, the one might be transformed into the other."²²⁴ Spencer says of forgetting as a tool of historical recovery that it requires a "persistence of stories and texts" to achieve replacement—invoking Primo Levi:

²²¹ Ankersmit, "Sublime Dissociation": 296, 302.

²²² Foot, "Remembering, Forgetting": 198.

²²³ Spencer, "Lucan's Follies": 48; Ankersmit, "Sublime Dissociation": 300–303.

²²⁴ Carsten, "Politics of Forgetting": 331.

the artistic perfection of frequently evoked narrative memories cannibalizes “raw memory” and replaces it.²²⁵

Indeed, such ideas are not unsympathetic to current neurological studies which look at the role of patterned behavior in building new neural pathways in the brain.²²⁶

The cultural peril of ancient Near Eastern communities of the first millennium B.C.E. is fairly patent: they were not just imperialized; they underwent the first systematic world-imperialization in human history. The motivation to forget is clear: this was an avenue for the preservation and re-creation of communities under attack, whose political independence and demographic integrity was under threat. Take for instance the multitude of stories required to square Armenian Christian communities' understanding of a heroic, royal lineage with a pagan past;²²⁷ the elaboration of Aramaean stories from Elephantine to Anatolia; the range of stories produced by post-exilic Jewry; and even the revivalism of today's diasporic Assyrian community; for which re-telling became integral to cultural survival.

THE FIRST “WORLD EVENT”

But was it an event? Was it considered an event? What would that matter? Indeed, was it the first “world event,” and what could I mean by the tendentious, argumentative claim of my title, anyway? Much depends, of course, on what we want of such terms. It is an even more difficult question, in a way, given that the “event” may never have happened at all.²²⁸ On top of this, the nature and knowability of historical “events” is perhaps the most prolific topic in all of historical theoretics. I hope the reader will forgive (perhaps even thank) me for engaging with this problem in only the most immediate practical terms, adopting only a few theoretical ideas as they seem directly useful.

²²⁵ Spencer, “Lucan's Follies”: 47, 49. One notable alternative to “replacement,” however, is the possibility that people are able to maintain multiple memories simultaneously; see C. Rovee-Collier, “The Roots of Multiple Memory Systems,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 143/2 (1999): 266–79.

²²⁶ K.-H. Bäuml, “Semantic Generation Can Cause Episodic Forgetting,” *Psychological Science* 13/4 (2002): 356–60.

²²⁷ Walker, *Legend of Mar Qardagh*, 281–85.

²²⁸ In thinking that no actual military siege (let alone two campaigns) was ever mounted against Jerusalem—but only the (very real) threat of one—I join, among others, Grabbe, *Good Kings and Bad Kings*, 4: “a statement patently false.”

An "event" entails so many heterogeneous qualities that it is unproductive to think of events denotatively, as entities made up of necessary criteria. More useful is an understanding of the "event" connotatively, as having the capacity to contain a variety of sufficient attributes. A definition of an "event" which requires specific preconditions to be met ignores the term's polyvalence (and hence low synonymy) as one of its most important attributes.

Still, an event must contain enough attributes to attain a critical magnitude of meaning. I think first of four *narrative attributes*: Was the event perceived to have actually happened, i.e., was at least the core of the tale perceived to be real (*reality*)? Was the event precipitated by specific and identifiable conditions (*cause*)? Did it cause other things to happen (*consequence*)? Was it capable of being embedded in a clear sequence (*consecution*)? Roughly spoken, these have to do with the degree to which a given story used a historical "voice". Then we can think of four underlying *discourse attributes*: Was it perceived as being important (*significance*)? Was it attended by a clear sense of "before and after" (*temporality*)? Was the occurrence clearly distinguishable from others of its kind in the historical record (*difference*)? Was it important that it was known to other cultures, i.e., outside of a single tradition (*exteriority*)? Roughly again, these have to do with the weight of implied cultural change, its degree of importance.

Clearly not every story in the archipelago took an equal interest in portraying the 701 B.C.E. incident in historical terms, even setting mere accuracy aside. Only the Biblical accounts (2a) fully satisfy all eight criteria; by contrast, the Assyrian account (1a) imputes high narrative fidelity—the first four categories—but unsurprisingly denies importance to the event in terms of significance, temporality, difference, and exteriority: the defeat of Jerusalem was supposed to sound like other Assyrian victories generally.²²⁹ The Syriac tales form an almost diametrically opposite reaction—though they collectively entail a very high degree of significance and temporal force in both religious and ethnic terms, they are, to put it flatly, a narrative mess—the identity of Sennacherib, what happened in which order and why, the high incidence of anachronism—such aspects are thoroughly disordered throughout the cluster. Other clusters present a more mixed picture: the Egyptian tales have high cause, but low consequence;

²²⁹ Except perhaps where the Assyrian account takes a mild interest in exteriority by trumpeting it among its other victories, as an example of imperial might.

unreality, but stronger consecution. Even when we encounter such wildly fanciful stories as those of Ninus and Nimrūd, we must admit that they *modeled* themselves generically as historical accounts. Conversely, the story's reception in the medieval Christian west invested relatively modest symbolic importance to the biblical account, despite understanding it quite straightforwardly as a true historical event.

Let us look a little further by turning to a particularly helpful analysis, that of W. Sewell, Jr., who attached the question of event theory to the 1789 fall of the Bastille. Sewell also identified cause and consequence as constitutive of "events,"²³⁰ but considered other attributes. Three of these seem appropriate to our subject: first, that that an event should become an "*act of signification*" denoting its capacity for structural transformation. By "transformation," Sewell means that words like "Bastille" took on "authoritative new meanings. . . . [introducing] new conceptions of what really exists" (pp. 861–62); the quality of transformation reminds us of Ankersmit's concept of sublimation. For Sennacherib, I have argued that this re-signification lay in the talismanic power of his name, replacing or transforming a traditional image of the king as hero, as *paterfamilias*, as shepherd, into a symbol of the arbitrary violence of imperial kingship. This new signification was generative of a new form of social authority from imperialized cultures distrustful of distant palaces, reliant instead on local non-royal elites.

The "fractal character" of events, Sewell continues, further indicates that events are uniquely modular, useful to different narratives indicative of different structural transformations (pp. 877–78). Events stand in the position of words in a sentence, arbitrary, manipulable and integrable in different strings of meaning, which, like sentences, are at least partly governed by rules of grammar and syntax. The multiple clusters and genres of the Sennacherib archipelago explain its narrative versatility as well as its generally poor reproduction of an accurate past. Indeed, the overwhelming extent of late antique historical "confusion" of the facts of the deep past in general—that Sennacherib was a king of Babylon, a Zoroastrian, a Christian, led an army of Arabs, besieged Tyre, Luz, or Pelusium—or that the Assyrians become the Babylonians, and the Babylonians became the Persians—manglings and garblings of time, place, and identity—all of this we tend to perceive as a near-ubiquity of individual and perhaps structural instances of bad scholarship. Perhaps; but without disputing

²³⁰ W. H. Sewell, Jr., "Historical Events": 862, 871.

the fact of such astonishingly creative inaccuracies, one must also think of the phenomenon in abstract terms. What did it mean for late antique thinkers to be so intrigued by the deep past—of the urgency with which so many of those scholars worked and reworked the ancient king lists—yet with so little interest or ability to get it right?

It puts one in mind of "magical realism," where impossible elements intrude on realistic narratives; here we find a reversal of sorts, with real historical narratives transposed into impossible (i.e., anachronistic) settings—with the underlying verities all the more emphasized for their transhistorical, even time-traveling, power. Proffered symbolically, the stories cloaked their meanings—the apologiae of the *ummânū*, the preservation of identity in diaspora, the lament for the demise of local, traditional kingship—all safely camouflaged in criticisms of a deeper past which did not require specificity because of the timeless quality of their complaints.²³¹ Even the specific mistakes had their purpose in critically expressing disinterest in the particularities of political history over the premium placed on wisdom.

Sewell also emphasizes both that "historical events are spatial as well as temporal processes," and that events entail a degree of ritual performance (pp. 868–71, 876–77). Taking these two points as one, I would draw attention to the theatricality of the Jerusalem encounter, replete with stage (2 Kings 18:17), actors, scripted speech, blocking, and audience (2 Kings 18:26–28)—a veritable proscenium on which the encounter was enacted; and each re-telling reproduced this performativity.²³² The stagecraft of the Biblical encounter seems so plain as to present the scene vividly before our eyes, but a fuller comparative study of such scenes might be more helpful in teasing out the particular appeal of this one.²³³

²³¹ Cf. Dalley, *Esther's Revenge*, 192–93: "What kind of story is it that shifts from one dynasty to another, from one king to much later one, without bothering to tidy up the evident inconsistencies which are left in the supposedly historical narrative? 'Most commentators frankly admit that the author has here made a blunder in his chronology,' but this admission does not explain why such an obvious inconsistency was tolerable." Dalley concludes that the medium for this kind of creative "updating" is rooted in practices of re-enactment.

²³² Since Hezekiah is given credit for the construction of the "pool" and "conduit" in 2 Kgs. 20:20, it may be that the place suggested the king.

²³³ Sewell ("Historical Events") considered other elements central to the character of an "event," such as "collective creativity" (p. 867), the "authoritative sanction" of later tradition (p. 874), and "heightened emotion" (p. 865; see also Feldt, *The Fantastic*, 245–46, who argues for a cognitive link between the fantastic and specific emotional effects); while these qualities do not seem demonstrably absent from the archipelago historiography, these do seem lesser points.

The dramatic quality of the 701 B.C.E. event was crucial to its popularity—the sheer entertainment value of unexpected miracles, and the corrosive humor of their “fifth voice,” criticizing living kings by altering time, space and circumstance. Though we might be tempted to view such devices as indicative of unreliability and bias, the quality is an index not only to the event’s perceived significance and difference, but to an improved capacity to tell and re-tell these stories; certainly no one was sitting around a campfire anywhere and recounting *Sennacherib’s* version of his third campaign. The captivating charm (or, by turns, profundity) of the stories defined their subjects as “events” precisely because they occasioned performance; they were generative of acts of *telling*.

Finally, let us take an emic approach to the question: what would ancient and pre-modern readers have expected of an “event,” anyway; as a thing-that-actually-happened? Surely modern standards of historical verification did not exist, yet the perception of reality was still privileged, and some interest was taken in available methods of corroboration. Proof and disproof were absent methodologies because they were absent concerns, and vice-versa—but another manner of truth and confirmation was sought (and found) in the existence of other stories, especially reinforcements from different genres, from different culture groups, and in different media (an almost museological sensibility).

Let me conclude by taking up two possible objections to this understanding of the archipelago’s historical intent. First, it might be argued that differing levels of historical subjectivity might reasonably strike us as products of genre rather than *mentalité*. Positing a distribution of historical sensibilities among the cultures of the later ancient world, according to this understanding, could be a phantom produced by different types of narratives, by the stories themselves, and not by their users. My brief answer is to point again to the multigeneric presence *within* the clusters—that every al-Ṭabari, relating historically “true” stories of the deep past, knew also his clearly fantastic tales of Nimrūd, and so forth. The referentiality between genres, both within and between cultures, meant that the historical truth-claims of individual tales could not be purely determined or bounded for the reader or hearer by genre alone.

A second objection might be that the qualities of significance and temporality presume much of later readers’ external knowledge of what preceded the Jerusalem event: what *could* fifth or third century readers know of before-and-after, or of significant structural change, with so little knowledge of what happened in 705, 721, or 745 B.C.E.? But here I think

the question prefigures the answer: returning to the theme of "forgetting," and the observation that Sennacherib stood at the head of a new tradition critical of kingship, the question of temporality runs up against the nature of an event as a rupture—a barrier to or device *against* knowing the pre-event past. What seems more important is that Sennacherib's campaign was an archetypal earliest-event-one-could-know—an ur-event, the one which introduced the before-and-after historical sensibility that subsequently took root. The very epistemology of historical explanation was thus one of the enduring legacies of the Assyrian cosmopolis. The Sennacherib episode reflected the new sense that "events"—historical change in the world of men, effected *by* men—had for the first time become an open possibility.

INDEX OF TOPICS

- Aba-Enlil-Dari/Mannu-kīma-Enlil-ḫātin, 302–303
- Abdi-li'ti, King of Arvad, 56, 237, 240
- Abiam, King of Judah, 19
- Abraha, 455
- Ābrāhām, Mār, 316, 317
- Absalom, 366, 412
- Abtalyon, 347
- Abydenus, 449
- Achab, 395
- Adad-nārāri I, 489
- Adad-nārāri III, 176
- Adad-šum-ušur, 304 n37
- Adiabene, 317, 319–320
- Adrammelech/Ardamusanus/Adramelik, 47, 310, 311, 452–453, 471, 480, 481
see also Arda-Mulissi
- Afrem, Mār, 440, 452
- agriculture, 147, 149
- Aḫāt-abiša (sister of Sennacherib), 177, 199
- Ahaz, King of Judah, 15, 28–30, 188
- Aḫiqar
 historicity of, 302–304
 as Jew, 309
 in *Story of Aḫiqar*
 Aramaic version of, 300–301, 322, 327–328
 Syriac version of, 313–314, 323
 in *Tobit*, 309–310, 329–330
 as *ummānu*, 467–468, 471
see also *Story (and Proverbs) of Aḫiqar*
- Aḫi-t.allī, 192 n133
- A/išpa-bara, 235
- Akhenaten, 165, 166, 167
- Akitu* festival, 213
- Akitu* house, 216
- Akkadian language, 170–171
- Alagar Zagar *see* Šalmaneser V
- Alexander the Great, 384
- Alf laylah wa-laylah (One Thousand and One Nights)*, 300
- alienation, 278–279
- allegorising, 430, 439
- Alphios (bishop), 425
- alū* demon, 203–204
- Amara, 152
- Ambaris, King of Tabal, 177, 199
- ambassadors, 269
- Amenhotep III statue, 126
- Amorites, 379
- Amun-Re Temple (Kawa), 119
- Ana-Tašmētu-taklāk, 191 n124
- Andrew of Caesarea, 428–429
- Andronikos of Berenice, 425–426
- angels, involvement in siege of Jerusalem, 6, 19, 37, 40–41, 42–44, 50, 333, 335–337, 354, 362, 363, 365–370, 380, 385, 474
- Annales* school, 141, 151
- annihilation, 42
- Antiochus IV (Epiphanes), 336, 427, 428
- antiquarianism, 490
- Antiquities* (Josephus)
 on Magog, 428
 part of text of, 340–343
 Sennacherib in, 448
 on siege of Jerusalem, 475
 Third Campaign in, 331–332, 336, 444–445
- Anukis (goddess), 125–126
- Apocalypse of Elijah* (Coptic), 335
- apocalypticism
 relations between prophecy and, 332–333
 in Second Temple Judaism, 332–334
 Third Campaign and, 6, 325, 332–334, 352, 368–369, 385–386
- Apologia ad Autolyicum* (Theophilus of Antioch), 392
- Apostolic Constitutions*, 419
- Appian, 361
- Aqar-Bel-lumur, 286
- Aquila, 410, 411
- Arabic language, 454–455
- Arad-Mulišši *see* Arda-Mulissi
- Aramaic language
 as *lingua franca*
 of Assyrian Empire, 25, 179, 296, 463
 of Babylonian Empire, 296
 of Persian Empire, 296
- Sennacherib stories in
 mentions of Sennacherib in
 Story of Aḫiqar, 297–308, 314–315, 322, 323, 327–328, 446–447
 Targum Jonathan, 353–354
 Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, 375, 379

- time span of mentioning of, 295
Tobit, 309–311, 313, 323, 328–330, 382, 446–447
- ummânu* in
 Eliakim, 468
 Ahiqar, 467–468
 Isaiah, 468
 Rabsaris, 469–470
 Rabshakeh, 468–469
 Šebnah, 468
 Tobit, 468
- as Sennacherib's mother tongue, 180, 195
- Aramaic magic, 447
- Arameans
 Assyrian Empire and, 296, 306–307, 322, 323
 Egypt and, 307
- Ararat/Arārāt *see* Urartu, Kingdom of
- Arbela/Erbil, 320, 321
- archaeological evidence
 of consequences of Third Campaign, 99–101
 of siege of Lachish, 79–84
 of war preparations by Hezekiah, 11, 93, 98
- archipelago of stories
 accuracy of, 501–502
 awareness of, 438
 clusters of, 441–456
 as colonial resistance literature, 465
 forgetting and, 497
 historical environment of, 456–464
 meaning of, 437
 themes
 flight and hiding, 477–484
 miracle, magic and martyrdom, 473–477
ummânu, 464–473, 492
- Ardaḥšir II, viceroy of Adiabene, 317
- Arda-Mulissi, 311–312
see also Ardamusanus/Adrammelech
- Ardamusanus/Adrammelech, 47, 310, 311
see also Arda-Mulissi
- Ariel (city), 415
- Arije, King of Ukku, 283
see also Ukku, Kingdom of
- ark of Noah *see* Noah's ark
- Armenian language, 299, 308, 439, 452–453, 476
- Armenians, 314–315
- Arrian of Nicomedia, 359 n29
- arrogance, of Sennacherib, 366–367, 386, 405, 408, 409–410, 412
- arrows/arrowheads, 83–84
- Asa, King of Judah, 19, 32–33, 448 n57
- Ascension of Isaiah*, 337, 345
- ‘Aseret ha-melakhim* (The Midrash of the Ten Kings), 384
- Ashdod, 227, 237, 237 n49
- Ashkelon *see* Šidqa, King of Ashkelon
- Ashur (country), 368, 402 n47, 404, 407, 417, 430
see also Assyrian Empire/Assyria
- Ashur (son of Shem), 368
- Ashur-resuwa, 50, 262, 283, 284
- Asiatic copper *see* copper
- assassination, of Sennacherib, 25, 45, 47
- Assur fragments, 54 n15
- Assur stelae, 179, 189, 203, 214
- Assyrian Empire/Assyria
 administrative texts of, 443
 Aramaic as *lingua franca* of, 25, 179, 296, 463
 Arameans and, 296, 306–307, 322, 323
 army of, use of intelligence by, 252, 253, 256
- Babylonia and
 annexation of, 209, 233
 in Isaiah, 404, 414
 puppet king on throne of, 209
 rebellion/revolt against, 209–210, 234
 reverent esteem for, 212, 234
 cities in, role of, 195, 226–227
 colonists from, 462, 480
 correspondence of, 169–170, 173, 198–200, 226, 227, 303, 305, 312, 482, 483
 deportation practices of, 42, 60, 67–68, 86–88, 86, 101, 460–462, 478–479, 483
- Egypt/Kush and, 108, 116–117, 127–129
- expansion of, 196, 209, 458
- garrisons/outposts of, 257–258
- ideology of, 52
- intelligence services of *see* intelligence services (Assyrian)
- Judah and, 457–458
- Kushite presence in, 154–156
- provincial system of, 260–261
- revolts/rebellions against
 of Babylonia, 209–210
 of Ekronites, 239–240, 241
 of Hezekiah, 20–23, 66, 69–71
 of wider alliance, 72, 75, 458
- Taharqa and, 25, 34, 64–65, 109, 110, 111, 117, 124–125
- territorial extend of, 164

- treaties of, intelligence and, 263
see also Assyrian royal house/court;
 Third Campaign; vassals
 Assyrian Eponym Chronicle, 485
 Assyrian exile, 375–379
 Assyrian King List (last), 485
 Assyrian language, 195
 Assyrian royal house/court
 correspondence of, 483
 diviners at, 270–271
 rivalry at, 304
 Sargonids and, 435, 485–486
 ties with Judean royal family, 186–187
 women
 of Arabian royal descent, 187
 harem quarters, 178
 pictorial representations of, 214
 prominence of, 213–214
 titles of, 178
see also Assyrian Empire; *under specific names of kings and queens*
 Assyrian royal inscriptions
 deportees mentioned in, 42, 67, 460–461
 gendering in, 212
 Kushite horsemen in, 155–156
 Kushite rule in, 107
 numbers in, 42, 67, 460–461
 plot turns in, 473
 queens in, 214
 restlessness in, 477
 themes in, 239
 topics in, 171
 verb “hear” in, 289
see also Sennacherib’s Annals
 Aššurbanipal’s Prisms, 289–290
 Aššur (deity), 56, 59, 215–216, 218, 405, 407
 Aššurbanipal, King of Assyria
 antiquarianism of, 490
 childhood activities of, 196
 correspondence of, 173
 as crown prince, 197–198, 199
 deportations by, 478
 Elamite reliefs of, 441
 intelligence used by, 289
 military campaigns of, 69, 110–111
 palace at Nineveh, 227
 portrayals of, in Aramaic, 297
 relation with brother, 442
 royal inscriptions of, 169 n21, 289–290, 311
 as scholarly patron, 305
 Urad-Gula and, 304 n37
 wives of, 189
 Aššurbanipal I, King of Assyria, 486
 Aššurbanipal’s Cylinder A, 311
 Aššur-ilī-muballissu, 193, 194, 218
 Aššur-nādin-šumi (son of Sennacherib)
 in Babylonian King List A, 180
 death of, 193, 209, 210, 312, 481
 King of Babylon, 209
 prominence of, 218
 Sennacherib’s son, 175, 180, 193, 218
 Aššurnaširpal II, King of Assyria, 226
 Aššūr-šarru-ušur, 312
 Aššur-šumu-ušabši, 193
 Aššur-ušabši, 218
 Asterius (the Sophist), 418–419
 Atalyā (^{MUNUS}*A-ta-li-a*, ^{MUNUS}*A-tal-ia-a*)
 Arabic origin of name, 187
 burial of, 183, 203
 death of, 185–186
 Hebrew origin of name, 186, 188, 207–208
 mother of Sennacherib, 183, 207
 relation to Yabâ, 183, 186, 188
 time of arrival in Assyria, 188
 wife of Sargon II, 183, 185, 200, 207
 Athanasius, 395
 authorship, of Sennacherib’s Annals, 170
 Avtalyon, 384
 Awgen, Mār, 317–319, 381, 450, 471, 476
 Ayarammu, King of Edom *see* Malik-rammu, King of Edom
 Azariah, 368

 Ba’al, King of Tyre, 69
 Babylonian Chronicles, 107, 123, 311, 441
 Babylonian Empire
 Aramaic as *lingua franca* of, 296
 Assyria and
 annexation of, 209, 233
 in Isaiah, 404, 414
 puppet king on throne of, 209
 rebellion/revolt against, 209–210, 234
 reverent esteem for, 212, 234
 Chaldean takeover of, 233
 mentioned by, Theodoret of Cyr, 402 n47, 404, 417, 430
 see also Nebuchadnezzar I;
 Nebuchadnezzar II
 Babylonian exile, 376, 480
 Babylonian King List A
 mentions of Sennacherib in, 180
 reliability of, 181
 Sennacherib’s family on, 180, 234 n38
 Baladan *see* Merodach-Baladan
 Banītu (^{MUNUS}*Ba-ni-ti*)
 Hebrew origin of name, 186

- identical to Yabâ, 184–186, 188
 mother of Atalyâ, 186
 wife of Šhalmaneser V, 183
 Bar Hebraeus, 314–315
 Bar Kochba Revolt, 333
 Baruch, Book of
 Hezekiah in, 332–333
 mentions of Sennacherib in, 332–333
 miracles in, 474
 part of text of, 343
 Basil the Great, 394
 Bastille, fall of, 502
bâtiqu (denouncers), 252–253
 Batis, 359 n29
 Bavian inscription, aggressive humor in, 212
 Behnâm, Mâr, 315–317, 323, 450, 471, 476
bēlat bēti, 178 n57
 Belchira, 345
 Bēlet-ilî (goddess), 194
 Bel-etir, 265
 Bēl-ibni, 209
 Bel-iddina, 265
 Bellino Cylinder, 63
 Bēl-upaḥḥir, 303–304
 Bel-ushezib, use of intelligence by, 256, 259, 265, 281
 Ben Zakkai, Rabban Yoḥanan, 374
 Berossus of Babylon, 175 n41, 311, 331, 438, 442–443, 449, 480
 Bēt-Gubbē monastery, 316–317
bhadralok (“respectable people”), 466
 blasphemy
 by Nebuchadnezzar, 404, 418
 by Pharaoh, 418
 by Rabshakeh, 351, 353, 354–355, 408, 410
 by Sennacherib, 329, 353, 382, 404, 407, 408, 410, 424
 blockade-techniques, 246–247
 bodyguards (*ša qurbāti*), 267–268, 275
Book of Cures, 357
 British Museum (London), Lachish reliefs at, 85
 “Brook of Egypt,” 108, 109, 113, 135, 136
 Budu-ilu, King of Bit-Amman (Ammon), 56, 237, 240
 Buḥtnaşsar, 455
 bull colossi
 deciphering of, 51
 Hezekiah on, 67
 Luli in, 58–59
 transport of, 199
 vassals on, 62
 Bull of Ta-Seti (Sanam), 122
 Bunimovitz, Shlomoh, 100
 Butana Steppe, 143, 145, 146
 Byron, Lord, 456
 cacique-chiefs, 466
 “caged bird” analogy, 245–246
 captives *see* deportations/deportees/
 captives
 carrot-and-stick strategy, 278
 cattle, importance of, 157
 cattle-road, Taharqa’s commemoration of, 124, 125, 157
 cedar, 106, 119, 148, 159
 Chemosh-nadbi, King of Moab, *see*
 Kamusu-nadbi, King of Moab
 Chicago Prism, 42, 54, 62, 237, 350
 chinilpa (“friendly to Japan”), 466
 Christian Topography (Cosmas), 428
 Christians, persecution of, 317, 320
 Chronicle (Eusebius), 135
 Chronicles, book of
 concept of war and peace in, 32–33
 date of composition of, 13–14
 David in, 15
 deportations/deportees/captives in, 42, 479
 God as great King in, 38
 Hezekiah in
 Ahaz and, 29–30
 extended life of, 46–47, 49
 payments to Sennacherib, 50
 portrayal of, 28–30, 31–32, 49
 religious activities of, 15–16, 28–30, 34
 as righteous king, 33–35
 Sennacherib and, 21–23, 33–36
 Simeronites and, 20
 speech of, 18
 trust in God of, 18–19
 verses dedicated to, 15–16
 war preparations by, 16–17, 18–19, 93, 459–460
 Sennacherib in
 assassination of, 45–46, 47
 Hezekiah and, 33–35
 payments of Hezekiah to, 50
 portrayals of, 50
 Simeonites in, 15
 Solomon in, 15
 Third Campaign in
 consequences of, 48–49
 dating of, 326
 historical credibility of, 13–14

- as holy war, 36–37
 neglect of Chronicler's account of, 13
 no background information on, 21–23
 Rabshakeh's speech in, 35–36
 reshaping of, 14, 27–31, 33–35, 41–50
 sources used for, 16, 26
 verses dedicated to, 15–16
 war preparations by Hezekiah, 39–43,
 43–44, 49–50, 459–460
- Chronicles of Zuqnin*, 315
Chronicon Paschale, 429
- chronology
 of Egyptian monarchy, 65 n54
 on Rassam Cylinder, 63
 in Sennacherib's Annals, 63, 72
see also prolepsis
- Church of Mār Behnam, 451
Church/Ecclesiastical History (Theodoret of
 Cyr), 418, 428, 440
- Cimmerians, 228, 257, 281, 285
- cities/towns
 conquering of, 65–66, 67
 destruction of
 during First Campaign, 246 n83
 during Third Campaign, 246–247
 naming of, 67
- City of David (Southeast Hill), 89, 90, 91
- city-gates, of Lachish, 77, 79, 82, 86–87
- city-walls, of Lachish, 77
- Civilization and Its Discontents* (Freud), 165
- Clement of Alexandria, 330, 392–393
- Clio and the Doctors* (Barzan), 173
- collective forgetfulness, 495–499
- colonialism/imperialism
 of New Kingdom, 151–153, 154
 social-political response to, 436, 500
- colonists, Assyrian, 462, 480
- Commentary of Isaiah* (Eusebius of
 Caesarea), 393–394
- Commentary on Daniel* (Theodoret of Cyr),
 404
- Commentary on Ezekiel* (Theodoret of Cyr),
 404–406, 428
- Commentary on Isaiah* (Cyril of
 Alexandria), 421
- Commentary on Isaiah* (Procopius of
 Gaza), 426
- Commentary on Isaiah* (Theodoret of Cyr),
 412–417
- Commentary on Jeremiah* (Theodoret of
 Cyr), 417–418
- Commentary on Matthew* (Origen), 393
- Commentary on Revelation* (Andrew of
 Caesarea), 428
- Commentary on the Psalms* (Cyril of
 Alexandria), 425
- Commentary on the Psalms* (Diodore of
 Tarsus), 396–400
- Commentary on the Psalms* (Theodoret of
 Cyr), 408–412
- Commentary on the Twelve Prophets* (Cyril
 of Alexandria), 420–422
- Commentary on the Twelve Prophets*
 (Theodore of Mopsuestia), 400–402
- Commentary on the Twelve Prophets*
 (Theodoret of Cyr), 406–408
- Commentary on Zechariah* (Didymus the
 Blind), 395–396
- compensation, in psychoanalysis, 214
- conscripts, foreign, 60, 159
- The Contest for the Benefice of Amun*, 129
- The Contest for the Breastplate of Inaros*,
 129
- Contra Julianum* (Gregory of Nazianze),
 394
- conversions
 to Christianity
 of Sennacherib, 315, 323
 of Sennacherib's sons, 383, 384, 450
 to Judaism, of Sennacherib's sons, 384
- copper
 obtained as tribute, 106, 113, 148, 149,
 150
 prestige of, 150, 157
 used in decoration, 119
- core-periphery models, Kushite Empire
 and, 138
- correspondence, of Assyrian Empire,
 169–170, 173, 198–200, 226, 227, 303,
 305, 312, 482, 483
see also messaging
- Cosmas (Indikopleustes), 428
- cosmocrator, 351–352
- Counsels of Wisdom*, 303
- counterpropaganda, 278
- counter-ramps, 81
- counter-reconnaissance, 273
- court tale genre, 304, 307, 322, 327
- cross-examination, definition of term, 52
- Ctesias, 449
- cultural forgetting, 495–499
- cuneiform, 492, 493
- Cyril of Alexandria, 420–425
- Cyrus, 423
- Dahshur Road Stela, 118–119
- dajjālu* (patrollers), 251–252, 279
- Damascus, 69, 245, 287, 414

- damnatio memoriae*
 against Pi(ankh)y, 135
 against Sennacherib, 231 n27
- “dancing” (“μαελεθ”), 410
- Daniel, Book of, 328
- Dante Alighierie, 439
- Darfur, 147–148
- David, King of Israel
 in Chronicles, 15
 as Messiah, 372
 prophecy of, 358, 397, 401, 408, 425
- De incarnatione verbi* (Athanasius), 395
- Dead Sea Scrolls *see* Qumran Scrolls
- deities, female, prominence of, 215
- Demetrius (Jewish historian), 392–393
- Demetrius the Chronographer*
 fragment 6
 dating of, 330
 part of text of, 339–340
 Sennacherib in, 330
- Demotic Egyptian, 129
- denouncers (*bātiqū*), 252–253
- denunciations, 276 n157, 280, 282
- deportations/deportees/captives
 in Chronicles, 42, 479
 in Isaiah, 479
 on Lachish reliefs, 86–88, 86, 101
 practices of Assyria, 42, 60, 67–68,
 86–88, 86, 101, 460–462, 478–479, 483
 registering of, 483
 resettlement of, 461–462, 478–479
 in Sennacherib’s Annals, 42, 60, 67–68
 used
 in intelligence, 259
 for labor, 60
 for military purposes, 68
- deserters, 259
- Diagnosis in Assyrian and Babylonian
 Medicine* (Scurlock & Andersen), 167–168
- Diaspora Revolt, 333
- diasporic literature, 461–462
- Didaché*, 419
- Didymus the Blind, 395–396
- Diodore of Tarsus, 396–400, 421
- Diodorus Siculus, 449–450
- Dionysus of Halicarnassus, 361
- displacement, in psychoanalysis, 211
- divine intelligence (DIVINT), 272,
 280–282, 476
- diviners, 270–271, 279, 476
- divinity, kingship and, 205
- DIVINT (divine intelligence), 272,
 280–282, 476
- Doeg (arch-traitor), 410
- Dome of the Rock, 92
- Dongola-Napata Reach, 143, 145, 146, 147,
 153
- Dracula (Vlad III), 491
- dry-farming, 145
- Duke Frederick II, of Swabia, 440
- duplications, in story “B,” of Third
 Campaign, 26
- Dur-Šarrukin, 227–228
- ear-men, 254–255
- Ecclesiastes, book of, 355
- Echnaton oder die Erfindung des
 Monotheismus* (Maziejewski), 167
- Edom, kingdom of, 61
- Egypt
 Arameans and, 307
 Assyrian Empire and, 108, 127–129
 colonial control of Kush, 151–153
 the Exodus from, 363–365
 Judah and, 414
 Kushite control of *see* Kushite Empire
 population of, 143
 religious traditions of, 154
 Third Campaign against
 in Kings, 64–65
 in Sennacherib’s Annals, 64–66
 use of intelligence in, 289–290
see also Kushite Empire
- Egyptian corpus
 Esarhaddon in, 129–130, 448
 Sennacherib in, 129, 447–448
 Taharqa in, 130
ummānu in, 470–471
- Egyptian monarchy, chronology of, 65 n54
- Egyptology, psychohistory and, 166
- “εἰς τὸ τέλος” (“to the end”), 410
- Ekron, Kingdom of, 64, 236, 239–240, 241
see also Paḏī, King of Ekron
- Elam (son of Shem), 368
- Elam, Kingdom of, 209, 212, 265, 481
- Eleazar ben ‘Azariah, 365
- Eleazer, 336
- Elephantine, 125
- “*élèves*,” 466
- Eliakim (son of Hilkiyah), 341, 356,
 358–359, 468
- elites/new gentry
 authority of, 466, 492
 autonomy of, 435
 historical analogs to, 466
 legitimacy of, 465
 social authority of, 467
see also *ummānu*

- Ellipi, 235, 307
 Eltekeh, battle at, 25, 56, 64–66, 109, 239
 emotions/emotional life, 164 n4, 167–168
 Enlil/Illil (deity), 216
 entrusted (*gēpu*), 268, 275, 281, 287
Enuma Eliš, 305–306
 Ephraim, 423
 epics, 202, 211, 213, 229, 298, 452–453, 483, 487–490
 Esarhaddon, King of Assyria
 character of, 5
 correspondence of, 173, 303, 305, 312
 deportations by, 478
 military campaigns of, 123, 124, 127
 mother of, 191, 219
 paranoid personality disorder of, 221–222
 portrayals of
 in Aramaic, 297, 309
 in Demotic Egyptian, 129–130, 448
 in Syriac, 313–314
 protective custody of, 481
 reign of, 109–110
 as scholarly patron, 305
 on Sennacherib, 203
 “Sin of Sargon” and, 230–231
 succession of, 41, 45, 47, 74, 219, 442
 use of intelligence by, 252, 255, 256, 265, 267, 279, 280
 wives of, 189
 Esarhaddon’s Chronicle, 107, 110 n18
 Esarhaddon’s Prism A, 45 n105, 312
 Esarhaddon’s Prism B, 311
 Ešarra-ḥammat, 189
 Esther, Book of, 328
 Ethiopic language, 309, 439
 ethnonyms, 120
 Eugene, Saint, 317–319, 381, 450, 471, 476
 Eupolemus (Jewish historian), 393
 Eusebius of Caesarea, 393–394, 442, 449, 472, 480
 events
 attributes of, 501–502
 fractal character of, 502–503
 as open possibilities, 505
 reader’s expectations of, 504
 exaggerations
 in ancient sources, 41–42
 in Sennacherib’s Annals, 65, 67, 460–461
 excavations
 at Jerusalem, 13, 89, 91, 92
 at Tel Lachish, 13, 76–77
 at Nineveh, 85
 at Timna, 13
 executions, 101
 exile, 479–481
 Exodus (from Egypt), 363–365
 exploratores, 256
 extispicies, 281
 eyes of kings, 254–255
 Ezekiel, Book of, 370
 Ezra, Book of, 334–335, 343–344
 fear, used in intelligence, 276 n157, 279, 280, 282, 289
 fire, use of, during siege of Jerusalem, 368–370, 447
 First Campaign (against Merodach-baladan)
 booty list of, 70
 destruction of settlements during, 246 n83
 outcome of, 209, 234–235
 in Sennacherib’s Annals, 70, 205
 flight, 379–381, 445, 477–479
 “fly,” 377
 folk tales, 380, 455, 467
 food storage, 11, 17 n26
 “forget Lampe” parable, 497 n216
 forgetting
 about kingship, 435, 477, 505
 archipelago of stories and, 497
 cultural memory and, 495–496
 identity reformation and, 499
 processing trauma and, 498–499
 through historical explanation, 497
 see also memory; remembering
 The Forms of Violence (Bersani & Dutoit), 167
 Fort Shalmaneser, 155
 fortifications, 81, 91, 444, 459
 forts/fortresses, 257–258
 Freud, Sigmund, 165, 166, 498
 Funj sultanate, 147–148
 Gabriel (angel), 43 n100, 367–368, 369–370, 447
 garrisons/outposts, 257–258
 Gebel Barkal, 152
 Gehonim, 447
 gendered language, 212
 genealogical amnesia, 495–499
 Georgian language, 439
 Gihon Spring, 91
 Gilgamesh epic, 202, 229, 487–488
 God
 absence during Third Campaign, 377–378

- blasphemy
 by Nebuchadnezzar, 404, 418
 by Pharaoh, 418
 by Rabshakeh, 351, 353, 354–355, 408, 410
 by Sennacherib, 329, 353, 382, 404, 407, 408, 410, 424
 as great King, 38
 involvement in siege of Jerusalem
 in Chronicles, 40–41, 43–44
 Theodoret of Cyr on, 411–412
 through angels, 6, 19, 37, 40–41, 42–44, 50, 333, 335–337, 354, 362, 363, 365–370, 380, 385, 474
 versus pagan gods, 35–37
 power of, 353, 405
 saving of Israel, 337, 376
 versus Sennacherib, 37–38, 383
 trust in
 of Hezekiah, 18–19, 49–50, 333
 in speech of Rabshakeh, 355
 Gog, 372, 373, 405–406, 421, 428
 gold, 21, 33, 150, 355, 356, 357, 403
 governors, 260–261, 275, 287
 graffiti, 124–125
 “Great Massacre,” 317, 320
 Great Temple of Amun (Gebel Barkal), 113, 114
 Great Triumphal Stela of Pi(ankh)y
 on domestic affairs, 112–113
 erection of, 146
 on expansionism, 132
 on foreign affairs, 113
 Greek language
 as *lingua franca* of Near East, 297
 mentions of Sennacherib in
 Andrew of Caesarea, 428
Apostolic Constitutions, 419
 Asterius, 418
 Athanasius, 395
 Basil the Great, 394
 Berossus, 442
 Clement of Alexandria, 393
 Ctesias, 449
 Cyril of Alexandria, 421, 423, 424–425
 Demetrius the Chronographer, 330
 Didymus the Blind, 395–396
 Diodore of Tarsus, 396–400
 Diodorus Siculus, 449–450
 Eusebius of Caesarea, 393–394, 442
 Gregory of Nazianze, 394
 Herodotus, 330–331, 448, 449
 Isodore of Pelusium, 426
 Olympiodore of Alexandria, 426
 Origen, 393
 Procopius of Gaza, 426
 Synesius of Cyrene, 425
 Theodore of Mopsuestia, 400–402
 Theodoret of Cyr
Church History, 418
Commentary on Daniel, 404
Commentary on Ezekiel, 404–406
Commentary on Isaiah, 412–417
Commentary on Jeremiah, 417–418
Commentary on the Psalms, 409–412
Commentary on the Twelve Prophets, 406–408
Quaestiones in Octateuchum, 403–404
 Theophilus of Antioch, 392
 Sennacherib stories in, 472–473
 spelling of Sennacherib in, 391
 Gregory of Nazianze, 394
 guards, 257–258
 Gurdî, King of Tabal/Kulummû, 20, 201, 228–229, 232–233
 Ḥadiānu of Damascus, 174 n35
 Hallel Psalms, 363–364, 365
 Ḥalulê, battle of, 209–212, 306
 Ḥamâ, 174 n35, 214 n229
 Hamath, 287, 462
 hamlets *see* villages/hamlets
 Hammurapi, King of Babylon, 168, 490
 Hananiah, 367–368
 Ḥanigalbat, 181
 Ḥanunu, 68, 108, 265
 harem quarters, 178
 Ḥarrân (city), 181, 322
 Hasmonean channel, 92
 Hatarika, 287
 haughtiness *see* arrogance
Ḥayyot, 370
 heavenly powers, six orders of, 335
 Hebrew
 origin of name of
 Atalyâ, 186, 188, 207–208
 Yabâ, 184, 186, 188, 207
 spoken by Rabshakeh, 208
Hellenistic Synagogue Prayer, 337, 345
 Herodotus, 12, 330–331, 332, 340, 365 n51, 448, 449, 475
 hero-kings, 487–490, 492
 Hexapla, 411
 Hezekiah, King of Judah
 sources
Apostolic Constitutions, 419

- Ascension of Isaiah*, 337
 Assyrian annals, 20
 Baruch, 332–333
 bull colossi, 67
 Chronicles
 Ahaz and, 29–30
 extended life of, 46–47, 49
 payments to Sennacherib, 50
 portrayal of, 28–30, 31–32, 49
 religious activities of, 15–16, 28–30, 34
 as righteous king, 33–35
 Sennacherib and, 21–23, 33–36
 Simeronites and, 20
 speech of, 18
 trust in God of, 18–19
 verses dedicated to, 15–16
 war preparations by, 16–17, 18–19, 93, 459–460
 Cyril of Alexandria, 421, 422, 424, 425
 Diodore of Tarsus, 396–400
 Eusebius of Caesarea, 394
 Ezra, 334–335
Hellenistic Synagogue Prayer, 337
 Isaiah, 27, 31
 Kings
 fourteenth year of, 21 n37, 24 n46
 payments to Sennacherib, 20
 Philistines and, 20
 portrayals of, 24, 30–31, 33–35, 37–38
 rebellion against Sennacherib, 20–21
 verses dedicated to, 14–15
 war preparations by, 16
 Midrashic texts, 356–357, 371–373
Second Apocalypse of Baruch, 332–334
 Sennacherib's Annals
 payments to Sennacherib, 20, 57, 69–70, 72, 247–248
 rebellion against Sennacherib, 66, 69–71
 Talmud, 372–374
 Theodoret of Cyr, 403–404, 408–409, 413, 415
 themes
 betrayal of, 358–359
 extended life of, 46–47, 49, 398–399
 and gold from Temple doors, 21, 33, 150, 355, 356, 357, 403
 illness and recovery of, 46, 243, 444
 intelligence used by, 458–459
 interest of early Christian commentators in, 430
 Isaiah and, 370–371, 373
 Isaianic traditions and, 355
 Merodach-Baladan and, 31, 242–243, 459
 as Messiah, 371–374, 409
 Padi and, 66
 portrayals of, 24, 27, 31, 33–35, 37–38
 religious activities of, 15–16, 28–30, 34
 gratitude towards God, 371–373
 prayers, 334–335, 338, 356, 363–365
 religious reforms of, 374
 righteousness/piousness of, 33–35, 363, 424
 Sennacherib and
 Chronicles, 33–36
 leniency of, towards, 207–208, 221, 247–248
 loosing territory to, 68, 99, 247–248
 as part of apocalyptic vision, 332–334
 payments to Sennacherib, 20, 50, 57, 69–70, 72, 247–248, 355, 403
 rebellion against, 20–23, 66, 69–71
 shift of alliance of, 241–243
 and siege of Lachish, 102
 Song of Triumph and, 371
 trust in God of, 18–19, 49–50, 333
 urbi of, 69 n82, 241–243, 289
 war preparations by
 archaeological evidence of, 11, 93, 98
 in Biblical sources, 16–17, 18–19, 93, 459–460
 in Midrashic texts, 356–357
 and Siloam tunnel, 94
 see also Judah, Kingdom of
 “*Hezekiah Tunnel*” *see* Shiloah/Siloam tunnel project
 Hillel, Rabi, 373–374
 Hinnumu, 265
l'histoire événementielle
 explanation of, 142
 limitations of, 3, 106, 140–141, 159
Histories (Herodotus)
 part of text of, 340
 Sennacherib in, 330–331, 448, 449
 on siege of Jerusalem, 365 n51, 475
 Third Campaign in, 331
 historiography
 ancient authors and, 361–362

- Sennacherib's Campaign and, 6, 325, 338, 433
- A History of Egypt* (Breasted), 133
- History of Mār Qardagh*, 319–322, 323, 451
- History of the Persians* (Ctesias), 449–450
- Hittite treaties, 263
- Homilies* (Asterius), 418–419
- Horemheb, 121, 132
- horsemen, 155–156
- horses, 147, 148, 155–156, 157
- Hosea (prophet), 350, 375, 401, 406
- Hoshea (son of Elah), 108, 378 n74
see also Samaria/Samaritans
- Hryw-Sa* (sandy ones), 115
- human intelligence (HUMINT), 272, 280–282
- Humban-haltash II, King of Elam, 265
- Ḫumban-nimena, King of Elam, 209, 212, 481
- HUMINT (human intelligence), 272, 280–282
- humor, 212
- Ḫunni, 196, 226
- Huns, 428
- Hu-Teshub, 263
- Iamani of Ashdod, 109, 134, 136
- Iasubigalleans, 235
- Ibn Khaldun, 455
- Ibn Rusta, 455
- iconography, 121, 132
- identity, reformation of, 499
- illustrators, 439
- Imhotep, 448, 471
- imperialism see colonialism/imperialism
- Inaros Cycle (Pedubast Cycle), 128, 483
- Inaros I, 297, 447–448, 475
- India, 466
- Indikopleustes (Cosmas), 428
- informers, 252–255, 259, 260–261, 265–266, 289
- inscriptions
- Bavian, 212
 - Chicago Prism, 54
 - Esarhaddon in, 297
 - Inaros I in, 298
 - Kushite, 111–123, 127–130, 158
 - Long Inscription (Sanam), 122–123
 - New Kingdom, 113
 - numbers in, 42, 67, 460–461
 - Rassam Cylinder, 53–54
 - Sennacherib in, 206 n195, 217
 - Sheikh Faḡl, 297, 298
 - Shiloah/Siloam, 93–94, 444, 459
 - Southwest Palace (Nineveh), 190
 - of Aššurbanipal, 169 n21, 289–290, 311
 - Tašmētu-šarrat in, 190, 214
 - Taylor Prism, 11, 42, 51 n2, 54, 62, 350
 - see also Assyrian royal inscriptions; Sennacherib's Annals
- intelligence (Assyrian)
- on Egyptian army, 289–290
 - on Urartian Kingdom, 228, 257–258, 259–260, 261, 263, 284–285
 - on Uruk, 265
- intelligence services (Assyrian)
- compared to
 - modern services, 250–251, 268
 - Roman intelligence, 274
 - covert actions and, 277
 - denunciations and, 276 n157, 280, 282
 - DIVINT, 272, 280–282
 - gathering of information
 - pre-systematic, 273–274
 - systematic, 274–278
 - psychological warfare and, 278
- use of
- alienation in, 279
 - army spies in, 256–258
 - by Assurbanipal, 289
 - believable, entrusted (*qēpu*) in, 268, 275, 281, 287
 - by Bel-ushezib, 256, 259, 265, 281
 - bodyguards (*ša qurbāti*) in, 267–268, 275
 - communication in
 - oral, 262–263, 264
 - written, 250, 261
 - coordinators in, 262
 - denouncers (*bātiqū*), 252–253
 - diviners in, 270–271, 279
 - ear-men in, 254–255
 - enemy sources in
 - reliability of, 259
 - voluntary/involuntary, 258–259
 - by Esarhaddon, 252, 255, 256, 265, 267, 279, 280
 - eyes of kings in, 253–254
 - fear in, 276 n157, 279, 280, 282, 289
 - garrisons/outposts in, 257–258
 - governors in, 260–261, 275, 287
 - by Hezekiah, 458–459
 - infiltrated spies in, 264–266
 - informers in, 252–255, 260–261, 265–266, 289
 - intelligence verification in, 281–282

- messengers (*mār šipri*) in, 266–267, 275
 patrollers (*dajjālu*) in, 251–252, 279
 personnel verification in, 280–281
 religious personnel in, 269, 280–282
 by Sargon II, 257–258, 259–260, 263, 269, 279, 285, 287, 289
 by Sennacherib
 as crown prince, 283–285
 as king, 285–290
 processing of intelligence by, 276
 sources, 287–288
 before Third Campaign, 288–289
 during Third Campaign, 289–290
 special agents in, 264–269, 283–284
 summary briefings in, 284
 surveillance in, 279
 by Tiglath-pileser III, 287
 tongues (*ša lišānim*) in, 253–254
 treaties in, 263, 286
 vassals in, 263–264, 275, 288
 women in, 265
 intelligence services (modern), 250–251, 268, 269
 intelligence services (Roman), 256, 272, 274
 Isaiah (prophet)
 Hezekiah and, 370–371, 373
 mentioning “fly,” 377
 prophecy of, 374–375, 427
 as *ummānu*, 468
 Isaiah, book of
 Assyria and Babylonia in, 404, 414
 Hezekiah in
 as Messiah, 371–374
 portrait of, 27, 31
 used as source for, 17, 18
 Sennacherib in, 45
 Third Campaign in
 consequences of, 47
 Egyptian/Babylonian assistance to Judah, 459
 siege of Jerusalem in, 40–41, 49–50, 352–353, 355–356, 358–359, 365–368, 370
 sources used for, Kings, 26–27
 used as source for, Chronicles, 16
 Ishtar cult, 321
 Islamic culture, 456
 Isodore of Pelusium, 425
 Ivan III, 440
 Jacob, 19 n34, 220, 406, 423
 Jacob/James of Nisibis, 319
 Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, 19, 419
 Jeroboam, King of Israel, 395
 Jerome, 439
 Jerusalem
 Assyrian siege of
 sources
 apocalyptic texts, 368–369
 Chronicles, 41–43, 49, 355–357
 Diodore of Tarsus, 396–400
 Ecclesiastes, 355
 Ezekiel, 370
 Genesis, 367–368
 Histories (Herodotus), 365 n51
 Isaiah, 40–41, 49–50, 352–353, 355–356, 358–359, 365–368, 370
 Kings, 40–41, 49–50, 352–359, 365–366, 368
 Midrashic texts, 355, 358, 362, 365–370
 New Testament, 390–391
 Psalms, 44, 358
 rabbinic traditions, 315 n80, 348–349
 Seder Olam Rabbah, 357, 359
 Sennacherib’s Annals, 38–39, 69, 207–208
 Talmud, 352–354, 359
 Testament of Adam, 335–336
 Theodore of Mopsuestia, 401–402
 Theodoret of Cyr, 411–412
 Toseftot Targums, 447
 Zechariah, 366, 369
 themes
 blockade instead of siege, 246–247
 compared to Exodus, 363–365
 dramatical quality of, 503–504
 God’s involvement in
 in Chronicles, 40–41, 43–44
 Theodoret of Cyr on, 411–412
 through angels, 6, 19, 37, 40–41, 42–44, 50, 333, 335–337, 354, 362, 363, 365–370, 385, 474
 miracles during, 475
 as model for Qur’ānic material, 455
 Nebuchadnezzar on, 369
 Passover and, 44 n100, 363–364, 367
 Rabshakeh’s negotiations/speech
 at, 31, 35–36, 37–38, 39–40, 69–71, 95–96, 208, 351, 376, 397, 422
 blasphemy in, 351, 353, 354–355, 408, 410
 trust in God in, 355

- Sennacherib's flight from, 379–381, 445, 480
- Sennacherib's leniency during, 207–208, 221, 247–248
- site of Assyrian camp during, 95
- size of Assyrian army during, 94
- use of fire during, 368–370, 447
- war preparations by Hezekiah, 11, 16–17, 18–19, 94, 356–357, 459–460
- see also* Third Campaign (701 B.C.E.)
- Babylonian siege of, 44, 376, 389, 442
- City of David (Southeast Hill), 89, 90, 91
- excavations at, 13, 89, 91, 92
- fortifications of, 91, 444, 459
- Gihon Spring at, 91
- metaphor of adultery of, 354
- Northeast Hill, 90, 95
- pottery found at, 93, 98
- Roman siege of, 95, 390 n3, 427
- schematic drawing of, 90
- second wall of, 17 n25
- Shiloah/Siloam tunnel project, 17–18, 444, 459
- Temple Mount at, 92–93
- water systems at, 17–18, 91–92
- The Jewish Wars* (Josephus), 95, 444–445
- Jews/Jewish people
- Aramaic speaking, 298
- Assyrian exile, 375–379
- diaspora of, 376, 479
- Exodus from Egypt, 363–365
- and *Ahiqar* tradition, 307–308
- messianic hope of, 371–374, 386
- Joah (son of Asaph), 341, 356, 357, 359, 468
- Joel (prophet), 401
- Joseph, 220
- Joseph and Asenath*, 337
- Josephus, 331–332, 336, 340–343, 360–361, 428, 444–445
- Judah, Kingdom of
- and Assyria, 457–458
- deportations from, 42, 67–68, 86–88, 86, 101, 460–462, 478
- Egypt and, 414
- impact of Sennacherib's campaign on, 99–101
- status as faithful vassal, 236
- support of Ekronite revolt, 241
- see also* Hezekiah, King of Judah
- Judah the Maccabee, 335, 336
- Judaism, apocalypticism and, 332–334
- Judas, 419
- Judean royal house/court
- ties with Assyrian royal family, 186–187
- see also* Judah, Kingdom of; *under specific names of kings and queens*
- Julian the Apostate, 316, 317, 394–395
- Kalbi-Ukua, 286
- Kalbu, 303
- Kalḥu, 182, 195, 201, 227
- Kamusu-nadbi, King of Moab, 56, 237, 240, 288
- Kant, Immanuel, 497 n216
- Karnak inscriptions (Taharqo), 127
- Kassites, 235
- Kawa, 152
- Kawa inventories, 120, 131
- Kawa stela III, 119
- Kawa stela IV, 117–119
- Kawa stela V, 117–118
- Kazan Tartars, 440
- Keira sultanate, 147–148
- Kenyon, Kathleen M., 89
- Khan Krum, 440
- Khor (Syria-Palestine)
- Kushite incursions into, 107
- tribute from, 113, 127, 128, 131, 148, 157–158
- King John, 491
- Kings, book of
- Hezekiah in, 444
- attack on Philistines by, 20
- fourteenth year of, 21 n37, 24 n46
- and Isaiah, 371
- payments to Sennacherib, 20
- portrayal of, 24, 30–31, 37–38
- rebellion against Assyria of, 20–21
- used as source for, Chronicles, 18
- verses dedicated to, 14–15
- war preparations by, 16
- Merodach-Baladan in, 31
- Sennacherib in, 443–444
- assassination of, 25–26, 45, 219, 312
- payments of Hezekiah to, 20
- portrayal of, 37–38
- Third Campaign in
- versus Chronicles, 14, 27–31, 33–35, 41–50
- consequences of, 47
- dating of, 326
- against Egypt, 64–65
- Egyptian/Babylonian assistance to Judah, 459
- siege of Jerusalem in, 40–41, 49–50, 352–359, 365–366, 368

- story "A," 23–24, 30–31, 50
 story "B," 24–27, 30–31, 50
 dating of, 25
 duplications in, 26
 two different campaigns, 23 n44
 used as source for, *Chronicles*, 16, 27
 verses dedicated to, 14–15
 Tiglath-pileser III in, 443
 kings/kingship
 dismantling traditions of, 485–491
 and divinity, 205, 474
 "forgetting about," 435, 477, 505
 heroic, 487–490, 492
 passive role of, 469–471
 of Sennacherib, 202–206, 486–487
 Kiš, 488
 Königsnovelle, 448
 Kūlyātā monastery, 316
 el-Kurru cemetery, 146
 Kushite Empire
 assessment of, 135
 cattle and, 157
 core-periphery models and, 138, 139
 economy of
 redistributive prestige, 150–151, 158
 and Sahelian environment, 145–147,
 148, 149
 foreign policy of
 capriciousness of, 135–136, 138
 compared to, traditions in Nubian
 governance, 140
 expansionism, 151
 geopolitical naïveté, 154–155
 motivations for
 border defense/domestic security,
 136–137, 138, 151, 159
 expansionism, 131–132, 137–138, 139
 geopolitical naïveté, 134–135, 138,
 151
 sibling rivalry, 135
 trade, 106–107, 130–131, 159
 Nubian prototypes and, 137, 140, 141,
 158
 towards Levant/Near East, 105–106,
 109, 117–118, 120–122, 127–130, 131,
 159
 fomenting rebellion in, 133–134,
 138
 towards northern Africa, 123
 horses and, 148, 155–156, 157
 iconography of, patterned after New
 Kingdom, 121, 132
 influences on
 of Middle Kingdom, 153–154
 of New Kingdom, 132, 139, 151, 154
 of Old Kingdom, 153–154
 interest in
 copper, 150
 luxury goods, 106–107, 119, 148, 150,
 157, 159
 Marduk-apla-iddina and, 138, 139
 military campaigns of
 during Pi(ankh)y's reign, 113, 115
 during Shabaka's reign, 115–116
 during Shebitqo's reign, 105–106,
 116–117
 by Taharqa, 109–111, 117–118
 used for brief defense, 158
 and New Kingdom, 121, 132, 139
 Nubiology and, 140–141, 158
 pastoralism and, 157
 religious traditions of, 154
 Sargon II on, 108–109
 territorial extend of, 151
 trade and, 106–107, 130–131, 148, 158,
 159
 see also Kush/Nubia; Meroitic era
 Kushite inscriptions
 reference to Near East in, 115, 158
 royal
 detailedness of, 111–113
 on domestic affairs, 112–113
 on foreign affairs
 increase in, 118–120
 scarcity of, 113–117
 towards Asia, 120–122, 127–130
 towards northeast Africa, 123
 "Kushite oath," 115
 Kush/Nubia
 Egyptian colonial control of, 151–153
 expatriates from, in Assyria, 155–156
 map of, 144
 mercenaries from, in Levant, 155
 population of, 143, 145
 topographic complexities of
 Nilotic environment, 142–143
 Sahelian environment, 143, 145
 see also Kushite Empire
 Lachish
 archaeological drawing of, 78
 city-gate of, 77, 79
 city-walls of, 77
 destruction of
 by fire, 79
 importance to Hezekiah of, 102
 excavations at, 13, 76–77
 fortifications of, 81

- mentioned by
 Cyril of Alexandria, 422
 Theodoret of Cyr, 407
 palace-fort at, 77–78
 portrayal of, on Lachish reliefs, 88–89
 pottery found at, 96, 98
 siege of
 duration of, 84
 importance to Sennacherib of,
 101–102
 main attack on, 79
 population during, 84
 site of Assyrian camp during, 79–80
 size of Assyrian army during, 84
 sources for, 12, 22, 39
 weapons used during
 bows/arrows, 83–84
 counter-ramps, 81
 iron chains, 83
 perforated stones, 83
 siege-ramps, 80–81, 82–83, 82,
 84–85, 86–87
 slings, 83
 water systems at, 78
 Lachish reliefs
 city-gates on, 82, 86
 deportees on, 86–88, 86, 101
 excavation and transfer of, 85–86
 executions on, 101
 importance of, 441
 portrayal of
 city of Lachish on, 88–89
 Sennacherib on, 88
 siege-ramps in, 82
 languages, gendered, 212
 Latin language, spelling of Sennacherib
 in, 391
*Le vocabulaires des sentiments dans les
 textes sumériens* (Jaques), 167–168
 “Letter of God” (Esarhaddon), 312
Letter to Africanus (Origen), 393
Letter to Marcellinus (Athanasius), 395
 Levant/Near East
 Assyrian armies in, 139
 Kushite mercenaries in, 155
 psychohistory and, 166–168
 Libbāli-šarrat, 189
Life of Aesop, 299
limmu office, 470, 486
lingua franca
 Aramaic as, 25, 179, 296, 463
 Greek as, 297
 literature
 heroic kingship, 487–491, 492
 resistance, 436, 465, 491
lmlk seals, 11, 93, 96, 97, 100, 444
 locusts, 401, 406, 421
 Long Inscription (Sanam), 122–123
 Lucian, 361
 Luli, king of Sidon, 58–59, 72, 477
 LÚ.*Urbi*, 69 n82, 241–243, 289
 luxury goods
 Kushite Empire’s interest in, 106–107,
 119, 148, 150, 157, 159
 as “primitive currencies,” 149
 Luz, 352, 445–446, 475
 Maccabean Revolt, 336
 Maccabees, Book of
 part of text of, 344–345
 Third Campaign in, 336
 “μαελεθ” (“dancing”), 410
 Magianism *see* Zoroastrianism
 magic, 475–476
 magical realism, 503
 magnates (*rabbūte*), 470
 Magog, 372, 373, 428
 Maimonides, 379, 439
 Malik-rammu, King of Edom, 56, 237, 240,
 288
 Manasseh, King of Judah, 15, 28, 29, 345,
 419, 443, 462 n115
 Mannu-kīma-Enlil-ĥātīn/Aba-Enlil-Dari,
 302–303
 Manu-ki-Ninua (governor of Kar-
 Sharrukin), 261
 Mār Awgen story, 317–319, 450
 Mār Behnām story, 315–317, 323, 451
mār šīpri (messengers), 266–267, 275
 Marduk Ordeal, 213
 Marduk-apla/u-iddina II *see* Merodach-
 Baladan
 Marduk-rēmāni, 236
 Marduk-šākin-šumi (exorcist), 204
 Marduk-zākir-šumi, King of Babylon, 234
 Mari letters, 253–254
 martyrdom, 472, 476–477
 al-Masūdi, 438, 454
 Mattai, Mār, 315, 316, 317
*The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean
 world in the age of Philip II* (Braudel), 141
 Megasthenes, 139
 Mehmed II, 440
mem (Hebrew letter), 372
 memory
 cultural
 forgetting and, 495–496
 reception history and, 435, 494

- remembering and, 494–495
- narrative and, 499–500
- processing trauma and, 498
- religious, 347, 385–386
- see also* forgetting
- Memphis, sack of, 110, 127
- Mentyu-nomads, 119
- mercenaries, 155
- merciful (*rhmn*), 305
- Merodach-Baladan (Marduk-apla/u-iddina II, King of Babylon)
 - analogy between Kushite Empire and, 138–139
 - in Babylonian King List A, 180
 - Hezekiah and, 31, 242–243, 459
 - intelligence on, 286
 - mentioned by, Procopius of Gaza, 427–428
 - Sargon II and, 209
 - Sennacherib and, 70, 205, 209–210, 224, 233, 234–235, 469
- Meroitic era, 140, 145, 150
- messaging, 482–483
 - see also* correspondence
- messengers (*mār šipri*), 266–267
- Messiah, 371–374, 409
- mice, 331, 340, 342, 394 n17, 475
- Michael (archangel), 43 n100, 367–368, 447
- Michael the Syrian, 452
- Middle Kingdom, 153–154
- The Midrash of the Ten Exiles (*Midrash 'eser galuyot*), 384
- The Midrash of the Ten Kings (*'Aseret ha-melakhim*), 384
- Midrashic texts
 - Assyrian exile in, 375–379
 - contemporizing of Biblical terms in, 356
 - hermeneutics and, 350–351, 359–360
 - Hezekiah in, 371–373
 - Hezekiah's war preparations in, 356–357
 - historical material in, 348, 360–361, 385, 386–387
 - legitimacy of, 347–348
 - Nebuchadnezzar II in, 352, 369
 - Sennacherib in, 352, 366–367, 375–376, 379, 382–383, 384, 385–386
 - siege of Jerusalem in, 355, 358, 362, 365–370
- military intelligence
 - importance of, 272, 274
 - phases in, 273
 - through soldiers and outposts, 256–258, 271
- Milqia shrine, 321, 322
- Milton, John, 439–440
- Minihimmu, King of Samsimuruna, 56, 237, 240
- miracles, 473–475
- Mishael, 368
- Mitinti, King of Ashdod, 56, 68, 99, 237, 240
- Moab, kingdom of, 61, 415
- Moabites, 379
- Montuemhat, 119, 128
- Moses, 165, 166–167
- Moses of Khoren, 314
- Moses the Egyptian* (Assmann), 167
- Moshav Lachish, 80
- motivated forgetting, 495–499
- Mukin-zēri, 233
- Mullissu (deity), 215–216
- Mullissu-mukannišat-Ninua, 226
- MUNUS.É.GAL, 178–179, 191–192, 200
- Mušēzib-Marduk, 209
- Nabonidus, 490
- Nabopolassar, 176
- Nabu-ahhe-eresh, 265
- Nabu-ahhe-iddina, 266
- Nabû-apla-iddina/Nabû-bāni, 303
- Nabû-šarru-ušur, 312
- Nabû-šarru-ušur (son of Sennacherib), 193, 219
- Nabu-shumu-lishir, 286
- Nabû-šum-iškun/Nabusumiskun
 - and assassination of Sennacherib, 312–313
 - historicity of, 303
 - in *Story of Aḥiqar*, 300–301, 313
 - see also* Yabusemakh-miskin
- Nabu-ushallim, 255
- Nabu-zer-kitti-lishir, 265
- Nabû-zeru-lešir, 303–304
- Nabû-zuqup-kēnu, 170–171, 202, 229, 304
- Nadin/Nadan/Nadab, 300, 304, 309, 313, 467, 471, 483
- names/naming
 - of Arabic origin, 187
 - of children, 384
 - of cities, 63, 67
 - of Hebrew origin, 184, 186, 188, 207
 - spelling of, 391
 - talismanic power of, 502
 - throne, 204, 486
- Naneferkasokar, 471
- Nanefersokar and the Babylonians*, 129
- nannies, 195

- Naq̄'a (Zakūtu, wife of Sennacherib)
 on Assur stela, 179
 mother of Esarhaddon, 191, 219
 origin of, 306
 political power of, 192, 214
 relationship with Millissu, 215
 relationship with Tašmētu-šarrat, 192
 seal of, 192
 sources for, 191–192
Story and Proverbs of Aḫiqar and, 303
 title of, 191–192
 wife of Sennacherib, 179, 191–192, 201, 214, 215
- Naram-Sin, 490
Naram-Sin and the Enemy Hordes, 488
 narratives
 attributes of, 501
 fidelity of, 359
 and memory, 499–500
- Nastaseñ stela, 126
 Near East *see* Levant/Near East
 Nebosumiskin, 467
Nebuchadnezzar and Marduk, 489
Nebuchadnezzar to the Babylonians, 489
 Nebuchadnezzar I, King of Babylon, 488
 Nebuchadnezzar II, King of Babylonian Empire
 antiquarianism of, 490
 blasphemy by, 404, 418
 mentioned by/in
 Asterius (the Sophist), 418
 Clement of Alexandria, 393
 Cyril of Alexandria, 422, 423
 Eusebius of Caesarea, 442
 Gregory of Nazianze, 395
 Midrashic texts, 352, 369
 Origen, 393
 Procopius of Gaza, 427
 Theodore of Mopsuestia, 401
 Theodoret of Cyr, 404–405, 412, 413, 415, 416
 Samaria and, 401
 Sennacherib and, 454–455
 on Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem, 369
 siege of Jerusalem by, 44, 376, 389, 442
 siege of Tyre by, 446
- Negev, of Judah, 31, 99, 100
 Neo-Assyria *see* Assyrian Empire/Assyria
 Nergal temple (Tarbišu), 202, 230
 Nergal-šarru-ušur, 312
 Nergal-šumu-ibni, 193
 New Kingdom
 colonialism of, 151–153, 154
 Kushite Empire influenced by, 132, 139, 151, 154
 royal inscriptions of, 113
 Nicholas V, Pope, 440
 Nicolaus of Damascus, 450
 Nietzsche, Friedrich, 498
 Nikephoros I, 440
 Nile, 421
 Nilo-Sahel, 142–143, 144, 145–153, 155, 156–160
 Nimrod, 321 n103, 455, 502, 504
 Nimrud Wine Lists, 155
 Nineveh
 Assurbanipal's palace at, 227
 as lion's den, 423
 Sennacherib's palace at, 101, 227
 Nineveh Horse Reports, 155–156
 Ninurta, temple of, 310 n60
 Ninurta-kudurri-ušur, King of Suḫu and Mari, 273–274
 Ninus, 449–450, 502
 Nippur, 303, 489
 Noah's Ark
 Mār Awgen and, 318
 resting place of, 318, 323
 Sennacherib and, 6, 315 n80, 319, 381, 383–384
- Nob, 353
 non-royal pretenders, 482 n163
 North Peristyle Court (Karnak), 127
 Northwest Palace (Kalḫu), 182
 Nubian Dynasty *see* Kushite Empire
 Nubian Nile, 142–143, 144
 Nubian prototypes, Kushite foreign policies and, 137, 140, 141, 158
 Nubiology, Kushite Empire and, 140–141, 158
 numbers, 41–42, 67, 460–461
 Nuri cemetery, 146
- Odyssey* (Homer), 370
 Old Kingdom, influences on Kushite Empire, 153–154
 “old man tale,” 379–381, 445
 Olympiodore of Alexandria, 426
One Thousand and One Nights (*Alf laylah wa-laylah*), 300
 Onuris (deity), 126
 Orientalism, 472
 Origen, 393
 outposts/garrisons, 257–258
- Paḏi, King of Ekron, 20, 64, 66, 68, 99, 238, 240, 241, 288, 443, 457

- see also* Ekron, Kingdom of
 paganism, 35–37, 314, 316, 323, 384, 440,
 451–452, 453, 472
 palace-fort, at Lachish, 77–78
 Papyrus Anastasi I, 126
 Papyrus Rylands IX, 128
Paradise Lost (Milton), 439
 paranoid personality disorder, 221–222
 Passover, 44 n100, 363–364, 367
 pastoralism, 147, 157
 patrollers (*dajjālu*), 251–252, 279
 patronymics, 129
 payments *see* tributes/payments
 peace, as divine reward, 32
 Pedubast Cycle (Inaros Cycle), 128
 Pemu (son of Inaros I), 447
 Pemu of Heliopolis, 129
 Persian Empire, 296
Peshitta, 318, 383
Pesiqta Rabbati, 373
 Phalaros of Agrigente, 425
 Pharaoh (biblical), 395, 402–403, 405, 412,
 418, 468, 483
 Philistines, 20, 22, 31
 Phoenician states/Phoenicians, 22, 60, 61
 Pi(ankh)y, Nubian Pharaoh, 112–113, 115,
 132, 135
 Polyhistor, 449
 population, of Lachish, 84
 postponement, of verdict, 354
 post-traumatic stress syndrome, 203–204
 pottery *see* storage jars
 prayers
 of Eleazar, 336
 Hallel, 363–364
 of Hezekiah, 334–335, 338, 356,
 363–365
 pretenders, 482
 Procopius of Gaza, 426–428
 prolepsis
 in Sennacherib's Annals, 66
 see also chronology
 prophecies
 of David, 358, 397, 401
 of Isaiah, 374–375, 427
 relations between apocalypticism and,
 332–333
 provincial system, 260
 Psalms, book of, 44, 358
 psychoanalysis, 164–165, 167
 psychohistory
 criticism of, 166
 Egyptology and, 166
 Near East and, 166–168
 Sennacherib and, 169–173
 theoretical foundations of, 164–165
 psychological warfare, 278
 Ptolemy IV, 330, 336
 Puduilu, King of Beth-Ammon *see*
 Budū-ilu, King of Bit-Amman (Ammon)
 Pul *see* Tiglath-pileser III, King of Assyria
 punishments
 of Batis, 359 n29
 by the gods, 202
 of Šebnah, 359, 378
 of Sennacherib, 46
 by Sennacherib
 of Babylonians, 70, 213
 of Ekronites, 56, 64, 68, 240
 exemplary, 278
 in inscriptions, 206 n195
 of Judahites, 68, 86, 87, 102,
 247–248
 of Kulummeans, 233
 of Šidqa, 56, 62–63, 238
 war as divine, 32, 33, 35
 Pythagoras, 472

 Qardagh, Mār, 319–322, 450, 451, 471
 Qardu *see* Urartu, Kingdom of
qēpu (believable, entrusted), 268, 275, 281,
 287
Quaestiones in Octateuchum (Theodoret of
 Cyr), 402–404
 Quardū/Jabal Jūdī, 315 n80, 318–319, 323
 Qumran Scrolls, 309, 331
 Qur'an, 455

 rabbinic traditions *see* Midrashic texts
 Rabsaris, 22, 25, 47, 332, 469–470
 Rabshakeh (Rab-shakeh/Rab-Šaqê), 27–28,
 469–470
 blasphemy of, 351, 353, 354–355, 408,
 410
 Doeg and, 410
 on Kushite foreign policy, 134–135
 mentioned by
 Cyril of Alexandria, 422
 Diodore of Tarsus, 397
 Gregory of Nazianze, 394
 Herodotus, 332
 Josephus, 341
 Theodoret of Cyr, 408, 410, 411
 sent to Jerusalem, 22, 47
 speech/negotiations of, 26 n57, 31,
 35–36, 37–38, 39–40, 69–71, 94, 95,
 208, 376, 397, 422
 in story "B," 25

- trust in God of, 355
as *ummānu*, 468–469
- raiding, 147, 150
- Ra'imā (mother of Sennacherib)
life span of, 182
mother role of, 195
origins of, 180–181
sources for
Assur stela, 179, 214
on debt-note, 182
wife of Sargon II, 179–182, 200
- Raiwanu, 265
- Ramiel (angel), 368–369, 447
- Rashi (Shlomo Yitzchaki), 41 n94
- Rashi/Arashi, 307
- Rāši/Arāši, 307
- Rassam, Nimroud, 53 n13
- Rassam Cylinder
annal inscriptions on, 53–54
chronology on, 63
dating of, 53 n13
and foreign conscripts, 60
fullest account of Third Campaign, II, 72
ideological limitations of, 72
practical limitations of, 72
and reinstatement of Paḏi, 66
Taharqa's campaign on, III
- Rav Papa, 354
- reception histories
changes in, 491–492
social/cultural memory and, 435, 494
of Third Campaign, 325–346
- reconnaissance, 273
- refugees *see* deportations/deportees/
captives
- Rehoboam, King of Judah, 19, 19 n35, 32
- reliefs
Elamite reliefs of Aššurbanipal, 441
from Great Temple of Amun, 113, 114
portrayals of Sennacherib on, 88, 169, 171, 173, 463–464
see also Lachish reliefs
- religious personnel in, 263
- remembering
cultural memory and, 494–495
see also forgetting; memory
- replacement, of traditions, 485–494
- resettlement, of deportees, 461–462, 478–479
- Reshana (Theodosiopolis), 418
- residences, of Sennacherib, 195, 201, 226–228
- resistance literature, 436, 465, 491
- re-telling, 499, 504
- “Revolt of Babylon,” 297
- revolts/rebellions
against Assyria
of Babylonia, 209–210
of Ekronites, 239–240, 241
of Hezekiah, 20–23, 66, 69–71
of wider alliance, 72, 75, 458
- Rezin, King of Aram, 69, 245, 247
- rhmn* (merciful), 305
- Rib-Hadda of Byblos, 155
- The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt* (Wilkinson), 133
- Romanian language, 439
- Romans
intelligence services of, 256, 272, 274
siege of Jerusalem by, 95, 390 n3, 427
- royal palaces, 92–93, 101
- royal villains, 491
- royals-in-exile, 482
- Rukibti/Rukubti, King of Ashkelon, 62, 238
- Rusa II, King of Urarto, 228
- Russian language, 439
- Russia/Soviet Union, 268
- ša lišānim* (tongues), 253–254
- ša qurbāti* (bodyguards), 267–268, 275
- sack
of Memphis, 110, 127
of Thebes, 111
- sackcloths, 390, 422
- Sahel, 143, 155, 156–160
- Šalmaneser III, King of Assyria, 65, 226
- Šalmaneser IV, King of Assyria, 174 n35
- Šalmaneser V, King of Assyria
in Babylonian King List A, 180
deportations by, 478
family background of, 176–177
heir apparent, 194
mentioned by
Cyril of Alexandria, 423
Theodore of Mopsuestia, 401
Theodoret of Cyr, 412
Theophilus of Antioch, 392
portrayals of, 309, 328
reception history of, 492
Samaria and, 108, 389, 443
Tyre and, 60
wives of, 183, 184–186
- Samaria/Samaritans
Assyrian colonist at, 462
capture/fall of, 21 n37, 389 n1, 401
intelligence and, 287
Šalmaneser V and, 108, 389, 443

- Sennacherib and, 421–422, 423–424, 426–427
see also Hoshea (son of Elah)
- Sambatyon (river), 378–379
- Sammurāmat, 214
- Šamši-Adad V, King of Assyria, 460
- Šamši-ilu, 174 n35
- Samson, 380
- Sanam (Long Inscription), 122–123
- Sanasar, 452–453, 471
- Sandstone Stela, 146
- “sandy ones” (*Hryw-Sa*), 115
- Sá-pa-ta-ku-u’ (Shebitqo), 109
- Šapur, 471–472
- šar tamhari, 488
- Sārā, 315–317
- Sārā (daughter of Sennacherib), 451
- Šarezer, 480
- Sargon Birth Legend*, 488
- Sargon II, King of Assyria
 Babylonian policies of, 201, 209, 227
 capture of Samaria by, 389 n1
 construction/engineering works by, 227
 on contact with Kush, 108–109, 154–155
 correspondence of, 198–200, 226, 483
 death of/loss of body of, 20, 201–202, 229, 232, 458, 481
 deportations by, 460, 478
 on enemy spies, 273
 epics about, 488
 family of
 mother, 183, 185
 Šalmaneser V and, 176–177
 Sennacherib (son), 175, 198–201, 205, 211–212, 221, 225–226
 wives
 Atalyā, 183, 185, 200, 207
 Ra’imā, 179–182, 200
- Iamani affair and, 109, 134
- intelligence used by, 257–258, 259–260, 263, 269, 279, 285, 287, 289
- internal opposition to, 197
- mentioning of Shebitqo, 116
- military campaigns of
 to Der, 65
 against Gurdī, 201–202, 228–229
 against Urarṭo, 228, 257–258, 259–260, 263
- and Tyre, 60
- Sargonids
 and Assyrian kingship, 435, 485–486
 dynastic instability of, 11, 481
- Sargūgā, 318–319
- šarratu, 178 n
- Šarru-lu-dari, King of Ashkelon, 62, 238
- Šar-ušur, 471
- Sasun, noble men of, 452–453, 476
- Satan, 425
- Saul, King of Israel, 412
- scouts, 256–257
- Scythians, 428
- seals
 of Assyrian queens, 192, 214 n229
 on storage jars, 11, 93, 96, 97, 98
- Šebnah or Shebna
 betrayal of Hezekiah by, 357
 mentioned by/in
Chronicon Paschale, 429
 Eusebius of Caesarea, 393–394
 Procopius of Gaza, 427
- negotiations by, 341, 356
- punishment of, 359, 378
- two different persons, 358–359
 as *ummānu*, 468
- Second Apocalypse of Baruch*, 332–334
- Second Temple Judaism, apocalypticism and, 332–334
- Seder Olam Rabbah*, 357, 359
- The Seed of Kingship*, 488–489
- Semiramis, 214, 450
- Sennacherib, King of Assyria
 accession of, 458
 “Arab,” 453
 Aramaic traditions and, 323
 Armenians as descendants of, 314–315
 arrogance of, 366–367, 386, 405, 408, 409–410, 412, 460
 assassination of
 in Babylonian Chronicles, 311
 in Biblical sources, 442
 in Chronicles, 45–46, 47
 in Esarhaddon letters, 303, 312
 on Esarhaddon’s Prism A, 45 n105, 312
 on Esarhaddon’s Prism B, 311
 flight of assassins to Ararat, 41, 45, 47, 310, 312, 318–319, 382, 383–384, 450, 480, 481
 involvement of son(s) in, 47, 310–312, 318, 381–382, 415
 in Isaiah, 45
 in Kings, 25–26, 45, 219, 312
 in Mār Awgen story, 318, 381
 in Sennacherib’s Annals, 311–313
 in Talmud, 381–382
 in *Tobit*, 310–311, 382
- as “bad guy,” 437, 446
- blasphemy by, 329, 353, 382, 404, 407, 408, 410, 424

- childhood/youth of, 194–196
 compared to/parallels with/as
 Absalom, 366
 conqueror of the world, 351–352
 Duke Frederick II, of Swabia, 440
 Julian the Apostate, 394
 Khan Krum, 440
 Mehmed II, 440
 Ninus, 449–450
 pre-Islamic hero, 454, 456
 royal villain, 491
 Satan, 425
 Valens, 440, 452
- construction/engineering works by
 hydraulic systems, 305
 in inscriptions, 217
 in Khorsabad, 198–199
 Nergal temple (Tarbiṣu), 202
 in Nineveh, 205, 225
- correspondence of, 169–170, 173, 198–200, 227, 482
- as crown prince, 197–201, 226–227, 276, 283–285
- cruelty of, 375–376, 386
- damnatio memoria* against, 231 n27
- deportations by *see* deportations/
 deportees/captives
- descendants of, 450, 452, 471, 480
- education/training of, 196, 224
- family of
 Atalyā, as mother of, 183, 207
 family tree, 172, 174
 parallel's with family of Aššur, 215–216
 Ra'imā (mother), 179–181, 195
 Sargon II (father)
 ambivalent attitude towards, 211–212
 emulation of, 205, 221
 expunging memory of, 175, 202–203, 213, 221, 248
 relationship between, 199–201, 221, 225–226
- siblings, 175, 177, 195, 199
- son-in-laws, 194
- sons
 conversion to Christianity of, 383, 384, 450
 conversion to Judaism, 384
 involvement in assassination, 47, 310–312, 318, 381–382, 415
 number of, 193–194, 312
 prominence of, 218
 relationship between, 218–219
 see also under names of specific sons
- wives
 Naqī'a, 179, 191–192, 201, 214, 215
 prominence of, 213–214, 218, 221
 stealing of, 192
 Tašmētu-šarrat, 179, 189, 190–191, 201
- foreign policies of
 Babylonian, 209–210, 221
 continuing Sargon's, 232, 248
 imperial, 71
 Judean, 226
 see also military campaigns of
 versus God, 37–38, 383
 Gog and, 372, 373, 405–406, 421
- Hezekiah and
 in Chronicles, 22–23, 33–35
 leniency towards, 207–208, 221, 247–248
 loosing territory to, 68, 99, 247–248
 as part of apocalyptic vision, 332–334
 payments to Sennacherib, 20, 50, 57, 69–70, 72, 247–248, 355, 403
 rebellion of, against, 20–23, 66, 69–71
 see also Third Campaign
- intelligence used by, 276, 283–290
- interest of early Christian commentators in, 430
- keeping his own name, 204, 486
- kingship of, 202–206
 radical innovation of, 486–487
- languages spoken by, 195
- Luz and, 352, 445–446, 475
- military campaigns of
 blockade-techniques of, 246
 against Chaldean tribal confederations, 224, 235
 against Egypt, 442, 448
 against Gurdī, 232–233
 against Iasubigalleans, 235
 against A/išpa-bara, 235
 against Kassites, 235
 against Luli, 58–61
 against Merobach-Baladan/Babylon, 70, 205, 209–210, 224, 233, 234–235, 469
 second campaign to the west, 23 n44, 73–74
 siege-techniques of, 80–87, 244–245

- strategies used in, 244, 246–247, 247–248
 against Tarsus, 442, 449, 472
 against Ukku, 198
see also Jerusalem, Assyrian siege of; Lachish, siege of; Third Campaign
 mix up of all nations by, 379
 name of
 spelling of, 391
 talismanic power of, 502
 Nebuchadnezzar and, 454–455
 Noah's ark and, 6, 315 n80, 319, 381, 383–384
 old man tale and, 379–381, 445
 Padi and, 457
 psychohistorical evaluation of
 angriness of, 209–210
 and post-traumatic stress syndrome, 203–204
 self-confidence of, 204
 sources used for, 169–173
 Tukulti-Ninurta I as role model for, 211, 219
 willingness to implement changes, 217–218
 realism of, 197
 religious activities of
 conversion to Christianity of, 315, 323
 paganism of, 314, 315, 316, 323, 384, 440, 451–452, 453
 relationship with Sin, 181
 sacrifice of his sons, 382
 as Zoroastrian, 314, 316, 323
 religious reforms of, 213, 215, 217, 231, 486
 residences of, 195, 201, 226–228
 see also Southwest Palace (Nineveh)
 return to Assyria, 44
 royal archive, move of, 227 n12, 285–286
 Samaria and, 421–422, 423–424, 426–427
 as scholarly patron, 305–306
 “Sin of Sargon” and, 230–231
 succession of, 193, 219–220
 Taharqa and, 25, 34, 64–65, 109
 texts of his reign, 52–53
 vassals *see* vassals (Assyrian)
 Sennacherib Ioannes Artsruni, King of Vaspurakan, 452
 Sennacherib's Annals
 authorship of, 170
 chronology in, 63, 72
 credibility of, 72–73, 237 n47
 exaggerations in, 65
 First Campaign in, 70, 205
 formulaic character of, 171
 literary code of, 52, 72
 propagandistic nature of, 72, 237 n47
 recensions of, 53–54, 63
 Sennacherib in
 assassination of, 311–313
 payments of Hezekiah to, 20, 57, 69–70, 72, 247–248
 personality of, 170–171
 Third Campaign in
 analysis of, 55
 conquering of cities in, 65–66, 67
 consequences of, 47–48
 deportations, 60, 67–68, 460–462
 against Egypt, 64–66
 Ekronites and, 64, 239
 Hezekiah and, 57, 66, 69–71, 247–248
 Luli and, 58–59
 naming of cities in, 63, 67
 overlap with story “A,” 24
 prolepsis in, 66
 Şidqa and, 62–63
 siege of Jerusalem in, 38–39, 69, 207–208
 vassals during
 faithful, 56, 61–62, 237, 238–239
 unfaithful, 55–56, 57–61, 62–63, 69–72, 238
 Serbian language, 439
 Şeru'a-eřirat, 297
 Sethos, 331, 472
 settlement patterns, changes in, 99–100
 Shabaka/Shabatka, Nubian Pharaoh, 65, 115–116, 132
 Shalmaneser III, *see* Šalmaneser III
 Shalmaneser IV, *see* Šalmaneser IV
 Shalmaneser V *see* Šalmaneser V
 Shamash-shumu-ukin, 281, 284, 297
 Shamash-zeru-iqisha, 265
 Shapur II, 317, 320–321
 Sharezer, 47, 310, 312, 318, 481
 Sharidu, 265
 Sharru-emuranni, 267
 Shebitqo/Shebitku, Nubian Pharaoh and Assyria, 116–117
 expansionist aspirations of, 132
 Iamani affair and, 109, 134, 136
 Shebna *see* Šebnah (Shebna)
 Sheikh Faql inscriptions, 297, 298
 Shemaiah, 347, 384
 Shephelah (of Judah), 31, 68, 96, 99–100
 Sheru'a (deity), 215–216

- Sheshemnefertum, 471
 Shiloah/Siloam Inscription, 93–94, 444, 459
 Shiloah/Siloam tunnel project, 17–18, 93–94, 444, 459
 Shishak, Pharaoh, 32
 Shubria, 312, 481
 Shulmu-Bel, 285
 Shumu-iddina, 281
 Şidqa, King of Ashkelon, 20, 62–63, 238, 241, 477
 sieges
 ramps, 80–81, 82–83, 82, 84–85, 86–87
 techniques, 80–87, 244–245
 of Theodosiopolis (Reshana), 418
 of Tyre, 446
 see also under Jerusalem; Lachish, siege of
Sifre Deuteronomy, 357
 Şilla, 312–313
 Şilli-bel, King of Gaza, 68–69, 99
 Siloam inscription *see* Shiloah/Siloam Inscription
 Siloam tunnel project *see* Shiloah/Siloam tunnel project
 Simeonites, 15, 31
 Simeronites, 20
 Sin (deity), 175, 181
 “Sin of Sargon,” 230–231
 Sin-aḥu-uṣur, 177
 Sinuqi, 471
 Sion, 407
 Sisera (general), 419
 six orders, of heavenly powers, 335
 slaves, 101
 Slavonic language, 439
 slings, 83
 Soleb, 152
 Solomon, King of Israel, 15
 “sometime afterward,” 21
 Song of Triumph, 371
 sorceresses, 471
 Southeast Hill *see* City of David
 Southwest Palace (Nineveh)
 construction of, 101
 Lachish room at, 85, 102
 monumental sphinxes, 190
 see also Lachish reliefs
 special agents, 264–269, 283–284
speculatores, 256
 Starkey, James, 76, 80
 Stela Cheikh Lahib, 122 n70
 stelae
 Assur, 179, 189, 203, 214
 Cheikh Lahib, 122 n70
 Dahshur Road, 118–119
 Great Triumphant (Pi(ankh)y), 112–113, 132, 146
 Kawa III, 119
 Kawa IV, 117–119
 Kawa V, 117–118
 Nastaseñ, 126
 Sandstone Stela, 146
Stelenreihen, 179
 storage jars, 11, 93, 96, 97, 98, 100
 stories
 about Sennacherib
 accuracy of, 501–502
 allegorising in, 430, 439
 Arabic cluster of, 454–456
 Aramaic cluster, 295–323, 446–447
 ummānu in, 467–470
 archipelago of, 433–505
 Assyrian cluster, 441–443, 501
 Christian Western writers and, 439–440
 diffusion of, 12, 439
 dismantling royal traditions and, 485–491
 dramatical quality of, 503–504
 early Christian cluster, 389–431, 474
 Egyptian cluster, 447, 501–502
 ummānu in, 470–471
 exile in, 479–481
 flight in, 379–381, 445, 477–484
 generic diversity of, 438, 463–464, 504
 Greek cluster, 449–450
 Hebrew Bible cluster, 442, 444–446, 478, 482, 501
 languages of, 438–439
 magic in, 475–476
 martyrdom in, 476–477
 in Midrashic literature, 347–387
 miracles in, 473–475
 narrative fidelity in, 359
 painters/illustrators and, 439
 passive role of king in, 469–471
 popularity of, 437, 456
 Second Temple period, 325–345, 474–475
 Syriac cluster, 450–454, 476
 ummānu in, 465–473, 492
 Story (and Proverbs) of Aḥiqar
 Assyrian identity in, 307
 court tale genre and, 304, 307
 diffusion of Sennacherib stories and, 439

- Elephantine text of, 298–299, 301–302, 307–308, 327
- Esarhaddon in, 297, 313–314
- exile in, 480
- Aḥiqar in, 300–301, 313–314, 322
- historicity of, 303–304
- history of, 298–300
- Jewish origin of, 308 n51
- messaging in, 483
- Nabusumiskun/Nabû-šum-iškun in, 300–301, 303
- Nadin/Nadan/Nadab in, 300, 304, 309, 313, 483
- part of text of, 339
- proverb collection in, 301, 304–305
- Sennacherib in, 297–308, 313–314, 322, 323, 327–328, 446–447
- versions/translations of, 299, 327
- see also Aḥiqar
- Strabo, 139, 450 n63
- Stromata* (Clement of Alexandria), 392
- structural amnesia, 495–499
- sublimation, concept of, 210, 497, 499, 502
- surveillance, 278–279
- Symmachus, 410, 411
- Synesius of Cyrene, 425–426
- Syriac Acts of the Persian Martyrs*, 315–316
- Syriac language
- Sennacherib stories in, 450–454, 476
 - Christian accounts, 314–322, 323
 - Chronicles of Zuqnîn*, 315
 - History of Mār Qardagh*, 319–322, 323, 451
 - Mār Awgen story, 317–319, 450
 - Mār Behnām story, 315–317, 323, 451
 - Story of Aḥiqar*, 313–314, 323
 - ummānu* in, 471–472
 - Syriac Transitus Mariae*, 335
 - Šadditu, 191
 - Šušanqu (Sheshonq), 194
- al-Ṭabari, 454–455, 504
- Ṭabūa, 187
- Tacitus, 361, 452 n70
- Taharqa statues (Nineveh), 125–126
- Taharqa/Taharqo/Tirhakah, Nubian Pharaoh
- capture of family of, 127–128
 - cattle-road commemoration, 124, 125, 157
 - in Egyptian corpus, 130
 - expansionist aspirations of, 132, 139
 - loss of tribute from Khor, 113, 127, 128, 131, 148, 157–158
 - mentioned by, Origen, 393
 - military campaigns of
 - against Assyria
 - in Babylonian Chronicle I, 110
 - and graffiti from Lower Nubia, 124–125
 - on Kawa stela, 117
 - in Kings, 25, 34, 64–65, 109
 - Rassam Cylinder, 111
 - during reign of, 120–123
 - military status of, 118–119
 - nautical expeditions, 123
 - “Tale of Two Brothers,” 297
 - Talmud
 - Hezekiah in, 372–374
 - Sennacherib in, 352, 354, 379–382, 445
 - siege of Jerusalem in, 352–354, 359
 - Third Campaign in, 352
 - Tang-I Var inscriptions, 116
 - Targum Chronicles, 43 n100
 - Targum Jonathan*, 353–354
 - Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, 375, 379
 - Targumic Tosefta*, 319
 - Tarsus, 442, 449, 472, 480
 - Tartan (*turtānu*), 22, 25, 47, 332, 469–470
 - Tašmētu-šarrat
 - Akkadian origin of name, 189
 - relationship with Naqī’a, 192
 - seal of, 192
 - sons of, 219
 - sources for, 190, 214
 - wife of Sennacherib, 179, 189, 190–191, 201
 - taxations, 147, 149
 - Taylor Prism, 11, 42, 51 n2, 54, 62, 350
 - Te’elḥunu, 214
 - Teglaphasar see Tiglath-pileser III
 - Tel Lachish see Lachish
 - Tel’elḥunu, 187
 - Tell ed-Duweir see Lachish
 - Tell esh-Shalaf, 66 n59
 - Temple, rebuilding of, 366
 - Temple Mount, 91, 92
 - Ten Lost Tribes, 330, 340, 349 n8, 375–378
 - Testament of Adam*, 335–336, 344
 - Thebes, sack of, 111
 - Theodore of Mopsuestia, 400–402
 - Theodoret of Cyr, 402–418, 428, 440
 - Theodosiopolis (Reshana), 418
 - Theodotion, 410
 - theology of history, 332–333, 336
 - Theophilus of Antioch, 392

Third Campaign (701 B.C.E.), 460

sources

Antiquities, 331–332

Assyrian annals, 47–48

Chronicles

consequences of, 48–49

dating of, 326

historical credibility of, 13–14

as holy war, 36–37

neglect of Chronicler's account of, 13

no background information on, 21–23

Rabshakeh's speech in, 35–36

reshaping of, 14, 27–31, 33–35, 41–50

siege of Jerusalem in, 39–43, 43–44, 49–50

sources used for, 16, 26

verses dedicated to, 15–16

war preparations by Hezekiah, 459–460

Chronicon Paschale, 429

classical writing, 12

Cyril of Alexandria, 423–424

Diodore of Tarsus, 397

Histories, 331

integration of, 51–52

Isodore of Pelusium, 426

Kings/Isaiah

versus Chronicles, 14, 27–31, 33–35, 41–50

consequences of, 47–48

dating of, 326

against Egypt, 64–65

Egyptian/Babylonian assistance to Judah, 459

siege of Jerusalem in, 40–41, 49–50, 352–359, 365–366, 368

story "A," 23–24, 30–31, 50

story "B," 24–27, 30–31, 50

dating of, 25

duplications in, 26

two different campaigns, 23 n44, 74

used as source for, Chronicles, 16, 27

verses dedicated to, 14–15

Maccabees, 337

prophetical writing, 12

Sennacherib's Annals

analysis of, 55

consequences of, 47–48

Egypt and, 56, 64–66, 109, 239

Ekronites and, 64, 239

Hezekiah and, 57, 66, 69–71

Luli and, 58–59

naming of cities in, 63, 67

overlap with story "A," 24

prolepsis in, 66

Şidqa in, 62–63

sources used for, 16, 26

two phases in, 55

vassals during

faithful, 56, 61–62, 237, 238–239

unfaithful, 55–56, 57–61, 62–63, 69–72, 238

Talmud, 352

Theodore of Cyr, 405, 408, 418

themes

apocalyptic interpretation of, 6, 325, 332–334, 338, 352, 368–369, 385–386

consequences of, 47–49, 99–101

destruction during, 246–247

Egypt and, 56, 64–66, 109, 239, 331

Ekronites and, 239

flight and exile in, 477

general scheme of, 102

God's absence during, 377–378

Hezekiah in

against Ahaz, 29–30

extended life of, 46–47, 49

payments to Sennacherib, 50

portrait of, 28–30, 31–32, 49

rebellion against Assyria of, 21–23

religious activities of, 15–16, 28–30

religious activities of, 34

against Sennacherib, 33–35

Simeronites and, 20

sources used for, 16, 17, 18

speech of, 18

trust in God of, 18–19

verses dedicated to, 15–16

war preparations by, 16–17, 18–19, 93, 459–460

historical setting of, 20–23

historiographic relevance of, 6, 325, 338, 433

importance for Sennacherib of, 207–208, 460

intelligence during, 287–290

Kushite intervention in, 25, 34,

64–65, 109–111, 117–118

Luli and, 58–59

reception history of, 325–346

- Sennacherib in
 army of, 352
 assassination of, 45–46, 47
 flight from Judah, 379–381, 445
 against Hezekiah, 33–35
 payments of Hezekiah to, 50
 portrayal of, 38
 siege of Jerusalem in, 49–50
 theater of operations of, 457
 two different campaigns
 A.K. Grayson on, 73
 in Kings, 23 n44, 74
 vassals during
 faithful, 56, 61–62, 68, 99, 236, 237,
 238–239, 247–248
 unfaithful, 55–56, 57–61, 62–63,
 64, 69–72, 238, 247–248, 457
 as world event, 1, 164, 325, 436,
 500–505
see also Hezekiah, King of Judah;
 Jerusalem, Assyrian siege of; Lachish,
 siege of; Rabshakeh; Sennacherib;
 Ten Lost Tribes
- Thomas à Becket, 440
 throne names, 204, 486
 Thucydides, 361
 Tiglath-pileser III, King of Assyria
 Ahaz and, 30
 Assyrian expansion under, 196, 209
 deportations by, 460, 478
 family background of, 176
 intelligence used by, 287
 in Kings, 443
 mentioned by
 Cyril of Alexandria, 423
 Theodore of Mopsuestia, 401
 Theophilus of Antioch, 392
 military campaigns of
 against Damascus, 69, 245, 247
 against Philistia, 108
 reception history of, 492
 Tyre and, 58 n25
 wives of
 Banītu, 184–186, 188
 Yabá, 182, 184–186, 188, 203,
 207
 Tiglath-pileser III's Annals, 245
 Timnah (Tel Batash), 13, 65, 100
 Tirhakah, King of Kush (Ethiopia) *see*
 Taharqa/Taharqo/Tirhakah, Nubian
 Pharaoh
- Tobias (son of Tobit), 468, 475–476, 477,
 480
- Tobit (person), 328–329, 468
 Tobit, book of
 and Book of Daniel, 328
 and Book of Esther, 328
 dating of, 328
 exile in, 480
 Aḥiqar in, 309–310, 329–330
 magic in, 475–476
 miracles in, 474–475
 part of text of, 339
 Sennacherib in, 309–311, 323, 328–330,
 382, 446–447
 Shalmaneser V in, 309, 328
 story of Aḥiqar in, 299
 Tobit (person) in, 328–329, 468
 versions/translations of, 308–309
 tongues (*ša lišānim*), 253–254
 toponym lists, 122
 toponyms
 African, 126
 Asiatic, 121, 126
 with element Dūr, 246 n83
 endings of, 319 n 91
 on Great Triumphant Stela, 112
 mentioned at Kawa, 120
 in Sennacherib's annals, 63
 on Taharqa statues, 125–126
- Torah study, 374
 torture, 258–259
 Toseftot Targums, 447
 totalitarian regimes, intelligence services
 in, 251
 “Totem and Taboo” (Freud), 202 n176
 “to the end” (“εις τὸ τέλος”), 410
 T’ovma Artsruni, 453
 towns *see* cities/towns
 trade
 Kushite Empire and, 106–107, 130–131,
 148, 158, 159
 Sahelian, 148–149
 traditions, replacement of, 485–494
 transformation, concept of, 497, 502
 treaties, 263, 286
 tribute/booty lists, 67 n71, 70, 74
 tributes/payments
 to Sargon II
 of Ashdod, 227
 of faithful vassals, 236
 to Sennacherib
 of Ashdod, 237
 of Ashkelon, 238
 of Hezekiah, 20, 50, 57, 69–70, 72,
 247–248, 355, 403

- Tuba'lu, King of Sidon, 56, 61, 237, 240
 Tukultī-Ninurta Epic, 211, 219, 489
 Turkish language, 439
turtānu (Tartan), 22, 25, 47, 332, 469–470
 Twenty Fifth Dynasty (Egypt) *see* Kushite Empire
 “22 kings of Khatte,” 133
 Tyre, 58 n25, 59–61, 69, 446
T3-q3.t, 146
- Ukku, Kingdom of, 198
see also Arije, King of Ukku
 Ulūlāyu, King of Syria *see* Šalmaneser V
ummānu, 465–473
 autonomous elite, 472–473
 as ghostwriters, 170
 in Sennacherib stories
 in Aramaic cluster
 Eliakim, 468
 Aḥiqar, 467–468, 471
 Isaiah, 468
 Rabsaris, 469–470
 Rabshakeh, 468–469
 Šebnah, 468
 Tobit, 468
 authority of, 492
 in Egyptian cluster, 470–471
 in Greek cluster, 472–473
 placement at centre of narrative, 467
 in Syriac cluster, 471–472
- Urad-Gula, 304 n37
 Urartū, Kingdom of
 destination of Sennacherib's assassins,
 41, 45, 47, 310, 312, 318–319, 382,
 383–384, 450, 480, 481
 intelligence on, 228, 257–258, 259–260,
 261, 263, 284–285
urbi, 69 n82, 241–243, 289
 Urda-Mullissu, 45, 193, 219
 Uruk
 and *Aḥiqar* tradition, 302, 306
 intelligence on, 265
 Uru-milki, King of Gubla (Byblos), 56, 237,
 240
 Urzana, King of Mušasir, 263, 284, 285
 Ushu (coastal area), 62
 Uziel, Joe, 100
- Valens, 440, 452
 Vararanes, 440
 vassals (Assyrian)
 chart of, 240–241
- faithful
 individual or collective submission
 of, 62
 Kingdom of Judah, 236
 lists of, 56, 61–62
 territory given to, 68, 99, 247–248
 tributes paid by
 to Sargon II, 236
 to Sennacherib, 57, 237
- unfaithful
 Hezekiah, 57, 69–72, 247–248
 Kingdom of Ekron, 56, 64
 Luli, 58–59
 punishment of, 55–56
 Šidqa, 56, 62–63
 used in intelligence, 263–264, 275,
 288
- verdict, postponement of, 354
 viceroys (Egyptian), 152
 villages/hamlets, 246
 “Vision of the Twelve Waters,” 332
 Vlad III (Dracula), 491
- war, as divine punishment, 32, 33, 35
War with Elam, 489
 wartime
 preparations
 food storage as, 11, 17 n26
 by Hezekiah, 11, 16–17, 18–19, 93, 94,
 98, 356–357, 459–460
- water system
 at Jerusalem, 17–18, 91–92
 at Lachish, 78
- wet-nurses, 195
- women
 Assyrian royal house and
 of Arabian royal descent, 187
 harem quarters, 178
 pictorial representations of, 214
 prominence of, 213–214
 titles of, 178
 used in intelligence, 265
- world event, Third Campaign as, 1, 164,
 325, 436, 500–505
- Yabâ (MUNUSYa-ba-a)
 Arabic origin of name, 187
 burial of, 182, 203, 207
 Hebrew origin of name, 184, 186, 188,
 207–208
 identical to Banītu, 184–186, 188
 mother of Sargon II, 183

- relation to Atalyā, 183, 186, 188
time of arrival in Asyria, 188
wife of Tiglath-pileser III, 182, 184, 207
Yabusemakh-miskin, 313
 see also Nabû-šum-iškun/Nabusumiskun
Yamani of Ashdod, 65
al-Ya'qūbī, 454
Zakkai, Mār, 316, 317
Zechariah (prophet), 335
Zechariah, book of, 366, 369
Zerubbabel, 366, 407
Zimri-lim, King of Mari, 173
Zobah, 287
Zoroastrianism, 314, 316, 320, 323

INDEX OF KEY TERMS

<i>abātu</i>	259	<i>'Išḫupri</i>	110
<i>abullu</i>	246	<i>iššuru</i>	245–46
<i>adab</i>	454	<i>išwr.w</i>	129
<i>adê</i>	239		
<i>akītu</i>	321	<i>jahilīyya</i>	456
<i>ālāni šehrūti</i>	235		
<i>Arda-mulīšši</i>	45	<i>Kaši</i>	59
<i>arnu</i>	240	<i>katāru</i>	239
<i>'ašabiyya</i>	456	<i>kilūbu</i>	69n.77
<i>ʔslštrny</i>	129	<i>kispu</i>	311
<i>šš</i>		ΚCY	130
<i>šš mʔc n Ḫnty-š</i>	119	<i>kūsaya,</i>	155, 156
<i>šš mʔc n tp ḫty.w</i>	119		
<i>šš mʔc qd.t nbd m ḫm.t Sḷ.t</i>	119	<i>le-marbeh</i>	372
<i>ʔS<R>HDN</i>	130	<i>liblib dārū</i>	486
<i>šwnw</i>	119	<i>limmu</i>	470
		<i>lišānu</i>	251, 253–54
<i>bātiqū</i>	251, 252–53	<i>lmlk (למלך)</i>	11, 444
<i>birāti</i>	245, 246	<i>loimós</i>	445
<i>dajjālu</i>	251–52	<i>madattu</i>	443
<i>damnatio memoriae</i>	135, 491, 495	<i>maḫḫu</i>	468
<i>dgʔr (dgʔr-ir)</i>	126	<i>mamītu</i>	239
<i>dgrw</i>	126	<i>maqātu</i>	259
		<i>mār šarri (rabū)</i>	226, 283
<i>ēnāti ša šarri</i>	251, 254–55	<i>mār šipri</i>	266–67
		<i>marzbān</i>	320
<i>Fnḫ.w</i>	122	<i>maššartu našāru</i>	257
		<i>middot</i>	350
<i>gensā</i>	452	<i>Mishneh</i>	17
<i>gerivah</i>	381	MLK	130
		<i>mʔc.t (ma'at)</i>	
<i>ḫalāqu</i>	259	<i>Mnty.w (Mentyu)</i>	120, 129, 159
<i>ḫarādu</i>	257	<i>Mr</i>	119
<i>Ḫatti</i>	11	<i>mšc</i>	117
<i>ḫayyot</i>	370	<i>mūdū</i>	256
<i>ḫʔ bīn</i>	128	<i>mukinnu</i>	252–53
<i>ḫwn-nfr</i>	117n.45	<i>muṭīr ṭēme</i>	256
<i>ḫm.t</i>	106, 119, 157		
<i>ḫry.w-šc (ḫry.w-šcy)</i>	115, 120, 129, 158, 159	<i>nadān mātišun</i>	54n.16
		<i>nadān šattišun</i>	54n.16
<i>ḫuḫāru</i>	69n.77	<i>nakriš</i>	239
<i>ḫstrpn</i>	129	<i>naḫushtan</i>	357
		<i>Nḫsy (Nehesy)</i>	127
<i>idnw</i>	152	<i>Ninurta</i>	45
<i>ina šukbus aramme</i>	54n.16		
<i>inʔq</i>	118	<i>Omer</i>	365

<i>paṭaḥšā</i>	320	ἀλληγορικῶς	425
<i>qēpu</i>	268–69, 281, 287	ἀνθρωπαρέσκων	411
<i>qerēbu</i>	240	ἀνοσίῳς	424
<i>rab šaqê</i>	134, 469–70	δεινά	427
“ <i>rab saris</i> ”	469	δυσσεβεῖς	403
<i>rabbûte</i>	470	εἰς τὸ τέλος	396
<i>r-b-3-r (r-b3-r)</i> . See also <i>t3-r-b-r</i>	127n.91	ἐξεπαίδευσε	413
<i>Rdnw</i>	118, 119	εὐτύχησα	402
<i>remānû</i>	305	ιδίωμα γὰρ ἔστιν γραφικόν	397
<i>rḥmn</i>	305	μαλεθ	410
<i>rmṭ.w ʿ-mḥ.ti</i>	120	περιβάλλω	390
<i>Rṯhw-Qb.t</i>	121	περιζώννυμι	391
		Θαρθαν	429
		᾿θεῖα δίχα	427
		τὸν ταμίαν	427
<i>ša aranšunu la ibšû</i>	54n.16	אחרי הדברים והאמת האלה	21–22
<i>ša qurbûti</i>	267	אחר זה	22, 23
<i>šarru rabu ... šar mât Aššur</i>	37	אל תיראו ואל תחתו	18 n. 30
<i>šatammû</i>	281	בא במצור	39
<i>ša uznî</i>	251, 254–55	ההמון	30 n. 66
<i>šēpšu mîtru</i>	67n.68	החמה [ה]אחרת	17
<i>Sîn-aḥḥê-eriba</i>	11	המלך הגדול מלך אשור	37–38
<i>sn</i>	135n.134	ומיציאו/י מעיו	45 n. 106
<i>Sngr</i>	121	וינהלם מסביב	48
<i>Sty.w</i>	129, 158, 159	ויהי אחר הדברים האלה	21–22
<i>St.t</i>	120,	וישב בבשת	44 n. 101
<i>šnw nb pḥr wr</i>	122	וישמע אל-	289
		ויכחד	42
<i>t3-r-b-r (t3-ir-b-r)</i>	126	חסדיו	28
<i>T3-q3.t</i>		חיל כבד	40
<i>Ṭḥn.w</i>	122	חזקו ואמצו	18 n. 30
<i>THRQ</i>	130	יהודית	39
<i>turtānu</i>	469–70	ישבו יבשו רגע	44 n.101
<i>Ṭmḥ.w</i>	119	כל גבורתו	28
<i>ṭs</i>	117n.46	מנחה	48
		מגדנות	48
<i>ummah</i>	456	ציר	98
<i>ummānu</i>	464, 470	עמנואל	18 n. 31
<i>urbi</i>	69n.82,	קבץ	17
	241–42, 289	קוזמוקרטור	352
<i>Urartu</i>	45		
<i>Urdu-Mullissu</i>	45		
<i>Wšḥ-rn=f</i>	129, 470n.136		
<i>zūk šēpē</i>	244		

INDEX OF SOURCES AND COMPOSITIONS

ANCIENT NEAR EAST SOURCES

- Aḥiqar, col I:1–10, 325, 327–328, 339
 Annals of Sennacherib, 24, 245
 Bull colossus No.2, 58, 60
 Bull colossus No.4, 68
 Chicago Prism, 42, 51 n2, 54, 62, 237, 350
 Cylinder C, 58–59
 OIP 2 31–32, 288, 289
 Rassam Cylinder
 17, 42
 32–35, 56, 58–61
 36–38, 56
 39–41, 56
 42–48, 56
 49–54, 57
 55–58, 57
 59–60, 68
 61–92, 60
 Taylor Prism, 11, 42, 51 n2, 54, 62, 350
 Annals of Tiglath-pileser III, 245
 ARM 26/1 244, 245, 254
 Aššurbanipal Prism A, 289
 Aššurbanipal Prism C, 289
 Assyrian Eponym Chronicle, 485
 Assyrian King List, 485
- Babylonian Chronicle (ABC 1), 107, 110, 123, 441
 Babylonian King List A, 180, 181, 234 n38
 Bavian Inscription, 212
 BM 121206, 216
 BMS 35, K 2757, 303
- The Contest for the Benefice of Amun*, 129
The Contest for the Breastplate of Inaros, 129
- Dahshur Stela of Taharqo, 118–119
Diagnostic Handbook, 203–204
- Epic of Creation*, 213
 Esarhaddon Chronicle (ABC 14), 107, 110 n18
- Gilgamesh Epic, 202, 229, 487–488
 Great Triumphal Stela of Pi(ankh)y, 112–113, 132, 146
- Horemheb Karnak inscriptions (Tenth Pylon), 121
- Kawa Inventories, 120, 131
 Kawa Stela III, 119
 Kawa Stela IV, 117–119
 Kawa Stela V, 117–118
 The King of Battle (*šar tamḥari*), 488
- Marduk Ordeal*, 213
- Nanefersokar and the Babylonians*, 129
Naram-Sin and the Enemy Hordes, 489
Nebuchadnezzar to the Babylonians, 489
 Nimrud Wine Lists, 155
 Nineveh Horse Lists, 155–156
 NL 29, 258
- Papyri
 Amherst 63, 297, 307
 Anastasi I, 126
 P. Berlin
 P 15658, 299 n14
 P 23729, 299 n14
 Rylands IX, 128
 TAD, C1.1, 298
- RINAP 4 33 III, 252
 RINAP I 43, 287
- SAA I
 1–28, 227 n12
 4, 269
 12, 254
 29, 227, 284, 285
 29–31, 284
 29–32, 283
 29–40, 226
 30, 285
 31, 257, 284, 285
 32, 289
 33, 284
 39, 199
 100, 236
 110, 443

- 133, 226
153, 227
SAA II 3, 286
SAA III 33, 231
SAA V
3, 252
32, 260
45, 263
84–104, 262
85, 252
105, 252
147, 263
169, 276
202, 278
277–280, 227 n12
281, 199, 226, 228
SAA VIII 567, 253
SAA X
96, 286
III, 256, 281
SAA XI
17, 199
33, 443
50, 443 n33
57, 443
162, 259
SAA XIII
131, 271
178, 281
SAA XV
4, 171
32, 276
35, 277
90, 263
91, 260
103, 276
125, 277
131, 277
156, 257
186, 253
219, 267, 276
231, 251
246, 254
SAA XVI
42, 280
95, 280
97, 280
124, 253
125, 171
143, 171
148, 254, 257
SAA XVII, 227 n12
34, 255
43, 255, 269
110, 286
155, 277
SAA XVIII
56, 264
83, 267
100, 303, 311
125, 265
148, 254
155, 277
Sandstone Stela of Pi(ankh)y, 146
Sargon Birth Legend, 488
Seed of Kingship, 488–489
Stelenreihen Assur, 179, 189, 203, 214
Taharqo Dashur Stela, 118
Taharqo Karnak inscriptions (Sixth Pylon),
127
Taharqo Sanam inscriptions (Second
Pylon), 122–123
Tang-I Var inscription, 116
TCL 3 300, 273
Tukulti-Ninurta Epic., 211, 219, 489
VAT 4923, 265
War with Elam, 489
YBC 11382, 255

APOCRYPHAL AND PSEUDO-EPIGRAPHICAL SOURCES

- Ascension of Isaiah, 3:2, 325, 337, 345
2 Ezra, 19:6, 391
4 Ezra, 7:40, 325, 334–335, 343–344
2 Baruch
53:7–8, 336
56:5–74:4, 332–333
63, 368
63:1–10, 325
63:1–11, 332–334, 343
63:6–11, 369
Joseph and Aseneth, 8:9, 325, 337
Judith, 4:11, 390
1 Maccabees
2:14, 390
3:47, 390
7:41, 365, 391

- 2 Maccabees, 15:22–24, 492
- 3 Maccabees
 5:46–6:21, 336–337
 6:1–15, 325, 336–337, 344–345
 6:2–9, 492
 6:5, 351
- Sirach, 48:12, 391
- Testament of Adam, 4:6, 325, 335–336,
 344
- Tobit
 1:12–14, 393
 1:15–22, 325, 328–330, 339
 1:16–18, 393
 1:18, 382
 1:21, 310, 382
 1:21–22, 299
 1:24, 382
 4:1–15, 329
 11:18, 299
 14:10, 299, 309
 48:19, 353

BIBLICAL SOURCES

- Genesis
 9:23, 368
 10:8–9, 45 n103
 10:22, 368
 15:4, 45 n106
 15:7, 367
 30:11, 402
 32:1–24, 19 n34
 37–50, 219–220
- Exodus
 12:29, 364, 367
 20:11, 391
 21:15, 377
 23:23, 42
- Numbers, 21:8, 357
- Deuteronomy
 6:16, 32 n70
 12, 34
 22:23–24, 354
 27:26, 412
- Judges
 16:17, 380
 19, 380
- 1 Samuel, 31:1–13, 49
- 2 Samuel
 5:17–25, 49
 7:13, 45 n106
 24:16, 43
- 1 Kings
 13:34, 42
 14:21, 32
- 2 Kings
 8:16–11:16, 186
 13–37, 14
 15:17–18:12, 443
 15:18, 492
 16, 15, 28, 31
 16:2b, 29
 16:3–4, 30
 16:5–16, 29
 16:7, 188
 16:10–16, 30 n64
 16:17–18, 29
 17:3, 328
 17:6, 376
 17:7–23, 377
 17:20–23, 376
 17:24, 462
 18:1–8, 14
 18:2, 46 n110
 18:3, 29, 33
 18:3–8, 24
 18:4, 15, 30 n64, 357, 362, 374
 18:7b, 20
 18:8, 20
 18:9–10, 21 n21, 46 n110
 18:13, 27, 47, 99, 223
 18:13–16, 21, 23, 50, 74
 18:13–19:13, 12
 18:13–19:37, 12, 23, 350, 444
 18:13–37, 14
 18:13a, 21
 18:13b, 22, 39
 18:14, 22, 33
 18:14–16, 27–28
 18:14a, 31
 18:15–16, 33
 18:16, 357

- 18:17, 22, 30 n66, 40, 41, 47, 91, 94, 95,
 354, 366, 492
 18:17–19:8, 208
 18:17–19:9a, 26, 27
 18:17–19:35, 74
 18:17–19:37, 24
 18–19, 15–16
 18:19, 37, 38, 39
 18–19, 94, 326, 328, 336
 18:19–25, 355
 18:20–21, 34
 18:21, 64, 135, 355
 18:22, 34, 34 n78, 355
 18:23, 35
 18:25, 34, 355
 18:26–28, 492
 18:27–28a, 40
 18:28, 38
 18:30, 18, 35, 355
 18:32, 376
 18:32b–35, 35
 18:33–34, 25
 18:33–35, 27
 18:33b–34, 36
 18:37, 356
 19, 319
 19:1–4, 31
 19:1–37, 14
 19:2, 359
 19:4, 35
 19:7, 27, 45, 371
 19:9, 64, 289, 290
 19:9a, 25, 34
 19:9b–35, 26, 27
 19:12–13, 25
 19:14–19, 363
 19:15–19, 371
 19:17, 46
 19:18, 355
 19–20, 14
 19:20, 371
 19:23, 366
 19:32, 39, 49
 19:33–34, 371
 19:34, 47 n111, 49
 19:35, 37, 41, 43, 50, 336, 336–337, 352,
 354, 363, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 474
 19:35–36, 44
 19:35–37, 41
 19:35a, 50 n119
 19:36–37, 27, 310
 19:37, 45, 219, 312, 318–319, 329, 382,
 383, 436
 20, 21 n21
 20:1–11, 243
 20:1–20, 444
 20:6, 12, 243
 20:12–19, 242
 20:13, 243
 20:20, 17, 28, 91, 94
 20:20b, 16
 21, 15, 28
 24b, 34
 25:27–30, 326
 28, 37
 32b, 18
 36–37, 26
 201:12–19, 31
- Isaiah
 7:1–9, 468
 7:1–17, 29
 7:14, 364
 7:20, 381
 8:3, 364
 8:5–8, 468
 9:6, 372–373
 9:8–10, 423
 10:5–6, 404
 10:5–11, 355
 10:13, 375, 379
 10:16, 367, 368
 10:27, 374
 10:32, 353
 10:32–33, 374
 12:5, 371
 13, 37
 14:3–20, 458
 14:9, 492
 14:27, 424
 14:23.24–25, 414
 17:1–14, 468
 17:12–13, 424
 18:1–6, 34
 20:5, 355
 22:9–11, 93
 22:9–11a, 17
 22:10, 93
 22:11b, 18
 22:15–22, 358
 22:15–25, 394
 24:16, 373
 30:1–7, 34
 30:2–3, 355
 31:1, 355
 31:1–3, 34

- 31:3, 355
 33:3, 370
 36, 319
 36:1, 22, 27, 47, 99, 326
 36:1-2, 394
 36:1-37:38, 350
 36:1b, 39
 36:2, 22, 30 n66, 40, 41, 47, 91, 94, 95
 36:2-5, 358
 36:2-37:8, 208
 36:2-37:9a, 27
 36:3, 358
 36:4, 37, 38
 36:5-6, 34
 36:6, 405
 36:7, 34, 34 n78
 36:8, 35, 399
 36:9b, 34
 36:10, 34
 36:11, 479
 36:12, 479
 36:12-13a, 40
 36:13, 38
 36:14-15, 35
 36:15, 18
 36:16-17, 479
 36:18, 424
 36:18-20, 35
 36:18a, 18
 36:18b-19, 36
 36:18b-20, 27
 36:19-20, 422
 36:20, 366, 383
 36:22, 359
 36-37, 12, 16, 26, 94, 336, 395
 37, 412
 37:1, 363
 37:1-2, 390
 37:1-4, 31
 37:2, 359
 37:3, 422
 37:4, 35, 39
 37:7, 27, 45, 46
 37:9a, 25, 34
 37:9b-36, 27
 37:10, 403, 417
 37:10-13, 404
 37:15, 356
 37:15-20, 363
 37:16, 391
 37:17, 326
 37:20, 391
 37:21, 326
 37:24-28, 478
 37:25, 352
 37:29, 424, 427
 37:33, 39, 49
 37:35, 47 n111, 49
 37:36, 37, 41, 43, 50, 391, 424
 37:36-37, 44
 37:36-38, 41
 37:37, 326
 37:37-38, 27, 310
 37-38, 27
 37:38, 45, 219, 329, 365, 436
 38:1-8, 428
 38:9-21, 444
 39:1-2, 394
 39:1-8, 31, 242, 459
 40:22, 408
 40:24, 370
 62:6, 367
 63:9, 43
- Jeremiah
 5:12, 377
 17:5, 424
 17:5-7, 34
 50:17, 426
- Ezekiel, 428
 1:5, 370
 21:22, 370
 29, 405
 31:3, 405
 34:31, 378
 35:10, 405
 38, 421
 38:14-16, 405
 39:11, 406
- Hosea
 1:7, 406
 10:11, 406
 10:14, 375
- Joel
 1:4, 401, 406
 1:6, 378
 2:17, 407
- Amos
 3:12, 407
 4:7, 406
- Jonah
 3:6, 390
 3:8, 390

- Micah
 1:9, 407
 1:13, 407
- Nahum, 1:11, 407
- Habakkuk, 1:7, 382–383
- Zephaniah, 1:10–11, 17
- Haggai, 2:20–23, 407
- Zechariah
 1, 336
 1:7–13, 335–336
 2:9, 369
 4:10, 366
 11:8–9, 42
- Psalms
 11:2, 358
 13:1, 418
 19:8–9, 420
 20:7–8, 371
 20:10, 371
 33:15, 395
 41:4, 396
 75:2, 405
 95:3, 38
 101:8, 368
 103:20, 367
 113–118, 364
 139:16, 373
 145:6, 391
 83.5, 42
- Job
 5:5, 365
 34:29, 378
- Proverbs
 1:8, 377
 4:11, 377
 12:10, 375
- Ecclesiastes, 9:18, 355, 356
- Lamentations, 4:12, 417
- Daniel
 3:15, 404
 3:25, 369
 4:1, 404
 13:1, 405
- Ezra, 4:10, 462
- Nehemiah
 3:25–29, 92
 12:37, 92
- 1 Chronicles
 4:32–43, 16
 4:39–41, 20, 31
 10:1–12, 49
 14:8–16, 49
 14:17, 49
 17:11, 45 n106
 21:15, 43
 21:16, 390
 28:14–18, 34
 29:2–8, 34
- 2 Chronicles
 4:32–43, 15
 12:1, 32
 13:3, 19 n34
 14:1–6, 32
 14:7–10, 19 n34
 14–16, 19 n34
 15:5–6, 32
 15:15, 32
 16:9, 33
 17:1–2, 19 n34
 17–18, 19 n34
 18:31, 419
 20:3, 19 n34
 20:6, 419
 20:29–30, 49
 26:6–8, 49
 26:21, 378
 28, 28
 28:1b, 29
 28:2b, 29
 28:3–4, 30
 28:16–21, 29
 28:18–19, 31
 28:20–21, 30
 28:22–23, 30 n64
 28:24, 29
 28:24–25, 29
 28–33, 15
 29:2, 29, 33
 29:3, 29, 33
 29:3–31:21, 16
 29:18–19, 29
 29–30, 374
 29–31, 15, 21, 28
 29–32, 15

- 30, 30
 30:1, 29
 30:6–11, 29
 30:6–13, 479
 30:25, 479
 31:2–3, 37
 31:11–19, 479
 31:20–21, 30
 32, 94, 336, 350, 404
 32:1–12, 326
 32:1–23, 12, 13, 15–16, 355
 32:1a, 21
 32:1b, 21, 22, 39
 32:2, 42
 32:2–4, 93
 32:2–6a, 16, 18, 22, 30, 34 n74
 32:2–8, 49, 357
 32:2–8a, 35
 32:3, 42
 32:3–4, 18
 32:5, 93, 356
 32:6b–8, 18, 30
 32:7, 30 n64
 32:7–8a, 30
 32:8, 364
 32:9, 22, 40, 47, 94
 32:10, 19, 34, 38
 32:10b, 39
 32:11, 39
 32:11–12, 34
 32:12, 337, 479
 32:13–15, 35
 32:13b–14, 36
 32:15–17, 36
 32:18, 19, 39
 32:19, 36
 32:20, 30, 365
 32:20–22, 37
 32:21, 19, 27, 33, 37, 40, 41, 44, 50 n119,
 219, 356, 436
 32:21–22, 34, 310, 382
 32:21–23, 48
 32:21a, 35
 32:21b, 42, 43, 45
 32:22, 43
 32:22–23, 16, 19, 35, 48
 32:23, 44
 32:24–26, 49
 32:24–33, 15
 32:25, 371, 372
 32:25–26, 32
 32:27–30, 15
 32:29, 37
 32:30, 17, 91, 94, 357
 32:31, 32, 242
 33, 28
 33:13, 419
 34–35, 15
 36:11–21, 44

GREEK, HELLENISTIC AND ROMAN SOURCES

- Ctesias, *History of the Persians*, Frag. 1
 §§2–20, 449
 10.5, 445
 10.21, 445
 10.30–35, 459
 Demetrius the Chronographer, fig. 6, 325,
 330, 339–340
 Josephus, *The Jewish War*
 5.303, 95
 Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica*,
 II.1–22, 449–450
 5.404–408, 445
 5.504–507, 95
 Eusebius, *Chronicles*, 135
 Michael the Syrian, 452
 Hellenistic Synagogue Prayers, 6:10, 325,
 337, 345
 Nicolaus of Damascus, 450
 Herodotus, *Histories*, 2:141, 12, 325, 340,
 365, 449
 Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*
 XIII, 450
 XXVI, 450
 XXXI, 378
 Josephus, *Antiquities*, 452 n70
 1.61, 428
 10, 336
 10.1–23, 12, 331, 340–343, 444
 10.2, 445
 Strabo, *Geography* XVI, 450 n63
 Tacitus, 361, 452 n70

ISLAMIC SOURCES

- Ibn Khaldun, 455
 Ibn Rusta, 455
- Mār Behnām inscriptions, 451
 al-Mas'ūdi, 438, 454
- Qur'an
 Sura 17, 455 n88
 Sura 105, 455
- al-Ṭabari, 454–455, 504
- al-Ya'qūbī, 454

NEW TESTAMENT AND EARLY CHRISTIAN SOURCES

- Acts
 4:24, 391
 12:23, 391
- Apostolic Constitutions*, Book 7, canon 37,
 419–420
- Asterius, *Homilies*, 25.17, 418
- Athanasius, *De incarnatione verbi*, 36.3,
 395
- Chronicon Paschale*, 429
- Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 21,
 392–393
- Cosmas, *Christian Topography*, 428
- Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the
 Psalms*, 19:2, 425
- Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary
 on Amos*
 7:1–3, 421
 8:1, 421
 8:8, 421, 422
 9:5, 422
 10, 422
- on Hosea
 1:1, 421
 1:7, 420
 10:11, 421
- on Isaiah, 423–425
- on Micah
 1:1, 422
 1:9, 422
- on Nahum
 1:14, 422
 2:2, 423
- on Zechariah
 1:8, 423
 1:21, 423
 3:7b, 423
- Didymus the Blind, *Commentary on
 Zechariah*, 1:8, 395–396
- Diodore of Tarsus, *Commentary on the
 Psalms*
 13, 396–397
 19 & 20, 398
 32, 399
 47, 400
- Galatians, 4:8, 391
- Gregory of Nazianze, *Contra Julianum*
 Or. 5.3, 395
 Or. 5.26, 394
 Or. 5.27, 395
 Or. 4.110, 394
- John
 5:44, 391
 9:29, 419
 13:2, 419
- Luke, 21:20–24, 390
- Matthew
 1:23, 421
 16:18, 425
- Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, 16:1, 393
- Origen, *Letter to Africanus*
 6, 393
 19, 393
- Procopius of Gaza, *Commentary on Isaiah*
 9:8–17, 426–427
 17:12–14, 427
 22, 427
- Revelations
 11:3, 390
 20:7–8, 428
- Romans
 3:11–12, 397
 3:13–18, 397

- Theodoret of Cyr, *Church History*, 418, 428, 440
- Theodoret of Cyr, *Commentary on Daniel*, 404
- Theodoret of Cyr, *Commentary on Ezekiel*, 428–429
- Theodoret of Cyr, *Commentary on Isaiah*
 3:2–4, 413
 7:8–9, 413
 13:1, 414
 18:7, 414
 19:17, 414
 27:13, 415
 28:4, 415
 29, 415
 36–37, 415
 37:10–13, 413
 40:23, 415
 51:9, 415
- Theodoret of Cyr, *Commentary on Jeremiah*
 10:23, 417
 13:8, 417
- Theodoret of Cyr, *Commentary on Psalm*
 13, 408, 410
 19, 408
 28, 408–409
 30, 409–410
 52, 410–411
 75, 411–412
 79:14, 412
 118:21, 412
- Theodoret of Cyr, *Commentary on the Twelve Prophets*, 406–408
- Theodoret of Cyr, *Commentary on Ezekiel*, 404–405
- Theodoret of Cyr, *Quaestiones in Octateuchum*
 Q4Kings 51, 403
 Q4Kings 52, 403
 QGen, 404
- Theophilus of Antioch, *Apologia ad Autolyicum*, 2:31, 392
- 1 Timothy, 6:20, 425
- Titus, 3:10–11, 425

QUMRAN SCROLLS

- Qumran Scrolls
 4Q196
 2:1–2, 329
- 2:3–4, 310
 frg. 2, 309, 310

RABBINIC SOURCES

- Babylonian Talmud
- Ber.
 10b, 357
 28a, 379
- Git., 57b, 384
- Meg., 11b, 351
- Menah, 109b, 383
- Pesaḥ
 56a, 357
 118a, 363
- Sanh.
 26a, 359
 26b, 359
 94a, 368, 373, 378
 94a–95b, 372
 94a–96b, 380–381
 94a–b, 445–446
 94b, 362, 373, 374–375
 95a, 352, 353, 354
 95a–b, 445
 95b, 369, 370
 95b–96a, 382
- 96a, 381, 383
 96b, 384, 445
 99a, 373–374
 Soṭah, 46b, 379, 446
 Yoma, 54a, 379
- Jerusalem Talmud
- Pesaḥ
 9:4, 363
 36d, 363
- Sanh.
 10:6, 379
 29c, 379
- Midrash
- Eccl. Rab., 9:29, 355
- Est. Rab., 7:3, 383
- Exod. Rab.
 8:2, 363, 364, 366
 8:5, 363, 364, 367, 368
 30:5, 377

- Gen. Rab.
 49:1, 384
 69:8, 352
 73:6, 378
 89:6, 375
 Lam. Rab., 2:9, 379
 Lev. Rab.
 5:3, 378
 5:5, 358
 7:6, 367
 18:2, 383
 27:11, 375
 Midr. Ps., 11, 368
 Midr. Zuta, Cant. 8:6, 369
 Num. Rab.
 8:3, 366
 9:24, 366
 11:7, 366
 23:14, 376
 Pesiq. Rab.
 18:9, 365
 23:2, 373
 35:6, 369
 Petiḥa, 30, 363
 Sifre Deut.
 37, 376
 203, 357
 Song Rab.
 4:8, 371
 4:20, 371
 18:5, 363
- Midrash Tanḥuma
 Metzora' 12, 381
 Noah, 368
 21, 368
 Tazri'a, 10, 365
 Tezaveh, 3, 365
 Va-yakhel, 8, 384
- Seder Olam Rabbah, 23, 357, 359, 363, 383
- Targunim
 Targum, on 2 Chr. 32:12, 368, 369
 Targum Jonathan, on Isaiah 10:32, 372
 Targum Pseudo-Jonathan
 on Exodus 34:10, 379
 on Isaiah 10:32–3, 375
 Tosefta Targum
 on 2 Kings
 19:35, 368
 19:35–37, 363
 19:37, 382
 Tosefta Qidd., 5:4, 379
- Yalkut Shimoni I, 250, 383
 Yalkut Shimoni II
 163, 363
 236, 383
 241, 363

VULGATE/LATIN TRANSLATION

- 3 Kingdoms
 20[21]:16, 390
 27, 390
- 4 Kingdoms [LXX]
 10–15, 423
 18:9–12, 389
 18:9–13, 422, 423
 18:13–16, 389
 18–19, 394, 403, 408, 421, 429
 18:23, 399
 18:29, 405
 18:31, 397
 18:32, 397
 18:33–35, 396, 398
 19, 412
 19:1–2, 390
- 19:3, 398, 400
 19:10, 403
 19:15, 391, 398
 19:15–18, 403
 19:18, 391
 19:19, 391
 19:23, 394
 19:24, 394
 19:31, 402
 19:35, 391, 394, 397, 420, 422, 424, 426
 19:35–37, 401
 20:1, 398
 20:1–11, 428
 20–25, 389
 21:2–7, 423
 32–34, 423

INDEX OF MODERN AUTHORS

- Adams, W. Y., 133, 152
 Aharoni, Y., 63, 76
 Andersen, B., 167–168
 Andrae, W., 179
 Ankersmit, R., 497 n216, 498, 502
 Assmann, J., 167
 Aubin, H., 107, 136, 137, 141
 Avigad, N., 91
- Bagg, A. M., 244 n73
 Barnett, R., 88
 Barzan, J., 173
 Beaulieu, P.-A., 302–303, 306–307
 Becking, B., 67 n65
 Bersani, L., 167
 Borger, R., 190
 Braudel, F., 141–142
 Breasted, J. H., 133
 Bright, J., 136
 Broshi, M., 84, 246 n83
 Bryce, J., 138–139
 Bunimovitz, S., 100
- Carsten, J., 499
 Cassirer, E., 362
 Charpin, D., 168
 Chilton, B., 371
 Cogan, M., 3
 Collingwood, R. G., 52
- Dagan, Y., 99
 Dalley, S., 156, 179, 184, 185, 186–187,
 206–207, 236, 468
 Dallibor, K., 124, 125
 De Odorico, M., 561
 De Rougé, E., 120
 DeMause, L., 165
 Der Derian, J., 278–279
 Dietrich, D., 227 n12, 278
 Dillard, R. B., 38
 Dodd, C. H., 390
 Dubovský, P., 5, 228
 Dutoit, U., 167
- Edelman, D. V., 51–52 n5
 Edwards, D. N., 147–148, 149, 150, 158
 Eisenstadt, S. N., 435
- Eissler, K. R., 165
 Eph'al, I., 84–85
 Erikson, E. H., 165
- Fales, M., 4–5
 Faust, A., 100
 Fecht, G., 110 n18
 Finkel, I., 179, 191 n124
 Finkelstein, I., 84, 246 n83
 Fitzmyer, J., 309
 Follet, R., 250
 Foot, S., 498 n219
 Fraade, S., 359–360
 Frahm, E., 4, 52–54, 462, 486
 Freud, S., 165
 Fuchs, A., 244
 Fuller, D. Q., 148, 149, 158
- Gallagher, W., 55, 70
 Garbini, G., 25 n53
 Gardiner, A. H., 111–112, 113
 Gay, P., 166
 George, A., 489 n188, 490–491
 Geva, H., 91
 Grabbe, L. L., 243 n73
 Graetz, H., 360
 Grayson, A. K., 73
 Guha, R., 466
- Halphen, L., 106, 142
 Harrak, A., 317, 381, 384, 451
 Hill, R. C., 408, 410 n88, 410 n89
 Hintze, F., 124
 Holm, T. L., 5
 Honor, L. L., 51–52 n4
- James, T. G. H., 134, 135, 137, 151, 156
 Jansen-Winkel, K., 154
 Jaques, M., 168
- Kahn, D., 65 n54, 118, 127, 131–132
 Kalimi, I., 2–3, 11–50, 92, 94, 219, 310, 326,
 350, 355
 Kendall, T., 154
 Kenyon, K. M., 89
 Kinnier Wilson, J. V., 167
 Kister, M., 348

- Kitchen, K. A., 125, 132, 133, 134,
 137, 158
 Klauber, E. G., 267
 Klengel, H., 168
 Kloner, A., 91
 Kottsieper, I., 302 n23
 Kuhrt, A., 133

 Lambert, W. G., 176
 Layard, A. H., 51–52 n3, 116
 Leclant, J., 120
 Lederman, Z., 100
 Levi, P., 499–500
 Lewy, J., 267
 Liverani, M., 19 n35, 64 n53
 Luckenbill, D. D., 54 n15, 306 n42
 Lüdtke, A., 497

 MacDonald, K. C., 149
 Mallowan, M., 155
 Mayer, W., 67 n65
 Mazar, B., 66 n59
 Mazar, E., 89
 Maziejewski, F., 167
 Melville, S. C., 191, 306
 Michalowski, P., 490
 Millard, A. R., 70
 Milton, J., 439–440
 Morkot, R., 132, 140, 152, 153, 158
 Motyer, J. A., 133, 158

 Na'aman, N., 98
 Nadali, D., 245
 Novák, M., 317

 O'Connor, D., 143
 Oegema, G. S., 5–6
 Olmstead, A. T. E., 54–55
 Oppenheim, A. L., 250
 Oredsson, D., 92
 Ottosson, M., 92

 Parker, B. J., 258, 492
 Parpola, S., 178 n55, 187, 230, 231, 255,
 303–304, 311
 Picchi, D., 118, 133
 Pongratz-Leisten, B., 493
 Pope, J., 3–4
 Porten, B., 302 n23
 Postgate, J. N., 187

 Radner, K., 191, 192, 213
 Rahlfs, A., 391

 Rainey, A. F., 63, 64 n53
 Ranke, L., 360
 Rawlinson, H. C., 51
 Reade, J., 213, 215
 Redford, D. B., 115, 118, 120, 122 n70, 131,
 132, 133, 158
 Re'em, A., 91
 Reich, R., 89
 Renan, E., 498
 Richardson, S., 7, 164
 Ricoeur, P., 498, 499
 Ryholt, K., 447–448

 Schmitt, J. J., 468
 Schneider, T., 128–129
 Scurlock, J., 167–168
 Sewell, W., Jr., 502–503
 Shai, I., 100
 Shiloh, Y., 89
 Shukrun, Eli, 100
 Siegel, M., 495
 Simpson, W. K., 126, 127
 Spalinger, A. J., 115, 118, 125, 127, 128, 133,
 137, 158
 Spencer, D., 499
 Starkey, J., 76, 80
 Streck, M., 179
 Strugnell, J., 302 n23

 Tadmore, H., 38 n89, 55, 69 n82, 70
 Talbot, H. F., 51 n2
 Török, L., 136, 137, 140, 150, 153
 Trevelyán, G. M., 155, 156
 Trigger, B. G., 141

 Ulmer, R., 6
 Ussishkin, D., 3
 Uziel, J., 100

 Van De Mieroop, M., 168, 178 n55
 Verheyden, J., 6–7
 Vernus, P., 127
 Vikentiev, V., 126–127
 Vittmann, G., 128

 Walker, J. T., 322
 Warren, C., 92
 Wehner, M., 496
 Weidner, E., 266
 Weigall, A., 124, 125
 Weissert, E., 175 n 41, 179
 White, H., 360
 Wilce, J., 494

Wilkinson, T., 133
Williams, B., 154
Williamson, H. G. M., 18 n33
Wilson, C., 92

Yardeni, A., 302 n23
Younansardaroud, H., 317

Younger, K. L., 55
Yoyotte, J., 120
Yurco, F. J., 120, 136, 137

Zadok, R., 187
Zawaski, S., 450
Zvi, E. B., 215